

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

On the Failure to Transform: The Tragedy of
State-led Revolution in the Postcolonial
Caribbean

By

Luis Vega Estrada

July 2024

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts
degree in the
Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Jonathan Levy

Preceptor: Deirdre Lyons

Introduction: State-led Postcolonial Failures to Transform and Systematic Collisions

The postcolonial world of the late 20th century saw a tremendous upheaval against post-independence neocolonial governances, the Caribbean, perhaps the most emblematic of this turnover.¹ Indeed, David Scott cites the New Jewel Movement's (NJM) overthrow of Eric Gairy in Grenada as “a world-historical *event* in the modern history of revolutions, and certainly an unprecedented event in the political history of the Anglophone Caribbean. It was a revolutionary beginning, undoubtedly, a euphoric leap into the future.”² However, the collapse of the Grenada revolution spelled a disastrous end for postcolonial movements aiming towards the transformation of capitalist society. Scott mournfully writes that the Grenada revolution was “the beginning of the end of a whole *era* of revolutionary expectation—indeed, of revolutionary socialist possibility;” by 1983, “...the global conditions of possibility for *any* postcolonial socialism were already in steep—irreversible—decline.”³ So cataclysmic was this collapse that, for Scott, it exemplified “a larger phenomena of global transformation,” towards a postcolonial aftermath “stricken with immobility and pain and ruin.”⁴ Left in the wake of this collapse is a “temporal” residue through which the contemporary Caribbean wades through, a nostalgic “*afterness*” wherein long since flatlined socialist “futures” persistently haunt present subjects into a yearning for its return; it is a miasma which chokes present possibility.⁵

Scott's presentation of the collapse of the Grenada revolution utilizes the space of temporal political action and tragedy as a “generative” “conceptual structure” for understanding its collapse as a narrative event.⁶ His conceptualization of tragedy is Hegelian in presentation;

¹ David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Time, Tragedy, Memory, Justice* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

² Scott, 4.

³ Scott, 4.

⁴ Scott, 5, 6.

⁵ Scott, 5, 6.

⁶ Scott, 43.

tragedy's essence is conflict, it is "*systematically* understood in terms of contradiction, self-division, incommensurability, strife and struggle."⁷ The point for Scott is this: humans which engage in political action are faced with its inner contingent and incalculable nature, a plurality of interests can lead to collisions between the actions of different people, collisions which are a result of "competing forces" entrenched in their "uncompromising *one-sidedness*."⁸ Utilizing this Hegelian outlook towards the Grenada revolution, the conflict between political actors of the NJM collided in tragic action, demonstrating the "pervasive contingency and ineradicable unpredictability and" the "susceptibility" of action to "political emotions."⁹ It is an argument which intends to understand political action as unstable, incalculable, and therefore as action which carries the potential within it for unforeseen, tragic dramatic collisions between revolutionary protagonists.¹⁰

While Scott's Hegelian presentation is stimulating, it contains its analysis within the peculiarities of the Grenadian 'political sphere' as it were, i.e., within the actions of subjects, relying on the conceptual developments of tragedy to interpret the movement of subjects within this apparently isolated political sphere. However, the notion of tragedy, collisions, and state-led actions towards societal transformation in the Caribbean remains an interesting point of inquiry. Indeed, one cannot help but ask if there is something fundamental about the state operating in the postcolonial world which prevents it from being the locus of transformation. The Caribbean, being the sight of many such attempts at socialist social transformation, had its respective projects generally in the grip of doom by 1983. I argue, however, that their late-20th century failures to transform Caribbean society present as tragedy in a different sense. When viewed

⁷ Scott, 45.

⁸ Scott, 48.

⁹ Scott, 51.

¹⁰ Scott, 51.

from a Marxian position, the tragedy lies in the fact that the state, as a result of its determinations of form in generalized capitalist social relations, is *fundamentally incapable* of revolutionary transformation and action. By a failure of transformation, we mean a failure to transcend the capitalist mode of production whose essential core are relations of value. In fact, all actions of state, I argue, stay well within the reproduction of capital as a social form.

To clarify, this position asserts that it is not that the state cannot *allow* for transformation, rather, it is systematically *incapable* of doing so. This is only apparent by problematizing the state as a form of appearance of the capital relation, a problematization which the Caribbean scholarship has not rigorously undertaken. It is not that, for instance, the Marxist-Leninist arrangement of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) could not allow for transformation in Grenada, or that the retainment of Westminster style democracy in Jamaica limited the progression of the working class. Rather, the argument presented here asserts that the state is systematically limited in its ability of intervention due to the nature of its systematicity with the relations of capital. *Such system limitations render the contours of the state's incapability to transform society.* This is regardless of its particular postcolonial arrangements, the state-form itself is bound to and springs from the capital relation.

However, due to the state taking on a fetishized surface appearance as an apparently 'relatively autonomous' neutral political form, from the *perspective* of the state it sees the social forms of capital—i.e., money, legal subjects—as reliable points of entry for socialist transformation. From the perspective of those engaging in state-led action—i.e. state intervention—changes through policy and strategies of redistribution appear as transformational pathways. *The tragedy of postcolonial state-led attempts at social transformation is their collision with the systematic limitations of the state in capitalist society.* The state is limited in

the sense that it can only be fixed on manipulating certain *forms of appearance of the value-relation*, thus, constituting a failure of transformation *from the outset*. Therefore, irrespective of the collisions between peculiar ‘political’ subjects, postcolonial state-led projects of transformation will collide with the fundamental systematic limitations of the state as determined by the capital relation. This is in part what this article attempts to assert, that this collision was immediate and experienced by these Caribbean state-led projects.

While I argue that the Caribbean is an appropriate space of inquiry for this assertion, this is not to say that the following presentation of the state is necessarily limited to the Caribbean as such. Due to the generalization of commodity production, it is not far-fetched to assert that collisions with the system-limits of the state are not unfamiliar to the rest of the postcolonial world. However, Caribbean scholarship has long been steeped in questions of the state due to the empirical variety of transformational experiments and their tragic outcomes. By way of opening with Scott, we have borne witness to the post-Grenada trauma which seems to haunt the intellectual air in the Caribbean sphere. However, as mentioned, the scholarship has lacked an adequate articulation of state and capital which reveals the essential elements of the tragedy of state-led transformation. In this sense, there is a critical omission of the *relationship* between the state and capital which leads to repeated conceptualizations of the state as a neutral, autonomous political entity or as an associated reflection of the general interests of global capital. Thus, the state remains unproblematized at the level of capitalist relations, leading to the maintenance of a *spirit of political optimism* around the state as a potential locus of transformation in the Caribbean. Among some scholars this spirit develops incredible vigor, producing eyebrow raising conclusions. For instance, we may point to Paget Henry’s emphatic notion that it is in the Caribbean subject’s *social ontology* to seek refuge in the state as a point of transformation into

socialism.¹¹ We will return to Henry in the conclusion of this article. It suffices to say that this statist optimistic spirit is certainly part and parcel of this debilitating miasma which does not allow us to see beyond old futures.

For the moment, we will note that the region's catastrophic end of socialist opportunity and the scholarships'—either implicit or explicit—spirit of optimism around the state as a locus of transformational power presents a significant opportunity for a reevaluation of the state and its limits of action in postcoloniality. Therefore, a substantial portion of this work is dedicated to a critique of the Caribbean scholarship as it relates to the state and the relations of capital. This work introduces and argues for a dialectical reconstruction of the concrete in thought to articulate the relationship between the state and capital in order to move towards a rigorous understanding of the failures to transform in the postcolonial world using the Caribbean as an experiential backdrop. It is an attempt to move beyond strictly political or sociological explanations for the failure of transformation in the Caribbean and firmly assert that the state *cannot* be the panacea for the region's contemporary haunting. Thus, this work is in part a methodological argument which urges the Caribbean scholarship to reconsider the ways in which it evaluates the capitalist social form and the state. It is an argument which, on the one hand, suggests that an adequate reconstruction of capital's anatomy is fundamental to understanding the failure of movements which genuinely sought to transform Caribbean society in the late 20th century. On the other hand, in our process of reconstructing the anatomy of capital, the spirit of optimism around the state will be thoroughly exorcised; such a reconstruction will reveal the interconnection between the state and capital, demonstrating that the actions of the state are systematically limited to a

¹¹ Paget Henry, "C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney and the Rebuilding of Caribbean Socialism," in *Journeys in Caribbean Thought: The Paget Henry Reader*, ed. Jane Anna Gordon, et al. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), 217.

manipulation of the forms of appearance of the capital relation, rendering the state as wholly incapable of transformation.

Approaches to the State in the Postcolonial Caribbean

On Twentieth Century and Contemporary Scholarship as it Relates to the State in the Postcolonial Caribbean

Discussions of the state in Caribbean postcolonial scholarship are awash in studies relating to middle class domination, developmentalism, the legacies of decolonization, and the nation as it relates to the state. What follows is an assessment of general accounts of postcolonial leadership—both neocolonial and nominally revolutionary—across the Caribbean West Indies in the mid to late 20th century. These approaches to the inquiry of the state, however, remain on the whole sociological and political—in other words, they are attentive to the content of the state, relying on the normative spheres of the ‘economy,’ the ‘social,’ and the ‘political’ to conduct assessments.¹² These are studies devoted to articulating the state in terms of its actions as it executes power over postcolonial societies.

What is peculiar about these sociological and political accounts however, is that they generally posit the state as a category without specificity as to its role in capitalist society and without emphasis on the necessary determinations which constitute its form. Phrased another way, their discussions of the state are conducted without specifying what is particular about the

¹² This is apparent, for instance, in Brian Meek’s short study of Jamaica in 1993, where he proceeds through an analysis of these three spheres applied to Jamaican society in split and discrete distinction to assess what he describes as a crisis of the Jamaican political two-party system and a failure of a Jamaican elite to continue to legitimate an “inherent right to ‘run things.’” See: Brian Meeks, “The Political Moment in Jamaica: The Dimensions of Hegemonic Dissolution,” in *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*, ed. Aaron Kamugisha (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 89.

state in capitalist society. Rather, the character of the postcolonial state relies on these aforementioned analyses of class, developmentalism, and nation, with capital understood as a process which happens in a misty economic background; it is as though capital is a process which occurs merely alongside the state's existence in an unspecified connection. The state as a category then, in this view, appears as a kind of neutral mechanical social entity. These sociological and politically oriented studies are chosen to highlight the pitfalls in their methodology towards the state and capital and to demonstrate how the state remains unproblematized or inadequately understood. In this sense, they inadvertently—or at times purposefully—maintain the spirit of optimism towards the state in the Caribbean.

With this general sentiment established, let us move deeper into these sociological and political accounts with one of the most preeminent scholars of the Caribbean West Indian states in the 20th century, Percy C. Hintzen. Hintzen, a socio-political theorist, advocates for a general theorization of the West Indian postcolonial state as one which was developed through the control of a middle class elite, a class which became “vested with the legitimate right to create a new postcolonial society.” These legitimate rights are a kind of bureaucratic “technical and administrative knowledge,” which Hintzen suggests they came to acquire through a struggle against “colonial domination,” beginning in the “1920s and 1930s,” sparked by “little access to *economic capital*.”¹³ Through what he defines as ideological constructs of identity, these middle class elites forged an Afro-creole identity which latched onto general anticolonial sentiments, making it one of their “conditions of power” for accension into the postcolonial state.¹⁴ The other condition towards ascension, Hintzen argues, is the necessity of “legitimacy construct(s);”

¹³ Percy C. Hintzen, “Reproducing Domination Identity and Legitimacy Constructs in the West Indies,” in *Reproducing Domination: On the Caribbean Postcolonial State*, ed. Percy C. Hintzen, Charisse Burden-Stelly, and Aaron Kamugisha (University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 17, 19. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Hintzen, “Reproducing Identity and Constructs in West Indies,” 20.

elements such as Westminster democracy, “bureaucratic structures,” and the “ideology of development embedded in nationalist discourse,” are strung together to form their “authorial power.”¹⁵ Essentially, it is how this middle class makes their case for legitimacy. Here, the state is posited as a set of developed machinery controlled by a particular class group who overcame British “colonial legitimacy” as a result of strenuous changes in the “conditions of colonial economic production.”¹⁶

This kind of argument which emphasizes the role of an indigenous middle class grasping at the reigns of state control and proceeding to describe what this class does with such control, is not an uncommon one. Much earlier, C.L.R. James pointedly critiqued this ‘West Indian middle class’ in their movement towards independence. For James, the middle classes were devoid of political passion and were excluded from “the centers of economic life,” or the ‘core’ of the British colonial system; their sense of development in James’ view was one that was not autocentric as they had been “excluded from large-scale agriculture,” and the “control of big industry, commerce and finance.”¹⁷ The West Indian middle classes were in a debilitating limbo for James, directionless and detached from both “the economic masters of the country and the black masses.”¹⁸ Without ‘economic’ power, they are “politically paralyzed before their former masters, who are still masters,” in the postcolonial scenario; the solution for James was a forward leap in the “structure of the economy” propelled by a mobilization of “the mass against all who will stand in their way.”¹⁹ Thus, as it is argued here for both Hintzen and James, the developmentalism led by a middle class in control of the postcolonial state is one which

¹⁵ Hintzen, “Reproducing Identity and Constructs in West Indies,” 28-31.

¹⁶ Hintzen, “Reproducing Domination Identity and Legitimacy Constructs,” 37.

¹⁷ C.L.R. James. “The West Indian Middle Classes,” in *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*, ed. Aaron Kamugisha (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 249-50.

¹⁸ James, 254.

¹⁹ James, 254.

reproduces a kind of colonial order, only headed by a postcolonial elite.²⁰ It is perhaps an argument not too indistinct from Walter Rodney's assessment of the 20th century postcolonial West Indies, where he concludes that a class of "petty bourgeoisie," has come to control the postcolonial state, "manipulating... divisions amongst the people," creating a "petty bourgeois domination and dictatorship in the English-speaking Caribbean."²¹ It appears as though that in general for these scholars "the key question is the social class and character of the party or parties which controls state power," or in other words, that the character of state power seems to change depending on the will of the particular group who controls it.²² The state in this view seems to not be immanently capitalist, rather, it has more to do with the contents of a *mechanical* operation, related to a particular class, which 'make it' capitalist. Indeed, the relation between the state, nation, and capitalism as a social form is played rather fast and loose; for our purposes, it is evident that within the literature—and this is consistently so—there appears to be no *inner* relation between the state and capital, and pressing, a consistent use of capital in an unspecified, normative sense.

What is remarkable as much as it is deeply confusing, is how Hintzen understands capital, or rather, how he misunderstands it through a Bordieuan extension. As with Brian Meeks' identification of three spheres of social life—the economic, the political, and the social—Hintzen identifies *various* kinds of *capital*: "economic, social, cultural and symbolic."²³ This slicing of capital as a category has its methodological justification in being able to apparently handle both the subjective "cognitions" of individuals and "social facts" as "integrally related."²⁴

²⁰ Hintzen, "Reproducing Identity and Constructs in West Indies," 35.

²¹ Walter Rodney, "Contemporary Political Trends in the English-Speaking Caribbean," in *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*, ed. Aaron Kamugisha (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 4.

²² Rodney, 4.

²³ Hintzen, "Reproducing Identity and Constructs," 15.

²⁴ Hintzen, "Reproducing Identity and Constructs," 15.

It is a frame which intends on analyzing what is not just ‘objective social fact’ in fear of abandoning cultural factors; an abandonment which would render culture as a non-factor in the motions of the state and classes. In this view, social classes are “organized around competition” in order to gain as much as possible from these forms of ‘capital.’²⁵ Capital as articulated here, however is completely unidentifiable. Is ‘economic capital’ merely money and the ability to produce? How is money related to capital? What is being produced? Instead of a kind of social form, or “mode of life,” capital is rendered as a nebulous power, graphed onto what *appears* to be various ‘political’ phenomena; the capitalist social form is rendered as any other mode of production, a process of the accumulation of various ‘things.’²⁶ In this view, state intervention becomes a mechanical means for the “accumulation of wealth, income, status, and prestige,” amongst these middle classes—*class* remains nothing but a kind of competition over interests and the production of certain commodities to fulfill such interests in this inquiry.²⁷ Again, we ask: what *kind* of wealth? What *kind* income? Are symbolic and cultural ‘capitals’ merely a method of acquiring an ‘economic surplus?’ Surplus here, we should note, is also categorically nebulous and nonspecific. All of these concepts are posited without their determinations of form, thus, they are not necessarily interconnected in this formulation; they are only *conceptually* interrelated without significant pause on the matter of the specificity of the capitalist social form.

In the absence of an adequate conceptualization of capital, we may turn to Clive Y.

Thomas’ assessments of the postcolonial state. These are assessments which he deliberated in the 1970s which attempt to present a historical-materialist determination of its form, specifically its

²⁵ Hintzen, “Reproducing Identity and Constructs,” 14. Nationalism for Hintzen, is a form of capital, as are particular “cultural style(s)” among the middle classes. They are ‘capitals’ which “legitimize” this middle classes “position of dominance in the social hierarchy, and to legitimize its preferential access to the economic surplus.”

²⁶ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Prometheus Books, 1998), 37.

²⁷ Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism, and Modern Sociology* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991), 186.

‘authoritarian’ form. Perhaps Thomas’ ‘historical-materialist’ qualification may move us away from Hintzen’s socio-political pitfalls. Yet, the same issues of are apparent here only in an altered presentation. In an essay, he looks to “discuss in detail the formation, nature, and methods of operation of the authoritarian state,” and “get behind” the state’s appearance, or the way in which it is “perceived through its methods of rule.”²⁸ Presenting eight characteristics of the “materialist basis” for the form of the postcolonial authoritarian state, an analytical separation between economy, the ‘social,’ and the political persists within Thomas’ exposition.²⁹ In Thomas’ articulation, we find the authoritarian state-form to be a formation which arises out of “underdeveloped productive forces,” leading to an underdevelopment of the capitalist mode of production, unfulfilled “bourgeois’ ideas of legality and equality,” a leading “petty bourgeoisie in the exercise of state power,” and an expanding state in perpetual crisis.³⁰ Significant here is the notion of a discreet economic basis which directly determines the state, merely a mirror of its economic basis, and all of postcolonial society’s ideological moments follow suit. This oversimplification occludes the development of the state’s *form* in the sense that it does not undertake the question of why the state necessarily appears as it does within the capitalist social form to begin with. Moreover, Thomas’ notion of underdevelopment into the constitution of the postcolonial state implies stages in the development of the nation-state, a project which in his view has been prohibited from progressing by the metropole. Remaining underdeveloped, the state’s progression must be completed in an autocentric way through the leadership of the nation. In other words, it is a call for the postcolonial state to develop the capacity transform society

²⁸ Clive Y. Thomas, “The Rise of the Authoritarian State,” in *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*, ed. Aaron Kamugisha (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 99, 103.

²⁹ Thomas, 100-102.

³⁰ Thomas, 100-102.

with industrial capability and to use such capability to fulfill the needs of the nation, all the while detached from the motions of the international market.

Hintzen along with Charisse Burden-Stelly in a contemporary co-authored essay, have critiqued Thomas on this point, noting that “Thomas’ emphasis on the development of techno-material conditions mirrors the logic of neoclassical economics and neoliberalism that posit the failure of national formations to create these conditions as the root cause of exclusion and dehumanization.”³¹ For Thomas, “industrial development” becomes the “basis for freedom, self-determination, and the international legitimation of small underdeveloped dependent states.”³² This reveals that Thomas does not consider industrial development as necessarily capitalist, rather, industrialization is posited here as lying outside of the capitalist relations of production in autonomous motion. Further, Burden-Stelly and Hintzen find that Thomas has failed to make a conceptual distinction between the state and the nation; Burden-Stelly and Hintzen argue that the state is instead an amalgamation of “globalized forces and processes that are integrally entangled with the apparatuses of national government.”³³ The state, in this view, is a force which imposes “global” capitalist interests onto a national government; in other words, the authors claim that “state power” is a thing which is “embedded in national political formations.”³⁴ The state then produces “state-effects,” categories, such as “worker” and “peasant” which “impose themselves on the governing apparatuses of the territorial nation.”³⁵ Any potential transformation of society led by national governance predicated on these state-effects, the authors argue, will not see

³¹ Charisse Burden-Stelly and Percy C. Hintzen, “Culturalism, Development, and the Crisis of Socialist Transformation: Identity, the State, and National Formation in Clive Thomas’s Theory of Dependence,” in *Reproducing Domination: On the Caribbean Postcolonial State*, ed. Percy C. Hintzen, Charisse Burden-Stelly, and Aaron Kamugisha (University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 234.

³² Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, 234.

³³ Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, 227.

³⁴ Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, 227, 239.

³⁵ Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, 227, 239.

fruition because they do not actually overturn the forces of the state. Thomas' developmentalism, which requires the state-effects of workers and peasants to mobilize and take control of national governance, renders invisible other possibilities of life.³⁶

This critique by Burden-Stelly and Hintzen sees the nation as something which has been 'inserted' into a "nation-state nexus," positioned within "global capitalism," and they further suggest that "nationalist discourse is a form of culturalism that conscripts the modern nation-state into the global capitalist project."³⁷ This notion of the state as distinct from the nation, and as something which enwraps the nation in a global process, is not dissimilar from Michael-Rolph Trouillot's argument that the nation is "pitted against" the state, and in moments, may change the state in response to the nation.³⁸ Yet, while the authors claim that the state's "processes, practices, and technologies in national and social formation" are a "necessary condition of accumulation for the capitalist world system," this is an *associated* connection rather than one firmly established. In the final analysis, what Burden-Stelly and Hintzen have asserted is that the state is a conglomeration of powers which has inserted into itself the postcolonial nation and to some extent dictates the creation of certain social components. However, the state's determination within the capitalist social system is undiscussed, and what exactly it is aiding in accumulating is not explicitly stated; capitalism as a social form—as with the other scholars discussed—remains a nebulous 'economic' space. The appearance of the state-form is implied as something coterminous with capitalism, or a set of powers which is associated with it, but the mere implication of this is not to understand the nature of its being in inner interconnection with the rest of the categorical forms which appear in the capital relation. Thus, while in this instance the

³⁶ Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, 232, 235.

³⁷ Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, 232, 235.

³⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "State Against Nation," in *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*, ed. Aaron Kamugisha (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 50.

authors maintain a position that is not sympathetic to the state—therefore contrasting Thomas—the way in which the state has been conceptualized continues to leave the relationship between state and capital as an association, leaving room for the state to be unbounded by the capital relation.

Further on the notion of the postcolonial nation-state within a global capitalist system, Adom Getachew finds that the postcolonial state in the international system experienced an “unequal integration,” positioned into a “hierarchy that facilitated domination,” post-decolonization.³⁹ Getachew figures anticolonial nationalism, the process of decolonization, and the overturning of neocolonial governances as moments of “worldmaking” as opposed to an inevitable ones; moments wherein postcolonial nations attempted to bring forth a new international system on the basis of nondomination.⁴⁰ Turning on this point, Getachew calls for a theoretical intervention, posing “postcolonial cosmopolitanism” in light of extensive examinations of various worldmaking projects across the Global South which capitulated by the end of the 20th century.⁴¹ In general, the concept of postcolonial cosmopolitanism is attentive to hierarchy within the international system of states and the way in which this hierarchy continues to reproduce itself and its domination; hierarchy meaning here “processes of integration and interaction that produce unevenly distributed rights, obligations, and burdens,” among states.⁴² Getachew appears to not be interested in any particular “defense of the state,” remaining insistent that it is not a necessity for approaching international nondomination and national self-

³⁹ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 23.

⁴⁰ Getachew, 28. The latter term of ‘nondomination’ is intended to describe a system of states in democratic and redistributive interrelation with the aid of specific institutions.

⁴¹ Getachew, 23-24. Such projects included regional “egalitarian” and “redistributive” attempts to move away from dependence, protecting sovereignty in so far as it led to a kind of “democratic and redistributive” “egalitarian welfare;” both general modes of achieving nondomination, or “international equality” in her view.

⁴² Getachew, 33.

governance.⁴³ However, she “*remains open to the state* as an institution that provides normative and political resources against international hierarchy.”⁴⁴ Ultimately, it is an outlook dedicated to an “international *redistribution of political and economic power,*” and the aspiration of nondomination amongst “already constituted peoples.”⁴⁵

Getachew appears to be in search for a *political* social formation which will allow the project of nondomination to be realized through an examination of the capitulation of other postcolonial worldmaking projects. On the occasions in which she examines Black Atlantic federalism, or the development and internationally redistributive projects of Jamaica under Michael Manley, Getachew attributes their failures to the Black Atlantic’s inability to unite politically and “the political weakness of postcolonial states” like Jamaica within this unequal, hierarchical international system.⁴⁶ Yet, as with the other scholars mentioned here, the form of the state and the way in which it relates to the capitalist social form, is unspoken of. One may be prompted to ask if the failures of postcolonial states to sustain international programs of nondomination, redistribution, etc., are perhaps not due to its political content, but rather, due to the form of the state itself, inherent in its general character. Or, more pressingly, if these international programs can even be constitutive of transformation *in the first place*. This is something that Getachew seemingly does not consider and given that she still finds the state as a useful social form in so far as it is used as a ‘resource’ for achieving nondomination—it is evident that she does not find the state to be wholly problematic. This kind of articulation is possible only if one fails to deeply consider the fact that the existence of the state as necessarily tied to the capitalist social form.

⁴³ Getachew, 33.

⁴⁴ Getachew, 33. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ Getachew, 34, 35-36. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ Getachew, 138-139, 157, 171.

The Results of Past and Contemporary Inquiries: A View of the State at the Surface

What then are the general results of these sociological, political, and nominally historical-materialist inquiries which attempt to approach the postcolonial state in the late 20th century? In their view, the state appears to be understood as a neutral mechanical political force, *or* a set of dominating political processes which are reflective of the processes of global capital. Further, the scholarship argues that 20th century revolutionary movement leaders influenced by notions of equality amongst states in an international system made the nation-state the subject of development, with the state being viewed by these leaders as the central mechanism through which development is suggested to be possible. Additionally, the scholarship emphasizes the state as controlled by a middle class of elites throughout the 20th century regardless of any revolutionary pretensions. The scholarship also seems to suggest that the postcolonial state, as a conglomeration of “technologies and apparatuses,” harbors powers of cultural and identity creation and legitimation, i.e., the power to create certain categories of subjects directly in the contingent interests of the accumulation processes of global capitalism and maintains the power of asserting certain discourses (such as development discourses).⁴⁷ Further, certain national class entities, such as a middle class elite, or certain ‘anticolonial wordmakers,’ appear to have some influence over the motions of the state if not complete control of it. Yet, because the state is linked to imperatives of postcolonial domination, this linkage does not allow for a state which exists outside of this global capitalist international hierarchy which it has been unequally integrated into. In sum, the state in one sense appears to be a kind of reflection and agent of global capitalism, and in other senses a neutral controllable power mechanism which functions to

⁴⁷ Percy C. Hintzen, “The Caribbean, Freedom, and the Ruses of Global Capital,” in *Reproducing Domination: On the Caribbean Postcolonial State*, ed. Percy C. Hintzen, Charisse Burden-Stelly, and Aaron Kamugisha (University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 245, 251, 254.

assert various social, cultural, and economic powers. This characterization informs the scholarship's stances on the contemporary use of the state as a locus of social transformation in the Caribbean.

The above assessments of the state however, remain woefully unclear on what the exact relation is between the state-form and capitalism, other than alluding to its role in moving global 'surpluses' or aiding in 'accumulation.' There appears to be an implication that the state is directly identifiable with capital and serves the general interests of a 'global capitalist elite' through the auspices of a local hegemonic middle class. One may be prompted to ask: surpluses of what? Accumulation of what? Other than simply stating that the state manifests this role, they do not *explain* how it comes to poses this specific form of appearance in relation to capital. A form of state is *already presupposed* in their presentations. Essentially, *none* of these scholars can move toward answering the question: what is the state's role in the capitalist social form and what are its *necessary determinations* of form? Relatedly, they cannot answer the more pressing question of whether or not there is something *fundamental* about the character of the state that constitutes these recurrent, tragic failures of postcolonial social transformation; in other words, if there are particular *systematic limitations to its action due to the determination of its form in the capital relation*.

These scholar's methodological approaches begin with a general concept of the state and it appears that the capitalist mode of production is *also* already presupposed. Thus, in their analyses it is *taken for granted*; they demonstrate an acute lack of its understanding as a social form, or a particular mode of existence. Or in other words, when capital is figured as relating only to mere 'economy,' in the general sense, it completely elides how the state-form is determined in this historically specific mode of production. An understanding of the category of

state as one which is a manifestation of capitalist social relations is necessary if one is to try to approach the form and therefore the actionable limits of the state. The state as a category in the above inquires begins with the state taken at face-value, as a normative general concept whose functions are already preconceptualized and is only articulated further with empirical specification within the discreet space of the 'political.' In a word, the state is explained through its very functions. This general concept of state is then linked to some concept of capital which varies widely between scholars; from a cloudy notion of 'economy,' or of production, to an accumulation of social prestige, to an accumulation of cultural powers, to the process of an accumulation of unspecified surplus, etc. What makes capitalism a particular and specific mode of production? What constitutes this form of social metabolism? What is value, commodity, money, labor, etc., in this social form of existence? These scholars do not brush these fundamental questions, perhaps because they believe that by positing the category of capital, one can already gather what they mean: that it is the defined, discreet space of the economic or the space of production in general; the production of 'wealth,' increases in wealth, etc. But such a formulation only creates a significant categorical gap between the state and the capitalist social form, where the leap is made to connect the two *externally* without either of their inner determinations understood. This conceptual intertwining may leave one with an understanding that the state preforms some role in the service of capital, but the manner in which the connection is suggested is not one which is necessarily mutually presuppositional; the state becomes a neutral, external political object in this sense, where one can even be open to its use as a 'resource' for aspirations of nondomination. What is central to note here, is that there is an explicit disconnect between the 'economic' and the 'political' as two separate analytical levels, muddling an approach to the state which puts it in real internal connection with the relations of

capitalism as a social form. Such a separation withholds any inquiry as to the limitations of state actions and therefore masks the state's real inability to be a locus of transformation.

Indeed, it is notable that these scholars whether directly or indirectly, suggest that in a transformed society, the state and by extension, as we shall come to see, *capital*, continue to exist in some manner.⁴⁸ Because they appreciate capital only as an economic subfield of society, they conjure redistributive international and domestic programs which largely maintain forms of *value*, or the *value relation*, core to the existence of capital as a social form of existence.⁴⁹ It appears that for them, although the state currently preforms a kind of cultural dominance and distributive service to the maintenance of capital, it is also implied that perhaps under certain conditions, the state can exist wholly *outside* of these capitalist relations and perform other roles more in line with a fairer distribution of 'economic responsibility' and burden. This is evidence of a state methodologically unsystematized, or not situated in relationship with the capitalist social form's *real* movements, only in *conceptual* movements conjured by the scholars. One cannot posit the state without the comprehensive understanding of the capitalist social form in its real movement and vice versa. Utilizing categories such as surplus, capital, state, accumulation, class, etc., in transhistorical generality holds little analytical power—how is one meant to understand the state in capitalist postcoloniality if such categories are simply posited and then

⁴⁸ This is of course with the important exception of C.L.R. James whose later work would argue fiercely against the state.

⁴⁹ Positions among the scholarship of course vary. Paget Henry and Brian Meeks for instance, carry nominally 'social democratic' positions around the state. Clive Y. Thomas was intent on a more 'centralized' state, whilst Hintzen and Burden-Stelly seem to be ardent critics of the state. Yet, Hintzen and Burden-Stelly's critiques still fall short of actually explaining the relation between the state and capital and the state's determination of form. Therefore, they still include the state in prescriptive solutions. See for instance: Brian Meeks, "Imagining the Future: Rethinking the Political in Jamaica (2006)," in *Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 152-158; Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, "Culturalism, Development, and Socialist Transformation," 240, specifically their citation of Thomas Pogge; Paget Henry, "Caribbean Marxism: After the Neoliberal and Linguistic Turns," in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, ed. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 338, 352; Clive Y. Thomas, "On Reconstructing a Political Economy of the Caribbean," in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, ed. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 509-511.

conceptually determined as though they are not moments of a specific mode of life? The failure of the postcolonial state to transform society is not due to its modes of attempting to do so—i.e. through development projects, redistribution, etc.—there is something fundamental about the state-form that limits the postcolonial state from *any* emancipatory transformation of social relations; it is that it is limited and *fixed to* kinds of interventions that are within the capital relation, as we shall indicate later. These analyses above, by not going through the trouble of *deriving* the state-form from the capital relation, fail to unveil what is specific about the state in capitalist society, and thus, cannot properly appreciate its role, and therefore, its *limits*. *Herein lies the source of this spirit of political optimism towards the state*, here in the absence of an articulated relationship between the state and capital and in the analytical separation between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political.’

Systemization? On Nesbitt’s Marxian Approach to Slavery and Considerations Towards the State

Nick Nesbitt’s work on eighteenth to nineteenth century Caribbean slavery within the capitalist social form presents a methodology which is useful for forming a more analytically rigorous approach to the postcolonial state. Utilizing contemporary Marxian thought, Nesbitt urges us to understand the role of slavery in the Caribbean “via Marx’s concept of social form.”⁵⁰ Social forms are “social relationships under capitalism” which are “comprehended in relation to the central governing element of [capitalist] society, value, and its general form of appearance as commodities bearing monetary price or exchange value.”⁵¹ In a word, the point of Nesbitt’s inquiry is to understand the role of slavery in the Caribbean through social form analysis, a mode

⁵⁰ Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean* (University of Virginia Press, 2022), 4

⁵¹ Nesbitt, 4.

of analysis whose intent is to understand the specific forms of labor and wealth in a particular society.

Thus, Nesbitt's analysis proceeds in so far as slavery is a specific form of labor and value is a peculiar form of wealth specific to capitalist society. Slavery is a form of labor which produces no surplus-value due to the nature of its purchase—it is not the labor-power of the slave that is purchased but their whole person. What then, Nesbitt asks, is the point of this form of labor persisting in this mode of production?⁵² Nesbitt prompts this question in the course of a thorough literature review, which finds that the scholarship has not theoretically systemized slavery within the capitalist social form, rather, it has merely suggested an empirical and historical connection between them. He notes that within the scholarship, “it remains to be clearly demonstrated that while *in (and only in) the capitalist social form wage labor alone produces value...* it must be shown as well how slave and other forms of non-wage labor made real and significant contributions to wealth production and accumulation well into the nineteenth century.”⁵³ Further, Nesbitt finds that the categorical forms used in these empirical and historicist inquiries are not adequate, that in fact, we often are “confronted” with “conceptual salad(s)” of terms, comparable to what has been mentioned about the way in which Caribbean postcolonial scholars approach the connection between the state and capital.⁵⁴

For example, in a critique of Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, Nesbitt notes that “for all the unquestionable originality and force of William's claims, capitalism—a historically and conceptually determinate and delimited social form—remains... an uninterrogated, undefined presupposition.”⁵⁵ In other words, the scholarship had not adequately demonstrated

⁵² Nesbitt, 6.

⁵³ Nesbitt, 29.

⁵⁴ Nesbitt, 44.

⁵⁵ Nesbitt, 17.

the *necessity* of slavery within capitalism, or *why* it appears in a social form where the accumulation of value is its essential motion, and it has also not interrogated capital *itself*. For Nesbitt, Caribbean studies of slavery “universally (even including nominally Marxist analyses) lacked a conception of the nature of value in capitalism that would allow for the theoretical analysis of slavery and capitalism as social forms.”⁵⁶ This is much the same with Caribbean studies of the postcolonial state, i.e., that these studies lack a conception of value relations that would pierce through the state and its relation to capital.

Similar to Nesbitt’s overview of studies on slavery, we have found that studies of the state in the postcolonial Caribbean are theoretically impoverished as it relates to the anatomy of the capitalist social form; they argue their positions without “any clear understanding of the singular nature of capitalism itself.”⁵⁷ They are studies which present uninterrogated categories to further their inquiries, with “vague and indeterminate qualifiers” such as surplus accumulation, ‘wealth,’ etc., to “describe” capitalism.⁵⁸ To theorize the failure of postcolonial state-led revolutionary action robustly, it must be systemized within a particular, determinate social form, the capitalist social form. Taking Nesbitt’s lead, this work will attend to a Marxian mode of thought and demonstrate that the value relation has everything to do with the failure of the postcolonial state to assume a revolutionary role in attempts at overcoming the social form it resides in.

⁵⁶ Nesbitt, 29.

⁵⁷ Nesbitt, 33.

⁵⁸ Nesbitt, 43.

On Method: Towards a Dialectical Reconstruction of the State-form

An Exposition of Dialectical Reconstruction

Thus far, I have interrogated Caribbean scholarship pertaining to the postcolonial state. From the preceding discussion, I have found that in general, the state is treated in these inquiries with capital already presupposed. The state is posited as related to it in a simple conceptual, associative relation, with a number of unspecified normative concepts to articulate the relation. Capital itself, remains misty in these presentations, uninterrogated and undefined; perhaps in so far as it is something in the literature, it is presented as an accumulation of indeterminate ‘things;’ i.e. wealth, cultural power, social prestige, surplus product, etc. We also understand that this conclusion about how Caribbean scholars treat capital is corroborated by Nesbitt’s assessment of the Caribbean scholarship on slavery.⁵⁹ Now, moving away from our critique of the scholarship, the goal here is to articulate the state-form in relation to capital with piercing clarity as to reveal why such a social form comes into being and its purpose, to then motion towards a theorization of its limitations and its fundamental inability to initiate total social transformation in the postcolonial world. To make this presentation coherent, we must approach the state in a different manner, one which in part wrestles with the immanent categories of the capitalist social form in their *real* movement.

Here, I would like to posit an approach to grasping the capitalist social form which Marxist scholar Juan Iñigo Carrera has coined to be a dialectical reconstruction of the concrete in thought.⁶⁰ Iñigo Carrera argues that the dialectical reconstruction of the concrete is the method

⁵⁹ See Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery*, chapter 1. Among these scholars, Nesbitt discusses studies conducted by Eric Williams, Robin Blackburn, and Dale Tomich, among others.

⁶⁰ Juan Iñigo Carrera, “Method: From *Grundrisse* to *Capital*,” in *In Marx’s Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 56.

which we find being used throughout Marx's opus *Capital*, initially elaborated on in the *Grundrisse*. In a word, what Caribbean scholars have done thus far is only *represent* the state and the categories they associate with capital in a conceptual form. The state, capital, surplus, etc., are all concretions of a peculiar mode of life which these scholars have not made the effort to specify and interrogate as a part of a social form. A concrete thing is so "because it is the concentration of many determinations" and thus "a unity of the diverse."⁶¹ It is both a "result" of a series of social determinations, but at the same time, the point at which we move in thought "for observation [*Anschauung*] and conception."⁶²

At this juncture of the concrete, there must be a distinction made between a logical representation of a particular concrete thing and a dialectical reproduction of its movement in thought. Beginning with the former, we may understand this mode of thought as a kind of doubling in of the concrete in thought; a concrete moment which we face is morphed into a representational form, a *concept*, apart from its real presuppositions, in a pure thought-form.⁶³ The concrete, turned concept, becomes the point of departure for the inquiry.⁶⁴ Logical representation proceeds analytically then, by accepting the concrete only in its immediate form and reducing it to this immediate form as such, it is rendered and understood at "*face-value*," and presented as such.⁶⁵

Rendered into a conceptual appearance, logical representational modes of thought do not entertain the idea that the concrete may have *inner* "causal necessit[ies]."⁶⁶ Indeed, as already emphasized, the concrete is accepted at face-value and applied generally across all societies

⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 101.

⁶² Marx, *Grundrisse*, 101.

⁶³ Iñigo Carrera, "Method," 46.

⁶⁴ Iñigo Carrera, "Method," 46.

⁶⁵ Iñigo Carrera, "Method," 46. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ Iñigo Carrera, "Method 50.

transhistorically as a concept, for instance, as ‘labor,’ as Marx discusses in the *Grundrisse*, or as surplus, as wealth, etc., in the case of the previously discussed literature.⁶⁷ This representation of the concrete is then further abstracted from, producing numerous related concepts; “relations among them” are established “according to constructive necessity, that is, a *logic*.”⁶⁸ Thus, in the representational mode of thought, relations of necessity are those constructed *by* thought, through a logical imposition upon the reduced concrete, i.e., *logical constructions*; the necessities of the concrete to appear as such concrete are those produced by logical construction.

Within a representational mode of thought then, logical structures, or logical linkages, are imposed *externally* in order for conceptual relations to be produced between concepts. *A logical construction* of necessary determinations, or how the *representational* concrete is determined, is produced in thought. Phrased another way, logical movements in thought construct necessities of the representational concrete in thought which are apart from the real concrete itself; these movements are therefore “*alien* to the movement of the necessity that determines the object.”⁶⁹ Here, *real* necessity is substituted by *constructive* necessity.⁷⁰ In this sense, these conceptual logical constructions are not the *real* necessary determinations of the concrete, rather, they are only retrieved from a representation of the concrete in thought, thus, “those simpler concepts are obtained by assuming a purely ideal concrete bereft of non-recurring real attributes.”⁷¹ Simply put, the way the concrete is determined in this mode of thought is first through developing a conceptual abstraction of it, a representational form. Its further concepts are related to each other through a “constructive necessity that is inevitably external to them and that simultaneously

⁶⁷ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 50; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 103, 104.

⁶⁸ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 46.

⁶⁹ Juan Iñigo Carrera, “Dialectics on Its Feet, or the Form of the Consciuousness of the Working Class as Historical Subject,” in *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 66.

⁷⁰ Iñigo Carrera, “Dialectics on Its Feet,” 66.

⁷¹ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 50.

preserves the mutual externality of those concepts in the represented unity;” it is as though one is stringing conceptual points together through a logical imposition.⁷² This is how, for instance, Burden-Stelly and Hintzen can associate the state with capitalism without actually exposing their real inner relations. In their procedure they are conceptually intertwined as opposed to presented in thought as immanently mutually determining things in actuality.⁷³

The dialectical reconstruction of the concrete in thought however, proceeds in a different manner. Iñigo Carrera notes that “*reproducing* the concrete by means of thought implies that the course taken by the progression of ideas *must be the same* as that followed by the development of the necessity of the concrete, namely its determination, in its real actuality.”⁷⁴ Thus, when confronted with a concrete, I will not then proceed by its conversion into a concept through an abstraction. Rather, the point is to immanently reconstruct in thought its necessary determinations, or the concrete’s content which makes it appear as such a concrete, and therefore, follow its movement in thought as it moves *in actuality*. It is *not* the imposition of a logical structure which moves the concrete in thought in a dialectical reconstruction. In a logical representation, what becomes of the concrete is a series of abstractions and thought-forms, and further, it is an imposed logic which sets such conceptual forms in motion.⁷⁵ Rather, “dialectical analysis penetrates the real concrete in search of the necessity that makes it what it is.”⁷⁶ It is to pierce the concrete form, to immanently understand the make-up of its necessary interconnected content which has determined its appearance as a result of various determinations. The analysis moves not by an external imposition of logic and neither does it begin with a *concept* of the

⁷² Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 51.

⁷³ Burden-Stelly and Hintzen, “Culturalism, Development, and Socialist Transformation,” 237.

⁷⁴ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 47. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 54-55.

⁷⁶ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 56.

concrete although it still *faces* a concrete form. My point here is that the dialectical reconstruction of the concrete in thought allows for an inquiry that follows the real movement of social forms and their necessary determinations which conjure their appearance as a result of such determinations. It is a form of thought which moves beyond the immediate appearance of a thing and avoids external logical impositions that force it to move accordingly with that logic.

We should note that this dialectical mode of inquiry also begins with the notion that no category posited is without its presuppositions; things cannot exist as they do in pure thought-forms. Marx's course of inquiry throughout *Capital* is one concerned with the capitalist social form and the social relations specific to it. Social phenomena such as labor or the generation of surplus, have existed across many societal forms, however, in each respective social form they are particular to a mode of production. One cannot speak of 'surplus product' in general, of 'wealth' in general, of 'accumulation' in general or, more to the point, one cannot speak of "production in general," or of a "generic 'economy.'"⁷⁷ Rather, it is critical to insist on categories which retain specificity and distinction, and further, to insist on their quality as mutually presuppositional.⁷⁸

Marx is quite clear about the erroneous general and transhistorical use of categories when discussing the treatment of the category of labor by political economists, noting that labor becomes in their hands "the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form" in their view.⁷⁹ Further, he notes that these categorical forms always express a "given," that is, "modern bourgeois society," "given in the head as well as in reality, and that these categories therefore express the forms of being, the

⁷⁷ Patrick Murray, "Things Fall Apart: Historical and Systematic Dialectics and the Critique of Political Economy," in *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 97, 96.

⁷⁸ Murray, "Things Fall Apart," 96.

⁷⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 104.

characteristics of existence, this subject, and that therefore this society by no means therefore begins only at the point where one can speak of it *as such*.”⁸⁰ The categories posited in this dialectical reconstructive form of thought therefore exist in a kind of systematicity specific to the capitalist social form. Each moment has a “two-way directionality,” wherein “the dialectical movement from simpler to more complex categories reveals the latter to be presupposed by, and implicit in, the former.”⁸¹ There is an inseparability to the aspects of the phenomena under examination and each presupposes the other in a mutual construction—there is no inner hierarchy to the necessary content of a concrete. In this sense, the state-form cannot be understood without a respective understanding of the capitalist social form in which it resides, and vice versa. Understanding this systematicity, there is no way in which the state-form can exist as a form which is completely independent of the existence of the capitalist social form; as say, a mechanistic tool which a ‘social class’ utilizes for the transformation or the domination of society.

We should recall that what is being attempted here is a systemization of the state with a proper account of the capitalist social form which Caribbean scholarship has evidently not previously attempted. Dialectical reconstruction as an approach is distinct in the fact that it avoids the pitfalls of positing transhistorical categories with presupposed functions or content. It emphatically suggests piercing through the form of appearance of a thing and to seek its inner relational determinations as to represent its actual movement and experience. My point here is that, on the one hand, utilizing this mode of thought will outline the contours of the state as a form of appearance of the capital relation, of relations of value. On the other hand, it intends to suggest that Caribbean moments of socialist possibility experienced a collision with the

⁸⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 106.

⁸¹ Murray, “Things Fall Apart,” 105.

systematic limitations of the state; that the tragedy of state action is that, due to the state's determinations of form, its actions will never lead to social transformation. The state-form, lodged in this mode of production, is an integral presupposition of the motions of value accumulation. That is to say that there is something essential previous scholars have missed in the character of the state by way of leaving it unproblematized, that is, the relations of value and the specificity of the mode of production, which enable a new perspective on why the state-form is incapable of being a transformative element in the Caribbean. Thus, this is by no means a *history* of Caribbean postcolonial states, although the categories which will be presented always maintain historical specificity in so far as they are forms which appear in the capital relation. Now, we will attempt to rectify the previous scholarship on the state by first giving a proper account of capital.

On Matters of Capital: Commodity, Money, and the Domination of the Value-Form

We have noted that Caribbean studies of the state-form have treated capital as though it is only the 'economic' side of life; the utilization of empirical data to gesture towards what they identify as capitalism is the usual for these sociological and political assessments. Typically, they point to a disproportionate accumulation of money reaped from the exploited masses, a growing split among social classes, studying the movement of import/export patterns, among other characteristics to form a concept of capitalism.⁸² These empirical political economic strategies utilize general economic categories to assert these characteristics of capital. However, as we have discussed above, the notion of production in general is an unhelpful mode of analysis, especially if one is to motion towards making conclusions about the state-form in a specific mode of

⁸² See: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "State Against Nation," 62; Brian Meeks, "The Political Moment in Jamaica," 84-85.

production. Indeed, Stuart Hall remarked that “what is ‘common’ to production,” across historical epochs, “cannot provide a method which enables us to grasp, concretely, any single ‘real historical stage of production.’”⁸³ That these categories appear here in the scholarship as “reified and fetishized,” or “as seemingly ‘natural’ facts of life and as ‘objective necessities,’” is without question.⁸⁴ Moving forward with this understanding, a presentation of the specificity of the capitalist social form is essential. The driving question here is similar to Marx’s path of inquiry in *Capital*: what is the “specific social form and purpose of labor and wealth,” which we know to be the results of a particular type of social mode of production, i.e. the capitalist mode of production?⁸⁵

The point of departure for this inquiry is the immediate result of the form of labor within the capitalist social form, the commodity, or the immediate form of wealth in this mode of production. The commodity is the simplest expression of a peculiar form of organizing labor, whose content consists of use-value and exchange-value, but whose primary expression is exchange-value.⁸⁶ The importance of this point of departure cannot be understated, as it “is the simplest concrete form bearing the capacity to organize social labor—hence social consumption—in a society where individuals are free of personal dependence.”⁸⁷ Indeed, “the point of departure... is the commodity as the *dominant* social form of the products of labor; it is then, ‘not isolated acts of exchange, but a circle of exchange, a totality of the same, in constant

⁸³ Stuart Hall, “Marx’s Notes on Method: A ‘Reading’ of the ‘1857 Introduction,’” in *Selected Writings on Marxism*, ed. Gregor McLennan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 27.

⁸⁴ Norbert Trenkle, “Value and Crisis: Basic Questions (1998),” in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, ed. Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinsin, and Nicholas Brown (Chicago: M-C-M’ Publishing, 2014), 1.

⁸⁵ Patrick Murray, “Unavoidable Crises: Reflections on Backhaus and the Development of Marx’s Value-Form Theory in the *Grundrisse*,” in *In Marx’s Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 122.

⁸⁶ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 56.

⁸⁷ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 68.

flux, proceeding more or less over the entire surface of society.”⁸⁸ The commodity necessarily expresses itself in a “quantitative relationship,” however, the exchangeability of heterogeneous use-values suggests a common substance between the commodities being exchanged.⁸⁹ Such a common substance, which has crystalized itself in the appearance of exchange-value, does not bear its form in the act of exchange, only that the exchange relation *expresses* the common substance in question and demonstrates the necessity of it in order for the relation to take place.⁹⁰ Here, “the analysis faces the potentiality of human productive action, in other words, of labor, as the source of the commodity’s exchangeability.”⁹¹ When abstracting from a commodity’s use-value, what is left is their commonality of being products of labor.⁹² The common substance is understood to be *abstract* labor, which is then objectified as *value*; important here is the distinction being made between value and exchange-value.⁹³

Here, we approach the question of the *value-form*. Value is essentially an abstraction, a social relation and *real* abstraction historically specific to a form of labor and production, i.e. “*abstract* value-producing labor.”⁹⁴ By a real abstraction, we mean one which occurs not as a consequence of “human consciousness,” or “as an act of thought,” rather, an abstraction which occurs as a practical result of human activity.⁹⁵ The labor which is conducted within the capitalist

⁸⁸ Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2023), 183.

⁸⁹ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 56.

⁹⁰ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 56.

⁹¹ Iñigo Carrera, “Method,” 57.

⁹² It is worth noting that one cannot assert the exchangeability of things based on their use or utility, because the usefulness of a produced article is directly tied to the article in question, therefore, an abstraction of its use into a generalized form would simply cause the thing to vanish in abstraction. It should also be noted that this abstraction is a *practical/real* abstraction, which is subsequently overviewed below this statement. See: Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 183; Geoffrey Key, “Why Labour is the Starting Point of *Capital*,” in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed. Diane Elson (New York: Verso, 2015), 52.

⁹³ Diane Elson, “The Value Theory of Labor,” in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed. Diane Elson (New York: Verso, 2015), 132-133.

⁹⁴ Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 184.

⁹⁵ Trenkle, “Value and Crisis,” 7.

social form is peculiar in the sense that it is done so privately, the resultant commodity is the result of this specialized private labor. However, such concrete labor is “abstracted from their material particularities,” in the moment of exchange and *reduced* to the expenditure of human energies in the act of laboring, thus constituting the substance of value and allowing for exchangeability.⁹⁶ This is not to say that some labor is ‘concrete’ while other forms of labor are ‘abstract;’ what is meant by this reduction into abstract labor is that *all* concrete labor has been reduced to a general, physiological expenditure of human energies in practical action. The substance abstract labor, however, is distinct from value, “in the same sense that the quantity of a chemical substance in its fluid form determines the magnitude of its crystalline or jellied form.”⁹⁷ In other words, the substance of value remains distinct from “what is determined,” value.⁹⁸ Yet, as gestured toward above, value itself is not a *thing* in the sense that one can sensuously seek it within a commodity, it is a *suprasensuous* phenomena; “value is simply an abstraction, without

⁹⁶ Trenkle, “Value and Crisis,” 6; Iñigo Carrera, “Method: From *Grundrisse* to *Capital*,” 57-58. It is important to note that since the capitalist social form is geared towards the incremental production of value, it is not as though the product of labor only becomes commodity in exchange. All production “occurs already in the context of a fetishized form of value,” which is to say that value presupposes production in this system already. Therefore, all products of labor are meant to “fulfill a single purpose: to represent in the form of value,” a certain magnitude of abstract labor (Trenkle, 9).

Further, we should observe here the indirect way in which labor in capitalist society is organized. Due to the private form in which this labor takes, social labor finds itself in a kind of “asocial disunity,” which is then rectified in an indirect moment, that of exchange where private labor is practically abstracted and becomes abstract labor; therefore, social labor must find a way to achieve unity through practical abstraction. As Juan Iñigo Carrera notes: “In effect, the exchange relation, the corporeal materiality of any concrete form of the product of social labor mutates into that of the general equivalent as a synthetic expression of the indirect unity of social labor. This reveals that the unity of social labor is specifically established in capitalism on the basis of the general materiality of human labor.” See, Iñigo Carrera, “Method: From *Grundrisse* to *Capital*,” 60-61.

Finally, we should take a moment to address abstract ‘labor-time.’ Labor-time is the “immanent measure” of value, which “means that the value of a commodity is measurable as a pure quantity because it is an objectification of abstract labor, i.e. of ‘indifferent’ labor-time.” Essentially, labor-time is also not a “directly observable” phenomena, rather, its appearance is a change of form into money immanent in the value-form; one cannot, for instance, simply replace money with a kind of labor-time measurement for each commodity in question due to differentiations in concrete labor. Social or abstract labor-time only becomes an observable thing in the act of exchange. See, Diane Elson, “The Value Theory of Labour,” 136-139.

⁹⁷ Elson, 133.

⁹⁸ Elson, 133.

practical reality.”⁹⁹ This is not to say that value is merely ideational or a creation of mere consciousness. Value certainly has objectivity in the sense that it affects all aspects of the capitalist mode of life, yet it is not readily observable due to the fact that it is a practical abstraction which occurs in the way the form of labor is configured in the capitalist social form.¹⁰⁰ In a word, “value itself has no immediate form.”¹⁰¹ How then, does value manage to *appear* if it is a surpasensuous, abstract phenomena? It appears in a particular *form* in the *products of labor*. In other words, “[value] cannot stand on its own: it is not a category designating a reality which is independent of exchange-value, but a reality which is *manifested through exchange-value*.”¹⁰² Or more to the point, value “must confront it’s necessity and realize itself in some form, this being exchange-value.”¹⁰³ What is now appreciable is that value must necessarily take on a form of appearance, a *necessary* expression in the form of the “universal equivalent, a commodity directly exchangeable with all other commodities,” money.¹⁰⁴

This preceding analysis of the value-form has demonstrated not only the necessity of money as the form of appearance of value, and the nature of value as a specific phenomenon belonging to the capitalist social form, but it has also demonstrated the mutual presuppositions of the categories of value, exchange-value, use-value, abstract/concrete labor, and the commodity.¹⁰⁵ The course of this dialectical reconstruction has taken us from the commodity in

⁹⁹ Elson, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Elson, 133.

¹⁰¹ Iñigo Carerra, “Method,” 58.

¹⁰² Elson, 134. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰³ Iñigo Carerra, “Method,” 58.

¹⁰⁴ Elson, 134.

¹⁰⁵ By the ‘necessity of money,’ we mean to say that money is not a superfluous thing which exists independently of other categories. Rather, money is a necessary form of appearance of value without which value could not exist as a social phenomena. It is also worth noting that it is not only money that can express the value of a commodity—a materially different commodity in a two-way exchange accomplishes this expression. However, the expression of value in terms of another commodity is limiting in the sense that it expresses the value of a *single* commodity. The universal equivalent, money, expresses the value of all commodities in a world of commodities, or in other words, it is the manifestation of all commodities being related through mutual substance which they all share. See: Diane Elson, “The Value Theory of Labour,” 134.

an immediate form, to exchange-value, to value, back to the commodity, enabling us to posit the commodity as an actually concretized form in thought, i.e., as a result of several necessary determinations. What has been done thus far then, is the “disclosure” of “the essence of what is under study,” i.e., the specific form of wealth in the capitalist social form, *value*, and in part, the role of the form of labor in this society; the form of labor in relation to the category of capital is to be discussed further below.¹⁰⁶

For the moment, it is useful to point to value and its appearances as somewhat analogous to Hegelian categories of essence in order to further clarify what we mean when we figure the relations between them as essence and appearance.¹⁰⁷ The commodity and money are externalized, differentiated, yet continuous appearances or *forms* of value; in a word value is the suprasensuous abstract *essence* of exchange relations which occur on the immediate surface of society. This is not to say that commodity and money are ephemeral or epiphenomenal appearances which somehow ‘distort’ the ‘real relation,’ value. Rather, they have been demonstrated to be necessary forms to the social existence and relations of value, yet at the same time, these are forms which are “derived in the movement of essence as the form-determinations of essence.”¹⁰⁸ That appearances must be different than the essence of the matter is apparent, but in the relations of appearances, “the sphere of essential relations” is never “abandon[ed].”¹⁰⁹

Value is a social relation which only occurs in a “social form of labor” which “is simultaneously

¹⁰⁶ Murray, “Things Fall Apart,” 107.

¹⁰⁷ While the notion of essence-appearance is in part a Hegelian notion, the relationship between Hegel and Marx in this space is somewhat tenuous. Scholars such as Jarius Banaji find that Marx did not apply a Hegelian logical conceptual system in order to understand the movement of essence, rather, it was following the essence within its appearance which gives way to the category of value. See: Jarius Banaji, “From the Commodity to Capital: Hegel’s Dialectic in Marx’s ‘Capital,’” in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed. Diane Elson (New York: Verso, 2015), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Jarius Banaji, “From the Commodity to Capital: Hegel’s Dialectic in Marx’s ‘Capital,’” 18.

¹⁰⁹ Banaji, 18.

social and private.”¹¹⁰ This peculiar kind of sociality is indirect, the value relation is a necessary means of validating “privately undertaken production,” yet, as a real abstraction, it must appear as money.¹¹¹

Now we may approach a proper conception of capital and the form of labor within this mode of production. Capital, in a word, is a historically specific social relation—it is the movement and accumulation of value through the series of forms in which it returns to.¹¹² Or phrased differently, capital appears as “a universal *distinct* from its moments, while simultaneously *continuous and identical* with these moments, which together constitute capital’s process of self-valorization.”¹¹³ The forms of value, commodity and money within the circuit of capital then, are only important in so far as they are forms which lend to the accumulation of value despite remaining distinct from each other; in other words—and this is critical—they are not forms which can exist independently of this movement.¹¹⁴ The end of the movement of capital is to valorize value, thus the end of the capitalist social form as a total social form, or as a mode of social mediation, is predicated on the incremental movement of value based on the materiality of a certain form of labor conducted privately, but whose abstract, temporal substance constitutes value. Such labor is acquired by the capitalist through the historical existence of the proletariat, a class whose conditions of existence have been separated by force and thus, they *must* engage with capital’s mediative power through the sale of their labor-power in order to continue to persist through the acquisition of money in the form of *wages*.¹¹⁵ Thus, the form of labor subsumed by the capitalist mode of production is not one which “human beings” do

¹¹⁰ Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 181.

¹¹¹ Smith, “Hegel, Marx, and the Comprehension of Capitalism,” 29, 32.

¹¹² Smith, 22.

¹¹³ Smith, 23.

¹¹⁴ Smith, 23.

¹¹⁵ Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 322.

“willingly,” or naturally.¹¹⁶ Rather, “they do it because they were separated from the most basic means of production and existence” and must engage in this form of labor to persist, “by selling their vital energy, as labor power, for an external purpose,” the purpose of valorizing value.¹¹⁷

Value as a social relation then, is not a mere expression of the way in which things are distributed in society, it is *integral* to the mode of production; value is a “category of capitalist production itself” and is thus directly imbedded in the way in which the system of labor functions in this social form.¹¹⁸ Indeed, “*only in capitalism* do temporal units of this expenditure of energy, [abstract labor], serve as the immediate basis of the organization of social reproduction.”¹¹⁹

What the above articulation of capital suggests is that capitalist social form is one which is *dominated by value*. Far from being just a thesis of the exploitation of labor for the extraction of surplus-value, “the fundamental insight of Marx’s theory of value is that *the peculiar unity of social and private labor in capitalism transforms social relations among producers into a quasi-autonomous system of real abstractions imposing themselves on everyone by means of an impersonal and abstract domination.*”¹²⁰ In other words, *all* are subject to the power of this mode of production which rests on the basis of the valorization of value, including the capitalist who is subject to the “*compulsory commands,*” of the market.¹²¹ A conglomeration of social relations—a certain configuration of labor, a mode of production—confronts society in “alien form” as commodity, as money, as the market, as wages, etc.¹²² It is an *appearance* of a world of relations

¹¹⁶ Trenkle, “Value and Crisis,” 4.

¹¹⁷ Trenkle, 4.

¹¹⁸ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A reinterpretation of Marx’s critical theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

¹¹⁹ Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 185.

¹²⁰ Mau, 185. This is not to say that the familiar narrative of surplus-value is not important. Indeed, the exploitation thesis is integral to how the accumulation of value functions. However, the point here is that Marx’s dialectical reconstruction of capitalism cannot be reduced to the exploitation of one class by another.

¹²¹ Mau, 186.

¹²² Mau, 187.

between things in the act of exchange, however, the “domination of value is a domination of people by people *mediated* by relationships between people and things.”¹²³ The substance of value, abstract labor, and value itself, while still ultimately a manifestation of relations between people, become detached and “thing-like” through their appearances, seeming to occupy an autonomous, impersonal capability to dominate the way in which society is mediated.¹²⁴

This extensive presentation of the capitalist social form demonstrates that capital is not a *thing*, or a mere accumulation of things, or simply ‘the economy,’ it is a total social form, a mode of production which informs its relations of distribution, a *mode of life* whose condition for reproduction is the valorization of value. Opposed to the presentations of capital from the Caribbeanists discussed above, the categorical forms of money, wages, labor, etc., are not forms without presuppositions, but specific, mutually presupposing forms with function in a particular epoch of life. They are *functional forms* of capital, which will be critical to our discussion of the limits of action of the state below, which suggests that, in so far as the state intervenes, it is only *manipulating* these functional forms. Further, these are fetishized *appearances* of a particular, dominating real abstraction, capital, i.e. value in accumulative motion. Now what is left is to systematize the state as it exists through the relations of capitalism. Such a systemization is a necessary component to understanding the failure of the Caribbean postcolonial state to transform capitalist society’s essential social relations. I suggest that the state is fixed to actions which manipulate the functional forms of capital, and thus, the actions of state-led movements tragically collide into this limitation. Firstly, however, some brief preliminary notes on the applicability of Marx in the Caribbean are to follow.

¹²³ Mau, 187, 188. This also suggests that one cannot merely contribute all forces of domination to the value relations. Rather, it is the value relation in conjunction with class domination; the value relation expresses a domination between capitals, whilst class domination expresses a domination within the sphere of production itself.

¹²⁴ Mau, 187.

On the 'Applicability' of Marx in the Postcolonial World: On the Late Marx's Studies of Non-Capitalist Societies

Within Caribbean literature, there are concerns that the use of Marx's approach to social being may be a limitation on studies of states that are not Europe or dominant capitalist powers. A common claim appears to be that Marx held an overly determinist unilinear view of history as well as certain Eurocentricities that limited his understanding of what were otherwise non-capitalist societies.¹²⁵ This is certainly the case in Marx's early writings, particularly that of the *Manifesto* which presented the movement of capital as a universally determined and progressive historical occurrence that would further intensify the class struggle to the benefit of the proletariat for an eventual world revolution.¹²⁶ Brian Meeks for instance, claims that this view of history is a methodological impediment to the use of Marx in the Caribbean and in postcolonial contexts in general. Meeks proports that it is worth keeping an 'economic' Marx around for the sake of class analysis, however, the notion of a determinate revolution as an inevitable occurrence should be abandoned.¹²⁷

In agreement with Meeks, such a view of history should be rectified and indeed, there should be an openness about the way in which we engage with Marx. However, my contention with Meek's assertion lies in the fact that one cannot 'employ' an 'economic' Marx in the first place; this point is to be further developed in an articulation of the relationship between the 'political' and 'economic' below. For the moment, suffice it to say that to reduce Marx's rich

¹²⁵ See for instance: Brian Meeks, "The Frontline: Valentino, Pablo Moses, and Caribbean Organic Philosophy in the Seventies (2003)," in *Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 10; Brian Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: An Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 10; George Belle, "Against Colonialism: Political Theory and Re-Colonization in the Caribbean," in *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*, ed. Aaron Kamugisha (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 179.

¹²⁶ Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 477.

¹²⁷ Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory*, 40.

analysis to one of *just* class struggle or to one of exploitation would be a disservice to the insights the dialectical reproduction of the concrete in thought provides. The overview explicated above of his methodological approach to the capitalist social form should indicate as much. Moreover, and more to the point here, contemporary studies of Marx's later work on Russia, as well as his studies of other non-capitalist societies, suggest that Marx abandoned such a unilinear view of history and the inevitability of a solely proletarian revolution; see the footnote for extended comments on this subject.¹²⁸ In light of acknowledging Marx's studies of non-capitalist

¹²⁸ It will serve us here to point for a moment to Kevin Anderson's overview of Marx's progression on matters of non-capitalist societies to make evident the turn in Marx's thought. Notably, this turn towards multilinearity begins at the same time Marx begins his work in *Grundrisse*. Indeed, "by the late 1850s and early 1860s, Marx's perspectives on non-Western societies began to evolve," as his original notions of the 'progressive force' of capital began to dissipate (See: Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 162-163). Commenting on India for instance, he no longer regarded its colonization by the British as a "progressive modernization," instead, he noted that while "old forms" of life "have disintegrated without progressive new ones being able to form and develop" (Anderson, 162-163, 165). What was left was a destitution of life and not the automatic generation of a capitalist mode of production, or production on the basis of value relations. The real subsumption of non-capitalist societies under the capitalist mode of production did not seem to be a linear progression. Here Marx indicates subsumption's instability, or phrased a different way, that subsumption was not progressing necessarily towards itself. By *subsumption*, we mean the process by which the "labor process" in any given society becomes "subsumed under the logic of capital" or the valorization of value. A *real* subsumption of a labor process "happens when capital 'radically remolds' the 'social and technological conditions of the labor process, that is, when *capital* as a *social form materializes itself*" (see: Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 234, 235). Further, it is worth noting that in the French edition of *Capital*, there is explicit evidence "that his narrative of primitive accumulation was meant as a description of Western European development, nothing more, and hardly a global grand narrative" (Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 179). Indeed, with this in mind, it would be fair to say that Marx's critique of political economy was not suggesting that *all* regions of the world were following the same path as England, only that Western Europe was doing so.

Marx's correspondence with Russian academics and anti-tsarist movement leaders also demonstrates an abandonment of the unilinear narrative of revolution. Firstly, Marx stressed in a correspondence with Nikolai Mikhailovsky that Russia does *not* have to necessarily progress into capitalist production to see a revolutionary transformation into socialism (Anderson, 228). Indeed, "Marx was denying (1) that he had created a unilinear theory of history, (2) that he worked with a deterministic model of social development, or (3) that Russia in particular was bound to evolve in the manner of Western capitalism" (Anderson, 228). These contentions are further emphasized in Marx's letters to Vera Zasulich, and where we also find the suggestion that even in the real subsumption of labor under capitalism, past modes of life continue to persist even if their appearance has been changed (Anderson, 223). Indeed, the *total* subsumption of life to capitalism appears unfeasible in these writings (Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*; see also Mau, *Mute Compulsion*, 250 on total subsumption). Finally, there is the 1882 preface to the *Manifesto* where Marx suggests that the communal forms of Russian society during this period would be a necessary, and even *spearheading* component to a revolution into socialist development (Anderson, 235). In other words, this suggests that Marx believed "Russia would not need to go through an independent capitalist development to reap the fruits of modern socialism," if it engaged in revolution in conjunction with Western revolutionary movements (Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 236).

Looked at together, this evidence suggests that Marx turned to a multilinear view of history by the end of his life, and indeed, expresses that no determination is absolutely certain. This narrative that Marx saw the necessary

societies, I will move into a discussion of the state-form and its system-limits as an experience of the Caribbean.

On the Form of the Capitalist State and the Postcolonial Failure to Transform: Collision into System Limits

Preliminary Notes: Against a Separation of the 'Economic' and the 'Political'

To approach a discussion of the state, the interrelation of the economic and political must be addressed in order to move into a discussion of the systematic limits of the state. We have previously noted in the above a particular separation between 'economic' categories and 'political' categories (the state) in postcolonial Caribbean studies as it relates to theorizing the state. Further, we have suggested that these analyses place the state in immediate relation to capital without an elaboration of its inner genesis of form. This approach is not an unfamiliar one, however, here I argue that such an approach is debilitating if one wishes to understand the category of the state beyond merely being cognizant of its apparent and immediate content, its empirical variety, or seeing the state as a reflection of a ruling class general interest. In order to have a sense of the limitations of the state, it is critical to situate its analysis as a "relation between" it "and the form of production in capitalist societies."¹²⁹ The intention here is to break out of the political and economic dichotomy for the reasons that since it is an unsystematic

development of capitalism in every non-capitalist society can be safely dispelled and dispensed with. Moreover, this dispels the old orthodox historical materialist and developmentalist narrative that the development of the 'productive forces' are necessary to achieve any kind of social transformation in the postcolonial world. While the labor process the world over has been largely subsumed under capitalism, these examples of his late writings function to "serve an important heuristic purpose, as a major example of his dialectical theory of society" (Anderson, 245). Marx's theories of revolution and history are in the end, multilinear in nature, and at the same time, are flexible enough to "offer considerable scope for particularity and difference" (Anderson, 244).

¹²⁹ John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, "Introduction: Towards a Materialist Theory of the State," in *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*, eds. John Holloway and Sol Picciotto (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1978) 1, 10.

approach, it cannot hope to comprehend the development of the state-form, and thus, is “unable to analyze systematically the *limitations* imposed on the state by the relation of the state to the process of capital accumulation.”¹³⁰ Rather, to achieve a proper dialectical reconstruction of the state-form, a *derivation* of the state from the categories of the capitalist social form sketched previously is necessary, thus, revealing its genesis of form and limitations of function. A distinct and oppositional separation between the political and economic only gets us farther away from our stated goal.

While not all of the Caribbean scholars previously discussed are self-described Marxists in their approaches, it is not difficult to associate the basis of their perspectives on the state with the analyses of Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas; both of whom famously debated their views on the capitalist state in the 1970s.¹³¹ Poulantzas’ theorization of the state situated itself on an Althusserian “structuralist model of society,” wherein society is “composed of three levels, the economic, the political and the ideological.”¹³² In Poulantzas’ reading, *Capital* explained the ‘economic level’ of capitalist society through discreet categories pertaining exclusively to the economic sphere. The political, yet to be explained, necessitated its own “political concepts.”¹³³ Essentially, for Poulantzas, “capitalist society is characterized by a relative autonomy of the economic and political ‘instances’ which allows one to make each instance a separate and specific object of study.”¹³⁴ The state figured in this society then, is an instance which fulfills the particular role of “securing the cohesion of the society as a whole,” however in his conception it

¹³⁰ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 1, 10.

¹³¹ See: Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers) 1969. For Poulantzas’ critique of Miliband see: Nicos Poulantzas, “The Problem of the Capitalist State,” and “The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau,” both found in *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law and the State*, ed. Martin James (London: Verso, 2008).

¹³² Simon Clarke, “The State Debate,” in *The State Debate*, ed. Simon Clarke (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), 16-17.

¹³³ Clarke, “The State Debate,” 17; Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 9.

¹³⁴ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 6.

remained fairly distinct with respect to class and the economy.¹³⁵ On the other hand Miliband proceeded with a direct “identification of capital and the state,” and thus, in a detailed empirical analysis, concluded that the state is an apparatus “stamped” with the “character” of the “dominant class.”¹³⁶ Poulantzas insisted on a state which was not a mere reflection of the economy, rather, its role is more so that of a cohesive “*factor*” in the reproduction of a total system of interrelated yet autonomous ‘levels’; its political and ideological roles were emphasized in his mode of analysis over anything else.¹³⁷

Many of these aforementioned elements of analysis can be seen in what has already been discussed about the Caribbean literature of the state. Importantly for our purposes, the basis between Miliband, Poulantzas, and the Caribbean scholarship, is the insistence on “the political as an autonomous object of study, arguing, at least implicitly, that recognition of the specificity of the political is a necessary precondition for the elaboration of scientific concepts.”¹³⁸ What suffers in this mode of analysis, with the treatment of the political as a distinct sphere, is a lack of elaboration on the interrelation between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political,’ and further, it overlooks how these two spheres only *appear* as distinct and oppositional, or as a mere reflection of one another.¹³⁹ This is in addition to the fact that this mode of thought only explains the state through its functions as state. It is, in a word, a *fetishized* appearance of a separation. The appearance of this separation is indeed an immanently determined *form of appearance*, an appearance of the *form* of the state, due to the nature of the capital relation, or the movement and accumulation of value.

¹³⁵ Clarke, “The State Debate,” 17, 20.

¹³⁶ Clarke, “The State Debate,” 20.

¹³⁷ Clarke, “The State Debate,” 21.

¹³⁸ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 3.

¹³⁹ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 6.

In order to understand the relation and inner unity between the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’ forms, we must not treat Marx’s categorical forms as exclusive, discreet economic forms which must be extended with concepts of ‘social capital,’ ‘cultural capital,’ ‘hegemony,’ etc. Rather, following the state derivationists, the point is to derive the state-form from the determined forms of commodity, value, capital, etc.¹⁴⁰ This is not to suggest a kind of base-super structure approach to the state, with the economic base being the final determinant of all other social forms. In such a model, “capital and the economic are” “posited *a priori* as being separate from the political, so that it is not clear how the unity (and interrelation) of the separate spheres is to be analyzed.”¹⁴¹ The intention of a derivationist approach is, rather, “to develop the concepts of *Capital* in the critique of not only the economic but also the political form of social relations.” The derivationist approach constitutes a critique of the surface, fetishized, conceptual forms of the political, i.e., the *state-form*.¹⁴² In a word, we mean to assert that “the economic and the political are both *forms* of social relations, forms assumed by” “the capital relation; forms whose separate existence, springs both logically and historically, from the nature of that relation.”¹⁴³ As we did with the immediate appearance of the commodity, revealed to be a *form* of value contained within it, we now pierce through the category of the state in relation to the social relations of value through a derivation of its form. This follows the dialectical reconstruction mode of thought, which will both systemize the state in the capitalist social form and reveal its basic limitations of action.

¹⁴⁰ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 17.

¹⁴¹ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 14. The state derivational school on the state refers to a school of thought developed in reaction to the Miliband-Poulantzas debate. This school focused on several fundamental, theoretically abstract questions which arose out of the motions of the West German state in the 1970s. See Holloway and Picciotto’s “Introduction,” and Clarke’s “The State Debate,” for extensive discussion of contributors to the German debate and the derivationist school, including: Joachim Hirsch, Elmar Altvater, Bernhard Blanke, Ulrich Jürgens, Hans Kastendiek, among others.

¹⁴² Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 4.

¹⁴³ Holloway and Picciotto, “Introduction,” 14.

Deriving the State-form and its Limits of Action from the Category of Capital, or The Manipulation of Surface Forms

In the derivation of the state as a form of appearance of the ‘political,’ through the category of capital, I will follow closely the German derivationists Blanke, Jürgens, and Kastendiek, whose monumental form-analysis attempts to answer several questions: (1) how to critique the way in which political and social theorists take for granted the mystified separation between the economic and the political which “inwardly belong together;” (2) how to go about explaining this apparent separation as being “*a reality* made up of separately organized self-reproducing social relationships;” (3) and finally, “how, in this dual sense, are the *possibilities and limitations of action* or the state or ‘political system’ of a capitalist society to be determined?”¹⁴⁴ Approaching these questions, a few clarifications are to follow. We are interested in the derivation of a form of appearance out of the relations of capitalist production; a form which takes on what is essentially an extra-economic form of appearance yet still constitutes as a necessity for the inner mediation of capitalist society.¹⁴⁵ The point is not to explain the existence of the form of the state through this or that function, or through the role in which it fulfills in the capitalist social form through an examination of its effects.¹⁴⁶ To do so would be to begin with an “abstract, ahistorical definition as the starting point” for the explanation of the state-form; rather, “it must found its necessity in determined requirements of capitalist society.”¹⁴⁷ This assertion is similar to the reason why we did not start from the ‘concept’ of the commodity to uncover the relations of value; in other words, to begin with a general concept of the state would be to begin

¹⁴⁴ Bernhard Blanke, Ulrich Jürgens, and Hans Kastendiek, “On the Current Marxist Discussion on the Analysis of Form and Function of the Bourgeois State: Reflections on the Relationship of Politics to Economics,” in *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*, eds. John Holloway and Sol Picciotto (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1978), 108.

¹⁴⁵ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 110.

¹⁴⁶ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 113.

¹⁴⁷ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 114.

with a presuppositional abstraction, i.e., the state as “a form *separated* from society in which the general interest [of capital] is preserved or administered.”¹⁴⁸ Beginning with such a presuppositional, general concept of the state would limit the analysis. At this point of departure “all the functions of ‘the state’ are thus already contained *in nuce*, in its essence,” and therefore, “inquiries into the reasons for the functions, but above all into the limitations of the state in capitalist society can no longer be adequately answered.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, in order to be free of this methodological trap, a trap which leads us into merely describing the content of state functions, we have to begin with a free and empty category of state, where “every preconceived concept of the state has been abandoned,” and “mere associations and immediately, empirically derived notions of the ‘state’ do not already infiltrate the initial stages of the inquiry.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, we must turn to the categories of capital, which we have already assessed as being categorical forms which constitute the fetishized appearance of peculiar social relations; the relations of capital. A form analysis of the state must reveal the state as something which is necessary to the “reproduction of the society itself,” thus a developed form which exists *in relation* to yet “*alongside*” the other categorical forms already expressed, thus giving the *appearance* of an outside extra-economic force.¹⁵¹

The point at which this inquiry begins is crucial, however, suffice it to say that the point of departure here must be the commodity, or the relations of commodity production.¹⁵² We have

¹⁴⁸ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 116. This is also similar to the argument made by Marx with regards to the treatment of the category of labor by political economists’ in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which we have discussed previously.

¹⁴⁹ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 117. Beginning from the general concept of the state would essentially lead into a description of its historical and political variations, or merely reduce it to a ‘class state’ as its main function.

¹⁵⁰ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 118.

¹⁵¹ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 119.

¹⁵² Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 121. The authors argue that this point of departure is the main determinant point. Other contributors to the debate have inadequately attempted to derive the state from various other points of departure: the “surface of society,” or in simple commodity circulation as a primordial form of capitalism; the

previously discussed value as a peculiar mode of asocial sociality between producers. Such a sociality is impersonal and without physical force, expressed in the exchange of commodities with value, whose substance is abstract labor, necessarily appearing in the form of money.¹⁵³ However, commodities are not things which will themselves into exchange. People engage in the conscious act of exchange, although it is a necessarily compelled act; indeed, “the act of exchange presupposes acting people and constitutes a relationship between acting people, albeit only as agents of circulation.”¹⁵⁴ Here, the sphere of circulation, where the forms of value circulate through a metamorphosis of their equal forms, becomes a fundamental point of analysis. People in the sphere of circulation relate to each other as having “identical social and formal quality.”¹⁵⁵ This relation becomes expressed in a legal *form*, in other words, people in the sphere of circulation become “legal subjects” as they relate to their commodities as private owners.

The legal subject and the form of law are essentially the subjective expressions of the relations of commodity exchange; in a word, “the implementation of the law of value constitutes the implementation of the rule of law.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, out of the commodity form, is derived an extra-economic coercive force, here in this moment, in the form of law. In this sense, the relations of commodity production is the point which marks the *appearance* of a separation between “material relations” and “relations of legal persons;” society coheres in a doubled appearance,

category of crisis which assesses the state as an organizer and administrator; and the category of class struggle. These points of departure are not able to completely answer the questions outlined in this initial inquiry: at the surface of society, there is a misconception of simple commodity production as not pertaining to capitalism; the category of crisis merely reduce the state to a violent suppressor or a satisfier of needs, ultimately designating the state as a neutral instrument; the category of class struggle does not answer the question of why the state maintains an impersonal appearance not immediately associated with the dominant class.

¹⁵³ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 122.

¹⁵⁴ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 122.

¹⁵⁵ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 122.

¹⁵⁶ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 123. The law of value referring here to the exchange of equivalent values of commodities in the sphere of circulation.

yet the “subjects of law act in conformity with the movement of value” regardless of this appearance of the “abstract and ‘supra-personal’” form of law. Total social relations of reproduction still function in so far as they are being conducted in accordance with the movement and accumulation of value; in the sphere of circulation, the form of money still indicates that people “act towards a thing,” i.e., commodities and money, the reified, fetishized appearances of value.¹⁵⁷ Here, we see the genesis of the apparent separation between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political,’ *politics* now identified as “relations of will between independent, equal subjects of law.”¹⁵⁸ The extra-economic force of law then, protects capital in the motions of its circulation, it protects the formal equality of exchange in the sphere of circulation, and is thus, is part of the functions of a *class* state, although it appears as “apparently ‘neutral.’”¹⁵⁹ Money (in so far as it is a form of value) and labor-power in the sphere of circulation however, are forms of capital which only retain a formal appearance of exchange equality at the level of circulation.

The comportment of the subjects of law at the level of circulation is regulated by extra-economic force in the form of law, “guaranteeing that the subject behave in accordance with the demands of” the movement of value, and thus, in a peculiar way, the “formal character of the law applies” to the forms being circulated—“someone who possesses property is protected not as a person but as the owner of commodities.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, the extra-economic force relates to people not as *people* in an immediate sense, rather it relates to them only in so far as they are legal subjects, commodity owners, as a category *necessary* to the movement of and accumulation of value.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 124.

¹⁵⁸ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 124.

¹⁵⁹ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 125, 127.

¹⁶⁰ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 128.

¹⁶¹ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 128.

At this point, we may approach the ways in which this extra-economic force is mediated through forms, and the ways in which its interventions in the process of capital's social reproduction is limited. Thus far, we have noted how extra-economic forces have maintained their intervention in the sphere of circulation, in the money form and in legal form, "this means," and this is key, "that these attempts to intervene *do not directly and immediately shape the relations between the social classes particularly in the sphere of private production, but are mediated through the basic forms.*"¹⁶² In other words, the actions of the extra-economic force can only be conducted through the basic forms of appearance which we have established, those of the legal form and the forms of value. Further, the extra-economic force in the form of law can only relate to people only in so far as they are legal subjects. Thus, while the extra-economic force comes about as a result of the commodity form, implying that politics cannot be separated from economy as two discreet moments of capitalist society, these same forces can only effect "the reproductive process from *outside*, mediated through legal subjects."¹⁶³ When the form of state as a concrete *conglomeration of various extra-economic forces* attempts for instance, a monetary policy, their actions are only done "*vis-à-vis* the money-owner through the medium of money" thus only "affecting the process of reproduction externally."¹⁶⁴ Essentially then, the state as a form, or the manner in which it conducts its relational functions in the capitalist social form, is limited to *the sphere of circulation*, its actions are a *manipulation of the external forms of appearance of value*, or what we earlier had indicated as the *functional forms* of capital.

Let us elaborate on this point through a final summation. The division of the economic and the political as fetishized forms of appearance finds its genesis in the relations of commodity

¹⁶² Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 130. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶³ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 130.

¹⁶⁴ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 130.

production. Value, its materiality as being composted of the substance of abstract labor, then expressed in the form of money, is the means through which the asociality of capitalism is rectified, its social relations are expressed in the exchange of commodities. The relations of exchange allows “for the existence of an extra-economic instance and this engenders the abstract possibility of an intervention from ‘outside’ in the spontaneously socialized process of society’s material reproduction.”¹⁶⁵ From our preceding analysis of capital, we understand that as a social form whose drive is the accumulation of value, capital or value in process must move through its forms of appearance—i.e. money, commodity, wages, etc.—in the sphere of circulation and gain additional value in the sphere of production. We have since understood these forms to be functional forms: “reproduction occurs through forms which capital must assume in its various stages of production and circulation, forms which *although related functionally* as forms of *capital to the total process*, are, *as forms*, subject to their own conditions.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, the money form, the commodity form, etc., do not move independently of the total process of capital as they retain an inner connection, but at the same time as form, retain a relative autonomy. For our purposes, the key point is this: the state can *only* relate to the reproduction of capital through its functional forms, or its *modes of appearance*. The money form for instance, is only a “*form of mediation* of state interventions, *vis-à-vis* capital... but only from the perspective of capital is it a functional form, which can therefore be understood only from its context, or interconnections.” *This is why it is worth the effort to go through the trouble of articulating capital in a dialectical reconstruction, otherwise, this insight is lost.* The state intervenes through these functional forms, and in fact, can only be *fixed* on them, and regards them as existing autonomously from each other as it does not operate from an inner perspective of capital; it can only see fetishized,

¹⁶⁵ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 137.

¹⁶⁶ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 137.

autonomous forms, and sees these individuated forms as “possible cause(s) of crisis or as factor(s) of control.”¹⁶⁷ The state creates extra-economic “instruments” of intervention “corresponding to these form-specific functions. Policy thus *fixed in form* must *necessarily reinforce appearances*, i.e., *strengthen still more or ‘consolidate’ politically these tendencies towards autonomization.*”¹⁶⁸ The forms of value are relegated to being individuated forms, autonomized and their connections are externally conjured, unseen is their inner connection in the movement of capital. On the side of the legal subject, they are free and equal subjects only as it relates to this process of reproduction. Finally, we reach our point on the system-limit of the state.

Any basic action of state in the capitalist social form, especially those which intend to be wholly transformative of society, will collide with a systematic limitation, the limitation that it cannot do anything but manipulate the fetishized and reified forms of capital, of value in process. It cannot reach beyond the sphere of circulation into the sphere of production, into the configuration of the way in which the form of labor is done; a form of labor which produces surplus-value and further, is in relation to the constitution of value itself.¹⁶⁹ The state’s actions are wholly mediated by having to move through its legal subjects and the fetishized forms of value which it fixates on, to do otherwise would be to undercut its very conditions for existence. This demonstrates that the state *itself* is derived from capitalist relations of production and its motions fit snugly as a category in this total social form of mediation. In a word, the state is a manipulator of the circulation of dead labor, of the functional forms of appearance of capital and,

¹⁶⁷ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 138.

¹⁶⁸ Blanke, Jürgens, Kastendiek, 138. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁹ Importantly, this is not to say that the sphere of circulation consists of mere form illusions and the sphere of production is the ‘real’ sphere which must be transformed—these spheres, while distinct, work inseparably as part of the total system or social form of the mode of production, i.e., the capitalist mode of production.

in this sense, it *cannot* be the locus of social transformation—worse so because it cannot comprehend these forms in their inner connection *as capital*. The state in capitalist society is fundamentally incapable of transcending the mode of production. It cannot even say that it ‘redistributes’ the products of labor, as distribution is already determined by the mediation of capital. The reconstruction outlined here will allow us to understand how the Caribbean failed attempts at socialist transformation were in part, an experiential collision with these limitations of the state-form.

On the Grenadian and Jamaican Moments of the 1970s-80s: The Experience of System-Limit Collision

A certain difficulty arises in the above presentation of the relation between the state and capital and the suggestion that the relation outlined above constitutes the experience of Caribbean failures to transform; that, upon the use of the state, 20th century state-led Caribbean movements were met with the system-limits of the state-form and thus were functionally non-transformational. Indeed, this presentation is reminiscent of a theoretical debate between Brian Meeks and Hilbourne Watson, wherein Watson presented a sterile rearticulation of Marx’s dialectic in *Capital* in the defense of its use as a mode of analysis towards the Caribbean, whilst Meeks argued that such a theoretical presentation means nothing if it cannot actually “come to terms with the harsh reality of practical politics,” specifically the “Caribbean praxis of the seventies and eighties.”¹⁷⁰ What is present here is a contention between ‘*model*’ and *experience*,

¹⁷⁰ Brian Meeks, “Arguments within What’s Left of the Left: James, Watson, and the Question of Method (2001),” in *Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 45. For Watson’s initial criticism, see: Hilbourne Watson, “Themes in Liberalism, Modernity, Marxism, Postmodernism and Beyond,” in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, ed. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press), 355-394.

of theory and practice. Readers may contend that, while I have presented a ‘theoretical model’ of the state in capitalist society, there is no direct empirical or experiential connection between this presentation of the state and the Caribbean states of the late 20th century. The issue here is one of *abstraction* and *empiricism*. Thus, it would do well to overview Marx’s methodology in so far as abstraction is concerned in order to assert that indeed, the Caribbean is included in this presentation of the state because the Caribbean manifests the state-form.

Briefly, Marx neither abstracts *from* things nor abstracts particular things in order to subsume them *into* larger universals; these kinds of abstractions are what Richard Gunn deems as *empirist* abstractions.¹⁷¹ Rather, against empirist abstractions, Marx’s abstractions exist in a temporal and importantly, *practical* sense. Moreover, even as universal as they appear, abstractions “exist as particulars for their part.”¹⁷² It is the notion that abstractions exist simultaneously in theory as well as in practice, e.g., how value both exists theoretically but also in *practical* abstraction as a result of the constitution of commodity production.¹⁷³ In a word, “*all* social life, abstraction included, is essentially practical.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, what we have presented are not abstractions which are mere towers of high theory, rather, they are “*determinate* abstraction(s)” with a practical and particular substance in a totalization that is not to be construed as a universal ‘causing’ all particulars.¹⁷⁵ An understanding of how “the *form* of something can be construed as *mode of existence*” continues to be critical here.¹⁷⁶ Abstractions or universals exist in practical or concrete senses, and simultaneously, concrete things may *also* exist as abstractions. What “links”

¹⁷¹ Richard Gunn, “Against Historical Materialism: Marxism as a First-order Discourse,” in *Open Marxism Volume II: Theory and Practice*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 15.

¹⁷² Gunn, 16.

¹⁷³ Gunn, 16-17.

¹⁷⁴ Gunn, 17.

¹⁷⁵ Gunn, 17.

¹⁷⁶ Gunn, 20.

this space is the *form* in which these abstractions or concretions exist; modes of existence, form, “links determinate abstraction to practice.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, Marx’s determinate abstractions are abstractions “*in and through* which phenomena obtain, unlike empiricist abstraction which is *abstraction from* the phenomena concerned.”¹⁷⁸ The notion of forms allows for the inner relation between things, that something may exist in multiple forms or modes of existence, i.e, as capital exists in multiple functional forms. Here is woven a “criss-crossing field of mediation which amounts to a *totality*” even as some forms seemingly exist “*as*” other things “*without remainder*.”¹⁷⁹ My point here is that my presentation does not consist as an abstraction ‘separate’ from its ‘object.’ Our abstractions (like value for instance) are not ones which are divorced from phenomena to then constitute a distinguished theory of the object, i.e., the Caribbean or the state, etc. Neither do we insist that the ‘universal’ of the value-form ‘caused’ the failure to transform in the Caribbean. Rather, the modes of existence—forms—of determinate abstractions, practical in all senses, is an attempt to move beyond a separation between theory and practice, and indeed, presents something far more *experiential*: the peculiar existence and experience of social life in the capitalist social form, including the things which *exist* as abstractions. The above does not exist as a theoretical *model*, or as an empiricist abstraction, i.e., abstracted from ‘real society.’ This articulation should relieve us of the accusation that we are merely grafting a ‘clean universal theory’ onto a unique ‘complex particular,’ the Caribbean.

I maintain that this presentation of the state-form and its system-limits are not limited to the Caribbean. Nonetheless, the late 20th century Caribbean still *presents* as a space whose *experience* is the limits of state-form, lived in dynamic motion. At base, the moment these

¹⁷⁷ Gunn, 20.

¹⁷⁸ Gunn, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Gunn, 24.

Caribbean revolutions and ‘transformational’ projects held steadfast to the state constituted a tragic failure to transform due to the fundamental inability of the state-form to do anything but manipulate the forms of appearance of value, i.e. functional forms of the capital relation.

Caribbeanists may ask: should this derivation of the state be ‘grafted’ onto a radical revolutionary Grenada? A social democratic Jamaica under Michael Manley? Were these peripheral nation states still ostensibly ‘capitalist’ states? I rebut that we are not *grafting* anything in saying that they certainly they were capitalist in so far as they were state-*forms* existing in and through the capital relation, whose actions were still in the motions of a society weaved into the global generalization of the process of the accumulation of value.¹⁸⁰

Despite the apparent difference of a Michael Manley’s Jamaica under the People’s National Party (PNP) functioning in Westminster character and the Grenada revolution’s PRG functioning through a so-called top-down “paternalistic socialism,” at basis, they are still forms of the capitalist state.¹⁸¹ Both were fixed on the manipulation of the surface forms of value at the level of the sphere of circulation; this fixation is not due to particular leadership, rather, it is because of the fundamental character of the state-form. Both the experience of the PRG and Manley’s Jamaica betray the state’s capability for intervention as limited to mediation with the money form and legal subjects in the sphere of circulation. The PRG and Jamaica largely sustained their redistributive and ‘transformative’ efforts through loans for instance.¹⁸² Even PRG’s monumental effort in “carry[ing] out far reaching social programs in health, child care,

¹⁸⁰ It is worth keeping in mind what has been previously stated about real subsumption, that the *total* subsumption of all social life under the capitalist social form is impossible. Thus, saying that these states were still manifestations of the capital relation does not equate to saying that *all* social life in Grenada or Jamaica during this period was totally subsumed under the logic of capital or the valorization of value. This leaves appropriate room for other modes of life that persisted although in a marginal way.

¹⁸¹ Carl Stone, “Whither Caribbean Socialism? Grenada, Jamaica, and Guyana in Perspective,” in *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada*, ed. Jorge Heine (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1991), 297, 298; Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory*, 157.

¹⁸² Stone, “Whither Caribbean Socialism?”

education and housing,” necessitated a mediation through capital; not only in the sense that foreign loans (money-form) largely fueled these endeavors, secondary school students for instance, still engaged with capital in the form of money to pay school fees albeit at a reduced price.¹⁸³ As Blanke, Jürgen, and Kastendiek note, “the ‘organization’ of certain services, such as education, is in fact characterized by its *mediated* relationship to the reproductive process.”¹⁸⁴ Moreover, what are “employment-generating and social welfare programs,” if not the manipulation of surfaces forms of dead labor? The formation of state-enterprises, as with Jamaica during this period, are not the state functioning “*as a state*” but rather “*as individual capital*.”¹⁸⁵ By this we mean that state-enterprises continue to purchase a labor-power such that it continues to perform a particular form of labor, value producing labor, in exchange the worker receives wages; *all* processes contained within the sphere of circulation.

Indeed, despite their ‘empirical differences,’ the state in postcoloniality experiences the same system-limits; the efforts of the PNP and the PRG collided with these limits, however, from the perspective of the state, this appeared to be a part of a transformational effort because of their fixation on the functional forms of capital. While we do not mean to assert that Maurice Bishop was *the state* of Grenada, as a practical agent of it, we can glimpse some of this state perspective. In his 1982 speech relaying the ‘economic’ plans for Grenada for instance, Bishop constantly makes reference to ‘capital’ as mere implements to production, to money as not an expression of anything in particular, but as a kind of redistributive tool or element towards development towards “hundreds of university scholarships, more training opportunities,” and “more

¹⁸³ Meeks, *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory*, 164, Maurice Bishop, “Education is a Must! Speech to Inaugurate the National In-Service Teacher Education Programme (NISTEP) at the Grenada Teacher’s College, 30 October 1980,” in *In Nobody’s Backyard: Maurice Bishop’s Speeches, 1979-1983 A Memorial Volume* edited by Chris Searle (London: Zed Books, 1984), 56.

¹⁸⁴ Blanke, Jürgen, Kastendiek, “Form and Function of the Bourgeois State,” 131.

¹⁸⁵ Stone, “Whither Caribbean Socialism?” 301; Jürgen, Kastendiek, “Form and Function of the Bourgeois State,” 131.

employment.”¹⁸⁶ None of these forms are seen as the *functional forms of capital*, or of the capital relation, relations of value, etc. Here, these historic attempts at societal transformation collide with the system-limit of the state without awareness that such a collision has occurred. The transformation of the whole of society fails in part because, as we have continued to emphasize, the state is systematically incapable of transcending the mode of production lest it destroy the essence of the relations which give it form.

As we have outlined, capital operates through functional forms, their mere appearance presupposes the continued existence of capital in these ‘transformational’ projects. Moreover, the appearance of *the state-form itself*, the appearance of a seemingly distinct, autonomous ‘political’ form, indicates the persistence of the capitalist mode of production, i.e. of commodity relations. As we have demonstrated in our derivation of the state, the state presupposes the existence of capital, and vice versa. This is not to say that these respective movements were ‘destined to fail,’ or doomed to fail in the effort towards socialist transformation. However, the notion of the state-form as the locus of transformational power certainly led to these respective movements collision with its system-limits. Herein lies their tragedy of action, to continually seek transformation in the state when they, unbeknownst to them, could *only* engage in the manipulation the moments of value; the capitalist mode of production remained *unchallenged*.

By Way of Conclusion: To Dash all Hope in the State

This article has critiqued the way in which Caribbean scholarship has thus far interpreted the postcolonial state and its relationship to capital; interpretations which I contend have led to a

¹⁸⁶ Maurice Bishop, “Forward to 1982—the Year of Economic Construction! New Year’s Address to the Nation, Made on Radio Free Grenada and Television Free Grenada, 1 January 1982,” in *In Nobody’s Backyard: Maurice Bishop’s Speeches, 1979-1983 A Memorial Volume* edited by Chris Searle (London: Zed Books, 1984), 101-102, 104-105.

maintenance of a spirit of optimism around the state as a locus of social transformation. Through a thorough dialectical reconstruction of capital and its relationship to the state, we have exorcised this spirit, firmly asserting that the state cannot be a vehicle for socialist transformation in the postcolonial world. Otherwise, we collide into the system-limits of the state in the capitalist social form, as the state is a ‘political’ form of appearance of commodity relations, of the *capital relation*. We have asserted that the late 20th century Caribbean experiments to transform is this experience manifest.

The Caribbean continues to linger in the post-mortem of 1983, and certainly, so does the scholarship, which appears traumatized by the failures to transform. Continuing to place the state in prescriptive solutions towards transformation from the perspective constructed in this article, is to fail to recognize its inner connection with the capitalist social form. These statist prescriptive solutions are a very manifestation of this haunting, choking miasma of dead futures which we explicated at the beginning of this article. In light of our inquiry, Paget Henry’s insistence that the Caribbean should not “apologize” “or attempt to deny” its “state-centered politico-economic identity,” and further, that the state remains a perfectly sound method towards “rebuilding Caribbean socialism” now appears quite astonishing.¹⁸⁷ More *egregiously* unfounded is the notion that doing so “rings of subjective authenticity.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, to suggest that it is part of an “identity that we [the Caribbean people] seek to build on and expand” on should be *denied outright*.¹⁸⁹

For the moment, what I have substantiated is this: the postcolonial state in capitalist society is fundamentally incapable of societal transformation and to insist otherwise is to act

¹⁸⁷ Henry, 217.

¹⁸⁸ Henry, 217.

¹⁸⁹ Henry, 217.

bound to the statist spirit, and to immediately collide with the state's system-limits. The tragedy of state-led action would rear its head once more. I suggest that the position outlined in this article may be used to probe particular issues that have thus far been unresolvable in the Caribbean despite the state's best efforts. Related inquiries may probe *why* it is that 20th century Caribbean revolutions took the course of tragic state-led action. This may involve an inquiry as to the relation between political forms of appearance of the capital relation and the subject. In brief, such a study would have to contend further with the ideological nature of the sphere of circulation in relation to the subject and the conjuring of fetishized thought-forms. Further inquiries may ask why it is that the Caribbean scholarship has placed such spiritual faith in the state-form, which may require an epistemological genealogy. The Caribbean need not be a place haunted by the 'traditions of dead generations' of statist. May the creative potentials of the Caribbean masses flourish beyond such old imperatives.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Kevin B. *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Bellofiore, Riccardo, Guido Starosta, and Peter D. Thomas, eds. *In Marx's Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014.
- Bonefeld, Werner, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis eds. *Open Marxism Volume II: Theory and Practice*. London: Pluto Press, 1992.
- Bonilla, Yarimar. *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Clarke, Simon. *Marx, Maginalism and Modern Sociology: From Adam Smith to Max Weber*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991.
- Clarke, Simon, ed. *The State Debate*. London: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1991.
- Elson, Diane, ed. *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*. New York: Verso, 2015.
- Getachew, Adom. *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Hall, Stuart. *Selected Writings On Marxism*, edited by Gregor McLennan. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.
- Heine, Jorge, ed. *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991.
- Henry, Paget. "C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney and the Rebuilding of Caribbean Socialism," in *Journeys in Caribbean Thought: The Paget Henry Reader*, edited by Jane Anna Gordon et. al., 199-223. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016.
- Hintzen, Percy C., Charisse Burden-Stelly and Aaron Kamugisha, eds. *Reproducing Domination: On the Caribbean Postcolonial State*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022.
- Holloway, John and Sol Picciotto, eds. *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*. London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1978.
- Kamugisha, Aaron, ed. *Caribbean Political Thought: Theories of the Post-Colonial State*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013.
- Larsen, Neil, Mathias Nigles, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown, eds. *Marxism and the Critique of Value*. Chicago: MCM', 2014.
- Nesbitt, Nick. *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022.
- Mau, Søren. *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital*. London: Verso, 2023.
- Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*. New York: Penguin Books, 1973.
- Marx, Karl and Fredrich Engles. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." In *The Marx-Engles Reader*, second edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 469-500. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978.
- Marx, Karl and Fredrich Engles. *The German Ideology*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998.
- Meeks, Brian. *Caribbean Revolutions and Caribbean Revolutionary Theory*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001.
- Meeks, Brian. *Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

- Meeks, Brian and Folk Lindahl, eds. *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001.
- Miliband, Ralph. *The State in Capitalist Society: an analysis of the Western system of power*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1969.
- Moseley, Fred and Tony Smith, eds. *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: A Reexamination*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015.
- Murray, Patrick. *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017.
- Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law and the State*, edited by Martin James. London: Verso, 2008.
- Scott, David. *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Searle Chris, ed. *In Nobody's Backyard: Maurice Bishop's Speeches: 1979-1983 A Memorial Volume*. London: Zed Books, 1984.