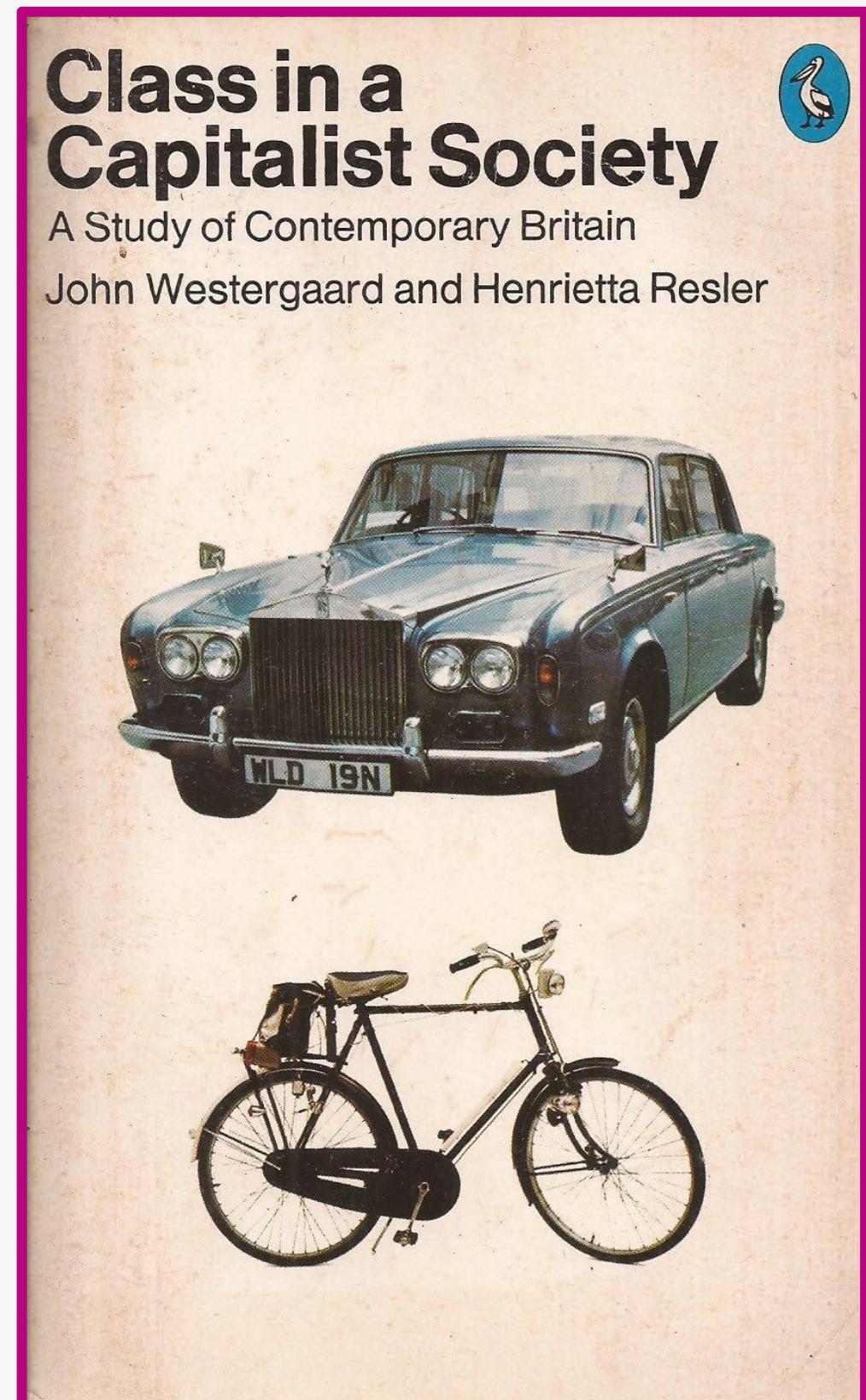


# Why we Still Need Class Analysis: But What Sort of Class Analysis Do we Need?

Lancaster University, The John Westergaard Annual Lecture 9th November 2021

# Class in Capitalist Society: A Study of Contemporary Britian



# We Still Need Class Analysis (2021) Why?

- To explain the forces that shape people's lives: the conditions, limits and possibilities by which they live and die
- Hence the shape social relations take (economic, symbolic and social encounters) as they are lived
- To analyse why these forces emerge: eg the role of capitalism in shaping forces and social relations
- How these manifest as inequality: why we have it/how it works
- But...not just economic. Importance of the symbolic economy in distributing moral and cultural value
- To question "in whose interests?" does class work in order to understand power

# How These Cohere in the Present: Who Were the Most Likely to Die in the UK Through Covid-19?

**The elderly:** care home excess deaths over 40,000 declared in first year "As if Expendable

**The disabled:** 6 out of 10 people who have died with COVID-19 are disabled (Health Foundation Nov 2020)

BAME groups: the pandemic in England produced **high death rates of BAME** (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) populations in proportion to white people. Abdul Razaq et al. (2020) found that Black excess deaths (observed vs expected) are 4.5 times higher for the Black African population, 2.5 times for the Black Caribbean population, 8 times higher for the Black other background population. ("Disparities Report")

**The working class:** for men it is those working in manufacturing, chefs, those in public-facing transport roles (including bus and taxi drivers) and security guards; and for women-those working in retail and caring or personal services. 50% of healthcare workers who died were from BAME backgrounds.

Multi-factorial: area/housing specific: In the UK women in the most deprived areas are 133% more likely to die from COVID-19 than those in the least deprived areas ([Stafford and Deeny 2020](#)). Multi-generational households highest risk (Disparities)

THE UNPROTECTED = DISPOSABLE, DEPLETED (austerity for a decade)

# Initial Problem: Very Different Registers and Spaces of Class

- Definitions produced through very different academic theories (contested, disciplinary influences, national inflections)
- Politics of class: feminist, anti-racist, marxist, bourgeois
- History of classifications organized and legitimated by state institutionalization
- Also different representations of class exist in symbolic economy/cultural industry
- Classifications are lived and felt through affective registers: experienced as subjectivity
- Always entangled with race and gender, as they are here: eg: davis, jones, wolpe, C.Hall, S.Hall, balibar, gilmore wilson, bannerji, farris, ware, hage, haider, valluvan, mcclintock, kelley, field & field, federici; virdee, reay, G.Bhattacharyya, T.Bhattacharya, bhambra, back, tyler, lentin)

# Lecture Framework

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- Historical necro legacies
- My framework: forces, process, legitimation making class relations
- Significance of changing capitalism
- Significance of state and symbolic legitimation
- Summing up

# Another Problem : Long and Different Entangled Histories of Violence and Classification

- Thanatocracy (linebaugh): enclosures, decommuning, death & vagrancy
- Necropolitics: (manjapara, mbembe) experiments with extraction and death
- Witch hunts:
- (Federici): gender genocide,
- Fear of women, control of repro
- Dispossession
- Disposability
- Discipline

# Significance of these Pre-Capitalist Labour/Colonial Legacies

- Ability to turn death into profit: e.g. English law dispute between insurers/slave shippers in the 1783 “Zong” case, when sea captain threw overboard 132 (out of 470) slaves and claimed insurance (Krikler 2017). Legal battle over value as cargo or insurance. Slaves not classified as legally human.
- NO SOCIAL PROTECTION
- The financial systems we have now (and will come to...) were developed through primitive accumulation and slavery eg debt (Graeber, Gago), land rent, usury, insurance (Baucom 2005)
- The categories developed for value extraction relied on legitimations of “less than human”: labour, chattel, breeding body (Gilmore Wilson)

# Significance of Legitimation by the State

- Thanatocracy – to – labouring legitimation by degeneracy, danger
- Necropolitics - to - slavery legitimation by inhumanism, threat
- Witch hunts - social reproduction- controlled fears of monstrous breeding
- All classified by systems of inhumanity:
- Degenerate, monstrous, dangerous
- All also produce a long history of fight-back

# Morphing, Monstrosity: Degeneracy

- **Symbolically branded and institutionalized:** Francis Bacon (1618, *The Lord Chancellor*) developed a ‘**theory of monstrosity**’ to describe the “hideous creatures” that roamed England (the dispossessed). They were portrayed as dangerous and contagious (Linebaugh and Rediker). Note state/capital relation.
- **Witches: also branded** (i.e. women who controlled reproduction, medicine, care and health) and considered monstrous. (Federici “Caliban and the Witch”)
- The theory of monstrosity was later developed via eugenics and species classification by **Edward Long in 1774 into a theory of racism**
- **And class:** by the 19<sup>th</sup> century monstrosity and racism were well established through the generic definition of degeneracy. (Engels 1844/1958) notes of the working-class: ‘a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and intellectually to bestiality’ (p.33).
- Note division between “primitive” haters and protectors
- Classification are mechanisms for the distribution of life, property, labour, bodies, all in the interests of the extraction of value and discipline of potential unruly populations

# Significance of 6 D's: *The Process for Producing Class Differences*

- Dispossession
- Depletion
- Degeneracy
- Disciplined
- Disposability
- Death

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- Accumulation
- Amassing
- Authority
- Disregarding
- Protected
- Life

# My Focus: Class Processes and Class Relationships

- Accumulation: the logic and driver of capital
- Exploitation: relies on labour, theory of surplus value
- Appropriation/expropriation of property
- Legitimation of some/delegitimation of others
- Entitlement to labour/culture of others
- All shape the making of subjectivity

# My Framework

- The deadly legacies of capital
- Develop processes for class/race/gender formation
- Via state institutionalization (eg law, welfare, education)
- All shape the possibilities for what is class and how it can be lived
- Via classifications (symbolic economy/culture industry)
- Set the terms for cultural value struggles/affective experiences – produce

# My Focus: Legitimation of Class Processes

Legitimation of those processes relies on:

- State institutionalisation and
- Symbolic economy: allocation of symbolic values
- Social reproduction: the infrastructure crucial to all forms of economic extraction

# Drawing on my Research on Class

## **Formations of class and gender (1997)**

The making of gendered working-class subjectivity; defending institutional and symbolic devaluing living class relations

## **Class, self, culture (2004)**

Middle-class formation, significance of classification, entitlement, accumulation of culture *as if* property mc affects eg resentment

## **Feminism after Bourdieu (2004)**

Class affects, the class-and gender based shape to subjectivity (with Lisa Adkins)

# Drawing on my Research on Class continued...

## **Reacting to reality tv: audience, performance, value (2012)**

Making personhood, symbolic economy distribution of value, wc representation as source of mc profit and its effects  
(with helen wood)

## **Handbook of marxism (2022)**

Marx and marxist debates on class, race and gender (with sara farris, alberto toscano and svenya bromberg)

# Not Stratification

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- NOT stratification (very different historical legacies - developed for government taxation)
- NOT STATUS (a strategy of legitimization)

Hence why we need to understand:

- Capitalism so Marxist debates about stagnation, financialization and rentierization and the increased significance of wealth (eg Picketty)

# What Sort of Capitalism, Changing Relations of Capital and Labour? What Happens to Class?

- Accumulation - is the logic of capital. That has not changed but the processes have
- Exploitation: John's book is an analysis of labour exploitation, and state support for. Exploitation is a relationship between capital and labour.
- What happens when capital stagnates and becomes less dependent upon labour (eg Lapavitsas "*Profit without Production*")
- Appropriation/expropriation
- The taking/hoarding of property, use of another's property, extracting rent from property (is this a different sort of capitalism?)
- What happens to legitimation of capital that relies on historic classifications ?
- Is class made and experienced differently?
- Just remembering that most class analysis rests on the capital/labour relation (eg John Westergaard)

# Different Capitalisms? (End of Capitalism?)

- STAGNANT CAPITAL: globally manufacturing still significant but all agree we are now in a period of stagnation plus lack of investment
- FINANCIALISATION (financial capital): significance of fee extraction, global finance extends its tentacles into state debt as well as household debt (lapavitsas, lazarrato, cooper)
- RENTIER CAPITALISM: controlling, hoarding and guarding assets. Including IP. No dynamic/creative investment (brett christophers)
- Automated capital:
- Replication of technical capacities has led to stagnation. Dispersed labour. No revival (benanav)
- END OF CAPITALISM: control of infrastructure, only few can convert and distribute info as commodity (mckenzie wark)
- CATASTROPHE CAPITALISM: endless extraction of everything, everywhere
- If capital is stagnant and hoarding what happens to class?
- See: brett christophers' isaac and tamara deutscher memorial lecture for historical materialism:  
<https://www.Youtube.Com/watch?V=icnh0ouvww>

# Does Increasing House Ownership Change Class Relations?

- NO
- In 1975 John Westergaard noted the increase in private housing: “possession of small property that carries no power” (housing market relative values). Very different to corporate property, eg Google v me (even though my flat earned more than me in a year)
- But it does **LEGITIMATE** property interests. It makes property appear as if equal (a bit like the myth of free exchange of labour”). AS Brett Christophers shows huge differences
- State resources and deregulation support corporate property eg Grenfell and small property (houses) **NOT** social housing.
- Subsidy of ownership (eg tax, mortgage)
- Reveals the stagnation of wages (eg the increased significance of wealth to income: Picketty
- Protection for house ownership can be precarious (bubbles); scam –sub-prime
- Financialisation led to sub-prime crisis; acute spatial class/race making (6d's)

# Class and Capital

- Global division of labour is still significant (forced economic migration)
- FINANCIALISATION: increased gap between those who rely on debt and welfare to stay alive. And those who have assets (eg access to investing/assets). Always complicated by class inheritances (BC crit of A, K, C)
- RENTIERIZATION: BC: similar to above but focuses on corporate rents (eg google, ESSO, banks). A division of labour is still evident eg between those who protect rents (eg accountants, lawyers, bankers) and those who "sweat" for the companies to protect their rents
- AUTOMATION AND VECTORALISM: those who control IP and monopolize and protect their rent are a vectoralist class "atop a pyramid of exploited labour" – global. How to maintain domination when our commodity-information – is abundant (mckenzie wark)
- ALL ABOUT PROPERTY: DIFFERENT TYPES of extraction eg rent, debt & labour
- All rely on state support & deregulation (eg tax avoidance) JW: state as prisoner of capital (1975)
- Yet still none could survive without the work of social reproduction

- Class relations change from capital/labour to labour for protecting capital extracted from rent and finance
- This is a global relation as the dominant rentiers are global and corporate
- Rentier capital has increased reliance and control of nation states (eg saps, austerity)
- Low wages/debt used to service debt and/or rents
- Theoretically significant as if rent is "unproductive" it will not create anything, not the "motor" of capital
- But it will - like "unproductive" social reproduction (eg care) maintain capital forms

# Does Changing Capitalism Impact Upon the Symbolic Economy and the Distribution of Moral and Cultural Value via Classifications?

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No

- Class is ideological, working to legitimate power. Hence desperation to deny (40yrs) discursively
- The working class still often used as a signifier of pathology, the constitutive limit, across medias (eg tyler)
- Profit whilst being pathologised (RTV)
- And access to cultural industries more difficult for WC: cultural capital still required for access
- Affective registers: loss, pain and insecurity (ontological) represented as psychological/individualized
- But also challenged via value struggles eg helen wood and my research

# State Institutionalization of Class Difference Intensifies

- Between those who are afforded social protections of their life/property/assets and those who are not
- The 3 legacies of thano, necro, social repro combine in state treatment: think disposability, COVID deaths
- Social & health care systems depleted
- Increasing significance of lack of any protections (not just labour but life), transfer of responsibility to the family, individual by the state
- Lack of security across a range of sites: housing, food, safety, ontological
- The history of significance of labour protections fought for by the working class have been substantially destroyed (e.G. Zero hour contracts)
- State protection of inheritance (assets significant for class repro across generations eg grandparents and tuition fees)
- Protections against precarity, historically significant class difference

# Knots and Cuts

- The entangled historic thanato/necro/repro legacies of dispossession, disposability, depletion, degeneracy continue into the present, still involving global movement
- Class cuts through race and gender making significant differences in social protection and security. It constitutes and disrupts, hence:
- Hall's (1980) 'Race, is thus also, the modality in which class is 'lived'. The medium through which class relations are experienced.' Always combined in practice but abstractions enable mechanisms to be revealed
- Whiteness operates '*as-if*' it is a property across class, shaping hierarchies of personhood in all state institutions, especially law (Harris) and occupation (Roediger)
- Class cuts through gender not just by the SDoL but also social repro -- by the use and entitlement to another's labour (e.g. domestic, caring, etc). The race, gender, class dynamics particularly apparent in care/health work and migrant labour (Farris).

# Class Divisions = Differences Between the Socially Protected and Unprotected

- Labour has NOT been superseded by assets/wealth/rent. They exist simultaneously and create class divisions because class is a relationship (not a measurement, a position in a hierarchy)
- Class relations are about *both* HAVING and DOING
- The division is between those who are positioned to accumulate, exploit, appropriate, who can capitalise on assets, who have dispositions of entitlement to people and property and can protect themselves and their property. And those who cannot.
- State institutions enable capital accumulation via: Law, contracts, accountants and IP (patents) used to protect interests and legitimate value
- Symbolic institutions continue to further legitimate difference and distribute moral and cultural value

# Conclusion 1

- Class is both abstract and concrete.
- Class is a social relation, shaped by capitalist processes, lived through ...institutionalized and legitimated by the state, legitimated by symbolic relations of classification
- Different temporalities to capitalist processes: not eclipsed but simultaneous
- Class is always constituted by difference
- Class is a biopolitical formation because it is about the distribution of death and life
- Class is also an ideology, constantly reproduced through the symbolic economy eg of “callous disregard” and “malevolent neglect”
- Frame is important for understanding how class is lived daily through the classed encounter
- And as an affective response at the level of subjectivity via feelings such as shame, resentment and the individualizing of blame and responsibility for structural problems

# Conclusion 2

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- To understand how these affects (resentment/shame) get mobilized in the interests of power by forms of hate that were designed to divide and control (roediger, mondon and winter)
- Refuse the competitive identity tournaments that de-politicize by treating culture as an asset, a protected property that blocks connections to others
- There's a lot at stake
- Class is not just a description, but a struggle for life, social protection, security, cultural and moral value, sanity
- If we take the long view what we see are similar characters promoting similar processes: loading the 6D's of dispossession (housing, health, land), depletion (health, care), degeneracy (symbolic), disciplined (debt, incarceration), disposability (no protections, no security), to death ..– with further D's: disregard, derision, disdain and disrespect
- I hope John Westergaard would have appreciated this. His emphasis on the state and sources of resistance is still very important.