

**The Dialectics of Domestication: Domestic Colonialism and
Internationalist Criticism in North America**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a reconstruction of the concept of domestic colonialism as developed by revolutionary thinkers in the US 1960s. While rhetorics of occupation and colonial extraction are still prevalent in North American politics, the actual conceptual framework of domestic colonialism is routinely dismissed in the human sciences. I argue that this dismissal largely relies on two readings of the concept that, ultimately, are one-sided: as a social scientific theory of racism, on the one hand, and as a rhetorical strategy, on the other. I argue that ultimately it needs to be considered a concept aimed at dialectical critique, a form of political knowledge aimed at clarifying the stakes and impediments to emancipatory struggles for self-determination in North America. More specifically, it was a rubric of political judgment that pushed against domesticating readings of revolt as containable and answerable within the scope of ‘domestic’ politics. It was a dialectical concept in that it worked at the edges of available languages of politics, stretching them to make sense of novel historical predicaments. In turn theorists of domestic colonialism read revolt as exposing the presence of the international ‘within’ the domestic, the impossibility of enclosing ‘domestic’ politics as such in North American political orders structured by racial subjugation and colonialism. I argue that theorists of domestic colonialism offered a signal contribution to the critique of domestic politics as such, re-reading it as in fact a violent but incomplete process of domestication. The domestic colonialism concept, considered as an intervention in the interpretation of insurgency in the 1960s, enacted a de-domestication of political analysis premised on an immanent contradiction between the assumption of ‘domestic’ politics and the necessarily ‘international’ and imperial forms of power required to maintain it. Therefore examining this concept in context offers an important contribution to critical international political thought through a sustained critique of the conceptual distinction that typically undergird the division of disciplines within political science: that between domestic and international politics.

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Introduction

0.1 Invoking Occupation

Interpreting the rebellions that punctuated the last decade, from uprisings against police brutality in Ferguson, Missouri, to the defense of land and water at Standing Rock, to the RCMP's militarized invasion of Wet'suwet'en territory, to massive national and international protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, commentators repeatedly characterized the contemporary predicament as one defined by "occupation." Roxane Gay wrote that Ferguson was an "occupation in plain sight."¹ In Minneapolis, one commentator noted, "the thin blue line looks like it is ready to invade a foreign nation."² In *The New Republic* one commentator emphasizes the role of the Trump administration in "treating U.S. cities like occupied territory."³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, however, puts it in a longer trajectory in which the routinization of police brutality and unaccountability converts the law into mere "force."⁴ Coates usefully points to the police as a crystallization of a broader legitimation crisis in North American political orders, a shift toward what Paul Passavant calls a "postlegitimation" state in which police power is used to incapacitate and contain the antiracist insurgency that police themselves

¹Roxane Gay. "Ferguson is an Occupation in Plain Sight and Words Aren't Enough to Change That." In: *The Guardian* (Aug. 14, 2014). URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/14/ferguson-occupation-peace-calm>.

²Nick Baumann. "When Police View Citizens as Enemies." In: *The Atlantic* (May 30, 2020). URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/05/george-floyd-protests-minnesota-urban-warfare/612421/>.

³Libby Watson. "The Trump Administration is Treating U.S. Cities Like Occupied Territory." In: *The New Republic* (July 17, 2020).

⁴Ta-Nehisi Coates. "The Near Certainty of Anti-Police Violence." In: *The Atlantic* (July 12, 2016). URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/the-near-certainty-of-anti-police-violence/490541/>.

spark.⁵ This dissertation began as an attempt to unpack the implications of this ubiquitous line of criticism for contemporary critical political theory.

What is especially electrifying about this language from the political theorists' vantage is that in it, police violence opens a set of questions about the basic parameters, legitimacy, and shape of political order. This is especially true if we return to this concept's provenance in sixties political criticism. Particularly instructive, here, is James Baldwin's classic 1966 essay "Report from Occupied Territory." Drawing on the circulation of images of occupation in Vietnam and Palestine, Baldwin reinterprets the predicament of Harlem through the prism of colonial domination: "Harlem is policed like occupied territory." While the police might conventionally be thought as performing the necessary, but ultimately regrettable, violence work required to sustain liberal political orders, read through the prism of colonization as *occupiers* they re-appear as "hired enemies of the population," with whom police do not identify but confront as a dangerous and potentially insurgent mass.⁶ From this vantage, occupation describes a mass vulnerability to the racial force of law:

"The citizens of Harlem... can come to grief at any hour in the streets... are not safe in their windows, are forbidden the very air. They are safe only in their houses – or were, until the city passed the No Knock, Stop and Frisk Laws, which permit a policeman to enter one's own home without knocking and to stop anyone in the streets, at will, at any hour, and search him."⁷

Under conditions of racial rule – exposed through the language of occupation – law appears not as a set of norms upon which residents of Harlem can lay claim, but as *force*. Law makes its appearance, here, only in "the scars borne by many of those dearest to me, the

⁵Paul A. Passavant. *Policing Protest: The Post-Democratic State and the Figure of Black Insurrection*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.

⁶James Baldwin. "A Report from Occupied Territory." In: *The Nation* (July 11, 1966). URL: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/report-occupied-territory/>.

⁷Ibid.

thunder and fire of the billy club, the paralyzing shock of spittle in the face.”⁸ This form of ‘anticolonial’ political criticism, therefore, opens an analysis of law as a “medium of racialized statecraft” instituting a racial split between those who are subjects *of* law and those who are subject *to* law, the latter being those who are “excluded from law’s protection [but] not excluded from law’s discipline, punishment, and regulation.”⁹

Three years later, Huey Newton of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence mobilized the language of occupation to describe a form of collective power-over. Like Baldwin he mobilizes a comparison between US police and military occupation in Vietnam. But, adding to Baldwin’s account of law’s conversion into mere force, he argues that this conversion is a response to claims for collective self-determination. The language of occupation, here, points to an analysis of counter-insurgency:

“Black people desire to determine their own destiny. As a result, they are constantly inflicted with brutality from the occupying army, embodied in the police department. There is a great similarity between the occupying army in Southeast Asia and the occupation of our communities by racist police.”¹⁰

In the Black Panthers’ version of this occupation analysis, then, it was not only a matter of law’s appearance as racialized policing but a symptom of an underlying conflict between a ‘colonial’ counter-insurgency and an internationalist, anti-imperialist “liberation politics.”¹¹ The politics of policing, here, crystallizes a deeper contradiction between the constitution of North American political orders and their reliance on the displacement of alternative sovereignties and forms of self-determination – Indigenous, Black, Chicano, diasporic.

⁸Baldwin, “A Report from Occupied Territory.”

⁹Lisa Marie Cacho. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. New York: NYU Press, 2012, p. 5.

¹⁰Huey Newton. “A Functional Definition of Politics.” In: *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002, pp. 147–149, p. 149.

¹¹Stuart Schrader. *Badges without Borders: How Counterinsurgency Transformed US Policing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019, p. 3.

Both of these analyses of policing as occupation re-interpret North American political orders from liberal states whose coercive mechanisms are over-stepping their limits to political orders premised on racial and colonial war.¹² As Achille Mbembe puts it, the language of occupation enables a re-description of ‘domestic’ order as an ordering process of imperial war: “where ‘peace’ is more likely to take on the face of a ‘war without end.’”¹³ If, as William Blackstone put it in the 1800s, the police power concerns “the due regulation and domestic order of the kingdom,” taking occupation as one’s guidestone implies that this domestic ordering has, in North America, required a form of counterinsurgent policing to constitute and maintain a domestic order founded on the displacement of alternative “desires to determine their own destiny.”¹⁴ At stake here is the emulsification of war and politics, whose central symptom is the police’s resemblance to an occupying army. The language of occupation points toward of political order as the “continuation of war by other means.”¹⁵

This provocative re-reading of political order as a process of occupation – war by other means – was inextricably related to an internationalist turn to the politics and ideas of decolonization. Reading Baldwin’s essay, Timothy Seidel argues that discourses invoking a “shared experience of late modern colonial occupation” served as a “chain of equivalence in efforts at transnational solidarity and resistance.”¹⁶ For example, as Michael Fischbach argues, the Black Panthers often mobilized the language of “pigs” to describe both local police and Israeli state forces (indeed the entire occupation).¹⁷ In other words, this language of

¹²See, on this line of thought Nikhil Pal Singh. *Race and America’s Long War*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018.

¹³Achille Mbembe. “Necropolitics.” In: *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003), pp. 11–40, p. 23.

¹⁴On Blackstone and the police power as ordering of a domestic kingdom, see Markus Dubber. “Criminal Police in the Rechtsstaat.” In: *Police and the Liberal State*. Ed. by Mariana Valverde and Markus Dubber. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, pp. 92–109; Markus Dubber. *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

¹⁵Michel Foucault. *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-6*. Trans. by David Macey. New York: Picador Press, 2003; Michel Foucault. *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973*. Trans. by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave, 2015.

¹⁶Timothy Seidel. “‘Occupied Territory is Occupied Territory’: James Baldwin, Palestine, and the Possibilities of Transnational Solidarity.” In: *Third World Quarterly* 37.9 (2016), pp. 1644–1660.

¹⁷Michael R. Fischbach. *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019, p. 120.

occupation was part of a broader development of internationalist political languages that envisioned “the fate of Black Americans as inseparably linked to the fate of Africans and other colonized peoples.”¹⁸ Revolutionary thinkers and movements in the US “connected repression of freedom movements at home to repression of anticolonial efforts overseas.”¹⁹ This meant not only engaging in internationalist solidarity but re-interpreting their own struggles as international struggles for self-determination. In Malcolm X’s words, “There are 22 million African-Americans who are ready to fight for independence, right here.”²⁰ Read through the broader context of decolonization, racial domination in the US as a “world problem” that could never be reduced to a “domestic issue.”²¹ The domestication of racism and struggles against it was criticized through an “optic of imperialism.”²²

The re-interpretation of political order as a form of colonial war enacted through both literal war and ‘other means,’ on the one hand, and a re-interpretation of struggles against racial domination as struggles for collective self-determination, on the other, was crystallized in the concept of **domestic or internal colonialism**. This concept, circulating in Black revolutionary movements in the 1960s and 1970s, worked to re-interpret racial ‘minorities’ in the US as ‘colonized nations,’ and indeed as members of a worldwide colonized majority. The Revolutionary Action Movement stated this particularly sharply in 1965: “Black Americans are a *colonial people*... the United States contains *two distinct nations: White America* – citadel of Western imperialism – and *the captive nation, colonial Black America*.”²³ This is often read in terms of a “colonial analogy,” in which these thinkers drew comparisons between their

¹⁸Penny M. von Eschen. *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 5.

¹⁹Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Counterinsurgency Transformed US Policing*, p. 3.

²⁰Malcolm X. “The Black Revolution.” In: *Malcolm X Speaks*. Ed. by George Breitman. New York: Grove, 1965, pp. 45–57, p. 49.

²¹Malcolm X. “An Appeal to African Heads of State.” In: *Malcolm X Speaks*. Ed. by George Breitman. New York: Grove, 1965, pp. 72–87, pp. 75–6.

²²See Alex Lubin. *Geographies of Liberation: the Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*. Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2014.

²³Revolutionary Action Movement. “A New Philosophy for a New Age.” In: *Black America* (1965), pp. 7–8, 10, 20, See chapter five for a discussion of the Revolutionary Action Movement’s writings.

situation and the predicament of the colonized in Africa and Asia. But the underlying logic here is not comparative but connective. It reads Black people in the US as “members of a Third World in the United States” *linked with* rather than straightforwardly identified with different constituencies. The idea here was less that the situation is the ‘same’ but that it is connected, that the US creates and is criss-crossed by a ‘Third World’ within.²⁴ Domestic colonialism was part of “a set of oppositional discourses and practices that exposed the hegemony of Americanism as incomplete, challenged its universality, and imagined carving up its spaces differently.”²⁵ In other words, it offered a de-familiarization of domestic politics as such, a refusal to assume the domestic order of the nation-state as the background to politics. By reading domestic politics just *as* a form of imperial power against which claims for self-determination could be and were being made, theorists of domestic colonialism “unsettled the cognitive ‘banisters’ of black radical thought from methodological and epistemological nationalism.”²⁶

In recent years, not only has the language of occupation continued to shape discussions of police power, but theorists and political critics have taken up the language of domestic or internal colonialism – and the writings of its proponents – to understand contemporary anti-racist insurgency and racial formations. Theorists of policing and anti-Black racism have used writings from the 1960s on “The Black Colony” to re-interpret contemporary struggles around policing as a question of colonial power-over, the systematic rule of one population by another through ‘occupation,’ or, in Barnor Hesse’s terms, “white sovereignty.”²⁷ Jackie

²⁴Roderick Bush. *The End of White World Supremacy: Black Internationalism and the Problem of the Color Line*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, July 2009, p. 179.

²⁵Nikhil Pal Singh. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Nov. 2005, p. 205.

²⁶Brandon M. Terry. “Stokely Carmichael and the Longing for Black Liberation: Black Power and Beyond.” In: *African American Political Thought: a Collected History*. Ed. by Melvin L. Rogers and Jack Turner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021, pp. 593–630, p. 619.

²⁷Barnor Hesse. “White Sovereignty (...), Black Life Politics: ”The N****r They Couldn’t Kill.” In: *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116.3 (2017), pp. 581–604; David Correia and Tyler Wall. *Police: A Field Guide*. London: Verso, 2018; Rinaldo Walcott. *On Property: Policing, Prisons, and the Call for Abolition*. Windsor: Biblioasis, 2021; Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*; Robin D. G. Kelley. “‘Slangin’ Rocks...Palestinian Style’: Dispatches from the Occupied Zones of North America.” In: *Police Brutality: an Anthology*. New York: W.W.

Wang, building out these analyses, argues that describing police in imperial/colonial terms exposes “how racial segregation and the spatial concentration of poverty essentially create zones that are marked lootable.”²⁸ In other words, many critical theorists are finding ways to re-mobilize the idea of domestic colonialism as a “political perspective” in the present.²⁹ This resurgence of interest builds on an already-existing preservation of the concept by anticolonial thinkers like Charles Pinderhughes, Roderick Bush, and Jared Ball, all of whom argue that “Rather than citizens, more ‘citizen-subjects,’ [Black] communities experience a form of colonialism (domestic, internal and/or neo) in which they are cordoned off and ruled... by White populations.”³⁰

Yet, for all this contemporary interest, politically and theoretically, in the idea of domestic colonialism, even a cursory look to the human sciences will reveal a deep skepticism about the concept, which is considered “discredited” and obsolete, while many of those politically sympathetic declare it outmoded given the “improbable, if not impossible” character of political claims for “independence” or self-determination.³¹ Much of these criticisms have to do with the apparently conceptually loose and politically misguided ‘colonial analogy’: not only is it difficult to substantiate a fulsome theoretical analogy between US racism and colonialism, critics argue, but it also in many ways distracted from a concrete analysis of the US predicament by looking to Third World ‘models.’³²

Norton, 2001, pp. 21–59.

²⁸Jackie Wang. *Carceral Capitalism*. South Pasadena: Semiotext, 2018, pp. 79–80.

²⁹Morgan Adamson. “Internal Colony as Political Perspective: Counterinsurgency, Extraction, and Anticolonial Legacies of ’68 in the United States.” In: *Cultural Politics* 15.3 (2019), pp. 343–357.

³⁰See Charles Pinderhughes. “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism.” In: *Socialism and Democracy* 25.1 (2011), pp. 235–256; Roderick Bush. “The Internal Colony Hybrid: Reformulating Structure, Culture, and Agency.” In: *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 129–164; Jared Ball. *I Mix What I Like! A Mixtape Manifesto*. Oakland: AK Press, 2011, p. 14.

³¹Criticisms of the concept of domestic colonialism are discussed in depth in chapter 2. But see Manuel R. Torres. “Internal Colonialism.” In: *Sage Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*. Vol. 1. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008, pp. 740–741; Ramón A. Gutiérrez. *Internal Colonialism*. In: *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, pp. 1–5.

³²See Donald J. Harris. “The Black Ghetto as Internal Colony: A Theoretical Critique and Alternative Formulation.” In: *The Review of Black Political Economy* 2.4 (1972), pp. 3–33; Michael Burawoy. “Race, Class, and Colonialism.” In: *Social and Economic Studies* 23.4 (1974), pp. 521–550; Errol A. Henderson. “Missing the Revolution Beneath Their Feet: The Significance of the Slave Revolution of the Civil War to the

0.2 Domestic Colonialism as Critical Political Knowledge

Thus the political language created by theorists of domestic colonialism is ubiquitous politically and enjoying a surge of interest in critical theory, but declared obsolete, a thing of the past, by critics. This dissertation responds to this tension by testing these claims of obsolescence against a reconstruction of the domestic colonialism theory as a contribution to contemporary anticolonial critical theory. I proceed through an historically-situated study of the concept in the work of some key political proponents, such as Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, Malcolm X, Harold Cruse, Jack O'Dell, and Robert L. Allen. To unpack the concept and its implications I look, too, to a series of conversations in the sixties and seventies in which it played a compelling role. In relatively 'chronological' order: communist debates about Black self-determination, Black internationalist engagements with Third Worldism, debates about the political economy of automation and burgeoning 'surplus populations,' and political contestations over racialized understandings of domesticity. This is not a complete historical survey but an attempt to reconstruct domestic colonialism as an orientation in anti-colonial political theory.

Responding to criticisms and dismissals of domestic colonialism involves answering two interrelated questions. First, what *kind* of concept is it? My answer to this question is that domestic colonialism emerges out of a dialectical practice of social criticism. It is a form of political knowledge in a double sense. It is politicized knowledge – a fundamentally *interested* form of knowledge emerging from and meant to orient a particular set of political struggles. It is, on the other hand, knowledge of politics. Theorists of domestic colonialism orient and interpret struggles through a certain claim to know something about how power works and the basic contradictions and limits of their political present. This sits in opposition to two readings that, in my view, typically govern rejections of the concept of domestic

Black Power Movement in the USA.” in: *Journal of African American Studies* 22.2 (Sept. 2018), pp. 174–190; Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2 edition. New York: Routledge, Mar. 1994, 162, note 4.

colonialism: readings of it as a rhetorical strategy and as a potential social scientific framework. As a claim to political *knowledge* the concept is not reducible to a rhetorical tactic or ‘political language.’ As a claim to *political* knowledge, it should not be measured according to standards of explanatory frameworks in positivist social science. It is not a competing ‘model’ for ‘race relations’ in the United States.

The study of the concept here reads it as a dialectical concept. In the understanding of dialectical thinking I unpack in chapter one, this means it is a concept sitting in the irreducible gap between thinking and the political world. It emerges from attempts to grapple with novel political problems and emerging forms of struggle that were exposing the ossification of existing forms of political knowledge. It was a diagnostic attempt to do justice to and develop new forms of Black rebellion – what James Boggs calls “the Black Revolt” – through the prism of international decolonization.³³ A dialectical concept develops in and through practices of social and political criticism, and thus a study of it “does not provide an ideal, analytic definition of a term but rather attempts to grasp the multisided processes in which they are embedded.”³⁴ This, however, does not mean that the concept is merely a *reflection* of its time – it is, rather, critical in that it offered not only an attempt to diagnose the contours of its present but also attempted to locate social forces announcing movements beyond that context.

Unpacking all this means answering a second question, which is: if domestic colonialism is to be read as a dialectical critique, *of what* is it a criticism? This dissertation argues that domestic colonialism is a dialectical critique of *domestication*. I will unpack this further below, as this is arguably the central theoretical contribution of this concept to contemporary anticolonial critical theory. However, an initial outline can be provided by re-stating the double impetus in invocations of occupation past and present. To describe North American

³³James Boggs. *Racism and the Class Struggle*. New York: Monthly Review, 1970, pp. 19–25.

³⁴Robert Nichols. *Theft is Property! Critical Theory and Dispossession*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, p. 74.

political orders in terms of a regime of occupation is to read ‘domestic’ political order as in some sense riven by an imperial relationship between populations. This is seen not only in the resemblance between police and occupying armies, but in the claims for collective self-determination understood terms of an anti-imperialist struggle for self-determination. Domestic political order is recast as a process of domestication that relies on the impossible, tenuous reduction and containment of alternative sovereignties and possible shapes of self-determination.

In other words, by re-interpreting struggles against state violence and racial domination through the prism of decolonization, the domestic colonialism concept offered a form of criticism hinging on an exploration of “how far the domestic already bears the hallmarks of what we call the international.”³⁵ In making claims about the international character of domination, and articulating it through an international political language (self-determination), theorists of domestic colonialism were “internationalizing the putatively domestic space of the settler nation.”³⁶ Disclosing the immanent presence of the international ‘within’ the domestic, or, better, the domestic *as* an international project, the concept of domestic colonialism shows that the conceptual distinction between domestic and international obscures a contradictory process of imperial power. As I hope to hint in this introduction and return to in the conclusion, this line of criticism therefore strikes at one of the central disciplinary moves of political science, that between domestic and international politics, by exposing the presence of the international as an immanent contradiction within the very idea of domestic political order.

In addition to excavating a crucial line of analysis that remains important, and alive, today, this reading of the concept also pushes against the idea that it is reducible to a “colonial analogy.” As noted above, critics often dismiss the concept as working on a misleading and

³⁵Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss. “Generalising the International.” In: *Review of International Studies* 31.3 (2005), pp. 451–471, p. 466.

³⁶Manu Karuka. “Black and Native Visions of Self-Determination.” In: *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3.2 (2017), p. 77, p. 87.

unrigorous analogy between racism in the US and colonialism. A particularly sharp criticism here is that it assumes the domestic space of the settler/racial state, taking it as the spatial frame for a kind of colonialism that happens *within* or *internal* to domestic political order. However, the concept is targeted precisely at showing the instability and interpretive violence of ‘domestic’ political order as a conceptual and political frame. It was a critique of any interpretation of revolt that took this frame for granted. With the US read through the prism of international decolonization, it was precisely domestic political order – the ‘within’ that was being put in question by claims for collective self-determination.

Further, the development of this critical, de-domesticating re-interpretation of revolt happened precisely through a set of analytical *distinctions* vis-a-vis colonialism rather than *analogies*.³⁷ The repeated appellation and modification of the concept of colonialism here – domestic, internal, semi-, neo- – all hint less at the application of a model than the attempt to *stretch* concepts of colonialism to make sense of the distinctive shape of US racial and colonial power.³⁸ The analysis offered by thinkers like Harold Cruse, Jack O’Dell, and Robert L. Allen, and, I argue, every thinker examined here, tries to work out how “coloniality...indexes more than colonialism.”³⁹

Thus theorists of domestic colonialism were not providing a ‘model’ of race relations, or drawing an analogy between two distinct but structurally similar contexts. To read it this way assumes its object of criticism, which is the domestic and domesticating frame of ‘US politics’ or ‘race relations.’ They were participants in a much wider theoretical and practical moment in which anticolonial thinkers were stretching concepts of imperialism and colonialism to track the persistence of colonial power in the wake of decolonization. **Domestication,**

³⁷For a compelling rejection of the analogical reading of domestic colonialism to which I am sympathetic, see Patrick D. Anderson. “Anticolonial Amerika: Resisting the Zone of Nonbeing in an Anglo-Saxon Empire.” PhD thesis. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2018.

³⁸Henrique Paulo Martins. “Internal Colonialism, Postcolonial Criticism, and Social Theory.” In: *Review du Mousse Permanente* (Aug. 11, 2018). URL: <http://www.journaldumauss.net/?Internal-Colonialism-Postcolonial-Criticism-and-Social-Theory#nb5>.

³⁹Minkah Makalani. “The Politically Unimaginable in Black Marxist Thought.” In: *Small Axe* 22.2 (2018), pp. 18–34, p. 22.

as I will argue in the next section, is a term that bundles up a web of interrelated lines of criticism that track the logic of imperial power's survival in North America through the making of domestic order. It is this conjunctural problem of the relationship between the worldwide decolonizing and the antiracist insurgency in the US that the domestic colonialism concept helped revolutionaries work through. In this respect this concept's contribution is less to a tradition of American political thought (though it does) than it is to anticolonial theory's diagnostic engagement with the wider moment of decolonization. To borrow from Robin D.G. Kelley's analysis of internationalist solidarity between Palestinian and Black liberation movements, at stake here is not just a set of analogical experiences but rather the underlying historical condition in which those analogies become possible at all: a moment of "Third World insurgencies and anti-imperialist movements."⁴⁰

Through my reading of theorists of domestic colonialism, I therefore argue that the concept is primarily diagnostic, a dialectical analysis of the contradictions of a conjuncture and an attempt to do justice to struggles that sharpen those contradictions. In the parlance of political theory, it is a rubric of political judgment, rather than an explanatory theory or a rhetorical 'political language.' This claim is both substantive and methodological. Substantively, I am saying this is what I think theorists of domestic colonialism are actually doing: they are engaging in "critique as a social practice."⁴¹ The methodological upshot, here, is that for political theorists the study of this concept offers an object lesson in 'thinking dialectically,' in how revolutionaries engage in theoretical judgments in the face of social and political transformations. If, as Theodor Adorno puts it, "things do not go into their concepts without a remainder," if our concepts are always trying to get a grip on a world that outstrips them, here I am studying the domestic colonialism concept as working in this gap between concepts and world. I am less interested in whether it got things 'right' and more in what

⁴⁰Robin D. G. Kelley. "From the River to the Sea to Every Mountain Top: Solidarity as Worldmaking." In: *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 48.4 (2016), pp. 69–91, p. 73.

⁴¹Robin Celikates. *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*. Trans. by Naomi Van Steenberg. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

kinds of remainders it exposed, and in the attempt to stretch, abandon, or invent concepts in response to the world.

To study this sort of activity stands in sharp distinction from two other, perhaps more tempting, ways of studying a concept in political theory. On the one hand, there is a temptation to convert this concept into a ‘discourse’ or ‘language’ that can be interpreted as a reflection of its times. The goal here would be to explicate the background linguistic and social context as the “ultimate background” against which this ‘discourse’ makes sense. This a ‘properly’ historical study, advocated by so-called ‘contextualists’ in the history of political thought. Here the concept becomes primarily an historical object, rather than something to be grappled with on its own terms as a theoretical challenge.⁴² On the other hand, it is tempting to go in the opposite direction and simply construct the “best version” of the concept as a model or framework for social analysis in the present.⁴³ My task is, rather, is to map out “the constellation which [one’s] own era has formed with a definite earlier one.”⁴⁴ What does this concept mean interpreted from the vantage of our present, and how does this concept’s interpretation of its own moment help us understand our own conjuncture in turn? What kinds of critical strategies and practices of judgment can theorists of domestic colonialism teach us? If the question is one of ‘obsolescence’ this question can only be contended with by leaving open the relation between past and present.

⁴²For some compelling attempts to take up this method, on which I have drawn significantly, see Sam Klug. “First New Nation or Internal Colony? Modernization Theorists, Black Intellectuals, and the Politics of Colonial Comparison in the Kennedy Years.” In: *Globalizing the US Presidency: Postcolonial Views of John F. Kennedy*. Ed. by Cyrus Schayegh. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, pp. 19–33; Sam Klug. “The Politics of Comparison.” In: *Dissent* Fall (2017). URL: <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/chris-hayes-colony-in-a-nation-review>; Sean Mills. *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011; Daniel Maitlin. *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

⁴³For persuasive and fascinating attempts to do this, see Anderson, “Anticolonial Amerika: Resisting the Zone of Nonbeing in an Anglo-Saxon Empire”; Charles Pinderhughes. “21st Century Chains: the Continuing Relevance of Internal Colonialism Theory.” PhD thesis. Boston: Boston College, 2009; Joe Turner. “Internal Colonisation: The Intimate Circulations of Empire, Race and Liberal Government.” In: *European Journal of International Relations* 24.4 (2018), pp. 765–790.

⁴⁴Walter Benjamin. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” In: *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. by Hannah Arendt. Trans. by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 2007, pp. 253–264, p. 263.

It is my view that the answer to what “constellation” is formed between our moment and the one under study here lies in its construction of a dialectical criticism of domestication. Thus the rest of this introduction begins sketching out what I take to be the key contribution of domestic colonialism – the critique of domestication – and its relation to literatures on empire in political theory and international relations.

0.3 The Critique of Domestication

In “Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory,” Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena usefully distinguish between two interrelated projects in Anglophone political theory are attempting to unpack the relationship between political theory and empire. Many are looking to expose the colonial and racial conditions underpinning and affirmed in political philosophy’s key texts. The second is the study of anticolonial thinkers and political theories of decolonization. Getachew and Mantena are concerned that the former task continues to be centred in the field of political theory. “Intellectual self-critique and self-cleansing” distracts, they write, from the broader project of studying how “anticolonial thinkers tried to pinpoint cultural and institutional sites – immanent to the experience of the colonized – that could generative new emancipatory futures.”⁴⁵ What is required is a turn from the interrogation of the colonial logics of canonical political thought to the “situated” but “utopian” and “reconstructive” theoretical practice of anticolonial thinkers. This project aims to further this effort by following this practice in the study of a particular theoretical “reconstruction,” namely the domestic colonialism concept. As I will show, the concept in many respects embodied a *need for theory*, for a “theoretic frame” or “summing up” that could orient political action. In many respects this means looking to those working in social and political movements as sources of theory, whose situated judgments are not, per se, amenable to abstraction as

⁴⁵Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena. “Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory.” In: *Critical Times* 4.3 (2021), pp. 359–388, p. 362.

systematic theories but offer insights that can be “redeployed.”⁴⁶

This project builds on Getachew and Mantena’s suggestion to move from intradisciplinary ‘self-criticism’ to the study of alternative imaginations of politics. In re-imagining apparently ‘domestic’ liberatory politics in terms of international self-determination, theorists of domestic colonialism highlight a significant limit in literatures on empire and political theory. Explicating this limit can help outline more clearly the importance of thinking through the domestic colonialism concept. In political theory and international relations, there has been a persistent tendency to frame the relationship between political theory and empire in terms of a tension between politics, liberty, and democracy ‘here,’ and colonial occupation, racial domination, and imperial extraction ‘over there.’ For example, historians of political thought have shown that the foundational liberal concepts of liberty and property were formed in primary relation to settler colonial dispossession, on the one hand, and colonial tutelage in Asia and Africa, on the other.⁴⁷ In other words, liberalism’s universalism has always been textured by “strategies of subversion” that exclude non-white subjects and undermine their rights.⁴⁸ This work took off with renewed urgency as the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars intensified worries about the relation between US liberal democracy and its military occupations abroad.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Katrina Forrester. “Feminist Demands and the Problem of Housework.” In: *American Political Science Review* OnlineFirst (2022), pp. 1–15, p. 1.

⁴⁷Barbara Arneil. *John Locke and America: the Defence of English Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; James Tully. *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Bhikhu Parekh. “Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill.” In: *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge, and Power*. London: Zed Books, pp. 81–98; Thomas McCarthy. *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Andrew Fitzmaurice. *Sovereignty, Property, and Empire: 1500-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Sankar Muthu. *Empire and Modern Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Duncan Bell. “John Stuart Mill on the Colonies.” In: *Political Theory* 38.1 (2010), pp. 34–64, For some examples, see.

⁴⁸Uday Singh Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

⁴⁹E.g. Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, July 2006; Jennifer Pitts. “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism.” In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010), pp. 211–235; Sankar Muthu. *Enlightenment against Empire*. First Edition edition. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, Aug. 2003; Antony Anghie. *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, May 2007; Jeanne Morefield. *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004; John Scott. *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the En-*

At stake in all this is how liberal theorists have historically tried to square this problematic relation between universalism and exclusion in attempts to “stretch the skin of a universal rhetoric over the corpus of a fundamentally exclusionary worldview.”⁵⁰

The critical force of these literatures has been to expose the contradiction between the abstract, universalizing claims of modern political thought and its practical use in the legitimization, maintenance, and obfuscation of empire. In other words, the project of mapping empire in the history of modern political thought has sought to undo the concealing work of distance between political life ‘here’ and imperial domination ‘there’: of “the stretch in time and space between the deed and result, between the work and the product.”⁵¹ Or, as Charles W. Mills aptly puts it, the disavowal of colonialism and racism’s connection with the central concepts of political theory works only on the basis of a process in which “*this* space actually comes to have the character it does because of the pumping exploitative causality established between it and those *other* conceptually invisible spaces.”⁵²

The Political and the Critique of Domestication

However, the problems raised by the domestic colonialism concept in North America – namely, the constitution and maintenance of political orders through the containment, displacement, and violent repression of alternative forms of self-determination – are precisely those *not* defined by this concealing distance. They thus elude this popular framing in key ways. As Amy Kaplan puts it, in North America “domestic and foreign spaces are closer than we think, and ... dynamics of imperial expansion cast them into jarring proximity.”⁵³ Some claim that this is a symptom of the broader disavowal of settler colonialism in the history

glish Revolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Mikael Hornqvist. *Machiavelli and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁵⁰Jeanne Morefield. *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 8.

⁵¹W.E.B. Du Bois. *The World and Africa and Color and Democracy*. Ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 26.

⁵²Charles Mills. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 74.

⁵³Amy Kaplan. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 1.

of political thought.⁵⁴ This then might be rectified by the simple addition of studies of legitimations of settler colonialism in modern liberalism.⁵⁵ But closing the distance, as it were, does not necessarily expose what is “jarring” about it. For example, Aziz Rana’s study *The Two Faces of American Freedom* exposes racial subjugation and colonial dispossession as the other ‘face’ of republican liberty in the US.⁵⁶ The goal here remains an internal criticism of strategies of exclusion ‘there’ (in continental empire, in the plantation) in order to make good on equal liberty ‘here’ (in the republic): the expansion of the political by prying open “the intersection of internal freedom and external power.”⁵⁷ But this still entails a sort of separation in which a given political community *has* an empire rather than *being* an empire.⁵⁸

Theorists of domestic colonialism were no doubt attentive to the tension between liberty ‘at home’ and imperial occupation ‘abroad.’ But they raise an entirely different issue, too: the way that ‘internal freedom’ actually works *as* external power. The question here is not the relation between politics here and empire there, but how the political works precisely *as* empire. Among theorists of domestic colonialism, this is often articulated as a sort of forced and subordinating inclusion within ‘domestic’ political order. Indigenous, Black, and diasporic subjects are not just excluded but, rather, “involuntarily entering” or “involuntarily included” within liberal democratic order.⁵⁹ To speak of the US as “occupied territories” is to highlight

⁵⁴As Robert Nichols polemically puts it, scholars of empire and political thought rarely “highlight their own implication in the colonial occupation of unceded Indigenous territories in the Americas.” Robert Nichols. “Contract and Usurpation: Enfranchisement and Racial Governance in Settler-Colonial Contexts.” In: *Theorizing Native Studies*. Ed. by Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 99–121.

⁵⁵Of which there are excellent examples, for example Duncan Bell. *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016; Adam Dahl. *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018.

⁵⁶Aziz Rana. *The Two Faces of American Freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 344–345.

⁵⁸On this distinction, see Charles S Maier. *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; David Armitage. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Paul Keal. *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: the Moral Backwardness of International Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁵⁹John Liu. “Towards an Understanding of the Internal Colonialism.” In: *Counterpoints: Perspective on Asian America*. Ed. by Emma Gee. Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, 1978, pp. 160–180; Robert Blauner. *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

the way that ‘politics’ as such is enacted in and through a kind of war against alternative political forms and possibilities. The expansion of the political through enfranchisement and inclusion may represent a continuation of this war by other means.⁶⁰ Thus, to borrow a phrase from Adom Getachew, the predicament of power faced by these theorists is primarily diagnosed as “domination within rather than exclusion from.”⁶¹ It is precisely in and through the making of ‘internal freedom’ that an *internalizing*, *domesticating* move of colonial and racial capture is enacted. This is captured nicely by David Roediger’s term “anticitizens”: racial others were taken not only as people *unworthy* of political emancipation, but as subjects that needed to be captured and *controlled* within as a condition of political community. As he puts it, “That Blacks were largely noncitizens will surprise few, but it is important to emphasize the extent to which they were seen as *anticitizens*, as ‘enemies rather than the members of the social compact.’”⁶²

Put simply, I orient my reconstruction of the concept of domestic colonialism as a contribution to a major shift, currently underway, in how political theory engages with ‘empire.’ This is a shift from the problem of the political theory’s imperial and racial conditions to a theorization of the political *as* empire, *as* a project of racial capture. I call this contradictory, unstable, and yet often hidden process *domestication*. In doing so, I draw on its

⁶⁰For example, theorists of settler colonialism have shown how moves to inclusion, recognition, and ‘reconciliation’ have worked as strategies of colonial power that distract from and dis-empower claims to land. See, e.g. Byrd’s claim that any vision of political emancipation based on inclusion is a “lost cause” if political order is “always already conceived through a prior and misremembered colonization... that cannot be ended by further inclusion or more participation.” See pg xxvi of Jodi A. Byrd. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Nichols, “Contract and Usurpation: Enfranchisement and Racial Governance in Settler-Colonial Contexts”; Glen Sean Coulthard. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, Sept. 2014. ISBN:] Jeff Corntassel and Cindy Holder. “Who’s Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru.” In: *Human Rights Review* 9 (Dec. 2008), pp. 465–489; Kevin Bruyneel. *The Third Space of Sovereignty*. 3rd ed. edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Oct. 2007; John F. Leslie. “Assimilation, Integration, or Termination: the Development of Canadian Indian Policy, 1943-1963.” PhD thesis. Ottawa: Carleton University, 1999.

⁶¹Adom Getachew. “Universalism after the Post-Colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution.” In: *Political Theory* 44.6 (2016), pp. 821–845, pp. 829–830.

⁶²David R. Roediger. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New Edition edition. London ; New York: Verso, July 2007, p. 57.

circulation in literatures on anticolonial and antiracist political theory, where it describes the making of ‘domestic politics’ as such through colonial and racial domination. Theorists of domestic colonialism, by raising the basically international, yet ‘internal,’ character of Black, Indigenous, and Chicano demands for self-determination, effectively exposed this process of domestication, which consists in the reduction of international claims to domestic ones, and international relations with *peoples* to the domestic governance of *populations*.

Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark’s essay “Criminal Empire” offers a paradigmatic theorization of domestication in the North American context. She uses the term to describe the peculiar settler colonial blend of military force and police power used to criminalize collective political rebellion. By criminalize she means that a properly ‘international’ phenomenon – a people’s collective uprising against an invading power (the Canadian and US states) – is *repressed* through military violence as an ‘external’ threat, but *re-interpreted* retrospectively as a criminal disorder ‘internal’ to the settler state. Individualizing collective acts of self-determination as social disorder or misbehaviour in need of ‘punishment’ works to “remake the foreign (Indigenous nations) into domestic (individual Indigenous subjects).”⁶³ This domesticating move persists, Janice Feng argues, in interpretations of assertions of Indigenous sovereignty as ‘civil disobedience,’ which assumes and naturalizes the very ‘civil’ order contested by these assertions.⁶⁴ These interpretations assume as complete what is in fact an imperial project of “national domestication, in which American territories and diverse populations were brought under federal jurisdiction.”⁶⁵

Likewise, Erin Pineda has used the term domestication to describe interpretations of

⁶³Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark. “Criminal Empire: The Making of the Savage in a Lawless Land.” In: *Theory & Event* 19.4 (Oct. 2016).

⁶⁴Feng shows this through a reading of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* with which I am in complete agreement: Hobbes’s fiction of a contract between atomized individuals is, whether Hobbes ‘justified’ colonialism or not, foundational to a discourse that replaces collective claims for land with civil resistance to state power, effectively assuming the central question of politics in settler colonial contexts. Janice Feng. “Domesticating Political Resistance: Rhetoric, Time, and (the Limits of) Settler Sovereignty in Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*.” In: *Theory & Event* 25.1 (2022), pp. 4–24.

⁶⁵Beth H. Piatote. *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, p. 5.

1960s Black freedom movements that take the background ‘civil’ order for granted, a move that both *contains* these movements within a ‘domestic sphere’ and *neutralizes* them as claims on that order rather than ones potentially working above, below, and alongside it through “imaginative transits” between North America, South Asia, and Africa.⁶⁶ In the contemporary conjuncture Barnor Hesse and Juliet Hooker argue that “global black protest” pushes against interpretive domestication: it resists “the foreclosure of more radical and transformative visions by acceptance of an improved version of the liberal status quo as the limited horizon of political philosophy and political possibility.”⁶⁷ They argue that resisting the foreclosure of radical possibility demands that we “think *against* and *in excess of* the centrality of the state as the horizon of political intellegibility.”⁶⁸

Crucially, this line of thinking combines, in the term domestication, a double move of *spatial containment* and *political neutralization* that is central to modern political thought. It points to a relationship between the reduction of revolt to ‘domestic’ politics and its neutralization as civil disorder or internal protest, claims made on the state. Sheldon Wolin offers an evocative gloss on this link in “Fugitive Democracy”:

“Boundaries are the outlines of a context; or, more precisely, boundaries signify the will to contextualize. Politically, contextualization signifies the domestication of politics in a double sense. A domestic politics is established with its distinctive practices and forms and distinguished from those of a similarly bounded societies and from international or intercontextual politics. But the domestication of politics also corresponds to one dictionary definition of domestication, ‘to

⁶⁶See Erin R. Pineda. *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, 89, and passim; For an attempt to think about civility and ‘civil disobedience’ beyond these domestications, see Robin Celikates. “Radical Civility: Social Struggles and the Domestication of Dissent.” In: *Debating Critical Theory: Engagements with Axel Honneth*. Ed. by Julia Christ et al. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020, pp. 83–94.

⁶⁷Barnor Hesse and Juliet Hooker. “On Black Political Thought Inside Global Black Protest.” In: *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116.3 (2017), pp. 443–456, p. 449.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 443.

tame, to bring under control.’ The ‘native country’ (*domus*) is the site of *domitus* or taming.”⁶⁹

This link between spatial containment and political neutralization has recently been highlighted in what we might call the most recent and most provocative iteration of the “colonial analogy” in Black political thought: Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons*. They argue that the very idea of the political, modelled on the *polis*, has always represented a domesticating containment of a much more expansive “sociality.” Politics, they write, is “the settler’s armed incursion” into the “common.” That is, politics as such is a force of enclosure and containment against which a fugitive movement of escape and self-sustenance emerges.⁷⁰ Indeed, political inclusion and ‘politicization’ more broadly is re-interpreted in their text as a contraction of possibilities premised on a denigration of alternative forms of collective life.

“In the trick of politics we are insufficient, scarce, waiting in pockets of resistance, in stairwells, in alleys, in vain. The false image and its critique threaten the common with democracy... But we already are. We’re already here, moving. We’ve been around. We’re more than politics, more than settled, more than democratic.”⁷¹

The ‘undercommons’ – alongside terms like ‘surround,’ work to describe an undomesticated collectivity that emerges, and is delimited, precisely in its escape from ‘politics’ proper. It has a “jurisgenerative fecundity” – a norm-generating and collectively transformative character – that projects of political inclusion and “uplift” capture and redirect.

Their declamation of *politics* more broadly hints that the critique of domestication is not just a criticism of a particular form of state violence. The criticism of domestication as it has

⁶⁹Sheldon Wolin. *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 101–102.

⁷⁰Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013, pp. 15–17.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 19.

emerged across various fields and discourses – Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, history, political science, feminist thought, sociology, and so on – enjoins a rethinking of politics. More specifically, the identification of politics and a ‘settler’ or imperial enclosure of something *more* – whatever that might be – implies the need to loosen our sense in political theory that “political thought is, by definition, the history of the polis, the self-contained, firmly bounded, sovereign, and integrated community.”⁷² This process of ‘colonial’ enclosure recasts a relatively useful distinction, in critical political theory, between ‘politics’ and ‘*the* political.’ Among those who use this distinction, “ ‘politics’ refers to the manifold practices of conventional politics. It is the terrain of routine political life.” “The political,” however, refers to how “the social bond is instituted and concerns deep rifts in society.”⁷³ In this understanding, focusing on ‘routine’ politics at the expense of the political effectively depoliticizes the basic antagonisms, contradictions, and structures of a given social and political order. The upshot is that what counts as political is itself one of the basic questions of political theory.

In one particularly useful iteration of the distinction between ‘the political’ and ‘politics,’ Claude Lefort writes that the political is “revealed, not in what we call political activity, but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured.”⁷⁴ Domestication is one name for the particular way that North American political orders have made this double move: the institution of a particular political form (the ‘domestic’ sphere of the settler/racial state) and the obfuscation of this institution (as ‘domestic politics’ tout court). The double movement of domestication is not just the enclosure of a ‘domestic’ space but the process of imperial capture, theft, and subjugation oriented toward the internalization and subordination of contending sovereignties, spatialities, and political forms. My study in the conceptual history and theoretical implications of ‘domestic colonialism’ is a small attempt, in one sliver of time and space, to think about how a set of revolutionary thinkers

⁷²Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, p. 4.

⁷³Costas Douzinas. *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Theory of Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 102–3.

⁷⁴Claude Lefort. *Democracy and Political Theory*. Trans. by David Macey. Cambridge: Polity, 1988, p. 11.

and movements attempted to *de-domesticate* political analysis through a criticism of this double movement. What would it mean to think of politics as something “dis-enclosed”?⁷⁵ No doubt this hints that moving toward ‘dis-enclosure’ might be aided by a move toward internationalism. However, ‘the international’ as it has been theorized in political science, too, is premised on a series of enclosures, as I will show in the next section.

The International and the Critique of Domestication

Conventional vocabularies in political science and international relations often tacitly assume the process of domestication by taking for granted a ‘domestic space’ of politics. Theories of the modern state within International Relations, for example, define it as an already accomplished process of “internal pacification.”⁷⁶ They take for granted, in other words, a particular vision of politics ‘inside’ – in which development, progress, and dynamics of political contestation – as defined against politics ‘outside,’ in international relations, which often taken by conventional IR theory to be a “realm of recurrence and repetition.”⁷⁷ Ironically, claims about an unchanging and ‘eternal’ structure at the international level play a crucial role in maintaining assumptions about the basic shape of politics proper as something happening ‘within’ an already ‘domesticated’ space.⁷⁸ When these assumptions are made explicit in, for example, the writings of English School theorist Hedley Bull, the creation and assumption of a ‘domestic’ sphere works precisely as a neutralization of conflict by reducing “competition among governments” – international claims – to “competition between contenting forces for control of a single government” through deliberation and dissent.⁷⁹ Theorized from outside,

⁷⁵I borrow this term from Achille Mbembe. See: Achille Mbembe. *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021.

⁷⁶Anthony Giddens. *The Nation-State and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity, 2005.

⁷⁷Martin Wight. “Why is There No International Theory?” In: *Diplomatic Investigations*. Ed. by Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 17–34; Robert H. Jackson. “Martin Wight, International Theory, and the Good Life.” In: *Millennium* 19.2 (1990), pp. 261–272.

⁷⁸This reading of realist thought is defended by Rob Walker in R. B. J. Walker. *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. 1 edition. Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, Nov. 1992.

⁷⁹Hedley Bull. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Second. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p. 9; See also Hedley Bull, Herbert Butterfield, and Martin Wight. “Society and Anarchy in International

from the vantage of ‘the international,’ politics properly speaking appears already secured in a domesticated space. However one theorizes international politics, assuming its autonomy retrospectively enacts a “spatial containment” of politics within territorial bounds.⁸⁰ International political theory has, here, typically assumed order “within states” as a starting point for theorizing international politics.⁸¹

I am not particularly interested in pursuing the history of these assumptions within IR. However, by criticizing these assumptions critical IR theorists importantly shift the question of international political theory away from theorizing the problems specific to a pre-delimited sphere of ‘international’ politics – a move that always, retrospectively, assumes a ‘domesticated’ sphere of politics proper. De-mystifying this assumption – basic not only to international relations but to any discourse concerning the distinction between domestic and international politics – requires the re-interpretation of ‘domestic politics’ as a basically unstable arrangement in need of continual discursive and practical reconstruction. As Richard Ashley puts it, this means asking “how is the domestic domain... constituted, bounded, set apart from other domains... so that it may be taken to provide the unproblematic ground to which all discourses of legitimation refer?”⁸² To do this requires not only a philosophical criticism but locating demands and struggles that challenge any easy resolution within ‘domestic’ politics: struggles that resist the the reduction of liminality, political contestation, and ambiguity into a clear distinction – simultaneously conceptual, territorial, and juridical

Relations.” In: *Diplomatic Investigations*. New Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 55–71, p. 70.

⁸⁰As Walker puts it, “Theories of international relations can thus be read as a primary expression of the limits of modern politics... They, especially, frame these limits spatially. Politics, real politics, they suggest, can occur only as long as we are prepared – or able – to live in boxes.” To my mind, theorists of domestic colonialism are not only rejecting the ‘box’ of US national politics but pushing at the edge of this basic limit to modern political thought in which politics always happens in some kind of ‘box.’ R. B. J. Walker. “International Relations and the Concept of the Political.” In: *International Relations Theory Today*. Ed. by Ken Booth and Steve Smith. Cambridge: Polity, 1995, pp. 306–327, p. 307.

⁸¹Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 22.

⁸²Richard K. Ashley. “Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique.” In: *Millennium* 17.2 (June 1988), pp. 227–262, p. 256.

– between inside and outside.⁸³ More specifically, it requires not just locating moves that transgress this boundary but target it directly, that reveal sovereignty as “not the location of the foundational entity of international relations theory but a site of struggle.”⁸⁴ Domestic politics, on this reading, is not a stable ‘space’ at all, but rather “a never completed process of *domestication*.”⁸⁵ As Manu Karuka puts it, in the context of North America this means showing that the categorical distinction between domestic and international politics services the concealment of imperialism: “To conceive of the United States in national terms is to naturalize colonialism... there is no ‘national’ U.S. political economy, only an imperial one, which continues to be maintained... through the renewal of colonial occupation.”⁸⁶ In other words, at stake here is not just questions of ‘sovereignty’ but of “counter-sovereignty,” the imperial domestication of alternative – Indigenous, Black, diasporic – claims to self-determination.

Thus critics of domestication, both in political theory and critical IR, recommend not an abstract re-imagination of political space but rather a critical practice in which we locate sites in which “people struggling to survive... challenge the resolutions” of politics through the domestic/international distinction by refusing to live within frames “envisaged by the cartographers of containment.”⁸⁷ This means seeking out those places where the internal contradictions of the ‘domestication’ process are sharpened by the presence of “the international in the national.”⁸⁸ If domestication actually is an unstable process, a “site of struggle,” this can be demonstrated only by locating those struggles that show “how far the domestic already

⁸³Bahar Rumelili. “Liminal Identities and Processes of Domestication and Subversion in International Relations.” In: *Review of International Studies* 38 (2011), pp. 495–508; David Campbell. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, Sept. 1998.

⁸⁴Cynthia Weber. *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, The State, and Symbolic Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 3.

⁸⁵Richard K. Ashley. “The Powers of Anarchy: Theory, Sovereignty, and the Domestication of Global Life.” In: *International Theory*. Ed. by James Der Derian. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995, p. 101.

⁸⁶Manu Karuka. *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019, p. xii.

⁸⁷Walker, “International Relations and the Concept of the Political,” p. 322.

⁸⁸Lisa Lowe. “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique.” In: *Cultural Critique* 40 (1998), pp. 29–47.

bears the hallmarks of what we call the international.”⁸⁹

Tim Vasko has recently argued that the success of an anticolonial turn in political theory and international relations hinges on “how political theorists have conceived of the relationship between ‘the political’ and ‘the international’ to date, and how to conceive of that relationship otherwise.”⁹⁰ In my view, this is because empire is concealed in and through the distinction between the political and the international. This is not just because empire is something that defies the spatial form of a system of states.⁹¹ From the vantage of anticolonial criticism in North America, this is so because the process by which ‘domestic’ order is made, and distinguished from international order, *is* a key form of imperial power. Thus it is precisely the relationship between domestic and international politics, or “the political” and “the international” that is raised in the re-interpretation of struggles against racial domination in the US as struggles for self-determination. This dissertation argues that theorists of domestic colonialism thus offered a critical re-interpretation of this relationship as one of immanent contradiction: in their context, the international is always already present in the political; the political is always already haunted by the necessity and impossibility of domesticating this ‘international’ presence. Thus the invocation of the international within the domestic works as an unbinding of the various theoretical and practical ‘enclosures’ upon which the domestic/international distinction is premised.

0.4 Decolonization and Internationalist Criticism

This critique of domestication, arguably, proceeds at multiple distinct but connected temporal scales. No doubt theorists of domestic colonialism were concerned with events unfolding, and whose nature and fate remained undecided, in the 1960s – ghettoization, police brutality,

⁸⁹Edkins and Zehfuss, “Generalising the International,” p. 466.

⁹⁰Tim Vasko’s essay in Inder Marwah et al. “Critical Exchange: Empire and its Afterlives.” In: *Contemporary Political Theory* 19 (2020), pp. 274–305, p. 285.

⁹¹A point made effectively in Tarak Barkawi. “Empire and Order in International Relations and Security Studies.” In: *The International Studies Encyclopedia*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.

‘riots,’ US imperialism in Latin America and Southeast Asia, and deindustrialization. Domestication in this immediate context is a discourse that neutralizes rebellion by spatially containing it within the US. Equally, these theorists seem to return again and again (and this especially true for Harold Cruse, Jack O’Dell, and Robert L. Allen) to the long-term story of US racial formation, and not least what Gerald Horne calls the story of the “counterrevolution of 1776.”⁹² Domestication here is the long-term “involuntary inclusion” or capture of racialized people as subjugated ‘populations’ within the US. However, judgments of both the urgent events of the late 1960s and the long-term history of racial domination in the United States were re-interpreted through the conjuncture of empire’s apparent demise and the seemingly inevitable universalization of postcolonial sovereignty – that is, decolonization.⁹³

I say “apparent” and “seemingly” here because for many writers the decolonizing moment was defined by a dynamic of opening and closure, of emancipation and re-capture, what Upendra Baxi calls a “dialectic of self-determination and re-colonisation.”⁹⁴ This dialectic is often described in terms of neo-colonialism, informal imperialism, cultural imperialism, postcoloniality, coloniality, and so on. These various terms all point, in different ways, to problems of *colonial durability*: the survival of colonialism past its expiration date. More specifically, they chart in unique ways how “cultural and political processes...reproduce a ‘colonial situation’ without the presence of a ‘colonial administration.’”⁹⁵ Many thinkers at the time, and today, see decolonization not entirely wrongly as “an apparatus for the serial production of sovereignty, a sovereignty machine that produces political units, standardized according to emplates of international law.”⁹⁶ Theorists of colonial durability seek to under-

⁹²Gerald Horne. *The Counterrevolution of 1776*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.

⁹³This typology of immediate events, mid-range conjuncture, and long-term is not mine. I am drawing here on Ferdinand Braudel but especially also Bush, *The End of White World Supremacy*.

⁹⁴Upendra Baxi. “‘The Dust of Empire’: the Dialectic of Self-Determination and Re-Colonisation in the First Phase of the Cold War.” In: *International Law and the Cold War*. Ed. by Matthew Craven, Sundhya Pahuja, and Gerry Simpson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 397–413.

⁹⁵Ramon Grosfoguel. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 154.

⁹⁶See Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel. *Decolonization: A Short History*. Trans. by Jeremiah Riemer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Jan. 2017; Judith Surkis. “Decolonization Terminable and Interminable.”

stand the persistence of colonial power in a world populated by sovereign states.

At stake here, clearly, is a problem of periodization – the ambiguous and incomplete split between a colonial and a postcolonial world – but more specifically a dialectical problem concerning the relationship between emancipation and domination, decolonization and re-colonization. Stuart Hall provides a useful terminology here in his idea that decolonization is not a shift between “two mutually exclusive states” but “a reconfiguration of a field” in which colonial power is preserved but in ways shaped by anticolonial insurgency.⁹⁷ Perhaps more bluntly, Frederic Jameson describes this moment as one in which “ ‘liberation’ and domination are inextricably tied.”⁹⁸ This dynamic undergirds diagnoses of what Escobar calls the “dialectics of repression” in the US sixties: a moment of “Second Reconstruction,” “race radicalism,” and rebellion counterinsurgently contained by revanchism, ostensibly colourblind ‘antiracist racism,’ and police repression.⁹⁹ As Sylvia Wynter puts it, the sixties

“Revealed... the gap that exists between our present ‘mental construction of reality’ as projected from the perspective (and to the adaptive advantage) of our present ethnoclass genre of the human, Man... and the way our global social reality veridically is out there.”¹⁰⁰

That is, it was a moment when the “over-representation” of all of humanity in terms

In: *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*. Ed. by Peter E. Gordon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 1–2.

⁹⁷Stuart Hall. “When Was ‘The Postcolonial’? Thinking at the Limit.” In: *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 242–260, p. 254.

⁹⁸Frederic Jameson. “Periodizing the 60s.” In: *Social Text* 9 (Spring 1984), pp. 178–209.

⁹⁹On these diagnoses of the US see Manning Marable. *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*. First edition. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984; Jordan Camp. *Incarcerating the Crisis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017; Jodi Melamed. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, Nov. 2011; David Theo Goldberg. *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, Nov. 2008; Loic Wacquant. *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham NC: Duke Univ Pr, 2009; Edward J. Escobar. “The Dialectics of Repression: the Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971.” In: *The Journal of American History* 79.4 (1993), pp. 1483–1514.

¹⁰⁰Sylvia Wynter. “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument.” In: *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003), pp. 257–337, pp. 311–312.

of white ‘Man’ was pried open by decolonizing struggles, struggles against patriarchy, and Black liberation struggles in North America. But this politics of human emancipation, she writes, was “coopted” and “reterritorialized.”¹⁰¹

Michael Omi and Howard Winant thus rightly defined this moment as a ‘break,’ when antiracist insurgency exposed fundamental fissures in US political and juridical order, but remained a momentary fracture partially ‘repaired’ by reconfigurations of racial and colonial power.¹⁰² That is, it both provoked “racial reforms” that “ameliorated” racial injustice *and* “worked to contain social protest” by shifting the terms of protest to claims *on* rather than *below, above, or against* the racial state.¹⁰³ This shift from demands against to demands made to juridical order is what I have been calling domestication. My aim in this dissertation is not to explain this shift, nor to fully unpack it in its historical details. Rather, I am asking instead: how was this shift’s combination of “success” and “failure” – liberation and domination – already being theorized as it occurred?

Theorists of domestic colonialism were attempting to track the relationship between this “*worldwide* crisis of racial formation” and shifts in racial domination and emancipation in the US.¹⁰⁴ “American anticolonialisms” – as Rychetta Watkins calls them – excavated this link through a form of international, indeed, internationalizing criticism.¹⁰⁵ In the era of decolonization European empires habitually ‘domesticated’ imperial violence and power relations by claiming that their imperial ‘possessions’ were in fact part of one single, though uneven, sovereign jurisdiction. As Robert Jackson argues (sometimes lamentingly) anticolonial critics effectively “internationalized” colonial relationships, speeding their demise and the in-

¹⁰¹Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” pp. 262–263.

¹⁰²Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, pp. 78–9.

¹⁰³Howard Winant. “The Modern World Racial System.” In: *Souls* 4.3 (May 2002), pp. 17–30, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴For Winant this “crisis” was “A global accumulation of sociopolitical forces... that combined to discredit and finally undo the old world racial system.” Howard Winant. *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II*. First Paperback Edition edition. New York: Basic Books, June 2002, pp. 135, 141.

¹⁰⁵Rychetta Watkins. *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

vention of “quasi-state” sovereignty (sovereignty created through international law, rather than coercive capacity).¹⁰⁶ However, as a world of nation-states seemed to be irrevocably replacing that of empires, settler colonies such as the US attempted a sort of “domestication of race” and “domestication of anticolonialism” by containing their own ‘internationalizable’ problems within.¹⁰⁷ This worked primarily through the neutralization of anticolonial self-determination. As Brad Simpson argues, as self-determination was taking off as a groundnorm for international politics, and thus appropriated by “African American and Native American groups... to call for ‘economic self-determination’ for their communities,” the US and Canada, among others, endorsed the concept but “sought to limit its application to the narrowest possible sphere.”¹⁰⁸ More specifically self-determination was read as economic and cultural autonomy, as a set of demands realizable within, and indeed, *only* within, the regimes that claims for *political* self-determination put radically in question. This was partially accomplished through a constraining definition of colonialism as ‘salt-water’ colonialism, which conveniently excluded Anglo-American settler states.¹⁰⁹ Theorists of domestic colonialism confronted this domestication of self-determination head on – whether in the form of “Americanizing the Negro” (subordinating inclusion), “top-down” pacification by economic means and private funding, or straightforward police repression¹¹⁰ – by re-situating

¹⁰⁶Robert H. Jackson. *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

¹⁰⁷Sundhya Pahuja. “Corporations, Universalism, and the Domestication of Race in International Law.” In: *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*. Ed. by Duncan Bell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 74–93; Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*.

¹⁰⁸Bradley R. Simpson. “Self-Determination, Human Rights, and the End of Empire in the 1970s.” In: *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4.2 (2013), pp. 239–260, pp. 251–4.

¹⁰⁹See Joseph Massad. “Against Self-Determination.” In: *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9.2 (2018), pp. 161–191; Sheryl Lightfoot. *Global Indigenous Politics: A Subtle Revolution*. New York: Routledge, 2018; Timothy Vasko. “‘But for God’s Sake, Let’s Decolonize!: Self-Determination and Sovereignty and/as the Limits of the Anticolonial Archives.” In: *Politics of the African Anticolonial Archive*. Ed. by Shiera S. el-Malik and Isaac A. Kamola. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017; Barbara Arneil. *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

¹¹⁰See, respectively: Singh, *Black Is a Country*; Karen Ferguson. *Top Down: the Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Black Liberation*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013; Christian Davenport. *How Social Movements Die: Repression and Demobilization of the Republic of New Afrika*. Cam-

Black insurgency in the US as one vantage on a broader moment rather than one containable within ‘American’ politics.

This is hardly an original claim. A mountain of historical work has focused on how Black intellectuals and social movements effectively ‘internationalized’ struggles for freedom in the US by bringing them to a world stage pre-occupied with issues of colonial and racial domination.¹¹¹ As Nikhil Pal Singh puts it,

“While black individuals and social movements for equality have undoubtedly drawn from vocabularies that signify an adherence to universal values in the US political imagination... they have also drawn on universalizing discourses that surpass the sanction of national and transnational boundaries of US political and intellectual culture, including Islam, international socialism, black nationalism, and varieties of third worldism.”¹¹²

My concern in this dissertation is with one particular iteration of this, the “anticolonial vernacular” crafted by Black revolutionaries in the 1960s. The theory of domestic colonialism embodies, I argue, a kind of anticolonial political knowledge through which the revolutionary situation in the US was re-interpreted through the prism of decolonization, and through which, in turn, decolonization was re-interpreted through the prism of the revolutionary situation in the US. It was a rubric of political judgment that brought together a long-term

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

¹¹¹Mary L. Dudziak. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, July 2011; Justin Rosenberg. *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005; Thomas Borstelmann. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003; Brenda Gayle Plummer. *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996; Brenda Gayle Plummer. *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974*. Cambridge, England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, Nov. 2012; Carol Anderson. *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960*. Illustrated edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, Dec. 2014; M. Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones, eds. *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the Global Color Line*. 2008 edition. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, Sept. 2008; N. Slate, ed. *Black Power beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*. 2012 edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Nov. 2012; Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

¹¹²Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

summing-up of the basic contradictions of US racial formation, the conjunctural problem of decolonization and anticolonial sovereignty, and the pressing need to do justice to novel forms of rebellion and repression in the 1960s US. It was a form of what Robbie Shilliam calls “anti-colonial connectivity,” the “attempt to cultivat[e] knowledge ‘sideways’ so as to inform a decolonial project.”¹¹³ As Alina Sajed explains, anti-colonial connectivity here describes “translocal connections forged among colonized intellectuals, Western political activists, and anticolonial leaders” through “lateral engagement.”¹¹⁴ In the case of domestic colonialism, the concept was not about drawing *models* from abroad through a colonial analogy, so much as a dialectical learning process that loosened the grip of both domestic US order *and* the broader framework of sovereign enclosure. As Shilliam notes, the task of anticolonial connectivity as a form of knowledge is to think about how colonial forms of knowledge make different contexts *appear* radically separate when in fact they are distinct, but connected.¹¹⁵ My historically-situated reconstruction of the domestic colonialism concept tracks this production of political knowledge through a distinction between a domestic colony *thesis* and a domestic colonialism *theory*.

Starting from the idea that domestic colonialism works as an interpretation of insurgency and counterinsurgency, rather than as an abstract theory of ‘racial formations’ or as a rhetorical move, opens a reading of its *conceptual movement*. I understand this movement as one in which the failures of analogy expose singularity, which in turn begets an demand to make sense of the unique but connected predicament facing revolutionaries in America. The domestic colonialism concept in fact involves two logical moments: a domestic colony *thesis* and a domestic colonialism *theory*. Analogy plays a role in the domestic colony *thesis*, which offers a de-domestication of interpretations of rebellion by reading it as akin to anticolonial

¹¹³Robbie Shilliam. *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 3.

¹¹⁴Alina Sajed. “Re-remembering Third Worldism: an Affirmative Critique of National Liberation in Algeria.” In: *Middle East Critique* 28.3 (2019), pp. 243–260, p. 245.

¹¹⁵Robbie Shilliam. “Colonial Architecture or Relatable Hinterlands? Locke, Nandy, Fanon, and the Bandung Spirit.” In: *Constellations* 23.3 (2016), pp. 425–435, See.

revolt. In doing so, thinkers show how rebellion exposes basic problems with US social and political order that are not strictly answerable (in a just way) ‘within’ existing frameworks. But while revolt might be understood this way, its institutionalization into a positive response, a creation of a de-domesticated politics, resists straightforward analogy with anticolonial revolution in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The consequence is that the domestic colonialism concept works through the failures of analogy, rather than assuming its success, and turns toward an analysis of the unique dimensions of the “American” revolutionary question.

This turn back to the uniqueness of the United States, however, is not a matter of turning away from internationalist politics; rather, it is only through internationalist connections, imaginations, and study that the specificity of the US predicament is exposed. As an expression of anti-colonial connectivity, what the failures of analogy expose is not (just) an irreducible difference between two predicaments (American racism and Third World colonial situations), but the need to theorize the relation between these predicaments, to explain their appearance *as* distinct. Here I would push against those who read the concept primarily in terms of the ‘impact’ of anticolonialism on Black politics in the US. No doubt this is a crucial factor, but the domestic colonialism theory, as it emerges from these internationalist imaginations, is also an attempt to diagnose the *whole* conjuncture of the decolonizing moment in global politics from a *particular vantage*. By exposing the *impossibility* of fully translating what above Osterhammel and Jansen call the “serial production of sovereignty” into the US predicament of colonial and racial power, theorists of domestic colonialism were not only exposing the immanent contradictions of US racial formation but adumbrating some of the limits of post-war decolonization more broadly. In doing so, this particular version of anti-colonial connectivity offers an “alternative political horizon” to both domestic order and the implicit domestication offered by the modern international.¹¹⁶ As I will show throughout this dissertation, this answers a common criticism of domestic colonialism, that it assumes

¹¹⁶Sajed, “Re-remembering Third Worldism: an Affirmative Critique of National Liberation in Algeria,” p. 248.

the ‘domestic’ space in which this ‘kind’ of colonial power exists; on the contrary it was an interpretive frame of political judgment that refused to reduce the “complex spatiality of anticolonial mobilization...to rigid categories (national/international).”¹¹⁷ Indeed, this form of internationalist critique, I will show, was aimed less at transgressing or moving ‘beyond’ domestic politics and more at working “in opposition to the physical and legal parameters of the nation-state.”¹¹⁸

Because theorists of domestic colonialism were attempting to make sense of the epoch in which they lived – trying to diagnose their present, its limits, and its possibilities – it is difficult to outline this ‘context’ beforehand as the frame in which what they did makes sense. Studying this sort of dialectical criticism defies, in some sense, the historian’s injunction to ‘put everything in its proper context.’¹¹⁹ In other words, studying the making of political knowledge as knowledge *about* the conjunctural shift or periodization from which it emerges means that periodization cannot be done ahead of time. We face a kind of hermeneutic circle in the study of political ideas ‘located’ in the past: a period has to be delimited if we are to research a particular set of texts and a particular time, but its character and indeed its appropriate temporal boundaries are determinable only through the study of that (as yet undetermined) ‘period.’

Typically this circle is worked through via an answer to an ethico-political, rather than epistemological or historiographical question. Namely: what do we (want to) learn from the history of ideas?¹²⁰ Flathman, here, offers a useful distinction between “canonical” and “contextual” answers to this question. Canonical approaches typically position themselves as pupils of and conversation partners with past thinkers. Their writings can guide our practical

¹¹⁷Sajed, “Re-remembering Third Worldism: an Affirmative Critique of National Liberation in Algeria,” p. 248.

¹¹⁸Steven Salaita. *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. xiv.

¹¹⁹Constantin Fasolt. *The Limits of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

¹²⁰See Michael L. Frazer. “The Ethics of Interpretation in Political Theory and Intellectual History.” In: *The Review of Politics* 81 (2019), pp. 77–99.

lives more or less directly, because they are engaging in ‘perennial’ problems basic to ‘the’ human experience. This approach was sharply criticized by ‘contextualists’ who argued that one must construct the historical (social, linguistic) context in which a text’s arguments and statements make sense.¹²¹ Contextualists rightly insist on the difference between a past context and present problems; canonical theorists rightly note that insisting on this too strongly leads to an antiquarian disposition.

My answer is that in studying historically-situated practices of social and political critique, we have to hold this problem *open*: we cannot assume methodologically or philosophically any exact relation between history and theory. That is, we cannot assume any particular answer to the question of how far a set of thoughts or concepts is ‘contaminated’ or ‘conditioned’ by ‘its time.’¹²² To sharply contextualize these thinkers ahead of time is paradoxically to de-contextualize, to sideline the question of how they themselves theorized the relation between historical situations and theoretical critique. The domestic colonialism theory is not a reflection of its context, which works as an “ultimate framework” for understanding it; on the contrary, it at times represents a disjuncture with its own moment. This can only be grasped by taking as a methodological premise the idea that texts involve at least some attempt to *transcend* rather than reflect their present, that they might “inaugurate their own history.”¹²³

To highlight the situated character of dialectical critique alongside its non-identity with its ‘context,’ I prefer in this dissertation to characterize the ‘period’ of this dissertation as a *moment* rather than a *context*. I draw this language from other studies of anticolonial and Black internationalisms in the twentieth century: Erez Manela’s idea of a “Wilsonian

¹²¹Richard Flathman. “Here and Now, There and Then, Always and Everywhere: Reflections Concerning Political Theory and the Study/Writing of Political Thought.” In: *British Political Thought in History, Literature and Theory, 1500-1800*. Ed. by David Armitage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 254–278.

¹²²John Dunn. “The Identity of the History of Ideas.” In: *Philosophy* 43.164 (1968), pp. 85–104; Quentin Skinner. “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas.” In: *History and Theory* 8.1 (1969), pp. 3–53; John Greville Agard Pocock. “The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Inquiry.” In: *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 3–19. For key expressions of this question see.

¹²³Martin Jay. “Historical Explanation and the Event: Reflections on the Limits of Contextualization.” In: *New Literary History* 42.4 (2011), pp. 557–571.

Moment,” Christopher Lee’s outline of a “Bandung Moment,” and studies of the “federal moment” in which anticolonial internationalists sought political forms irreducible to either empire or nation-state.¹²⁴ In all three, the word moment is used to collect texts around a central historically-emergent problematic, but in ways that refuse to contain it in a particular period. The language of moment is used to describe the ways that confrontations with a problem set in motion historical processes, projects, and ideas that transcend their immediate context (while still remaining historical).

J.G.A. Pocock’s study *The Machiavellian Moment* offers a useful way of thinking about this. He argues that in describing the shift to republicanism in early modern Europe as a ‘moment,’ he is leaving open the relation between history and theory. This is because the ‘moment’ describes both the historical emergence of a political and intellectual language (in his case, modern republicanism) and the existential confrontation of the problem to which that discourse is an answer (in his case “the temporal finitude of the republic.”)¹²⁵ This problem emerges from, but exceeds and outlasts, the historical situation from which it emerges. A moment, then, is both history and theory. It is history theorized and theory historicized. To study “political theory as a situated activity,” as “historically situated” requires leaving the relation between the terms ‘historical situation’ and ‘theory’ relatively open as a *question* rather than something resolvable methodologically.¹²⁶ Both the ‘situation’ and its relation to thought are a problem, not a methodological premise.

¹²⁴See Erez Manela. *The Wilsonian Moment Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism, Isreal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Jan. 2009; Christopher J Lee. “Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung.” In: *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Afterlives*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, pp. 1–42; Michael Collins. “Decolonisation and the “Federal Moment”.” In: *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24.1 (Mar. 2013), pp. 21–40. ISSN: =.

¹²⁵John Greville Agard Pocock. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Revised edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Feb. 2003, pp. vii–ix; On the question of political languages, and Pocock’s attempt to work out a method for studying them without imposing external boundaries on them ahead of time, see Pocock, “The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Inquiry.”

¹²⁶Jason Frank and John Tambornino. “Calling into Question.” In: *Vocations of Political Theory*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2000; Jason Frank. “Democratic Imagination at the Brink.” In: *Polity* 47.4 (2015), pp. 566–575, On political theory as ‘situated,’ see.

What one learns from the study of dialectical criticism in a ‘moment’ rather than an historical study of a discourse in historical context is twofold. On the one hand, we aim to learn about the practice critical theory: how did these thinkers diagnose and work beyond the confines of their own time, and imagine alternatives? On the other, we learn the actual content of that critique and attempt to map out its presence in our contemporary world. While the theory of domestic colonialism cannot, probably, be straightforwardly ‘used’ in the present, the problematic of domestication and the demand for a politics of de-domestication that it inaugurated remain. The concept of domestic colonialism indeed *embodies* this twofold learning process, insofar as in drawing from anticolonial revolutions, they did not craft ‘models’ to be applied, but rather cultivated a critical disposition that loosened the hold of their context on them. In the same way, the study of the domestic colonialism concept pursued here aims not at its reconstruction as a ‘theory’ but rather at following closely the practice of critique so as to sharpen our own understanding of criticism and the problem of domestication today.

Therefore, in what follows I unpack a dialectical critique of domestication through an examination of the concept of domestic colonialism across a series of conversations. As I outline in chapter 1, the purpose of such a dialectical study is not, per se, to extract a theoretical system, or to produce a comprehensive study of a context, but to examine how these thinkers engaged in the activity of critical theorizing: how they worked to clarify the wishes and the struggles of an age. In studying other thinkers and contexts, these thinkers did not draw models and blueprint from far-off lands to be applied mechanistically to their own predicament. Rather, they examined these thinkers to situate themselves as one site in a wider totality of domination and struggle against it. In doing so they also found ways to stretch concepts used in other locales and for other purposes and put them to use. This dissertation aims track, therefore, how these thinkers cultivated dialectical dispositions in service of emancipatory analysis.

Chapter 1

Dialectical Dispositions

The misappraisal of the successful revolutions or the revolution-in-the-making, the premature celebration, the mistake, or the retraction forms the marrow of the human experience in history. Therefore the charge that a mistake has been made, or has been belatedly corrected, is itself compromised; it assumes a position outside of history, where there are no choices, failures, mistakes, or successes.¹

What does it mean, exactly, to say that a concept works dialectically, and what does it look like to ‘read’ something dialectically? In turn what does the study of the domestic colony concept imply for dialectical philosophy more generally? The outline of a dialectical disposition I offer here is part of the wider analysis of this dissertation, which is motivated by a hunch about a possible mutual illumination between dialectics and the domestic colony concept. Dialectical thought can push a study of a concept like domestic colonialism colonialism in productive and politically salient directions; the study of key proponents of the domestic colony thesis can show them to be important but oft-unconsidered exemplars of dialectical thinking.

In this chapter my aim is mainly on the former task, of thinking about what it means to think dialectically. My main argument is that dialectics is best considered in an adverbial grammar, as a way in which one can think or act (thinking and acting dialectically). Thinking

¹Russell Jacoby. “What is Conformist Marxism?” In: *Telos* 19.45 (1980), pp. 19–43, p. 20.

dialectically is a practical disposition guided by a cultivated awareness of the productive but ineluctable gap between one's concepts and the political world. This dissertation studies the domestic colonialism concept as an expression of this disposition.²

What exactly does thinking dialectically look like as a disposition of practical judgment? One way of getting at this is to think about problem to which it is the answer. As I will argue, this problem is the way the world outstrips our concepts. Dialectics emphasizes the productive *gap* between concept and world as a space of practical intervention and theoretical invention. This gap is evident in moments of historical and political surprise that elude available concepts. While I use the spatial language of a 'gap,' the experience of this gap is often temporal: an experience of an inability to keep up with the world, or a sense that one reads the world too fast, ahead of time, covering it in old or dead concepts no longer suitable to it. Too slow, or too fast: either way, this dialectical motion is felt as a need to stretch, invent, and abandon political languages in order to diagnose one's present.

Thinking dialectically is partly a response to "the problem of the new,"³ and more specifically a problem of judgment concerning what is new and what is old in a given predicament. This practice of judgment involves less the creation and justification of normative principles than an attempt to make sense of a series of political experiences and cultivate awareness of political possibility. Hannah Arendt evocatively described this kind of political theorizing as the attempt to "think what we are doing" on the basis of "our newest experiences and newest fears."⁴

While Arendt was critical of dialectics as a deeply "fallible" philosophy of history, she

²While I *distinguish* between this adverbial idea of dialectics from other conceptions, I do not comprehensively defend it. This latter task would, first, require a longer philosophical investigation. Further, in line with the idea that dialectics is not something that can be shown *a priori* nor solely from a hermeneutic reading of privileged texts (e.g. Hegel and Marx), but through the actual *use* of dialectical thought by actors, the first foray into such a comprehensive defence of an adverbial grammar of dialectics is precisely an examination of how it works in specific political struggles and predicaments of power. In other words, the 'proof' of this conception is in how well it works.

³Linda M.G. Zerilli. "Castoriadis, Arendt, and the Problem of the New." In: *Constellations* 9.4 (2002), pp. 540–553; Hannah Arendt. *The Life of the Mind*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1978.

⁴Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 5.

argues that Hegel, Marx, and their heirs rightly took up the injunction to theorize experience, and formulate theory in experiential terms. By relocating the search for “standards” of judgment into “the domain of human experiences” Hegel (and later, Marx) had attempted to “formulate a philosophy which would correspond to and comprehend conceptually the newest and most real experiences of the time.”⁵ However, the “theoretical” aspect of this philosophy worked not only to *comprehend* but to *capture* novelty. Dialectics as a philosophy of history works, on her account, as a digestive mechanism that converts the spontaneity of politics (what is unforeseeable, the event) into historical causality (what must have happened).⁶

However, since many of the signal experiences of revolution in dialectical thought have been failures, reversals, and blockages, we might better think of dialectics as a form of thought aimed at precisely the *difficulties* of metabolizing past and present.⁷ In this sense it is not simply “the new” that is the problem, but the difficulty of disentangling the old and the new in the first place. This shows that what is at stake is this question of whether our ways of thinking (or thinking in general) can grapple with the features of a present experience that exceeds available concepts, and that dialectical thinking’s success or failure lies less in ‘accuracy’ or the proffering of adequate normative principles than in the virtuosity with which thinkers stretch, reinvent, and abandon concepts in light of events. This dialectical virtuosity inheres in the navigation of the “constant tension between the desire to elaborate a theory and a wish to remain free to react to events.”⁸ In turn, the study of thinking dialectically follows how thinkers navigate this tension.

This tension between experience and theory structures engagements with the domestic colonialism thesis in the 1960s. Black revolutionaries invoked the idea of a domestic colony or a process of domestic colonization to resist Marxist philosophies of history that would sub-

⁵Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1972, p. 52.

⁶Ibid., p. 52.

⁷I am drawing here on the analysis of Hegel in Rebecca Comay. *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010; John Grant. *Dialectics and Contemporary Politics: Critique and Transformation from Hegel through Post-Marxism*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

⁸Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*.

ordinate their experience as a minor note in the development of proletarian revolution, *and* liberal stories about racism as a contingent aberration rather than constitutive feature of US political order. The theory, therefore, arises from a particular experience that, while rooted in long histories, was nonetheless novel in certain ways that exceeded available vocabularies of political critique. However, as Errol Henderson has persuasively demonstrated, a key feature of invocations of domestic colonialism is a sense of the indispensability of and need for *theory*.⁹ Built into the domestic colony concept is the idea that one needs concepts to understand and comprehend experience. The concept of domestic colonialism is compelling, in my view, because of the way it attempted to grapple with a set of experiences while remaining pliable enough to allow for “response to events.” It is neither a polemical refusal of available languages of politics (in the name of a return to a pure, unmediated reference to experiences of suffering) nor a totalizing framework that would replace Marxist philosophies of history. It is a hinge for a moment of revolutionary, dialectical learning aimed at diagnosing a novel situation. It is an irreducibly *theoretical* set of concepts that diagnoses a series of political experiences and historical processes that defined the present.

This conception is not entirely foreign to the way Hegel and Marx talk about dialectical critique. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that “scientific cognition . . . demands surrender to the life of the object, or what amounts to the same thing, confronting or expressing its inner necessity.”¹⁰ What he means here is dialectical philosophy follows the *internal* contradictions of a thing. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel follows how different shapes of consciousness, and entire “shapes of spirit” or forms of life, fail on their own terms. A dialectical critique therefore follows how a given formation’s constitutive contradictions lead it to its own demise, or at least bespeak a fundamental instability. This stands in opposition to an ‘external’ critique that judges a given formation by a timeless standard of judgment. Di-

⁹Errol A. Henderson. *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2019, passim.

¹⁰G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 32.

alectical thinking as Hegel explicates it in the *Phenomenology* takes this off the table; indeed, the development of Spirit in that text just *is* the progressive refusal of exterior, timeless standards sitting below, above, or behind the world of appearances. Things fail or stand based on their ability to navigate the contradictions produced by their own working, not because they fail to meet a timeless ideal.

Characterizing domestic colonialism in this way reads it as an attempt to locate the constitutive contradictions of US political and social formations. Central to this form of immanent critique is the idea that while these contradictions – to forecast, contradictions between a process of domestication that internalizes collectives as subjects of racial and colonial power and the continual production of insurgencies that exceed the ‘domestic’ – are *produced* by US political and social order, they cannot be *resolved* within them. The concept of domestic colonialism, as I will show in following chapters, persistently showed that what liberals saw as “problems” to be solved were in fact contradictions to be overcome.

This form of dialectical critique follows Marx’s maxim that “we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas” but charts the emergence of the new world in and through the old. Dialectical diagnosis works under the “credo” of “the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age.”¹¹ As Marx writes, “this is a task for the world and us [‘critical philosophers’].”¹² Dialectical thought does not involve offering an account of *the* dialectic or a philosophy of history. It resides in tension and motion between the two terms of philosophy and history, thinking and world. In other words, it is guided by a practice of locating contradictions produced by, but insoluble within a given social formation – a process often called “immanent critique.”¹³

¹¹Karl Marx. *Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge*. Letter. Sept. 1843. URL: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09-alt.htm (visited on 07/23/2021).

¹²Ibid.

¹³Rahel Jaeggi. *Critique of Forms of Life*. Trans. by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018, pp. 207–8; See also Seyla Benhabib. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study in the Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; Andrew Buchwalter. “Hegel, Marx, and the Concept of Immanent Critique.” In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29.2 (1991), pp. 253–279; Titus Stahl. *Immanent Critique*. Trans. by John-Baptiste Oduor. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.

In what follows I unpack the conception of dialectics that orients my dissertation, beginning with the idea of dialectics as a ‘method’ premised on the non-identity between concepts and things. Second, I build out the political implications of this through a reconstruction of recent attempts in political theory to stretch, disintegrate, or ‘open’ dialectical thought. These two constitute the main moves of a dialectical ‘counter-discourse’ in radical political thought: a philosophical move to non-identity and a political move toward openness and rupture. My own contribution: I argue that one way to hold these two moves (non-identity and rupture) together is through an adverbial grammar of dialectics. If the moves grounding recuperations of dialectical thought today involve a shift from grammars of *the* dialectic to multiple dialectics, the conception of dialectics I offer here – built out of the subject-matter of the 1960s itself – is one of thinking and acting dialectically. It is a form of practical wisdom in the Aristotelian sense (*phronesis*). The concept of domestic colonialism, then, can be read as a product of thinking dialectically, as part of a practice of critique and political learning.

1.1 The Problem of a Dialectical Method

Dialectics is notoriously difficult to simplify, not least because “dialectical reason,” as Hegel argues, “negates the simple.”¹⁴ This, however, does provide one positive suggestion: there is nothing simple. Every thing is driven forward by internal contradictions.¹⁵ Dialectical analysis involves giving an account of the unity of opposites within a thing (or a concept, a movement) – its essential contradictions – as the motive force of that thing. As Hegel writes: “dialectical reason” concerns “the *immanent emergence* of distinctions... found in the treatment of the fact itself.”¹⁶ The late Canadian Marxist Frank Cunningham points in

¹⁴G.W.F. Hegel. *The Science of Logic*. Trans. by George Di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 10.

¹⁵Including, of course, simplicity itself. Hegel identifies simplicity *as* nothing in the opening of the *Logic*, where it is identified with Being, and thus falls apart into a category that mediates nothing and Being (becoming). Hegel’s dialectic in the *Logic* is one of increasing differentiation and complicatedness.

¹⁶Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 34.

the right direction, then, when he argues that “dialectics is a science of change in its most general aspects.”¹⁷ It is a science of change that hinges on transitions driven by “determinate negation”: the (self-)negation of a given shape of consciousness or shape of life given its own inability to stand up on its own terms. This failure is “positive,” though: determinate negation is determinate precisely because it “has a *content*.”¹⁸ It is not an abstract negation or refusal but already contains some other shape in it, that would account for that which fails.

Cunningham is equally, right, however, that at stake in any debate about the dialectical method, or dialectics in general, is the “overall pattern of change.”¹⁹ Is a totalizing, unified account of change possible? Can one formalize this account of determinate negation into a method applicable to whatever one wishes to study? Or is such an analysis, given over to the “immanent emergence” of contradictions and change, necessarily disaggregated and multiple, rather than systematic? In many readings, Hegel’s answer on the terrain of philosophy of history seems to be one of systematic, imposed unity. Hayden White glosses Hegel’s philosophy of history along these lines:

“The historian cannot ‘rest satisfied with the bare letter of particular fact,’ but must rather strive to ‘bring this material into a coordinated whole; he must conceive and embrace single traits, occurrences, and actions under the unifying concept.’”²⁰

However, equally, Hegel argued that this unification could not come from anything ‘outside’ or ‘imposed’ on things. In his discussion of determinate negation in the *Logic* he argues, instead, that “this method is not something distinct from its subject matter and content.” It must be “in tune” with the “simple rhythm. . . the course of the fact itself.”²¹

¹⁷Frank Cunningham. *Understanding Marxism: a Canadian Introduction*. Toronto: Progress Books, 1981, p. 135.

¹⁸Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 33.

¹⁹Cunningham, *Understanding Marxism: a Canadian Introduction*, p. 136.

²⁰Hayden White. *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975, p. 89.

²¹Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 33.

For Hegel, this attunement of method to subject-matter grounds the speculative claim to unify thinking and being, concept and world, in systematic philosophy. However, others, like Theodor Adorno, pointed out that the demand to follow the immanent emergence of contradictions, the “inner necessity” of a thing, meant that this unity could never be guaranteed ahead of time. Hegel’s insistence that “the system is not to be conceived in advance, abstractly; it is not to be an all-encompassing schema” might “prove fatal” in the end to any guarantee of a unitary “whole.”²² It may instead expose a “logic of disintegration” that pries open the ineluctable *gap* between any unifying concept and the historical world.²³

In his critical engagement of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics Adorno thus highlights the basic internal contradiction of the claims of the Hegelian method. Let Adorno first restate the demand of dialectical thought in terms of “unreflected intellectual experience”:

“If someone wants to gain knowledge of something rather than cover it up with categories, he will have to surrender to it without reservation, without the cover of preconceptions, but he will not succeed unless the potential for the knowledge that is actualized only through immersion in the object is already waiting in him as theory.”²⁴

That is, one must surrender to the “inner necessity” of the object, but must, of necessity, do so in and through some sort of theoretical presupposition, or really the presupposition of the possibility that this inner necessity *can* be theorized. Dialectics is thus “neither a theory arrived at by induction nor one from which one could make deductions”.²⁵ Adorno sees this in terms of a need to refuse to separate method and subject matter. In his lectures on sociology he criticizes attempts “to conceive the method of sociology *in abstracto*, as something

²²Theodor W. Adorno. *Hegel: Three Studies*. Trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993, pp. 56–57.

²³Susan Buck-Morss. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*. New York: Free Press, 1977.

²⁴Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 81.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 81.

instrumentally separable from its subject matter.”²⁶ The task instead, as is hinted above already, is to “evolve the method from the subject matter,” to “suspend[ing] the principle of the separation of method from the subject.”²⁷

The contradiction is therefore between the idea of dialectics as a surrender to the thing, and the idea that this surrender can nonetheless serve as a ‘method.’ One requires a methodological presupposition or defence of this surrender; but this ‘method’ nonetheless risks being imposed as a formal schema. Adorno saw this contradiction as key to a diagnosis of pathological forms of ‘dialectical’ thinking. He has in mind here especially “diamat” in the “Eastern bloc, where the dialectic has been elevated into a kind of state religion.”²⁸ This risk, where “the dialectical method... very easily congeals into the trademark of a view,” or “elective weltanschauung,” is carried within the very idea of dialectics. It is not an external ‘mistake,’ for Adorno.²⁹ It is part of the inner necessity of the dialectical method, for him, to “in the strictly dialectical sense... [come] into contradiction with its own concept”³⁰ There is, he writes, “no guarantees that dialectic itself cannot in turn become ideology.”³¹

Adorno calls his answer to this problem negative dialectics, which is an anti-method. It is anti-methodical because it highlights the contradiction between concepts and things, between ways of thinking and what is thought about. Method cannot be discerned ‘before’ coming to the object of study. If the demand is to “evolve” the method from the subject-matter, Adorno sees the only way to safeguard this from formalization is to insist on the “non-identity,” the “divergence of concept and thing.”³² He argues that this makes it more faithful to the idea that we surrender to the inner necessity of the thing, by emphasizing the “primacy of the object.”

²⁶Theodor W. Adorno. *Introduction to Sociology*. Trans. by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 69.

²⁷Ibid., p. 70.

²⁸Theodor W. Adorno. *Introduction to Dialectics*. Cambridge: Polity, 2017, p. 54.

²⁹Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 75.

³⁰Adorno, *Introduction to Dialectics*, p. 50.

³¹Ibid., p. 48.

³²Theodor W. Adorno. *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course, 1965/1966*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008, p. 6.

Or, as he puts it, “the name of dialectics says no more. . . than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder.”³³

The primacy of the object, here, is not a return to some immediate ‘thing’ that exceeds concepts. It begins from a contradiction immanent to conceptualization. A concept claims precisely to comprehend something other than concepts: “all concepts. . . refer to non-conceptualities.”³⁴ But, precisely *as* concepts, they are irreducibly distinct from the non-conceptualities to which they refer. “Affirmative” dialectics solves this by seeing in things the reflection of the mind or “spirit.”³⁵ This forecloses the experience of the other by reading the world, ahead of time as it were, in terms of concept or method. Instead, negative dialectics centres this contradiction *as* the subject of dialectics: “we must reach this experience of the new and the other through conceptuality. . . is it possible to do something to the concept, which otherwise tendentially locks us into sameness, in order to use it as a mode of access to difference and the new?”³⁶

The point, put simply, is that the world outstrips thought, and that dialectics is at its most basic an attempt not to ‘get at’ or ‘comprehend’ the world in conceptual terms but to follow as closely as possible the motions that emerge from this gap between thinking and world. Adorno’s negative dialectics, in this respect – his “dialectical, materialist” disposition, rather than “dialectical materialist” worldview³⁷ – is an attunement to the limits of thought and the contradictory character of concepts. How, though, can this be transformed into a practicable form of analysis? What does a “negative dialectical” study of politics look like?³⁸

³³Theodor W. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. 2nd ed. edition. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, Jan. 1981, p. 5.

³⁴Ibid., p. 11.

³⁵Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 28.

³⁶Frederic Jameson. *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 2007, pp. 17–18.

³⁷Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*.

³⁸Susan Buck-Morss and Gillian Rose have both pointed out the difficulty of turning Adorno’s negative dialectics into a positive method of social research, and indeed of moving from the critique of philosophy to social critique within Adorno’s thinking. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*; Gillian Rose. *The Melancholy Science: an Introduction to the Thought of*

1.2 Toward an Adverbial Grammar of Dialectics

If “dialectic. . . is not to be thought of as a formal technique which can be applied indifferently to any object,” can any legitimate move toward methodological solidification be made?³⁹ A recent turn toward antagonistic and negative dialectics in critical political thought provides some helpful hints in this regard. Recent engagements with dialectics in social and political theory have, in many respects, followed the ‘anti-system’ of negative dialectics, and emphasized logics of disintegration and antagonism over unification and reconciliation. Dialectical critique today aims to grapple with uneven and heterogeneous yet connected struggles. Dialectics as system faces not only philosophical limits, but political ones. If the prospect raised by the dialectical method is one in which its ‘application’ might come to undo the possibility of total unification, this prospect finds some verification in a recent turn in contemporary critical theory toward “negative dialectics: aporetic, aleatory, and untidy.”⁴⁰ This untidy dialectics starts from historical events difficult to incorporate into any account of *the* dialectic as a progressive unfolding of freedom and reason. It is a matter of “reckoning with the collapse of revolutionary projects and clarifying the tasks of critique in the context of genocidal racism, capitalist exploitation, totalitarian violence, colonial domination, and the historico-political horizon set by the world war.”⁴¹

Here words like “despair,” “rupture,” and “restlessness” work as signposts toward a conception of dialectical thought as an insistence on the gap between consciousness and world, a “tearing” of consciousness. In this vision of a torn consciousness thought is always out-

Theodor W. Adorno. London: Verso, 1979, 185–190, 71–2, respectively; This conclusion is questionable in light of Adorno’s more positive remarks on how negative dialectics grounded his examinations in works such as *The Authoritarian Personality* and at the Frankfurt Institute more generally. See Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*; Nonetheless Drucilla Cornell is probably on the right track in her point that Adorno’s ‘method,’ if anything, is formulable less in terms of a social-scientific method than as an “ethical message” of the “more-than-this” and the “creation of what is truly new” in and through damaged life. Drucilla Cornell. *The Philosophy of the Limit*. New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 17–21.

³⁹Jean Hyppolite. *Studies on Marx and Hegel*. Trans. by John O’Neill. New York: Harper, 1969, p. 9.

⁴⁰Robyn Marasco. *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory after Hegel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 3.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.

stripped by the world it seeks to gain footholds in. Dialectics is “not... a roadmap to reconciliation” and “the satisfactions of the Absolute.” It is a form of thinking that insists we focus on moments of despair, loss, and blocked possibility.⁴² Whatever “reconciliation” might look like, it comes in the form less of an absolute and final satisfaction than a sense of absolute frustration: a reconciliation *to* contradiction rather than a resolution *of* all contradictions.⁴³ Put simply, this turn to dialectics is motivated by an insistence on the non-identity, the basic gap, between thinking and being, concepts and the world they comprehend.⁴⁴

This philosophical move toward non-identity, despair, and untidiness is linked to more concrete set of political problems concerning the ambiguous shape of new struggles and the need to make sense of emerging revolutionary subjects that exceed available categories. This link between untidy dialectics and the problem of relating different struggles was flagged by Frantz Fanon in 1962, when he wrote that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.”⁴⁵ He argued that in the colonial and decolonizing situation class is thoroughly structured by race. Or, as Stuart Hall evocatively puts it, “race is the modality in which class is lived.”⁴⁶ I do not want to make a stark claim here about whether these imply whether class or race is “prior.” The point is that separate categories – class, race, gender, colony – are used to make sense of struggles in which these terms coalesce. This raises again the gap between concepts and the world, and the challenge of receiving novel and heterogeneous struggles within the conceptual arrangements bestowed by past struggles and thinkers.

Kuan-Hsing Chen usefully sums up this political problem that motivates contemporary returns to dialectics:

⁴²Marasco, *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory after Hegel*, p. 29.

⁴³Todd McGowan. *Emancipation after Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 21–2.

⁴⁴Sina Kramer. *Excluded Within: the (Un)Intelligibility of Radical Political Actors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁴⁵Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove, 1963, p. 40.

⁴⁶Stuart Hall et al. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan, 1982, p. 394.

“The real question is to what extent an open-ended Marxism can set aside historical baggage, such as class determinism and the teleology of historical imagination. To what extent can it accept that social formations are made up of multiple, coexisting structures, which makes it necessary to analyze different structural axes together, and to embrace new forms and subjects of struggle?”⁴⁷

The question is whether dialectical criticism can grapple with the singularity of struggles along lines of race, colony, and gender. As a theory of race, class, and colony, domestic colonialism was a concept forged in movements attempting to grapple with precisely this possibility of making sense of forms of domination and practices of struggle in which race and class were inseparable. If it constantly oscillates between the reduction of Black oppression to political economy (imperial extraction from the ghetto and Black Belt) and an ideology of Black ‘separatism,’ it is precisely because it is an attempt to hold these two insurgencies together by way of a reference to the world-historical moment of decolonization. Black revolutionary movements were spaces in which this contradictory “dialectics of race and class” was continually negotiated, and the domestic colony thesis was a key index for this negotiation.⁴⁸

Studying domestic colonialism therefore adds to a contemporary “dialectical counter-discourse” resisting impulse to reduce the singular problems of decolonization and racial domination to other ‘determining’ rubrics. He argues that this dialectical counter-discourse, “by foregrounding rupture and shunning the lure of unity... grants weight to a separatist *moment* in dialectics – at the expense of premature reconciliation – but does so without succumbing to a hermetically separatist essentialism.”⁴⁹ Domestic colonialism, to be sure, was a concept that emphasized rupture – refusing a politics of conciliatory liberalism. Concep-

⁴⁷Kuan-Hsing Chen. *Asia as Method: Toward De-Imperialization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 72.

⁴⁸James Geschwender. *Class, Race, & Worker Insurgency: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

⁴⁹George Ciccariello-Maher. *Decolonizing Dialectics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 6.

tually, too, it took aim at the “remainder” produced by any totalizing move or story about political life, a remainder that threatens the “comforts of predictable motion” in politics.⁵⁰ The “lure of unity” comes in philosophical and political forms – and domestic colonialism is, precisely in the appellation and supplement of ‘domestic,’ a recognition of a remainder in languages both of anticolonialism and Marxism.

Thus to consider domestic colonialism dialectically does not mean reading it as a concept displaying the dialectical structure of historical development as a *whole*. It displays, rather, a dialectical disposition. Andrew Douglas calls this a dialectical “spirit of critique,” that articulates the “pursuit of our autonomy, struggling to stake out a self-satisfying and sustainable way of life in the world with others. . . and find ourselves run up at every turn against a conceptual and material reality that complicates and frustrates our best intentions.”⁵¹ Studying a dialectical concept follows how its inventors and users worked in the gap between concepts and political reality. Here dialectics is not so much a kind of philosophy or a grand theory but an *ethos*.⁵²

By highlighting this tragic ‘gap’ between our wishes and our world, dialectics leaves open the possibility that the gap between concepts and world might lie not only in intellectual failings but in the world itself. Pace Adorno, the fragmentation and incompleteness of the dialectic (its production of “remainders”) lies not with the failure of thought to be “adequate” to the world, but in the fragmentary, incomplete, and wrongness of the world itself. As Cedric Robinson argues, this is the keystone of any dialectical critique of historical materialism (as he sees it in Marx and Engels): the refusal to assume that the social world is a “geometric whole” that can be “discussed with arithmetic means and certainty.”⁵³

This shift to dialectics as a spirit of critique or *ethos* shifts the grammar of dialectical

⁵⁰Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*, p. 11.

⁵¹Andrew J. Douglas. *In the Spirit of Critique: Thinking Politically in the Dialectical Tradition*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013, p. 5.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 35–41.

⁵³Cedric Robinson. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 2nd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000, p. xxviii.

thought. Frederic Jameson's compelling typology of three "names" of the dialectic plays a crucial role in today's rethinking of dialectics: *the* dialectic, *a* dialectic, and dialectical. He notes that to use the definitive article – *the* dialectic – "is to subsume all the varieties of dialectical thinking under a single philosophical system." This is dialectics as "grand theory": a systematic, totalizing logic of history. To speak of *a* dialectic (one among multiple) means to resist this "unified field theory or 'theory of everything.'" Instead "any opposition can be the starting point for a dialectic in its own right," a "local" dialectic.⁵⁴ The attempt in this charting of local dialectics to extra a form of thought that is visible in *any* articulation of a local dialectic leads Jameson to the insistence on contradiction: "it is the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking."⁵⁵ By this he means that aporias and oppositions can always be reread as a contradictory *process* or *movement*.

This dissolving character of dialectics opens the third grammar of dialectics: the insistence that, in the face of "a particularly perverse interpretation or turn of events, 'it's dialectical!'"⁵⁶ For him, this insistence on the adjective dialectical is part and parcel of a dialectical critique of *the* dialectic, which always risks papering over contradictions or re-subsuming them into a single unitary framework, and *a* dialectic, which locates a formal structure of dialectics that might be seen anywhere, but with different content. The adjective seems to follow more closely the Hegelian maxim with which I begin: to follow the inner necessity or internal contradictions of a thing. To follow this necessity is to follow "some essential restlessness or negativity that fastens on to our thinking in those moments in which we seem arrested or paralyzed by an antinomy."⁵⁷ This seems to push towards an increasingly fragmented, untidy, and mobile conception of dialectics.

And indeed, this adjectival grammar of dialectics is key to today's dialectical counter-discourse. Ciccariello-Maher argues that, following the adjective "dialectical," in its "refusal

⁵⁴Frederic Jameson. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 2009, p. 5.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 15–19.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 50.

to see divisions subsumed into the whole, is arguably *more* faithful to the dialectical spirit.”⁵⁸ In turn, Douglas argues that “the adjective provides for our purposes a better initial inroad” because it emphasizes the ways in which “lived experience” dissolves and unsettles habits of common sense and ossified conceptual frameworks. For him, this leads us to a kind of “rhetorical embrace” of dialectics as a strategy of critical analysis, a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than a philosophical system. It thus allows for a more open sensibility that works to “revivify” our political sensibilities.⁵⁹

Studying dialectical criticism in practice, in the making of the concept of domestic colonialism, I want to add to this dialectical grammar book with a turn to dialectics in the adverb: thinking dialectically. This turn is inspired above all by the work of James and Grace Lee Boggs, and their continual insistence throughout their writings that one must “think and act dialectically.”⁶⁰ To talk about thinking dialectically means to emphasize what Douglas called an *ethos*, and what I will here call a disposition. It is a disposition in two senses. First, it is a cultivated comportment to the world, a *hexis* – an Aristotelian term naming a habituation or character that guides one’s relation to the world’s movements and affordances. Second, it is a dis-position. If it is a *hexis* or habit, it is one that is continually overturned by a sense of the difficulty of finally ‘positioning’ oneself.

Pushing toward an adverbial grammar, with its attendant terminology of ‘comportment,’ ‘dispositon,’ ‘posture,’ and *hexis* centres the experience of conceptual failure. More specifically it involves the tension between what we might call, following Marx, “science” and “life,” or “philosophy” and “politics.” This disposition is cultivated primarily in moments when, and is the ability to sense moments when, “life has caught up with and made a critique of theory.”⁶¹ It is driven forward by those experiences when the ‘remainder’ left by concepts

⁵⁸Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*, p. 13.

⁵⁹Douglas, *In the Spirit of Critique: Thinking Politically in the Dialectical Tradition*, p. 35.

⁶⁰Grace Lee Boggs. “Nothing Is More Important than Thinking Dialectically.” In: *CR: the New Centennial Review* 6.2 (2006), pp. 1–6.

⁶¹James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs. *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974, p. 42.

becomes especially palpable as political motion, insurgency, or shifts that one cannot track or capture “when your philosophic categories just don’t answer what has come from below.”⁶²

This highlights the basically practical impulse of dialectics: the idea that despite its appearance as an abstract, opaque philosophical language, it is primarily an investment in the ‘real’ movement of things. Marx in his *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts* – which, indeed, were key to the development of the Boggs’s account of ‘thinking dialectically’ – criticizes the idea of knowledge that “stays aloof” from material reproduction. Or, as he more pointedly puts it, “One basis for science and another for life is a priori a lie.”⁶³ This could function as a maxim for an adverbial grammar of dialectics as the refusal to separate science and life. This refusal of separate bases does not mean there is *one* basis, a common ground. Marx highlights the need to refuse separate bases but also insists on the limited capacity of concepts to grasp the “great wealth of human activity.”⁶⁴

Indeed, while Marx hints that there will be a “single science” that comprehends the self-creation of “man” by “human labour,” the “irrefutable proof of his *self-creation*, of his own *origins*,”⁶⁵ this does not locate some deeper conceptual ground by which science and life are united. Instead it is the practical unfolding of the tension between science and life that ‘unites’ the two terms. It is the process of the “negation of the negation,” i.e., history, and not any stable ‘third term,’ that links them. It just is the process by which ‘common’ bases of science and life are posited negated, and remade. If the *Manuscripts* are ‘Hegelian,’ it is less because of claims that communism is the “riddle of history solved,” than in the task that one locate, at the limits of available concepts, “the necessary form and dynamic principle of the immediate future.”⁶⁶

⁶²Raya Dunayevskaya. “Lecture in Japan on Hegel.” In: *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*. Ed. by Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson. Lanham: Lexington, 2002, pp. 137–144, p. 144.

⁶³Karl Marx. “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.” In: *Marx’s Concept of Man*. Ed. by Erich Fromm. Trans. by T.B. Bottomore. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966, pp. 86–196, p. 136.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 140.

That Marx does not unite the two terms is evident from his critique of Hegel in the *Manuscripts*. He argues that the the first “illusion of speculation” in Hegel’s dialectic is that “consciousness – self-consciousness – is *at home in its other being as such*.” The claim of absolute knowing (to have finally dissolved the distinction between knower and known) involves a rereading of the world in terms of spirit, the projection of conceptuality onto the non-conceptual. The danger ward off by *Marx’s* dialectic in the *Manuscripts* is just this danger: that “consciousness (knowing as knowing, thinking as thinking) claims to be directly the *other* of itself, the sensuous world, reality, life; it is thought over-reaching itself in thought.”⁶⁷ Marx articulates a negative dialectic, premised on the contradictory demand to both *refuse* separate bases for knowing and acting (science and life) while nonetheless highlighting the gap between consciousness and “reality, life.”

The singular *problem* to which thinking dialectically (as adverb) is a response is political and philosophical pathology in which thought “over-reaches” itself, replacing life with concepts, making it impossible to perceive or receive what is happening. Life returns, undoing ‘aloof’ concepts and forms of knowing, because concepts by their very nature are ‘aloof’ in their very character of conceptuality. As something premised on *life* and not on some better arrangement of concepts or systematic philosophy, it is irreducibly practical. As I will show, this means learning how to think dialectically necessitates actually studying the way in which certain people have thought and acted dialectically – following the dialectical mobilization of concepts to follow political insurgencies, movements, that exceed them – rather than expounding as tightly as possible some systematic dialectical philosophy. Thinking dialectically would then be the cultivated capacity to see when one’s concepts are over-writing life, to notice the ways life outstrips thinking. Studying dialectics means following how thinkers confronted this dialectical tension between life and thought. But again, the problem occurs – what does it mean, really, to “study” this? What does it look like?

⁶⁷Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” p. 185.

1.3 Thinking Dialectically as Practical Wisdom

One of the problems raised by the “anti-system” or “anti-method” of negative dialectics is that it becomes unclear exactly what it looks like to carry out a dialectical investigation. If dialectics “suspends the principle of separation of method from the subject,” yet cannot assume that the subject matter’s character is not immediately evident, there is a danger of vertigo: method must come from the ‘matter’ itself, but this involves at least a negative methodological claim to *not* impose some formal or technical method. There is a contradiction between an account of the limits of method and the need for what we might call ‘method-talk.’ To Adorno’s “anti-system” corresponds an “anti-method”: negative dialectics becomes a methodological discourse with an inventory of warnings about what *not* to do, presenting positive indications only in individual analyses, here and there. In his *Introduction to Dialectics* lectures Adorno hints that the problem here really concerns “praxis.”⁶⁸ This accounts, in part, for the sharp turn toward an insistence on dialectics as the analysis of political negativity and rupture, an analysis that does not proffer a distinct approach but resists formalization into method. Nevertheless, dialectics offers a certain way of doing things that is at least distinct from an ‘undialectical’ way.

In this section I therefore want to explore the possibility of working through this contradiction in a productive way by considering dialectics as a form of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*. In Aristotle’s ethical and political thought, practical wisdom is a virtuous disposition defined by the capacity to act in the right way in a given situation. It involves the connection between generalities (rules, principles, concepts) and the particulars (situations, actions) that necessarily exceed them. The English translation of *phronesis* as practical wisdom hints at the basic tension within it: between the theoretical and the practical. It is a concept that mediates the two. More accurately, it is a disposition – a habit, a comportment (*hexis*) through which the two are connected. This contradiction, for Aristotle, makes it

⁶⁸Adorno, *Introduction to Dialectics*, p. 35.

different both from scientific knowledge (which concerns things that always work the same way, i.e., natural and logical things) and technical knowledge (which, like *phronesis*, concerns things that change, but unlike it, has an unchangeable “model” according which one acts).⁶⁹ On this understanding, dialectics is a “way of being.”⁷⁰

One justification for reading thinking and acting dialectically as a kind of practical wisdom is that the latter actually contains the contradiction between general and particular that drives dialectics. My argument is not that if one is sufficiently ‘wise’ they will resolve this contradiction. On the contrary, in Aristotle’s conception it seems that practical wisdom involves a cultivated perceptiveness of the gap between one’s habits of thought and the irreducibly particular character of one’s predicament. It is precisely *not* “teachable” in the way that systematic science and technically applicable knowledge are. In this respect the contradictions between thought and world, between method and subject matter are (to paraphrase Marx) not abolished but given “room to move.”⁷¹

As a *hexis* of practical wisdom, thinking dialectically relies on a “plasticity” – “being at once capable of receiving and of giving form.”⁷² This dialectical plasticity is (as Catherine Malabou explains) a “movement of self-determination” defined by “opposing moments of total immobility (the ‘fixed’) and vacuity (‘dissolution’)” linked in “a whole which, reconciling these two extremes, is itself the union of *resistance* and *fluidity*.”⁷³ When Aristotle categorizes practical wisdom as a *hexis* he is pointing to the way that it is not transparently open to experience (it *resists* change, as habit) but is nonetheless malleable, capable of re-forming itself. But what is this “substance-subject,”⁷⁴ driven by this contradiction? If to *phronesis* corresponds the *phronimos*, the wise person, what corresponds to “thinking dialectically” as

⁶⁹Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985.

⁷⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer. *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. Trans. by Christopher P. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 39.

⁷¹Patchen Markell. *Bound by Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 110.

⁷²Catherine Malabou. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic*. New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 8–9.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 11.

a form of practical wisdom?

Adorno provides one hint: he argues that given that dialectics just *is* the contradiction between concept and thing, thought and world, the “agent” of this process is “contradiction itself—the contradiction between the fixed concept and the concept in motion.”⁷⁵ James and Grace Lee Boggs put this more evocatively as the contradiction between our fixed ideas of what ‘we’ are and way those concepts unfold in practice. In a 1985 speech Grace Lee Boggs argued that “we must love the questions themselves, first, because every time we act on our convictions, we create new contradictions or new questions; and secondly because we have no models for revolutionary change in a country as technologically advanced and as politically backward as ours.”⁷⁶ This encapsulates two main points about dialectics as practical wisdom: it follows the way that action stands in contradiction with its own concept, or unfolds in contradictory fashion, and it requires the ability to see without models, to notice the way one’s world outstrips thought.

Thinking and acting dialectically, as practical wisdom, is a cultivated ability to manage “the tension between statics and dynamics” that characterizes concepts.⁷⁷ Concepts, often, hold things still, condensing processes into images. This is precisely what makes them useful. A concept that somehow ‘matched’ the world perfectly would be like a map of 1:1 scale. In dialectical thought, “we literally seek to immerse ourselves in things that are heterogeneous to [thought].”⁷⁸ A concept may emerge in and through an historical process or a political struggle, but nonetheless come to be, *as a concept*, separated and distinct from any singular situation to which it might apply. In this way an *answer* may produce new questions – new contradictions between ways of thinking and the world in which one must act. Therefore, if what makes concepts useful is their character as condensations of historical processes, they

⁷⁵ Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 70.

⁷⁶ Grace Lee Boggs. “I Must Love the Questions Themselves.” In: *Grace Lee Boggs: Selected Speeches*. Detroit: Privately Published, 1990, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

carry with them “the risk of becoming trapped in the fixed concepts of what Hegel called the ‘Understanding.’”⁷⁹ In the “Understanding,” concepts emerging from the motions of the historical world become impositions, trapping us in modes of thinking outstripped by political life.

This language of conceptual capture runs through James and Grace Lee Boggs’s writings from the 1960s to the present, as a kind of negative principle of dialectical thought. As Grace Lee notes in a 1993 speech, her rediscovery (alongside CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya) of Marx’s early *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and Lenin’s notes on Hegel’s *Logic* highlighted the need to focus, as far as possible, on the contradictory tension between thought and the socio-political world. As she puts it,

“In periods of deep crisis in any movement, organization, or society, revolutionists must be able to think dialectically. That is, we must recognize that things are always changing, that the contradictions which are in everything are bound to develop and become antagonistic, so that ideas or paradigms or strategies that were progressive at one point turn into their opposite. This means that in times of crisis revolutionary leaders must have the audacity to create new ideas or paradigms or strategies which represent sharp breaks with what they themselves had previously believed.”⁸⁰

Thinking dialectically, here, is a practice, cultivated through study and struggle, of “keeping one’s ear to the ground to hear the new questions being asked at the grassroots. . . always being on the alert for the changes taking place in reality that force us to break loose from the fixed concepts that have come out of earlier struggles.”⁸¹ It is, then, a negative experience – one of the determinate negation, or specific failure, of a given set of concepts, languages, or

⁷⁹Grace Lee Boggs. “Thinking and Acting Dialectically: C.L.R. James, the American Years.” In: *Monthly Review* (Oct 1993), pp. 38–46, p. 39.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 38.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 45.

strategies. It is a kind of “listening.”⁸²

This is one more reason, then, to consider thinking dialectically in terms of practical wisdom. It is a particular way of describing the “intellectual perception” of what exceeds available conceptual languages. It is a cultivated capacity to notice (or, better yet, to not *not* notice) when an experience has upset or unsettled one’s habits.⁸³ This not only emphasis on a situation’s particularity but exactly how it relates to universals (in dialectical thought, concepts). Even if practical wisdom is “concerned with action and action is about particulars,”⁸⁴ and is disclosure of the “last thing, an object of perception, [and] not of scientific knowledge,”⁸⁵ it requires knowledge of *both* particulars and universals.⁸⁶ This ‘last’ or ‘ultimate’ thing (*eschaton*) that *phronesis* sees is not some absolutely concrete or ‘immediate’ thing. The ‘seeing’ here is an “intellectual perception” (*nous*)⁸⁷ Crucially, as distinct from other ‘practical’ dispositions such as craftsmanship, where there is an ideal or model against which we model and through which we shape things, the object of intellectual perception is “not seen in advance,” because ultimately it is an absolutely particular *action* or intervention in a situation conceived as a totality or whole.⁸⁸

Freyenhagen, bridging Adorno’s negative dialectics and Aristotle’s ethics, offers a formulation helpful for thinking about how concepts work in practical wisdom: “while Aristotelian judgments about life forms are not mere empirical generalisations, they are not completely

⁸²Or, as Sina Kramer usefully puts it, the problem to which the “method” of negative dialectics is an answer is: “how do we hear claims that we are constituted not to understand? How can we translate politically unintelligible claims, not by forcing those claims to assimilate to our own language, but by reconstituting our language and our politics...?” This implies that there is nothing about “life” in the Boggsian sense that will automatically break us out. It requires, as above, audacity, an ability and courage – and crucially, these are virtues in some sense – to break the fixed concepts in which one is trapped. See Kramer, *Excluded Within: the (Un)Intelligibility of Radical Political Actors*, p. 125.

⁸³I owe the terminology of ‘not not noticing’ to Don Carmichael. Though Martin Heidegger also a similar interpretation in his lectures on Plato’s *Sophist*. See: Martin Heidegger. *Plato’s Sophist*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003.

⁸⁴Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1141b15.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 1141b25.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 1141b20.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 1142b30.

⁸⁸William McNeill. *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999, pp. 39–40.

divorced from empirical reality either, but, so to speak, condensations of its actually observable specimens.”⁸⁹ In other words, the diagnosis contained in domestic colonialism – that the ‘domestic’ order of the United States just *is* an apparatus of racial capture that domesticates alternatives sovereignties and self-determinations – is not a *description* or *explanation* but a *condensation* of a complex, differentiated whole into a single intellectual perception that can index various political projects and actions.

The need to grapple with situations as a whole in their particularity is what both exposes, and necessitates, a move away from “fixed” concepts. Since practical reality is fundamentally changeable, so too should one’s concepts be as mobile as possible, pushing against the apparently natural ‘fixity’ that general concepts attain. As James Boggs writes, the challenge of the 1960s and 1970s was:

“To be ready to think dialectically. That is, we must be ready to recognize that as reality changes, our ideas have to change so that we can project new, more advanced aspirations worth striving for. This is the only way to avoid becoming prisoners of ideas that were once progressive but have become reactionary.”⁹⁰

The element of *projection* here is key: practical wisdom, like thinking dialectically, is irreducibly practical, and active. It involves an intervention in reality, and the making of new concepts and new ideas about ourselves. The task of thinking dialectically is not so much deciding what a situation *is* but what it might *become*. The intellectual perception involved in thinking dialectically is a perception of something that cannot be foreseen or ‘crafted’ according to some model. This involves a sensitivity to the limits of one’s languages and concepts of politics. This sensitivity is gained, largely, from experience, in the sense of something one undergoes. Translated into the language of the 1960s, it comes from struggle: struggling against

⁸⁹Fabian Freyenhagen. *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 243.

⁹⁰James Boggs. “Think Dialectically, Not Biologically.” In: *Pages from a Black Worker’s Notebook: A James Boggs Reader*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, pp. 264–273, p. 273.

arrangements of power, but also against one's own limited ideas, traditions, and lessons. This "process" of experience is, as Gadamer writes, "essentially negative." This negation in fact is precisely what illuminates what it 'negates' – our habits of thought and action. By witnessing the failure of our concepts, we also learn how they worked, and how they hold us back. In language similar to that of James and Grace Lee Boggs, Gadamer describes the "dialectical" nature of experience as an "escape from something that had deceived or held us captive."⁹¹

A dialectical disposition is built out of these "negative" experiences. Our failure to make sense of a given situation with available languages of critique – say, the failure of conceptual languages of 'exploitation' and 'exclusion' to make sense of anti-Black racism – tells us something about the critical need for an idea of freedom and emancipation in excess of those languages. Experience, here, is not so much the unadulterated encounter with things but a negative process by which that 'encounter' is seen only in its impossibility, its escape from our ways of thinking. As Gadamer puts it,

"The negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning . . . we gain better knowledge through [the object of experience], not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before. . . The negation by which it achieves this is a determinate negation. We call this kind of experience *dialectical*."⁹²

Experience is here "skepticism in action."⁹³ An 'experienced' person in this dialectical sense is disposed toward surprise. This was one of the *problems* of both undialectical and purportedly dialectical thought, for Adorno. Whether one is trapped in the "fixed concepts" of the Understanding, or of common-sense (pace Boggs) or has transformed dialectical thought itself into a formal method, the antidote – "a dialectical theory of society" – aims at the "restoration" of "genuine experience. . . that is, experience of something new."⁹⁴ This means

⁹¹Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. Trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. Second Revised. New York: Continuum, 1999, p. 356.

⁹²Ibid., p. 353.

⁹³Ibid., p. 353.

⁹⁴Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 51.

also the possibility of *doing* something new, something unregimented by available possibilities.

This is perplexing, since the problem is how one can experience something ‘new’ in and through concepts that seem to close off what is new. The answer lies in the productive contradiction between concepts and life. What is learned here is less an empirical procedure for locating experiences untainted by concepts but a sense of the necessity of historical surprise. Lenin provides a useful gloss on this in his 1906 pamphlet on guerilla warfare:

“Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at a given moment only, recognising as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to participants of a given period, *inevitably* arise as the given social situation changes. In this respect Marxism *learns*.”⁹⁵

Thinking dialectically is the capacity to learn in this sense: to be both resistant and receptive to what is new through sense of the inevitability of events that cannot be comprehended within one’s habits of thought. In other words, as Gadamer writes, “the dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in the definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.”⁹⁶ This dissertation traces both the cultivation of this kind of disposition among revolutionary thinkers in the 1960s but is an attempt to do a kind of political theory aimed, too, at this “openness to experience.”

1.4 Dialectical Learning

This dialectic of experience crucially involves a kind of learning. As ideas fall apart, are invented, and disintegrate once more, a sort of advancement is made. While these experiences might not be unified in some single theory of historical progress, it is still possible to describe

⁹⁵See Vladimir Lenin. “Guerilla Warfare.” In: *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, pp. 213–223. URL: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/gw/index.htm>, I want to credit the Twitter account @ImReadinHere for posting this passage.

⁹⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 356.

the contradictory friction of concepts and life as a “learning process.”⁹⁷ As Rahel Jaeggi notes, the task of contemporary immanent critics is to think about this learning process without some grand historical *telos* or theory of historical inevitability. The domestic colony concept indexes a learning process of some sort, a moment in which thinkers and actors grappled with shifts in social and political life through the stretching, invention, and dislocation of conceptual languages.

Nevertheless, as Jaeggi notes, even without any totalizing supposition there is still, built into any claim about learning, a presumption that we know what it looks like to ‘learn,’ and how a “successful” instance of learning can be distinguished from bad ones.⁹⁸ But, as we have already shown through Adorno’s critique of dialectics as system and method, through the disintegrating, centrifugal dialectics of race and colony, and through a turn to an adverbial grammar of dialectics, the singular, irreducible demand of dialectical thought is that one cannot impose such a definition of ‘learning’ onto ‘learning processes.’ What it means, and meant, to learn must be unpacked in and through the analysis itself. Again, though, it must nevertheless come to such an analysis with an idea of what it is looking for, and a general conception of what it means to learn. It is perhaps here that the dialectical contradiction between the impossibility of both separating and identifying method and subject-matter becomes itself the subject of study. It is also where the entire idea of ‘dialectics’ becomes clearer in both an abstract and concrete way: dialectics is basically pedagogical. It concerns the basic character of political knowledge.

The reconception of dialectics as a form of practical judgment along quasi-Aristotelian lines enables a provisional answer to the question: how does one learn to think and act dialectically? The answer at first is more or less negative. In the *Nichomachean Ethics* practical wisdom is distinguished from both *techne* and *episteme*, from technical, craft knowledge

⁹⁷I take this language of “learning process” mainly from Axel Honneth. *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*. Trans. by James Ingram. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*.

⁹⁸Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, pp. 216–218.

and from scientific principles. What makes it different from this is on the one hand their subject matter. Whereas *techne* concerns production (*poesis*), *phronesis* concerns action (*praxis*). Whereas *episteme* concerns things that are necessarily the way they are, *phronesis* concerns things that can be otherwise. But the crucial difference, following from these, is that *phronesis* is not *teachable*, whereas craft and science are. Both can be distilled into rules, procedures, and formulae that, when reproduced, will proffer similar results in a variety of contexts. Practical wisdom will not, because the “success” (acting rightly) hinges on the nature of the particular situation in which one acts.⁹⁹

Aristotle here faces a similar problem to that faced by the dialectical ‘anti-method.’ If *phronesis* cannot be distilled into a formal, teachable kind of knowing, how can it be more than a “knack” or unconscious habit? Here dialectics comes to Aristotle’s aid – we know that someone with a greater ability to navigate the *breakdown* of those habits of thought and action is in some sense more ‘wise.’ In similar fashion Aristotle points out that we do know people who seem obviously more capable of doing this than others who have the same educational background. How is this gap bridged? By *watching* and *emulating* those with practical wisdom. This follows from the above point that practical wisdom emerges from experience; young people are, well, generally inexperienced, especially in political matters. To study it therefore, we cannot rapidly gain experience. To grasp what it is, “we should first study the sort of people we call intelligent.”¹⁰⁰ This is dialectical in the more conventional (ancient) sense, too, by starting from conventional commitments about what it looks like to be ‘wise’ (and to ‘think dialectically’) and unpacking, questioning, and potentially undermining them through people who epitomize these commitments.¹⁰¹

It might seem that Aristotle is recommending imitation as the way to learn. Emulation, however, is not imitation. *Phronesis* has its end in itself, unlike *techne*, whose end is external

⁹⁹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a5.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 1140a25.

¹⁰¹See Thomas W. Smith. *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle’s Dialectical Pedagogy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2001, pp. 19–20.

– practical wisdom is something we do to fulfil and enact ourselves as human beings, whereas production is aimed at the approximation of an external ideal (e.g. a table). Unless we implausibly believe all human beings should look the same, or undialectically assume some purified, detached, ideal of humanity, *phronesis* offers no “Archimedean point.”¹⁰² Learning itself involves the kind of intellectual perception that guides practical judgment because it has to pick out, from a given person’s life, sayings, and doings, the *way* in which they navigated challenging situations, rather than imitate that person wholesale. Put simply: it does not mean striving to literally *be* or imitate Perikles, but to “judge” like him.¹⁰³ Examining those whose words and deeds index dialectical learning processes is a matter of attempting to locate the way in which they learned within what they learned and what they say. Aristotle’s injunction to learn *phronesis* by emulation requires the ability to locate the wisdom that is immanent to a given action. This does not mean simply focusing on the immediate action itself. Doing this will result in the transplantation of the ‘right’ action at one time to a time in which it may or may not be correct.

Indeed, the injunction to think dialectically aims precisely to combat the pathologies of reason that emerge from such problematic transplantations. This will become especially important in considerations of the domesticated colony concept. The most prominent criticism of the concept is that it is undialectical, and unwise, in this sense because it “imports” models from the Third World to explain the unique predicament of racial oppression in the US. The wider argument of this dissertation is that the domestic colony concept, while sometimes undialectical in this sense, was often the opposite: it often stretched available languages to articulate an “intellectual perception” of the situation at hand, and indeed structured its ‘importation’ of models with a starting point in struggles in the US.

While I will discuss their engagement with the colonial analogy more closely in a later chapter, here it will suffice to point to the methodology of revolutionary learning visible in

¹⁰²Smith, *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle’s Dialectical Pedagogy*, p. 19.

¹⁰³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b5-10.

Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century. In it they examine a series of revolutions – Russian, Chinese, Guinean – as antecedents of and resources for a new American Revolution. However, again and again they emphasize the unique geographical and historical contours of the US, the inability of simply ‘applying’ theories developed in these struggles to the US. In a fashion similar to, but more politically salient than, Gadamer’s discussion of dialectical experience, they argue that what the revolutionary learns, above all, through these studies, is that there are no models for revolution – at least “in this country.”¹⁰⁴ The very idea of revolution as the enactment of self-determination – as the historical process by which people teach themselves to be free – undermines any preconceived blueprint.

Likewise, while each of these studies turns up an ingenious use of dialectics by revolutionary thinkers such as Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Toure, it does not turn up a dialectical system or account of *the* dialectic. They write that instead, increasingly, all they can take from Marx is “his method of dialectical analysis” while resisting the exact conclusions.¹⁰⁵ They do not aim to think the thoughts of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Toure, but to think *like* them, by examining the relation between their thought and their political experiences. What makes the dialectical thinkers wise, and worthy of study is their capacity to work at the edges of Marxian concepts to make sense of their own, unique predicaments.

This is how I approach the history of the domestic colonialism concept. It is interesting and compelling in its own right as a conceptual formation. But it is also a site for thinking examining how revolutionary thinkers, under conditions of thoroughgoing repression, internal conflict, and organizational demands, navigated the need to invent and stretch concepts to make sense of novel and unique predicaments. The idea that these thinkers were wise does not mean I endorse all of their conclusions. It simply means that they ought to be considered crucial writers in the tradition of dialectical thought, not *despite* but *because* their thinking resists formalization into a systematic dialectical ‘theory’ or ‘method.’

¹⁰⁴Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, p. 138.

In turn, this account of practical, revolutionary learning forms the basic motivation of *my* study of domestic colonialism. I am not interested in adjudicating the best concepts for Black revolutionary struggle in the United States in the 1960s or in the present. Nor am I equipped for an examination of whether domestic colonialism best describes the experiences of Black people in the United States. Both of these things would require *experiences* that I do not have – not only the more obvious ‘lived experience,’ but also organizational, political experience. While I study these concepts because of the crucial importance of the history of struggles of Black liberation for political theory, primarily I approach these materials as a scholar interested in the possibilities and limits of a dialectical criticism of empire and colony. From this perspective they epitomize a profound attempt to stretch extant concepts of colonialism and empire in light of the unique character of anti-Black oppression and struggles for Black liberation. As will become clear in the next chapter, at stake here is not just this concept as one among others, but the question of what constitutes proper(ly) political knowledge. In my case, this concept more concretely offers an important early attempt to think not just about the imperial and racial *conditions* of politics, but politics *as* empire, *as* racial control. In a moment when conceptual stretchings proliferate in attempts to think through the shifting and protean shape of colonial power – postcolonialism, coloniality of power, informal imperialism, neocolonialism, imperial formations, and more – the study of theory under occupation in the United States offers an important avenue for cultivating a dialectical disposition.

Chapter 2

Domestic Colonialism and its Critics

Leaving analogies, in this case none too good, we look to facts, and find them also elusive. It is difficult to define a colony precisely. There are the dry bones of statistics; but the essential facts are neither well measured nor logically articulated. – W.E.B. Du Bois¹

Surveying dictionary and encyclopedia entries on domestic colonialism, one might conclude that the concept is itself one of the frozen or fossilized concepts that dialectical thought should push beyond. *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*'s brief entry remarks that “the term is now largely discredited, mainly because of the obvious difficulties in drawing parallels with colonialism strictly defined.”² The consensus around the concept among social scientists seems to be that while it provided an “instrumentalist and expedient fix” for radical thinkers in the 1960s, it became less and less useful and attractive as the “utopian ideals that naturally followed from the theory of internal colonialism – territorial autonomy, self-determination, community control, an end to racism – were gradually abandoned as improbable, if not impossible.”³

Indeed, Charles Pinderhughes argues that after the 1960s, there was a “free-fire zone for

¹Cited in Jared Ball. “Anti-Colonial Media: the Continuing Impact of Robert L. Allen’s ‘Black Awakening in Capitalist America.’” In: *The Black Scholar* 40.2 (2010), pp. 11–23, p. 13.

²Torres, “Internal Colonialism.”

³Gutiérrez, *Internal Colonialism*; See also Ramón A. Gutiérrez. “Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race.” In: *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 1.2 (2004), pp. 281–295.

unanswered criticism of ICT [Internal Colonialism Theory].”⁴ Much of this criticism aimed squarely at the so-called ‘colonial analogy’ between racism in the US and colonialism in the ‘Third World.’ For some critics, the obvious differences between these situations left domestic colonialism imprecise and unworkable as an explanatory model. For others, even if it remained useful as an evocative rhetorical strategy for those in various ‘Power’ movements – Black, Red, Yellow – it was limited by its lack of clarity around exactly what self-determination would look like.⁵ This chapter charts out a brief introduction to the concept of domestic colonialism, before showing how both proponents and critics reduced this more capacious, critical concept into either an explanatory framework of the ‘mechanisms’ of race relations, or into a rhetorical slogan aiming to shock establishment leaders and galvanize potential revolutionaries. In other words, I argue that these readings are accurate but one-sided: they occlude the concept’s emergence from dialectical criticism as a social practice. In the following chapter, I will outline more thoroughly three iterations of the domestic colonialism thesis that proceeded, more or less explicitly, by thinking dialectically: those of Harold Cruse, Jack O’Dell, and Robert L. Allen.⁶

While critics have focused on the difficulties of establishing a clear analogy between

⁴Charles Pinderhughes. “My Dialogue with Rod Bush on Internal Colonialism.” In: *Rod Bush: Lessons from a Radical Black Scholar on Liberation, Love, and Justice*. Ed. by Melanie E.L. Bush. Belmont: Ahead Publishing, 2019.

⁵Even key proponents in the 1960s and 1970s later abandoned the concept. Robert Blauner, who arguably popularized the concept among sociologists, later noted he left it behind for reasons of imprecision. On Blauner’s ‘recantation,’ see Pinderhughes, “21st Century Chains: the Continuing Relevance of Internal Colonialism Theory,” pp. 45–49; Tomas Almaguer, Chicano historian who played a key role in the uptake of domestic colonialism as an historiographical concept, argued that it was too closely wedded to a nationalist politics that was uncritical of its own gendered assumptions about masculinity, historical ‘castration,’ and ultimately the ideal of unified ‘nation’ in general. See Tomas Almaguer. “Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography: The Internal Model and Chicano Historical Interpretation.” In: *Aztlan* 18.1 (1989), pp. 7–28; Tomas Almaguer. “Toward a Study of Chicano Colonialism.” In: *Aztlan* 2.1 (1971), pp. 7–21; Tomas Almaguer. “Historical Notes on Chicano Oppression: The Dialectics of Racial and Class Domination in North America.” In: *Aztlan* 5.1 (1974), pp. 27–56; Another key writer here is Rodolfo Acuna, who reread Chicano history as one of ‘occupation’ in his *Occupied America*. When he transformed it into a textbook, later editions toned down the theoretical reliance on domestic colonialism. See Rodolfo Acuna. *Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation*. New York: Harper Collins, 1972.

⁶These are among the ‘strongest’ versions of the concept, argues Patrick Anderson, in his recent attempt to revive domestic colonialism. See Anderson, “Anticolonial Amerika: Resisting the Zone of Nonbeing in an Anglo-Saxon Empire.”

racial oppression in the US and colonial occupation elsewhere, reading the concept as a dialectical critique makes it more difficult to dismiss in this way, for three reasons. First, it may traffic in analogies but ultimately points toward the *unique* predicament of Black people in the Americas. Second, it specifies this unique position not through comparison between two distinct situations but through an invocation of the *connections* between distinct sites of colonial power. To be colonized ‘within’ is not to take for granted the inside of the US state. On the contrary, the domestic colony analysis loosens the grip of the distinction between inside and outside, insofar viewing “the Black population as a whole in the United States as an internally colonized group” was linked to recasting them as “members of a third world in the United States.”⁷

Following from this is the third reason: that the domestic colony concept is not merely the description or explanation of racism as a domestic *kind* of colonization but a clarification of contradiction between the process of *domestication* as a form of colonial power and struggles for *de-domestication* as an anticolonial refusal of it. The domestic colony concept is an immanent critique – it shows how the maintenance and reification of ‘domestic’ US political and social order produces insurgencies and political claims that cannot be solved within it. As Rod Bush argues, Black internationalists “represent the transcendence of the American dream by articulating notions of social justice that refused to be confined by our national borders” and challenge “a US hegemonic nationalist vision” in which antiracist struggle is a ‘domestic’ problem.⁸ Note: this is not simply a matter of locating struggles and ideas that crossed borders, that worked on an international scale. It is a critique of the very idea of ‘domestic’ space as, in fact, a process and project of domestication that requires the counterinsurgent capture – through discourse and through force – of movements that exceed this space. The domestic colony concept is a clarifying prism through which struggles re-appear as struggles along this line of domestication.

⁷Bush, *The End of White World Supremacy*, p. 179.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 179.

2.1 Theorizing White Power in the Era of Decolonization

Kenneth Clark, key expert psychological witness in *Brown v. Board of Education*, conducted a study of US ghettos and concluded that they are “social, political, educational, and – above all – economic colonies.”⁹ His statement was part of a proliferating language of critique rooted in references to colonial occupation and anticolonial revolution. The idea that racial ‘minorities’ in the United States are a domestic colony clarified and enjoined a turn away from liberal projects of inclusion and toward connections with struggles for self-determination among colonized peoples through an “anticolonial vernacular.”¹⁰ Ronald Bailey and Guillermo Flores argued that the concept signalled a broad de-domestication of antiracist politics:

“The present use of ‘the colonial analogy’ among racial minorities in the United States reflects an increasing identification with the forces of world decolonization and world revolution. The Native American, Afro-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Pilipino, and Asian-American have come to see themselves as distinct from white society and to search for their ‘roots’ within the domains of the third world from which their ancestors have come.”¹¹

Domestic colonialism, as a conceptual formation, was a map of the “particular and unique form of colonialism” in the US, one in which a state founded on the conquest of Indigenous and Mexican people, and the capture of black people as slaves.

Broadly speaking, the concept mobilized these “forces of world decolonization” to articulate a critique of political emancipation. SNCC organizer James Forman argued that “the

⁹Kenneth B. Clark. *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 11.

¹⁰Sean L. Malloy. *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War*. 1 edition. Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, June 2017.

¹¹Ron Bailey and Guillermo Flores. “Internal Colonialism and Racial Minorities in the U.S.: An Overview.” In: *Structures of Dependency*. Ed. by Frank Bonilla and Robert Girling. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973, pp. 149–160, p. 149.

international situation” enabled black freedom movements to refuse the “stifling” of its “creative potential” through “legalism. . . especially when that legalism had almost always worked to our disadvantage.”¹² For him, the broader situation of decolonization allowed for a shift from demands on domestic law to decide what was “Right or Wrong” to “develop[ing] an awareness of self-determination, the liberation of a subjected people from colonialism.”¹³

Malcolm X laid much of the rhetorical and conceptual groundwork for this turn. He argued that black people are not Americans but “victims of Americanism”: “America is a colonial power. She has colonized 22 million Afro-Americans by depriving us of first-class citizenship, by depriving us of civil rights, actually by depriving us of human rights.”¹⁴ In these speeches, Malcolm X mobilizes this ‘colonial’ predicament to enjoin a shift from civil rights to human rights. “So-called democracy has failed the Negro,” such that what is required is a “new interpretation, a broader interpretation” of civil rights struggle, from the “outside.”¹⁵ For Malcolm X, the problem with civil rights – the struggle for legal and political equality within the US – is that “as long as it’s civil rights, this comes under the jurisdiction of Uncle Sam,” stuck within the “domestic affairs of the United States.”¹⁶ He argues that by expanding the struggle for rights from the ‘civil’ to “human rights” the game is changed from a demand for rights and equality *from* and *within* the US to a demand for equality alongside a global majority of racialized people.

“Take it into the United Nations, where our African brothers can throw their weight on our side, where our Asian brothers can throw their weight on our side, where our Latin-American brothers can throw their weight on our side, and where 800 million Chinamen are sitting there waiting to throw their weight on

¹²James Forman. *High Tide of Black Resistance and Other Political and Literary Writings*. Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1994, p. 125.

¹³Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁴Malcolm X, “The Black Revolution,” p. 50.

¹⁵Malcolm X. “Message to the Grassroots.” In: *Malcolm X Speaks*. Ed. by George Breitman. New York: Grove, 1965, pp. 3–18, p. 31.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 34.

our side.”¹⁷

Reconceiving the US as an entity engaged not only in imperialism abroad but ‘domestic colonialism’ at home “internationalized” the problem of racism, refusing the domestic jurisdiction of the United States. The concept is an attempt to push against continual attempts to reduce racism to a ‘domestic’ issue and thus insulate the United States from internal rebellion and external critique.

Heirs of Malcolm X’s thinking in revolutionary movements in the US took these ideas further. The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), founded by students Max Stanford and Donald Freeman in Ohio, argued in various publications that “Black Americans are a *colonial people*, and that the United States contains *two distinct nations: White America* – citadel of Western imperialism – and *the captive nation, colonial Black America.*”¹⁸ The proper goal of struggle was therefore not inclusion – which would always be attenuated if these ‘colonial’ foundations remained intact – but self-determination.¹⁹ They saw the struggle of “internally” colonized peoples as “tied up with the colonial revolutions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”²⁰ The domestic colony argument emerges in part from this attempt to specify the unique character of the “colonized of North America” and their connection with revolutionary movements in the Third World.²¹

Another of Malcolm X’s political heirs, the Republic for New Afrika (RNA) not only noted the attenuation of political emancipation in the United States, but saw it as *itself* a form

¹⁷Malcolm X, “Message to the Grassroots,” p. 35.

¹⁸Revolutionary Action Movement, “A New Philosophy for a New Age”; See also Maxwell C. Stanford. “Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM): A Case Study of an Urban Revolutionary Movement in Western Capitalist Society.” Master’s. Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta University, 1986, pp. 10–11.

¹⁹Revolutionary Action Movement. “Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution.” In: *Black America* (1965), p. 11.

²⁰Revolutionary Action Movement, “A New Philosophy for a New Age,” p. 10.

²¹Kenn M. Freeman. “The Colonized of North America: a Review-Essay of Fanon’s Studies in a Dying Colonialism.” In: *Soulbook* 1.4 (1965), pp. 307–312; I discuss RAM’s internationalist thought in chapter 4, but on RAM generally see Robin D. G. Kelley. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. New Ed edition. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, June 2003; Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*; Bill Mullen. *Afro Orientalism*. First edition edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, Nov. 2004.

of colonialism. They made this claim through a reinterpretation of the fourteenth amendment of the US constitution. Key thinkers of the RNA such as Imari Obadele argued that it had nominally *offered* citizenship (as a choice), but was interpreted such that it *enforced* citizenship, forcibly enfranchising and assimilating African people in the US. The main consequence of this is not only a rejection of the freedom of the newly “free man” after slavery, but a closure of the multiple options which were “the basic right of the African,” including “a right (based on a claim to land superior to the European’s, subordinate to the Indian’s) to set up an independent nation of his own.”²² Black people were thus only “paper citizens” – forcibly included, and only nominally and incompletely protected by law, subject to racial terror and domination despite their ‘equality.’ In short, Africans in the US were, Obadele argued, “a colonized people” or a “captive nation.”²³ To be ‘internally colonized,’ for the RNA, was not to face an internal form of colonialism directly analogous to that experienced in the Third World, but colonialism *as* internalization and domestication, *through* subordinated and ‘enforced’ inclusion within the US.

They demanded a UN-supervised plebiscite to rectify this, if done in accord with “international law.” However, the RNA also argued that armed struggle for self-determination was justified by international law.²⁴ It would cover the possibility of a separate nation-state in the Black Belt: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina..²⁵ For the RNA, then, the idea of a domestic colony was a crucial component of their “New Afrikan Political Science,” their revolutionary philosophy and outlook upon which they built their mobilizations around the “Land Question” in the South.²⁶

²²Imari Abubakari Obadele. “The Struggle is for Land.” In: *The Black Scholar* 3.6 (1972), pp. 24–36, p. 28.

²³Obadele, “The Struggle is for Land,” p. 30; Edward Onaci. *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020, p. 44.

²⁴Indeed, they sought, in many of their programs and demands, rights under the Geneva Convention for members engaging in armed activities, and Prisoner of War status for captured and incarcerated members.

²⁵Obadele, “The Struggle is for Land”; Dan Berger. “‘The Malcolm X Doctrine’: the Republic of New Afrika and National Liberation on U.S. Soil.” In: *New World Coming: the Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009, pp. 46–55; Davenport, *How Social Movements Die: Repression and Demobilization of the Republic of New Afrika*.

²⁶Sam Klug. “What Then, of the Land?”: Territoriality, International Law, and the Republic of New Afrika.”

Perhaps more well known outside the US is the Black Panther Party (BPP), who also argued for a plebiscite “throughout the black colony” on Black self-determination.²⁷ As Bloom and Martin put it in their history of the Black Panthers, “rather than appeal for a fair share of the American pie, the Panthers portrayed the black community as a colony within America and the police as an ‘army of occupation’ from which blacks sought liberation.”²⁸ They argued throughout the 1960s that Black people lived under occupation in the ghettos of the North and in the plantation economies of the South. The Black Panthers engaged in armed self-defence and community building activities to build parallel institutions and social orders within Black neighbourhoods. It was an attempt to provisionally “liberate” territories within the US from the control of white power.²⁹ Though later on Huey Newton would criticize the idea of an domestic colony, citing the difficulty of locating a contiguous colonial space *and* the limits of nationalism, he nonetheless continued to theorize Black populations in the US as subjects of empire.³⁰

These are by no means perfect representations of these three groups (RAM, RNA, BPP),

In: *Journal of the History of International Law* 23.1 (2020), pp. 184–205; Berger, “‘The Malcolm X Doctrine’: the Republic of New Afrika and National Liberation on U.S. Soil”; Russell Rickford. “‘We Can’t Grow Food on All This Concrete’: The Land Question, Agrarianism, and Black Nationalist Thought in the Late 1960s and 1970s.” In: *The Journal of American History* 103.4 (2017), pp. 956–980.

²⁷Though, as Onaci argues, compared to the RNA they clearly had less plans and expectation that achieving self-determination would result in an entirely new state in need of administration and governance. The RNA built out a projected structure for the new government whereas the BPP’s titles and structure were lent more to naming positions in a revolutionary social movement. Huey Newton’s reasoning for this was not, he writes, totally off base, however: he worried that achieving Black sovereignty might result in a colonial or neocolonial situation in which the RNA would be surrounded by the US in ways similar to Cuba. The RNA, however, saw this as precisely what needed to happen, by analogy to Cuba. See Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, pp. 49–52.

²⁸Joshua Bloom. *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. First Edition, With a New Preface edition. University of California Press, Oct. 2016. ISBN: 978-0-520-29328-1, p. 61.

²⁹Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, eds. *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, Jan. 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8223-4343-1; Bloom, *Black against Empire*; Peniel E. Joseph, ed. *Neighborhood Rebels*. 2010 edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Feb. 2010.

³⁰Huey Newton. “Intercommunalism.” In: *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. Ed. by David Hilliard and Donald Weise. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006, pp. 181–199; Huey Newton. “Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970.” In: *The Huey P. Newton Reader*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002; John Narayan. “Huey P. Newton’s Intercommunalism: An Unacknowledged Theory of Empire.” In: *Theory, Culture & Society OnlineFirst* (2017), pp. 1–29.

nor are they the only groups to use the domestic colony concept. But they suffice to show that the concept emerged primarily through Black revolutionary movements' engagements with white power in the era of decolonization. As it emerged in these movements, the basic moves it contains were solidified: Black people were colonized, or captive, within the US, a status rooted in the history of slavery and its afterlives; this colonial predicament linked them, in the conjuncture of the 1960s, with anticolonial struggles across the globe. In other words: their capture and containment also linked them to other projects that exceeded that containment. Nonetheless, the articulations are messy, uneven, and even within any of these groups the concept shifted in political valence and theoretical meaning. Critics typically took up attempts to convert the concept into a social-scientific model, rejecting it as an explanatory framework, and ignoring the more politicized versions.³¹

Given its irreducibility to social scientific explanation or rhetorical tactics, it is perhaps no surprise that one of the most significant articulations of the domestic colony idea emerged from a collaboration between a movement activist and a political scientist: Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton's 1967 *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. In that text they provide a simple name for the object of critique that 'domestic colonialism' names: "white power." White power, or "institutional racism" is the permeation of social and political order by racial hierarchy, its basis in the color line, which persists in excess of any individual action or belief.³² Seeing white power as the basic structure of US social order allows them to reject any politics premised on a reading of US racism as an unfortunate aberration or drift away from the *telos* of liberal inclusion and democratic

³¹For an excellent criticism of the literature on these lines, see Anderson, "Anticolonial Amerika: Resisting the Zone of Nonbeing in an Anglo-Saxon Empire"; Pinderhughes also discusses this dynamic in Pinderhughes, "My Dialogue with Rod Bush on Internal Colonialism," To see it as theoretically undeveloped in its articulation in periodicals and by revolutionary moments also understates the scale of repression faced by proponents of this concept, repression that diverted concerns from writing longer texts. This risks seeing the concept as basically a-theoretical, as a kind of rhetorical slogan or political move, rather than what it was: an attempt to theorize something, to understand a predicament.

³²Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Vintage, 1967, p. 4.

unity. This latter politics had been governed by the idea of an “American dilemma,” or the “Negro problem”: a challenge to be solved within the framework of ‘America’ as it was.³³ Basically, this was conceived as a modernization project, meant to extract racism from US society through programs of uplift and enlightenment, bringing the US ‘up to speed,’ so to speak.³⁴

Carmichael and Hamilton explicitly reject this idea:

“There is no ‘American dilemma’ because black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them. Black people are legal citizens of the United States with, for the most part, the same legal rights as other citizens. Yet they stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society. Thus institutional racism has another name: colonialism.”³⁵

Here the concept works as a critique of the persistence of racial rule beneath the formal equality gained by the Civil Rights movement. Black populations perceive this persistence of white power, they write, in “very concrete terms”:

“The man in the ghetto sees his white landlord come only to collect exorbitant rents... the white policeman manhandle a black drunkard in a doorway... the streets in the ghetto lined with uncollected garbage... he knows the reason: the low political esteem in which the black community is held.”³⁶

In other words, the “white power structure” here works as a form of rule just as “monolithic” as colonial administrations.³⁷

³³Gunnar Myrdal. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962, p. lxxi.

³⁴See Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

³⁵Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, p. 5.

³⁶Ibid., p. 9.

³⁷Ibid., p. 10.

Carmichael and Hamilton do note that “the analogy is not perfect” because Black Americans are not colonized by a distant “Mother Country.” Nevertheless, they argue, “it is objective relationship that counts. . . not geography.”³⁸ This objective relationship is one in which “the black community has been the creation of, and dominated by, a combination of oppressive forces and special interests in the white community.” This question of a systematic creation of a subordinate community – an internal colony – raises the question of intention and agency in the white community. They argue that those responsible for directly maintaining various institutions deliberately maintain racial rule within them, while the white community at large benefits from “economic colonialism.” In this “colonial situation,” then, “the line between purposeful suppression and indifference blurs.”³⁹ The domestic colony concept is a way, in Carmichael and Hamilton’s iteration, of linking deliberate, counterinsurgent repression and tacit acceptance of white rule by white people.

By pointing this out, Carmichael and Hamilton are not only exposing a contradiction between ideal and reality, but showing the limits of any “domesticating” attempt to assume the US as a basic background of political action, since it is cleaved by antagonism and domination.⁴⁰ The concept used the language of colonialism to expose the limits of political emancipation and re-centre the question of the basic shape of political community. This sense that the concept describes the persistence of colonial rule in and through a system of formal equality runs through many articulations of the concept. Articulations of the concept by Latin American thinkers follows this line. Mexican social scientist Pablo Gonzalez Casanova argued in 1965 that “the notion of ‘internal colonialism’ is meant to understand the *re-direction* of colonialism ‘inward’ after ”independence” in the “old colonies.”⁴¹ Transplanting this conception to the US, Chicano thinkers argued in 1969 that

³⁸Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, p. 6.

³⁹Ibid., p. 23.

⁴⁰Singh, *Black Is a Country*.

⁴¹See Pablo Casanova. “Internal Colonialism and National Development.” In: *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1 (1965), pp. 27–37.

“The crucial distinguishing characteristic between internal and external colonialism does not appear to be so much the existence of separate territories corresponding to metropolis and colony, but the legal status of the colonized. . . a colony can be considered ‘internal’ if the colonized population has the same formal legal status as any other group of citizens, and ‘external’ if it is placed in a separate legal category.”⁴²

This line of analysis was pursued by many of those using the concept to understand Chicano political experience in the 1960s.⁴³ Similarly, Cherokee writer Robert K. Thomas argued that the “internal” colonial concept describes a form of “hidden colonialism” that works precisely because it eludes obvious and strict definitions of colonialism.⁴⁴ Whether or not they succeeded in articulating this concretely, the concept raises the *question* and *necessity* of “deveop[ing] totally new political institutions,” a “search for new forms” irreducible to US racial liberalism.⁴⁵

Coming off Carmichael and Hamilton’s articulations, and largely in the wake of the urban rebellions of the 1960s, social scientists such as Robert Blauner, William K. Tabb, and Robert Staples took up the idea of domestic colonialism as a social scientific theory. Blauner responded to criticisms of the “colonial analogy,” arguing that the “colonial model” had the “hope of becoming a framework that can integrate the insights of caste and racism, ethnicity,

⁴²See Mario Barrera, Carlos Munoz, and Charles Ornelas. “The Barrio as Internal Colony.” In: *Urban Affairs Annual Revire* 6 (1972), pp. 465–498, p. 483.

⁴³Some sociologists therefore argued that the internal colony analogy actually *better* applies to Mexican populations who were in fact spatially conquered and incorporated into the US state See Joan W. Moore. “Colonialism: The Case of the Mexican Americans.” In: *Social Problems* 17.4 (1970), pp. 463–472; Joan W. Moore. “American Minorities and ‘New Nation’ Perspectives.” In: *The Pacific Sociological Review* 19.4 (1976), pp. 447–468; Acuna, *Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation*.

⁴⁴See Robert K. Thomas. “Colonialism: Classic and Internal.” In: *New University Thought* 4 (1969), pp. 37–44, p. 38.

⁴⁵Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, p. 177; For a contemporary argument that this search for new forms was never really completed or theorized, see Robert L. Allen. *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*. London: Africa World Press, 1990; for a recent assessment with a similar conclusion, see Terry, “Stokely Carmichael and the Longing for Black Liberation: Black Power and Beyond.”

culture, and economic exploitation into an overall conceptual scheme.”⁴⁶ For him, this could be accomplished only by abandoning an analogy with *colonialism* as a political structure in favour of a comparison with “colonization” as a process. This could allow social scientists to transplant anticolonial theory as social science.⁴⁷ Domestic colonialism here would explain various forms of racial inequality and oppression, as well as Black insurgency against racial rule, in terms of “a common *process* of social oppression” in both colonial and the American context, “despite the variation in political and social structure.”⁴⁸

Despite the “imprecise” character of the analogy apparently underlying it,⁴⁹ an important critical move oriented this concept. This was the constitution of the ghetto as a systematic form of racial rule and captivity as a product of *policy*, and not happenstance: this was what Robert Nichols would call a *political* rather than *social* reading of ghettos.⁵⁰ As Blauner puts it, “today’s urban ghettos and barrios, like the legal segregation of the past, are devices for racial control.” They solve the “insoluble dilemma” that plagues all “racial systems”: the simultaneous forcible inclusion of racialized ‘others’ for “land or labor” and refusal of common life with those others.⁵¹ They are produced not by “‘blind’ market forces” but by “deliberate policies.”⁵² They are not a form of “overrepresentation” of one population in a given area.

William K. Tabb and Ron Bailey took this argument up in economic terms. Tabb argues that the internal colony thesis facilitates the application of theories of “neocolonialism” and “underdevelopment” to Black communities in the US.⁵³ He argued that “the black ghetto

⁴⁶Robert Blauner. “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt.” In: *Social Problems* 16.4 (1969), pp. 393–408, p. 394.

⁴⁷As with many Black revolutionaries, key theoretical texts for this transplant were Georges Balandier’s “The Colonial Situation,” Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*.

⁴⁸Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” p. 396.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁵⁰Robert Nichols. “The Colonialism of Incarceration:” in: *Radical Philosophy Review* 17.2 (2014), pp. 435–455.

⁵¹Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*, p. 32.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 32–3.

⁵³William Tabb. *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1970, p. 35.

be viewed ... from the perspective of development economics. In its relations with the dominant white society, the black ghetto stands as a unit apart, an internal colony exploited in *systematic* fashion.”⁵⁴ Ronald Bailey, likewise, emphasized the “super-exploitation” of an “easily manipulated and ever-growing industrial reserve army of the unemployed in the form of the black colony.”⁵⁵ He argues that this reserve army can be understood as a product of “dependency” in the sense of Latin American dependency theory – the politically enforced inability to ‘develop’ or ‘catch-up’ to ‘core’ imperial powers.⁵⁶ Just as sovereignty left intact informal imperialism and dependency, the “Emancipation Proclamation, Civil Rights Legislation... [and] Black Capitalism” left intact the “black internal colony.”⁵⁷ Again, the concept is used as an analysis of the limits and possibilities of legal emancipation within the US racial state.

Indeed, Robert Staples saw it as a crucial element in building up a specifically Black sociology, enabling a turn away from “individual attitudes of racial prejudice” toward the study of “systematic subjugation” and its consequences.⁵⁸ Domestic colonialism provides a more plausible historiography than those premised on “race relations” because it highlights the foundational “institutional mechanisms” of “Euro-American” rule.⁵⁹ Far from simply playing on analogy, he argues the concept is aimed at getting at the specificity of US racial formation without “substitut[ing] the African reality for the American.”⁶⁰ He pointedly argues that from the vantage of Black Americans, the law appears not as a form of protection but as a form of transitive rule: “Historically, a good case can be made for the argument that the function of law was to establish and regulate the colonial relationship of blacks and whites

⁵⁴Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*, p. 21.

⁵⁵Ron Bailey. “Economic Aspects of the Black Internal Colony.” In: *The Review of Black Political Economy* 3 (1973), pp. 43–72, p. 46.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁸Robert Staples. *Introduction to Black Sociology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976, p. 13.

⁵⁹Robert Staples. “Race and Colonialism: The Domestic Case in Theory and Practice.” In: *The Black Scholar* 7.9 (1976), pp. 37–49, p. 46.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 37, 40.

in the United States.”⁶¹ Black people effectively have “no law of their own”: they are subject to American law but are only nominally subjects of it.⁶² Even if the model is imprecise, he argues that it still holds water in discussing the police occupation of Black neighbourhoods and the inequities of the US criminal legal system.⁶³

As John Liu argues in a 1976 review of the “model” of “internal colonialism,” it aims not just to describe the attenuation of legal and political equality by the persistence of white power, but to criticize the domestication and redirection of antiracist struggle. It criticizes the way “the granting of rights to the colonized tends to obscure their condition from the outside world,” effectively domesticating the problem spatially.⁶⁴ It is a critique of the redirection and containment of broader projects of emancipation within the legal frame of the nation-state:

“the granting of *de jure* rights to racial minorities also has a bearing on the goals of their political movements. Because of the existence of equal rights, the direction of their political movements has tended to be channeled towards the exercise of these rights rather than towards the fundamental reconstruction of society.”⁶⁵

Domestic colonialism indexes the boundary between domestic and international politics a kind of hinge between a critique of these ‘domesticating’ forms of political emancipation and a wider form of political struggle.

The domestic colonialism argument was, then, a weapon of de-domestication among revolutionary Black movements, pushing against the US juridical and political order as the basic frame of debate and action. It broke with any historiographic and sociological categories that sustained the hyphens of US racial liberalism: African-American, Mexican-American,

⁶¹Robert Staples. “White Racism, Black Crime, and American Justice: an Application of the Colonial Model.” In: *Phylon* 36.1 (1975), pp. 14–22, p. 15.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 16–7.

⁶³Staples, “White Racism, Black Crime, and American Justice: an Application of the Colonial Model,” p. 22; Staples, *Introduction to Black Sociology*, p. 220.

⁶⁴Liu, “Towards an Understanding of the Internal Colonialism,” p. 164.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 165.

Asian-American.⁶⁶ Both as a language of political critique and an attempt to formulate this language as part of an antiracist and anticolonial sociology stand in sharp distinction from attempts to transform the concept into an abstract concept or historical category to applied anywhere something similar to colonialism occurs.⁶⁷ Conceived as a form of critique, it took aim at any understanding of US ‘race relations’ or race in general that undermined “projections of sovereignty” that did not fit within the US framework: it was part of “a set of oppositional discourses and practices that exposed the hegemony of Americanism as incomplete, challenged its universality, and imagined carving up its spaces differently.”⁶⁸ The ‘domestic’ in domestic colonialism hinted that empire and imperialism were not things that the US ‘did’ – they were what it was. It was a way of recasting political and social order *as* empire. It exposed the limits of political and legal emancipation insofar as it “unsettled the cognitive ‘banisters’ of black radical thought from methodological and epistemological nationalism.”⁶⁹ In other words, by seeing the domestic sphere of the United States as continually produced through ‘imperial’ or ‘colonial’ power, theorists of domestic colonialism mobilized the language of decolonization to expose the limits of projects of political emancipation in service of a wider project of self-determination.

This is an explicitly *political* reading of the concept: it aimed to clarify and sum up a set of experiences and insurgencies that might otherwise be unintelligible. It was a form of political knowledge, in the sense of a set of simplifications and condensations of experience that worked to diagnose a predicament of power and enable new forms of political engagement that exceeded the framework of the United States. Indeed, the concept emerges, in many respects, as an excavation of the attenuation and containment of two massive successes in the struggle for human emancipation: the advancement of legal and political equality in the US

⁶⁶Acuna, *Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation*, pp. 222–275.

⁶⁷For an example of one such attempt, see Michael Hechter. *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

⁶⁸Singh, *Black Is a Country*, p. 205.

⁶⁹Terry, “Stokely Carmichael and the Longing for Black Liberation: Black Power and Beyond,” p. 619.

(Civil Rights) and the largely successful appropriation of self-determination and sovereignty by colonized peoples (decolonization). Gary Okihiro, in his attempt to articulate a Third Worldist form of knowledge in the present, building on 1960s claims for self-determination, provides an excellent statement of the interrelation of these two successes and the ways they were contained through novel forms of colonial (white) power. While decolonization took a “detour. . . away from internationalism and toward national sovereignty,” “Third World struggles in the United States” were absorbed by nationalism and inclusion within the nation as the fullest expression of self-determination.”⁷⁰ The post-colonial state, attenuated by neocolonialism, and the ‘Third World within,’ its self-determination captured by logics of limited group autonomy and the politics of civic inclusion: these are two forms of “containment” through which colonial power sustained itself, critics claim, in a moment of radical political emancipation.⁷¹ The theory of domestic colonialism can be seen as an attempt to clarify this containment from the vantage of Black struggles for self-determination. It was an attempt to craft a form of political knowledge capable of seeing the ‘domestic’ space as the result of a colonial process, indeed, *as* empire or colony.

Despite the *dialectical* character of this concept’s focus on what is unique and singular about the context of the United States, and the specificity of its attempt to map the limits of political emancipation in the twentieth century US, it is persistently read by critics as a haphazard analogy. This is not necessarily a *misreading* by critics, insofar as there are many examples of analogies and comparisons. But it does rely on rather *one-sided* readings of the domestic colony concept. The two most prominent criticisms of the concept – that it fails as a social-scientific concept and that it is rhetorically dangerous, transforming colonialism into a mere ‘metaphor’ – rely on a reduction of the concept from a dialectical concept to either an explanatory framework or a rhetorical slogan.

⁷⁰Gary Y. Okihiro. *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 51.

⁷¹Vasko, “‘But for God’s Sake, Let’s Decolonize!': Self-Determination and Sovereignty and/as the Limits of the Anticolonial Archives.”

2.2 Critique I: Social Science

The idea of domestic colonialism was attractive to US social scientists, not least because it offered a way of talking about anti-Black racism that avoided the *other* misguided analogy between Black populations and immigrants, a theory that was primarily measured by assimilation. Despite earlier attempts by Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, and a simultaneous one by Robert L. Allen, Robert Blauner's work is often credited with popularizing the concept, and with the first attempt to transform it into an explanatory, theoretical framework for social science and sociology in particular. Blauner explicitly linked his concept to shifts in the form and content of Black struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, emphasizing the growing "identification with African nations and other colonial or formerly colonized peoples... among Black militants".⁷² However, because in his later work this was more explicitly denoted as a "model" of race relations sitting against "assimilation," his work is primarily read as the first attempt to transform this language of *political critique* into a *explanatory sociological category*.⁷³

Another important explication of the concept, typically a key citation and focus of critical engagement, was Tabb's *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto* which explicitly re-interpreted the concept as an economic theory of inequality and an explanatory framework for the production of ghetto poverty and political debilitation.⁷⁴ Again, while Tabb did insist his reading was linked to the need to incorporate the insights and analyses of actual militants into radical economics⁷⁵ in doing so the nature of this knowledge is cramped, slightly, into an *explanatory* mode. Similarly influential was Michael Hechter's application of these analyses, de-contextualized from their invention in the context of struggles for Black liberation in the

⁷²Further, as his emphasis on the "role of whites" and the need to do justice to novel shapes of Black insurgency, such as riots and movements for ghetto control, indicates, his interest is in an explicitly political, critical conceptual framework. Blauner, "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt," p. 394.

⁷³Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*.

⁷⁴Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*.

⁷⁵See William K Tabb. "Marxian Exploitation and Domestic Colonialism: a Reply to Donald J. Harris." In: *The Review of Black Political Economy* 4 (1974), pp. 69–87.

US, in the context of the “Celtic fringe” of Britain.⁷⁶ His analysis was then the font for many other applications of the concept as a theory of colonialism that occurs ‘within’ state borders.⁷⁷

For many, however, this ‘model’ “imprecisely labels the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities,” ignoring disparities between their predicaments and “traditional colonialism.”⁷⁸ More specifically, the concept apparently did not precisely enumerate the basic structural features and basic causal mechanisms of this domestic kind of colonialism. In attempts to clarify it, some scholars sympathetic to the concept ultimately concluded that despite its rhetorical and political appeal, there were difficulties “operationalizing” it as “an explanatory function expressed through mechanisms.”⁷⁹ Many of those hoping to use it found it difficult to “measure” domestic colonization.⁸⁰ In a critique of Tabb’s analysis, Donald Harris argued that the concept remained primarily “descriptive.”⁸¹ For him, the goal of the concept is to *explain* the emergence of ghettos as they were in the 1960s, and the specific place of Black workers in the US political economy. He sees this explanation as largely already furnished by a Marxist analysis of exploitation. He argues that the key culprit in the shift from explanation to description is the underlying analogy. As he writes: “the colonial analogy is sustained more by metaphor... by the use of terms that *evoke* a metropolis-colony relationship or a ‘typical underdeveloped nation’ [Tabb], than by systematic analysis.”⁸²

⁷⁶Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development*.

⁷⁷A recent re-iteration of this in the history of political thought is Barbara Arneil’s history of projects of actual domestic colonies in this sense Arneil, *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony*.

⁷⁸Torres, “Internal Colonialism.”

⁷⁹Norma Beatriz Chaloult and Yves Chaloult. “The Internal Colonialism Concept: Methodological Considerations.” In: *Social and Economic Studies* 28.4 (1979), pp. 85–99, p. 87.

⁸⁰Robert J. Hind. “The Internal Colonial Concept.” In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26.3 (1984), pp. 543–568, p. 554.

⁸¹Harris, “Black Ghetto as Internal Colony,” pp. 3–5.

⁸²Harris, “Black Ghetto as Internal Colony,” pp. 6–7; As sociologist Michael Burawoy later argued, the domestic colony concept appears to be “no more than an appealing analogy which is used to evoke images of unrestrained exploitation and community of interests between black America and the ‘Third World.’” See Burawoy, “Race, Class, and Colonialism,” p. 527; There is some truth to this claim that the concept, as a framework of social analysis, is primarily descriptive. In Blauner’s analysis, for example, it works primarily as a way to redescribe, in the language of anticolonial critique, things that are typically described in terms of domestic ‘race relations,’ and not as a way to mechanically explain why racism takes the shape it does. See the

Thus many of those seeking to use (or at least test) the concept as an explanatory framework found the analogy undergirding it as a major weak point. In analogizing between Black people's oppression in the US and colonial regimes, "it does violence to the common sense or conventional notion of colonialism."⁸³ Burawoy argued that in this analogy, it was largely the simple dichotomy between colonizer and colonized that is carried over, not the complex analyses of class, indirect rule, and internal differentiation among these groups excavated by colonial historians.⁸⁴ In their landmark book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant argue that while the "model" of internal colonialism provides a useful polemical critique of assimilationist 'race relations' literature, its proponents "ultimately reason by analogy" and therefore "cannot range over the uniqueness and complexities of American racial ideology or politics."⁸⁵ Further, in doing so the internal colony concept departs "significantly from the *original* meaning of the term colonialism."⁸⁶

In the 1970s Gilbert Gonzalez argued along similar lines that they stretch not only the meaning of colonialism but of nationhood, deviating from the strict definition of the nation as grounded in "contiguous territory." In stretching the term nation to Black (and Chicano) people in the US, he argues, they mistake "national minorities" for "nations," a statement that amounts to a reassertion of the political claim of which the domestic colony concept is a critique: the idea that the US automatically constitutes the background order of political space and activity.⁸⁷ For these critics, the domestic colonialism analysis is "a concept in search of a methodology."⁸⁸

introduction to Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*.

⁸³Burawoy, "Race, Class, and Colonialism," p. 527.

⁸⁴Burawoy, "Race, Class, and Colonialism"; This largely ignores Robert L. Allen (and indeed Carmichael and Hamilton's) analyses of the importance of class difference within Black communities and movements, which Allen terms a form of "neo-colonialism." See Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*.

⁸⁵Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 162, note 4.

⁸⁶Ibid., 179, note 46.

⁸⁷Gilbert G. González. "A Critique of the Internal Colony Model." In: *Latin American Perspectives* 1.1 (1974), pp. 154–161, p. 156; Ironically, other critics argue that theorists of domestic colonialism offered *too strict* a definition of colonialism to service the analogy, papering over the "far from uniform" character of colonialism across world history. Moore, "Colonialism: The Case of the Mexican Americans," p. 464.

⁸⁸Hind, "The Internal Colonial Concept," 560. Hind argues that this is a problem facing all comparative

Overall, the main criticism among social scientists was that the analogical basis of the concept led to imprecision on two fronts. First, by deviating from ‘traditional,’ ‘strict,’ ‘conventional,’ or ‘common-sense’ definitions of colonialism, it lacked categorical precision, and obscured the key ways the US deviated from these classic definitions. Second, because the concept largely works through an evocative metaphor – one first aimed at political polemics and consciousness-raising – it cannot sustain an explanatory framework organized around domestic colonialism. As Cedric Johnson nicely puts it, the concept seems to substitute “a close historical, critical analysis of society with a political allegory.”⁸⁹

Whether one thinks of the social sciences as “explanatory” or “interpretive” the concept seems to break down as an analogy. The latter is too descriptive to work as an explanatory framework; the analogy is too abstract to work as an interpretive grammar for an ‘understanding’ of the unique racial conditions of the US. To borrow Smith and Hollis’s distinction, the concept appears to fail both as an ‘outside’ story that explains the mechanics behind racial oppression, and as an ‘inside’ story that excavates the constitution of racial meaning in the US.⁹⁰ However, many argue that if it fails as an explanatory framework, the concept still worked (and works) as an important *rhetorical* move, a shift in ways of speaking. This second line of critique calls this into question.

2.3 Critique II: Rhetoric

Many readers of the concept of domestic colonialism read it in primarily rhetorical terms. By this I mean more than the ornamentation of language: ‘rhetorical’ here describes the creation and modification of ways of speaking politically. Here domestic colonialism represents a tactical shift in which new ways of talking about politics could produce new subjects. Recently,

⁸⁹Cedric Johnson. “Between Revolution and the Racial Ghetto.” In: *Historical Materialism* 24.2 (2016), pp. 165–203, p. 196.

⁹⁰On inside and outside stories, see Martin Hollis and Steve Smith. *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991, Chapter One.

Morgan Adamson likewise has argued that the internal colonial concept is less interesting for its “veracity” or as an “analytic” than as “a political perspective through which the constitution of new subjectivities, alliances, and political rhetorics [were] articulated within US Third Worldism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”⁹¹ This reading is more consistent, perhaps, than the social scientific approach, with the usage of the concept by revolutionaries themselves. Adamson’s analysis, for example, explicitly focuses on Robert L. Allen’s approach, which was crafted through organic interactions with revolutionary movements, intellectuals, and journalists.⁹²

Put simply, this reading rightly notes that the concept was an *intervention in* politics and not an abstract explanation of social order. More specifically, here it mobilizes “an anticolonial politics” to “remap alliances and generate viewpoints from which to ground resistance.”⁹³ We can see it here as a way, in the 1960s, that Black and Chicano revolutionaries worked to construct new “logics of equivalence,” articulations of an oppositional subject through rhetorical moves.⁹⁴ Or, insofar as this “political perspective” is enshrined in a certain anticolonial language of politics, an “anticolonial vernacular,” this might be seen as a kind of discursive milieu in which formerly immutable conditions become mutable, in which the “ultimate framework” for the meaning of speech has shifted.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Adamson, “Internal Colony as Political Perspective: Counterinsurgency, Extraction, and Anticolonial Legacies of ’68 in the United States,” p. 345.

⁹² While Adamson’s approach resists the idea that internal colonialism is a theory of “racial formations,” she in fact, throughout the essay, highlights precisely this function of the concept in conjunctural interventions in debates about the ghetto, and about police violence. Indeed, in her paper the concept appears primarily as an explanation and analysis of extraction and the spatial dimensions of racial capitalism – an analysis not entirely different from William K. Tabb, Robert Blauner, etc. – and therefore leans toward explanation. This is a tension that I think (as I will argue below) tells us something about the necessity of a dialectical reading that holds the rhetorical and ‘explanatory’ dimensions of this concept together. She also notes, rightly, that theorists of internal colonialism were prophetic in their claim that the internal colony may soon turn into a ‘penal colony’ – a kind of extension of the prison. See *ibid.*, p. 351.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁹⁴ On logics of equivalence see Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso, 1985.

⁹⁵ On the idea of discourse as the ultimate framework for discerning the meaning of speech acts, see Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”; On the idea of a new political language, see Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*; Malloy, *Out of Oakland*.

The domestic colony concept here is not a ‘theory’ per se. It is a *move*, a rhetorical tactic. However, it is precisely as such a rhetorical tactic that some have dismissed the concept. Critics in this vein worry that the colonial analogy overstretches colonialism, and therefore has more rhetorical costs than boons. Even Adamson, for example, nods toward worries about “diluting the term decolonize” through stretching the idea of colonialism. Indigenous critical thought raises the problem not only of over-stretching the concept, but a rhetorical and political danger that using the language of colonialism for relationships that depart from strict definitions of colonialism might undermine the underlying goal of forming alliances and novel subjects. This is because, as Barbara Arneil notes, while the domestic colony concept “tends to assume state borders and sovereignty” in its categorization of an internal *kind* of colonialism, “settler colonial scholars challenge the idea that indigenous peoples are ‘internal’ to any political or economic entity.”⁹⁶

Jodi Byrd takes up this line of critique. She argues that the very idea of an ‘internal’ colonialism takes for granted the internal space of the US (or Canada, etc.), ‘within’ which a domestic colonization process might occur. Thus even as the concept’s critical force lies in its de- domesticating breakage of the US domestic sphere as the ultimate background of political criticism and action, it risks reifying a boundary between internal and external that is in fact tenuous, constantly managed, and persistently resisted. The boundary between inside and outside, in settler states, is a project, a technology for colonial rule. Through conquest and pacification, settler regimes have typically sought to “make internal once and for all that which was external: native space.”⁹⁷ The risk inherent in the rhetoric of internal colonialism is that it can take this project of settler conquest as a *fait accompli*, pushing Indigenous peoples to the past as useful for metaphors and polemics but irrelevant in the present.

Starkly put, “the idea of ‘internal colonialism’ services the construction of the United States as a multicultural nation that is struggling with the legacies of racism rather than as a

⁹⁶Arneil, *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony*, p. 8.

⁹⁷Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, p. 126.

colonialist power engaged in territorial expansion from the beginning.”⁹⁸ This stands in some contrast to most proponents of the concept, who typically reject precisely the idea of US as a ‘multicultural’ or ‘multiethnic’ project premised on peaceful assimilation. Their theories typically insist on looking at the different ways that Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Chicano people have been “involuntarily” incorporated into US political, social, and economic order.⁹⁹

But Byrd’s argument hinges less on the form of knowledge found in the theory than in its rhetorical force, which *does* seem to risk leaving intact a boundary between inside and outside as the basic distinguishing factor between ‘internal’ and ‘traditional’ colonialism. For Byrd, Black radicals from Malcolm X to bell hooks have utilized colonialism as a rhetorical and metaphorical pattern, a narrative structure, to reread racial power in the US.¹⁰⁰ There is a danger here of turning colonialism (and decolonization) into a metaphor, shifting away from the struggles against Indigenous dispossession and for land back that define North American anticolonialism.¹⁰¹

This focus on modes of narration and rhetorical moves is central to an “Afropessimist” criticism of the colonial analogy. If Byrd and other anticolonial critics worry that the analogical language of domestic colonialism might obscure Indigenous struggles over and for land, Frank Wilderson worries that the analogy between colonization and anti-Blackness (be-

⁹⁸Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, p. 125.

⁹⁹Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America*; Bailey and Flores, “Internal Colonialism and Racial Minorities in the U.S.: An Overview”; Further, some Indigenous thinkers did find the language of internal colonialism fruitful. Robert K. Thomas argues that the concept helps expose the “hidden” colonialism of settler rule, and showed that “notions of ethnic or racial minority status fail profoundly to convey the sense of identity by which most or all North American populations identify themselves.” See Thomas, “Colonialism: Classic and Internal,” p. 29; On internal colonialism as applied to Indigenous peoples in the US, see Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, ed. *Economic Development in American Indian Reservations*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979; Gary Anders. “The Internal Colonization of Cherokee Native Americans.” In: *Development and Change* 10.1 (1979), pp. 41–55; Gary C. Anders. “Theories of Underdevelopment and the American Indian.” In: *Journal of Economic Issues* 14.3 (1980), pp. 681–701; Indeed, the account of internal colonialism in relation to settler colonization and Indigenous resistance often highlights the way the concept of ‘internal colonialism’ describes less a kind of colonialism ‘within’ national territory than colonialism *as* the forcible “incorporation” of peoples through the making of domestic space in the first place. See James Tully. *Public Philosophy in a New Key*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 259–61.

¹⁰⁰Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, pp. 133–4.

¹⁰¹Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” In: *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012).

tween anticolonialism and Black liberation) obscures the unique character of the latter. Frank Wilderson III has argued that the politics of analogy erases the fundamental – indeed, ontological – differences between the subject positions of the colonized and Black people in the Americas. They conceal, he argues, the distinction between humanity and inhumanity upon which antiblackness is premised. Blackness is not *of* the world of politics and resistance, in which dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, loss and recovery of territory, regression and progress, play themselves out. It was brought into the world in terms of slavery.¹⁰² As a structural subject position, Blackness – alongside the “settler” and the “savage” in North America – is determined by its appearance as property. In regimes foundationally structured by the reduction of Black people to property, the logics of resistance that typically characterize “politics” have, for Wilderson, a kind of absurdity. They require a “kind of ontological integrity which the slave cannot claim.”¹⁰³ The unique historical oblivion of capture, enslavement, and forcible transportation has no analogy. The imposition of narratives of loss and restitution that typically orient anticolonial theory are not available to, as he puts it, “rebellious property.”¹⁰⁴

Wilderson calls the attempt to re-read anti-Black racism and anti-racist struggle in other narratives the “ruse of analogy”: “the ruse of analogy erroneously locates Blacks in the world – a place where they have not been since the dawning of Blackness.” The “grammars of suffering” underneath superficially analogous forms of oppression shared by Indigenous, immigrant, and Black subjects are in fact “irreconcilable.”¹⁰⁵ In this respect the colonial analogy is not only conceptually flawed, for Wilderson, but has deleterious political effects, in that it attempts to restore a dialectically resolvable “conflictual harmony” to a relation of absolute antagonism and dehumanization. Often, among Wilderson and analysts taking up similar lines of thought, this takes the form of attempting to locate some economic rationale, or

¹⁰²Frank Wilderson. “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?” In: *Social Identities* 9.2 (2003), pp. 225–240.

¹⁰³Frank B. Wilderson. *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 30, 37.

political-economic function, for anti-Black racism, while ignoring its basically “gratuitous,” “libidinal,” and a-rational character.¹⁰⁶ However, it is also unclear exactly how this would undermine gestures of international solidarity, or an understanding of slavery and anti-Black racism within a world system constituted by colonialism and empire. Indeed, Carmichael pointed in this direction in Montreal at the 1968 Congress of Black Writers:

“Why us? Why did they go to Africa and just scatter us all over the earth? They had the Indians. Why us? Why the black man? Why is it they saw fit to split us up, put us in Trinidad, in Jamaica, in St. Thomas, in Brazil, in Cuba, in Panama, in Santo Domingo, in Guatemala, in the United States – eh, even in Canada. Why us? . . . And to say it is for economic reasons is to delude one’s self. . . it is to delude one’s self because they could have just as easily found white slaves; they could have easily gotten red slaves; they had Indian slaves. . . they had Chinese. Why the black man?”¹⁰⁷

While Wilderson would find much to like here, he might push Carmichael’s analysis on the *ontological* point. It is not a matter of history but ontology. Carmichael has not provided a fleshed out line of critique of whatever the non-economic reasons might be.

Turning to questions of history and historical tradition, it is not only ‘Afro-pessimists’ who make this argument that the colonial analogy missed out on the unique character of American slavery and its afterlives. Errol Henderson has offered, by way of an encyclopedic study of cultural nationalism in Black Power movements, a criticism of the colonial analogy. He notes that while thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke and institutions such as the Black church offered “domestic African American sources” for theorizing cultural revolution, Black Power thinkers typically turned to external resources.¹⁰⁸ As he writes:

¹⁰⁶Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, p. 43; see also Jared Sexton. *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiracism and the Critique of Multiracialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

¹⁰⁷Stokely Carmichael. “Black Power.” In: *The Dialectics of Liberation*. Ed. by David Cooper. London: Penguin, 1968, pp. 150–174, p. 215.

¹⁰⁸Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*, p. xi.

“BPM [Black Power Movement] revolutionists...spent an inordinate amount of time and resources attempting to import models of revolution from abroad that often did not fit the historical context or developmental trajectory of their uniquely African American experience.”¹⁰⁹

For Henderson, by mobilizing colonial analogies, Black revolutionaries missed out on “their own revolutionary antecedents in the United States, epitomized in the Slave Revolution.”¹¹⁰ For Henderson, one of the problems of the colonial analogy is that it is too pessimistic about anti-Black racism and slavery. It assumes that Black Americans do not have a culture of their own, and thus require a recovery of African and Third World cultures as a basis for revolutionary nationalism. He calls this “reverse civilizationalism.”¹¹¹

Another key line of criticism has noted the investments of the internal colony concept in masculinist visions of politics, and its understatement of the relevance of gender. When it came to mobilizing comparisons between US racism and colonial occupation, the complex politics of gender and sexuality in colonial contexts were rarely brought into the analogy.¹¹² Ramon Gutierrez notes that “for African Americans the dreams of internal colonialism ignited in hearts of men resonated more like tin in the ears of women.” The Chicano nationalist project, he argues, tended toward “misogynist” gender relations, with struggles for sexual equality subordinated to struggles for national ‘liberation.’¹¹³ Roderick Ferguson offers an explanation for this: the Black nationalism undergirding the internal colony analysis posed the history of racial domination as “a narrative of castration and gender distortion,” posing

¹⁰⁹Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*, p. xii.

¹¹⁰Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*, p. xxii; see also Errol A. Henderson. “Unintended Consequences of Cosmopolitanism: Malcolm X, Africa, and Revolutionary Theorizing in the Black Power Movement in the US.” in: *African Identities* 16.2 (Apr. 2018), pp. 161–175; Henderson, “Missing the Revolution Beneath Their Feet: The Significance of the Slave Revolution of the Civil War to the Black Power Movement in the USA.”

¹¹¹Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*, p. 30.

¹¹²Linda Gordon. “Internal Colonialism and Gender.” In: *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Ed. by Ann Laura Stoler. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 427–451.

¹¹³Gutiérrez, “Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race,” pp. 293, 291.

“revolutionary agency as heteropatriarchal reclamation.”¹¹⁴ Linda La Rue, writing in 1970, used the colonial analogy *against* this sexual subordination, arguing that “it seems incongruous that the black movement has sanctioned the revolutionary involvement of women in the Algerian revolution,” yet tacitly consigns women to lesser roles in struggles in the US.¹¹⁵ This line of criticism is examined at length in chapter 7.

Thus, the colonial analogy has been subject to extensive criticism, and with it, it seems, the broader concept of domestic colonialism. The analogy is inexact, imprecise, and “a-systematic.” For critics, this implies the need to dismiss the concept as an explanation of US racial oppression. Equally, as a form of rhetoric in the armature of Black revolutionary politics, critics note that this inexact analogy both understates settler colonialism (undermining the strategy of solidarity implied in the concept) and ‘imports’ models of struggle that do not fit in the US. These are premised on the perfectly plausible reading of the concept as a (radical, critical) attempt to recast the study of ‘race relations’ in terms of a worldwide colonial struggle.

2.4 “Distinct but Connected”

Both of these lines of critique – ‘scientific’ and ‘rhetorical’ – hinge on an understanding of the domestic colonial concept as primarily analogical. In fact, however, as I began to show before outlining these critiques, the concept is not straightforwardly analogical. It is better understood as an exposition of the peculiar ways in which racial and colonial domination in the US ‘survives’ the political emancipation offered by the era of decolonization. This is especially clear in more recent attempts to reconstruct the concept of domestic colonialism. Under the heading of “Internal Colonialism Theory,” sociologists such as Rod Bush and Charles Pin-

¹¹⁴Roderick A. Ferguson. *Aberrations In Black: Toward A Queer Of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp. 114–115.

¹¹⁵Linda La Rue. “The Black Movement and Women’s Liberation.” In: *The Black Scholar* 1.7 (1970), pp. 36–42, p. 39.

derhughes have argued that the concept remains useful, primarily for examining forms of inequality and political disempowerment that persist despite legal equality. As Pinderhughes argues, domestic colonialism, while subject to intense critique, remains useful to “capture the situation” of black people in the US in terms of a “geographically-based pattern of subordination”: the “scattered” confinement of black people through spatial segregation and police power.¹¹⁶ They link this analysis with a wider account of the “coloniality of power,” a term innovated by Latin American scholars to understand how colonial rationalities and practices continue despite ‘formal’ decolonization.¹¹⁷

From this vantage, the concept is part of a wider ensemble of concepts through which critics of empire stretched the meaning of colonialism to make sense of the various ways it survived its formal abolition. John Chavez has argued that though the concept has been subject to criticism and rejection among Chicano, Indigenous, and Black historians, it nonetheless “persists” in languages such as “neocolonialism, informal colonialism, postcolonialism, and borderlands theory.”¹¹⁸ Robert L. Allen, having articulated a key iteration of this concept in his *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, gives a nod to decoloniality and the coloniality of power in this vein as genuine heirs to the concept of internal “neo-colonialism,” mainly because it both outlines how colonial power survives formal equality, and links struggles against racial power to international struggles against imperialism.¹¹⁹ Ball provides, in turn, a sharp statement of the specifically political critique enacted by the concept of domestic

¹¹⁶Pinderhughes, “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism,” p. 236; Pinderhughes, “21st Century Chains: the Continuing Relevance of Internal Colonialism Theory.”

¹¹⁷Bush, “The Internal Colony Hybrid: Reformulating Structure, Culture, and Agency,” p. 354; On the coloniality of power as an account of the racial articulation of different roles in the colonial world economy – slavery, dispossession, migrant labour, and wage labour – see Aníbal Quijano. “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.” In: *Cultural Studies* 21.2 (Mar. 2007), pp. 168–178; Anibal Quijano. “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.” In: *Nepantla* 1.3 (2000), pp. 533–580; Sylvia Wynter. “1492: a New World View.” In: *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas*. Ed. by Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1995, pp. 5–57.

¹¹⁸John R. Chavez. “Aliens in Their Native Lands: the Persistence of Internal Colonial Theory.” In: *Journal of World History* 22.4 (2011), pp. 785–809, p. 809.

¹¹⁹Robert L. Allen. “Forty Years Later: Reflections on the Writing of ‘Black Awakening in Capitalist America.’” In: *The Black Scholar* 40.2 (2010), pp. 2–10.

colonialism. As he writes, “Rather than citizens, more ‘citizen-subjects,’ [Black] communities experience a form of colonialism (domestic, internal, and/or neo) in which they are cordoned off and ruled . . . by White populations.”¹²⁰ The domestic colony thesis highlights international connections between black freedom movements and anticolonial revolution to expose the limits of political emancipation – the bestowal of legal and political equality.

Read as a theory of the durability of a specific element in the coloniality of power, domestic colonialism can be seen as a conceptual *movement* of analogy and analysis, similarity and distinction. That is, the movement of analogy is interesting not so much for whether it *works*, but the precise way in which it *does not*. A dialectical reading of the concept will highlight how thinkers employing the so-called “colonial analogy” are not cramping their situation into a model borrowed from elsewhere, but mobilizing that model to expose that which exceeds it – what Adorno called the “dregs of the concept.” Domestic colonialism works at the edges of available languages of anticolonial self-determination to render intelligible forms of struggle that emerge *from* or at least *alongside* struggles for decolonization but whose claims may exceed the international and domestic orders being established through decolonization.

On this note, Jared Ball’s more recent uptake of the concept in his book *I Mix What I Like!*, an analysis of the ‘colonial’ control of black media offers two lines of thinking that might guide a reading of the concept as dialectical critique. First, it analyzes a predicament of power that is *unique*, but, second, one linked to other unique sites of domination and struggle against imperialism and colonialism. Jared Ball, building on the insights of Pinderhughes, Bush, and Allen – among many others – argues in his application of the concept of domestic colonialism to the music industry (and communications more generally) that the theory sees “African America *as* African America and as such sees the Black American struggle as distinct but ultimately connected to that of the African world and with all those on the lower rungs of a global colonial pyramid.”¹²¹

¹²⁰Ball, *I Mix What I Like! A Mixtape Manifesto*, p. 14.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 14.

Distinct but connected – this is the dialectical motion held in the concept that I want to unpack as part of my reinterpretation of it as a dialectical criticism of domestication. Domestic colonialism appears here as a process of counterinsurgency – something that *responds* to claims, desires, and struggles for self-determination, an attempt to contain and neutralize them. It is connected in terms of its internationalist politics, but insists on the specificities of the US ‘colonial’ situation as one of collective power-over, of rule by one population over another. Getting at this more capacious and critically flexible understanding of domestic colonialism requires unpacking a reading of it as a dialectical concept. This is what I set out to do in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Domestic Colonialism and Dialectical Criticism

Beginning with the 1917 revolution in Russia, a backward and semi-colonial nation, socialist national liberation movements have sprung up throughout the world to challenge and overturn imperialism. China, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, as well as other parts of Asia, Africa, Latin America have followed this course and are providing a dramatic and viable alternative to the misery of permanent underdevelopment. In effect they have counterposed national self-determination to imperialist subjugation, and socialist central planning to the social anarchy of capitalist economics. The ramifications of this worldwide struggle transcend our conceptual abilities.¹

The reality of world revolutionary events are running far ahead of Marxian theory.²

I have so far argued that to see domestic colonialism as only an analogy between US racism and Third World colonialism is to think one-sidedly. Reducing domestic colonialism to a *move* of analogy elides the conceptual *movement* of which that analogy is only the first

¹Robert L. Allen. "Black Liberation and World Revolution." In: *The Black Scholar* 3.6 (1972), pp. 7–23, p. 10.

²Harold Cruse. *Rebellion or Revolution*. Ed. by Cedric Johnson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 149.

(temporal and logical) moment. However, I have not yet unpacked domestic colonialism as a dialectical concept. This is what this chapter sets out to unpack the conceptual movement of domestic colonialism beyond analogy. Through a reading of select writings of Harold Cruse, Jack O'Dell, and Robert L. Allen, I argue that the concept of domestic colonialism works as a frame for interpreting insurgency in ways that undermine domesticating interpretations. It was a rubric of dialectical *political judgment* as outlined in chapter one.

Readings of the concept as a rhetorical strategy or an explanatory framework for racism take the 'colonial analogy' as the positive *goal* of the concept, such that debates turn on the accuracy or inaccuracy of the comparison. But in domestic colonialism as a practice of political judgment, the analogy is primarily a negative *moment*, a *determinate negation* of interpretations of revolt that situate it as disorder 'within' the United States. This determinate negation opens up a set of questions, problems, and projects that are internal to the domestic colonialism concept but which all turn precisely on the *failure* of analogy to make sense of Black insurgency in sixties North America. This failure of the colonial analogy turns theorists of domestic colonialism toward the singular predicament in which they find themselves as revolutionaries working in and against 'America.'

Despite Harold Cruse, Jack O'Dell, and Robert L. Allen's different political aims in articulating the domestic colonialism concept (cultural nationalism, a "Second Reconstruction," and anti-imperialist and anticapitalist revolution), their articulations all work through a common distinction between *rebellion* and *revolution*. Throughout the 1960s, all sorts of theorists and intellectuals, from Albert Camus, to Hannah Arendt, to James and Grace Lee Boggs, reflected on the distinction between rebellion and revolution. They typically highlight the difference between forms of insurgency that primarily reject a given social and political order, and forms that move to capture power in service of the creation of a new social and political order. Enzo Traverso, in his recent *Revolution: an Intellectual History*, glosses this distinction as follows:

“While there will always be debate over where precisely to draw the line between rebellion and revolution, it is still a useful distinction to make. Celebrating rebellions means hypostasizing their lyrical moment, when people stand up and act; interpreting revolutions means inscribing their disruptive emergence into a process of creative destruction, when an order is destroyed and a new one is built.”³

One might be tempted to read this distinction as a set of categories through which we can see *this* insurgency as rebellion and *that* as revolution, or in terms of a political choice *between* rebellion *or* revolution. However, the central claim I make in this chapter is that the concept of domestic colonialism distinguishes maps rebellion and revolution dialectically, working as an index for charting the pathways and blockages in the movement *from* rebellion *to* revolution in ‘America.’

I unpack this through a corresponding distinction between two moments in the domestic colonialism concept. In the first moment, the domestic colony *thesis, rebellion* is re-read in terms of an analogy with anticolonial revolt. Like anticolonial revolt it cannot a priori be understood ‘within’ the frame of the domestic because it puts that domestic sphere in question. In the second moment, the move to a domestic colonialism *theory*, this analogy breaks down in its application to the problem of *revolution*, which requires a set of programs and analyses attentive to the unique aspects of the United States that exceed any easy analogy. Thus the domestic colonialism is a hinge concept sitting between a critique of the domestication of rebellion and the imagination of a revolutionary politics on a de-domesticated basis. This chapter unpacks this motion from from colonial analogy to anti-colonial analysis, from ‘thesis’ to ‘theory,’ from rebellion to revolution as it unfolds in Cruse, O’Dell, and Allen’s mobilizations of domestic colonialism.

Jack O’Dell’s remarks in two essays published in *Freedomways* in 1966 and 1967 offer a useful starting point for thinking about a dialectical reading of domestic colonialism. There

³Enzo Traverso. *Revolution: An Intellectual History*. London: Verso, 2021, p. 18.

the prominent Civil Rights movement activist and intellectual argues that “the African population in America” are a “colonized people.”⁴ O’Dell is, at least here, not concerned with unpacking an historical and social explanation of racism or offering a rhetorical criticism of liberal politics. His articulation of the idea of domestic colonialism here is aimed at diagnosing “the revolutionary tidal wave against racism and colonialism” across the planet from the point of view of Black struggles for freedom and equality.⁵ A periodization is ongoing and emerging between “the barbarism of the past 500 years” and a new world premised on the abolition of colonial rule. A theoretical diagnosis is needed to frame critics’ and activists’ gaze in ways that help them navigate the “complicated and difficult” death of the old “order of things” in favour of the new.

In this kind of world-making and world-ending moment of decolonization, a rubric of political judgment is required that will map out what it reveals about the basic antagonisms of the US social formation. As he writes,

“It is in the very nature of the times that every so often in the life of a freedom movement, periodic flashes of events tend to illuminate the whole canvas of relationships in the society, making it possible to appraise, in a fundamental way, where the oppressed and oppressor stand in relation to one another.”⁶

Such periods “demand that the usefulness of certain assumptions be tested, that certain ideas be either revised or abandoned and other ideas reformulated, and this whole process is developed out of the experience of the movement.”⁷ A conceptual banister is needed to get a grip on the relation between the long historical experiences of struggles for freedom and the new experiences offered by the conjuncture of decolonization. According to O’Dell,

⁴Jack O’Dell. “A Colonized People.” In: *Climbin’ Jacob’s Ladder: the Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O’Dell*. Ed. by Nikhil Pal Singh. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, p. 129.

⁵Ibid., p. 126.

⁶Ibid., p. 126.

⁷Ibid., p. 126.

such periods raise anew the “problem of an adequate theory of emancipation.” Like other theorists of domestic colonialism, O’Dell worries about the way the political emancipation both enables further transformations but works also as a containment of antiracist politics. To navigate this tension “a freedom movement often has to sum up its experience over. . . a long span of time.”⁸

Domestic colonialism thus works, in this theoretical and practical predicament, as a “summing up of our particular experience in relation to American life and institutions over the past 300 years” from the standpoint of the decolonizing conjuncture, through “the relatedness of this experience to the general history of imperialism and colonialism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”⁹ This, in service of the creation of an “adequate theoretical framework – a sound system of ideas and definitions to guide the Movement in this complex period.”¹⁰ As this sort of summing-up of *history* as a *theoretical* lens for political judgment in a given conjuncture, this approach to the domestic colonialism concept sits productively in the gap between history and theory. It represents what Walter Benjamin once called a “materialistic historiography” based not on an “additive” approach but “on a constructive principle.”¹¹ Here history appears, to borrow a phrase from Marxist theorist Alfred Schmidt, as “a constructed concept (*konstruierter Begriff*), not as narrative history filled with content”: “Theoretical thinking. . . contains history in concentrated form rather than its unmediated copy.”¹²

What does it mean to talk about history in ‘concentrated form,’ as ‘construction’ rather than copy? It means to think dialectically, to work through the gap or non-identity between concepts and the world they describe. Adorno, on this count, notes that concepts in social and political thought elude definition – something made clear by debates trying to locate a ‘strict’ definition of colonialism – but this is not because they are ‘inaccurate’ but because they ‘sum

⁸O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 127.

⁹Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 127–8.

¹¹Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” p. 263.

¹²Alfred Schmidt. *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History*. Trans. by Jeffrey Herf. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981, pp. 32–34.

up' historical processes. Or, as Adorno puts it, a concept like domestic colonialism works less as a category than as an "abbreviation for an entire process."¹³ *How* and *what* one abbreviates involves an irreducibly practical element; these 'summings-up' are attempts to get a grip on what is happening and what one can do in response. So, in this sort of historico-theoretical articulation of the *longue duree*, the immediate conjuncture, and avenues of change, the goal is not to locate "causal connections between various moments in history," but to map out "the constellation which [one's] own era has formed with a definite earlier one."¹⁴

Harold Cruse, Jack O'Dell, and Robert L. Allen charted this constellation with the concept of domestic colonialism, clarifying how novel forms of struggle exceed available ways of summing up history, for example, certain iterations of liberal, Marxist, and nationalist philosophies of history that subsumed Black revolt as a significant but ultimately minor note. The "condensation" of US history in and through reference to the conjunctural shift of decolonization – the *de-domestication* of political judgment – enabled a resistance to domesticating narratives that threatened to neutralize the autonomy and critical ambit of Black revolutionary politics. I therefore read it as an attempt at the "self-clarification of the wishes and the struggles of an age."¹⁵ To 'construct' history is therefore not to impose a theoretical framework on it but to reconstruct it on the basis of a set of as-yet inchoate or undeveloped political openings in the present.

3.1 "A Dialectical Question"

Harold Cruse's important articulation of the concept of domestic colonialism, for instance, emerges from a dialectical criticism of "American Marxists," who Cruse argued had failed to "work out a meaningful approach to revolutionary nationalism."¹⁶ He writes in "Marxism and

¹³Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 29.

¹⁴Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 263.

¹⁵Marx, *Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge*.

¹⁶Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 158.

the Negro” that Marxists had failed to live up to their own injunction to think ‘dialectically.’ By either subordinating Black struggles to ‘universal’ proletarian revolution, or incorporating it into history as simply one more ‘backward’ nationalism pulled along by capitalist development, “White Marxists have tried to make the world reality fit their dialectical preconceptions; but world developments require that dialectical conceptions embrace world reality.”¹⁷

They have ‘constructed’ history in ways that obscure rather than reveal novel forms of insurgency. Cruse argues this is a consequence of turning dialectics into a theory of history as such, as a whole, an account of “historical laws.” This transforms dialectics into a static worldview or “standpoint” rather than a practical disposition open to shifts in the social and political world.¹⁸ Insofar as Marxists anticipate the world with their ideas, rather than grappling with the specificity of emerging social forces, they are “practicing *mechanistic* materialism rather than *dialectical materialism*.”¹⁹

A genuine dialectical materialist begins, rather, from the necessity and inevitability of historical surprises in which insurgencies exceed the interpretive constructions through which we receive them. As Cruse puts it,

“The very premise of dialectical thinking demands, in this instance, an admission that new forms of social consciousness can develop within capitalist societies which are of more political relevance than even the social consciousness of the conservative labor movement. Any other conclusion than this is manifestly anti-dialectical.”²⁰

The concept of domestic colonialism, in this context, thus works as an attempt to break through the ossifications of existing frameworks to do justice to these “new forms of social consciousness.” It does so by starting from an analogical claim:

¹⁷Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 150.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 148.

²⁰Ibid., p. 148.

“Like the peoples of the underdeveloped countries, the Negro suffers in varying degree from hunger, illiteracy, disease, ties to the land, urban and semi-urban slums, cultural starvation, and the psychological reactions to being ruled over by others not of his kind.”²¹

However, this concept is not reducible to this analogy. Arguably, it works as a hinge between two moves. On the one hand, the analogy clarifies a refusal of Black revolutionaries of both subsumption within liberal stories of racial progress and the demand to “conform to the Western Marxist timetable for revolutionary advances.”²² On the other, it exhorts a shift toward the creation of “revolutionary social theories of an economic, cultural and political nature. . . new philosophies of social change” that do justice to the unique predicament of revolution in America.²³

Even as Cruse mobilizes a ‘colonial analogy’ of sorts, he expresses deep skepticism about the turn to the Third World for *models* of revolutionary politics. He writes that in “flirting with the revolutionary nationalism of the non-West,” revolutionary nationalists in the US are “floating in ideological space. . . forced to face up to the colonial revolution and to make shallow propaganda of it.”²⁴ In other words, if forcing anticolonial and antiracist rebellion in America into cramped ‘Western timetables’ doesn’t do it justice, neither does reading it through an abstract imposition of frameworks from anticolonialism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Cruse argues that between ‘analogy’ and ‘analysis’ is an underlying problem of the *relationship* between decolonization in the Third World and the American scene. How can one evaluate or draw analogies between ‘distinct’ situations without countenancing how they relate in the wider international totality of the 1960s conjuncture? Cruse outlines this problem

²¹Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, pp. 75–6.

²²Ibid., pp. 94–5, 92.

²³Ibid., p. 96.

²⁴Ibid., p. 91.

in his commentary on Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and other revolutionaries' trip to Cuba.

“The ideology of a new revolutionary wave in the world at large had lifted us out of the anonymity of lonely struggle in the United States to the glorified rank of visiting dignitaries... this ideological enchantment, was almost irresistible. And there, vicariously, a crucial question was engendered: *What did it all mean and how did it relate to the Negro in America?*”²⁵

While transposing Third World revolutionary analysis to the US enables a de-domestication of *rebellion*, a refusal of various attempts to contain it spatially and temporally into ‘domestic’ politics, *revolution* needs to be mapped in relation to the specificity of the US. It needs to be articulated in “Afro-American terms.”²⁶

Domestic colonialism thus works through and across the distinction and connection between rebellion and revolution. Cruse begins with a sharp distinction between them. He argues that the ‘riots’ in US cities are rebellions, important ones that articulate a wholesale rejection of US social order. But “mere rebellions are not revolutions in themselves—especially in America.”²⁷ The main distinction here lies in the difference between rejection and projection, a reaction to power and a claim and plan to use it: “the Negro movement at this moment is not a revolutionary movement because it has no present means or program to alter the structure or form of American institutions... it is more properly called the ‘Negro rebellion’ against the American racial status quo.”²⁸ For Cruse, a revolution “changes the structural arrangements of society or else is able to project programmatic ideas toward that end.”

But none of this was meant to say *this* is rebellion, and *instead* one should do revolution. The task of criticism here is to expand on the revolutionary possibilities to which rebellions

²⁵Harold Cruse. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*. Ed. by Stanley Crouch. Main edition. New York: NYRB Classics, 2005, p. 357.

²⁶Ibid., p. 357.

²⁷Ibid., p. 350.

²⁸Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 101.

gesture. Even Cruse's persistent worry that rebellion will be absorbed and reduced to either a protest movement for concessions within the US or 'civil disorder' in need of social management assumes that rebellion is not important so much for what it *is* but for what people can *make of it*. It can be domesticated or expanded into something broader. The question was how to move *from* rebellion *to* revolution:

“How is it possible to change the Negro movement from a rebellion into a revolutionary movement? Again this is predicated on whether or not social changes to come in America will be revolutionary or evolutionary. This has not yet been determined. It is a dialectical question.”²⁹

The nature of a change beyond rebellion is not determined ahead of time, but it is not entirely open either. It must be charted through a “new school of radical theory and practice” aimed at diagnosing both the barriers to this shift and the goals and programs it would enact.³⁰

Jack O'Dell and Robert L. Allen, despite their political differences with Cruse, were engaging with much the same problem in their dialectical iterations of the domestic colonialism concept. Jack O'Dell's articulation of the idea of the “African population” as a “colonized people” was situated within an attempt to map how “movements of protest and reform mature into movements of a revolutionary dimension.”³¹ Protest and reform movements are not inherently limited to 'domestic' politics. If seen in the context of decolonization, they announce a shift from 'quantitative' accomplishments within the existing order toward a qualitative transformation of that order as a whole. This conjuncture marks a turning point where the former have piled up enough to tilt the scales qualitatively.

“The accomplishments of the Freedom Movement to date, in their totality, represent an accumulation of quantitative changes which has prepared the conditions

²⁹Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 102.

³⁰Ibid., p. 258.

³¹O'Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 127.

for a qualitative change... making possible the final uprooting of the relics of the slave society.”³²

Similarly, in his analysis of the “July Rebellions,” O’Dell resists attempts to reduce them to “riots” or civil disorders. They are continuations of the “one continuous sturggle” of the “Negro community” to free itself from the its “agonizing situation” of subordinating capture within the United States.³³ They are not, further, rejections of ‘civil rights’ as such but expansions of it beyond the domesticating frames of juridical equality and toward the “basic economic and political problems,” “the whole fabric of exploitation in the ghetto... the police occupation force representing the State power of the colonial regime.”³⁴ They contain seeds of revolution insofar as they are a recent permutation of this *long* tradition of struggle: “Riots have little to do with freedom; revolts or rebellions against oppression have everything to do with freedom.”³⁵ What is important here is that the distinction between rebellion (and protest) and revolution is not made absolutely or categorically. Rebellions are already read as part of an historical process in which they can be transformed into revolution – the institution of a “new government.”³⁶

Allen, too, leaves this “dialectical question” open in the opening of his *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, one of the most important articulations of the domestic colonialism concept in the 1960s. Starting from the Black Power movement and the rebellions in US cities throughout the 1960s, he writes that they are symptoms of a failure of domestication: “The black revolt is emerging as a form of national liberation struggle.”³⁷ To do justice to them, therefore, requires a frame in which “the Third World, the underdeveloped world,

³²O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 113.

³³Jack O’Dell. “The July Rebellions and the ”Military State”.” In: *Climbin’ Jacob’s Ladder: the Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O’Dell*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, pp. 145–159, p. 148.

³⁴Ibid., p. 149.

³⁵Ibid., p. 149.

³⁶Jack O’Dell. “The Threshold of a New Reconstruction.” In: *Climbin’ Jacob’s Ladder: the Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O’Dell*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, pp. 110–123, p. 116.

³⁷Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 1.

exists as surely within America as it does across the seas.”³⁸ However, he notes,

“Whether this struggle can be characterized primarily as rebellion for reforms or a revolution aimed at altering basic social forms, even so basic a question cannot be given an unequivocal answer.”³⁹

This is not because of a fundamental ambiguity in the meaning of rebellion and revolution. On the contrary, Allen insists that they are “interrelated” but clearly “not identical.” It is because whether the struggle ‘is’ one or the other depends on the outcome of various practical interventions. “The rebel may transform himself into a revolutionary. . . but this is not an automatic consequence of rebellion.” It requires political mobilization, and more specifically a “strategy for black liberation. . . based not only on the needs and demands of black people, but . . . designed to counter the anticipated response of the opposition.”⁴⁰ Two years earlier in a pamphlet called *Dialectics of Black Power*, Allen worried that despite advocacy of “anticolonial struggle” built on the idea of “black people as a dispersed colony in the U.S.,” “black radicals, with some exceptions, have been unable to apply this analysis concretely or transform it into a program for struggle.”⁴¹

Allen too, situates this conjunctural predicament within the long-term history of Black rebellion and racial counterinsurgency. Indeed, he notes that one must always be aware of the deeper movement of “social revolution” in which various “upsets, detours, and delays” might be experienced.⁴² In Allen’s book, this longer social revolution is oriented by a sense that Black people in the US are a nation captured within.

“If it is admitted that black nationalism is a serious component of black thinking, both in the past and present, the question naturally arises why this ideology is

³⁸Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 284.

³⁹Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 140.

⁴¹Robert L. Allen. *Dialectics of Black Power*. New York: A Guardian Pamphlet, 1968. 36 pp.

⁴²Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 1.

vigorously advocated only during times of social stress. Does black nationalism exist only at certain historical junctures, or is it always there like the subterranean stresses which precede an earthquake?”⁴³

If black nationalism is a subterranean stress, exposing the *internationality* with which US ‘domestic’ space is riven, rebellions cannot be domesticated as civil disorders. They are not necessarily revolutionary, but emerge from a problem to which there are only revolutionary resolutions. For all three thinkers there is a sense that what is required is an analysis that makes sense of this in a way that maps the specificity of US struggles in relation to “the political-economic dialectic operating between imperialism and national liberation movements on a world scale.”⁴⁴ The question is exactly how the domestic colonialism, as a construction of history, maps out this relationship as one upon which the movement from rebellion to revolution hinges.

3.2 “A Special Variety of Colonialism”

Rebellions are not revolutionary, but they expose predicaments of power that cannot be remedied except through revolutionary change. Domestic colonialism offers a reading of history that does justice to this exposure. As a concept mapping pathways from rebellion to revolution, I said, domestic colonialism is not *only* analogy but almost inexorably opens questions beginning from the necessary failure of all ‘colonial analogies.’ The failure of analogy leads to an attempt to reconstruct history through the intersection of the *longue duree* experience of racial domination and antiracist insurgency in America and the conjunctural experience of the era of decolonization. So, what does this constructed history, in “concentrated form,” look like? It is one in which an analogy facilitates the exposition of the unique predicament facing revolutionary politics in the US.

⁴³ Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 115.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 22.

A movement from analogy to analysis is evident in Cruse's "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American" (1962). He argues that Black people in the US are a "domestic colony" and that "the only factor which differentiates the Negro's status from that of a pure colonial status is that his position is maintained in the 'home' country in close proximity to the dominant racial group."⁴⁵ But this one apparently minor factor that differentiates Black Americans' predicaments from a 'pure' colonial status is rather substantial, and grounds much of the actual *theory* of domestic colonialism offered. Indeed, Cruse notes that theory must grapple with the fact that "the Negro in America represents a unique type of colonized man never before seen elsewhere in the world."⁴⁶ Cruse argues that the unique history of slavery in the US makes the situation structurally different from colonialism strictly defined: "Instead of the United States establishing a colonial empire in Africa, it brought the colonial system home and installed it in the United States."⁴⁷

The emphasis here is on connection rather than comparison:

"From the beginning, the American Negro has existed as a colonial being. His enslavement coincided with the colonial expansion of European powers and was nothing more or less than a condition of domestic colonialism."⁴⁸

If Black populations in the US are subject to an "administrative underdevelopment," this is a result of this specifically American history rather than something strictly analogous to colonial occupation in the Third World. The term "colonial being" offers a flexibility in the way colonialism is understood as a broader imperial formation rather than category for describing individual polities or bilateral relationships of occupation. It is an indication of how, as Minkah Makalani puts it, "coloniality . . . indexes more than colonialism," because it "calls attention to the challenges that persists around questions of the political, sociality, and

⁴⁵Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 77.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 191.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 76.

governance even after ‘freedom.’”⁴⁹ In this US this means offering a theoretical frame that maps rebellion and subjugation within a unique colonial “European-African-Indian” racial amalgam that *is* the ‘United States.’⁵⁰

Similarly, Jack O’Dell describes this ‘amalgam’ as a “special variety of colonialism,” based on the “uniqueness of the experience of Afro-Americans.” This uniqueness follows from the macrohistorical violence through which “their ancestors were forcibly removed from their traditional territory of African societal development and transported to anew territory, unfamiliar to them, colonized and enslaved. . . the solution to this problem must take into account its uniqueness.”⁵¹ Rather than drawing a strict *analogy* between colonialism and racism in the US, O’Dell insists that we stretch our understanding of colonialism itself. We are overly limited by definitions that narrow it to colonialism as “an overseas army and an overseas establishment set up by a colonial power thousands of miles away from its home base.”⁵² This “picture of colonialism” is too “rigid” and “does not allow for its many varieties.”⁵³ In lieu of this rigid understanding he offers a more flexible one:

“In defining the colonial problem it is the role of the institutional mechanisms of colonial domination which are decisive. Territory is merely the stage upon which these historically developed mechanisms of super-exploitation are organized into a system of oppression. The status of Afro-American, Indian, and Mexican populations in the United States today, each a colonized people, confined as they are to the bottom of the pyramid of economic and political power, confirms the point.”⁵⁴

O’Dell here points to a need to analyze the specifically American ‘institutionalization’ of

⁴⁹Makalani, “The Politically Unimaginable in Black Marxist Thought,” p. 22.

⁵⁰Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 113.

⁵¹O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 138.

⁵²Ibid., p. 137.

⁵³Ibid., p. 138.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 138.

coloniality.

This frame of a unique situation – colonial but not in ways strictly analogous to European empires – enables a longer view of the entwinement of the political and racial subjugation in the United States. In a dynamic that Joel Olsen calls the rule of “white democracy” and Adam Dahl calls the “coloniality of constituent power,” the making of the American people happens in and through collective power over Black and Indigenous peoples.⁵⁵ The American Revolution is a *counter-revolution* in which political emancipation and racial subjugation are inextricably entwined, a revolution in the *name of* settler conquest and racial counterinsurgency.⁵⁶ As Jack O’Dell writes,

“The de-colonization of the American mainland achieved by the Revolution of 1776, which at the same time left the institution of slavery intact, meant, in effect, that the African population in America remained a colonized people.”⁵⁷

Harold Cruse’s analysis adds that The American Revolution both institutionalized *and* obscures this dynamic in which the political is opened and expanded on top of racial domination:

“The so-called ‘democratic heritage’ of the American tradition has served as historical camouflage to hide the fact that America participated from colonialism through its peculiar institution of slavery. Although a very special kind of colonialism... slavery was an organic offshoot of European subjugation of Africa and the New World.”⁵⁸

Political emancipation is basically incomplete in the United States, because the claim that the US is ‘already’ democratic foreclose an analysis of the peculiar colonial power underscor-

⁵⁵Joel Olson. *The Abolition of White Democracy*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2004; Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought*.

⁵⁶Horne, *The Counterrevolution of 1776*; See also Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*; Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*.

⁵⁷O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 129.

⁵⁸Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 105.

ing US social order. The contradiction with which revolutionaries in the twentieth century are confronted in attempting to move from rebellion and protest to revolution is the “paradox... of a nation ... born in the fires of an anti-colonial revolution while at the same time consolidating its state power and sovereignty on the basis of preserving the slavery variety of colonialism.”⁵⁹ It is not just a matter of slavery, however, but a racial formation in which various alternative political claims are contained by a settler colonial state: “The land stolen from the Indians was rapidly put into cultivation by the slave labor of black men stolen from Africa. The life and history of Afro-American and Indian peoples are closely interwoven in their contribution to the development of America... the plantation and the reservation are twin institutions of social control and ‘containment.’”⁶⁰

Beginning with this counter-revolution of 1776 as a moment in which racial and colonial domination is obscured through its *enclosure within* the settler/racial ‘democratic’ state enables Cruse and O’Dell to chart the longer history of political emancipation and its contradictions in the United States. This problem of domestic colonialism hints at the basically incomplete character of the *bourgeois* or *political* revolution. A specifically American revolutionary politics *must* start from this curious predicament in which struggles for *human* emancipation take place on a terrain where political emancipation is attenuated. As O’Dell puts it, “In terms of ‘progress,’ the reality is that, in a very basic sense, we are taking up where the first Reconstruction leftoff, when it was brutally overthrown ninety years ago.”⁶¹

As Harold Cruse puts it, the problem facing 1960s revolutionaries is that though they may draw on anticolonial and communist revolutionary visions, they do so in struggles to articulate “aspirations which should have been realized decades ago.”⁶² As he writes,

“Our black bourgeois-democratic revolution started in 1900 and is still incom-

⁵⁹O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 130.

⁶⁰Jack O’Dell. “Foundations of Racism in American Life.” In: *Climbin’ Jacob’s Ladder: the Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O’Dell*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, pp. 80–101, p. 86.

⁶¹O’Dell, “The Threshold of a New Reconstruction,” p. 112.

⁶²Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 240.

plete due to our unique and peculiar American circumstances and the institutional structure of race relations. . . it is still the same bourgeois-democratic revolution still being defeated, delayed, and aborted.”⁶³

Cruse, then, sees a threat to US capitalism not in Marxism but in a bourgeois nationalist Black revolution that de-links Black economic development from a US political economy that structurally underdevelops Black communities. Likewise, O’Dell argues that the repression of Reconstruction was a violent domestication of Black populations within the US as a subordinated and captured people: “The defeat of Reconstruction further confirms the colonial-captive position of the Black population in America.”⁶⁴ However, to say that the struggles of the 1960s are continuous with a long, still incomplete bourgeois-democratic revolution for *political* emancipation does not mean that Cruse or O’Dell are arguing that revolution should be strictly oriented toward reform within the United States or toward ‘Black capitalism.’

Rather, both provide a de-domesticating reading of bourgeois revolution, in which the terroristic containment of the promises of Reconstruction is inseparable from the dawn of the US’s overseas empire in the 1898 moment. As O’Dell puts it, the demise of Reconstruction was only the inward face of a US imperial formation:

“The United States empire-builders. . . had no need at the time to set up ‘colonies’ in Africa several thousand miles away from American shores. All that was necessary was that there be set up a system of restrictions and subjugation of the seven million Afro-American population within the United States. That is precisely what the rulers of America proceeded to do. The overthrow of the Reconstruction governments, the rounding up of the remaining Indian population. . . set the stage.”⁶⁵

⁶³Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 240.

⁶⁴O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 130.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 132.

Cruse, in turn, notes that only by understanding the containment of Reconstruction in imperial context can one understand the longer history of Black nationalism, resurgent in the era of decolonization. He argues that “the roots of black nationalism must be found *both* in the failures of black Reconstruction and the rise of the American imperialistic age, which is to say the age in which American foreign policy became openly imperialistic, coupled with renewed national oppression inside the country.”⁶⁶

Robert L. Allen concurs, arguing that the strategies for domesticating Black rebellion in the 1960s are part of a much longer history in which racial rule is continually reconfigured and re-asserted – “political power is usurped by whites” in the face of antiracist, emancipatory, democratic insurgency.⁶⁷ The idea of domestic colonialism offers a condensation of an historical process punctuated by insurgency and counterinsurgency. After Reconstruction, Allen writes,

“Behind the political and legal framework of domestic colonialism stood the police power of the state, the state militia, and the U.S. army. As if this were not enough, an informal colonial army was created by the Ku Klux Klan and other ‘white citizens groups. It was the armed terrorism of these groups that helped in successfully undermining Reconstruction. And anyone who has lived in a ‘modern’ black ghetto knows, it is no mere figure of speech when the predominantly white police forces which patrol these communities are referred to as a ‘colonial army of occupation.’”⁶⁸

Allen places the 1960s conjuncture within this long frame in which ‘American democracy’ is instituted *on* and *over* Black populations through racial control. Allen’s *Black Awakening* argues that this long-standing attenuation of democratic revolution is being re-iterated

⁶⁶Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*.

⁶⁷Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 9.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 10.

in and through a politics of inclusion and ‘civil rights’ in the present, in which “black people...are being granted the same political rights as those accorded to whites.”⁶⁹ He argues that viewed in this long-term frame of domestic colonialism, this ‘accomplishment’ of bourgeois revolution in fact marks another contradictory moment that combines revolution and counter-revolution, victory and defeat. His central argument is that “black America is now being transformed from a colonial nation into a neocolonial nation; a nation nonetheless subject to the will and domination of white America.”⁷⁰ The neocolonialism through which former colonies are ‘captured’ by economic compulsion despite their independence is refracted inward in the US, as the capture of Black communities despite and *through* their political emancipation.

Allen’s invocation of “a program of domestic neo-colonialism...designed to counter the potentially revolutionary thrust of the recent black rebellions in the major cities across the country” brings the discussion back to the conjuncture of the 1960s.⁷¹ This long-term condensation of history by way of the concept of “domestic colonialism” re-situates the 1960s in the *longue duree* process through which Black populations were effectively captured and contained within the US precisely through the making of a US ‘democratic’ people. This problematic was, perhaps, always evident in some sense, but becomes knowable in a *new way* when refracted through the conjuncture of decolonization and anticolonial revolution in the 1960s. As Harold Cruse argues, through the prism of “domestic colonialism,” “the racial crisis in America is an internal reflection of this contemporary world-wide problem of readjustment between ex-colonial masters and ex-colonial subjects.”⁷² The question is just how much it is a *reflection* and how much it is a *refraction*. This refraction enjoins an analysis of the unique barriers and blockages facing what O’Dell calls “the next phase in our

⁶⁹Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 13.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 14.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 17.

⁷²Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 105.

decolonization struggle.”⁷³

3.3 The Antinomies of Rebellion

Thus it is in this context that these theorists, mobilizing domestic colonialism as a dialectical critique, diagnose the limits of rebellion as symptoms of the simultaneous failure and durability of *domestication* as strategy of ‘colonial’ power. Indeed, turns to ‘colonial analogies’ themselves are diagnosed as symptoms *of* the very condition of domestic colonialism as a unique ‘variety’ of colonial power as collective capture. The condensation, abbreviation, and ‘construction’ of history in terms of domestic colonialism offers a rubric of political judgment that clarifies the limits of rebellion.

As O’Dell had argued, the rebellions of the 1960s in Watts, Newark, Detroit, and elsewhere could not be reduced to ‘riots.’ They were about justice and freedom, at root, even if these claims might be inchoately expressed. But, on the other hand, Cruse notes that these were just as surely *not* revolutions.⁷⁴ As he writes in *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*,

“Ghetto uprisings like Harlem and Watts lend credence to the spectre of revolution. . . but as long as these uprisings are sporadic, the American capitalistic welfare state will absorb them. . . Uprisings are merely another form of extreme protest action soon to be included under the heading of Natural Calamities.”⁷⁵

In other words, insofar as rebellions *reject* a given political order but do not *project* an alternative set of organizations, they risk being re-incorporated and domesticated within US

⁷³O’Dell, “The Threshold of a New Reconstruction,” p. 121.

⁷⁴Indeed, Cruse excoriates the “Marxist Left” for “read

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revolution into every actual or potential uprising,” because it has had its own revolutionary potential “nullified” by the “inner dynamic of American capitalism.” Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 371.

domestic order as another threat or disorder to be prevented. Rebellions are basically malleable. What they *are* ultimately resides in what they can *become*, and in terms of determining this latter question, the forces of domestication seem to have a decisive advantage because they do not have to imagine an alternative to US domestic order. They need only manage the contradictions thrown up by its imposition, that is, the contradiction between the creation of a domestic ‘democratic’ political order and its violent reduction of potentially *international* revolutionary claims to internal disorders and protests.

These thinkers criticized two linked discursive and practical strategies through which rebellion was reduced to riot. In one version, the contradictions of domestication are *suppressed* through state violence and repression. The “military state” responds to the rebellions with a re-assertion of what Jack O’Dell calls “policemanship as a style of government”: the rule of one population over another through militarized policing.⁷⁶ This is visible not only in the immediate response to the ‘riots’ in US cities but to extended repression of Black revolutionary movements through assassinations, counter-intelligence, and police provocation. All of these are domesticating moves in a broader “policy of ‘containment,’” for O’Dell.⁷⁷ In another version, the contradictions are not suppressed but *dulled* through the transformation of insurrection into ‘civil’ disorder, read as a violent transmission of demands and problems essentially answerable within the domestic order of the US. This is the province not only of the ‘military state’ but “white liberals,” who, Robert L. Allen argues, do not use the word ‘riot,’ and

“Prefer to use the broader (and more delicate) phrase, ‘urban crisis’ when referring to the troubled cities. To them the cities present not a battleground but a crisis to be managed.”⁷⁸

Alongside this reduction of a *political* insurrection to *social* disorder is a thoroughgoing

⁷⁶O’Dell, “The July Rebellions and the “Military State”,” p. 155.

⁷⁷O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” pp. 141–2.

⁷⁸Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 193.

attempt to incorporate the claims of Black Power and Black self-determination within the strictures of racial capitalism through the cultivation of a “black capitalist buffer class firmly wedded (in both political and financial terms) to the white corporate structure.”⁷⁹ This was, for Allen, carried out through linkages between government agencies, social scientists, and private enterprise aiming to ‘develop’ the ghetto. In relation to this, he quotes an especially revealing statement by the head of the Clairol company at the 1968 “Black Power Conference”:

“The Clairol chief told his audience that at first the term black power ‘very frankly filled me with dread.’ But this was no longer the case now that he understood black power to mean ‘equity’ and ‘empowerment,’ that is, ‘ownership of apartments, ownership of homes, ownership of businesses, as well as equitable treatment for all people.’”⁸⁰

Allen is concerned, here, with the extension of a policy of “containment” of rebellion through investments that “convince black people that they as a group have a stake in the American system.”⁸¹ Domesticating responses to rebellion are therefore governed both by repression and pacification. In a particularly pessimistic diagnosis, Cruse notes on this count that “The dynamic of American capitalism, backed up by Federal and state power, absorbs and legitimizes whatever it wills and subdues what it does not sanction.”⁸²

Cruse argues for an analysis that not only pushes against this domestication but enables visions of alternatives emerging from rebellion. As he writes in relation to the 1965 uprising in Watts, “what was missing in Watts was the larger social strategy that might have encompassed much more than Watts. Without this strategy, the full enactment of what Watts represents – a process with a beginning, middle, denouement and end – will never take place

⁷⁹Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 220.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 164.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p. 396.

in this society.”⁸³

A de-domesticating reading of rebellion therefore cannot just concern itself with excavating it as a symptom of ‘domestic colonialism’ – the attempt to cramp ‘intercontextual’ politics into ‘domestic’ politics. The domestic colonialism *theory*, as an account of the unique domesticating form in which colonial power takes here, gestures toward the dangers of ‘absorption’ within domesticating frames:

“One of the keys to understanding the effectiveness of any tactic, idea, strategy, or trend in the Negro movement, is to determine how well the American system can absorb it and thus, negate its force. To repeat, the American social system quite easily absorbs all foreign, and even native, radical doctrines and neutralizes them.”⁸⁴

Cruse argues that this limit applies “all the more” to Black revolutionary thought because “this movement is more native than others and therefore more intimately connected to the inner American social dynamic.”⁸⁵ Cruse is here pointing to what Nichols (much more recently, in relation to settler colonialism) has called a “ratchet effect.”⁸⁶ Domestication, as form of state violence and colonial power that forcibly *includes* claims for self-determination as internal, debilitates and limits over time our ability to imagine and work in ways that ‘de-domesticate.’ The process which domestic colonialism *theorizes* also limits the capacity of those subject to it to imagine alternatives.

For Cruse, a key symptom of this is what we might call the antinomies of rebellion. He argues that rebellions and movements in the US 1960s *reject* US order but are entrapped within it, such that they are suspended in ambivalence despite continuous ‘activity.’ As he puts it, rebellions against domestication take the form of “compulsions toward integration

⁸³Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p. 383.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 361.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 361.

⁸⁶See Nichols, *Theft is Property! Critical Theory and Dispossession*.

and compulsions toward separation. . . the inescapable result of semi-dependence.”⁸⁷ Without pathways ‘out’ of domestication – a task that requires not only a critique of *US* domestic order but *domestic order in general* – these “compulsions” are left “in a neglected state of suspension until they break out in what are considered to be ‘negative,’ ‘antisocial,’ ‘antiwhite,’ ‘antidemocratic’ reactions.”⁸⁸ This suspension is not a product of a lack of imagination but of the very predicament of power against which Black liberation movements had to work.

Allen, on this note, argues that there is a rational kernel to what some critics of black nationalism call a “pathological response” to racial control: namely, the “tendency for [black] nationalism to withdraw into mythical, religious fantasies, escapist dreams. . . or utopian hopes that American capitalism will somehow see fit to grant black people a chunk of its territory.”⁸⁹ The political reasonability of ‘escapist dreams’ and ‘utopian hopes’ is made more evident, for Allen, by the 1960s rebellions. These “played a key role in retrieving black nationalism from the world of fantasy” by showing the grip that a collective, self-determining *rejection* of US state power had.⁹⁰ These rebellions exposed the material contradiction in the US social formation that both *necessitates* and *undermines* our ability to imagine alternatives: the “hard fact of American life that there is insufficient productive space in the American economy for twenty million black people.”⁹¹

Though this requires a specifically American answer, turns to models from the Third World for models make sense in a predicament in which domestication itself has limited interpretive frames for political judgment. Indeed, in Cruse’s writing, the domestic colonialism thesis thus works as a diagnosis of the “colonial analogy” itself as a pathology emerging *from* the stark limits placed on agency and imagination by the unique forms of colonial power governing the American social formation.⁹² These limits create a “form of rebellion that has

⁸⁷Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 101.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 81.

⁸⁹Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, pp. 117–118.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 126.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 115.

⁹²Cruse claims that the basic contradiction is that of a nationalism that emerges as precisely an “American

no historical precedent in philosophical content,” but this naturally leads to a search for banners of judgment elsewhere.⁹³ Cruse nonetheless retains sharp criticism of those borrowing revolutionary concepts wholesale from the Third World. While many revolutionaries invoke Che, Mao, and Fanon,

“Their ‘revolution’ is a borrowed term abstracted out of the revolutionary ideologies of the ‘Third’ or ‘Bandung’ world. It is the revolutionary sentiments of identification with movements as close as Cuba and as distant as China, but its native methodology is one of pure and simple protest.”⁹⁴

Thus borrowing analogies and models does not seem to chart paths from rebellion to revolution. Arguably, it poses impossible choices – nationalism or liberalism, separation or integration – that basically *accept* the result of domestication as opposed to opening avenues of struggle against it.

Indeed, Cruse argues that while *rebellion* might be understood in analogical terms to anticolonial revolt, *revolution* in America must take a distinct form. As he puts it,

“Rejection of white society is analogous to the colonial peoples’ rejection of imperialist rule. The difference is only that people in colonies can succeed [in ‘ejecting’ the colonizer] and the American Negro nationalists cannot. The peculiar position of Negro nationalists in the United States requires them to set themselves against the dominance of whites and still manage to live in the same country.”⁹⁵

The “revolutionary goals” of an American revolution cannot be drawn from the Third product” of a “history that created a far-flung triangular relationship between Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.” He notes that ironically this distinct but connected predicament produces a will to analogy and a search for analogies elsewhere. See Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, pp. 420–448.

⁹³Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, pp. 190–191.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 188.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 95.

World. But nonetheless, Cruse seems to acknowledge the necessity of an internationalist form of revolutionary learning:

“One of the greatest disadvantages is that all our native politicians (both reform and revolutionary) must study, absorb, and attempt to imitate foreign models and foreign philosophies in pursuit of their own native utopias.”⁹⁶

Domestic colonialism poses the question in terms of working *through* the logic of analogy and reference to decolonization to diagnose the specific conditions of the United States. The *failure* of analogy is a symptom *of* the specific refraction of colonial power in the United States, and moving beyond it requires charting the specificity of an American revolution in the decolonizing conjuncture, that is, an American revolution on the basis of a de-domesticating analysis. Domestic colonialism contains a dialectical movement in which the analogy between colonialism and US racial oppression exposes the need for a uniquely ‘American’ revolution:

“The new, young nationalists [must] recognize that ultimately, their situation must have an American, not an African, solution. This means that American nationalism must be geared organically to the native American revolutionary dynamic toward social change.”⁹⁷

3.4 The Contradictions of “American” Revolution

Does this mean that Cruse, O’Dell, and Allen, in drawing the distinction between ‘mere’ rebellion and its fulfilment in revolution, demand some sort of revolutionary blueprint, a ‘plan?’ No. The *dialectical* movement from rebellion to revolution is premised on the idea that while rebellion may beget ‘pathological’ responses, ‘America’ cannot solve the problems of its own

⁹⁶Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p. 189.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 360.

making either. As Cruse puts it, “White America has inherited a racial crisis that it cannot handle and is unable to create a solution that does not do violence to the collective white American racial ego.”⁹⁸ The domestic colonialism concept, while not locating ‘models’ in the Third World, leverages the international decolonial moment to think beyond the limits of available rubrics of political judgment. As Cruse argues, the analyses of “Western Marxists” are fundamentally limited because they “have become provincially rooted in the crisis-reality of the Western world and cannot transcend the conceptual limitations of that world.”⁹⁹

All three thinkers therefore argue that domestic colonialism be used to think dialectically: not to draw ‘models’ from other contexts to be applied but to learn *ways* of thinking, to cultivate a revolutionary disposition. Transcending the “conceptual limitations” of the “crisis-reality of the Western world” means not *entering another context* but examining other predicaments to see how revolutionaries there themselves transcended “conceptual limitations.” This, in service of charting paths forward in the specifically American predicament of power by locating relationships rather than analogies between sites of struggle. While since my focus is on defending a reading of domestic colonialism as a form of dialectical critique, I will not outline the exact features of Cruse, O’Dell, or Allen’s proposed revolutionary ‘results.’ What is especially relevant is the kind of revolutionary vision emerges out of this dialectical learning.

This vision is one not of *separation* or *integration* but transformative *institution*. Cruse argues that one thing connecting the American revolution to Reconstruction and then to decolonization as a global conjuncture is the task of creating new orders. As he puts it, what what distinguishes revolutions from rebellions is really that “revolutions write new constitutions, throw out old ones, or amend them to conform to new human aspirations. *This is a world process that is still going on.*”¹⁰⁰ This demand to make a new society is located ‘here’

⁹⁸Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 104.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁰⁰Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p. 397.

in the sense of not demanding an ‘exit’ from domestic order, but remains de-domesticating because it does not try to “reform the social system from the inside” but to rebuild it.¹⁰¹ Studying anticolonial revolutions teaches about not the particular spatial form they took (a postcolonial state) nor the tactics they used to get there (guerilla warfare, revolutionary violence of a colonized majority against a colonial minority) but the *task* to which these were an answer and which remains to be carried out, the institution of new political orders.

O’Dell charts this in terms of the continuation or indeed completion of the “unfinished business” of Reconstruction, a “New Reconstruction.” To “put our movement in full stride with the present stage of development of the African revolutions” is not to model struggle on anticolonial revolution but to recognize the “moral imperative to secure governmental power.”¹⁰² The “next phase in our decolonization struggle,” O’Dell writes,

“Is not a question of establishing a separate state or a separate territory, but one of achieving representative governmental power in those areas wherein the black population has historically been a majority or a substantial minority.”¹⁰³

This struggle for governmental power might appear to be ‘domesticated’ as a struggle for power *within* the US domestic order. To some extent, it *is*. But the profound barriers to this project posed by the “lingering colonial status” of Black populations (something visible precisely *through* the de-domesticating reference to decolonization) means that for O’Dell the struggle for governmental power will turn on an internationalization of US space. it will be driven against containment in a ‘domestic’ frame by a coalition between the “colonized nationalities within the ethnic structure of the U.S. nation... the Negro, Mexican, Indian, and Puerto Rican populations.”¹⁰⁴ Further, given the imbrication between the “military state” abroad and “policemanship as a style of government,” a necessary element of the “New Re-

¹⁰¹Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p. 397.

¹⁰²O’Dell, “The Threshold of a New Reconstruction,” p. 121.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁰⁴O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” p. 144.

construction” will be an “end to American colonialism” both ‘here’ and ‘there,’ in “far-flung domains.”¹⁰⁵ Further, like Cruse, he sees this not only as a Black revolution but necessarily an *American* one that aims at “*aiding the country as a whole*,” moving it in “a new humanist direction.”¹⁰⁶

Precisely because coloniality appears as domestication in America, any de-domesticating politics transforms this political order as a whole. “The struggle of Afro-Americans for full ‘decolonization and development,’ ” O’Dell argues, reveals that from the *antinomies* of rebellion (‘separation’ and ‘integration’) comes a movement driven by a revolutionary answer to American *contradictions*. As he writes, because “our colonial-type status” is “insitutionalized and embedded within the larger socio-economic structure of American society,” any revolutionary struggle against this condition will “inevitably affect the entire institutional framework of American society.”¹⁰⁷ This transformation, in turn, precisely because it turns on the failure of the basically contradictory process of domestication upon which US political order is founded, is not just a quantitative advance ‘within’ domestic US order. Quoting the “political principles” utilized by the American counter-revolution, he argues that the New Reconstruction is a movement to “institute a new government,” to make a new society, a “fundamental redesign.”¹⁰⁸

Allen pushes this understanding of internationalist revolutionary transformation further in his understanding of move from rebellion to revolution. Again, ‘internationalism’ here means working with and learning from anticolonial struggles both in North America and in the Third World, but not drawing blueprints and models. As he puts it, “Our task is to study and learn from the general experience of the Third World struggles, and to apply this general knowledge to our particular situation.”¹⁰⁹ Here Allen notes that the refraction of anticolonial revolution

¹⁰⁵O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” pp. 144, 2.

¹⁰⁶O’Dell, “The Threshold of a New Reconstruction,” pp. 121–2.

¹⁰⁷O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” pp. 140–1.

¹⁰⁸O’Dell, “The Threshold of a New Reconstruction,” p. 116.

¹⁰⁹Allen, “Black Liberation and World Revolution,” p. 22.

in the US does not only require a “thorough-going racial and economic reorganization inside the US” – rather than ‘separation’ or ‘integration’ into existing order.¹¹⁰ Extending the claim that domestication means de-domestication transforms the US to the globe as a whole, he argues that the “domestic colonial populations has a unique and crucial role to play in the dialectic of world revolution” because domestic colonialism has produced “internal forces necessary to promote and consolidate domestic opposition to imperialism.”¹¹¹ Thus not only is it a refraction of decolonization but a key element *in* the wider decolonizing struggle for a post-imperial world order. He takes SNCC as exemplary here in their work “gathering together the parts for a revolutionary analysis of American society and the roles of American imperialism abroad and ‘neocolonialism’ at home,” though they could not transform it into a “revolutionary program.”¹¹²

Domestic colonialism offers a background framework for holding together myriad forms of struggle that appear easy to categorize as non-revolutionary – struggles for legal equality, social reform, economic independence. Indeed, ‘reforms’ play a key role in Allen’s ‘transitional program.’ The domestic colony thesis, by pointing to a fundamental problem of collective white rule over Black populations in the US, offers a framework for adjudicating the ‘revolutionary’ possibilities inherent in reforms. Reforms are key in the shift from rebellion to revolution insofar as they are oriented by a “over-all strategy for social change.”¹¹³ The dynamic of de-domesticating insurgency and domesticating neo-colonialism turns on the question of reform: both projects struggle to claim reforms as something that affirms, respectively, a de-linking from US racial capitalism or a legitimation of it, to “buttress a society which in its totality remains as exploitative as ever.”¹¹⁴ ‘Reforms’ and ‘reformist’ moves, in the ‘transitional’ program, here, can be seen as roadmaps from rebellion to revolution insofar

¹¹⁰Allen, “Black Liberation and World Revolution,” p. 15.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹²Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 256.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 157.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 157.

as they are drawn into confrontation with or escape from attempts to recapture them within a domestic framework.

Learning from the experience of neo-colonialism in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, Allen argues that it is impossible to establish a “separate and self-sufficient black economy” because “the community does not have control over all of the essential goods and services which it requires for survival” and any control would be attenuated by the wider impersonal compulsion of global capital. However, he argues for a “transitional program” emphasizing

“a struggle to create an all-encompassing, planned communal system on a national scale and with strong international ties. Such a struggle would begin to break down capitalist property relations within the black community, replacing them with more socially useful communal relations.”¹¹⁵

Acknowledging the immense constraints on revolutionary action in the US and the centrality of struggle within in the wider contestation of US imperialism, Allen argues that this struggle is not an outright confrontation with state power but “a strategy of calculated confrontation, using a mixture of tactics,” but oriented fundamentally by the long-term goal, constantly delayed and attenuated since Emancipation, “to abolish, by any means possible, the real control of white society over the black community, and to extract needed reforms”.¹¹⁶ These necessary reforms will necessarily mean revolution in the United States as a whole, rather than a collective exit from it; that is, the tactical escape from US racial capitalism is a means to push it beyond itself as a totality:

“America cannot be genuinely liberated until white America is transformed into a humanistic society free of exploitation and class division. The black and white worlds, although separate and distinct, are too closely intertwined—geographically,

¹¹⁵Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 278.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 280.

politically, and economically. . . both must change if either is to progress to new and liberating social forms”.¹¹⁷

This is not a conciliatory move. It grounds a further shift away from ‘white America’ toward internationalist solidarity within the US, effectively internationalizing US political space by linking with other “semicolonial” peoples: Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, and Mexican-Americans.¹¹⁸ The shape of self-determination here is expansive, turning away from easy unitary nationalisms toward an internationalism that refuses any clear opposition between the ‘domestic’ and ‘the international,’ while nonetheless insisting on the transformation of the US as a whole.

The concept of domestic colonialism, considered as a dialectical criticism, aims not just to theorize racism or articulate a revolutionary plan, but provides a rubric of political judgment for navigating the capacious but dangerous space between rebellion and revolution. To only see it as an analogy is to focus on the domestic colony *thesis* at the expense of the conceptual movement toward an analysis of the specific meaning of coloniality and decolonization the ‘American’ scene. The concept indexes a learning process in which the antinomies of rebellion produce opportunities for experimenting and searching for new forms. The concept orients interpretations of struggle, not towards a regulative idea (of, say, a separate state, of communism, or a finally ‘finished’ American nation-state) but towards a de-domesticated disposition that *resists* various attempts to cramp political action and political judgment into domesticating frames.

While offering a form in which the contradictions of an “American” revolution must move, it does not offer any form for this revolution ahead of time. This must be located in actually emerging social forces. Anything less is to abdicate dialectical and critical thought. What James Forman wrote about his time in SNCC is probably true with respect to the crit-

¹¹⁷Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 281.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 281.

icism of domestication: “we had no models.”¹¹⁹ In the chapters that follow, I trace out theoretical and political conversations in which the capacious concept of self-determination and ‘anticolonial’ revolution de-domesticated political judgment and exposed the contradictions of domestication. I take the dialectical iteration of this concept in the writings of Harold Cruse, Jack O’Dell, and Robert L. Allen as a methodological lens. Through it, the concept works not as a reifying, ossifying analogy, nor as a rhetorical tactic. It was a refusal of the options on offer in the name of something more: a dialectical attempt to do political theory in the ambiguous borderland between a rejection of what is and a projection of what might be.

¹¹⁹In Forman, *High Tide of Black Resistance and Other Political and Literary Writings*.

Chapter 4

Communist Criticism and Black Self-Determination

*The new period will have a logic of its own.*¹

In Aime Cesaire’s letter to Maurice Thorez announcing his break with the French Communist Party, he wrote that communist thinking and practice had papered over the autonomy and singularity of Black and anticolonial struggle. He writes that

“We, men of color. . . have come to grasp, in our consciousness, the full breadth of our singularity . . . the singularity of our ‘situation in the world,’ which cannot be confused with any other. The singularity of our problems, which cannot be reduced to any other problem...”²

How to think about revolutionary politics in a way that does not *reduce* one problem into another, and do justice to the “singularity” of various struggles? It was precisely this question that Harold Cruse thought ‘Western’ Marxists failed to grasp. In the US, reductive analyses among socialist parties and theorists – and their direct impact on white workers who rejected Black claims for autonomous struggle, or sidelined the question of racism entirely – resulted practically in what Michael Dawson describes as “ ‘You’re fired!’ ‘No, I quit!’ ” situations.³

¹Claude Lightfoot. *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*. New York: International Publishers, 1968, p. 16.

²Aime Cesaire. “Letter to Maurice Thorez.” In: *Social Text* 28.2 (2007), pp. 145–152, p. 147.

³Michael C. Dawson. *Blacks In and Out of the Left*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 39.

Cedric Robinson diagnoses the underlying predicament here as one in which “presumably general principles of historical or objective nature were opposed to factors of special and short-term significance.”⁴ While debates within Marxism require the ‘encompassing’ of new events and new ways of knowing, these risk being filtered through a division of the apparent and the essential, the particular and the general, the contingent and the structural, through which antiracist struggle has typically been reduced to a displacement of economic struggle.

The communist iteration of the concept of domestic colonialism, the theory of Black self-determination in the United States, would appear to be a classic case of this reduction. It appears to be a wholesale imposition of debates about the national question in Marxist thought onto the predicament of racial injustice in the United States. This sense of imposition plays a key role in what Robin D.G. Kelley calls the “anti-Communist confessionals” of “Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, George Padmore, Margaret Walker, and a host of others.”⁵ For example, George Padmore remarked that the communists’ “failure to make a greater impact on popular Negro opinion has been due to the tactical mistakes and psychological blunders which the Communist Parties of the Western World – America, Britain, France, and South Africa – have made in their approach to the darker peoples.”⁶ Among these blunders in the US is the translation of concepts from radically different contexts to the US at the expense of actually-existing American internationalisms.

However, many thinkers taking up the problem of self-determination in communist politics did so in ways that neither capitulated to ‘reductive’ stories nor flatly rejected communist political thought. They worked through the singularity of which Césaire wrote by *stretching* rather than abandoning Marxist accounts of historical change and revolutionary subjectivity. Even if the communist line on self-determination dogmatic ‘doctrine’ handed down by party officials, thinkers like Claudia Jones, Harry Haywood, and Claude Lightfoot grinded

⁴Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, p. 62.

⁵Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, p. 38.

⁶George Padmore. *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*. New York: Roy Publishers, 1956, p. 289.

it against the rough grain of their own situation. The question of self-determination could not be answered abstractly in terms of a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on the basis of theoretical validity. It was (in Claudia Jones’s words) a “special question”⁷ that reoriented political judgment in de-domesticating ways, both against familiar stagisms of American communist thought and against politics that assume the boundaries of the US nation-state.

It became a site through which one could analyze how the historical and geographical specificity of antiracist struggle outstripped many familiar elements of Marxian philosophies of history. Cedric Robinson remarks in *Black Marxism* that racial domination and its legitimation “ran deep in the bowels of Western culture, negating its varying social relations of production and distorting their inherent contradictions.” It follows, perhaps, that what is required is a “distorted” analysis.⁸ Jones, Haywood, and Lightfoot’s distinct conceptualizations of the problem of self-determination offer such productively ‘distorted’ iterations of Marxist political judgment.

On the one hand, self-determination exposes a peculiarly American combination of the most ‘advanced’ monopoly capitalism and the most ‘regressive’ regimes of racial terror. Robinson has highlighted how Marxist thought has sometimes relegated nationalism to a “backward” or at best temporary note in the progressive emergence of socialism.⁹ However, to conceptualize political struggle in terms of national self-determination here is not itself backward but a response to the ‘backward’ or ‘old’ elements persisting and being brought along *with* advancement. For Haywood, for example, the advancement of monopoly capitalism and the persistence of racial rule go hand in hand, two sides of the same imperialist capture of Black workers within the US. For these thinkers, this meant that self-determination was a way to articulate various forms of resistance to these forms of domination as revolu-

⁷Claudia Jones. “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt.” In: *Beyond Containment: Autobiographical Reflections, Essays, and Poems*. Ed. by Carole Boyce Davies. Banbury: Ayebia, 2011, pp. 60–70, p. 62.

⁸Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, p. 66.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 62–3.

tionary.

In mobilizing self-determination as a dialectical concept that worked at the edges of historical materialism, the thinkers examined in this chapter recast a classic problem of ‘lag’ – the presence of the old not in spite of the present but as a crucial part *of* it. Self-determination was a concept to work through a dialectical insight that Adorno and other Marxist theorists of fascism recognized later. The backward element of racial domination within the US social formation was not, as some Marxian thinkers might think, “an obstacle on the smooth path of historical progress,” which the ‘national question’ would help clear away. Instead the ‘advancement’ *produces* the ‘backward’ such that the “dialectical task” is “deriving what has lagged behind precisely. . . by reference to the movement of progress itself.”¹⁰ The rise of the US to the centre of monopoly capitalism (i.e., imperialism as a stage of capitalist development) is inseparable from the regression embodied in racial terror, racialized economic underdevelopment, and white power more broadly. To borrow from Adorno, “the supposedly static sectors of society must actually be derived from the dynamic trajectory at work.”¹¹

In reading the US social formation as one driven by imperialism and riven with ‘national questions,’ these theorists’ engagement with self-determination offers an important criticism of domestication. For instance, in Jones and Haywood’s estimations, those invoking an ‘objective’ shift in public opinion away from nationalism in the “Black-Belt” towards integration worked on a false binary between separation from or inclusion in an unchanged ‘American’ order. They also accepted as an inevitable shift what was in fact a product of a specifically American imperialism defined by a combination of racial terror in the South and rapid industrial development in the North. Demographic shifts Northward and public opinion shifts toward integration were not signs of the demise of a politics of self-determination but a sign it needed to be articulated in more flexible ways that could *politicize* these shifts, which appeared natural and objective.

¹⁰Adorno, *Introduction to Dialectics*, pp. 143–4.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 145.

The picture of ‘imperialism’ that emerges from the vantage of the ‘national question’ in the US reads US empire primarily in terms of domesticating capture. In this picture, the development of US capitalism *necessitates* a politics of self-determination, because it structurally requires a ‘national’ form of racial oppression. But it also *undermines* that politics insofar as it economically and politically debilitates the ‘nation’ through long-term processes of economic incorporation on subordinated terms, driven by what Marx once called the “mute compulsion” of capital. In this respect, following my reading of Cruse, O’Dell, and Allen, the conceptual opposition between imperialism and self-determination therefore works here not as an attempt to set out a blueprint that ‘anticipates the world’ but to provide a conceptual and political language that resists domesticating interpretation and practice that accept as given what is in fact the site of struggle: the ‘domestic’ or ‘national’ sphere of the United States.

4.1 Claudia Jones and the Dialectics of Self-Determination

This is why I begin with Claudia Jones’s reflections on self-determination. Though these well predate the ‘period’ with which this dissertation is concerned, they offer an enduring formulation of the concept of self-determination as a fundamentally open concept. Its meaning and possibility or impossibility cannot be anticipated abstractly. It is a banister of political judgment that ‘sums up’ the connections between different struggles over time. No doubt this is just one aspect of Claudia Jones’s prolific work in the Communist Party of the USA. This is to say nothing of local organizing in women’s and peace movements (which she saw as deeply intertwined), and against US imperialism and racism across the planet. Throughout this work Jones had cultivated a critique of the separation of Black and worker’s struggles, and the reduction of the struggle for “Negro equality” to other questions. These reductive and exclusionary conceptions of revolutionary political subjectivity were symptoms of “white chauvinism.” Her theory of the “triple oppression” (race, gender, class) of Black women workers was not only a massive dialectical expansion of CPUSA doctrine but un-

derpins a good deal of work now under the heading of intersectionality.¹² Her interventions in global politics mark her as a central contributor to international relations theory too, not least because she insisted on the necessity of indexing political analyses to broader shifts and “realignments” in colonial geopolitics.¹³

As Carole Boyce Davies argues, Jones’s political biography itself challenges domesticating analyses, “consistently resist[ing] containment within the limitations of space, of time and place.¹⁴ Jones’s “fearless” drive to “link decolonization struggles internally and externally, and to challenge U.S. racism, gender subordination, class exploitation, and imperialist aggression simultaneously” resists (both practically in her life, and theoretically as an ‘object’ of knowledge) the “deportation” of Black radical women subjectivity, and what Dawson calls the “whitewashing” of Left history.¹⁵ Therefore, as Davies writes,

“While a domestic U.S. approach is appropriate for fleshing out of the specifics of African American feminist political history in the United States, such a position remains bordered within the U.S. narrative of conquest and domination and thus accompanies the ‘deportation of the black radical female subject’ to an elsewhere.”¹⁶

This deportation was of course a literal attempt to domesticate Jones, to “contain” her in the sense of “containment policy.” For her, this was an expression of nothing less than a “fascist threat” built into US political and social order.¹⁷ Jones’s life is arguably characterized by

¹²See Kate Weigand. *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women’s Liberation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, pp. 97–113; Denise Lynn. “Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in Feminism.” In: *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8.2 (2014), pp. 1–20; Carole Boyce Davies. *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

¹³Sarah Dunstan and Patricia Owens. “Claudia Jones, International Thinker.” In: *Modern Intellectual History* FirstView (2021), pp. 1–24; Zifeng Liu. “Decolonization is Not a Dinner Party: Claudia Jones, China’s Nuclear Weapons, and Anti-Imperialist Solidarity.” In: *The Journal of Intersectionality* 3.1 (2019), pp. 21–45.

¹⁴Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, p. 5.

¹⁵Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, p. 2; Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left*, p. 17.

¹⁶Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, p. 4.

¹⁷See Charisse Burden-Stelly. “Claudia Jones, the Longue Duree of McCarthyism, and the Threat of US Fascism.” In: *The Journal of Intersectionality* 3.1 (2019), pp. 46–66.

a sort of dialectic of domestication and de-domestication insofar as her deportation – a violent attempt by the U.S. authorities to reassert the binary opposition between domesticated politics and radical exclusion – made “‘elsewhere’... a creative space and another geographical location for activism.” Her activities began to stretch from Britain, to the Caribbean, to the USSR, to China.¹⁸ Jones’s constant negotiation of the boundary between domestic and international as a politically created site of violence and of struggle enabled a de-domesticating analysis of the conjuncture of decolonization.

Davies explicitly argues that Jones’s reflections on self-determination and internationalism are an “early assertion of an internal colonialism (which highlighted the links between the diaspora and African and other nations involved in decolonization struggles).”¹⁹ This insistence on national oppression linked the local organizing of Black women domestic and factory workers against abuse and oppression to US imperialism more broadly. John Munro, on this account argues that by recasting the entire conjuncture from one about ‘American liberty,’ and ‘Soviet Justice’²⁰ to one of opposition between “anticolonial socialism” and “capitalist neocolonialism,” Jones was able to connect the broader geopolitics of anticolonialism and imperialism to the “intricacies of oppression.”²¹

Jones’s reflections on self-determination emerge from this anti-imperial, ‘intersectional,’ and flexible orientation to praxis. Her 1946 essay “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt” is mobilized against “Browderism,” and more specifically Earl Browder’s claims not only that Black people would automatically gain inclusion in ‘America’ through capitalist development, but they had made their “historic choice... for

¹⁸Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, p. 4; On Jones’s deportation and its consequences, see John Munro. *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonization, 1945-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 176–180.

¹⁹Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, p. 231.

²⁰To borrow a term from Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge Univ PR, Feb. 2007.

²¹Munro, *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonization, 1945-1960*, pp. 124–5.

their complete integration into the American nation as a whole and not for separation.”²² Her paper undermines this claim not through a defense of separation as a strategic choice but of the *principle* of self-determination as a critical defense against domesticating practices and interventions. I argue that the essay puts on display Jones’s dialectical criticism of domestication. The criticism of Browder can be unpacked as a criticism of domestication in two parts: first, a critique of domesticating readings of the ‘choice’ of Black populations, and second, a mobilization of self-determination as an open, dialectical concept.

She rejects those who first identify self-determination strictly with *separation*, and then dismiss it as impossible as a “practical political matter.” This is “tantamount to forcing on the Negro people a choice, which they are clearly not in an objective position to make.”²³ The underlying point here is that in identifying self-determination abstractly with separation, and then attributing a ‘choice’ regarding it to an imagined ‘Negro people,’ Browder has reread an ‘objective’ shift in the impersonal compulsion of the US political economy in terms of a ‘subjective’ choice. As Jones writes,

“Those who impute to the Negro people the main responsibility for ‘accepting’ or ‘rejecting’ the principle of self-determination. . . base their conclusions on the subjective factor, instead of the objective and historical conditions of oppression of the Negro people in the Black Belt.”²⁴

Thus the logic of choice needs to be excised insofar as what is at issue is the political creation *of* a subjectivity – a collective ‘self’ – capable of increasing the ambit of ‘choice’ in the first place. Her diagnosis of the situation in the Black Belt draws on a colonial analogy to describe the collective debilitation of a potential Black nation, whose capacity to politically choose is suppressed. She understands “the Negro question as a *national* question, that is, as

²²Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 65.

²³Ibid., pp. 65–66.

²⁴Ibid., p. 68.

a question of a nation oppressed by American imperialism, in the ultimate sense as India is oppressed by British imperialism and Indonesia by Dutch imperialism.”²⁵

However, this by no means assumed the exact contours and desires of this nation. At the end of the essay she draws a useful distinction between sociologically “de-limiting the characteristics of the Negro people” and working to “develop the national consciousness of the Negro people.”²⁶ She draws here on Stalin’s definition of a nation as an “historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up.”²⁷ In Jones’s case, her insistence on the specificity of national oppression within the Black Belt concerns a historically *evolving* community, one whose basic characteristics are in the making, and whose capacities of *making* itself are violently constrained.

Jones’s analysis, consistent with my overall claim about the domestic colonialism concept, is oriented not just toward analogies (with India and Indonesia for example), but toward using such analogical frames to think through the singular predicament of Black people working against racial oppression in the US. She argues that looking to this singular predicament exposes the facile character of gestures to ‘historic choice.’ Discussing the location and shape of the nation in the Black Belt, she writes,

“The migrations of the 1870s, of the First World War, and of the Second World War, did not appreciably diminish the proportion by which the Negroes find themselves a majority today in the Black Belt – these are virtually the same. It cannot be said that this majority is accidental, or that the Negro people continue as an oppressed people within the Black Belt by inertia or by choice. They continue so because the sheriff’s posse of the twentieth century is carrying on, under new forms, the work of the slave-catchers of the nineteenth. The majority

²⁵Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 65.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 62.

remains a majority by force.”²⁸

What Davies calls Jones’s assertion of “internal colonialism” is, like later iterations, a way of holding together various historical periods as different permutations of a *longue duree* development of a racial formation.

In her ‘summing up’ (to recall Jack O’Dell’s formulation) the refraction of US imperialism inward onto Black populations has taken the form of *capture* rather than *expansion*.²⁹ While no doubt racial exclusion has been central to US racial oppression, seen through the lens of the ‘national questions,’ it has been expressed through a sort of subordinating *inclusion* that debilitates the capacity of Black people to collectively determine their own destiny. She describes the “prison-house” of US national oppression as such:

“The Civil War, which abolished chattel slavery, failed either to break up this area of Negro majority or to fully liberate the Negro people within it. Retaining their plantation lands, the ex-slaveholders soon forced [them] to return to these lands... as sharecroppers. A series of laws passed by Southern states – the crop lien laws, the jumping contract laws and so on – prevented and still prevent the free migration of the Negro people. Scarcely less than before the Civil War, is the Black Belt a prison-house of Negroes, the chains which hold them now are the invisible chains of poverty, the legal chains of debt-slavery, and when the landlords deem it necessary, the iron shackles of the chain gang.”³⁰

Domestication is a form of racial and imperial power that neither ‘breaks up’ nor ‘liberates’ its subjects. It places them in a sort of limbo, a captured state. While Jones draws on Lenin’s analysis of the national question and imperialism, she does so in ways that point

²⁸Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 63.

²⁹Though this is by no means to say Jones was not critical of US imperial expansion, or saw it as disconnected from Black oppression. She paints a picture of the US as one single imperial formation in her 1958 essay “American Imperialism and the British West Indies.”

³⁰Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” pp. 62–63.

to a unique combination of “monopoly capital” and “semi-feudal” as the main “perpetrators” of national oppression³¹ – a combination that would become central to Haywood and Lightfoot’s analyses. Thus the colonial (or in this case ‘imperial’ or ‘national’) analogy is mobilized to put in one image what Saidiya Hartman calls “the elusive emancipation and travestied freedom” in the wake of the nineteenth century.³²

Self-determination here emerges as a capacious concept, a rubric of political judgment that links struggles against these two ‘perpetrators’: monopoly capitalist ‘super’ or ‘double’ exploitation and semi-feudal racial capture. In her essay Jones argues that the concept of self-determination helps unify two struggles that seem to move for ‘integration’ but are actually ‘national’ insofar as they are not a matter of “assimilation” but the radical transformation of US political order in service of “democratic integration, [which] means breaking down the fetters that prohibit the full economic, political, and social participation of Negroes in all phases of American life.”³³ These two struggles require different strategies and orientations: in the North it is a struggle for “equal rights” which is “enhanced by the presence of a large and developing Negro proletariat, in the area of the most highly developed capitalism.”³⁴ In the South, equal rights require an additional move of national mobilization to ensure their “enforcement,” which means not just enforcing Federal law but “wiping out the economic, political, and social survivals of slavery.”³⁵

The concept of self-determination, Jones writes, does not stand opposed to struggles for legal equality but *links them together* despite their differing location in the US social formation and their different relations to the development of capitalism. It is a concept that brings into one frame struggles against the “most advanced” aspects of US capitalism, and the “most regressive” forms of racial domination. This is why self-determination can neither

³¹Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 60.

³²Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 10.

³³Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 66.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 66–7.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 67.

be identified strictly with separation (and dismissed out of hand) or with integration (and thus domesticated within the US). These are not the same, but they are not mutually exclusive. Self-determination enables a kind of lodestar whose shape in some places may be asserting the advanced and vanguard role of the “doubly oppressed” Black workers in Northern factories, and in others may require more explicitly national or ‘separatist’ tendencies, as in (for Jones) the Black Belt. Black self-determination turns on the “double oppression” of Black people “as wage slaves and as Negroes,” which exposes the simultaneous existence of ‘advanced’ capitalism and forms of national oppression that are “rooted in economic and historic conditions of a precapitalist nature.”³⁶

The role of the communist here is not to *reduce* these struggles to economic ones nor to subsume them into a smooth story of capitalist development but to help unify struggles against the uneven and lagged character of US racial capitalism. As she writes, “the right of self-determination does not exclude the struggle for partial demands; it presupposes an energetic struggle for concrete partial demands.” Indeed, self-determination is a concept that helps to “interconnect the partial demands.”³⁷

The *right* to self-determination therefore cannot be eliminated; it is inalienable. As Jones writes, “The right of self-determination is not something one can dangle, withdraw, or put forward again as a sheerly objective factor.”³⁸ To claim that Black populations have *already* made their choice transforms a *right* into a policy choice. Further, it gives “sanction” to the “poll-taxers and feudal landlords in the South to continue exploiting the Negro people and poor white son the basis that ‘this is what the Negroes want.’ ”³⁹ This is to “blunt the struggle for self-determination,” accepting domestication as a *fait accompli* through a false, undialectical, and rigid choice between inside and outside.

This requires, for Jones, a more capacious and flexible understanding of self-determination

³⁶Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 69.

³⁷Ibid., p. 67.

³⁸Ibid., p. 66.

³⁹Ibid., p. 68.

as a bundle of rights and demands that can orient struggles even if they are not realizable in the short-term. Here separation is not “identical with self-determination.” Rather, drawing on Lenin she argues that “the right to separation is inherent in the right to self-determination.” It is something philosophically and ethically *available* rather than a choice to be made *now* or in any instance.⁴⁰ It serves as a dialectical image through which various ‘partial’ demands and ‘limited’ struggles can be connected in one, long-term historical process of emancipation. Thus, engaging with the question of self-determination in unique circumstances, Jones makes a signal move away from self-determination as “a slogan of immediate action” to “a *programmatic demand*.”⁴¹

In language drawn from Cruse, O’Dell, and Allen, we might say it is a hinge for shifts from protest and rebellion to a long-term constructive process of *revolution* not limited by the domesticating narratives and bounds of US liberal democracy: a way to understand the “vital connection” between “current struggles” and the broader “programmatic slogan” of self-determination offered by the Communist Party. It is not a “slogan advanced as an issue on the order of the day” but a more enduring “*guiding principle*.”⁴² Such a principle works not as itself a final goal (though this possibility is held open) but as an overall frame in which to interpret revolt and struggle in the first place. It “serve[s] as a beacon to the day-to-day struggles for Negro rights.”⁴³ Thus Jones’s iteration of the self-determination thesis can hardly be considered rigid adherence to a Communist line handed down from on high. On the contrary, it is a dialectical reformulation of the concept that enables de-domesticating readings of apparently ‘partial’ struggles across apparently disparate and diverse contexts.

Jones is a crucial precursor to the theory of domestic colonialism. This essay in particular mobilizes the idea of an internally colonized nation not to support forms of struggle modelled on anticolonial revolution but to ask what emancipatory practices and analyses are

⁴⁰Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 65.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 70.

⁴²Ibid., p. 70.

⁴³Ibid.

made available through the *connection* between the US and the broader moment of decolonization. Starting with Jones sets the stage for analyzing the communist iteration of domestic colonialism on the basis of “transnational feminist work.” Such work not only impores us to resist white male chauvinism. According to Carol Boyce Davies, Jones’s analyses of self-determination and her broader transnational peace work cultivate a sensibility in which

“The nation-states in which we live as subjects have been produced out of specific political imperatives and histories and that they therefore seek to contain, arbitrarily, a variety of peoples subject to the whims of these same nation-state enterprises.”⁴⁴

The self-determination line, as a *guiding principle*, worked less as a positive ‘end’ or ‘blueprint’ than as part of a disposition aimed at continually resisting this containment. This pliable understanding of the dialectics of self-determination can guide a reading of further debates on self-determination in the long 1960s.

4.2 Revolutionary Positions: Harry Haywood’s Anti-Imperialist Critique of Domestication

Crafting a Communist ‘line’ on self-determination in the United States was a major feature of Harry Haywood’s political and intellectual life. A self-described “Black Bolshevik,” he took practical and theoretical paths well in excess and against the domesticating boundaries of the US nation-state. Further, his work bespeaks the connections between communist and ‘partial’ struggles of which Jones writes. He grew up in the South, fought in both World Wars, organized labour struggles in Chicago and New York, aided struggles against racial terror such as the Scottsboro case, and studied and travelled in the Soviet Union. By the middle of the twentieth century, as anticolonial revolution swept the planet, Haywood had already

⁴⁴Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, p. 21.

become an important theorist and organizer within the Communist Party of the United States and the Third International more broadly, having been tasked with articulating a *revolutionary* answer to the question of self-determination.

He and Jones share a common moment in their intellectual biographies, both attracted to the Communist Party for its injunction to connect mobilizations against racial and economic injustice in the US to anti-imperialism abroad. In his 1978 autobiography Haywood writes that the US police repression of communist protests in Chicago against fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia highlighted the link between imperialism and US racism: "The defense of Ethiopia had now become a fight for the streets of Chicago."⁴⁵ In the context of the era of international decolonization after World War II, Haywood saw Black struggles for liberation and against "racist terror" as linked to "the successes of the world anticolonialist movement in Asia and Africa."⁴⁶

Haywood's engagement with the question of self-determination and domestic colonialism plays out the dialectic of analogy and analysis that I have argued characterizes the concept of domestic colonialism in its revolutionary articulations. Haywood uses this concept to stretch historical materialist analyses to make sense of the singular predicament of the US and Black struggles for democracy and equality. For example, starting from his 1957 pamphlet *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, he argues that "the formulation of the Negro question by the Party as in essence a question of an oppressed nation correctly related the struggle of the Negro people to the class struggle of the American working class against capitalism, imperialism, and for socialism."⁴⁷ This section explores how the concept of self-determination is worked through as a way to establish this correct relation.

In a 1948 book *Negro Liberation*, Haywood unequivocally asserts what critics of domestic

⁴⁵Harry Haywood. *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*. Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978, p. 219; Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*.

⁴⁶Harry Haywood. *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*. Chicago: Workers' Press, 1975, p. 1.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 2.

colonialism call the colonial analogy. He argues that “the Black Belt is a kind of ‘internal colony’ of American imperialism. . . the character of the oppression of the Negro in no sense differs from that of colonial peoples.”⁴⁸ He never really strayed from this assertion. He was, as Dawson puts it, “doctrinaire.”⁴⁹ From one view, Haywood might then appear to be a rigid thinker, holding onto a line developed in the 1920s well into the 1970s despite everything.

However, in Haywood’s work, I argue, the concept works, as with Jones, less as an *immediate demand* than as a programmatic, guiding principle premised in *rights*, broadly conceived in internationalist terms. As such a principle it rejects domestication in the double sense of internalization (within the ‘US’) and neutralization (within a more ‘general’ struggle for workers’ revolution). As he puts it in his autobiography *Black Bolshevik*, a Communist affirmation of right of self-determination “established that the Black freedom struggle is a revolutionary movement in its own right, directed against the very foundations of U.S. imperialism, with its own dynamic pace and momentum.”⁵⁰ No more, then, could the struggle for racial equality in its specifically American form take a backseat.⁵¹

“[It] Destroys forever the white racist theory traditional among class-conscious white workers which had relegated the struggle of Blacks to a subsidiary position in the revolutionary movement.”⁵²

In the late 1940s, this assertion of the autonomous “dynamic and momentum” of the Black freedom struggle was directed mainly against the “treachery” of Browder’s revisionism. Indeed, Haywood credits Jones with revivifying his defense of the self-determination thesis against Browder’s claims that Black people had made their “historic choice” for in-

⁴⁸Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, p. 146.

⁴⁹Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left*.

⁵⁰Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 234.

⁵¹I owe a debt in the following analysis to the following considerations of Haywood’s theory: Michael C. Dawson. *Black Visions: the Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 183–198; Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*, pp. 78–93; Johnson, “Between Revolution and the Racial Ghetto.”

⁵²Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 234.

tegration rather than “separation.”⁵³ Like Jones, Haywood rejected Browder’s ‘treacherous’ transformation of a *right* to self-determination to an historical event already passed.⁵⁴ It was not only this temporal neutralization of Black self-determination as already ‘accomplished,’ but a spatial domestication that was key here. In the face of a deeply riven political and social formation, Browder insisted on “national unity.”⁵⁵ This sense of the line on self-determination not only as a ‘revolutionary answer’ or ‘program’ but as a critical orientation *against* domesticating analyses would be crucial to Haywood’s flexible re-iteration of the concept.

This flexibility is evident first of all in Haywood’s rejection of a binary choice of ‘integration’ or ‘separation.’ He approvingly cites a set of articles by CPUSA member James A. Allen that refuted the “revisionist” identification of self-determination with “secession.” As Haywood puts it, “federation and various forms of autonomy were also encompassed within the right of self-determination.”⁵⁶ Self-determination, precisely as a rigid line – since it invokes an inviolable principle of international law – works as an opening of political options. In Haywood’s *Negro Liberation*, a direct response to “Browderism” and other “revisionisms” on the question of Black self-determination, the line on self-determination enables an escape from the limits of discussions of ‘race relations’ or “racial persecution” by reading US anti-black racism as a “particular form and device of national oppression,” the analysis of which has to be set in the broader context of decolonization after World War II.⁵⁷

This flexibility emerges, however, at the very beginning of the development of Haywood’s revolutionary position on self-determination as a student in the Soviet Union. He writes that upon arriving there he saw little benefit in the idea of national self-determination for Black struggle in the US. As he writes, “to me, the idea of a Black nation within US boundaries seemed far-fetched and not consonant with American reality.”⁵⁸ First of all, it tactically un-

⁵³Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, pp. 543, 551.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 532.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 530–1.

⁵⁶Ibid., 554. Allen would later reject the self-determination thesis.

⁵⁷Harry Haywood. *Negro Liberation*. New York: International Publishers, 1948, pp. 137–8.

⁵⁸Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 139.

dermined, with an “interim stage” of nationalism, a politics of proletarian unity. But more damning was the “gratuitous assumption of a non-existent Black nation, with its implication of a separate state on US soil.”⁵⁹ Ultimately, he writes, “the analogy foundered [on] the question of territory.”⁶⁰ Here he raises the singular predicament of domestic capture *within* as a barrier to any transplantation of the national question. As he puts it,

“The subject nations of the old czarist empire were situated either on the border of the oppressing Great Russian nation or were completely outside it. But American Blacks were set down in the very midst of the oppressing white nation, the strongest capitalist power on earth. Faced with this. . . How then could one convince US Blacks that the right of self-determination was a realistic program?”⁶¹

Already here there is a tension between a demand for a ‘realistic’ program and the sense that what is ‘realistic’ (or not) is a product of specific political choices, imperial histories – structures that work as limitations but not unsurmountable *limits*.

His Soviet interlocutors tugged at this tension. Despite his insistence on historical specificity and reality, they called his analysis “ahistorical!” Nasanov in particular, Haywood writes, claimed his skepticism was ahistorical because it did not account for how the relative applicability of the concept of ‘nation’ was indexed not to any essential character *or* to a sociological description of a group at one point, but to the history of that group’s debilitation through racial or colonial domination. At stake in the colonial analogy was not whether a concept was adequate to reality. It was a matter of how the concept could or could not illuminate an historical process by which it was *made* inapplicable. Haywood describes the product of this dialectical exchange in *Black Bolshevik* as such:

“Certainly, some of the attributes of a nation were weakly developed in the case

⁵⁹Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 139.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 140.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 140.

of US Blacks. But that was the case with most oppressed people precisely because the imperialist policy of national oppression is directed toward artificially and forcibly retaining the economic and cultural backwardness of the colonial peoples as a condition for their superexploitation.”⁶²

Asking whether a given people can be subsumed under the abstract category of ‘nation’ is undialectical. One must instead begin by situating any ‘national question’ in an historical analysis and political criticism of imperialism that both nationally oppresses a people and debilitates their capacity to act *as* a nation.

Returning to Haywood’s post-war position, what makes racism a form of ‘national oppression’ is not some essential characteristic of Black people as ‘national’ but a specific form of domination irreducible to the exploitation of wage-labour. This is crystallized in Haywood’s rejection of the idea that migration of Black people out of the South meant that the sociological basis of national self-determination had disintegrated. He notes that Allen’s articles in particular pointed toward an understanding that whether or not this migration had affected the demographics of the Black Belt, the structural features of this region within the US social formation remained tied to national *forms of oppression*, especially “the remnants of slavery in the sharecropping system.”⁶³ Demographic shifts or not, there remained a struggle “in its own right... against semislave conditions reinforced by racist barbarism, and, in the long run, for the completion of the land revolution left in default by the betrayal of Reconstruction.”⁶⁴

Even if critics *were* correct about a mass exodus, the plantation economy of the South remained intact, and accepting this ‘exodus’ as objective fact and voluntary choice depoliticized the underlying dynamics of “imperialism” driving it.

“Comrades who espouse the ‘direct integration’ position have manifestly de-

⁶²Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 199.

⁶³Ibid., p. 553.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 199.

parted from a dialectical materialist analysis of the position of Negroes in the US. They have been all too eager to seize upon the ‘facts’ (supplied by liberal apologists for Negro oppression) and ‘irreversible long-term trends’ to prove that the Negro question is *being automatically solved within the framework of imperialism.*”⁶⁵

For Haywood, claims for the inevitability of integration through capitalist development take as inevitable a contestable *political* compulsion driven by the mechanization of agriculture (producing surplus populations in need of work) and the expansion of manufacturing (re-absorbing them on terms amenable to “monopoly” capital).

Haywood here mobilizes the concept of imperialism to outline the contradictions of domestication as a process of subordinating ‘inclusion.’ Citing Lenin, he argues that imperialism is driven by a contradiction between “two tendencies in the national question, both universal laws of imperialism.” On the one hand, there is a “long trend leading objectively toward integration, that is, the amalgamation of the Negro people into the American nation as a whole.” At the scale of the Black Belt, this is only one place in the wider, global process of the centralization and concentration of capital, and the consolidation of a world market.⁶⁶ This integration, however, is not smooth and automatic but requires violence and oppression: “imperialism can achieve this ‘unity’ only by means of violence and oppression, and, as a result, the other tendency arises, which finds its expression in the struggle of oppressed peoples of colonial and dependent nations to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression. This is precisely the main contradiction of the imperialist system.”⁶⁷ Thinking about revolutionary possibility in the US must begin from this “dialectical fact.” For Haywood, this dynamic is therefore only one, very important, vantage on a broader world-historical process of imperialism, one increasingly on the table in the era of decolonization. As such, “the Negro

⁶⁵ Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, 5. My emphasis.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

question cannot be considered in abstraction from the international picture.”⁶⁸ The question is, however, precisely how the contradiction between economic ‘integration’ and national self-determination plays out in the specific context of the US.

Despite his assertion of a colonial analogy in *Negro Liberation* the actual analysis present in his writings is in fact driven by a demand to understand the singularity of this predicament and alter ones accounts of class struggle accordingly. Indeed, Haywood reads the entire history of Black liberation struggles in the twentieth century, until the 1970s, as oriented by Black movements’ “assertive drive for a viable, collective identity adapted to the peculiar conditions of their development in the U.S. and their African background.”⁶⁹ Before *Negro Liberation* Haywood had already articulated the autonomy of Black oppression in terms of an “agrarian question,” an “unsolved agrarian question in the South,” rooted in the survival of the “Southern plantation system.”⁷⁰ In *Negro Liberation* itself Haywood expands on this, connecting it to the broader context of anticolonial revolution.

“Simply put, the issue is the transfer of land from the monopoly of a small, semi-feudal class of big landed proprietors to the mass of the landless peasantry...at the root of the titanic conflict raging throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world... in countries like China, India, Indonesia, and Korea, it is no longer possible to deny the necessity and inevitability of agrarian revolution, for the simple reason that scores of millions of these people have made this issue their own.”⁷¹

Haywood argues that *like* colonies, the Black Belt’s largely agrarian character is not an accident, but *held* in a position of agrarian underdevelopment within the system of capitalism (i.e. imperialism) as a whole. A region mined for resources and foodstuffs, then opened as

⁶⁸Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, p. 18.

⁶⁹Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 636.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 554.

⁷¹Haywood, *Negro Liberation*, p. 83.

a market for manufactured goods, it is systematically and transitively underdeveloped. Its “full development is artificially and forcibly retarded by imperialism.”⁷² Seeing the problem in agrarian terms centres the failure of attempts to complete the “bourgeois-democratic revolution” of Reconstruction: not just the quashing of political emancipation but of demands for *land reform*. The reason why the apparently ‘backward’ agrarian question persists in the otherwise ‘advanced’ and imperialist United States emerges from the imperial domination and domestication of Black revolt after Reconstruction.

This demands, for Haywood, an analysis that steps out of a philosophy of history that sets feudalism, capitalism, and socialism in discrete and irreversible succession. The failure to dismantle the material basis of the plantation undermines all attempts to make good on the ‘automatic’ or ‘inevitable’ trends toward integration noted by Haywood’s targets. To cramp this predicament into familiar ‘stagisms’ is to be met with the following “paradox”:

“Existing in the very midst of the world’s most highly industrialized country which ostensibly long ago abolished all pre-capitalist relations. . . is nevertheless a type of problem customarily associated only with backward, industrially retarded lands which have still to complete their bourgeois democratic revolutions.”⁷³

What makes the US predicament of power unique is a peculiar amalgam of imperialism (*qua* the highest stage of capitalism defined by the dominance of monopoly and finance capital) and the racially ensconced ‘feudalism’ of the plantation mode of production. Much as in Jones’s essay, the era of decolonization enables an an analysis of the contemporaneity of the ‘advanced’ and the ‘regressive.’ In turn, it enables an understanding of apparently ‘reformist’ struggles – for political rights and for land reform – as part of an anti-imperialist struggle against national oppression everywhere. The sorts of struggles Haywood relates to

⁷²Haywood, *Negro Liberation*, p. 146.

⁷³Ibid., p. 146.

decolonization are therefore not strictly analogous to anticolonial revolution.

Though they confront an “agrarian” question – forced underdevelopment backed up by racist violence – they do so under ‘advanced’ conditions. The struggles of sharecroppers for land reform and for control over the products of their labour, for example, were not mobilizing for an overall turn to industrialization previously held back. They were working in the context of an ‘already’ industrialized US that worked as the financial backing for their ‘national’ oppression. As Haywood puts it, “Present-day Negro sharecropping is a hybrid form, combining the most primitive features of capitalism with survivals of chattel slavery. . . under the over-all domination of monopoly capital.”⁷⁴ This, in turn, is why struggles *against* sharecropping are also struggles against the most advanced “imperialism”: because the plantation and its reconfiguration in sharecropping had formed the basis of the US “struggle for imperialist supremacy” since its inception.⁷⁵ This is a question of connection rather than analogy.

A purely analogical understanding of self-determination would, for Haywood, “violate the most elementary aspect of dialectics,” which must “take into account what was correct in one historical situation may turn out to be incorrect in another.”⁷⁶ To start from an analogy between two self-contained situation plays into what Nelson Peery would later call “petty-bourgeois intellectuals’ search for laboratory purity in social systems.”⁷⁷ Instead the task is to locate struggles in the US in relation to the “whole new world situation”: “the anti-colonialist upsurge in Asia and Africa, and the important world role played by the Asian-African bloc of nations as a result of the Bandung and Cairo Conferences.”⁷⁸ Haywood points to decolonization as a way to push beyond the domesticating frames both of the US nation-state and (what in his writings amounts to the same thing) the “revisionist” assimilation of Black struggle to the struggle for equality within the US. Self-determination becomes an

⁷⁴Haywood, *Negro Liberation*, p. 35.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 52–3.

⁷⁶Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*.

⁷⁷Nelson Peery. *The Negro National Question*. Chicago: Workers’ Press, 1975, p. 20.

⁷⁸Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, pp. 15–16.

“acid test” by which to measure to domesticating or de-domesticating character of various “left” positions.

“The acid test of internationalism for US communists is first of all how we stand on self-determination for people directly oppressed by US imperialism – for example, the Negro people in the Deep South, and the peoples of Latin America, including Puerto Rico.”⁷⁹

In turn, the *failure* of the Communist Party to take seriously the existing nationalist sentiments across the US left them surprised by the 1960s “Black revolt.” It shattered the “myth” of the “revisionist” line that “Blacks were well on their way to being assimilated into the old reliable American ‘melting pot.’”⁸⁰ Lacking a programmatic insistence on self-determination as a guiding principle, Haywood argues, they could not see how “struggle was transformed from an internal, isolated one. . . into a component part of a worldwide revolutionary struggle against a common enemy.”⁸¹

Self-determination works as a guiding principle here. Through 1960s struggles appear not as a shift from Southern Civil Rights to Northern ghetto rebellion – a common discourse – but as an internal shift in an overall condition of imperialism. The rebellions were, for Haywood, in some part a result of the “mechanization of agriculture” and the “out-migrations” that revisionists took to be harbingers of ‘automatic’ integration. The unique amalgam of advanced industrial capitalism and plantation ‘feudalism’ re-emerges here from a different vantage, the ghetto rebellions being a failure of the cities to work as an “escape valve.”⁸² As he writes in a 1965 essay in *Soulbook*, “The dominant economic trends in U.S. society are not towards imminent, direct integration of the Negro people into the existing social structure. On the contrary, the trends are towards strait-jacketing the Negro people into [a] lower,

⁷⁹Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, p. 20.

⁸⁰Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 628.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 629.

⁸²Ibid., p. 641.

frozen caste throughout the country.”⁸³ The process that apparently marked a ‘historic choice’ for domestication would create, for Haywood, the preconditions for a re-emergence and re-consolidation of “Black national consciousness. . . a new generation of revolutionaries.”⁸⁴

This leads him to articulate a far more pliable understanding of self-determination, in terms of the nationalist “effort of a people to assert its identity and its dignity.”⁸⁵ However, it is still aimed at a domesticating reading much like that concerning the demise of the ‘agrarian’ base of the Black Belt. Again he asserts the “dialectical fact” that the *lack* of apparently ‘national’ characteristics and the emergence of nationalist tendencies are *both* produced by imperialism.⁸⁶ For example, the “lynch law of the South and police brutality in the north” both domesticate and de-domesticate, demoralize and unify.⁸⁷ In this context Black nationalism appears as a re-appearance, of “the attempt to set an independent course for the movement; to shake off the dead hand of liberalism, paternalism, gradualism, and dependency.”⁸⁸ Self-determination, precisely as an all-too-rigid, “doctrinaire” idea that Haywood *never* gave up, works as a flexible rubric of judgment through which one can view a continuous line struggle neither automatic nor doomed, but subject to fits and starts – a “distorted” analysis for a distorted social formation.

4.3 A Revisionist Line? Lightfoot’s Critique of Self-Determination

If Haywood accuses Communists of being caught by surprise by the rebellions of the 1960s because they had abrogated the frame in which they make sense – self-determination for the Black Belt – a 1960 Communist Party resolution offers a key articulation of this abrogation.

⁸³Harry Haywood. “The Crisis of Negro Reformism & The Growth of Nationalism.” In: *Soulbook* 3 (1965), pp. 203–207.

⁸⁴Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, p. 643.

⁸⁵Harry Haywood. “The Two Epochs of Nation-Development: Is Black Nationalism a Form of Classical Nationalism?” In: *Souldbook* 4 (1965), pp. 257–266, p. 257.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 263.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 260.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 260.

The basic claim of this resolution was that

“Though the specifically oppressed part of the American nation, the Negroes of the United States are not constituted as a separate nation. They have the characteristics of a racially distinctive people or nationality. They are a component part of the whole American nation which is itself a historically derived national formation, an amalgam of more or less well differentiated nationalities.”⁸⁹

Claude Lightfoot, a fellow Communist who met Haywood both in Chicago and the USSR, played a key role in writing this resolution. Lightfoot took up the same insistence on the singular character of the predicament of Black revolutionaries vis-a-vis the US social formation. He drew from it a rejection of territorial self-determination. While Haywood left open the exact use of the right of self-determination in his dialectical uptake of the concept, there is a sense throughout his writing that without the *option* of territoriality it loses its de-domesticating critical force. And this is precisely what happens here: without territoriality, the question of domestic order is already folded into an “amalgam” of nationalities. While “the Negro question” remains a “national question,” the “Negro people in the US are not a nation.”⁹⁰ Whereas Haywood saw the rise of urban rebellion as part of the same “imperial” system, the 1960 resolution reads it as a turn to the necessity of “Black political emancipation genuinely achieved” as a stepping stone on the “American road to socialism.”⁹¹

Whereas Haywood’s rigidity on the line of self-determination paradoxically allowed him to take up the dialectical injunction to adjust one’s concepts to the singularity of one’s predicament, Lightfoot saw an insistence on territoriality as a false analogy with other locales. In the late 1960s and 1970s Lightfoot pursued a criticism of domestication and a de-domestication of political judgment, but in ways that, he thought, necessitated a rejection of territorial self-determination. When seen as a result of a process of dialectical, internationalist learning,

⁸⁹Claude Lightfoot. *The Negro Question in the U.S.A.*. New York: New Century Publishers, 1960, p. 2.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 2.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 3.

Lightfoot's rejection is less a turn from revolution to reform and more a reconceptualization of these terms in the broader context of decolonization. Even if he substantially departs from the territorial line on self-determination, his analysis is still governed by a demand for domestication. As he writes, "It is not possible to appraise trends and developments within the Black community in isolation [from the] world scale. . . . Black people do not live in a vacuum even though they are victims of a segregated existence."⁹²

In his 1968 *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, Lightfoot argues that since socialism "is on the agenda" in a "number of underdeveloped countries in Asia and Africa," socialists should "while avoiding mechanistic translations. . . learn from this world experience."⁹³ He argues that socialists need to be especially attentive to the aftermath of self-determination, and most especially the problem of "neo-colonialism": "the economic exploitation of independent countries."⁹⁴ He argues that two main features of neocolonialism – the installation of a colonially-educated elite as leaders in the 'post-colonial' state, and remaining economic reliance on not only former colonizers, but rising US imperialism, "make it clear that the winning of independence. . . does not add up to equality of the underdeveloped nations with their former, absentee rulers."⁹⁵ In *Black America and the World Revolution* (1970) he argues that socialist solidarity and confederate linkages among new states are required to save off neocolonialism.⁹⁶

Lightfoot's skepticism about territorial self-determination, it seems, is linked less to an acceptance of the bounds of the US nation-state than to an understanding of the difficulty of establishing a "strong black republic in a world still largely dominated by imperialist powers."⁹⁷ This is not a result of him "mechanically translating" the experience of Africa and

⁹²Claude Lightfoot. *Black America and the World Revolution*. New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1970, p. 45.

⁹³Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, p. 113.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 117.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 119.

⁹⁶Lightfoot, *Black America and the World Revolution*, p. 75.

⁹⁷Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, p. 127.

applying it to a much starker situation in the US. On the contrary, he is saying that the lessons of Africa are really not about how revolution ‘goes,’ so to speak, but the broader global context in which revolutionary politics is conducted.

Here Lightfoot’s criticism arguably turns the other way, such that the revolutionary experience of Black people in the US is an indication of the limits of decolonization more broadly. Lydia Walker has recently argued that studies of decolonization in the post-war era rarely countenance “the contours of decolonization from those left behind,” those whose decolonizing claims are neutralized or contained within ostensibly ‘postcolonial’ states.⁹⁸ Lightfoot’s analysis is an exception to this trend, arguing that the unique position of Black people in the broader imperial system offers a crucial vantage:

“The Negro people, nowadays more commonly called Afro-Americans or Black people... constitute a very unique people. There have been several times in history when their status served as a barometer of things to come.”⁹⁹

In the context of debates about self-determination, the idea of Black oppression and resistance as a yardstick for the progress of the world more broadly allows for a rethinking of the relation between self-determination and revolution. Lightfoot had already noted a certain lag or limits faced by Black revolutionaries – if Nkrumah and a militant, anticapitalist, anticolonial, mass party could not preserve a socialist republic, how could Black Americans in proximity to US imperialism do so? Giving up the principle of territorial self-determination looks like capitulation to imperialism, a failure to live up to an anticolonial ideal set by decolonization. But it is not a failure. It begins from a critical view of racial oppression in the US as ‘lag’ in the international shift of decolonization, a limit or remainder of fascist racial rule in the heart of the emerging ‘liberal’ world order, such that progress away or toward

⁹⁸Lydia Walker. “Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making*.” In: *Past & Present* 242.1 (Feb. 2019), pp. 227–264, p. 228.

⁹⁹Lightfoot, *Black America and the World Revolution*, p. 33.

fascism relies on struggles for Black liberation in the US.¹⁰⁰ The reversals and blockages to Black liberation in a decolonizing world say just as much about the limits of the principle of self-determination as they do about the limits of inclusion.

Haywood would probably object that Lightfoot has abrogated the fundamental question of land. For Haywood, this worked as a hinge between reform, rebellion, and revolution. Lightfoot sees not land but struggles for political power as a way to protect Black people from white revanchism and to expose the limits of the capitalist system.¹⁰¹ However, this does not mean Lightfoot sees the US as a bounded space, accepting the consequences of imperialism as a *fait accompli*. On the contrary, he argues the “international significance” of these reformist struggles is precisely to sharpen the contradictions of U.S. empire, a formation that connects the debilitation of Black people at home and imperial occupation abroad – “complement[ing] napalm bombs for Vietnamese children with starvation diets for Black children.”¹⁰²

Lightfoot did not really tried to reformulate the land question in a more supple way. This is especially evident after the 1960s, in *Human Rights, U.S. Style*. There, he acknowledges that the question of Indigenous dispossession cannot be avoided in discussions of the land question. He writes that “the foundation for what was done by the English, Anglo-Saxon people, to the non-white races all over the world was laid by the genocidal treatment of the American Indian peoples.”¹⁰³ Acknowledging a productive intellectual relationship with Indigenous radicals, Lightfoot notes that land is a question, but one that must be expressed in recognition of relations to the land “not as owners of the land but as part of it.”¹⁰⁴ More importantly for my argument regarding domestication, Lightfoot here turns toward an explicit criticism of what Karuka calls “continental imperialism”: “the locomotive pulling the train

¹⁰⁰Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, pp. 55–6.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 132–3.

¹⁰²Lightfoot, *Black America and the World Revolution*, p. 43.

¹⁰³Claude Lightfoot. *Human Rights, US Style: From Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: International Publishers, 1977, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 48.

of history forward [in North America]. . . was landgrabbing, especially for railroads and oil industries.”¹⁰⁵

Once one has accepted settler colonial dispossession as a starting point for an history of capitalism and socialism in the US, there can be no unproblematic relation to the land upon which a territorial claim to Black self-determination is made. As Lightfoot argues, the prioritization of national self-determination—both within and without the Communist Party—“as it applied to Blacks” has occluded the importance of the “genocidal treatment of Native Americans.” The upshot is that the radical projects of Black liberation and communism are fundamentally conditioned by an oft-unacknowledged “debt to the original inhabitants of this land.” This condition is, on the one hand, a limit on the legitimate scope of a politics of territory. On the other hand, this broadens emancipatory politics through Indigenous sovereignty: “Until Native Americans gain their full rights, no one in this land will ever enjoy full freedom.”¹⁰⁶

Lightfoot’s analysis opens a more nuanced analysis of the specificity of imperialism as capture and domestication. It shows the limits of any analysis of self-determination and the ‘national question’ that, in hewing too close to territoriality, risks eliding the analysis and political critique of the process of imperial capture and theft that constituted ‘territory’ in the Americas. For Lightfoot, this analysis and political critique should begin with an analysis of the unique development of US imperialism in the nineteenth century. He takes this analysis up in a chapter entitled “Racism and the Expansion Westward.” What makes this development ‘unique’ compared to European imperialism in its heyday? His answer is one now familiar in this study. It is the proximate, unique, and ‘internal’ character of empire. Whereas “the subjugation of peoples of all non-white colors throughout the world. . . took the form of colonies in faraway places. . . in the United States the oppressors and oppressed coexisted in the same geographic area.” He argues that this proximity accounts for a corre-

¹⁰⁵Lightfoot, *Human Rights, US Style: From Colonial Times to the Present*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 70.

spondingly unique intensity in colonial and racial domination, its peculiar libidinal energy, built less on indifference toward the life of the colonized and more on a continual project of counterrevolution, a knowledge that the dominated cannot be put at a distance, contained elsewhere.¹⁰⁷

Again, it is a question of how to grapple with the unique predicament of a collective entrapment, a political and economic capture. From the point of view of this debate about the territorial character of Black self-determination, a significant point in his analysis is the way he links slavery to ‘expansion’ Westward, i.e., the theft of Indigenous land. This occurs in the context of his much wider argument that “racial exploitation... the super profits obtained by Black, brown, red, and Asian peoples helped to lay the foundation for the growth of this nation into one of the most highly developed industrial nations in world history.” In other words, his starting point is that capitalism has always been colonial and racial capitalism—that slavery and colonialism facilitated the primitive accumulation of capital and facilitated the development of US capitalism in particular. In this context, he argues that the process of imperial expansion to the West was “tied in with the institution of slavery.”¹⁰⁸ The monocultural and rapid production of plantations “rapidly exhausted the soil, thus making it necessary for a constant expansion of slave states.”¹⁰⁹

Lightfoot’s discussion of the amalgam of racial oppression that underpins US capitalism in *Human Rights, US Style* is not a direct intervention in debates about Black self-determination in the US. Partly this is because the debate is, by 1977, already ‘over,’ having been won, at least politically, by critics of a territorial conception of self-determination. However, it offers an analysis of the history of US imperialism that calls into question the desirability of a politics of democratic inclusion and fulfillment. This is first of all because US ‘democracy’ has, he writes, always been supported by imperial expansion across the globe.

¹⁰⁷Lightfoot, *Human Rights, US Style: From Colonial Times to the Present*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 116.

However, more damning for Lightfoot has been the combination of democracy with racial exploitation throughout the US history, a fact that “places serious limitations on the claims that this nation in its fundamental character is a democracy.”¹¹⁰ The fundamental is key here. The processes of racial domination central to the development of US capitalism and liberalism are not, here, amenable to a kind of fulfilment through internal critique—a claim made on an attenuated universalism. As he writes, “Our whole history provides proof that reforms may be possible in our democratic structure but that they are inherently limited. And in circumstances when the masses seek solutions outside of the system of capitalism, the open dictatorial face of the capitalist class is more and more revealed.”¹¹¹ In this respect, Lightfoot remains in a similar polemical position vis-à-vis a politics of inclusion and democratic fulfilment as opposed to one based in self-determination, even if he has loosened the territorial element of the latter. Thus it is not that the US has failed to live up to its ideals; it is that it has produced problems that it cannot solve within existing spatial parameters of domestic order.

4.4 De-Domesticating Communist Critique

Self-determination appears “infinitely malleable.” This should be no surprise given that philosophically it is a right possessed by a ‘self’ that does not yet exist.¹¹² As Weitz argues, however, the ‘self’ in self-determination could all-too-easily be hardened into one set against an ‘other’ and ascribed essential and biological roots.¹¹³ In the Communist articulations of self-determination offered by Jones, Haywood, and Lightfoot avoid this. For them, the ‘self’ of self-determination – a colonized or systematically oppressed ‘nation’ – is a *political* concept. Though these thinkers hardly agreed in exact programmatic issues they all mobilized it as a dialectical critique rather than a frozen blueprint. The concept offered a *negation* of at-

¹¹⁰Lightfoot, *Human Rights, US Style: From Colonial Times to the Present*, p. 60.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 208.

¹¹²Eric D. Weitz. “Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right.” In: *The American Historical Review* 120.2 (Apr. 2015), pp. 462–496, p. 489.

¹¹³Ibid.

tempts to delimit the shape of this nation either ‘in’ or ‘out,’ and of attempts to sideline the problem of racial domination within Communist politics. In turn, it offered a *construction* of history as the making of a ‘self’ whose political demands could not be contained within the US nation-state. It became a rubric through which, to borrow a passage from Claude Lightfoot, revolutionaries could think past the “narrow limits of their battlefield” and connect their immediate problems to “the treasure house of experience gained by past struggles.”¹¹⁴

The era of decolonization offered an historical occasion for these de-domesticating maneuvers. Their iterations of the concept of domestic colonialism (in terms of an opposition between national oppression and national self-determination) were not premised on a strict analogy between colonial contexts and the United States. On the contrary, what drives each thinker’s position on self-determination is the *distinct* character of the US racial formation. However, they located this distinct character precisely in relation to the wider moment of post-war decolonization. As Lightfoot’s analysis shows, they also hinted at the limits of post-war decolonization as an emancipatory shift in global politics. This was not because it failed to bring about communism. It was because its inexorable logic as the extension of self-determination *as sovereignty* shipwrecked on the unique contradictions of the US political economy and Black populations’ place in it.

For Jones, this meant the necessity of a flexible re-iteration of self-determination as a dialectical, open concept: a guiding principle. For Haywood, this meant that *only* adherence to the possibility of territorially-understood self-determination could prevent the imperialist domestication of Black politics within US ‘national unity.’ For Lightfoot, it meant a more capacious understanding of self-determination as a non-territorial politics that linked struggles for political emancipation in the US with decolonization – both ‘here’ and ‘there.’ Precisely because all three saw insistence on territoriality as a precursor to its rejection, and thus the domestication of Black struggle to a “subsidiary” position, they end up situating *the ques-*

¹¹⁴Lightfoot, *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, p. 191.

tions of political form, principle, and program on the boundary of domestic and international politics.

Chapter 5

Domestic Colonialism, The Bandung Project, and the Colonial Limits of the Modern International

So it went: worlds were dying, worlds were being born. . . – Richard Wright¹

Now that the show is over, the Black masses are still without land, without jobs, without home. . . – Malcolm X²

In 1945 there were 51 sovereign states. By 1970, there were over 160. This was the result of a “violent, fiercely contested process that pitted imperial rulers against colonial subjects”: The proliferation of anticolonial insurgency across the planet that came to be known as ‘decolonization’.³ In the field of international relations, decolonization is typically considered a “final wave” in the globalization of international society – final because it represented the universalization of the norm of self-determination and the de-legitimation of alien rule.⁴ For

¹Richard Wright. *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!* First Edition edition. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, Feb. 2008.

²Malcolm X. “Last Answers.” In: *Malcolm X Speaks*. Ed. by George Breitman. New York: Grove, 1965, pp. 194–226.

³Dane Kennedy. *Decolonization: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 2–5.

⁴Neta C. Crawford. *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511491306; Christian Reus-Smit. *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Daniel Philpott. *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

many it is a testament to the “contagious” character of sovereignty noted by thinkers like Nicholas Onuf and John Ruggie: that once sovereignty is let out of the bag, as it were, other forms of politics have a hard time resisting displacement.⁵

The quotes above Richard Wright and Malcolm X, respectively, highlight the two poles of US Black radicals’ ambivalence about this process of decolonization. On the one hand, there was something “extra-political, extra-social” about decolonization, a transformation of the world in which Black Americans could play a key role.⁶ Malcolm X agreed with this, himself invoking decolonization and, notably, the Bandung conference as signs of an increasingly global struggle against white supremacy. But in his last writings he also noted the importance of keeping watch for the ways empire – and especially US imperialism – would survive so-called decolonization. Malcolm X, insisting on the need to “internationalize” Black movements for freedom in the US, struggled to articulate Black self-determination both within, and against, the politics of anticolonial sovereignty. If an ‘anticolonial’ Black politics offered a refusal of an attenuated liberal ‘inclusion,’ it equally could play into an emerging reconfiguration of imperial “divide-and-conquer” through postcolonial sovereignty⁷

Whether decolonization was invoked as an inspiration or as a new set of problems, it appeared less as a set of empirical historical occurrences than as a conceptual object, epistemic frame, or ongoing project. This chapter argues that theorists of domestic colonialism offered, and continue to offer, an important intervention in debates about decolonization in International Relations. Working between over-inflated optimism about decolonization as ‘worldmaking’ transformation and skeptical visions of neo-colonial capture of anticolonial states, they offered a *dialectical* reading of decolonization. This dialectical reading turned

⁵See John Gerard Ruggie. “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations.” In: *International Organization* 47.1 (1993), pp. 139–174; Nicholas Onuf. *The Republican Legacy in International Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 120.

⁶Richard Wright. *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995, p. 14.

⁷Malcolm X. “The Old Negro and the New Negro.” In: *The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches*. New York: Merlin House, 1971, pp. 118–178, p. 141.

on the universalization of self-determination. Whereas many worry that anticolonial self-determination was transformed into a politics of enclosure and nationalism ‘derivative’ of Western political form, Black internationalist readings of decolonization exposed how the language of self-determination worked as a hinge between the ‘expansion of international society’ and a set of political claims enabled by, but irresolvable in, the world this expansion made.

I unpack this through Black radical invocations of the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, and its apparent heirs (non-alignment and Tricontinentalism).⁸ The conference worked as a touchstone for Black, Asian, and Chicano radicals in the 1960s US. While divergent readings at the time of the conference typically focused on its attempted refusal of Cold War dynamics and the complex *realpolitik* at play in the conference proceedings, Black revolutionaries focused primarily on its status as the first meeting of the new states of “colored peoples” oriented by a “moral violence in international affairs.”⁹ Much-discussed in the Black press in 1950s, habitually invoked by Malcolm X in speeches in the early sixties, a focal point for debates in circles around activists like James and Grace Lee Boggs in Detroit, and working as the basis of a “New Philosophy” in the Revolutionary Action Movement, Bandung was a sign of an emerging internationalist subjectivity centred on race, one that exceeded the presumption of state sovereignty affirmed at the conference itself.

Theorists of domestic colonialism therefore offered an early, though sometimes unacknowledged, contribution to “decolonial” readings of Bandung as the creation of an “epistemic framework” and “project.”¹⁰ These readings see Bandung not as a normative shift *within* modern international order driven by the entrance of newly independent postcolonial

⁸Henceforth I follow convention and call this the Bandung Conference.

⁹Sukarno. “Speech at the Opening of the Bandung Conference, April 18, 1955.” In: *Africa-Asia Speaks from Bandung*. Djakarta: Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955, pp. 19–29.

¹⁰Vijay Prashad. “Bandung is Done: Passages in AfroAsian Epistemology.” In: *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*. Ed. by Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen. New York: NYU Press, 2006, pp. xi–xxiii; Vijay Prashad. *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*. Illustrated edition. New York: The New Press, Apr. 2008.

states, but as a refusal of incorporation into a compromised international order. For example, Pham and Shilliam argue that “Bandung redefines the very idea of international relations in terms of who constitutes the global and what constitutes the political.”¹¹ In the hands of Black radicals in the 1960s US, too, Bandung was transformed from an historical occurrence into a discursive and conceptual crowbar prying open the boundary between ‘the political’ (inside) and ‘the international’ (outside).

Here, the spread of postcolonial sovereignty was not the source of a straightforward analogy between anticolonial revolution and Black liberation, but of a renewed analysis of world affairs in terms of race. Anticolonial revolutions allowed Black radicals to re-interpret the meaning of revolution along lines that refused the domestic, but this did not imply a straightforward shift to international politics through ‘separate’ state sovereignty. Instead, it was about shifting the grammar of political membership, recasting Black radicals as “members of communities that transcended national boundaries.”¹² Therefore this chapter aims to support my wider claim in this dissertation that theorists of domestic colonialism did not draw strict analogies between either colonialism and racism, nor anticolonialism and Black freedom movements. The point was rather to diagnose the broader worldwide context in which any such analogy could be made at all, and to enable a politics of internationalism that resists capture within a picture of ‘the international’ as a world divided into structurally similar domestic communities.

I argue that Black internationalism here – and specifically, the Revolutionary Action Movement, indexes the transformation of a set of historical occurrences into a conceptual apparatus, or a set of theoretical and political problems. The concept of domestic colonialism works as a hinge between a language of self-determination indexed to the sovereign state and the emergence of a form of internationalist politics that resists domestic containment. Black

¹¹Quynh Pham and Robbie Shilliam. “Reviving Bandung.” In: *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders, Decolonial Visions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. 3–20, p. 16.

¹²Judy Tzu-Chun Wu. *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era*. 1 edition. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, May 2013, p. 2.

radicals' revolutionary enthusiasm shifted the subject of self-determination from 'peoples' to a 'Black' subjectivity that linked decolonization situations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with Black struggles in the United States. While individual nations might attain independence in post-war international order, this emergent subjectivity – this 'we' united against racial and colonial hierarchy in international affairs – leveraged the constrained predicament of Black Americans to articulate dissatisfaction with this form of international order.

Black internationalists actively aimed to translate Bandung into a way of thinking and acting, a "Bandung Humanism." This humanism was not premised on an exact *analogy* between anticolonial self-determination and Black liberation in the US, but on an understanding of the linkage between diverse sites of anti-imperial action. It is a form of "anti-colonial connectivity," a way of "cultivating knowledge 'sideways' so as to inform a decolonial project."¹³

Indeed, "Bandung as politics" – rather than historical event or spiritual project – aims to understand the domestication of politics through the globalization of the sovereign state *as* a reconfiguration of colonial power rather than its demise. The problem is how to theorize the linkages between apparently divergent and disparate sites of struggle against empire and colonialism. Bandung humanism is one attempt to cultivate "relatable hinterlands," affective and epistemic connections between "differentially situated" subject positions nonetheless linked by their common roots in coloniality, such as "native" and "slave."¹⁴ Black internationalism offered a set of practices and relations through which revolutionaries diagnosed the continuities of colonialism in terms of the containment and siloing of anticolonial and antiracist struggle.

Their thinking on this issue offers not only a critique of this international situation in line with contemporary postcolonial criticism, but adds an important critique of a basic presumption of 'international' theory: an internally ordered and stably bounded 'domestic' sphere.

¹³Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*, p. 3.

¹⁴Shilliam, "Colonial Architecture or Relatable Hinterlands? Locke, Nandy, Fanon, and the Bandung Spirit," pp. 425–7.

By reading their ostensibly ‘internal’ struggles for equality as part of a worldwide struggle on behalf of a subject that has no clear linkage with any given or anticipated sovereignty, “American anticolonialisms” exposed how the international was present in the ‘domestic.’¹⁵ A reading of how invocations of decolonization exposed a transnational racialized subject enables, in turn, a consideration of how these Black internationalisms transformed the ‘domestic’ from an assumed or given premise of international theory into a (indeed, *the*) site of political contestation and struggle. They thus point to the limits of the distinction between the domestic and the international, not by pointing to some ‘globalizing’ phenomenon that transgresses or surpasses it, but by explicitly raising it as the very site for contests about the shape and location of politics as such.

In sum, my main argument in this chapter is that the domestic colony concept can be reconstructed as a dialectical critique of the modern international. By “the modern international” I mean the historical and theoretical solution of the problem of political oneness and manyness – universality and particularity – through the containment of politics within sovereign states, linked and buttressed by a system or society of states.¹⁶ This critique is dialectical because it argues that, on the one hand, the expansion of the international system through decolonization crucially contains (literally and ideologically) anticolonial politics, while on the other hand fomenting connections that attempt to overcome this containment. The predicament of Black Americans as diagnosed by Black revolutionary internationalists ratcheted up this dynamic, disclosing how the world order constructed in and through decolonization produced internationalist subjects whose claims could not be answered within it. While some have argued that the difficulty of integrating or realizing demands for Black self-determination within the international system is a sign of the quixotic character of those

¹⁵Watkins, *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities*, Watkins uses the term “American anticolonialisms” to describe Black, ‘yellow,’ and ‘red’ claims for power in the US..

¹⁶Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*; Jens Bartelson. *A genealogy of Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney. *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*. 1 edition. New York: Routledge, Dec. 2004.

demands,¹⁷ a dialectical reading sees them as a practical exposition of the limits of that system.

5.1 Decolonization and International Political Thought: the Case of Bandung

The Bandung Conference was a continuation of previous meetings – such as the League Against Imperialism (1927), the Manchester Conference (1945), and the Colombo Conference (1954) answering the need for persistent diplomatic engagement between peoples either formerly or still subject to colonialism. In turn, “like a big bang,” Bandung is said to have inaugurated a tradition of non-alignment and anticolonialism in international politics and culture – a “Bandung Constellation.”¹⁸ Indonesian president Sukarno offered a statement of the sensibility that would govern this ‘constellation’ long after the conference:

“Yes, there has indeed been a ‘Sturm uber Asien’ – and over Africa too. The last few years have seen enormous changes. Nations, States, have awoken from a sleep of centuries. The passive peoples have gone, the outward tranquility has made place for struggle and activity... The mental, spiritual, and political face of the whole world has been changed, and the process is still not complete. There are new conditions, new concepts, new problems, new ideals abroad in the world. Hurricanes of national awakening and reawakening have swept over the land, shaking it, changing it, changing it for the better.”¹⁹

This “first intercontinental meeting of the colored peoples of the world” offered an indication of a growing coalition of newly independent states. It brought together leaders from

¹⁷See, for example, Klug, “‘What Then, of the Land?’: Territoriality, International Law, and the Republic of New Afrika.”

¹⁸Darwis Khudori. “The Bandung Conference and its Constellation.” In: *Bandung Legacy and Global Future: New Insights and Emerging Forces*. New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2018, pp. 1–20, p. 2.

¹⁹Sukarno, “Speech at the Opening of the Bandung Conference, April 18, 1955.”

Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to provide collective support and solidarity against the use of the ‘Third World’ as a terrain for Cold War battles. A key sign of the ‘non-aligned’ character of the Bandung Conference was the contest over *whose* colonialism they would condemn – a contest that ended in the denunciation of “colonialism in all its manifestations” rather than an explicit mention of ‘Eastern’ Soviet imperialism.²⁰

When the conference occurred it was covered in the Black press extensively.²¹ But it loomed especially large, not just as an occurrence, but as an *idea*, among Black radicals in the 1960s. Jack O’Dell, a key theorist of domestic colonialism, invoked it as one event in a wider prism including the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Congress of the People in South Africa.²² In *Inner City Voice*, a Detroit radical paper, James Boggs argued that “a new International for the world Black revolution. . . has been in the process of birth ever since the Bandung conference. His essay suggests that this was not only a movement *toward* internationalism from domestic politics but an opening of the question of just who comprises “the international.”²³ As Stephen Ward notes, Boggs “saw in this rising Third World, with its nationalist ferment and Bandung style of non-alignment, a political creativity with the potential to reconfigure global politics and fashion revolutionary change in the world order.”²⁴ Detroit activist General Baker remembers, in a 2014 interview, repeated discussions of Bandung and its implications among radicals, and how it worked as a focal point in discussions of alliances and solidarities across borders and identities.²⁵ Bandung, throughout these discussions, worked as an ideological foothold for a flexible anti-imperialist internationalism.

²⁰Christopher J Lee. “At the Rendezvous of Decolonization: The Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, 18-24 April.” In: *Interventions* 11.1 (2009), pp. 81–93.

²¹Munro, *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonization, 1945-1960*.

²²O’Dell, “A Colonized People.”

²³Mullen, *Afro Orientalism*, p. 99.

²⁴Stephen M Ward. *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, p. 202.

²⁵Charles Ferrell. *A Tribute to General Baker*. In collab. with General Baker. Oct. 11, 2014. URL: <https://www.theblackscholar.org/a-tribute-to-william-bill-watkins-by-w-f-santiago-valles/> (visited on 04/20/2022).

These worked in the shadow of Richard Wright's famous 'report' on the Bandung Conference in *The Color Curtain*, where he argued that the conference represented a shift in the fulcrums of world politics from class to "race and religion."²⁶ I will discuss these engagements further below, I want to situate them, first, in readings of Bandung not as an event *in* world politics but a framework through which events in world politics can be reread.

More specifically, a growing literature sees Bandung as the beginning of a decolonial *project* in IR, one whose endurance is a symptom of the continued, but more protean, existence of imperial and colonial forms of power beyond the decolonizing era. As Mustapha Kamal Pasha puts it, "Bandung... encodes decolonial possibilities" that exceed "the assumption of decolonizing moments under civilizing tropes of either the 'expansion of international society,' or state-building and democratization."²⁷ Its enduring significance lies in the "feeling of political possibility presented through this first occasion of 'Third World' solidarity."²⁸ This possibility is linked to the resistance it presented, even if in a 'Bourgeois' or 'nationalist' valence, to accounts of anticolonial politics as a repetition of Western modernization: "decoloniality has its grounding in the Bandung Conference of 1955... a delinking from two major Western macro-narratives."²⁹ Bandung is here much more than an historical event, and not least one that can be incorporated clearly into an inexorable spread of Western sovereignty.

Instead, 'Bandung' becomes a vantage from which one can know, sense, and become otherwise: not an object of knowledge but a source for alternative orders of political knowledge. It is a source for a way of seeing and knowing international politics anew: "a global political imaginary in the making," one that exceeds the 'global' as currently conceived, a "new universalism" that undoes the false pretence of Eurocentrism, or an oppositional poli-

²⁶Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, pp. 127–155.

²⁷Mustapha Kamal Pasha. "The 'Bandung Impulse' and International Relations." In: *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 144–165, p. 145.

²⁸Lee, "Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung."

²⁹Walter D. Mignolo. "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (de)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience." In: *Confero* 1.1 (2013), pp. 129–150, pp. 130–1.

tics of anti-imperialism.³⁰ It is the source of a “Bandung Humanism” that remains effective as a normative ground in Afro-Asian cultural exchange, political solidarity, and economic interdependence.³¹

Thus Bandung is read not as an event, but as a political and epistemic *project* orienting an emerging anticolonial, collective subjectivity.³² As a recent collection of scholars in *Third World Approaches to International Law* argues, Bandung crystallizes “the longer, open-ended project to deconstitute and reconstitute order in the world. . . through post-imperial forms of governance.”³³ As Dilip Menon argues, “Bandung is back,” not as an object of archival or historical study but as

“A condensation of many aspirations: Afro-Asian solidarity, the idea of decoloniality, and the possibility of new alignments in the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of what those who do international relations have called a unipolar world.”³⁴

As condensation of aspirations – a ‘summing up’ of a set of divergent experiences and attempts to exit colonial relations of power – the event is read as something more than the events themselves. Instead it is an “ideological force embodied by but not limited to the meeting of 1955, a right and proper subject of contemporary political engagement as well as

³⁰On these readings, see respectively Himadeep Muppidi. “Elements of Bandung.” In: *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders, Decolonial Visions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. 23–36, p. 34; Siba Grovogui. “A Revolution Nonetheless: the Global South in International Relations.” In: *The Global South* 5.1 (2011), pp. 175–190; B.S. Chimni. “Third World Approaches to International Law: a Manifesto.” In: *International Community Law Review* 8 (2006), pp. 3–27; Makau Mutua. “What is TWAIL?.” In: *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law* 94 (2000), pp. 31–40.

³¹Hong Liu and Taomo Zhou. “Bandung Humanism and a New Understanding of the Global South.” In: *Critical Asian Studies* 51.2 (2019), pp. 141–143.

³²Prashad, *The Darker Nations*; Grovogui, “A Revolution Nonetheless: the Global South in International Relations.”

³³Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiah, eds. *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures*. New York: Cambridge University Press, Nov. 2017, p. 11.

³⁴Dilip M. Menon. “Bandung is Back: Afro-Asian Affinities.” In: *Radical History Review* 119 (Spring 2014), pp. 241–245.

of history.”³⁵

As “ideological force” it becomes not an historical event but a principle of historical interpretation. The Bandung “spirit” (a term coined by Roeslan Abulgani in his report on the conference) runs through the Non-Aligned Movement (1962, Belgrade), the Tricontinental Conference (1966, Havana), the NIEO (1973, Algiers), and even the World Social Forum (2001, Porto Allegre).³⁶ These movements unite the 1950s-1970s as a “Bandung era,” for some.³⁷ Even dramatic shifts in ideology and practice, such as those toward socialism from non-alignment and toward armed struggle from peaceful coexistence, can be read as shifts *within* this single movement rather than shifts *between* different projects.

Here historians re-emerge, ready with archival pins for over-inflated speculations about the Bandung spirit. Robert Vitalis, most notoriously, has pointed out glaring historical mistakes, such as placing Tito and Nkrumah at the conference, even though they were tied up elsewhere.³⁸ This, he argues, is rooted in a deep desire to locate thick continuities between decolonization in Ghana, Bandung, and the Non-Aligned Movement’s beginnings in 1962.³⁹ Analysts of the foreign policy of individual attendees have, in turn, shown that Bandung, the NAM, and the NIEO were linked to drastic shifts in foreign policy agendas and ideological orientations in these countries, especially India.⁴⁰ Further, some have noted that race was

³⁵Antoinette Burton, Augusto Espiritu, and Fanon Che Wilkins. “The Fate of Nationalisms in the Age of Bandung.” In: *Radical History Review* 95 (2006), pp. 145–8.

³⁶Prashad, *The Darker Nations*; Robert J. C. Young. “Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental.” In: *Historiein* 5 (May 2006), p. 11; Anne Garland Mahler. *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, May 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8223-7114-4; Michael Hardt. “Today’s Bandung?” In: *New Left Review* 14 (Mar-Apr 2002 2002), pp. 112–118.

³⁷Bret Benjamin. “Bookend to Bandung: The New International Economic Order and the Antinomies of the Bandung Era.” In: *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6.1 (2015), pp. 33–46.

³⁸Robert Vitalis. “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-Doong).” In: *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4.2 (2013), pp. 261–288.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Itty Abraham. “From Bandung to NAM: Non-Alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–65.” In: *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46.2 (Apr. 2008), pp. 195–219. ISSN: 1466-2043, 1743-9094. DOI: 10.1080/14662040801990280. URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14662040801990280> (visited on 08/17/2020).

not as important at the conference as it appears from later reflections, excepting Philippines president Carlos Romulos's speech.⁴¹

This stark opposition between spiritual inflation and historical deflation is a symptom of the fact that Bandung is an historical event that raises the question of the very relationship between theory and history. Contemporary discourses on Bandung show that the question is not whether or not Bandung or its consequences can be historically and directly tied to future emancipatory movements, but rather the relationship between historicity and theory, or the status of history as a ground of political and philosophical critique. At stake in working through this problem is the possibility of a turn to anticolonial internationalism that avoids what Pasha calls postcolonial critique as "spectacle, not politics."⁴² At stake here is a political-philosophical problem of how an event can be turned into a project – what bridges the gap between "Bandung as history" and "Bandung as politics"?⁴³

Aida Hozic, in her reply to Vitalis, partly confirms the historians' criticisms, noting key mistakes in the post-2005 Bandung literature. She claims that these historical falsities are "symptoms of aspirations": "although objectively unfounded, they are constitutive—they generate their own realities."⁴⁴ Narendran Kumarakulasingam agrees, noting that while "shoddy historiography... leads to incorrect assessments about ideological coherence and unity, which then result in an overstatement of the significance of Bandung," the very meaning of historicity – the relation between history and theory – is at stake in any reading of these events. Mis-memories and forgettings of Bandung as 'spirit' pose the question of whether "the historical does not exhaust all worlds for us."⁴⁵ In my view, neither of these replies

⁴¹Vitalis, "The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-Doong)."

⁴²Mustapha Kamal Pasha. "The Bandung Within." In: *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders, Decolonial Visions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. 201–209, p. 205.

⁴³On this opposition between history and politics see Antonia Finnane. "Bandung as History." In: *Bandung 1955: Little Histories*. Ed. by Antonia Finnane and Derek McDougall. Caulfield: Monash University Press, 2010, pp. 1–8; Derek McDougall. "Bandung as Politics." In: *Bandung 1955: Little Histories*. Ed. by Antonia Finnane and Derek McDougall. Caulfield: Monash University Press, 2010, pp. 131–140.

⁴⁴Aida Hozic. "False Memories, Real Political Imaginaries: Jovanka Broz in Bandung." In: *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders, Decolonial Visions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. 95–100, p. 99.

⁴⁵Narendran Kumarakulasingam. "De-Islandind." In: *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders, Decolo-*

fully answers the historical critique. However, neither do they merely reaffirm the ‘spirit’ against the history; rather, they necessitate a genealogical re-opening of history that would read Bandung not as providential beginning of non-alignment, nor as recapture of anticolonial politics within Western international order, but sign of blocked possibility. It is a sign, here, of the blockages and “campaigns of pacification” that limited the Bandung project over the course of the twentieth century.”⁴⁶ Bandung crystallizes the containment of decolonial projects within the Westphalian state. Nevertheless it – precisely as a moment many see as the apogee of anticolonial sovereignty or the usual alternative of humanitarian universalism – is linked to a refusal of this containment, a refusal that lives on as a theoretical and practical problem for the present.⁴⁷ It bespeaks the problem of “forg[ing] alternative visions of the world while operating with colonial space.”⁴⁸ It opens the question of what would constitute a “way out,” an escape from the containments of ‘the international.’

In this respect Bandung is not the name of a ‘spirit,’ or a ‘project’ but a *problem*: that of escaping the re-capture of anticolonial politics *in and through* sovereignty. Tim Vasko, on this note, argues that the moment of Bandung represents a key instance in which the “double bind” of decolonization is on display, where authoritative discourses in international law had “articulated the sovereign nation-state as *the* enabling constraint of visions of African postcolonial self-determination and sovereignty in the post-war rearrangements of colonial and neocolonial power.”⁴⁹ Seen in this light, the ‘mistakes’ and over-optimism of current revivals of Bandung as decolonial ‘spirit’ are not just ‘symptoms of aspirations’ but attempts to think through and past the limits of the international order against which Bandung pushed (unsuccessfully).

The problem is one of *refusal*, of locating political forms, political knowledge, and po-

nial Visions. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. 51–60, pp. 51–2.

⁴⁶Pasha, “The Bandung Within,” p. 201.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 202.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 202.

⁴⁹Vasko, “‘But for God’s Sake, Let’s Decolonize!': Self-Determination and Sovereignty and/as the Limits of the Anticolonial Archives,” p. 190.

litical possibilities that exceed the domestic/international containment of politics. Richard Wright put his finger on this in his notion that the conference represented something “extra-political, extra-social”: “de-occidentalization.”⁵⁰ Years later, Mignolo affirms this reading, arguing that Bandung was a key moment in which the problem of “dewesternization,” of exiting and moving beyond Western political form and its indebtedness of colonial power, was “materialized.”⁵¹ By dewesternization and deoccidentalization these thinkers mean basically this: “you do not accept the options that are available to you... that is the legacy of the Bandung Conference.”⁵² This is a reading of Bandung as neither reducible to its historical occurrence (and post-colonial disappointment) nor as a “spirit” or “spectacle,” but very precisely as an orientation to politics that reads these two poles dialectically. It is not a matter of choosing between the deflation of history or the inflation of spiritualization. Instead, Bandung becomes a sign for the inability of the constellation of sovereignty and the international system to do justice to political imaginations that the ‘expansion of international society’ makes possible.

5.2 Bandung among “The Colonized of North America”

Black internationalist invocations of Bandung are an early encounter with this problem of refusal. This reading highlights the nature of Bandung’s enduring “normative relevance”⁵³ as inhering less in its positive principles than in its posing of a problem: namely, the domestication and containment of anticolonial politics within the nation-state. What I will call their *revolutionary enthusiasm* bridged the gap between the events themselves and the transforma-

⁵⁰Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, p. 203.

⁵¹Mignolo, “Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (de)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience,” p. 143.

⁵²Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018, p. 135.

⁵³This terminology is from See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya. “The Normative Relevance of Bandung Conference for Contemporary Asian and International Order.” In: *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008, pp. 1–18.

tion of Bandung into a problematization. This term enthusiasm should not be mistaken for optimism or naivete. Gayle Plummer, in her history of connections between Black freedom movements and decolonization after 1955, argues that a near-universal convergence on the nation-state as the necessary container for politics was a key feature of this era.⁵⁴ She argues that this moment offered to Black internationalists either incorporation into the US state or a basically quixotic quest for a sovereign state. Suggestively, however, she notes that this is not a problem with the Black movements ensnared in this logic, but with the wider limits imposed on political form. She “wonders whether an essential problem lies in the nation-state form itself.”⁵⁵

If one looks at the empirical involvement of African-Americans in the Bandung Conference itself, one finds, on this note, a story of containment, capture, and stark limits placed on internationalist politics. Penny Von Eschen has noted the “conspicuous” absence of towering intellectuals who sought to attend, such as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois. Both were denied passports, at once a punishment for ‘communist sympathies’ and a guard against those who would expose US hypocrisy on issues of racial equality.⁵⁶ Du Bois raised precisely this issue in his memorandum on the Bandung Conference:

“Every effort has been made by the U.S.A. to conceal the facts concerning Negro prejudice and discrimination here. . . . No Negro who is liable to tell the truth about American Negroes has recently been allowed to travel abroad, while Negroes willing to concede or distort facts are permitted to travel and often have their way paid.”⁵⁷

Thus one of the immediate meanings of the Bandung Conference was that it highlighted

⁵⁴Plummer, *In Search of Power*, p. 19.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁶Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, p. 107.

⁵⁷See W.E.B. Du Bois, Memorandum on the Bandung Conference. Accessed at <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b144-i346>. See also Jones (Matthew Jones. “A ‘Segregated’ Asia?: Race, The Bandung Conference, and Pan-Asianist Fears in American Thought and Policy, 1954-1955.” In: *Diplomatic History* 29.5 [2005], pp. 841–868)

the stark constraints on the movement of Black Americans, and especially ones involved in radical movements and struggles. Claudia Jones (discussed in the previous chapter) was in the process of being deported by the US. The Bandung Conference, as a mobilization against white supremacy and racial hierarchy in international affairs, raised “the US government’s treatment of Jones [as] yet another example of white supremacist reaction, displayed for all the world to see.”⁵⁸

This is all to say that Black internationalists and revolutionaries were well aware of the limits imposed not only by the United States, but the wider international situation (of the ‘Cold War’) on their movement, speech, and capacity to organize. However, much as the ‘failures’ of Bandung generate desires to make it into something more than its historical occurrence, for Black internationalists facing a dire predicament, Bandung galvanized the possibility of a de-domesticated, uncontained form of antiracist and anticolonial politics. In the 1950s it served as a “major impetus to the new wave of internationally minded struggle within the African American community,” a struggle that used the language of self-determination, but in ways irreducible to conventional expectations of anticolonial nationalism and post-colonial sovereignty.⁵⁹ As Rod Bush argues, the “spirit” of Bandung “complicated the US effort to manage an international system that was increasingly shaped by a politics of race and anticolonialism.”⁶⁰

While critics rightly note that Bandung was primarily an expression of the triumph of anticolonial self-determination as expressed through postcolonial state sovereignty, in the stretching of Bandung from historical event to problem of refusal it becomes the sign of an emerging subject dissatisfied with this triumph. This subject was defined along racial lines, though race here was not a biological or essential characteristic but a political affiliation constituted in opposition to white supremacy in international politics, a fragile but galvanizing

⁵⁸Munro, *The Anticolonial Front: The African American Freedom Struggle and Global Decolonization, 1945-1960*, p. 215.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁶⁰Bush, *The End of White World Supremacy*, p. 192.

unity. Malcolm X outlined this emerging subjectivity in “Message to the Grassroots”

“In Bandung... was the first unity meeting in centuries of Black people... there were dark nations from Africa and Asia... Despite their economic and political differences, they came together. All of them were Black, brown, red, and yellow. The number-one thing that was not allowed to attend the Bandung conference was the white man... Once they had excluded the white man, they found that they could get together... they had unity.”⁶¹

Bandung was a sign of a “Black revolution... worldwide in scope” and aiming at “land” and “nation” as its primary goals.⁶² In turn, he reads the repression faced by integrationists and revolutionaries alike as a product of white fears about this worldwide revolution playing out in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.⁶³

Despite the obvious (analytical) benefits of refusing the limitations of a liberal politics of inclusion within a racist society, this turn to land and nation was no doubt plagued by difficulties: how would land be redistributed (and what of Indigenous peoples)? Where exactly would this new nation be? Critics of Malcolm X repeatedly argued that he was engaging in “reverse racism” and demanding a new form of segregation. And indeed, when he clarified the “political philosophy of Black nationalism” in “The Ballot or the Bullet,” it appeared not as the creation of a territorial state but as the reorientation of struggles around the language of self-determination, where he reads segregation, properly speaking, as a form of colonial power in which one is separated but nonetheless governed by the community that excludes. As he puts it, “A segregated district or community is a community in which people live, but outsiders control the politics and economy of that community.”⁶⁴ Black nationalism is a

⁶¹Malcolm X, “Message to the Grassroots,” p. 5.

⁶²Ibid., p. 10.

⁶³Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁴Malcolm X. “The Ballot or the Bullet.” In: *Malcolm X Speaks*. Ed. by George Breitman. New York: Grove, 1965, pp. 23–44, p. 42.

“re-educat[ion] into the science of politics” that rereads politics as a whole in terms of this capacity and incapacity of self-determination.⁶⁵

The invocation of Bandung as a “unity meeting” of racialized peoples across the Third World provides a sort of supplement or aid to this attempt to exit – philosophically and politically – the claustrophobic conditions under which one might imagine a ‘separatist’ politics of anticolonial and antiracist self-determination in North America. It offered, to borrow from Ines Valdez’s reading of Du Bois’s internationalism, a sign that de-linking and “self-segregating” movements lead not to isolation and separation but may offer “the awakening of a transnational consciousness, the ability to escape for a moment destructive forms of identification offered by the American polity and to reenvision the political struggle against racial [in]justice from a transnational perspective.”⁶⁶ Re-imagining Black people in the US as a domestic colony was not a straightforward transplantation of a politics of anticolonial sovereignty but an articulation of Black populations in the US as members of an internationalist subjectivity. In other words, the domestic colony thesis – that “America. . . has colonized 22 million Afro-Americans” who suffer, alongside the Third World, from “Americanism”⁶⁷ – offers an exit from the choices on offer by the politics of domestication: domesticating incorporation within the racial state and ‘separatism’ modelled on the expansion of international society. It articulates a political subject working against this way of drawing the domestic/international distinction.

At stake here is the emergence of a new ‘we’ “exiting the confined terms of engagement of their domestic polities.”⁶⁸ The next section is devoted to unpacking the importance of this subject as the ground for a critique of domestication in international relations. If, as Feldman cogently argues, participants in debates about and within the ‘Third World Left’ in the United

⁶⁵Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” p. 38.

⁶⁶Ines Valdez. *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 141.

⁶⁷Malcolm X, “The Black Revolution,” p. 50; Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” p. 26.

⁶⁸Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft*.

States “believed that a properly dialectical understanding of the history of Black Liberation in America would allow them to identify the surest source of radical, emancipatory subjectivity,” invocations of Bandung serviced one such dialectical understanding.⁶⁹ The ‘dialectical’ character of this understanding resided in how “the shared heritage of a past and ongoing insult” – racial oppression, colonialism, imperialism – serves “a diagnostic function, upon which a politics of emancipation can be founded.”⁷⁰ This explicitly political understanding of race thus works as a hinge from a common experience of injustice and the forging of an internationalist answer to that injustice in the form of a transnational ‘Black’ subject.

I write ‘Black’ in quotes here because one of the key features of this dialectical understanding of race as political “subjectivation” was the way the ‘Black’ in Black internationalism stood in for a multi-racial, anti-imperialist subject. In this conception, race is something flexible, articulated politically as an what Chela Sandoval, in her discussion of Third Worldist feminism in the US, terms “oppositional consciousness.”⁷¹ The importance of the Bandung Conference among Black radicals in the US was part of a sense that “Afro-Asian affiliation. . . present[s] a dialectical and synthetic model of transraciality that abolishes comfortable and discreet categories of ‘racial,’ ‘ethnic,’ or even ‘disciplinary’ modeling.”⁷² To be domestically colonized was not just to be a distinctly colonized ‘people’ but to be propelled toward coalition with other ‘Black’ subjects. In this de-essentialization of race, “[color] . . . emerges as not so much a genotypic marker as a badge of political affiliation.” In her reading of Tri-continentalism – an “extension into the Americas of the well-known Afro-Asian movement begun at the 1955 Bandung conference” – Anne Garland Mahler argues that the binary between “white and color” was not “racially deterministic.”⁷³ It was instead a “‘metonymic

⁶⁹Benjamin Feldman. “Liberation from the Affluent Society: The Political Thought of the Third World Left in Post-War America.” PhD thesis. Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2020, p. 120.

⁷⁰Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft*.

⁷¹Chela Sandoval. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

⁷²Bill V. Mullen. “Persisting Solidarities: Tracing the AfroAsian Thread in U.S. Literature and Culture.” In: *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*. New York: NYU Press, 2006, pp. 245–259.

⁷³Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, p. 4.

color politics,' [in which] the image of a white policeman metonymically stands in for global empire, and conversely, the image of an African American protestor signifies [a] global and transracial resistant subjectivity."⁷⁴

This invocation of a transnational anti-imperial subject explicitly rejects visions of political subjectivity as "forged through a social contact provided by the state or through a narrow definition of class or race."⁷⁵ This pushed against the persistent attempt to 'domesticate race' through readings of antiracist rebellions in terms of so-called 'race relations.' Instead, the "Jim Crow racial divide functions as a metonym. . . . for a Tricontinental power struggle in which all radical, exploited peoples, regardless of their skin color, are implicated."⁷⁶

This means that if 'color' is prioritized through invocations of Bandung, it is as a dialectical hinge or hold that might extend politics from domestic confinement to the "politicization of the Third World as subject."⁷⁷ Articulations of a politics of self-determination through comparisons and linkages with anticolonial self-determination push that language to its limit, mobilizing not for self-determination in the sovereign state but in an emergent 'self' that exceeds containment within domestic politics. This is especially clear in the writings of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). In these writings, they clearly link the domestic colonial analytic to membership in an internationalist community working against US imperialism.

In an essay in the Revolutionary Action Movement's organ *Black America*, Stanley Daniels positioned a politics of self-determination as a refusal of both integration and separation. True integration and true separation, he writes, would necessitate the destruction of the US, insofar as the latter is premised precisely on the imposed Blackmail between these options. Either would rob the US of "the Afro-American colony" and mean "the collapse of the system." As

⁷⁴Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, p. 4; See also, on this, Cynthia A. Young. *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 26.

⁷⁵Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, p. 11.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁷Anuja Bose. "Frantz Fanon and the Politicization of the Third World as a Collective Subject." In: *Interventions* 21 (2019), pp. 671–689.

he puts it,

“After analyzing carefully and honestly the colonial condition of the Afro-American population we have to admit that neither separation nor integration is the issue in the Black movement. We cannot do either until we first attain a state of economic, political, and social independence. The course for Afro-America now is Self-Determination.”⁷⁸

But what is self-determination if not either incorporation or separation? For RAM this self-determination was inseparable from the transformation of Black populations from an internal minority to members of a planetary majority. As Donald Freeman puts it in “The Colonial Revolution and Black America”:

“The Afroamerican falsely considers himself to be minority. We are not a minority; we are that segment of the majority of the world population that lies within the belly of a white oppressor, the ruling class of the United States... it should be clear that we have a common bond with these Asians, Africans, and South Americans.”⁷⁹

Self-determination implies not containment but a kind of “anti-colonial connectivity.” Robbie Shilliam, Alina Sajed, and Pham and Mendez argue in their own ways that anti-colonial connectivity describes how imaginative and empirical linkages between anticolonial movements enables the creation of knowledge not beholden to any imperial centre – in this case, the United States.⁸⁰ As Vijay Prashad argues, Bandung worked for many radicals across

⁷⁸Stanley Daniels. “What Course for Black Americans: Separation or Integration? Part II.” in: *Black America* 5/6 (Sep/Oct 1963), pp. 8–9, p. 8.

⁷⁹Donald Freeman. “The Colonial Revolution and Black America.” In: *Black America* 5/6 (Sep/Oct 1963), p. 4, p. 4.

⁸⁰See Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*; Alina Sajed. “Insurrectional Politics in Colonial Southeast Asia: Colonial Modernity, Islamic ‘Counterplots,’ and Translocal (Anti-Colonial) Connectivity.” In: *Globalizations* 12 (2015), pp. 899–912; Sajed, “Re-remembering Third Worldism: an Affirmative Critique of National Liberation in Algeria.”

the globe as an “epistemic framework.”⁸¹ It was a conduit for attempts to “cultivate knowledge sideways” through travel, the international press, and imaginations of other locales.

RAM’s work is consistent with this analysis. They offered a new form of knowledge: “Bandung Humanism.” In the wake of the Watts rebellion in 1965 – which had showed that “we are still slaves, i.e., colonial subjects, not citizens denied our rights”⁸² – the Revolutionary Action movement argued that that rebellion was linked to anticolonial revolutions across the globe, if not in aims then at least in that both are stoked by the same “system” – the “system of capitalism of slavery of us... [even] after a hundred years of so-called freedom.”⁸³ Key here is that RAM is focused on the attenuations of political emancipation – whether as equality ‘within’ (inclusion) or equality ‘without’ (political independence). US imperialism – “Yanqui Imperialism” – has its guise in the policeman’s baton, the factory boss, and colonial occupation. This common system, appearing in disparate ways, links Black Americans with “our bandung blood brothers (Asia, Africa, and Latin America)” – note the shift to Latin America, unrepresented at Bandung.⁸⁴ The “colonized of North America” were not *analogous to* but *linked with* revolutionaries elsewhere.⁸⁵

This analysis pushed most explicitly against those left perspectives that emphasized class above all else.⁸⁶ They argued instead that an anti-imperialist analysis of the wider world situation should be oriented around race as inextricable from economic exploitation and domination. As they argued in “The African War of National Liberation,” “the historical reality is that the ‘sub-proletariat,’ not the proletariat, have created revolutions, are leaders of the world revolution, vanguard and dictatorship of the new world. The nature of the world revolution will be drawn on racial lines by the very nature of history.”⁸⁷ This shift in analytic, for them, was

⁸¹Prashad, “Bandung is Done: Passages in AfroAsian Epistemology.”

⁸²Cited in Mullen, *Afro Orientalism*, p. 89.

⁸³Revolutionary Action Movement. “The African American War of National Liberation.” In: *Black America* Summer-Fall (1965), pp. 3–4, 12–18, p. 3.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁵Freeman, “The Colonized of North America: a Review-Essay of Fanon’s Studies in a Dying Colonialism.”

⁸⁶On this aspect of RAM see especially Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 77, and *passim*.

⁸⁷Revolutionary Action Movement, “The African American War of National Liberation,” p. 4.

wedded to a view Eastward, to anticolonial and socialist revolution in Asia:

“The contradiction the African-American must face is that he must tear down the very society he built but was not allowed to participate in...the African-American must now choose between the materialism of the west and the humanism of the east.”⁸⁸

Still RAM did not abandon either a dialectical or a materialist analysis – even if they did explicitly reject overly rigid impositions of historical materialism as implicated in this “materialism of the west.”⁸⁹

Indeed, the humanism of the East was symbolized in a Bandung Humanism that was explicitly dialectical. As they write, Bandung Humanism “constitutes a revolutionary revision of Western or traditional Marxism to relate revolutionary ideology adequately to the... developments occurring in the post-World War II era.”⁹⁰ This marked not an abandonment of a dialectical analysis, but a shift in the fundamental contradictions of global capitalism after World War II: “the principle contradiction in the world is between imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism, and the colonies.”⁹¹ This was a dialectical contradiction insofar as the rapid economic development in the United States, facilitated through, for RAM, the expansion of US imperialism, also had created a massive Black underclass who – whether they wanted to or not – *could not* be absorbed by the system.⁹²

While invoking Bandung, they departed from its practice and ideology. First, they explicitly rejected the “neutralism” and non-alignment insisted upon in 1955; now Bandung symbolizes the “goal of... the international eradication of ‘Yanqui’ (US and Nato) impe-

⁸⁸Revolutionary Action Movement, “The African American War of National Liberation,” p. 4.

⁸⁹Revolutionary Action Movement, “Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution.”

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 11.

⁹¹Revolutionary Action Movement. “World Black Revolution (1966).” In: *Viewpoint Magazine* (Dec. 29, 2017). URL: viewpointmag.com/2017/12/29/world-black-revolution-1966/ (visited on 09/10/2021).

⁹²I analyze this line of argument more closely in chapter six through James Boggs’s work.

rialism” and a refusal of “integration within this decadent imperialist framework.”⁹³ Bandung’s refusal of Western form is kept, while its politics is shifted from non-alignment to an explicitly oppositional anti-imperialism that links anti-imperialism in the Third World with revolutionary action in the US. Indeed, it places Black Americans at the centre of this world movement, given “their four hundred year endurance. . . and their strategic domestic bondage in [America’s] ‘belly.’ ”⁹⁴

This shift away from ‘neutrality’ enables a de-domestication of ‘anticolonial’ struggle in the US. Invocations of Bandung as a movement of solidarity between African and Asian nations work to unpack Black ‘nationalism’ as “really internationalism.”⁹⁵ It expands the domestic colonialism thesis away from analogy and toward anti-imperial linkage. Indeed, they argue that an analogical “revolution *in* in the Black community” belongs more properly to “bourgeois nationalism,” which is doubly contained as ‘within’ the US and ‘within’ capitalism.⁹⁶ Indeed, the ‘within’ of the US is by no means its ostensible domestic boundaries, because it “operates internationally as a wing of Western imperialism oppressing the Bandung or non-white world.”⁹⁷

Instead, “Bandung Humanism, or Revolutionary Black Internationalism,” is oriented toward the emergence of a new subject that transcends the boundaries of a world governed by US power: “three quarters of mankind, i.e., the ‘Black’ or red, yellow, and brown peoples.” Here ‘Black,’ as in Mahler’s analysis of the Tricontinental, serves metonymically for a subject that emerges from, but cannot be solved without the abolition, of a contradiction between “Western imperialism and the Third World.”⁹⁸ This is especially clear in an August 1965 article in *Black America*:

⁹³Revolutionary Action Movement, “Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution,” p. 10.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁹⁵Revolutionary Action Movement, “A New Philosophy for a New Age,” p. 10.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 10.

⁹⁸Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, p. 81.

“RAM philosophy may be described as revolutionary nationalism, Black nationalism, or just plain Blackism. It is that Black people of the world (**darker races, Black, yellow, brown, red, oppressed peoples**) are all enslaved by the same forces. RAM’s philosophy is one of the world Black revolution or world revolution of oppressed peoples rising up against their former slave-masters. Our movement is a movement of Black people who are coordinating their efforts to create a ‘new world’ free from exploitation and oppression of man to man.”⁹⁹

Here, what is especially striking is that the analysis is less as scholars like Errol Henderson worry, an imposition of anticolonial thought on the US.¹⁰⁰

Not only this, but they extend *abolitionist* revolution to a planetary scale, as the model for anti-imperialism. This dialectical expansion of ‘Black’ subjectivity across the globe was as Robin D.G. Kelley argues, based on a “rejection of unconditional racial unity” that “plac[ed] a critique of neocolonialism. . . at the center of their theory,” meaning they explicitly rejected reactionary regimes in Africa and the Caribbean.¹⁰¹

In his perceptive reading of RAM’s history and writings, Kelley argues that the turn to a capacious, generative, and explicitly dialectical understanding of Black internationalism was not a product simply of rigorous thinking but of tensions within the movement. He notes that offered a mobile compromise between “nationalists” who prioritized a nationalist, separatist struggle *before* the building of socialism, and socialists who argued that the two were basically inseparable.¹⁰² Such an articulation says a lot about the care required to think about the politics of refusal involved here. RAM did not necessarily cohere into a programmatic

⁹⁹Quoted in Mullen, *Afro Orientalism*, 89, bold in original.

¹⁰⁰For Henderson’s worry see Henderson, *The Revolution will Not be Theorized: Cultural Revolution in the Black Power Era*, passim. John Jones, in his M.A. Thesis, offers a history of RAM that highlights, throughout, the consistent reference not just to the ‘Third World’ but the American past, and particularly the “militancy of slave revolts” as models for revolution in the United States. See <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/jones-ram-history.pdf>.

¹⁰¹Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, p. 109.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 83–4.

ideology or ‘solution’ to the dilemmas of Black liberation in the era of decolonization. But, like other revolutionary internationalist movements and thinkers, they used the politics of self-determination to give the contradictory tendencies on offer by that era ‘room to move.’ In the Revolutionary Action Movement’s ‘Black’ internationalism, the Bandung Conference exposes how ‘nationalism’ leads not to separation, but to a wider political question – indeed, a “dialectical eschatology” – concerning what a truly post-imperial world might look like.¹⁰³ It announces forms of political imagination that resist incorporation into the binary opposition of inside (‘the’ domestic) and outside (‘the’ international) Richard Wright had forecasted this in *The Color Curtain*:

“Bandung was a decisive moment in the consciousness of 65 per cent of the human race, and that moment meant: HOW SHALL THE HUMAN RACE BE ORGANIZED? The decisions or lack of them flowing from Bandung will condition the totality of life on earth.”¹⁰⁴

In what follows, I argue that this was not through some utopian projection of an alternative ‘plan’ for world order, but through a dialectical sensibility, arguing that the very constraints and impossibilities confronting Black self-determination movements hinted at the basic limits of the postcolonial order that made them possible.

5.3 Self-Determination and “The Colonized of North America”

This new internationalist subject in turn enabled a recasting of the ‘internal’ of the United States as a fundamentally contested boundary, rather than an assumed spatial framework for political action. If Bandung pointed toward an expansive possibility of reorganizing the

¹⁰³Revolutionary Action Movement, “Relationship of Revolutionary Afro-American Movement to the Bandung Revolution.”

¹⁰⁴Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, p. 208.

world, it was also true that, as Richard Wright argued, the “white Westerner” might refuse to accept the Bandung “challenge” and instead “seek for ways and means of resubjugating these newly freed hundreds of millions of brown and yellow and Black people.”¹⁰⁵ Sukarno had raised this question at Bandung itself, noting that colonialism would remain in “modern dress,” as economic and cultural control of newly independent states. Political emancipation – national independence – would be a new vehicle for colonial control.¹⁰⁶

The articulation of an internationalist Black subject – the North American star in the “Bandung Constellation” – stretches the language of anticolonial self-determination to gesture toward a form of politics not fully captured by the emerging world order premised upon it. They offer an attempt to think past the limits of this arrangement in the very moment where what Gary Wilder terms a postcolonial “drama of dashed expectations” was unfolding.¹⁰⁷

In North America the problem posed by Bandung was the attempted containment of anticolonial and antiracist politics within the domestic orders of settler/racial states. What Tim Vasko calls the “authoritative discourse” on decolonization in international law was premised on a “salt-water” definition of colonialism that explicitly excluded what RAM called the “colonized of North America.”¹⁰⁸ Regarding Bandung specifically, in the Eisenhower administration worries proliferated about the rise of a new ‘yellow peril’ that would spread to racial others within the US, undermining US state security.¹⁰⁹ Anticolonial internationalism not only risked shifting toward communism, but threatened the internal order of the United States.

The 1960s witnessed, not least in response to expansive protest movements among racial

¹⁰⁵Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, pp. 203–4.

¹⁰⁶Sukarno, “Speech at the Opening of the Bandung Conference, April 18, 1955.”

¹⁰⁷Gary Wilder. *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*. Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2015, pp. 17–19.

¹⁰⁸Vasko, “‘But for God’s Sake, Let’s Decolonize!': Self-Determination and Sovereignty and/as the Limits of the Anticolonial Archives.”

¹⁰⁹See Jones, “A ‘Segregated’ Asia?: Race, The Bandung Conference, and Pan-Asianist Fears in American Thought and Policy, 1954-1955”; Eric Gettig. “‘Trouble Ahead in Afro-Asia’: The United States, the Second Bandung Conference, and the Struggle for the Third World, 1964-1965.” In: *Diplomatic History* 39.1 (2015), pp. 126–156.

‘minorities’ and Indigenous peoples across North America, an attempt to answer these was made largely in the form of an assimilationist politics of inclusion. I have already shown how the concept of domestic colonialism was mobilized against this project. In turn, those working to contain revolutionary struggles in the US and Canada shifted toward a politics of group recognition. Even Nixon supported “Black Power” of his administration’s own making, one oriented around Black entrepreneurship and individualism. Contemporary Robert L. Allen, in his *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, traced how the Ford Foundation, the Federal Government, and various municipal governments were funding elements within groups such as CORE that were pushing Black radical organizations toward Black capitalism. Frazier, too, rose the possibility of a “Black bourgeoisie” who would both enable some modicum of economic advancement for Black people in the US, while undermining revolutionary politics’ base (unemployed but educable youth) and anti-capitalist aims. As Nikhil Pal Singh argues, from the 1940s to the 1970s there was an insistent attempt to “Americanize the Negro” by representing racial domination as a ‘domestic issue,’ one that could be separated from the international scene. This was not just a US government project, but had its proponents in Black freedom movements, “Black leadership” who “bargained away the more expansive demands and critiques of Black radicalisms” in favour of a “faith that the gap between American ideals and American realities was closing.”¹¹⁰ For Penny Von Eschen, this represents a “domestication of anticolonialism.”¹¹¹

Thus, as the norm of self-determination spread, settler/racial states turned from explicitly attempting to deny its applicability to domestic populations, toward attempting to shape its uptake. As Brad Simpson puts it, as the universalization of self-determination led “African American and Native American groups... to call for ‘economic self-determination’ for their communities,” these states had to accept the principle, but simultaneously “sought to limit

¹¹⁰Singh, *Black Is a Country*, p. 166.

¹¹¹Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, pp. 98–117.

its application to the narrowest possible sphere.”¹¹² A politics of cultural recognition and economic autonomy were ‘allowed’ to the exclusion of shifts in political form and authority. ‘Peoplehood’ took on a malleable character, containable within the sphere of domestic politics by taking off the table any question of land, territorial limits, and international recognition.¹¹³ The status of the US as a racial and colonial state was obscured by its ostensible “anticolonial ideology,” in which it figured as the eighteenth-century origin of a norm of self-determination and independence.¹¹⁴ As ‘already’ decolonized, these states could pose struggles for self-determination ‘within’ as internal demands for the benefits of membership denied.¹¹⁵ In the case of Black movements for self-determination, this domestication of Black politics was accomplished not only discursively but practically through COINTELPRO and mass repression.

A key mechanism of this shift was a flexibility and openness inherent in the concept of self-determination. Settler/racial states at once emphasized this flexibility in their domestication of nationalist movements within the US, and insisted on a rigid definition in their assertion of their state sovereignty as the basic container of political life. The domestic/international boundary was a discursive instrument of counterinsurgency, one that became increasingly solidified in a consensus about political form as the revolutionary 1960s came to an end. This, at any rate, was the problem posed in the United States by the wider shift toward the “domestication of race” and antiracist politics in the era of decolonization.¹¹⁶ Authoritative discourses of international law “articulated the sovereign nation-state as *the* enabling constraint of visions of . . . postcolonial self-determination and sovereignty in the post-war

¹¹²Simpson, “Self-Determination, Human Rights, and the End of Empire in the 1970s,” pp. 251–4.

¹¹³Massad, “Against Self-Determination,” p. 184.

¹¹⁴On this see Gareth Stedman Jones. “The Specificity of US Imperialism.” In: *New Left Review* 1.60 (1970), pp. 59–86; Michael Mann. *Incoherent Empire*. London: Verso, 2005.

¹¹⁵A. G. Hopkins. “Rethinking Decolonization.” In: *Past & Present* 200.1 (Aug. 2008), pp. 211–247; Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty*; Joanne Barker. *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

¹¹⁶Pahuja, “Corporations, Universalism, and the Domestication of Race in International Law.”

rearrangements of colonial and neocolonial power.”¹¹⁷

Black internationalist uptakes of the international politics of decolonization, working in these radically constrained conditions – not only at the centre of a nascent US empire but without any obvious ‘traditional’ territory to ‘decolonize’ – saw it as an impetus to locate forms of politics not assimilable to modern visions of ‘domestic’ politics. Theorists of domestic colonialism represent a long-standing tendency emphasizing a

“Refusal to subsist either as a ‘problem of race relations’ or as ‘our Negroes’... the world within America had to change, they reasoned, because the world beyond American borders presented the possibility of wider, imagined publics—indeed, the majority of the people on the planet.”¹¹⁸

Singh rightly notes that the challenge was not just to pursue self-determination in the framework of emerging postcolonial order but to refuse the oppositions it offered to Black Americans. The problem – for which ‘Bandung’ served a productive frame of reinterpretation – was that of working to “define Black political subjectivity and a revolutionary sense of Black peoplehood in the context of the failure of middle-class and working-class struggles for integration, and of the impossibility of a fully separatist program.”¹¹⁹

Robert L. Allen offered a dialectical analysis of this question in *Black Awakening*. He argues that if Black nationalism tends toward “escapist dreams,” on the one hand, or pacified acceptance of the US state as the basic framework of action, on the other, this is “completely intelligible.”¹²⁰ However, the oscillation between these poles has more to do, he argues, with an emerging surplus population of the “Black and unemployed” who increasingly have no “productive role” in the system. In an analysis evoking James Boggs’s 1963

¹¹⁷Vasko, ““But for God’s Sake, Let’s Decolonize!: Self-Determination and Sovereignty and/as the Limits of the Anticolonial Archives,” p. 190.

¹¹⁸Singh, *Black Is a Country*, p. 125.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 197.

¹²⁰Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 117.

take in *The American Revolution*, Allen insisted that the US's racialized political economy was throwing up populations and problems that it could not incorporate.

In similar fashion, the universalization of self-determination – the 'expansion of international society' – enabled political demands for Black self-determination that were not, strictly speaking, answerable within it. As Manu Karuka writes,

“Within the supposedly ‘domestic’ cultural, political, and economic space of the United States, Black radical demands posit claims to justice that cannot be resolved within the framework of the nation. . . especially in its critique of the international dimensions within the putative national borders of the United States.”¹²¹

Invocations of self-determination for the domestically colonized took the flexibility that enabled domestication and turned it into a de-domesticating discourse, one that envisioned 'self-determination' as an internationalist project linking a third world 'within.'

5.4 Internationalizing the Domestic

The articulation of an international and multiracial Black subject as it emerges in movements like RAM undermines the distinction between domestic and international politics. However, this is not only because it posits some wider formation that transgresses and transcends the boundaries of nation-states. Far from it – Black American engagements with the 'Bandung' phenomenon of decolonization typically highlighted the sharp constraints on the movement and organization of Black freedom struggles across borders. Recasting Black Americans as part of a wider, transnational subject helped articulate a vision of self-determination not easily incorporated into the binary on offer by post-war international order: formal equality 'inside' or territorial independence 'outside.' In doing so they explicitly raised the conceptual boundaries of 'domestic' as a key site of political struggle and critique. The domestic/international

¹²¹Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*, pp. 86–7.

distinction, here, reappears as a technology of imperial rule, a crucial element in the continuities of colonialism after decolonization.

As a form of knowledge, then, “Bandung Humanism” strikes at one of the basic presuppositions of modern theories of the international. This is the distinction between an international sphere bereft of an overarching authority, and a domestic sphere stably ordered and bounded by a sovereign power. In key articulations of this distinction, a vision of a pacified domestic sphere is projected backwards as the basic presupposition of its *lack* in the international sphere.

As Hedley Bull’s version of this distinction shows, visions of an ‘anarchical’ international society thus assume, and indeed, are offered in the name of, an assumed understanding of politics’ limits, location, and shape within the sovereign state, which “provides a means for maintaining order... but also a source of dissension among conflicting groups in society which compete for its control.”¹²² It creates a domestication of conflict, even in the most extreme case, by imposing the domestic as the basic background framework for political contestation.

International theory, then, has a tendency to describe in terms of a conceptual distinction what is in fact a focal point of political struggle: the difference between a domestic politics in which “conflict takes the form of competition between the contending forces for control of a single government,” and an ‘international’ “competition among governments” and potential governments. Entities that do not stabilize this distinction are exiled from consideration: they “fall outside the purview of ‘international relations.’”¹²³ Theorized from the outside, from ‘the international,’ the political appears as a domesticated space in which political conflict, dynamism, and progress are possible within stark limits – these limits including agreement on the basic form of politics. Whether the international is ordered or disordered, debates

¹²²Bull, Butterfield, and Wight, “Society and Anarchy in International Relations,” p. 70.

¹²³Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 9.

about it assume order “within states.”¹²⁴ At stake here is not merely that international politics and the idea of a foreign/domestic distinction enables certain constituencies to seize power at the expense of others, but that it constrains the very form of the political world in which it makes sense to seize or exact power.

Indeed, one of Hedley Bull’s central worries (in the 1980s) is that the domestic is increasingly ‘internationalized’ as war shifts from something between states to something within them. This, of course, is the spectre raised – over-optimistically or not – by the Revolutionary Action Movement’s forecasts of guerilla war in US cities. Bull’s projection of an ordered domestic sphere backward from the international is demonstrated in his assertion that this shift in away from a stably divided international order toward civil war and intervention may allow “the ideological struggles between communist and anti-communist, neo-colonialist and radical nationalist [to] take a violent form.”¹²⁵ That is, questions of politics and political form – who rules, and how – become recast as the stakes of civil wars. The ‘assumed’ domestication of politics is interested in the preservation of a particular vision of where politics is and what it looks like.

Critical thinkers in the field of international relations have therefore highlighted how discourses about international relations typically assume what politics ‘proper’ looks like. If IR theorists routinely presuppose a picture of world politics divided into a system of sovereign states, they leave untouched the question of how those sovereign states manage to conform cartography to politics – map their boundaries onto actually-existing domestic constituencies and communities. Indeed, there is an oft-unacknowledged research program established through this sort of critical reading of international theory and international law: the critical de-mystification of the form, genesis, and boundaries of ‘domestic’ order as a site of struggle rather than something assumable and given as the basis for the study of IR.

¹²⁴Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 22.

¹²⁵Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 191; See also Martin Wight. “Western Values in International Relations.” In: *Diplomatic Investigations*. Ed. by Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 89–131.

At stake here is the political as such, as Karena Shaw argues, “the conditions under which, and the practices through which, authority is constituted and legitimated, and what these constitutions and legitimations enable or disable.”¹²⁶ It is a matter not only of politics but the “shared ontology” underpinning political thought and action, the very idea of where, when, and what politics must be, and the question of how this ontology is itself instituted politically while “excluding the constitution of that ontology from consideration as political.”¹²⁷ Explicitly raising the ‘domestic’ as a *politically created* ‘ontology’ of politics exposes possible “collective futures” that might hinge on the transformation of political form, including but not limited to Indigenous and Black struggles for self-determination.¹²⁸ The ‘inclusion’ of such struggles in international political thought means insisting on domestication as a process, one continually interrupted and exceeded by projects not easily assimilable to ‘the’ domestic nor ‘the’ international.

If IR theorists, and indeed, practitioners, sometimes assume that each member of international society represents an “already fully constituted” state with a clearly bounded domestic community, this can only be a retrospective, assumptive stabilization of “the boundaries of domestic community,” which are “in flux.”¹²⁹ Questions of “community constitution” – the delimitation of the spatial and juridical limits of domestic politics – are “resolved” through conceptual fiat in discussions of the international system..¹³⁰ Black internationalist politics of self-determination take up an avatar of domesticated order – the ‘Bandung’ vision of post-colonial states – but in doing so articulated political projects that not only resisted easy incorporation into domestic US politics, but challenge our understanding of ‘the domestic’ broadly.

Revolutionaries who transformed struggles for equality into self-determination projects

¹²⁶Karena Shaw. “Indigeneity and the International.” In: *Millennium* 31.1 (2002), pp. 55–81, p. 56.

¹²⁷Karena Shaw. *Indigeneity and Political Theory: Sovereignty and the Limits of the Political*. New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 22.

¹²⁸Shaw, “Indigeneity and the International,” p. 57.

¹²⁹Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, The State, and Symbolic Exchange*, p. 7.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.

relocated “the international in the national.”¹³¹ They did not only by invoking self-determination – recasting domestic US order as a contested regime of occupation – but by extending the ‘self’ in self-determination to an international subject. Contests over this subject of self-determination, and attempts to debilitate it, hint that “the consensus and order that is seen to reign in the domestic is [not] a happy twist of fate. . . [but] the effect of a form of association that minimises dissent and rewards conformity to produce an appearance of homogeneity.”¹³² While theorists of IR have focused primarily either on how IR *theory* reifies this boundary, Black internationalists explicitly confronted this boundary as a product of a counterinsurgent policy.

They did so by thinking dialectically: working at the edges of available political languages and forms to articulate that which exceeds them. Self-determination proved to be an important hinge here, one that could productively move from a ‘separatist’ struggle to one that integrated Black Americans into an internationalist anti-imperialist movement.

Revolutionary Black internationalists, working at the limits of the modern international as it was solidifying in the era of decolonization, did not just move from the domestic to the international ‘realm.’ Their political imagination exceeded the modern organization of political order into sovereign states in an international system, because it showed how the problems posed by Black self-determination were not resolvable within it. Internationalism oriented around this anticolonial revolutionary enthusiasm not only was not containable within the US juridical and political order, but also exceeded the modern international order that holds ‘domestic’ politics in place. Black internationalists offered theories of world order and neo-imperialism that traced how the expansion of the modern international system did not *emancipate* or even really *include* the formerly colonized and enslaved, but incorporated them in subordinate fashion, working as a mechanism of domestication rather than liberation. This, then, is the last contribution a study of Black internationalism makes to critical

¹³¹Lowe, “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique.”

¹³²Edkins and Zehfuss, “Generalising the International,” p. 467.

IR theory: it emphasizes *human emancipation* as the standard of judgment in any analysis of international politics by highlighting *internationalist* formations that exceed containment in *the* international. On the contrary: it shows how the difficulties faced by Black revolutionary movements pursuing self-determination, in which they were torn between accommodation *within* and quixotic impossibility *without* has less to do with the limits of these movements than with the limits of the modern international within which they worked and which continues to structure global politics.

Chapter 6

The Self-Determination of the Superfluous

Fortunately or unfortunately, national liberation and social revolution are not exportable commodities. – Amilcar Cabral¹

In the 1960s, Watts, Harlem, Detroit, Newark, and other urban areas plagued by racialized poverty and geographical segregation bore witness to mass uprisings. These “commotions,” as James and Grace Lee Boggs would later call them, were sometimes deemed ‘riots,’ senseless expressions of an irrational crowd’s rage and criminality. Liberals typically read the riots as symptoms of genuine problems that took things too far. Official discourse and government commissions used a more sanitary term: “civil disorders.” Reports from social scientists making up the McCone Commission after Watts and the Kerner Commission after Detroit argued that these disorders were temporary and accidental problems in need of management by state intervention. The disorders themselves were perfectly rational, but dangerous, responses to exclusion, discrimination, and policy failure. At the same time, the post-1960s moment saw the rise of a law and order discourse that saw the liberal and commission responses as concessions to senseless violence.² But what the law-and-order and reformist approaches held in

¹Amilcar Cabral. “The Weapon of Theory.” In: *Unity and Struggle: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.

²For an outline of these debates, see Elizabeth Hinton. *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s*. New York: WW Norton, 2021.

common was the idea that the appropriate response to ‘disorder’ is control. By understanding the proximate causes of revolts (whether these were cast in terms of a racist fiction of primal criminality or a reformist reading of policy failure), their “future recurrence” could be prevented.³

Against these interpretations, critics read these ‘riots’ as indications of a nascent ‘anticolonial’ or ‘national’ revolution in the United States. They were a refraction of anti-imperialist sympathies within the confines of the US: a “colonial war at home.”⁴ For example, Robert Blauner, who would later offer an important version of the domestic colonialism theory in US sociology, criticized claims that the uprising in Watts was an act of “blind rage and anti-white hate” perpetrated by an irrational “Negro crowd.” He takes the McCone Commission to task for expunging the *political* character of these events and reading them as social behaviour in need of control and management.” For Blauner the Commission has obscured how participants were

“Particularly communicating their hatred of policemen, firemen, and other representatives of white society who operate in the Negro community ‘like an army of occupation.’ They were asserting a claim to territoriality, an unorganized and rather inchoate attempt to gain control over their community.”⁵

This assertion of territoriality, he argues, resembles how nationalist anticolonial struggles actively shape and produce novel political subjects. The ‘riot’ is “a crystallization of community identity through a nationalist outburst against a society felt as dominating and oppressive,” a revolt along lines akin to those drawn between “‘natives’ and their colonial masters.”⁶

³As put by the *Kerner Report*: National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. *The Kerner Report*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

⁴Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy. “The Colonial War at Home.” In: *Monthly Review* 16.1 (May 1964), pp. 1–13.

⁵Robert Blauner. “Whitewash Over Watts: the Failure of the McCone Commission Report.” In: *Trans-Action* (March/April 1966), pp. 3–9, 54, p. 8.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9.

Blauner is only one voice in a wider surge in the idea of domestic colonialism in the wake of Watts.⁷ While government commissions saw uprisings as disorders or riots to be managed and prevented, radicals saw them as symptoms of a deeper fissure in the foundations of US political order and the emergence of new forces of insurgency that might answer it. As Jay and Conklin argue in their *People's History of Detroit*, “Many local activists saw the insurrection [of 1967] as a fundamentally political event, not an ‘orgy of pillage’ that the media described.” This specifically political orientation was guided by organizations premised on ideas of anticolonial and nationalist self-determination rather than legal equality and liberal inclusion, organizations that “increasingly viewed black Americans as a colony and related their struggles to those of colonized peoples of developing countries.”⁸ Offering a frame for reading rebellions like those in Watts and Detroit as ‘national’ struggles rejecting US political order as a whole, the domestic colony thesis enabled a rejection of any attempt to cast them as resolvable within the domestic order of the US nation-state. But it also de-domesticated readings of urban revolt in the sense of interpreting them as symptoms of deeper contradictions. It illuminated how, as Gerald Horne puts it:

“Uprisings like those in Watts in 1965 are akin to a toothache in that they alert the body politic that something is dangerously awry. Their dramatic nature grabs and holds attention and can motivate sweeping social reform and/or repression.”⁹

Thus on one side some saw the uprisings as riotous disorder in need of pacification, repression, and management – through ‘hearts and minds’ or counterinsurgent state violence. On the other, the uprisings appear as the harbinger of revolution in the United States.

James and Grace Lee Boggs worked at the centre, geographically and conceptually, of these debates. Two years before Watts, in his 1963 *The American Revolution*, James Boggs

⁷On this surge, see Gerald Horne. *Fire This Time: the Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. Charlottesville: Da Capo Press, 1997, p. 38.

⁸Mark Jay and Philip Conklin. *A People's History of Detroit*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 135.

⁹Horne, *Fire This Time: the Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, p. 41.

had prophetically remarked on the possibility of ‘riots.’¹⁰ Their analysis cut between categorizations of 1960s revolts as ‘riot’ and as ‘revolution.’ Like other critics of official, liberal, and law-and-order interpretations, their writings evince a sense that they were not “mindless riots” but “conscious, though inchoate, insurrection.”¹¹ As Boggs notes, “reforms and revolutions are created by the illogical actions of people”: the ‘riot’ is an illogical expression of a logical tendency.¹² James and Grace Lee Boggs’s reading saw these revolts primarily as *rebellions*, collective rejections of an unjust social order that did not yet project *revolutionary* alternatives.¹³ For the Boggses, then, these were revolts that reflected attitudes on the ground in inchoate but potentially revolutionary fashion. This did not mean they were inevitably revolutionary. Rather, to borrow a phrase from Detroit radical newspaper *the Fifth Estate*, these revolts were nothing more, and nothing less, than “Just plain folk. Plain folk, some white, most black, who were angry at America. Plain folk who set Detroit on fire and made Watts look like a love-in.”¹⁴

James and Grace Lee Boggs therefore confronted a key problem indexed by the domestic colonialism concept examined in this dissertation: the need to map pathways from rebellion to revolution. This meant, in their writings, seeing rebellion dialectically. That is, not for what revolt *is* but for what it might *become*. The question was not the proximate causes of rebellion but what fundamental contradictions it expresses and what lines of practical and discursive intervention could expand the possibilities expressed in it. This chapter therefore examines the role of the idea of domestic colonialism (and its critique) in James and Grace Lee Boggs’s writings about rebellion in the 1960s.

In writings from the 1960s James Boggs mobilized analogies with colonialism and an-

¹⁰James Boggs. *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963, p. 11.

¹¹Horne, *Fire This Time: the Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, p. 3.

¹²Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, pp. 11–12.

¹³Grace Lee Boggs. *Living for Change: an Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 146.

¹⁴Harvey Ovshinsky, “City Ablaze,” *Fifth Estate* 35 (August 1-15, 1967). <https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net/library/35-august-1-15-1967-city-ablaze>

ticolonialism to interpret “the black revolt.” However, far from pointing out a fundamental similarity between the US predicament and colonial occupation, he enjoins an analysis of the unique set of contradictions and problems from which Black rebellion emerges in the US. He uses domestic colonialism to diagnose a situation that exceeds easy analogies: the emergence of a new class of Black “outsiders,” increasingly expendable vis-a-vis capitalist production, from shifts toward automation and deindustrialization. The domestic colony thesis allows Boggs to recast the insurgency of this population as a struggle for collective control – self-determination – under conditions of economic abandonment and social control. His writings display the dialectical relation between the domestic colony thesis and domestic colony theory: while *rebellion* might be productively interpreted in terms of anti-colonial self-determination, the actual programmatic institutionalization and creation of self-determination, *revolution*, exceeds any easy analogy with anticolonial revolution in the Third World.

6.1 Rebellion under Occupation: the Outsiders and the Idea of Domestic Colonialism

James Boggs employs the domestic colony thesis in his analysis of a new revolutionary subject in the post-war moment. Like others mobilizing the domestic colony idea, he points to features of his conjuncture that exceed available languages and frames of political analysis, most notably liberalism and Marxism. He argues that many “are imprisoned in thought patterns that have now become outmoded by the industrial and social development of the past generation.”¹⁵ Throughout the 1960s Boggs argued that the shift toward “cybernetics” and automation was radically reshaping class struggle in the United States in ways that challenged previous understandings of the working class and existing avenues of worker politics, such as unions. More precisely, Boggs’s diagnosis pointed toward a double shift not easily

¹⁵See “Liberalism, Marxism, and Black Political Power,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, pp. 26–32.

understood within existing languages of politics. First, automation was not merely *displacing* certain sectors of the working class, to be absorbed elsewhere. It was permanently *expelling* them from production as a workless class. Second, from this “expendable” class was emerging a novel revolutionary subject: “the Outsiders,” a class of unemployed and underemployed, largely Black, workers who owe little to the ‘system.’

In *The American Revolution* (1963) Boggs writes that deindustrialization is undermining anticapitalist struggles premised on a unitary and unified working class. As he puts it, “Today the working class is so dispersed and transformed by the very nature of the changes in production that it is almost impossible to select out any single bloc of workers as working class in the old sense.”¹⁶ Automation is key here, as its replacement of workers with machines, distributed unevenly along racial lines, produces a “growing army of the permanently unemployed.”¹⁷ Of course, the production of surplus populations was a familiar topic in Marxist thought. Marx himself, in volume one of *Capital*, had argued that capitalism structurally relies on a “reserve army” of the unemployed, disciplining the working class, replacing variable capital with constant capital, and reducing the cost of labour. Marx and Marxists had long been concerned with how the increasing replacement of “living” labour with “dead” labour would shift the terrain of class struggle.¹⁸ Boggs argues that this quantitative set of shifts between living and dead labour, variable and constant capital, are undergoing a more fundamental qualitative change:

“Automation replaces men. This is of course nothing new. What *is* new is that now, unlike most earlier periods, the displaced men have nowhere to go. The farmers displaced by mechanization of farms in the 20’s could go to the cities and man the assembly lines. As for the work animals like the mule, they could

¹⁶Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, p. 17.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁸Karl Marx. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990, pp. 781–802; Michael Denning provides a useful review of this concept in Marx’s writings in Michael Denning. “Wageless Life.” In: *New Left Review* 66 (Nov/Dec 2010), pp. 79–97.

just stop growing them. But automation displaces people, and you don't just stop growing people even when they have been made expendable by the system. . . The question of what to do with the surplus people who are the expendables of automation becomes more and more critical every day.”¹⁹

Recent readers of Boggs put him on the radical wing of what Aaron Benanav calls the 1960s “automation discourse.” Automation discourse is premised on the idea that technological shifts such as automation portend massive transformations in political and economic life, whether these be dystopian or utopian.²⁰

While Benanav worries that automation discourse often detaches technological shifts from a diagnosis of the social and political forms that enable them, he and others note that Boggs emphasized the need to focus on shifts in economic and political form.²¹ Boggs saw automation as a racially distributed technological and economic shift. The permanent displacement of workers via “cybernetics” would be a continuation of ‘last hired, first fired’: a continuation of what Boggs argues is a long American tradition of leaving to Black workers the “the leavings, the castoffs of the whites: jobs which the whites did not want anymore or refused to do at all.”²² This analysis remains in the 1970s, when James and Grace Lee Boggs remark that “The role assigned to blacks in this society since colonial days has been that of scavengers, taking the leavings in every sphere, whether it be jobs, homes, schools, churches, or neighbourhoods.”²³ This radicalized distribution of automation’s effects undermines facile claims of working class unity. If “vast numbers of humans were being made redundant,”

¹⁹Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, p. 36.

²⁰Aaron Benanav. *Automation and the Future of Work*. London: Verso, 2020.

²¹Jason E. Smith. “Nowhere to Go: Automation, Then and Now Part One.” In: *The Brooklyn Rail* (Mar. 2017). URL: <https://brooklynrail.org/2017/03/field-notes/Nowhere-to-Go> (visited on 01/06/2022); Benanav, *Automation and the Future of Work*.

²²James Boggs. “The Negro and Cybernation.” In: *The Evolving Society: First Annual Conference on the Cybercultural Revolution—Cybernetics and Automation*. New York: Institute for Cybercultural Research, 1966, pp. 167–172, 168, Though Boggs notes that the cybernation would come for the “white jobs” too (170).

²³Boggs, “The Negro and Cybernation”; Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 175.

Boggs's writings pointed out that "this would inevitably take a racialised form" in the US.²⁴ In turn, while Boggs does note the importance of technological shifts, he is not a technological determinist. As Danny Haiphong aptly notes, "the destructive impact of automation was not a problem of technology itself but rather of the capitalist system from which technology is utilized."²⁵

Boggs is taking neither a 'dystopian' nor 'utopian' point of view. Both of these views were fairly common in the 1960s, and Boggs's approach can be understood as moving between them. A dystopian point of view was present in writers such as Sidney Willhelm's *Who Needs the Negro?* where he claimed that automation was producing new forms of resistance, but also leading almost inexorably to a politics of racial elimination. The growing superfluity of Black workers might be 'solved,' Willhelm argues, through a policy of removal and genocide.²⁶ More optimistic and utopian versions of the automation discourse took, and continue to take, automation as the source of a shift from a working society to a workless one, and therefore from exploitation to emancipation. A classic example here would be Herbert Marcuse's claim in *Eros and Civilization* that technological advances bring destruction, but also the possibility of transcending the "reality principle" of modern capitalism.

Boggs's account sees automation not for what *is* or what it will *cause*. Importantly Boggs here is rejecting both technological and economic determinisms. As he would recount later in the 1980s, one of the biggest challenges with thinking about deindustrialization and a nascent neoliberal restructuring of US political economy was the idea that "we no longer believe in the capacity of human beings to determine the course of society but instead accept

²⁴John Merrick. "'Nobody Knows More About Running This Country Than Me': James Boggs and the Racial Politics of Automation." In: *Autonomy* (May 10, 2021). URL: <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/boggs-merrick/> (visited on 01/06/2022).

²⁵Danny Haiphong. *Lessons from James Boggs: Capitalist Automation in the 21st Century*. Black Agenda Report. May 18, 2014. URL: <https://truthout.org/articles/lessons-from-james-boggs-capitalist-automation-in-the-21st-century/> (visited on 01/06/2022).

²⁶Sidney Willhelm. *Who Needs the Negro?* New York: Anchor Books, 1971; Cedric Johnson offers a very useful comparison of Willhelm and Boggs's approaches to this issue in Cedric Johnson. "James Boggs, The 'Outsiders,' and the Challenge of Postindustrial Society." In: *Souls* 13 (2011), pp. 303–326.

the philosophy that human consciousness is determined by economic conditions.”²⁷ The idea was to situate automation as something demanding the renewal of ideas and practices of self-determination and self-government in the face of the impersonal compulsions of modern capitalism. To quote one chapter title from *The American Revolution*, it was not an automatic social process tending toward doom or emancipation. It was a political *challenge*: something portending possibilities and difficulties, sharpening contradictions within a social formation, but contradictions that needed to be amplified and taken up by people themselves.²⁸

This focus on the renewal of self-determining politics in the face of apparently objective and inevitable social processes is visible in Boggs’s focus less on the broader political economy of automation and more on the emergence of a revolutionary subject, the outsiders. The outsiders crystallize the harms following from automation but also portended the possibility of a politics aimed at a ‘workless’ and ‘classless’ society because they were already expelled from production. And here enters the domestic colony thesis, for this expulsion from ‘the system’ is read through a provocative analogy with anticolonial revolt. As Boggs puts it,

“Most. . . are afraid to face the reality and continue to hope that the old house can still be patched up. The outsiders, in contrast, owe no allegiance to any system but only to themselves. Being workless, they are also stateless. They have grown up like a colonial people who no longer feel any allegiance to the old imperial power and are each day searching for new means to overthrow it.”²⁹

Like other iterations of the domestic colony thesis, it is a de-domesticating interpretation of revolt. It describes the breaking and remaking of allegiances: a break with US domestic economic and political order (including those struggling for economic gains within it) and a turn to allegiances with anticolonial and socialist revolution in the ‘Third World.’ As he

²⁷James Boggs. “Toward a New Concept of Citizenship.” In: *The James Boggs Reader: Pages from a Black Radical’s Notebook*. Ed. by Stephen M Ward. Detroit: Way, 2011, pp. 274–283, p. 280.

²⁸Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, p. 33.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 52.

writes in a contemporaneous 1963 essay, “The black masses in the United States cannot depend on the white workers as their allies” – since the latter are still wedded to struggles *about* economic distribution and *within* the scene of production. Thus, by “identifying [with those] . . . struggling for freedom and independence against the Western imperialists,” “Black Americans, even though they are a minority in the United States, have been able to act with the confidence that they are part of a world majority.”³⁰

The outsiders are not just ‘like’ a colonial people but connected to colonized people across the globe. Whereas “the class struggle for economic gains can be, has been, incorporated within the national struggle. . . the struggle of the colored races cannot be blunted in such ways. It transcends the boundaries between nations.”³¹ The outsiders’ struggle against the collective racial domination of white over Black in the US – amplified by their increasingly ‘superfluity’ vis-a-vis production – cannot be domesticated within national or economic struggles precisely because it is ineluctably linked to the struggle against white rule across the planet. To read Black rebellion as simply a permutation of class struggle or as a struggle for equality within the US would be to domesticate it, immunizing the US domestic order from the broader question of anti- and de-colonial self-determination. Here, he notes that he uses “the word ‘black’ as *political* designation to refer not only to Afro-Americans but to people of color who are engaged in revolutionary struggle in the United States and all over the world.”³²

This de-domestication not only enacts a shift in the implicit and possible allegiances announced by the rebellion of the outsiders, but a shift in the diagnosis of their rebellion itself toward the broader context of imperialism. For instance, US involvement in the Third World is both a solution to and instigation of rebellion among surplus people. One ‘solution’ to the problem of expendable people is to literally expend them – use them up – in wars such

³⁰“The Meaning of the Black Revolt in the U.S.A.,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 16.

³¹“The City is the Black Man’s Land,” in *ibid.*, p. 49.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 50.

as that in Vietnam. As he puts it:

“Who... was to be the cannon fodder? The black youth for whom the United States no longer had any use because mechanization, automation, and cybernation had already made them obsolete.”³³

If rebellion is, in part, a refusal to be expended, disposed of, and abandoned, it is also a refusal of the attempt by the state to pathologically ‘re-absorb’ the expendables of deindustrialization through military conscription. On this note Boggs argues that “the wave of rebellion which erupted in the streets of Watts in 1965 and exploded in Detroit in 1967” was not just a rejection of the immediate situation of poverty, police brutality, and systematic discrimination. It was also an expression of a nationalist, indeed, internationalist sentiment that connected “recriminations against blacks at home” and “the racist character of US wars abroad.”³⁴ The domestic colony thesis here opens up onto an analogical *comparison* but also an invocation of the analytic *connections* between struggles against white power in the US and against colonialism elsewhere.

Moreover, the domestic thesis ‘analogy’ opens a frame for a historically and geographically specific predicament that exceeds any straightforward identification of the US with Third World situations. Boggs does invoke occupation to describe the quasi-colonial style of police and political power exercised over Black communities in US cities. For example, the essay “The City is the Black Man’s Land” (1966) argues that barring any broader political and economic transformation, cities will become places where

“Increasing numbers of black youth, rendered socially unnecessary by the technological revolution of automation and cybernation, policed by a growing occupation army which has been mobilized and empowered to resort to any means

³³“The Future Belongs to the Dispossessed,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 85.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 88.

necessary to safeguard the interests of the absentee landlords, merchants, politicians, and administrators, to whom the city belongs by law but who do not belong in the city and are themselves afraid to walk its streets.”³⁵

However, while they clearly invoke a kind of colonial analogy here, it is mobilized to describe a quite specific predicament distinct from colonial exploitation and domination, insofar as the problem is rooted in the increasingly “socially unnecessary” character of certain populations and the demand that these ‘dangerous’ classes be contained by police power.

Thus this predicament, while gestured to by the colonial analogy, exceeds an easy analogy. Indeed, if colonialism relies on a sort of super-exploitation for the sake of metropolitan wealth accumulation and strategic expansion, the main distinction here is that the expendables are defined precisely by the fact that they are not “colonized” to be exploited. On the contrary, in Boggs’s analysis they are abandoned, excluded from even being exploited as workers properly speaking. They no longer “feed” the capitalist through surplus labour but must be “fed” by “productive” society.³⁶ In this abandonment seems to subsist their potentially revolutionary character. In the wake of the rebellions of the 1960s, James and Grace Lee Boggs argued that “Unemployed or unemployed, the new expendable blacks are a constant threat to the system. Not only must they be fed to cool off the chances of their rebelling, but they occupy the choicest and most socially critical land in the heart of the nation’s cities.”³⁷ The domestic colony thesis therefore mobilizes colonial terminology to reject readings that see rebellion as an aberrant or accidental ‘problem’ solvable in technical fashion within the confines of the existing system. Instead, it is a symptom of the growth of a class that, whether or not anyone (including themselves) wants to re-integrate them into social order, cannot be without transforming that order.

³⁵In Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 40.

³⁶Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, p. 52.

³⁷James Boggs. “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party.” In: *The James Boggs Reader: Pages from a Black Radical’s Notebook*. Ed. by Stephen M Ward. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, pp. 196–228, p. 175.

As Patrick King notes, this is a “conjunctural” diagnosis.³⁸ But it is tied to a longer-term story about the basic contradictions of US political economy, not least the link between the development of capitalism and the ‘underdevelopment’ of Black communities. He notes that this underdevelopment is just one site in a much broader phenomenon that might later be called the “development of underdevelopment”: “the process of advanced nations advancing through exploitation of an underclass excluded from the nation.”³⁹ In 1969 he situated the predicament of the outsiders more broadly in a long-term process of quasi-colonial underdevelopment. As he puts it:

“Black America is underdeveloped today because of capitalist semicolonialism; just as Africa, Asia, and Latin America are underdeveloped today because of capitalist colonialism.”⁴⁰

Here Boggs mobilizes vocabularies of anticolonial critique to situate the growth of the outsiders as only the latest permutation, tinged by the moment of deindustrialization, of this ‘underdevelopment.’ But it is not a matter of strict analogy. The terminology *fascism*, rather than colonialism, hints at a crucial difference between colonial underdevelopment and its refraction in the US. For, he notes, the underdevelopment and stagnation of Black economic progress is buttressed, at bottom, by not only the legal and political inscription of Black people as inhuman or inferior to white people, but more broadly “fascism”: for Boggs, “the naked oppression of a minority race not only by the ordinary citizens of the master majority race, is the normal, natural way of life in this country.”⁴¹ This ‘fascism’ is expressed in the twin violences that enabled the development of capitalist property relations in the Americas:

³⁸Patrick King. “Introduction to ”Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come” By James Boggs.” In: *e-flux* 79 (2017), pp. 1–9. URL: http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_94671.pdf (visited on 01/06/2022).

³⁹James Boggs. “Black Power: a Scientific Concept Whose Time has Come.” In: *The James Boggs Reader: Pages from a Black Radical’s Notebook*. Ed. by Stephen M Ward. Detroit: Way, 2011, pp. 171–179, p. 173.

⁴⁰“The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 134.

⁴¹Boggs, “Black Power: a Scientific Concept Whose Time has Come,” p. 173.

slavery and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. James and Grace Lee Boggs write in *Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party* that “Indian dispossession and African slavery are the twin foundations of white economic advancement in North America. No section of the country was not party to the defrauding of the red man and the enslavement of the black.”⁴² Thus the expulsion of Black workers from production as a new class (the outsiders) is only the latest permutation of this foundational violence, rooted in the conjunctural shift toward deindustrialization.

In drawing his analysis of ‘underdevelopment’ from the “twin” foundational violences of North American political orders, Boggs’ mobilization of a colonial analogy exposes a situation that exceeds easy analogies. He argues that this unique predicament, in North America, is different than the development of capitalism “elsewhere. . . which first exploited its indigenous people and then fanned out through colonialism.” On the contrary, American capitalism “started out by dispossessing one set of people (the Indians) and then importing another set of people (the Africans) to do the work on the land.”⁴³ The so-called development of underdevelopment thus took on a peculiar form in this context. Unlike those in the Third World, ‘held back,’ placed in the ‘not yet’ of colonial tutelage,⁴⁴ Black underdevelopment is *advanced* in the sense of being carried along with US capitalist development. This is not underdevelopment through an interruption of their “natural and historical process of development.” They are rather swept up and expended as a kind of human fuel for US capitalism. In this respect in Boggs’s analysis Black communities are not only ‘exploited’ but *used up*: “Black communities are used communities, the end result and aftermath of rapid economic development.”⁴⁵

A key symptom of this is spatial segregation. Whereas in the Third World the colonized are trapped in agrarian life, Black communities are captured in cities.⁴⁶ Thus when James

⁴²Boggs, “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party,” p. 202.

⁴³“The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 134.

⁴⁴As described in, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. New. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁴⁵“The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 137.

⁴⁶“The City is the Black Man’s Land,” in *ibid.*, pp. 163–4.

and Grace Lee Boggs mobilize the colonial analogy they are partly transplanting the analysis of superexploitation and alien rule found in European colonies. We see this, perhaps, in the following:

“Most of these [’ white administrators and entrepreneurs] live in the outlying sections of the city or in the suburbs that surround the city like a white noose. In the morning they drive into the city to rule the ‘natives.’ At night they leave behind their police army of occupation and drive back on publicly subsidized freeways to their own neighborhoods to enjoy the profits and salaries that are their reward for ruling these ‘natives.’”⁴⁷

However, it is more accurate to read it as a way to conceptualize the *colonial* response to a predicament not easily mappable as colonialism, namely, the production of rebellious surplus populations located in ‘used’ communities. These communities are subject to exploitation in ways that resemble colonialism, but the underlying set of contradictions and social tensions that produce rebellion therein is relatively unique.

The domestic colony thesis in this instance thus points to the way that US capitalism, especially as it is embodied in a class of ‘entrepreneurs and landlords’ who reap profits while benefitting from public resources, both survives on the basis of Black communities and cannot solve the tensions this produces. Policing and anti-police insurgencies like the ‘riot’ of 1967 cannot strictly speaking be ‘resolved’ within the confines of the US nation-state and capitalist political economy. They can only be displaced, contained, and held at bay through a counterinsurgent form of policing. In turn, this policing is militarized, akin to an ‘occupation,’ because of racial prejudice or racial fears (even if these may play a part). It follows from the need to contain the collective rejection of a system that squeezes, excludes, and uses the ‘outsiders’ as fuel rather than enabling them as political subjects.

⁴⁷Boggs, “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party,” p. 206.

Without any genuine revolutionary answer, “Spontaneous eruptions are inevitable in the present period of police occupation and provocation of the black street force.”⁴⁸ As James and Grace Lee Boggs write in “The City is the Black Man’s Land,” urban rebellions such as that in Watts indicate fundamental questions about the shape of political order, rather than simply presenting disorder: “The war is not only *in* America’s cities; it is *for* the cities. It is a civil war between black power and white power whose major battle was fought last August in Southern California between eighteen thousand soldiers and the black people of Watts.”⁴⁹ This expression of a *political* question rather than a problem of disorder is posed precisely in and through the domestic colony thesis, a reading of rebellion as a form of ‘anticolonial’ revolt: white America’s “entire way of life depends upon blacks remaining so weak, poor, and ignorant that they offer no threat to white authority. . . against these exploiters and overseers, the black community is now struggling for its self-determination like a colony against imperialist power.”⁵⁰

6.2 Containing Rebellion: Another ‘Colonial Analogy’

In Boggs’s writings, the domestic colony thesis thus enabled two linked de-domestications in the interpretation of ‘urban rebellion.’ First, it refused to take various containers – the neighbourhood, the city, the nation-state – as the background interpretive frame. Instead, rebellion is an expression of collective, potentially self-determining refusal. Second, it related rebellion to a basic set of contradictions in US political and social order, namely the rapid development of US capitalism through the *use* and eventual *abandonment* of Black communities. These are the two moves I have been attempting to link, theoretically, in this historically-situated investigation of the *critique of domestication* so far. The *containment* of rebellion within the frame of the US nation-state and the *reduction* of rebellion to social disorder go hand-in-hand:

⁴⁸Boggs, “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party,” p. 225.

⁴⁹“The City is the Black Man’s Land, in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 163.

⁵⁰Boggs, “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party,” p. 206.

these are the twin moves of domesticating forms of analysis and response to insurgency. The domestic colony thesis thus can work as a criticism of these domesticating moves.

While the ‘spontaneous eruptions’ in US cities could be understood as symptoms of a basic contradiction – the inability of the US political economy to reabsorb displaced and ‘expendable’ workers – Boggs did not therefore see them as inherently revolutionary. The uprisings could not be reduced to mere ‘riots,’ but they should not be inflated into revolutions either.⁵¹ Instead, they argued, they could better be characterized as rebellions.⁵² In *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (1974), a book emerging partly from a lecture and discussion series on revolution in 1970, they offer the following outline of rebellion as a form of insurgency:

“Rebellion is a stage in the development of revolution, but it is not revolution... Rebellions break the threads that have been holding the system together and throw into question the legitimacy and the supposed permanence of existing institutions. They shake up old values so that relations between individuals and between groups within the society are unlikely ever to be the same again. The inertia of the society has been interrupted.”⁵³

The key distinction between a rebellion and a revolution is that the former primarily rejects “without providing a positive vision of a new future.”⁵⁴ A consequence of this, in *Revolution and Evolution*, is that rebellions typically *imagine* themselves as political transformations but tend to make demands of power rather than claims for it.⁵⁵ As I will show in the following sections, the Boggsian iteration of the domestic colony thesis was riven by this

⁵¹Indeed, later on, the Boggses would worry that even their own relatively measured consideration of the ‘commotion’ in Detroit overinflated it and fed into a heady optimism that obscured clear-eyed analysis. See James Boggs et al. *Conversations in Maine*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

⁵²For instance, it is described as such throughout Grace Lee Boggs’s autobiography: see Boggs, *Living for Change: an Autobiography*.

⁵³Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 18.

distinction between rebellion and revolution: rebellion might be akin to an anticolonial revolt or rejection (an interruption of racial rule's 'inertia') but revolution is difficult to conceive in strictly 'anticolonial' terms in the US.

This distinction between riot, rebellion, and revolution was not meant, however, to work as a framework for judging individual actions categorically. That is, it described less what an event *is* and more what it *could be*. Rebellion is a dialectical hinge concept here. Though it certainly deflates revolutionary optimism about the uprisings of the 1960s, it exhorts an analysis of how "spontaneous rebellion" might be shaped into "conscious struggle" through some "philosophy, some general body of ideas."⁵⁶ The question was how to move *from* rebellion *to* revolution, not to pose a voluntaristic choice *between* rebellion and revolution.⁵⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the Detroit rebellion, their answer to this question was something like the creation of a vanguard party drawn from and attuned to the predicament in which 'the outsiders' found themselves. The creation of "dual or parallel power structures out of struggle" might enable a politics organized by a "revolutionary party" and guided by principles of collective self-determination," that "enable the black community to create a form of liberated area out of what are at present occupied areas."⁵⁸ Thus in this specifically vanguardist answer to the problem of moving from 'anti-colonial' rebellion to an American revolution, without a revolutionary party there would be "rebels but not revolutionists, rebellions but not revolutions."⁵⁹

An underlying presupposition here is that insurgency is not anything in itself. A dialectical analysis is concerned not with what it is but with what possibilities it entails and what contradictions it sharpens. Something must be *made* of rebellion, to "move beyond rebellion to revolution."⁶⁰ At stake here is therefore the criticism of those interpretations and responses

⁵⁶Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 18–20.

⁵⁷See on this Boggs, *Living for Change: an Autobiography*, pp. 143–150, 152–155.

⁵⁸Boggs, "Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party," p. 223.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶⁰Boggs, *Living for Change: an Autobiography*.

that insist on what the rebellion *is*, and attempt to *reduce* it (interpretively and practically) to rebellion. A common feature in James Boggs's writings in the 1960s is a critique of framings that domesticate rebellion by reducing it to 'riot.' The insistence on a mobile concept of rebellion with the aim of moving it to revolution is an important antecedent to what Ranajit Guha calls the analysis of "the prose of counter-insurgency." For Guha, a key technique in the discourse and historiography of colonialism was the conversion of potentially *political* revolt into *social* disorder.⁶¹ Revolts that strike at the heart of the arrangement of political power and authority, emerging from basic antagonisms of a given social order (ruler/ruled, colonizer/colonized, capital/labour) are recast as disorders entirely 'internal' to and resolvable within the very order they strike against. This is an interpretive move that reads conscious political action as criminal behaviour in need of management, which makes this interpretation *real* – whether through 'hearts and minds' or militarized repression. One expression of this in the Boggses' writing is in *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, when they note that "the Kerner Commission has denounced racism in order to stem rebellion."⁶²

Boggs points to these two tendencies in responses to rebellion that aim to reduce it to riotous disorder. On the one hand, he tracks what Robert L. Allen calls a "domestic program of neo-colonialism": "setting up all kinds of social agencies, training bureaus, and the like to head off the stateless and workless people."⁶³ On the other hand, rebellion might simply be "crushed."⁶⁴ In unpacking these possibilities, but especially the latter, Boggs shifts the colonial analogy from comparisons with Asia, Africa, and Latin America to comparisons with Indigenous genocide in North America.

Without "self-government of major cities by the black majority," James and Grace Lee Boggs write in 1966 of the distinct possibility of

⁶¹Ranajit Guha. "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency." In: *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 45–88.

⁶²Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 174.

⁶³Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*, p. 53.

⁶⁴"The Meaning of the Black Revolt in the U.S.A.," in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 17.

“Wholesale extermination of the black population through mass massacres or forced migrations onto reservations as with the Indians (white America is apparently not yet ready for this, although the slaughter of thirty-two blacks in Watts by the armed forces of the state demonstrates that this alternative is far from remote).”⁶⁵

Three years later, in the wake of more rebellions across the US, James and Grace Lee Boggs argue that this possibility of extermination is rooted in a much longer history. They argue that the turn to a politics of disposability and “extermination” is rooted in the “glorification of the white race. . . and of America’s ‘Manifest Destiny’ . . . which has dehumanized whites to the point where today millions are ready for the ‘final solution’ of exterminating the black street force because of the threat it poses to the system.”⁶⁶ The ‘colonial analogy’ here is not with colonial domination abroad but with the extermination of Indigenous peoples upon which settler colonialism is premised.⁶⁷

While this line of criticism might imply alliances between Indigenous and Black revolutionary projects, given a common condition, it also risks placing Indigenous and Black vulnerability to ‘genocide’ in sequence. The terrifying spectre of racial elimination in the United States might read as a *repetition* of a *past* violence, already completed. The analogy, precisely because it takes up *settler* colonialism as its main point of analogy, plays well into Byrd’s criticism that the domestic colony thesis borrows from but elides the fact that struggles against racism and capitalism take place on stolen land. Worse still, it risks reading this

⁶⁵“The City is the Black Man’s Land” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*.

⁶⁶Boggs, “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party,” p. 217.

⁶⁷As argued by Patrick Wolfe in Patrick Wolfe. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” In: *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (Dec. 2006), pp. 387–409; Boggs was alone in this analysis. Not only had a delegation of African-American intellectuals and activists submitted charges of genocide against the US at the UN, but other analysts of automation saw it as portending elimination. Sidney Willhelm argued in work culminating in *Who Needs the Negro?* that deindustrialization was leading to a convergence in fate between the “Red Man” and “Black Man”: elimination. Willhelm, *Who Needs the Negro?*; Rather than being subject to amplified exploitation both groups were increasingly used up, expended, and removed in order to protect those still wedded to production. Robert L. Allen too, noted references to the possibilities of “concentration camps” in US cities as responses to ‘riots.’ Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*.

theft as a *fait accompli* rather than an ongoing struggle.

This is complicated further by a claim at the centre of the Boggses' writing since the 1960s: that those working toward Black and anti-capitalist self-determination should reclaim land in the cities for themselves as a semi-permanent basis of Black Power, a 'liberated territory.' Bartell terms this emphasis on land and practices of community-building and reclamation on it the Boggses' "political ecology."⁶⁸ In the 1960s Boggs refers to violence done to Indigenous peoples, and especially after the 1960s James and Grace Lee Boggs attempted to cultivate connections with Indigenous movements through the New Organization for an American Revolution. What is less present is a precise reflection on just *whose* land is being 'reclaimed.'⁶⁹

Thus the colonial analogy shifts toward analogies with settler colonialism. While it risks transforming colonization into a "metaphor,"⁷⁰ Boggs does situate struggles for Black self-determination alongside the broader history of settler colonial dispossession in North America. James and Grace Lee Boggs repeatedly insisted on tying together stories about the subjugation of Black people and about the dispossession of Indigenous people as the twin foundation of US political order. Revolution in the US will hinge, then, not only on Black Power but on the *double* problem of undermining both of these foundational violences: "the extermination of one race of people, the Indian, and the enslavement of another, the African."⁷¹ If our goal here is a reconstruction of the critique of domestication and the clarification of a de-domesticating reading of insurgency in Boggs's writings, we need to avoid the displacement of Indigenous dispossession to the past. But there are some productive upshots to Boggs's turn to this alternative analogy.

⁶⁸Brian Bartell. "The Political Ecology of James and Grace Lee Boggs." In: *Rethinking Marxism* 33.3 (2021), pp. 396–414.

⁶⁹For example in *RETC* they basically take for granted Indigenous dispossession and locate the key lines of antagonism and contestation around "the land issue" in terms of "who would settle the land from which the Indians were being driven." Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 159.

⁷⁰Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."

⁷¹Boggs, "Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party," p. 233.

First of all, it is a shift from comparison toward an analysis of the distinct but connected predicament facing revolutionaries in the US. Above all this was a situation in which a condition of superfluity was being universalized.⁷² In this predicament it was not only a politics of elimination that revolutionaries might confront but a politics of domestication or “pacification.” Boggs argues that as increasing numbers become superfluous to production, social antagonisms will grow between those who are ejected forcibly from production and those who are forced to “feed” – or police and contain – them. For Boggs, while the growth of the welfare state, alleviated suffering in the short term, it ultimately worked as “pacification programs” meant to keep the ‘expendables’ wedded to US political order and capitalism more broadly. Boggs at times here even seems to mime a conservative rhetoric insisting on ‘self-reliance,’ arguing that welfare is a “pacification program meant to make these millions of people feel like victims.”⁷³ However, he is pointing out that welfare centres the US state as the only solution and backdrop to questions of racial and economic inequality. Broadly speaking he is criticizing an approach to welfare that reorients politics away from the questions of what kind of community one would like to live in and toward the “need to eat.”⁷⁴ In this respect Boggs’s work points toward the basic affinity between welfare and punitive neoliberal responses to antiracist insurgency: both recast politics in the form of economic management, “putting economics in command.” The attempt to ‘answer’ the problem of insurgency strictly within US political and social order is here linked to the reduction of political action to social disorder, whether the ‘solution’ to the latter is welfare support or abandonment.

Even more than a negation of these programs, however, Boggs offers an analysis of their

⁷²Cedric Johnson has argued that while Boggs’s analysis of automation and its consequences is “prophetic,” it is nonetheless “timebound.” It is linked too deeply, Johnson argues, to an “inspirational but quaint” uptake of the “heady confidence generated by the post-Bandung anticolonial revolutions.” Indeed, he even argues that Boggs’s limitation of his analysis to the US context now appears especially dated given that “the problem of wageless urban life is now a planetary phenomenon.” On the contrary, this makes his analysis all the more important, as he specified the beginnings of what would be a universalized phenomenon, and its consequences, in the laboratory of deindustrializing US cities. Johnson, “James Boggs, The ‘Outsiders,’ and the Challenge of Postindustrial Society.”

⁷³Xavier Nicholas. *Questions for the American Revolution*. In collab. with James Boggs. 1973, p. 19.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 12.

basic inability to actually succeed in containing rebellion. He predicted in *American Revolution* and beyond that increased investment in welfare, far from dulling the contradictions of deindustrialization by providing a safety net for those who no longer ‘owe’ anything to capitalist production, would *sharpen* them. As he puts it, only a “limited number” of workers ‘in the old sense’ are able to remain in production:

“The rest are like the refugees or displaced persons so familiar in recent world history. There is no way for capitalism to employ them profitably, yet it can’t just kill them off. It must feed them rather than be fed by them. Growing in numbers all the time, these displaced persons become a tremendous drain on the whole working populations, and creating growing antagonism between those who have jobs and those who do not. This antagonism... between those who have to be supported and those who have to support them... will create one of the deepest crises for capitalism in our age.”⁷⁵

The rise of various mechanisms for “feeding” surplus populations was less a ‘solution’ than a temporary displacement of this antagonism between the ‘possessors’ and the ‘dispossessed.’ From this tension, he argues, “there will grow a counterrevolutionary movement” driven by “resentment.” This revanchist movement, he claims, will drive the emergence of struggles against it not only for a new economic system but for a more human set of relations premised on equality. They will have to take a stand not just on economic distribution but against those fascist attempts to contain and eliminate racialized surplus populations.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Boggs’s prognosis here – ‘pacification’ by welfare’ or ‘elimination’ through revanchist racial violence – his analysis did not draw out comparisons with other locales and impose them on the US. Boggs’s invocation of comparisons with settler colonial elimination hint at an attempt to get at the unique situation in the US. In turn,

⁷⁵Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, p. 37.

however, this situation is not isolated from the rest of the world but works as a staging ground for a broader reshaping of the contradictions of racial capitalism around the “gap between the dispossessed of the world and the possessors (i.e. the neocolonialists).”⁷⁶ Black rebellion in the US is therefore an avant-garde sign of this broader coming struggle for new forms of politics that answer for the production of superfluous people. This is not therefore isolated but connected with the broader anticolonial shift across the planet:

“The chief virtue in being black at this juncture... Stems from the fact that the vast majority of the people in the world who have been deprived the right of self-government and self-determination are people of color. Today these people of color are not only the wretched of the earth but people in revolutionary ferment, having arrived at the decisive recognition that their underdevelopment is [a result of] their systematic confinement to backwardness.”⁷⁷

The question of course, was precisely how this revolutionary ferment was refracted in North America, through the problem of superfluity.

Put simply, Boggs’s turn to an analogy with settler colonialism from one with anticolonial revolutions in Asia and Africa indicates that the aim is to diagnose the specific conditions of revolutionary politics in the US. If it risked downplaying the present role of Indigenous sovereignty movements, it also rejected any easy analogies with other locales. While the domestic colony *thesis* was useful as a de-domesticating analysis of rebellion, the theory of *revolution* required a step away from this thesis and toward a more sophisticated domestic colonialism *theory* specific to the US. And Indeed, James and Grace Lee Boggs came to repeatedly criticize analogies between Black liberation and anticolonial revolution. They argued that these comparisons had deleterious political consequences because far from exposing what the historical specificity of the problem at hand – the becoming-superfluous of Black

⁷⁶“The Future Belongs to the Dispossessed,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 89.

⁷⁷Boggs, “Black Power: a Scientific Concept Whose Time has Come,” p. 176.

people in the US – it led to the imposition of models from structurally different circumstances onto US revolutionary practice. For example, the Black Panthers demanded knowledge and application of Mao’s *Little Red Book*. Other groups attempted to transplant Che’s *foco* theory to US cities. Some took Algerian insurgency against French rule as a model for revolutionary practice.⁷⁸

6.3 “You Can’t Import Contradictions”

If analogies with colonialism enabled a de-domesticating refusal to read rebellion as ‘internal’ disorder, Boggs also argued that such analogies might also limit one’s reading of rebellion *to rebellion*. Analogies might get at the sense of widespread rejection, and undermine domesticating interpretations of and responses to revolt, but they offer little in the way of projecting possible shapes of revolutionary politics. Indeed, he argues that the colonial analogy lends itself to a nationalist separatism that, ultimately, amounts to a sort of escapism:

“Most of those who call themselves Black Power advocates are trying to find a solution for blacks separate from a solution for the contradictions of the entire United States. . . .many black nationalists are going off into all kinds of fantasies and dreams about what Black Power means—like heading for Africa, or isolating themselves in a few states.”⁷⁹

In essays like “Putting Politics in Command” (1970) Boggs argues that critics and movements hinged on analogies with colonialism are characterized by radical *rhetoric* of separation and a *practice* of rebellion for the sake of reform. In that essay the Black Panther Party is his target. While deeply sympathetic to their attempt to transform the “black street force”

⁷⁸As Boggs writes, “Critical of the lack of ideology in such organizations as SNCC and CORE, the Panthers borrowed intact the *Little Red Book*, without distinguishing what is appropriate to China, or a post-revolutionary situation, and what is appropriate to the United States, or a pre-revolutionary situation.” See “Putting Politics in Command,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 185.

⁷⁹James Boggs. “Beyond Rebellion.” In: *New York Times* (Sept. 23, 1972). URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/09/23/archives/beyond-rebellion.html> (visited on 01/09/2022).

into a revolutionary subject, he argues that they direct this force toward rebellion – demands *of* rather than *for* power. For Boggs this is epitomized in the Ten-Point Program, which he argues is a document of rebellion rather than a revolutionary program: it is a “reaction to, and defense against white oppression. . . rather than an offensive strategy leading to the conquest of power.” Its demands, further, are directed toward “concessions. . . from the white power structure.”⁸⁰

Readers might naturally quibble with Boggs’s polemical interpretation of the Panthers’ program. But the upshot for the concept of domestic colonialism is that while the domestic colony thesis enables a rejection of any easy acceptance of a politics of inclusion and legal equality, it can also entrap insurgent politics in a binary opposition between a tendency toward capitulation and an almost unattainable ideal of ‘separation.’ The way beyond this in James and Grace Lee Boggs’s thinking in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a turn away from borrowed models and analogies. What is required, they argue, is an insistence on the unique character of US social and political order, which exceeds any analogy:

“Every country’s past is particular, but America’s is so particular that it almost seems to have evolved on another planet. . . the creation of a new nation founded on concepts of freedom and equality more advanced than any hitherto dreamed of, but a nation that would eventually exterminate and enslave people on a racial basis as they had never before been exterminated or enslaved in human history.”⁸¹

The intimacy and inextricability of the most ‘advanced’ US capitalism and the most ‘regressive’ forms of racial domination require an analysis of the unique “historical and dialectical development of the US in particular.” The link between capital accumulation and the ‘using-up’ of Black communities “has made the blacks the chief social force for the revolt against American capitalism.”⁸² Analogies, here, would be a signal expression of undialectic-

⁸⁰“Putting Politics in Command,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 183.

⁸¹Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*.

⁸²Boggs, “Black Power: a Scientific Concept Whose Time has Come,” p. 174.

tical thinking, in which revolutionary concepts become frozen abstractions to which we are held ‘prisoner’ even as (and precisely because) we transport them to new contexts.⁸³ As James Boggs puts it in a 1973 interview: “you can’t import contradictions.”⁸⁴ The key watchwords here are a refusal to cramp this unique predicament into ‘foreign’ models: to avoid the temptation to “impose a model upon the struggles in this country.”⁸⁵

Thus the emphasis is decisively on the US and the specific conditions of revolutionary politics there. While the 1960s and 1970s were an “epoch of global revolution... the struggles most important to us are those taking place in *this* country, because they are the only ones we can really shape.”⁸⁶ One might think this is a sort of turn ‘inward,’ *away* from internationalism and Third Worldism. However, they continued to insist on the importance of “*all* the world revolutionary struggles which are now going on in China, in Vietnam, in Africa, in Latin America, and in the United States.”⁸⁷ It is precisely through the study of such revolutions that one can begin to understand the specific predicament facing revolutionaries in the US.

In “Putting Politics in Command,” Boggs begins unpacking a productive failure of analogy, showing that historical (Russian, Chinese, etc.) and foreign (Ghanaian, Vietnamese, Cuban) models cannot capture the problem of revolution in the US. Whereas “nationalism in a colony” in the Third World is a “relatively simple,” if arduous, process of ejecting the colonizer and struggling against “neocolonialism,” this makes little sense in North America. Here he argues the situation is “much more complex because our lives and our condition are so bound up with those of the oppressor... it is thus impossible to separate the development of our conditions of life as blacks in this country from the development of the system itself”⁸⁸ This makes it difficult to imagine revolution on the terms set by the negativity of rebellion, as

⁸³Boggs, “Think Dialectically, Not Biologically,” p. 273.

⁸⁴Nicholas, *Questions for the American Revolution*, pp. 17–18.

⁸⁵Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 171.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, p. 173.

separation and refusal. This refusal pushes against domestication but does not spell out what a specifically American ‘de-domesticated’ politics might be.

So, as Boggs puts it, “Even though blacks in the United States have many of the characteristics of a colonial people (super-exploited, undeveloped, powerless, segregated), there is no point in anyone... dealing or not dealing with the black movement as if blacks were in Asia or Africa.” Indeed, it is precisely “the fact that blacks are inside the United States, not in Africa or Asia or Latin America” that defines their historically peculiar conditions.⁸⁹ As I have already shown, the reading of rebellion as a move toward self-determination already undermines the interpretation of this statement as an acceptance of the domestic boundaries of the US. On the contrary, it is to see the *imposition* and *maintenance* of these boundaries as a key limit on revolutionary politics. It is by imaginatively working across them, examining other revolutions as potential sources for revolutionary knowledge (but not models), that one sees the curious condition in which “in relation to U.S. capitalism, blacks have played a role which is both *like* and *unlike* that of colonial peoples.”⁹⁰

Carrying over models from colonial contexts is not therefore a mistake, really. It is an important part of a broader conceptual movement in which analogy begets analysis, similarity exposes singularity. In this movement the reading of rebellion as anticolonial revolt allows for a refusal of any domesticating reading. It enables a de-domesticated ground, in which the ‘domestic’ space of US politics appears as already ‘internationalized,’ in some sense, for a return to the question of a specifically American revolutionary politics. This is the shift I have been calling the movement from the domestic colony thesis to the domestic colony theory. In Boggsian writings this shift is expressed in a move from a critique of colonial analogies to a repurposing of the concept of self-determination in service of the specific problem of being superfluous to capitalist production. I conclude, therefore, with a gesture toward a few of the iterations on this final theme that James and Grace Lee Boggs offered in the wake of the

⁸⁹“Putting Politics in Command,” in Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*, pp. 173–4.

⁹⁰Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 185.

1960s rebellions.

6.4 From Rebellion to Revolution

To recapitulate: in Boggs's writings in the 1960s, the rise of the Outsiders is cast as a result of a basic contradiction between the permanent expulsion of Black workers from US capitalist production and their continuing presence as political and economic forces within the US. Both the counterinsurgent attempt to contain or pacify rebellion, and the insurgent attempt to see it as straightforwardly analogous to anticolonial revolution, work less to sharpen or resolve that contradiction than to displace it. Pacification "dulls" the contradictions – engaging in what Christian Davenport calls "problem depletion," casting the rebellions as answerable only within the framework that they reject.⁹¹ Colonial analogies read the contradiction as an antagonism whose only 'solution' is radical separation. Both leave intact, arguably, a social order defined by the reproduction of superfluous people.

Thus Boggs's argument in *The American Revolution* and beyond points to the necessity of thinking about this contradiction as opening questions of political form. As he writes,

"These millions [of outsiders] have never been and never can be absorbed into this society at all. They can only be absorbed into a totally new type of society whose first principle will have to be that man is the master and not the servant of things."⁹²

It may seem as if the creation of this totally new type of society might be done 'from above,' so to speak. Might this not be another form of external control, no different from pacification or repression? This would become a key point of reflection, contention, and modification in James and Grace Lee Boggs' thought. A turn to revolution from rebellion

⁹¹On problem depletion as one strategy of demobilization, see Davenport, *How Social Movements Die: Repression and Demobilization of the Republic of New Afrika*.

⁹²Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*, p. 50.

implies that it makes good on the revolutionary potentialities presented by the rebels themselves, a development of them, rather than a mechanism of control or direction imposed from above.

The problem faced in terms of moving from an ‘anticolonial’ rebellion to a new American revolution is therefore defined by a tension between the need to move beyond the limits of rebellion while respecting the autonomy and generativity of rebellion itself. This means no imposition of a ‘model,’ no “smug plan” can replace the creation of new ideas, new practices, and new forms by the outsiders themselves.⁹³ In other words it is a matter of mapping the road from rebellion to revolution through the *self-determination of the superfluous*.

In *The American Revolution* Boggs warns about over-optimism about the revolutionary attitudes and capabilities of ‘the outsiders,’ while also emphasizing the quasi-inevitability of their eventual self-organization.

“Now I am not saying that this new generation of outsiders is an organized force. It is not as simple as that. In fact, no existing organization would even think of organizing them, which means they will have to organize themselves and that the need to organize themselves will soon be forced upon them. . . .”⁹⁴

This move to revolution premised on the self-determination of the superfluous resists easy transplantation of models from elsewhere. What emerges instead in their writings is a series of attempts to work out practices through which those rendered disposable and ‘occupied’ by a punitive state might reclaim self-government. The concept of anticolonial self-determination therefore survives in their attempts to think through this problem.

The response they offered in the wake of the 1960s was the creation of a vanguard party. Their theory of the vanguard party in the US is outlined in a series of texts, including *Manifesto For a Black Revolutionary Party*, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*,

⁹³Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook*, p. 50.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 52.

and *The Awesome Responsibility of Revolutionary Leadership*. Some readers, for example Patrick King, see this as one of the more “disappointing” aspects of Boggsian thinking, reading the turn to the vanguard as a paternalistic move.⁹⁵ Moreover, it seems like one more place where despite hand-waving to the contrary, a ‘model’ has been imported from other situations where a vanguard party has proved useful. In *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*, James and Grace Lee Boggs broach this issue of what it means to learn from other locales about the vanguard party. They argue that, on one hand, for “a black revolutionary movement” to evade study of Lenin’s theory of the party because he is white “would be just as ridiculous as for an African freedom fighter to refuse to fly an airplane because the Wright brothers were white Americans.” They argue that the development of the “vanguard party as originated by Lenin in Russia, and subsequently developed by Mao and Ho in Asia and Amilcar Cabral in Africa, belongs to all oppressed people of the world.” On the other hand, they note that “these guidelines can be applied only in relation to the specific conditions of a particular country and only by an organization that has developed out of indigenous forces.”⁹⁶

The party is important, they write, because of the “undeveloped” condition of superfluous people. As the Boggses write, “the national character of their oppression. . . is similar to that of a colonial people.” The party reached its highest theoretical development, they argue, in situations of enforced underdevelopment, for example of peasant populations. This is one reason for the immediate, apparently ‘analogical’ appeal of the party to the Boggsian analysis. But the mediate, and ‘analytical’ reason is that a vanguard party offers a forum or site where the uniqueness of revolutionary conditions can be exposed and rebellion developed accord-

⁹⁵King, “Introduction to ”Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come” By James Boggs”; Cedric Johnson offers a similar criticism of vanguardism in his reading of Huey Newton’s thought. See Cedric Johnson. “Huey P. Newton and the Last Days of the Black Colony.” In: *African American Political Thought: a Collected History*. Ed. by Melvin L. Rogers and Jack Turner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021, pp. 631–659.

⁹⁶James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs. *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*. Detroit: Committee For Political Development, 1970, p. 3.

ingly. For though there might be some comparisons in terms of the ‘underdevelopment’ of Black Americans and the colonized, the shape of this underdevelopment is different. Black Americans exist not in an agrarian colony but in the “technologically most advanced and politically most backward country in the world.” This, the Boggses argue, shifts “the fundamental goal of revolution”: “to create a society of politically conscious, socially responsible individuals able to use technology for the purpose of liberating and developing humanity.”⁹⁷ Thus the vanguard party concept is drawn from ‘backward’ locales but must grapple with the curious imbrication of regression and ‘advancement’ in US political economy.

In the Boggses’ dialectical reading of other struggles, they draw out not models of the vanguard party to be applied wholesale to the US, but new ways of thinking of the problem of depoliticization and politicization. The party is an answer to domestication. If rebellion is nothing *in itself* but must be *made* into something, the danger of relying on the spontaneity of the masses is that political antagonism will be redirected as an internal ‘problem’ in need to management. Indeed, claims about an “instinctive drive of the working class” toward revolution are just as likely to domesticate rebellion as those who attempt to control it through pacification and repression. In the analysis proffered by the Boggses, both of these lines of thinking replace the necessarily *political* work required to shift from rebellion to revolution with a logic of historical or social necessity. Both work by putting “economics in command” of politics.⁹⁸ The party is therefore premised on the idea that there is no obvious unity that will proffer self-determination; people do not automatically trend toward unity as a revolutionary subject.⁹⁹ Instead there is required the creation of “parallel power structures” to replace those that have “failed” surplus people.¹⁰⁰

In other words, though rebellion turns on a fundamental contradiction in US political economy and its amplification by deindustrialization, there is nothing automatic about a shift

⁹⁷Boggs and Boggs, *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*, p. 14.

⁹⁸Boggs et al., *Conversations in Maine*, p. 30.

⁹⁹On this claim see Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 192, 246.

¹⁰⁰Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*.

to revolution. People must teach themselves to self-determine once again, to reclaim ‘politics’ from ‘economics.’ The underlying rationale for turning to the party is hardly, therefore, a mechanical understanding of the relation between directionless masses and visionary leaders. It is precisely the attempt to create actually existing political fora in which people can resist any attempt to transform the challenge of automation and superfluity into a crisis manageable by “experts and technicians.”¹⁰¹ On the contrary, the party’s task is to provide an avenue for the expression of the way “the contradictions and antagonisms of a particular society have created a mass social force whose felt needs cannot be satisfied by reform but only by a revolution which takes power.”¹⁰²

The party provides avenues from rebellion to revolution not by imposing unity mechanically from above, importing some a priori notion of a ‘Black nation.’ It is a vehicle of “rapid political development” through criticism, “utilizing the energy created by the dynamic of error to advance the political maturity of the organization.”¹⁰³ In other words, it offers what theorists such as Jack O’Dell and Harold Cruse sought in the domestic colony concept: an institutionalization of attempts to ‘sum up’ and ‘put in a theoretic frame’ otherwise dispersed and temporary struggles. It is a living institution that preserves political memory and history and links struggles through time in one process of ‘failure’ and ‘maturation.’ One formulation from *RETC* is particularly informative here:

“A vanguard party is the instrument by means of which the militancy and the rebellion of the revolutionary social forces can be transformed from purely reflexive, trial-and-error reactions into purposeful, planned, and programmatic struggles for power.”¹⁰⁴

In other words, the party offers a way to transform individual *events* of rebellion into an

¹⁰¹Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 131–132.

¹⁰²Boggs and Boggs, *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*, p. 8.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 130.

enduring revolutionary subjectivity.

This is why the Boggses argue that a properly dialectical study of Lenin, Mao, and other theorists does not concern *who* the revolutionary subject is. On the contrary, the lesson of these theorists is that the one thing we *cannot* do is theorize about who the revolutionary subject is, and *then* assume the party will somehow ‘activate’ them.¹⁰⁵ Instead the party is the place where a revolutionary subject is *created* from rebels; or, more accurately, where rebels remake themselves into revolutionaries.

The turn from rebellion to revolution in their writings at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s is motivated, therefore, by a distinct turn away from the ‘colonial analogy.’ While even in *The Awesome Responsibilities* and *RETC* the ‘rebels’ are understood to be living in and reacting to a ‘colonial’ condition, an “‘internal colony,’”¹⁰⁶ the turn to a revolutionary party is also a turn to the specific conditions of the US, and the need to draw political programs, institutions, and strategies from the people therein. This never relinquished an internationalist outlook that de-domesticated the interpretation of rebellion. This initial spatial de-domestication that enables a turn to revolutionary theorists throughout the Second and Third Worlds who were thinking about how to undo domestication in its second sense, the neutralizing replacement of political agency with historical, social, or economic ‘logics’ of necessity. Thus we might say that the following exhortation is not only a reason *why* they think a party is necessary, but a *result* of a party’s engagement with the specificity of the US predicament:

“The life and death of the entire human race depends on the revolutionist in the United States recognizing that there are no models for a revolution in the United States.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Boggs and Boggs, *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶E.g. Boggs and Boggs, *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership*, p. 13; Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁷Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 179.

The movement of the domestic colonialism concept in James and Grace Lee Boggs's writings in the 1960s thus 'concludes' with a turn away from analogy and toward analysis. But it is not a matter of rejecting one in favour of the other, but of locating the uniqueness begot by the latter *through* the failure of the former.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a reconstruction of James and Grace Lee Boggs's arguments about revolutionary politics in the 1960s through the lens of a conceptual history of domestic colonialism. This necessarily limits the scope of engagement, since James and Grace Lee Boggs's politics extended well beyond the territory examined here. However, their writings in the 1960s epitomizes domestic colonialism as a conceptual *movement* rather than an abstract theory or rhetorical strategy. It was a way to grapple with novel forms of revolt, rooted in a unique set of 'American' contradictions (contradictions which would ultimately be exported to the Global South): the production of surplus people who would never be absorbed by existing capitalist production. They necessarily raise the question of revolution as the reshaping of political and social form toward a system that in which the superfluous would reclaim the capacity for self-determination rather than be 'absorbed' as subjects of administration.

The Boggsian iteration of the domestic colonialism concept might best be described as driven by a disposition guided by dialectical internationalism: a commitment to learning from revolutions past and present made against imperialism, colonialism, and racial domination not out of an interest in 'models' of revolution but as a form of revolutionary learning aimed at cultivating a dialectical disposition. The best of what 'other' revolutions did was precisely *not* to import models straightforwardly but to pinpoint the specific problems and conditions facing revolutionary politics there. This is a lesson that can, and even must, be learned through an anti-imperialist internationalism, but it was one that returned James and Grace Lee Boggs's analytical gaze and political commitments back to their own immedi-

ate vicinity. But, arguably, it had an enduring impact even when they moved away from strict colonial analogies. They engaged with the unique American iterations of deindustrializing abandonment, punitive neoliberalism, and political debilitation. But they did so on the ground of a de-domesticated scene in which the reclamation of agency in conditions of abandonment, containment, and economic compulsion is understood as self-determination.

Ultimately the insistence on self-determination moves against the twin moves of domestication (containment and neutralization) in a double rejection of attempts to a) take the US nation-state's boundaries as a backdrop for political action and b) to reduce politics to a technical issue. Various critics have, to be sure, found reasons for disappointment in various strategies – from the vanguard party to community-building – but the import of the 'self-determination of the superfluous' is that it opens onto a politics without 'precedent,' and demands that we continually move beyond ossified frames and habits. To paraphrase the late Jean-Luc Nancy, in James and Grace Lee Boggs's writings in the era of decolonization, to think in the tradition of anticolonial and Black self-determination in North America is to think without models.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸Jean-Luc Nancy. *Being Singular-Plural*. Trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 141–3.

Chapter 7

The Absent Dialectic of Domesticity

It is impossible to speak of the relation of women to capital anywhere without at the same time confronting the question of development versus underdevelopment.

– Selma James¹

What would it mean for a democracy to create a private realm of bodies to be ruled, and to racially mark them? – Joy James²

Throughout this dissertation I have been using the language of domestication to describe attempts to contain – spatially, juridically, and politically – revolutionary claims for self-determination to ‘domestic politics,’ and thus neutralize them as resolvable within the juridical and political frame of the nation-state. My claim, in turn, has been that the concept of domestic colonialism offered a theoretical vocabulary that interpreted claims for self-determination as demands that revealed that the sphere of ‘domestic politics’ was in fact always riven by its apparent opposite, ‘international’ politics. Domestic colonialism is a concept that exposes the internationalization of the domestic.³ Black revolutionary internationalists exposed that ‘domestic’ politics was in fact a mechanism of imperial and racial

¹Selma James. “Wageless of the World (1975).” In: *Sex, Race, and Class—The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952-2011*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012, pp. 102–109, p. 104.

²Joy James. “‘All Power to the People!’: Arendt’s Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy.” In: *Seeking the Beloved Community: a Feminist Race Reader*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013, pp. 307–326, p. 312.

³See Manu Karuka, “Black and Native Visions of Self-Determination”; Edkins and Zehfuss, “Generalising the International.”

power over the ‘colonized of North America.’ The dialectical critique of domestication exposes how ‘domestic’ politics contains its other, the international as a form of politics that happens *between* communities. However, this is not just a matter of moving past the limits of domestic US politics; it exposes the limits of politics qua the enclosed and bounded *polis* as such. Put simply, as I wrote in the introduction, in the constellation of North American racial capitalism and settler colonialism this recasts our entire understanding of ‘the political’: it is not a matter of criticizing and eliminating the colonial and racial conditions or limits of politics, but of criticizing the way politics as such works as a technology of colonial and racial power.

Thus my aim here has been show that the discourse on domestic colonialism re-interprets ‘domestic politics’ modelled on the *polis* as a contradictory, unstable formation that relies on the tenuous, and ultimately, impossible, ‘domestication’ of the international politics it contains and enacts. However, the *polis* is equally held up through its opposition to the *oikos*, the household and the private realm. In the field of political theory, the ur-text for this opposition is Aristotle’s *Politics*, where he defines politics proper in opposition to a collection of households. The latter is collective life, just as politics is, but concerns the management of the necessities of life. For Aristotle – and all those working in his long historical shadow – politics is precisely that place where we act independent of these necessities.

In contemporary political theory Hannah Arendt is the most notorious proponent of this distinction between the *oikos* and the *polis*. Drawing the distinction on the basis of Aristotle’s view, she sees the rise of various struggles over merely “social” issues such as the wage, the family, welfare, and housing as harbingers of the death of politics as such, its replacement by “political economy,” the reduction of political freedom to the ‘public’ governance of our collective biological needs. Here the household has left its proper place, and come to infect the entire public body; no longer living in *oikoi* distinct from the *polis*, we live in a “national

economy” in which we appear only as behaving animals.⁴ In many respects, despite the peppering of her analysis with Greek etymologies, she was expressing a quintessentially US republican ideology, in which independence from necessity and the household was a precondition of the voluntary community of citizens established in the American Revolution. Seen from the vantage of American political development, republican citizenship is a kind of masculine emancipation from a dependency indexed as feminine and childlike. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn nicely puts it,

“The equation of masculinity with activity in the public domain... was drawn in explicit contrast to the equation of femininity with the activities of daily maintenance carried out in the private domestic sphere. Those immured in the domestic sphere – women, children, servants, and other dependents – were not considered full members of the full political community... [which] was restricted to ‘free white males.’”⁵

If I am tracing, in this dissertation, a line of critique that exposes the instability of ‘domestic politics’ through an undermining of the domestic/international distinction, it would seem that this is basically incomplete without an inquiry into the other constitutive other of the political classically understood: domesticity.

Such an inquiry is equally demanded by the very language of ‘domestic’ or ‘internal’ colonialism. The words themselves contain a resonance with domesticity, intimacy, and the family. Linda Gordon has pointed this out in her essay “Internal Colonialism and Gender.” She writes there that the concept “evokes realms of colonial relations [pertaining to] the familial, the household, the relational, the ‘private.’”⁶ It is precisely this underlying meaning of intimacy and domesticity that helps evoke the difficulty of a revolutionary politics of self-

⁴Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 28.

⁵Evelyn Nakano Glenn. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 19.

⁶Gordon, “Internal Colonialism and Gender,” p. 429.

determination in North America – proximity makes it easier for claims to self-determination to be assumed as ‘internal’ struggles. The term ‘domestication,’ too, borrows from feminist claim that to be reduced to a sphere of domesticity is to be politically neutralized. However, while domesticity is key to the construction of the political (my object of critique) and works as an underlying metaphor of de-politicization (in the articulation of the critique), the actual politics of domesticity – the household, housework, patriarchal power, etc. – as they pertain to struggles for self-determination in North America have not been fully incorporated into my analysis. While, as Gordon writes, the domestic colonialism concept usefully “calls attention to the fact that the very distinction between domestic and foreign in U.S. history has been an ideological one,” the gendered and ‘intimate’ dimensions of this line of criticism remain underexplored here.⁷

This chapter therefore unpacks the relationship between a feminist criticism of domestication (as domesticity) and the internationalist critique of domestication (as domestic politics). It has, of course, been a central task of feminist criticism to “expose and elucidate the problems of a dichotomy which has been accepted as fundamental to liberal thought...that between the ‘public’ world of political life and the ‘private’ domestic world of family and personal relations.”⁸ The key move of *de*-domestication here is showing that the ‘domestic world’ is better understood not as a ‘space’ (to be left, or entered) but a process of enclosure (that captures and expels). It is not a matter of ‘the private’ so much as a “privatization process.”⁹ In relation to this problematic, black feminists argued (*vis-a-vis* black nationalisms) that ignoring this privatization process risked recapitulating it even in apparently liberatory movements, and (*vis-a-vis* white feminisms) that for racialized peoples – both in and in the US – the ‘de-domestication’ of housework and accompanying forms of power was already

⁷Gordon, “Internal Colonialism and Gender,” p. 437.

⁸Susan Moller Okin. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1989, p. 111.

⁹Shulamith Firestone. *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1970, p. 253.

pathologically accomplished.¹⁰

Black feminists working in revolutionary movements highlighted a persistent ‘re-privatization.’ Linda La Rue argued in 1970 that “Blacks speak lovingly of the vanguard and the importance of women to the struggle, yet fail to recognize that women have been assigned a new place, based on white ascribed characteristics of women, rather than their actual potential.”¹¹ Looking to prevalent analogies between Third World and US struggles, she notes that “the black movement has sanctioned revolutionary involvement of women in the Algerian revolution,” but “upon the rebirth of the liberation struggle in the sixties, a while genre of ‘women’s place’ advocates immediately relegated black women to home and babies.”¹² Black feminist critics connected this re-affirmation of ‘women’s place’ as a re-affirmation of white ideals, and therefore as a limiting factor in movements for black self-determination. This has been one central criticism of the domestic colonialism theory and the nationalism that apparently underpins it. Roderick Ferguson has argued that this nationalism has been premised on “a narrative of castration and gender distortion” that figures “revolutionary agency as heteropatriarchal reclamation.”¹³ This narrative is especially evident in the subordination of struggles concerning gender oppression to questions of ‘national liberation’ politics.

A compressed but indicative expression of this discourse can be found in “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy” by Robert Staples, a key proponent of the ‘domestic colonialism model’ in sociology. There he argues, despite his broader criticism of various stereotypes of Black women, for a general priority of antiracism over anti-sexist politics. As he puts it, “Black women cannot be free until all blacks attain their liberation.”¹⁴ Putting ‘all’ temporally and politically prior to ‘black women,’ Staples writes that all such that it excludes women. Audre Lorde argues that in making this move, Staples poses revolutionary Black feminism as an

¹⁰For an overview of these claims see Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Hyman, 1990.

¹¹Rue, “The Black Movement and Women’s Liberation,” p. 41.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹³Ferguson, *Aberrations In Black*, pp. 114–115.

¹⁴Robert Staples. “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy.” In: *The Black Scholar* 1.3 (1970), pp. 8–16, p. 16.

interruption of a proper sequential ordering: first ‘national’ liberation, then gender liberation. It therefore is cast as a threat to the project of self-determination understood in masculine terms.¹⁵ Given this prevalent narrative linkage between self-determination and the reassertion of a gendered distinction between domesticity and politics proper, Ramon Gutierrez argues that it is no surprise that “the dreams that internal colonialism ignited in the hearts of men resonated more like in the ears of women.”¹⁶ Frances M. Beal offered a signal iteration of this line of criticism, arguing that “those who are asserting their ‘manhood’ by telling black women to step back into a domestic, submissive role are assuming a counter-revolutionary position.”¹⁷

This chapter takes up this critical discourse as a critique of domestication. Black feminist critics of domesticity showed, like other feminist thinkers, that modern conceptions of political subjectivity are premised not only on a distinction between domestic and international politics, but between ‘domesticity’ and ‘domestic politics.’ However, they also offered a dialectical analysis of the de-domestication of the domestic. More specifically, they showed that racialized populations were already ‘de-domesticated’ but in pathological ways that facilitated their domination by white people. Bonnie Thornton Dill, for example, argues for a specifically dialectical analysis oriented by the contradiction between Black women’s role as labourers in the ‘public’ world outside the household and a “society where ideals of femininity emphasized domesticity.”¹⁸ They served as members not only of an ‘enclosed’ household but a broader private realm, as paid labourers for other families. This socially pathological double burden of ‘public’ and ‘private’ labour offers a ground for the development of a political perspective that refigures the ‘domestic’ completely, since it affords also a kind of consciousness and autonomy that already betrays any depoliticizing ‘privatization process.’

¹⁵Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 62–63.

¹⁶Gutiérrez, “Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race,” pp. 291–293.

¹⁷Frances M Beal. “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female.” In: *Meridians* 8.2 (2008), pp. 166–176, p. 169.

¹⁸Bonnie Thornton Dill. “The Dialectics of Black Womanhood.” In: *Signs* 4.3 (1979), pp. 543–555, p. 553.

Dill puts it, “The contradiction between the subjection of women from West Africa to the harsh deprivations of slavery, farm, factory, and domestic work and the sense of autonomy and self-reliance which developed, points in the direction of a new avenue.”¹⁹

Those inhabiting, acting, and writing from this contradiction expose the basic instability of ‘domesticity,’ and therefore of any political imagination premised on its enclosure and separation from public politics. Just as the domestic colonialism concept exposes the immanent presence of the international in the domestic, so this criticism of domesticity exposes the already ‘socialized’ and ‘disenclosed’ character of domesticity in societies textured by racial domination. In other words, they exposed the impossibility of domesticity, properly speaking, for racialized populations. As Beal puts it, while Black women were ‘relegated’ to the household, this never meant their full enclosure within it:

“It is idle dreaming to think of black women as simply caring for their homes and children like the middle class white model. Most black women have to work to help house, feed, and clothe their families... though we have been browbeaten with this white image, the reality of the degrading and dehumanizing jobs that were relegated to us quickly dissipated this mirage of ‘womanhood.’”²⁰

In this particular predicament of power, a politics of de-domestication is not a matter of moving against the enclosure of the household as an already accomplished fact but of exposing the possibilities inherent in the way that domesticity is always-already unstable and ‘de-domesticated’ under racial capitalism. This chapter traces three discourses, rooted in revolutionary politics in the 1960s and 1970s, that trace this contradictory ‘de-domestication of the domestic’: wages for housework, Angela Davis’s analysis of domesticity and Black women’s revolutionary subjectivity, and Joy James’s theorization of the Captive Maternal. All three show that the domestic is already de-domesticated, but in unfree and pathological

¹⁹Dill, “The Dialectics of Black Womanhood,” p. 555.

²⁰Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” p. 167.

ways.

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminists appropriated languages of anticolonialism to re-interpret gender domination in terms of ‘colonial domination’ and housework as a sort of enforced ‘underdevelopment.’ Women, here, appear as a members of a ‘Fourth’ or ‘Third’ world that transcends nation-state boundaries, a world defined by systematic ‘underdevelopment’ and enclosure in the household. In this respect they productively theorized domesticity as an international presence within ‘domestic politics’ through an internationalist feminist analysis. However, as in the other chapters of this dissertation, the *failures* of such analogies were highlighted by Black feminist critics of these feminist analyses. Angela Davis argued that ‘wages for housework’ failed to recognize that housework was *already* waged, *already* socialized, but in ways premised on racial domination. She argues that this pathological socialization of domestic labour also provided the ground in which humanizing relationships could be cultivated in opposition to slavery. Joy James engages this pathological de-domestication of domesticity as a generalized “private realm” of household power, upon which the political *as such* has been premised. The U.S. political, she argues, relies on a parasitic, consumptive relation to racialized families, who are ‘used up’ not only through extractive capitalism but in their very fights against it. Both Davis and James move from making analogies between Black struggles for freedom and anticolonialism, to an analysis of the broader international scene shaped by US imperial power. In the last section, I highlight how this move from analogy to anti-imperial analysis undergirded the analysis offered by key Black feminist organizations in the US such as the Third World Women’s Alliance and the Combahee River Collective (though I make no pretension to a comprehensive historical account). In each case, however, one of the central points is that domesticity becomes, itself, a weapon of political domestication: it is an instrument of counterinsurgency, a violent and repressive response to the basic instability of a political order that *relies on*, but *makes impossible* an enclosed ‘domestic’ sphere.

Before I turn to these lines of analysis, I should note that they are exemplars of dialectical thought as I have defined it here: the cultivation of a dialectical disposition defined by the ability to stretch and invent concepts to make sense of oft-unnoticed or novel forms of political insurgency. An analysis of the relatively autonomous dialectic of domesticity under US racial capitalism resisted the tendency to ‘reduce’ the struggles in ‘the household’ to some broader, more general, or more ‘determining’ struggles. They were not ‘adding’ or quantitatively expanding the criticism of domestication by including the experiences and perspectives of Black women, nor were they replacing it with an entirely new analysis. They were working at its limits, in the gap between it and political struggles concerned with domesticity. As Deborah King puts it, they were refusing “one-dimensional” modes of thought – whether “additive” (race, gender, and class are ‘added’ together) or “monist” (one ‘axis’ of oppression serves as an underlying cause of others).²¹ Instead, these analyses emerge from what Patricia Hill Collins calls the “dialectic of oppression and activism”: the dynamic and open relation between experiences of domination and theories of liberation.²² For Collins, this turn to experience is not a turn to experience as an unmediated ground of truth, but a site in which existing theories, concepts, and narratives confront the political world in ways that highlight their non-identity – the gap between concept and world. This is not a matter of strictly *matching* world and concept, but of locating a “self-defined standpoint,” a self-clarification of one’s position in struggle.²³ In this respect the critique of domesticity here tracks a moment of dialectical political judgment in which a set of experiences and histories cannot be grasped by existing accounts of political action and historical development, and in which this gap is mediated and worked through through conceptual innovation.

²¹Deborah K. King. “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology.” In: *Signs* 14.1 (1988), pp. 42–72, p. 51.

²²Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, p. 13.

²³Ibid., p. 34.

7.1 The “Privatization Process” from “Interior Colonization” to “Underdevelopment”

Domestication as I have unpacked it in this dissertation is a specific kind of depoliticization. Depoliticization, now, is just a word for the transformation of something that poses *political* problems – fraught with relations of power and domination, lacking a ‘technical’ solution – into something that is non-political, non-contestable. To re-politicize – to criticize – involves “exposing a concept as ideological or culturally constructed rather than natural or a simple reflection of reality.”²⁴ This does not inevitably lead to political contestation, but is political contestation’s condition of possibility. It reveals that ‘we’ have made something that we take to be inevitable and natural. My focus in this dissertation has been on how claims for Black self-determination have de-naturalized and re-politicized the very contours of the frame of US ‘domestic politics’ by showing the problems at hand to be *international* rather than domestic.

In this vein, feminism represents, in part, a critique of the household, family, or ‘domesticity’ as a site of depoliticization. As Susan Moller Okin puts it:

“Feminists have turned their attention to the politics of what had been previously regarded... as paradigmatically nonpolitical. That the personal sphere of sexuality, of housework, of child care, and family life *is* political became the underpinning of most feminist thought.”²⁵

A particularly well-known example of this line of criticism was the slogan “the personal is political.” In an essay so titled, Carol Hanisch described this process of politicization in “consciousness-raising” groups. Whereas critics denigrated these groups as “therapy,” Hanisch saw them as sites where apparently private experiences were seen as effects of political arrangements open to intervention and resistance. As she puts it, “One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no

²⁴Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, p. 14.

²⁵Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, p. 125.

personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.”²⁶ In her essay, readings of these sessions as ‘mere’ therapy was a move of domestication. Such interpretations put them in a ‘domestic’ or ‘private’ sphere but neutralized their novelty by erasing them as a form of political action. Against this, Hanisch argues precisely that “these analytical sessions are a form of political action... it is at this point a political action to tell it like it is.”²⁷ The slogan ‘the personal is political’ makes intelligible these new forms of action in ways that existing frameworks ignore or neutralize.

Colonial analogies played a key role in making intelligible the already political character of domesticity and ‘private’ life.’ For example, a group of feminists argued in “The Fourth World Manifesto” that “women are a colonized group who have never – anywhere – been allowed self-determination.” This pushed back, they wrote, against the subordination of feminist struggles as “adjuncts” to an apparently more general “anti-imperialist movement.”²⁸ As with theorists of domestic colonialism, they saw this as stretching the definition of colonization beyond “the dictionary definition of imperialism or colonialism to mean a group which is prevented from self-determination by another group.”²⁹ In her groundbreaking *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett argues in this vein that a “systematic overview of patriarchy as a political institution” shows that “sex has a frequently negative political aspect.”³⁰ To see domesticity as a blockage to political self-determination implies that sexuality “does not take place in a vacuum.”³¹ Apparently ‘personal’ relations are shot through with power – in ways that require a redefinition of politics itself beyond “our traditional formal politics” with its division between public and private.³²

²⁶Carol Hanisch. “The Personal is Political.” In: *Radical Feminism: a Documentary Reader*. Ed. by Barbara Chow. New York: NYU Press, 2000, pp. 113–117, p. 114.

²⁷Ibid., p. 113.

²⁸Barbara Burris. “The Fourth World Manifesto.” In: *Radical Feminism: a Documentary Reader*. Ed. by Barbara Chow. New York: NYU Press, 2000, pp. 238–264, p. 238.

²⁹Ibid., p. 247.

³⁰Kate Millett. *Sexual Politics*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1970, p. xi.

³¹Ibid., p. 23.

³²Ibid., p. 24.

Millett's uses a colonial analogy to politicize sex and its apparent proper domain (the household) as a site of political rule and insurgency. As she writes,

“The situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is a case of that phenomenon Max Weber defined as *herrschaft*, a relation of dominance and subordination. What goes largely unexamined, even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalized nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females. Through this system a most ingenious form of ‘interior colonization’ has been achieved.”³³

For Millett, recasting the household as a realm of *herrschaft* undermines any understanding of politics that relies on a depoliticization of domesticity. She calls these kinds of politics “patriarchal.” This is not just because they institutionalize male privilege but because they rely on a linkage between citizenship in domestic politics and *rulership* in the ‘domestic sphere.’ She points out, that is, that citizenship premised on equal liberty has typically been an equality of those who rule *over* families.³⁴

The de-domestication of the domestic is not therefore just the introduction of politics into the ‘private sphere’ or vice-versa. It undermines political orders premised on a tightly wound relation between the political and a privatized domesticity: “As co-operation between the family and the larger society is essential, else both would fall apart, the fate of three patriarchal institutions, the family, society, and the state are interrelated.”³⁵ A de-domestication of domesticity thus involves a much wider revolutionary transformation than the entrance of domesticity’s subjects into politics. Shulamith Firestone, on this count, argued in her *The Dialectic of Sex* that this shift requires the total socialization of housework and reproductive labour, which she understands as “the full self-determination, including independence,

³³Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p. 25.

³⁴Ibid., p. 35.

³⁵Ibid., p. 33.

of both women and children.”³⁶ Importantly, this self-determination is not understood on a model of separation, nor is it an attempt to destroy domesticity as one of the last “private retreats” under capitalism, but to “diffuse it [domesticity and its affective relations] – for the first time creating society from the bottom up.”³⁷

This socialization or de-domestication of domesticity across the whole social body animated the Wages for Housework movement in the 1970s. Theorists in this movement argued that a new “political perspective” was needed that would see domestic work as productive of value: “housework is already money for capital.”³⁸ In some sense, then, domestic work is already ‘socialized’ despite its apparent enclosure in the household. Sharp distinctions between domesticity and political life more properly conceal this fact:

“The ideology that opposes the family... to the factory, the personal to the social, the private to the public, productive to unproductive work, is functional to our enslavement to the home, which, in the absence of a wage, has always appeared as an act of love... [and] finds one of its clearest expressions in the organization of the nuclear family.”³⁹

For theorists of wages for housework, the ‘domestic’ sphere and the scene of production were linked and mutually constitutive parts of capitalism “in its totality.”⁴⁰ To refuse housework, or demand a wage for it, was not just a matter of ‘waging’ it in the literal sense but of illuminating the “totality of the working day” as including housework, and thus to confront capitalist production as a whole, in its reliance on ‘unwaged’ domestic work.⁴¹ This social-

³⁶Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution*, p. 234.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁸Ilvia Federici. “Wages against Housework (1975).” In: *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012, pp. 15–23, p. 19.

³⁹Ilvia Federici. “Counterplanning from the Kitchen (1975).” In: *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012, pp. 28–40, p. 35.

⁴⁰Tithi Bhattacharya. “Mapping Social Reproduction Theory.” In: *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press, 2017, pp. 1–20, pp. 1–20.

⁴¹Federici, “Wages against Housework (1975).”

ized existence of unwaged housework meant that domesticity was never fully domesticated – that what Firestone calls the “privatization process” was “by no means complete.”⁴²

The upshot, here, was that a non-pathological ‘de-domestication of the domestic’ could not be achieved within the framework of the US nation-state or American capitalism. Here theorists such as Selma James, Mariosa Dalla Costa, and Silvia Federici mobilized the language of colonialism and colonial analogies to make sense of this impossibility. Selma James saw the project of refusing housework and the enclosure of the household as a global struggle of “the least powerful – the unwaged,” a designation that for her links “The Third World” and “the kitchen in the metropolis” as “massive repositories” of unwaged labour.⁴³ Costa argues that “when we call the home a ghetto, we could call it a colony governed by indirect rule and be as accurate.”⁴⁴ the language of underdevelopment, more specifically, plays a key role in the Wages for Housework movement’s analysis of domestication. The exit from the household offered by political emancipation, they write, underwrites a re-domestication of women through the *extension* of their working day as both the factory and the home.⁴⁵ The escape from the household does not abolish it, but affirms it, a move Costa describes through an analogy with colonial underdevelopment:

“Here again we must draw a parallel, different as they are, between underdevelopment in the Third World and underdevelopment in the metropolis – to be more precise, in the kitchens of the metropolis. Capitalist planning proposes to the Third World that it ‘develop,’ that in addition to its present agonies, it too must suffer the agony of an industrial counterrevolution. Women in the metropolis

⁴²Mariarosa Dalla Costa. “Women and the Subversion of Community (1972).” In: *Women and the Subversion of Community: A Mariosa Dalla Costa Reader*. Ed. by Barbara Barbagallo. Oakland: PM Press, 2019.

⁴³Selma James. “Sex, Race, and Class (1974).” In: *Sex, Race, and Class—The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952-2011*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012, pp. 92–101, p. 99.

⁴⁴Costa, “Women and the Subversion of Community (1972),” p. 39.

⁴⁵“Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus that created a movement... to recompose the workforce with increasing number of women.” *ibid.*, p. 42.

have been offered the same ‘aid.’”⁴⁶

This language of underdevelopment borrowed from Black and anticolonial theorists’ refusals to be ‘reduced’ to subordinate or minor notes in a broader or more general class struggle. Selma James argues that feminists learned from Black freedom struggles the need for autonomy and self-determination from socialist movements not to ‘separate’ but to better fulfill their universalist claims: they taught feminists “the boldness to break” with an increasingly parochial “Left.”⁴⁷ Federici, likewise, argues that “the struggles of Black people in the 1960s... the struggles of blacks and welfare mothers – the ‘Third World’ of the metropolis – expressed the revolt of the wageless and their refusal of the only alternative capital offers: more work.”⁴⁸

The ‘Left’ here risks re-domesticating feminist struggles when feminists are “told that their confrontation with the white male power structure in the metropolis is an ‘exotic historical accident.’”⁴⁹ As a consequence, all it can offer is a domestication of feminist struggles as struggles *for* rather than *against* capitalist work: they offer “‘development’... more rationalized exploitation.” Like the Marxists criticized in the domestic colonialism theory, they demand only that women ‘catch up’ as exploited workers, when they are already announcing a more capacious move. As Federici puts it, “According to the Left, women are not suffering from capital, but are suffering from the absence of it... we presumably remain at a feudal, precapitalist stage.”⁵⁰ These theorists thus mobilize the language of underdevelopment to upset familiar stagisms in ways similar to theorists of domestic colonialism. Federici explains further:

“There is an immediate connection between the strategy the Left has for women and the strategy it has for the ‘Third World.’ In the same way as they want to

⁴⁶Costa, “Women and the Subversion of Community (1972),” p. 42.

⁴⁷James, “Sex, Race, and Class (1974),” p. 94.

⁴⁸Federici, “Counterplanning from the Kitchen (1975),” p. 38.

⁴⁹James, “Sex, Race, and Class (1974),” p. 97.

⁵⁰Federici, “Wages against Housework (1975),” p. 29.

bring women into the factories, they want to bring factories to the ‘Third World.’ In both cases they presume that the ‘underdeveloped’ – those of us who are un-waged and work at a lower technological level – are backward with respect to the ‘real working class’ and can catch up only by obtaining a more advanced type of capitalist exploitation. . . not a struggle against capital, but a struggle for capital.”⁵¹

Thus the invocation of a linkage between not only the political projects of the “wageless of the world” from the metropolis’s kitchens to the ‘Third World’ but also between the theoretical resources of feminism and anticolonial political economy enabled de-domesticating analysis.

Not only did it reject the privatization of women in the household, but also, in turn, rejected the neutralization of struggles against domesticity as minor or preliminary steps in a more general struggle, neutralizations through which “our struggle was privatized and fought in the solitude of our kitchens and bedrooms.”⁵² Far from simply extending the wage to housework, the critical project here was one of locating ways of *re*-socializing domestic labour: to “liberate women from the home” while “avoid[ing] a double slavery” in “another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation.”⁵³ Their analysis tried to show that housework was already ‘de-domesticated’ in ways that left intact a private sphere that facilitated the domination and depoliticization of women’s struggles against housework. Thus colonial analogies facilitated an incisive analysis of domesticity as dialectically unstable, such that political struggles could leverage its value-productive character in emancipatory struggles. However, as Angela Davis will argue in the next section, this also distracted from crucial unique elements of North American racial and gender domination irreducible to any colonial analogy.

⁵¹Federici, “Counterplanning from the Kitchen (1975),” p. 29.

⁵²Ibid., p. 36.

⁵³Costa, “Women and the Subversion of Community (1972),” p. 42.

7.2 “The Brutal Force of Circumstances”

One of the key underpinning claims of *Wages for Housework* was that domesticity was a depoliticizing and disempowering domestication, but that this domestication – this enclosure and neutralization – was never fully accomplished. The political economy of women’s oppression, here, lies in not only the private/public division but in its incompleteness. The ‘enclosure’ of domesticity never really separates housework from the totality of capitalist reproduction – and the escape from the household does not actually undermine the gendered division of work required for reproducing labour-power back in the home. In other words, for these feminist thinkers the de-domestication of the domestic was in some sense *already* pathologically accomplished. It could be non-pathologically accomplished through struggles around waging housework – around explicitly raising it to the fore as exploited labor. As Best puts it, the key claim here is that “ultimately, housework could not be waged under any conditions less than the exploding of the capital-labor relation altogether.”⁵⁴

Angela Davis’s criticism of *Wages for Housework* begins from this claim. She argues that Black feminists know quite well that wages for housework does not ‘explode’ the capital-labour relation. It is compatible with and a long-term feature of the status-quo. As she puts it, “Cleaning women, domestic workers, maids – these are the women who know better than anyone else what it means to receive wages for housework.”⁵⁵ Davis locates in this fact, however, a similar but perhaps more expansive dialectic of domesticity and de-domestication in which domesticity works both as a site of repression and of resistance. She sees the extension of racialized women’s domestic work beyond the household as both required by racial capitalism – it was one key way in which Black women bore the costs of the super-exploitation of black men – but undermined the bourgeois idea of domesticity, in which “women began

⁵⁴Beverley Best. “Wages for Housework Redux: Social Reproduction and the Utopian Dialectic of the Value-Form.” In: *Theory & Event* 24.4 (2021), pp. 896–921, p. 898.

⁵⁵Angela Davis. *Women, Race, & Class*. New York: Random House, 1981, p. 237.

to be ideologically redefined as the guardians of a devalued domestic life.”⁵⁶ This contradictory relation to domesticity exposes the *already de-domesticated, socialized* character of domestic work. The ‘wage’ received by domestic workers is thought to be more akin to a “housewife’s allowance’ than... a worker’s paycheck” – a socialization of domesticity rather than its reinterpretation as exploited wage-labour.⁵⁷ All too common assertions that these labourers are just part of the family, she writes, betray a domesticating impulse to read their work as simply an extension of private domesticity rather than work proper. They thus represent, here, a generalized ‘privatized’ population facilitating white social reproduction: “As paid housekeepers, they have been called upon to be the surrogate wives and mothers in millions of white homes.”⁵⁸ To unpack this predicament Davis turns to the longer-term history of women’s work under slavery – away from the colonial analogy mobilized by *Wages for Houswork* to the unique conditions of US racial formation.

Davis argues that “throughout this country’s history, the majority of Black women have worked outside their homes.” While under slavery, “women toiled alongside their men in the cotton and tobacco fields,” industrialization brought “outside work” in the form of waged domestic labour.⁵⁹ This “double burden of wage labor and housework” enabled, in turn, a kind of escape from the “psychological damage” accompanying enclosure in domesticity. Davis states this dialectical opening in terms of a self-making not fully controllable by the system of slave labour.

“While it is hardly likely that these women [expressed] pride in the work they performed under the ever-present threat of the whip, they must have been aware nonetheless of their enormous power – their ability to produce and create... perhaps these women had learned to extract from the oppressive circumstances of

⁵⁶Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, p. 228.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 231.

their lives the strength they needed to resist the daily dehumanization of slavery.”⁶⁰

The possibility of ‘learning’ to craft alternative, rehumanizing forms of association and power in these “oppressive circumstances” (to understate the facts) was indexed to the basic instability of domesticity here. Not only their oppression but their productivity “contradicted the hierarchal sexual roles incorporated into the new ideology. Male-female relations within the slave community could not, therefore, conform to the dominant ideological pattern.”⁶¹

This “nonconformity” was sometimes understood as a pathology, not least in myths of “Black matriarchy” and the idea that Black poverty is caused by a lack of father figures and a reliance on women’s labour.⁶² Davis’s earlier criticism of this myth in “The Role of Women in the Community of Slaves” offers an important articulation of the instability of ‘domesticity.’ She returns, here, to the history of slavery to “debunk the myth of the matriarchate” and its “unspoken indictment of our female forebears as having actively assented to slavery.”⁶³ Contrary to this myth, she argues that “by virtue of the brutal force of circumstances, the black woman was assigned the mission of promoting the consciousness and practice of resistance.”⁶⁴

This key role of domesticity as a site of resistance is disclosed, she argues, in the fact that slavery could precisely *not* tolerate black matriarchy because it too would represent an alternative source of authority in excess of the slave system. Slavery was a self-consciously “unnatural” imposition of disorder, she writes, that relied on the repression of alternative forms that emerged in “the social organization which the slaves themselves organized” which were “nurtured” in the (always threatened and ‘socialized’) realm of domesticity.⁶⁵ A key

⁶⁰Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, p. 11.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 12.

⁶²The Moynihan Report (1965) being perhaps the most notorious example of this discourse. *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶³That is, because they ‘benefitted’ by their equalizing subjection to violence. Angela Davis. “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves.” In: *The Black Scholar* 3.4 (1971), pp. 2–15, p. 4.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 6.

weapon of this repression was the imposition of domesticity not as a separate sphere but as an additional burden on enslaved women: “in the living quarters, the major responsibilities ‘naturally’ fell to her.”⁶⁶ Asserted as a natural order under a self-consciously “unnatural” system, domesticity was both broken (de-domesticated) and assumed in ways that rendered it fundamentally unstable. This instability, for Davis, offered a crucial hinge in resistance to slavery.

This was because, first, though domesticity was a site for labour that was additional to outside work, an “infinite anguish,” it was also a form of labour not directly absorbed by captors. As she puts it, “domestic labor was the only meaningful labor for the slave community as a whole [that] could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor.”⁶⁷ Domestication in ‘the household’ also put women at the heart of a place where slave communities not only produced and lived for themselves, but realized the utter dependency of the slave system and their captors on them. As Davis puts it,

“Precisely through performing the drudgery which has long been a central expression of the socially conditioned inferiority of women, the black woman in chains could help lay the foundation for some degree of autonomy, both for herself and her men. Even as she was suffering under her unique oppression as female, she was thrust by the force of circumstances into the center of the slave community”⁶⁸

In some sense, while women under slavery were pathologically ‘de-domesticated,’ the imposition of an ‘inferior’ place in the household opened a relational space where labour for oneself could be done. The household, a space of radical enclosure and neutralization, worked here as a site for self-determination under a totalitarian system of racial domination. The

⁶⁶Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” p. 6.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 7.

possibility of relatively autonomous labour in the domestic realm not claimable by captors indicated that domesticity's basic instability threatened the entire system.

This was because, in part, the household offered a mechanism for the "rehumanizing of relationships" through socially reproductive labour. Domesticity "nurtured" resistance, not by acting as a precondition to revolutionary politics (that is, through a division of labour between feeding revolutionaries and doing revolutionary politics) but in and through this reproductive labour itself. As Davis writes, resistance

"Could not have been sustained without impetus from the community they pulled together through the sheer force of their own strength. Of necessity, this community would revolve around the realm which was furthestmost removed from the immediate arena of domination. It could be located in and around the living quarters, the area where the basic needs of physical life were met."⁶⁹

Here, she writes, people living under slavery could reassert "the modicum of freedom they still retained."⁷⁰

This politically productive site of domesticity 'necessitated' a massive regime of counterinsurgency. Davis argues that this required forms of violence not monopolized by the state but circulated among the whole white population. As she puts it, "if the slave-holders had not maintained an absolute monopoly of violence, if they had not been able to rely on large numbers of their fellow white men... to assist them in their terrorist machinations, slavery would have been far less feasible."⁷¹ She especially points to sexual violence and rape as tactics of "counter-insurgency" – not expressions of instinctive urges or pure cruelty but as technologies of political power. This follows from the fact that, as CLR James puts it, slavery could never eliminate an incompressible minimum of humanity: "though one could trap them like

⁶⁹Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," p. 6.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 6.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 6.

animals, transport them in pens... they remained... quite invincibly human beings.”⁷² This humanity in turn worked as a source of resistance among slaves and a source of fear among slavers.

This reading of sexual violence as counterinsurgency is premised on an analysis of the “dialectical moments of the slave woman’s oppression”: the “total and violent expropriation of her labor with no compensation” and her status as ‘housekeeper of the living quarters.’ The ‘dialectic’ here is that these two moments sit in contradictory relation: domesticity is “incommensurable with what she had become.”⁷³ This contradiction – to restate the case – was visible in the “irrepressible talent in humanizing an environment designed to convert them into a herd of subhuman labor units.”⁷⁴ Sexual cruelty represents an attempt to dull or repress this contradiction by reducing women to the level of “biological being,” to “establish her as a female *animal*,” as a controllable creature rather than a subject with agency.⁷⁵ Crucially she sees this as visible across the broader international scene – “as a direct attack on the black female as potential insurgent, this sexual repression finds its parallels in virtually every historical situation where the woman actively challenges oppression” – taking Algeria as her key example.⁷⁶

Davis notes that this is just a dialectical imagine, a crystallization of “an intricate and savage web of oppression” that emerged from a pathologically accomplished ‘de-domestication’ of domesticity under slavery. Beyond it’s immediate context, the essay is also a criticism of the domestication of women under patently ‘de-domesticated’ conditions as a form of political counterinsurgency. That is, the essay traces counterinsurgent racialized and sexualized violence as a symptom of the instability of the idea and practice of domesticity upon which US political order is premised. As Davis writes, the contradiction between a “harness[ing]” to

⁷²C. L. R. James. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 12.

⁷³Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” p. 12.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 13.

the household and the fact that Black women are “never... exhaustively defined” by “uniquely ‘female’ responsibilities” underlies a key contribution of this dialectic to “struggles against the racism and the dehumanizing exploitation of a wrongly organized society.”⁷⁷ Davis locates the impossibility of ‘domesticity’ and therefore opens questions regarding what this all means for the political. For answers to this latter inquiry, I turn to Joy James’s provocative analysis of “The Captive Maternal.”

7.3 “An Absent Dialectic”

When Davis points to sexual violence and the imposition of ‘domesticity’ (under conditions of its impossibility) as practices of *counter-insurgency*, she re-connects, implicitly, an analysis of the instability of domesticity with an analysis of the political as racialized and sexualized collective power-over. It is a monopoly on violence held not by the state, per se, but the white population as a whole.⁷⁸ If Davis sees this instability as a site for political creation and an irrepressible humanity under slavery and its afterlives, Joy James offers an important skeptical, though dialectically productive, note.

In a series of essays exploring what she calls “The Captive Maternal,” the “private realm,” and US counterinsurgency, James argues that the aforementioned double burden of domesticity and ‘outside’ (political and waged) labour sustains a consumptive relationship between racialized families and US political order. That is, the Western and more specifically US making of ‘the political’ is premised on the consumption of Captive Maternal’s energy, time, and ultimately, lives. This consumption, in turn, works as a site for leverage, a place where

⁷⁷Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” p. 15.

⁷⁸In his reflections on the practice of armed self-defense in de-segregation struggles, Robert F. Williams offered a helpful and polemical re-interpretation of the ‘monopoly on violence’ attuned to the experience of those struggling against racial domination in the US in the 1960s South: “The Afro-American militant... does not introduce violence into a racist social system — the violence is already there, and has always been there. It is precisely this unchallenged violence that allows a racist social system to perpetuate itself. When people say that they are opposed to Negroes ‘resorting to violence’ what they really mean is that they are opposed to Negroes defending themselves and challenging the exclusive monopoly of violence practiced by white racists” Robert F Williams. *Negroes with Guns*. New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1962, p. 114.

the reliance of that order *on* those it oppresses becomes evident. In turn, again, this possibility of leverage transforms families into targets for counterinsurgent repression. Thus, Joy James unpacks the dialectics of domesticity through an analysis that extends ‘domestic’ labour to a broader scene of the Captive Maternal as an underside to ‘politics’ as such. As she puts it,

“The negation of consciousness among second-, third-, and fourth-tier ‘humans’ sanctions exploitation of the private realm’s household (garden/fields, nursery/orphanages, factories/labor, and prison camps) to nourish the public realm’s civic culture.”⁷⁹

A key underlying claim here is that the domesticity that serves as a reproductive basis – though one depoliticized – of politics is already ‘extended’ beyond the household proper, as a broader “private realm.”

Indeed, in a series of critical readings of Hannah Arendt, James reads the ‘private realm’ more broadly as a “cage” that extends across Black populations in the United States. “Civil rights activist-theorists,” she writes, “caged in the private realm of reproductive labor and segregation... forced their way into the public realm of citizenry, albeit in movements that also marginalized the leadership of women [and] LGBT people.”⁸⁰ As James notes, Arendt’s sympathy with white parents who wish simply to “not associate” with Black people (for Arendt, a ‘social’ but not ‘political’ concern) does not acknowledge that a subordinated and captive Black presence is already preferred by white Americans, a presence embodied in the “roots and dependencies of their ‘resistance to black equality,’ which “did not extend to those blacks who sharecropped for them, raised their white children, cleaned their white homes...”⁸¹ One of Arendt’s worst fears – the “socialization” of the household into the “blob” of the social, in which an idealized political realm becomes nothing but a giant household in which

⁷⁹Joy James. “The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal.” In: *Carceral Notebooks* 12 (2016), pp. 253–296, p. 263.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 272.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 270.

we merely behave biologically rather than act politically,⁸² has *already been pathologically accomplished* for Captive Maternals.

Indeed, the term Captive Maternal can be defined precisely in this way. It describes all those whose labour holds up “predatory democracy,” and whose lives are used up whether they uphold that predatory order or whether they refuse it. In either case, their lives are consumed through time theft, a kind of slow violence. Nevertheless, the violence of domestication – the imposition of a ‘private realm’ and the enclosure of “racialized peoples (and women)” in it is a ground of resistance. “State violence (through the laws, the police, the military) practiced in the ‘private’ realm shapes the practice and sites of power in the public realm but also incites communicative power and democratic action” among those forced into the private.⁸³ The ‘private’ has never been devoid of politics; it is a specific permutation of politics as collective *rule over*.⁸⁴ The ‘private’ is a technique of depoliticization, a fact evident, for James, in “the practice of voting disenfranchisement” and other “political maneuvers to reinforce and segregate political space and governance.”⁸⁵ Thus James argues that this requires an analysis of those who engage in this communicative power in the ‘private’ and how this political action becomes, too, a consumption of their lives.

In other words, the point is that the predicament that “incites communicative power” also saps the time and energy required to make good on this power. James illustrates this by honouring the experience of one Captive Maternal, Erica Garner. Garner’s status as Captive Maternal was highlighted in her eventually life-shortening work to get justice for her father Eric Garner (murdered by the police in Staten Island in 2014). Erica Garner’s politicization was not – as Arendt might expect – an “entrance” into the public from the private. On the contrary, it was a kind of forced politicization through the intrusion of the ‘public’ into the

⁸²See Arendt, *The Human Condition*; Hanna Fenichel Pitkin. *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁸³James, “‘All Power to the People!’: Arendt’s Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy,” p. 309.

⁸⁴A fact Arendt is well aware of: she repeatedly describes the *oikos* as a place where the members of the household are ruled, top down, in distinction from politics, where no one ‘rules.’

⁸⁵James, “‘All Power to the People!’: Arendt’s Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy,” p. 309.

private through predation and incursion into familial life. James argues that the apparently ‘private’ aspects of racialized community are sites of a dialectic of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Because “community and kin caretaking under adversity and warfare within a predatory democracy” can proffer “Maroon sites” and tenuous escapes from the consumption of Black labour (as Davis unpacks so clearly), they become targets of “the dominant aggressor [predatory political order] that demands all domains function under its control.”⁸⁶ Thus, she writes, “communities become combatants as their zones for survival are reduced to zones of occupation.”⁸⁷

The ‘entrance’ to the public, under these conditions, is not necessarily an emancipatory escape from the private but the extension of a ‘private’ time theft. It by no means undoes the need for domestic work required to survive and reproduce (including the reproduction of labour power). It simply extends the work of caring for children, cooking dinner, and grief management to “surrogate maternals” – a time-stealing ‘de-domestication’ of domesticity.⁸⁸ James reads Garner as a Captive Maternal whose struggle for justice eventually sapped her, too, of life. Garner herself analyzed this exhaustion as a symptom of counter-insurgency. It was an extension of the very system of consumptive and predatory ‘democracy,’ which in turn comes to consume political action and care-work itself, precisely because counterinsurgency and police repression require more care work.⁸⁹ That is, politicization is entrapped, *avant la lettre*, as an extension of ‘privacy.’

Crucially, for James, the experiences, writings, and speeches of “militant Captive Maternals” like Erica Garner are key to undermining what she calls “Womb Theory” (or “Western Theory”). Womb theory has provided white democracy and white theory with a “template that makes predation of the Captive Maternal invisible.”⁹⁰ She argues that while Western the-

⁸⁶Joy James. “The Captive Maternal and Abolitionism.” In: *Topia* 43 (Summer 2021), pp. 9–23, p. 14.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁸James, “The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal,” p. 280.

⁸⁹James, “The Captive Maternal and Abolitionism,” pp. 19–20.

⁹⁰James, “The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal,” p. 259.

ory has often acknowledged the relationship between a life-destroying consumption of forced labour and caretaking (not least in slavery) and political and philosophical freedom (Aristotle and Arendt being key examples here), the fact that those in the former ‘private realm’ *nonetheless politically resist* has been seen as a *threat* to theory and to democratic politics. As James writes, “the absent dialectic between master and Captive Maternal is a missed opportunity for the evolution of revolutionary theory... Unmoored from Captive Maternals, theory itself becomes art – a fabrication that when faced with perspectives of violent captivity might blink rather than see theory.”⁹¹ At stake here, from the point of view of my project, is not only an analysis of a specific dialectic of domesticity (a pathological de-domestication of domesticity as a broader ‘private realm’) but an injunction to *think dialectically*: to make intelligible that which existing theory and concepts makes invisible.

James’s analysis interprets domesticity as a site where the violence and unsustainability of racial democracy become clear. The collectivization through radical violence of a ‘private realm’ that is not limited to the ‘household’ but extended through all those whose work is consumed as a precondition for politics (and theory) exposes an uneasy dialectical reliance of predatory politics on its “captives.” As James writes: “a parasitic sovereign is neither free of its captives nor does it bring freedom to them.”⁹² At the beginning of “The Womb of Western Theory” James draws an important distinction between “democracy seeking” insurgents who look to expand political community, and “democracy-fleeing” insurgents, like Assata Shakur, who are targeted *by* politics, in genocidal and imperial counterinsurgency.⁹³ Captive Maternals are a third constituency, those who are neither ‘seeking’ nor ‘fleeing’ democracy but whose ‘captive’ character exposes the profound limits placed on both democracy-seeking and democracy-fleeing. They are “those whose very existence enables the possessive empire that claims and dispossesses them.”⁹⁴ They show that the purity of democratic political com-

⁹¹James, “The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal,” pp. 265–266.

⁹²Ibid., p. 261.

⁹³Ibid., p. 255.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 255.

munity, such as it is, always relies on the consumption of the energy and care of people they ‘cannot get rid of,’ and thus must always work to capture, control, and repress. This offers both a kind of “leverage” for Captive Maternals and drives counterinsurgent repression.⁹⁵

7.4 An Imperial Household

James explicitly links her analysis of the de-domestication of domesticity to the kind of de-domesticating criticism I have been examining throughout this dissertation (i.e., the critique of domestic politics through the excavation of an “international” within it). The counterinsurgent character of domesticity is understood as the imposition of a “private realm” that extends past any clear boundaries between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ politics. But James does not pursue this through an *analogy* between the predicament of US Captive Maternals and ‘Third World’ women, as the Wages for Housework theorists do. Instead she shows how the unique conditions of the US as a vantage for analyzing the *connections* between various sites of captive consumption and domestication. By unique conditions I mean, here, the specifically North American iteration of Western theory and politics as marrying “democracy with slavery.”⁹⁶ This marriage has always unsettled the idea of a ‘domestic’ nation that hid its basically imperial character as an apparatus of capture. This, indeed, has been one of the central claims of domestic colonialism as reconstructed in this dissertation. The settler revolt against British rule made possible a new empire enacted in and through ‘the political’ – the people:⁹⁷ “In transitioning a colony through a republic into a representative democracy with imperial might, the emergent United States grew a womb, it took on the generative properties of the maternals it held captive.” That is, it “fed” on racialized populations to

⁹⁵James, “The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal,” p. 257.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 256.

⁹⁷See on this: Dahl, *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern Democratic Thought*; Horne, *The Counterrevolution of 1776*; Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*; Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*.

“birth a new nation (a nascent empire).”⁹⁸ Thus a primary expression of US *imperialism* is precisely through the maintenance of political community through its “longest war... with its domestic target: enslaved or captive black women.”⁹⁹

Domestication not only imposed a domestic frame on potentially ‘international’ relations – between the US and Indigenous, Black, and diasporic peoples – but did so through the transformation of these populations, for James, into a generalized ‘household’ or ‘domestic sphere’ upon which republican freedom would be premised. Thus an anti-imperial reading of the US ‘nation-state’ and a Black feminist criticism of consumptive domesticity come together. A generalized ‘domesticity’ and imperial rule blend together in the treatment of internal ‘minorities’ as subject peoples and external ‘enemies’ as domestic subjects of imperial law. As James puts it,

“Government policies/legislation and social practices worked to politically and economically disenfranchise a racialized domestic realm (populated by Native, African, and Latin Americans) and a racialized foreign realm qua domestic realm populated by Indigenous peoples, Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians (hence the metaparadigm in which U.S. foreign and domestic policies seem to mirror each other in terms of the treatment of the non-European as colonized/dependent Other).”¹⁰⁰

James argues that a generalized, consumptive ‘domesticity’ – the lauded (in the case of Wages for Housework) and feared (for Arendt) socialization of the household – is a line on which democracy is folded into tyranny in the form of “predatory” or “racialized’ democracy.” She returns us to the Western idea of *the* political as already structured through imperial and racial domination irreducible to an enclosed political space. Instead the political,

⁹⁸James, “The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal,” p. 256.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁰⁰James, “‘All Power to the People!’: Arendt’s Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy,” p. 310.

the “collective power” of American and Canadian publics, is expressed primarily through the “household” rule over “marginalized sectors” such as “reservations” or “occupied territories.”¹⁰¹ An ‘internal’ empire: an imperial internalization that I have been calling, here, ‘domestication,’ belies a manifestation of the political not only with a set of imperial *conditions* but the political *as* empire, as collective and public rule over an imperial household.

For James, it is precisely those who inhabit this ‘domestic’ realm – stretching across borders – who pose the most profound challenges to “the racially determined ‘household’ or private realm” through “revolutionary change in U.S. domestic and foreign policies.”¹⁰² But for my analysis what is especially compelling is the basic first move made here: that ‘domesticity’ is already internationalized by US empire, that it is already *more* than domestic politics. The internationalization of domesticity thus represents, by way of domesticity, a de-domesticating criticism of ‘domestic’ politics as an obfuscation of imperial power. Black and “Third World” feminist criticism in the late 1960s and early 1970s evoked this internationalization of the domestic through domesticity.

For example, the Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA), which emerged from the Black Women’s Liberation Committee in SNCC, understood its constituency as “Third World” women. This category included not only “the nations and peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America” but their “descendants... within the confines of the United States.” The logic here is not analogical but connective: the TWWA’s writings admit of a dialectical, internationalist learning in which the goal is not to imitate foreign struggles or import their strategies but to demonstrate that “mass migration back to our respective homelands is *not* necessary.” Engagement with the experience of Third World women, here, exposes the need for a specifically American engagement with domestication.¹⁰³

In their inaugural paper they argued that one key connection between Black women and

¹⁰¹James, “‘All Power to the People!’: Arendt’s Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy,” p. 317.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁰³All citations from *Triple Jeopardy*, November 1971, pg. 16

Third World women's struggles was a contradiction between the "psychological tool" of the family as a technique of depoliticization and privatization, on the one hand, and a double exploitation "both at home and on the job," on the other.¹⁰⁴ This common condition works both as a double burden and a consciousness that 'equality' founded on the escape from the home was fundamentally limited both by the fact that 'outside' work was an additional burden and by the fact that equality in the 'First World' was all too often premised on leaving this double exploitation intact in the 'Third World.' That is, if the experience of Third World women in the US exposed the 'myth of emancipation' there – what Firestone calls the dynamic by which the extension of waged labour works as an addition rather than replacement to domestic labour – that myth risks being replayed on the international stage. Significantly, the "triple jeopardy" theorized by the TWWA is racism, sexism, and economic exploitation, but the latter is understood as *imperialism*. In this respect, the TWWA and other Black feminist groups often raised the question of an internationalized household as the primary target of political action, such that feminism *had* to be anti-imperial.¹⁰⁵

Extending the criticism of domestication offered by domestic colonialism, then, anti-imperialist feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s internationalized the domestic through the invocation of an imperial 'household.' They located, as Joy James does, the "womb" of American racial democracy in the present not only in 'internal colonies' – reservations and debilitated neighbourhoods – but across the boundaries of US empire. US foreign policy "extends the private realm, of the less than civilized, the subordinate, the politically unworthy, the non-peer, to the so-called Third World – the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East."¹⁰⁶ The private here is read as always-already disenclosed, a site of disenclosure and imperial imposition, not located in the household but spread across jail cells, police cars, and 'black sites,' all part of an internationalized domesticity. The term "private" is a

¹⁰⁴*Triple Jeopardy*, September-October 1971, pgs. 8-9.

¹⁰⁵On the TWWA and other radical Black feminist movements see Kimberly Springer. *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

¹⁰⁶James, "'All Power to the People!': Arendt's Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy," p. 322.

shorthand for the way that “racism transforms subjects into either rulers or ruled.”¹⁰⁷

The analyses examined in this chapter, therefore, extend the internationalization of the domestic enacted by the domestic colonialism concept. Like other iterations of the concept, they do not move strictly by analogy but through an analysis of the distinct but connected character of struggles against empire across the globe. More specifically, they locate this connection in the unstable and already ‘internationalized’ character of domesticity as both a site of counter-insurgency and insurgency. While this chapter can only gesture to this analysis as a possible site of criticism vis-a-vis the critique of domestication offered in this dissertation, Wages for Housework, Angela Davis, and Joy James’s analysis of ‘domesticity’ as a site of colonizing consumption inaugurates a de-domesticating analysis that looks for forms of political insurgency that leverage the reliance of *the political as such* on a generalized, internationalized domesticity. They raise the basic question of what it would mean to think of the political without re-affirming domesticity – not as the household but as a realm of racialized and gendered consumption and rule. They ask, as Joy James puts it, “what is thinking like, conditioned or reasoned within Womb Theory, once it is outside that womb?”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷James, “‘All Power to the People!’: Arendt’s Communicative Power in a Racial Democracy.”

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 283.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

“How to articulate the future historically?”¹

When I had to teach a class called “Introduction to Contemporary Political Theory,” I realized just how difficult it is to delimit the ‘contemporary.’ For one thing, many texts one might select for such a course are definitely ‘of the past’ in terms of distance: say, Max Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation,” Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*. Their historical distance does not prevent their inclusion in ‘contemporary’ political theory. We still live in a world to which these texts can speak. To do specifically *contemporary* political theory, then, is not a matter of studying texts recently written, or doing an abstract form of political theory ‘in the present.’ Rather, I realized, the inevitably political selection of texts required in the design of that course is implicitly forecasting a particular understanding of ‘contemporary’ theory as the task of outlining the contours of one’s political present. The actual practice of political theory, and the collective pedagogical practice of trying to do it better, is that of making this implicit activity explicit as the diagnosis of the present. This is what, in my view, the “contemporary” in contemporary political theory – to which I hope this dissertation contributes – means: it tries to get at the meaning of one’s ‘contemporary’ in the first place.

¹Fernando Coronil. “Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories.” In: *The Fernando Coronil Reader: The Struggle for Life is the Matter*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019, pp. 323–368.

In a recent essay, Achille Mbembe offers a clear statement of this orientation of political theory: “the task of theory, at least in the human sciences, has always also been to ask, what characterizes our present and our age? In other words, it has been about deciphering one’s own time and taking responsibility for one’s own fate.”² This is the kind of political theory I have been studying in this dissertation. Theorists of domestic colonialism were not just engaging in rhetorical moves, nor were they constructing an explanatory social scientific concept. Domestic colonialism is an attempt to “decipher one’s own time.” In this it represents an important though often under-acknowledged contribution to the practice of critical theory or “critical philosophy” defined as “the self-clarification of the wishes and the struggles of an age.”³ It was a form of *political knowledge* crafted “with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification.”⁴

The underlying vision of theory, here, is diagnostic. It is a practice of re-formulating political problems, understanding the contradictions at work in them, and locating those social and political forces that expose the insolubility of these contradictions and point toward alternative ways of acting and thinking. It is a matter of locating the emergence of the new from the old. This stands in clear opposition to understandings of political philosophy as the search for abstract principles of a just society (“applied moral philosophy”) or as “attempts to reflect on the desirable ends of human life.” To consider these things in abstraction from the social and political conflicts and events from which they emerge is to enact a philosophical “displacement of politics.”⁵ In this understanding of political theory as diagnostic practice, political ideas are studied in terms of the “thoughtful remembrance... condensation of happenings into concepts.”⁶ That is, it is a matter of crafting forms of political knowledge capable

²Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*, p. 14.

³Marx, *Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge*.

⁴Nancy Fraser. “What’s Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender.” In: *New German Critique* 35 (1985), pp. 97–131, p. 97.

⁵Bonnie Honig. *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

⁶Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 59.

of doing justice to the events with which we are confronted.

The regulative ideal, here, is perhaps those moments when theory “[comes] under the direct impact of the events themselves.”⁷ However, it is more likely that it is a matter of not of directly experiencing and totally grasping the situation one confronts so much as the negative experience of realizing that one’s thinking does not completely grasp it, and that it is enjoining the creation of new concepts. C.L.R. James, in a talk on Heidegger, called this experience in which one perceives something not noticable within one’s concepts a “moment of vision.”⁸ Political theory, on this read, is propelled forward by the movement of a world that constantly outstrips it. The task then is both that of mapping the failure of existing concepts to grapple with emerging forms of political action and political problems, and the need, in “moments of vision,” to condense these emergent events into new concepts. Through this dissertation I have been arguing that this kind of thinking, aware of the gap between concepts and the political world they are supposed to comprehend, is specifically *dialectical*.

Given that the goal of this dissertation has in some sense been to learn how to do this kind of diagnostic political theory – concerned ineluctably with the contemporary – why would I then turn toward a reading of texts from the past? My initial answer to this is that I started from a discourse that was politically contemporary but conceptually non-contemporary: whereas invocations of “occupation” and metaphors with colonial power circulated everywhere in discussions of police power and anti-police rebellion, when I looked to literatures on domestic colonialism in the social sciences I found mostly declarations of the idea’s obsolescence. Thus I was interested in what accounts for the continuing political effectivity of a ‘scientifically’ obsolete concept, and sought to test these declarations of obsolescence against a reconstruction of the concept as a form of critical theorization.⁹ But it is also the case, as

⁷Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 257.

⁸C.L.R. James. “Existentialism and Marxism.” In: *You Don’t Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*. Ed. by David Austin. Oakland: AK Press, 2009, pp. 91–104.

⁹One easy solution to this uneasy presence of the non-contemporaneous would be to split domestic colonialism into its rhetorical/political iteration and a scientific/explanatory iteration. While the latter is “discredited” – as one dictionary entry puts it – the former remains active as a rhetorical strategy. At the end of this study my

I will re-iterate in this conclusion, that one cannot learn *how* to do this diagnostic theory in any other way except by studying its historically situated practice by critical thinkers and revolutionary actors.

Thus this dissertation contributes to this dialectical tradition of critical theory as diagnostic practice, but in an informal way. I mean ‘informal’ non-pejoratively: I have not been concerned, for example, with constructing the formal philosophical foundations of normativity (as in the post-Habermasian tradition of critical theory embodied by thinkers like Rainer Forst).¹⁰ Nor, indeed, have I engaged in a close hermeneutical reconstruction of a critical or dialectical ‘method’ or ‘logic’ from classic texts in critical theory (e.g. Hegel and Marx). I have proceeded, instead, with a study of a particular episode of dialectical critique as a “social practice”:¹¹ the invention of the concept of domestic colonialism in the 1960s. I have tried to unpack, in the context of that conceptual innovation, what it meant for the writers examined here – from Claudia Jones, to Harold Cruse, to Jack O’Dell, to James and Grace Lee Boggs, to Angela Davis – to ‘think dialectically.’ This, surely inevitably, has had a centrifugal effect, since moving to this level of abstraction seems, necessarily, to pull in different directions as thinkers take up different objects and lines of analysis. Seen as a study of dialectical thought (and as a piece of writing) this dissertation no doubt exhibits what Theodor Adorno called a “logic of disintegration.”¹²

answer is that this separation is false and that the concept represented a diagnostic practice, a form of political knowledge. Further, I believe that the content of this political knowledge, its key orienting claims, are still capable of illuminating events.

¹⁰See, e.g. Rainer Forst. *Justification and Critique: Towards a Critical Theory of Politics*. Trans. by Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

¹¹Celikates, *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*.

¹²I should note, at this juncture, that the order of presentation does not follow the order of investigation here. Indeed, I never set out to understand ‘dialectics’ at all. On the contrary I was motivated by a curious contradiction between ubiquitous invocations of occupation in criticisms of police power, alongside what I discovered to be an almost total dismissal of this analytic lens among theorists in the social sciences. It was only as I began to pull together an attempted conceptual reconstruction of domestic colonialism as a critique of state violence that I saw the plentiful references to dialectics in the writings of its key exponents, and over time realized that I was, behind my own back, learning a great deal from these thinkers about the practice of dialectical social criticism. Thus I did not set out with a particular conception of dialectics, then read it ‘into’ theorists of domestic colonialism. I recognized the dialectical moves they were making only after reading, later, a set of writings on dialectics and its limits with CJ Bogle, Rob Jackson, and Corey Snelgrove. Discussing

The central aim of this conclusion, therefore, is an attempt to try and pull together some of the lessons this study of dialectical thinking offers to contemporary critical theory. These lessons can be categorized as, on the one hand, lessons for those concerned with the reconstruction of dialectical critique generally, and on the other, those concerned with the practice of anticolonial critical theory in North America, in particular. That is, the study of domestic colonialism not only offers important insights into what it means to ‘do’ dialectics, but also remains ‘contemporary’ in many respects for the critical diagnosis of the North American political predicament.

8.1 Cultivating a Dialectical Disposition

I have made the argument that in studying the invention of the domestic colonialism concept, political theorists can learn a great deal about thinking dialectically. One of the most fascinating characteristics of discussions of ‘dialectics’ is the simultaneous sense that it is unapproachable, inexplicable, and opaque, and the persistent attempt to present it in a simplified, usable form. This is true for its critics too, who see it as both a bewildering philosophical system and a seductive way of cramping historical events into a ‘logical’ story of development, as for its proponents, who might find the prose of key exponents both difficult to comprehend but electrifying when one does. The attempt to simplify dialectics, I think, is built into it. Precisely because it militates against anything being, strictly speaking, simple, it propels its students to turn to shorthands that will guide them through its motions. What simplification one takes up will always be one-sided, and will always shape one’s understanding of dialectics.

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* with Jeff Noonan, and reading it closely with Corey played a central role as well: though there’s only sparing references to the *Phenomenology* here, the text is shaped massively by discussions of it. In all this I realized that what I was doing was not just examining an interesting historical episode or recovering a concept that political theorists were ignoring; I was studying the making of political knowledge! I thus rediscovered anew, and with new urgency, at the heart of a set of writers of incredible political importance to me – as a tradition of thinking aimed at making sense of the peculiar contradictions of North American colonial and racial domination – a philosophical problem that drove me into the field of political theory: how can one claim to have political knowledge, and what is the specific character of that knowledge?

tics, whether it is that dialectics is a philosophy of contradiction, a ‘reconciliatory’ impulse, a system, a method, or a logic of ‘thesis, antithesis, synthesis.’ The shorthand that best captures the understanding of dialectics unpacked here is one offered by Grace Lee Boggs: the injunction to “think dialectically!”¹³

Thinking about dialectics in this way places it irrevocably in an *adverbial grammar*. Dialectics is not fully understandable as a noun (*the* or *a* dialectic) nor as an adjective (as in, ‘that’s dialectical’).¹⁴ Rather, thinking dialectically is a *way* in which people do something (like thinking or acting). Now, it might be tempting to think of this ‘way’ as a method: as an analytical procedure, abstracted from its subject-matter, and profitably applicable to any given thing, event, or problem. But to think adverbially about dialectics starts from a premise of dialectical thought, one that I hope to have been true throughout this study: that it requires a “surrender to the life of the object,” that subject-matter and method are inseparable. If dialectics is a way people do things, studying it cannot be a matter of extracting a method from different thoughts and actions, but has to be a matter of following as closely as possible “inner necessity” and implications of these actions and thoughts on their own terms. In this respect, the study of dialectical critique as a form of diagnostic political theory is not a matter of extracting an applicable diagnostic *method* so much as it is a dialectical *disposition*.¹⁵

Much concern in contemporary dialectical political theory is with the question of whether dialectics follows a negative, antagonistic impulse, or a positive reconciliatory one.¹⁶ Much

¹³Boggs, “Nothing Is More Important than Thinking Dialectically.”

¹⁴I have lifted this typology from Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*; It is taken up in different ways by, e.g. Douglas, *In the Spirit of Critique: Thinking Politically in the Dialectical Tradition*; Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*.

¹⁵To borrow from the underlying ancient Greek terms here, it is not a way that one goes (*a methodos*) but a way in which one *relates* to the world. The latter is prior to any given ‘method’ one might take up, and indeed consists in the abandonment of methods when they begin to blunt one’s sense of ‘the events themselves.’

¹⁶See for example Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*; Marasco, *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory after Hegel*; Kramer, *Excluded Within: the (Un)Intelligibility of Radical Political Actors*; Grant, *Dialectics and Contemporary Politics: Critique and Transformation from Hegel through Post-Marxism*; McGowan, *Emancipation after Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution*; Michael O. Hardimon. “The Project of Reconciliation: Hegel’s Social Philosophy.” In: *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 21.2 (1992), pp. 165–195; Jean-Luc Nancy. *Hegel: the Restlessness of the Negative*. Trans. by Jason Smith and Steven Miller. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002; Shannon Brincat. “Negativity and Open-Endedness in the Dialectic of World

of this literature turns to explicitly and self-described dialectical texts by Hegel, to Marx, to Fanon, to Adorno, and so on, to trace out whether dialectical movement in them works toward a totalizing, unifying reconciliation contradictions, or a fundamental restlessness and negativity. In asking whether dialectics can live up to a moment of apparent political antagonism, either by highlighting it or by proposing routes to reconciliatory politics, these discussions presuppose a *genuinely practical* dialectical problem: what is the relationship between concepts and the things they comprehend, between thinking and the political world?

A dialectical disposition, as I unpacked it in chapter one, is defined by a cultivated sense of this gap, or contradictory relation, between concepts and the world. It is ‘negative’ in this sense: not in insisting on political negativity (though one might) but in an awareness of the “non-identity” of thinking and being, of the inevitability of surprise and the upset of one’s concepts by historical experience.¹⁷ Drawing on a wide array of thinkers from Aristotle, to Hegel, to Adorno, to Gadamer, to James and Grace Lee Boggs, I argued that dialectical thinking might best be understood, here, as a form of practical wisdom or prudence – what Aristotle and his heirs call *phronesis*.

To recap, Aristotle uses this term to describe a kind of knowledge concerned with particulars, and more specifically, with actions (responses to situations). To be prudent in this sense is to know how to apply principles and concepts to these situations, and more importantly, when to deviate from one’s habits of judgment and create new concepts. Further, as an irreducibly practical form of thinking, this revision involves a move from, as James Boggs puts it, “perception to conception,” from the diagnosis of conceptual failure to a way of being and thinking otherwise.¹⁸ This is the very opposite of dialectics as a ‘system’: it is, on the contrary, a picture of thinking dialectically as defined by the continual confrontation with the failure of any systematic thought. The injunction to think dialectically is a revolution-

Politics.” In: *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 34.4 (2009), pp. 455–493.

¹⁷Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*.

¹⁸James Boggs. “Beyond Nationalism.” In: *Pages from a Black Radical’s Notebook*. Ed. by Stephen M Ward. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, pp. 253–263.

ary expansion of this idea of *phronesis* as a capacity to diagnose the ossification of one's concepts.

Nonetheless, practical wisdom does concern the *whole* of a person's life or the whole of an historical process. This, ultimately, is the measure of an action, what makes it 'right' or an 'error.' The *dialectical* iteration of practical wisdom, though, concerns not just one person and their ethical behaviour but *movements* and collective subjects. But, in turn, this does not mean that beneath it all, so to speak, there lies one unifying historical movement that dialectics tracks. In his essay "Recommencing the Revolution," Cornelius Castoriadis offers a neat formulation of this sensibility in a twentieth-century valence as the "ruination of the conception of a closed theory," which leaves in its place

"A living theoretical process, from whose womb emerge moments of truth destined to be outstripped... This does not entail some sort of skepticism: at each instant and for each stage in our experience, *there are* truths and errors, and there is always the need to carry out a provisional totalization, ever changing and ever open... the idea of a complete and definitive theory, however, is today only a bureaucrat's phantasm."¹⁹

A dialectical disposition therefore is that form of thought that is capable of recognizing when available concepts and theories – "provisional totalizations" are either being outstripped by the world or running ahead of it. My study of domestic colonialism has excavated it as a new 'provisional totalization' (a 'theoretic frame' or 'summing up' of a long-term historical whole) that would move beyond ossified narratives and frameworks.

Now, all of this was inevitably preliminary. As theorists of practical wisdom note, it is distinguished from, say, scientific or technical knowledge because it is not strictly speaking

¹⁹Cornelius Castoriadis. "Recommencing the Revolution." In: *Political and Social Writings Volume 3, 1961-1979: Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society*. Trans. by David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 27–55, p. 33.

‘teachable.’ One could never produce a ‘manual’ of practical wisdom, and likewise such a manual of dialectics would be nothing but a “table of contents” without any corresponding text.²⁰ Just as for Hegel the unfolding of ‘the’ dialectic is not only visible ‘behind’ or ‘in’ the various shapes of conceptual thought and spiritual creation, but *just is* the unfolding of these various shapes, their collapse and generation, what it means to have a dialectical disposition appears only in and through the actual *use* of dialectical thought in predicaments of power. As Aristotle puts it, we learn by watching how wise people act. In this respect we are less interested in copying their exact behaviour or adapting their ethical and political maxims, than in watching how and when they notice the inability of these habits and maxims to orient action, and what they do in response. By analogy, to learn how to think dialectically, one would have to actually examine how people engaged in this activity of conceptual criticism and innovation in the face of transformative political events. This is all to say that the meaning and the plausibility of this re-interpretation of thinking dialectically as a disposition or orientation for political judgment become clear only in and through the actual investigation undertaken in the rest of the dissertation.

8.2 Domestic Colonialism and the Practice of Dialectical Critique

The making of the domestic colonialism concept is one of these moments when “definitive theories” were breaking down and being “ruined” by novel forms of insurgency, not least the irrevocable de-legitimation and apparent demise, of empire. In turn, this moment required, it seemed, the fashioning of provisional totalizations in their place. The massive world-transforming shift of decolonization was both defying comprehension within available narratives and offering a new frame through which antiracist insurgency in the US could be interpreted. I have first and foremost read the concept as a critical response to the apparent

²⁰G.W.F Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 33.

failure of existing frameworks, and their proponents, to make sense of what James Boggs called “The Black Revolt.”²¹ Existing accounts of ‘the whole’ (“definitive theories” in Castoriadis’s phrase) such as (dogmatic versions of) liberalism, Marxism, and nationalism had the effect of domesticating antiracist insurgency. Domestic colonialism, though, does not represent an utter rejection of available concepts but an attempt to work at their edges, to stretch them – and if need be, break them to make sense of that which escapes them. What I’ve been studying all along, here, is a practice of what Ann Laura Stoler calls “concept-work”: a form of thinking that slips into “the unmarked space between [concepts’] porous and policed peripheries, to that which hovers as not quite ‘covered’ by the concept, as ‘excess,’ or ‘amiss,’ that which cannot be quite encompassed... that which spills across its edges.”²²

Clearly, one of the major targets and sites of this stretching is Marxist theory and practice. Theorists of domestic colonialism repeatedly, throughout this dissertation, have accused Marxists of domesticating Black political subjectivity as a ‘particular’ expression of a more general class struggle, with the more practical consequence that antiracist politics risked ‘dividing’ the movement for a socialist revolution. This by no means meant an abandonment, however, of the dialectical impulses enjoined by Marxian thought. On the contrary, the claim was that Black revolutionaries are *more* dialectical because they saw their concepts as responding to insurgencies that outstripped available concepts. Huey Newton put this in terms of a distinction between a system of “historical materialism” and a practical, responsive “dialectical materialism.”²³ Harold Cruse used an opposition between what he saw as Marxists’ “mechanical materialism” and a “dialectical” analysis that sees the political world as outrunning any scheme of linear causal explanation. RAM, for their part, argued for a shift from historical materialism to a “Bandung humanism,” a “dialectical eschatology.” In many respects this turn built on a major thread in James and Grace Lee Boggs’s political thought,

²¹Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle*.

²²Ann Laura Stoler. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 9.

²³See the discussion in Newton, “Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970.”

the shift from dialectical materialism to dialectical humanism, from a focus on political-economic contradictions to the contradiction between economic ‘development’ and spiritual ‘underdevelopment.’ In all these shifts, there is an attempt to point to novel aspects of Black insurgency not captured fully by the rubric of class struggle, and an attempt to in turn theorize the autonomy of antiracist struggle vis-a-vis Marxism.

The apparent failure of Marxists was in some sense a failure to fully undermine a more prevalent liberal misinterpretation of antiracist revolt through a teleological narrative of liberal progress. In this interpretation, racial domination is an accidental aberration, and antiracist revolt a response to its excesses. The domestic colonialism concept, here, interrupted these teleologies partly by breaking their spatial frame of American ‘domestic’ politics. In other words, they re-interpreted antiracist rebellion from something answerable within the framework of US domestic politics to something that called the basic parameters of this domestic political order in question. The “political emancipation” offered by liberal democratic citizenship only worked to conceal the workings of racial domination and collective-power over that worked as obstacles to a more expansive human emancipation.

This dialectical criticism of the inability of these frameworks to fully understand the contradictions and possibilities of 1960s antiracist insurgency was enabled by and enacted through a re-reading of the US scene in terms of struggles for self-determination against ‘domestic colonialism.’ Indeed, it is the broader scene of decolonization and anticolonial revolution that reveals the limits of existing ways of thinking. For Robert L. Allen, the rise of national liberation in opposition to “the misery of permanent underdevelopment... transcend[s] our conceptual abilities.”²⁴ For Cruse, “world revolutionary events are running far ahead of Marxian theory.”²⁵ For Haywood, Marxists are taking the appearance of the ‘fact’ of an historic choice for integration within both ‘America’ and within the Communist Party for granted while concealing the “dialectical fact” of imperialism as the broader process in

²⁴Allen, “Black Liberation and World Revolution,” p. 10.

²⁵Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p. 149.

which any ‘choice’ for integration occurs – and this dialectical fact becomes clear in new ways through the vantage of Third World struggles for self-determination.²⁶ For RAM the world situation was indicating a shift in the central “contradiction” in the world system to that “beterrn imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism, and the colonies.”²⁷ In James Boggs’s writings in the 1960s the struggle for freedom in the US is re-interpreted in terms of this wider moment as a struggle “for its self-determination like a colony against an imperialist power.”²⁸

This re-interpretation of Black rebellion as an anti-imperialist struggle enabled what I have been calling a form of de-domesticating criticism. This criticism was practically embodied by a turn *away* from a politics of inclusion in domestic political order and *toward* the creation of internationalist solidarity and political imaginations. It is precisely this move that, in turn, is accused of being *undialectical*. The concept of domestic colonialism is dismissed as a misguided and escapist ‘colonial analogy’ in which theories, practices, and narratives of decolonization were imposed as a model on the predicament facing Black revolutionaries in the US.

As I hope to have made clear, I do not think this criticism is wrong per se. In many cases, revolutionary thinkers in the 1960s *did* mobilize a strict colonial analogy, and often in “escapist” ways. However, I have argued that this is a one-sided reading of the concept. Considering it either as a rhetorical strategy trafficking in a colonial metaphor, or a social scientific theory using “the colonial situation” as a model for ‘race relations’ in the US – that is, taking it as a purely analogical concept – reduces the entire conceptual *movement* of domestic colonialism to one of its moments. The moment of analogy in fact is an inaugurating move in what Rahel Jaeggi calls a dialectical “learning process”²⁹ in which the *failure* of analogy makes possible an internationalist interpretation of the *specificity* of Black

²⁶Haywood, *For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question*, p. 25.

²⁷Revolutionary Action Movement, “World Black Revolution (1966).”

²⁸Boggs, “Manifesto for a Black Revolutionary Party,” p. 206.

²⁹Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*.

insurgency in the US through the prism of decolonization. Internationalist learning, whether through travel, intellectual exchange, or expressions of political solidarity, is the broader political scene through which this conceptual movement or ‘learning process’ takes place. In each chapter I have tried to reconstruct this conceptual movement as domestic colonialism’s immanent logic. Each thinker examined in this dissertation mobilizes a colonial analogy, but these mobilizations spark the development of a critical account of the unique contradictions and problems of US racial and colonial power.

Given that domestic colonialism is concerned with practical judgment, and more particularly the interpretation of revolt, this movement from ‘colonial analogy’ to analytic distinction can be seen as a movement corresponding to the unpredictable and un-guaranteed, yet dialectically explicable, movement between rebellion and revolution. The domestic colonialism concept begins as a de-domestication of insurgency by reading what appears as ‘protest’ or ‘disorder’ within domestic politics as an anticolonial *rebellion*. A rebellion is a wholesale rejection of a given social and political order. As James and Grace Lee Boggs put it in *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, rebellion interrupts the “inertia” of a social order. Analogies between “The Black Revolt” and anticolonial struggles against colonial occupation posed them not just as interruptions of politics as usual but as symptoms of the basic contradictions and antagonisms underlying politics as usual.

But this interpretation of revolt in terms of self-determination, circulating not only in ‘theory’ but throughout the American scene in the 1960s, raises problems that exceed any straightforward analogy. Whereas *rebellion* is, perhaps, profitably read through the lens of anticolonial revolt, domestic colonialism’s theorists insist that *revolution* cannot be ‘modelled’ on Third World decolonization. Revolution, here, means the move from rejection to projection, from destruction to creation, from liberation to freedom – in a word, the move from the death of the old to the birth of the new. This creation of a new polity could not be strictly modelled on the anticolonial ejection of the colonizer and their replacement with

a regime governed by the formerly colonized. A development of rebellion into revolution would have to countenance the broader, long-term history of the United States and would proceed, on this reading, through practices and theories of ‘self-determination’ irreducible to the form it was taking as the principle underlying international decolonization.

This problem would therefore require not a ‘colonial analogy’ but a “provisional totalization,” or – as I argued in chapter three – an “abbreviation,” “condensation,” or “summing-up” of the unique historical conditions of antiracist rebellion in the United States from the vantage of the moment of decolonization. In chapter three Harold Cruse, Jack O’Dell, and Robert L. Allen all use the concept of domestic colonialism to *refract* (but not *reflect*) the long, sometimes subterranean, sometimes explosive, struggle for Black freedom in the US through the prism of decolonization. In chapters four to seven, I examined how theorists mobilizing the domestic colonialism concept did not therefore *abandon* the interpretation of revolt as a struggle for self-determination, but rather explicated how this interpretation demanded an analysis of the unique blockages to revolution in the US, the unique forms in which imperial and racial power crucially would survive international decolonization there. The crucial dialectical lesson of internationalist engagements, here, was that the problem confronted by Black revolutionaries did not have any easily applicable models: “The scenario of the revolution in any country is unique and cannot be borrowed or applied dogmatically from the revolutionary scenario of any other country.”³⁰

Key here is the foundational violence of slavery and settler colonialism, both of which enacted a forms of collective power-over precisely *through* the creation of an ‘anticolonial’ state, referenced by most thinkers examined here, but especially pointedly in different ways by Harold Cruse, Jack O’Dell, James Boggs, and Joy James. In chapter four, communist theorists of self-determination posed self-determination against a form of ‘imperialism’ that not only stretched across the world but held together US political-economic order through a

³⁰Boggs, “Beyond Nationalism,” p. 254.

combination of the most ‘regressive’ racial domination and the most ‘advanced’ development of monopoly capitalism. In chapter five, RAM used the moment of decolonization not to establish a straightforward analogy but to read Black populations in the US as subject to an (incomplete, contestable) process of capture. In chapter six, James and Grace Lee Boggs pointed out the unique character of the US, the need to examine the specificity of systematic, racialized underdevelopment as a kind of capture and debilitation ‘within’ the US. In each case the ‘domestic’ in domestic colonialism pointed not to an analogy whereby a ‘colonial situation’ like that in the Third World simply exists ‘within’ the United States, but to a sense that existing concepts of imperial power and anti-imperialist struggles for self-determination needed to be stretched to make sense of a kind of colonial power through which the ‘within’ is created and therefore through which subject populations are subordinately captured.

Against this domesticating form of power these thinkers reformulated the anticolonial concept of self-determination in ways that were made possible by decolonization but expanded beyond the legal principle of self-determination understood as territorial sovereignty. Indeed, for Claudia Jones, for example, Browder’s argument that self-determination must be understood territorially paradoxically worked as a domesticating move that read Black self-determination as a utopian prospect. She showed, against this move, that self-determination was not a legal principle, or a policy choice, but a *right* and *guiding principle* that articulated the irreducibility of Black struggle to any other. Theorists in the Revolutionary Action Movement, taking up the concept of anticolonial, revolutionary self-determination in the United States, located its subject not as a ‘nation’ but as an internationalist Black subject whose claims could not be answered in any ‘domestic’ order. James and Grace Lee Boggs mobilized self-determination to understand the demands for collective self-control under conditions of capitalist compulsion – but this self-determination is answerable neither as a domesticated respect for ‘self-governance’ nor in the shape of a nation-state. It required the transformation of political-economic relations in a way that would no longer produce the surplus people

whose claims are articulated through self-determination. The feminist critics in chapter seven showed that the turn to a nationalist politics of self-determination, insofar as it modelled itself strictly on the nation-state, would reaffirm a subordination to struggles against gender domination to ‘national liberation’ in ways that undercut the latter.

In each of these cases, the language of self-determination – as a ‘colonial analogy,’ even – makes possible a set of analyses that resist the domesticating tendencies of Marxian historical narratives and liberal discourses of inclusion, but in turn crucially expands the concept of self-determination by pointing to a problem of self-determination that cannot be answered in the political form (the nation-state) forecasted by the concept’s legal instantiation.

Domestic colonialism therefore is defined by a conceptual movement that needs to be seen as a whole – not as different meanings of the concept held at different times, but as contradictory moments of the same concept. This movement is from a reading of rebellion through a colonial analogy, to the failure of that analogy and the demand for an analytic of the unique conditions of the United States, to a re-interpretation of the entire totality of the moment in which these ‘analogies’ and ‘distinctions’ make sense at all: decolonization. In this respect, I hope to have shown that the concept’s relevance cannot be determined through a debate about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a colonial analogy, or of a ‘nationalist’ politics that it creates. Its relevance lies instead in the dialectical critique of a specifically North American shape of colonial power and the articulation of a capacious, de-domesticating concept of self-determination.

8.3 A Dialectical Critique of Domestication

Social and political criticism is, in some sense, a practice of defamiliarization. That is, it is not so much interpretation as *re*-interpretation. Critical texts like Karl Marx’s *Capital* and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* re-interpret what we take to be stable and natural things – the commodity, sex – as mystifications of contradictory, unstable, and politically contested

processes: class struggle, normalization. Reading domestic colonialism as an exemplar of ‘thinking dialectically’ reveals that it, too, enacted a defamiliarizing interpretation too, one of eminent importance for contemporary political theory. They re-interpreted domestic politics – with its opposition from international politics, arguably one of *the* key orienting concepts of political science – as a contradictory, unstable, and politically contested process of domestication. The term domestication is ubiquitous in critical discourses, where it describes the co-opting of radical claims through their incorporation into the mainstream.³¹ However, in contemporary anticolonial criticism it retains this meaning but more specifically describes the attempt to reduce anticolonial criticism, demands, and action to ‘problems’ solvable within the framework of domestic politics. In this line of criticism, one opened in unique and historically significant ways by the concept of domestic colonialism, this ‘domestic politics’ does not pre-exist this reduction: it is instantiated and maintained through this counter-insurgent containment of rebellion.

Contemporary anticolonial and antiracist criticism, as I have shown in the introduction, has centred in large part on a critique of this move. Anticolonial critics are oriented by a critique of domesticating interpretations of dissent that read rebellion within the very ‘domestic’ political order that it puts in question. Thus Indigenous assertions of sovereignty against resource extraction and Black struggles for social transformation - things that put in question the basic parameters of political order in North America – are read as ‘civil disobedience’ that take for granted a ‘civil realm’ in which they happen.³² The struggles of immigrants for life-sustaining services is read as a servile claim on the very state whose legitimacy is put in question by their condition. Rebellions against state violence, not least police power, are read

³¹See, e.g. Michael J Thompson. *The Domestication of Critical Theory*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016; Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006; Peter Sloterdijk. “Rules for the Human Zoo: a Response to the Letter on Humanism.” In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009), pp. 12–28, p. 176.

³²See here Feng, “Domesticating Political Resistance: Rhetoric, Time, and (the Limits of) Settler Sovereignty in Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*”; Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement*.

as enjoining reform and ‘accountability’ rather than a basic transformation in the relationship between space, law, and violence. In other words, to borrow from Mishuana Goeman, a key line of contemporary criticism aims at resisting these “logics of containment.”³³

The internationalist, dialectical concept of domestic colonialism can therefore be seen as a crucial episode in the pre-history of this contemporary critique of domestication. Each theorist examined in this dissertation used the invocation of occupation and colonialism to reject interpretations of Black rebellion as a civil disorder, protest, or ‘problem’ to be solved in and by the domestic order of the US state. In doing so through the language of self-determination, further, they exposed the deconstructible, unstable character of the very distinction between domestic and international politics. By situating Black struggles against racial domination in the United States in the broader shift of decolonization, theorists of domestic colonialism *internationalized the domestic*.³⁴ In reading antiracist insurgency in terms of anticolonial self-determination they offered a diagnosis of domestic politics as always-already riven with international claims and antagonisms that in principle it cannot ‘solve’ without violence. The ‘resolution’ of these claims within domestic politics requires a pacifying reduction of these claims to disorders solvable through ‘policy’ or a repressive mobilization of state violence to ‘enclose’ them within. It is this forced, but contradictory, tenuous, and ultimately impossible process of reduction and neutralization that I have been calling ‘domestication.’ This is a process that is neither ‘within’ domestic politics nor a purely ‘international’ relation between communities, but rather the *constitution* of that distinction through imperial power. From the vantage point of North America in the era of decolonization – that is, through the domestic colonialism concept - ‘domestic’ and ‘the international’ are the necessary forms of appearance of imperial power. Put more simply, domestication is a kind of imperial power

³³Mishuana Goeman. “Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment.” In: *Native Studies Keywords*. Ed. by Stephanie Nohelani Teves. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2015, pp. 71–89.

³⁴This terminology is from Manu Karuka, “Black and Native Visions of Self-Determination”; Edkins and Zehfuss, “Generalising the International”; Lowe, “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique”; Ashley, “The Powers of Anarchy: Theory, Sovereignty, and the Domestication of Global Life.”

that works precisely through the making of domestic politics and the forcible containment of international claims – Black, Indigenous, diasporic – within it.

This stands in clear opposition to more typical claims about the fragility of a domestic/international distinction in international relations and political science. These are familiar to any political scientist in the form of theories of globalization: the domestic can no longer insulate itself from rapidly accelerating communicative, cultural, economic, political, and demographic flows. Indeed, early reflections on globalization in IR actually used the terminology of an “internationalization of domestic politics.”³⁵ This describes an external incursion of the international into the domestic. In some sense, then, it presupposes a somewhat stable distinction that is transgressed. The critique of domestication offered by theorists of domestic colonialism instead shows that the presence of ‘the international’ within ‘the domestic’ is one of domestic politics’ immanent contradictions. This is what the word domestication implies: that the distinction between domestic and international is not a stable division that might be contested or transgressed but a *contradiction* internal to North American political orders. This contradiction is revealed, and diagnosed, through a rereading of political antagonisms in the United States as a struggle between an imperial politics of domestication and an anti-imperial politics of internationalization.

As noted above, this account relies on a particular reading of the *longue duree* of state and imperial formation, and more specifically a re-interpretation of the founding moment of the American revolution as a moment that combined political emancipation and imperial capture. As Jack O’Dell puts it, “The de-colonization of the American mainland achieved by the revolution of 1776, which at the same time left the institution of slavery intact, meant, in effect, that the African population in America remained a colonized people.”³⁶ In Malcolm X’s iteration of this de-domesticating criticism, Black populations in the US are not so

³⁵See for example Robert Keohane and Helen V. Milner, eds. *Internationalization and Domestic Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

³⁶O’Dell, “A Colonized People,” 129. See chapter 3 for my interpretation of this claim.

much *excluded* as captured and subjugated *within* an American imperial formation. They are “victims of Americanism.”³⁷ This Americanization is an international process underpinning the constitution of domestic order: it relies on the forecasted conquest and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the creation and maintenance of a system of slavery capable of preventing ‘domestic insurrection.’

The turn to internationalist critique by Black revolutionaries in the 1960s is not a matter of bringing in ‘external’ or ‘foreign’ political questions into the domestic space of the US (though certainly they did that too). Rather, international decolonization enabled a diagnosis of the way US political order was *premised on but represses* an internationalizing racialization of Black people through slavery. The international is *already* locked up in the ‘domestic’ in destabilizing ways. As Newton puts it,

“Black Americans are the first real internationalists; not just the Black Panther Party but black Americans. We are internationalists because we have been internationally dispersed by slavery, and we can easily identify with other people in other cultures... We are always a long way from home.”³⁸

The inseparability of the constitution of domestic order from this internationalizing violence of slavery, and the internationalizing war against Indigenous peoples, means that the international is built into domestic politics. The process of domestication, as an imperial attempt to dull this contradiction, produces problems that it cannot ‘solve’ precisely because domestication *produces* international relations of power even as it writes them into ‘domestic’ space. While this basic contradiction was raised through the internationalist travels, study, and solidarity-making of Black revolutionaries – all of which transgressed the boundaries of the nation-state in ways that worried ‘the authorities’ – it sharpens contradictions internal to domestic political order. David Austin illustrates this nicely in his history of Black radicalism

³⁷Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” p. 26.

³⁸Newton, “Intercommunalism,” p. 194.

in 1960s Montreal. He writes:

“Homegrown Black militancy that was internationalist in scope... genuinely raised the alarm within Canada’s state security forces. They feared the transgressive political potential of the Black diaspora, its ability to challenge, disrupt, and profane the sanctity of the nation state.”³⁹

Indeed, he argues that the police and state authorities relied on an international of this militancy as coming from without. This enables the displacement of problems of racial domination and antiracist insurgency as ‘international’ ones that need to be either excluded or ‘solved’ within. But this militarized police response, justified as a reaction to matters of international/national security, is in fact driven by the impossibility of displacing this internationalism as the invasion of foreign influences. It is rather, the “prophylactic nation-state [to] pressure from within its borders.”⁴⁰

At stake here is therefore a rereading of the distinction between domestic and international politics not as something ‘transgressed by’ or unable to ‘grasp’ empire, but *as* a technology of imperial power. By recasting Black rebellion as part of a world-wide struggle for self-determination, theorists of domestic colonialism showed pointed to a process of domestication: the discursive assumption and practical, violent creation of a ‘domestic’ space of politics through the reduction, containment, and repression of the multifarious claims to self-determination and political creation that exceed the colonial/racial nation-state. Rereading rebellion as a struggle for self-determination that called into question this nation-state, they raised the question of *the political* as opposed to politics. The domestic colonialism concept offered a framework for the interpretation of revolt that saw it as raising questions not of politics – “the manifold practices of conventional politics” – but rather of the political: “the

³⁹David Austin. *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013, p. 158.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 161.

way in which the social bond is instituted.”⁴¹ In the context of a world shift to decolonization, rebellion against racial domination and exclusion was re-interpreted from routine “political activity” to a moment in which “the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured.”⁴² Domestication just is this double movement. It describes the institution of social and political order, which, indeed, *does* offer a form of political imagination and enables political action for some, through the containment and neutralization of alternative claims to self-determination – Indigenous “social alterity,” Black social “jurisgenerativity,” and all those forms of internationalist connection and self-making that “create other possibilities.”⁴³ This movement is obscured precisely as a condition for ‘normal’ political life, which is re-asserted and enforced through domesticating and depoliticizing interpretations of revolt.

For the practice of diagnostic political theory, the cultivation of a dialectical disposition, the theory of domestic colonialism is interesting less as a theory of racism or as a rhetorical strategy for on-the-ground politics but as form of political knowledge that enjoins us to expose at every turn these domesticating obfuscations. It gives us, in turn, tools for thinking about this domestication as fundamentally unstable, as always called into question through insurgency. The very difficult task, opened but hardly solved by the concept of domestic colonialism, is to de-domesticate our political analysis. This is something unthinkable within frameworks that assume a distinction between the political and the international, or domestic and international politics. What is required, to borrow from Moon-Ho Jung’s recent analysis of pan-Asian anti-imperialism and the US security state, to “read the verb behind the noun...to recognize empire’s instability, incoherence, and constructedness,” all of which are concealed

⁴¹Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Theory of Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 102–3.

⁴²Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, p. 11.

⁴³See, respectively Joanne Barker. *Red Scare: the State’s Indigenous Terrorist*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021; Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*; Moon-Ho Jung. *Menace to Empire: Anticolonial Solidarities and the Transpacific Origins of the US Security State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022, p. 25.

by assumption of ‘domestic politics.’⁴⁴

Certainly this means thinking beyond what Gaston Bachelard at one time called the “sharpness of the dialectic of inside and outside”: a “dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything.”⁴⁵ From this point of view, the tradition of political theory that has begun from the *polis* and its heirs re-appears as a “cartography of containment” that assumes away this process in order to secure stable objects of knowledge for political theory and International Relations respectively (‘the political’ and ‘the international’).⁴⁶ The political critique indexed by domestic colonialism does not turn from the domestic to the international, but rereads the boundary between them as *the* site of a struggle to which either side of that opposition (domestic/international) offers no emancipatory solution. De-domesticating criticism, the best of what the domestic colonialism concept offers, consists in a shift from “problems” to “contradictions.” The problems opened by demands for self-determination are not problems to be solved but contradictions that can be sharpened or dulled.

8.4 The Present State of Things

Naturally any claims about domestication raise the question of what a ‘dedomesticated’ politics looks like. Rachael Bowlby, in a critique of the idea of “domestication,” worries that when we talk about domestication (and I think we can include here the historical process and discourse of domestication under discussion here) we assume some kind of pure and ‘pre-domesticated’ formation. As she puts it, “domestication... involves a very undeconstructive story – of a wild and natural identity, a full presence, subsequently, and only subsequently, succumbing to forces that deprive it of an original wholeness.”⁴⁷ In some sense this more

⁴⁴Jung, *Menace to Empire: Anticolonial Solidarities and the Transpacific Origins of the US Security State*, p. 12.

⁴⁵Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. Revised edition. Boston: Beacon Press, Jan. 1994, p. 211.

⁴⁶Walker, “International Relations and the Concept of the Political.”

⁴⁷Rachel Bowlby. “Domestication.” In: *Feminism Beside Itself*. Ed. by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman. New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 71–91, p. 73.

formal criticism is played out in real criticisms of “sixties nostalgia”, in which texts like this dissertation represent a return to some pure version of revolutionary criticism belatedly lost.⁴⁸ Further, as feminist critics showed, there was always something impure, fraught, and internally contradictory about the politics of de-domestication embodied in a vision Black liberation as a ‘decolonizing’ struggle.

However, throughout this dissertation the problem has less been about articulating, in utopian or abstract fashion, what a politics ‘outside’ of domestication would look like, one that no longer abided by the cartography of containment and subordinating narratives of progress, than it has been about interpreting revolt as already embodying a de-domesticating criticism and insurgency, as exposing contradictions irresolvable within the framework of a domestic/international distinction. The point was to reinterpret rebellion as part of a broader revolutionary shift related to, embedded in, but distinct from ‘decolonization’ as it was unfolding across the globe. Indeed, the language of decolonization and the demise of empire provided, precisely, an index for making this interpretive leap from the analysis of rebellion to the imagination of revolution. But revolution was imagined very rarely in terms of a return to a “full presence” or “original wholeness.” Thinkers like Harold Cruse and Jack O’Dell read it, rather ‘impurely,’ in terms of a more expansive and emancipatory repetition of the blocked and “unfinished” bourgeois revolution of the turn of the twentieth century, a “Second Reconstruction.”⁴⁹ Some saw it in terms of a global socialist revolution linked to the rejection of underdevelopment. Others saw it as the creation of a society that would no longer produce surplus people, that would turn the rapid economic development made possible by imperialism into a genuinely ‘human’ society. But none of these ideas were set out as plans; they were interpretive schemes, “provisional totalizations” through which rebellions could be set together as linked struggles for a new world from the old.

⁴⁸Cedric Johnson. “Who’s Afraid of Left Populism? Anti-Policing Struggles and the Frontiers of the American Left.” In: *New Politics* 17.2 (2019). URL: https://newpol.org/issue_post/whos-afraid-of-left-populism/.

⁴⁹For a reading of the 1960s as a ‘Second Reconstruction’ see Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*.

While I have no objection to taking up these specific ideas, in my view the lesson of this for contemporary critical thought, defined as the diagnosis of the present, is that it needs to grapple with the implications of those political demands and those forms of rebellion that embody a de-domesticating politics irresolvable not only within the US nation-state within ‘domestic’ order *as such*. Where are we (political theorists) outstripped by reality today insofar as we retain a vision of politics modelled on the enclosure of “the political,” that is, insofar as we are heirs to the *polis*? What kinds of politics not only turn toward ‘the international’ from the domestic but expose the ‘domestic’ order as itself a technology of colonial and racial power? I think there are two demands, both which mobilize languages of occupation, and whose proponents are faced with and targeting directly the immensity and impunity of police power in North America.

These are “Land Back” and “Abolition.” Those who invoke these no doubt do have some sort of vision of what a de-domesticated politics looks like, but this vision emerges in and through the long process of fits and starts in which “success” and “failure” cannot be clearly distinguished, because their meaning is decided by a process that is not over yet. Land Back exposes Canada and the United States as machines of dispossession, and re-interprets rebellion, protest, and reform, in terms of this long struggle for the undoing of this dispossession through the restitution of land. Abolition takes aim at the state as a massive apparatus of capture that works not only through cruelty to individuals but through the debilitation of entire populations, who nonetheless resist. These are languages that embody, in my view, the dialectical movement that theorists of domestic colonialism teach political theorists to see: the connection between rebellion and revolution. Precisely because they are meant literally – as the return of land and the dismantling of police, prisons, and borders – they work as guiding principles and orienting frames that “sum up” the relation between multifarious struggles that may appear only partial, just as self-determination works, for Claudia Jones, to “interconnect

the partial demands” of daily struggle.⁵⁰

In some sense both of these struggles appear, just as self-determination perhaps did in the era of decolonization, to pose the de-domestication of political imagination *necessary* and *impossible*. Necessary, in the sense that they pose questions unanswerable within domestic order; impossible insofar as this order appears durable and the making of alternatives distant. This, at least, seems to be the sense of my students, who all agree that we cannot keep going the way we are going, that things are falling apart, and who see in contemporary rebellions against police power and colonial dispossession something great and energizing, but who are also deeply aware of the “boring of hard boards.”⁵¹ But theorists of domestic colonialism teach the need to re-interpret rebellion as part of a process, unpredictable to be sure, but a process nonetheless, of revolutionary politics and revolutionary learning, and thus see in them the announcement of ways of thinking that push past the limits of our frames of judgment. One of these frames, which it is incredibly difficult to think outside of, is that of a political world divided between domestic and international (one that remains no matter how much one maps this division’s transgression). By exposing the contradictory presence of the international in the domestic, those struggling for the world’s remaking are wiser than theory. Theory is always too late, or too early. Following along with revolutionary theorists of domestic colonialism as they think dialectically teaches us a great deal about what we can do within these limits. They practiced political theory not by positing a “state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself,” but by attempting to locate “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.”⁵²

⁵⁰Jones, “On the Right to Self-Determination for the Negro People in the Black Belt,” p. 67.

⁵¹Max Weber. “Politics as a Vocation.” In: *The Vocation Lectures*. Ed. by Tracy Strong and David Owen. Trans. by Rodney Livingstone. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004, pp. 32–94.

⁵²Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 57.

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