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## Migration and the Mobility of Labor

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### Abstract and Keywords

The reduction of human beings into human commodities, or “human capital”—indeed, into labor and nothing but labor—which was the essence of modern slavery, served as a necessary predicate for the consolidation and perfecting of what Marx called “labor in the abstract.” This requires us to re-situate enslaved labor as the defining and constitutive limit for how we comprehend labor as such under capitalism. The production of labor in the abstract, or labor “in general,” depended furthermore upon concrete productions of sociopolitical difference, particularly the branding of race. Analogously, migration provides a key site for contemplating the mobility of labor “as such”—labor “in general,” or labor in the abstract—while simultaneously illustrating precisely how such mobility is inexorably subordinated through the production of spatialized/ racialized difference that arises through the enforcement of (“national”) state borders and immigration law, branding migrant labor as “foreign” if not “illegal.”

Keywords: slavery, race, branding, abstract labor, difference, migrant “illegality”, immigration law, borders

The thought of Karl Marx, as the contributions to this *Handbook* amply demonstrate, has been and continues to be an indispensable intellectual and critical resource across the full spectrum of knowledge in the human sciences. As Jean-Paul Sartre ([1960] 1963) memorably acknowledged, Marxism “remains ... the philosophy of our time. We cannot go beyond it because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it” (1960] 1963: 30). This proposition remains as true in the twenty-first century as ever. Indeed, the perversity and plainly cataclysmic character of capitalism has only intensified in the era of aggressive neoliberal revanchism and is brutally and viciously manifest across the planet. In this respect, also recall that the inextricable political ethos and project of Marxism is Communism. And as Marx and Engels ([1848] 2008) famously

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proclaimed in the concluding lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, the working people of all countries have “a world to win” (1960] 1963:84).

Any intellectual exposition of Marxism that is not grounded in the Communist project of transforming the world, therefore, is merely a scholastic exercise. We should recognize that any Marxism worthy of the name is inseparable from these worldly stakes. In this spirit, we must approach and apprehend the challenge of elaborating a Marxian perspective on migration—the thematic focus here. This entry to the *Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx* extrapolates key insights from Marx’s corpus, in most instances referring only tangentially to migration as such, toward the ends of further elaborating what has remained an as-yet underdeveloped Marxian theory of migration (see De Genova 2012; 2016a; 2016b). A comprehensive Marxian theory of migration likewise commands a critical attention to theorizing questions of the state, law, nationalism, borders, citizenship, and race (among other social formations of “difference”). The focus here will highlight questions of race and labor.

If the stakes of any Communist politics are indeed the world, it is because an elementary predicate of Marx’s analysis of the regime of capital accumulation is its *global* scope and scale. Indeed, Marx establishes repeatedly that one must understand capital to have been global *from its inception*. In one of the most forceful articulations of this perspective, in his discussion of “the so-called primitive accumulation” in Volume I of *Capital*, Marx ([1867]1976) declares with a flourish:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize *the dawn of the era of capitalist production*. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has *the globe as its battlefield* ([1867]1976:915; emphases added).

Importantly, Marx’s critique identifies slavery, colonialism, genocide, and warfare as veritable preconditions for the very possibility of capital accumulation. A reconsideration of the crucial historical role of slavery in particular provides a vital source of Marxian critique for our global postcolonial present, especially with respect to advancing a rigorous analysis of migration as a global system of labor mobility and thus of the illegalization of migrant mobility as a central and constitutive form of labor subordination within this system.

# 1. Slavery, Labor, and Blackness

With specific reference to the disfigurement of the nascent struggles by the white working class in the United States because of the coeval existence of slavery, Marx famously proclaimed, “Labour in a white skin can never emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin” ([1867] 1976:414). This classic *racial* watchword of anti-capitalist struggle is no less pertinent today than in Marx’s era. “Labour in a white skin can *never* emancipate itself,” Marx notably insisted—wherever such whiteness is predicated upon the systemic denigration of Blackness. And where, or when, we may rightly demand, has whiteness ever *not* been so predicated?

For this, indeed, is the precise historical meaning of whiteness, its significance and salience (Du Bois [1920] 1971; cf. Allen 1994; 1997; Harris 1993; Roediger 1991; Roediger 1998; Saxton 1990). Rather than an immutable, transhistorical, pre-political “biological” essence, racial whiteness is truly “a very modern thing,” as W. E. B. Du Bois ([1920]1971:30) memorably put it. Indeed, whiteness is an invention of colonial/racial capitalism, originating in the brutal sociopolitical processes that have come to be known as primitive accumulation (Marx ([1867] 1976, pp. 873–941; see Cox 1959, Du Bois 1915; [1920]1971).<sup>1</sup> Referring to this global history of conquest as a material necessity for jump-starting and sustaining the processes of capital accumulation, Marx contends, “The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there” ([1867] 1976, p. 918). “In fact,” Marx concludes poignantly, “the veiled slavery of the wage labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal” (p. 925). Indeed, this “trade in men” (and women, and children), in Du Bois’s account (1915: Chapter IX; see [1939] 2014:97), “came in time to be founded on racial caste, and this caste was made the foundation of a new industrial system.” As a result, the “doctrine of race” arising from this primitive accumulation to justify and legitimate the subjugation of indigenous, colonized, and enslaved peoples thereafter had to be “frantically rationalized in every possible direction” (Du Bois [1939]2014:91). That racial whiteness has, since its inception, been an equivocal and treacherous fabrication, therefore, ought to be fairly evident. Nevertheless, the semblance of objectivity and purity customarily attributed to whiteness—its precisely un-natural yet terrifyingly naturalized social reality—has been forged and exulted only through a bloody history and a system of rule predicated on racial hierarchy in which whiteness has systematically been exclusively guarded as the most privileged condition—which is to say, in short, white supremacy.

White supremacy is a social and political order of domination and subordination that systemically generates and upholds inequalities of wealth, power, and prestige by privileging racialized whiteness over and above all other categories of “racial” identity (Du Bois [1920] 1971). Foundational racialized distinctions and meanings, such as “white” or “Black,” were literally invented, imposed, and enforced through various iterations of the global regime of European/colonial supremacy, retroactively. They appear as the

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transparent and self-evident (“natural”) names for differences that only came to have significance and gravity because the particular forms of exploitation and domination that created them required and relied upon their naturalization. Whiteness, like Blackness, is however no mere fact of nature. It is a fact of white supremacy.

To adequately adapt Marx’s critique of the racial coordinates of capitalism and the perplexities of labor in one or another racial “skin,” we must conceive of Blackness as more capacious than a mere synonym for African origin or ancestry alone. We need recourse to a conception of Blackness that corresponds to the full range of racialized categories that white supremacy has orchestrated under the sign of negation. In other words, we refer here not to any supposedly “objective” or “natural” sort of (phenotypic, quasi-“biological”) racial Blackness that might be more predictably attributed to people of African origin or descent in particular, but rather to the pronouncedly heterogeneous spectrum of all those categories of humanity that European imperialism unrelentingly produced as its colonized and enslaved “natives,” and thus as specifically non-“white.”

Moreover, we may instructively apprehend Blackness not primarily (or not exclusively) as a literal attribute of the “skin” per se but rather as the preeminent figure of racialized subordination within a global regime of white supremacy. The people of Africa—who were hunted, captured, kidnapped, commodified, trafficked, shackled, deported, tortured, raped, mutilated, and killed, all in order to subject them to a permanent regime of brutally coerced labor—were the only category of humanity in the modern world order “whose skin has been transformed into the form and spirit of merchandise—the living crypt of capital,” as Achille Mbembe (2017:6) argues. Indeed, if the Atlantic slave trade literally transformed African men and women into “human-objects, human-commodities, human-money” (p. 2), the term “Black,” that was devised to brand their particular flesh nonetheless “was invented to signify exclusion, brutalization, and degradation, to point to a limit constantly conjured and abhorred” (p. 6). Consequently, Blackness names that limit.

While never denying or disregarding the historical specificity of African experiences of white supremacy and the particularity for Africans and all people of African ancestry of being racialized as Black (see Chandler 2013; 2014; Gilroy 1993; Mbembe 2017), however, we require a more expansive and capacious understanding of Blackness as a sociopolitical category that *tendentally* encompasses the whole spectrum of racialized social identities produced as non-white within our global postcolonial regime of white supremacy. Here, we may recall that in his landmark text, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois proposes a *global* conceptual framework for apprehending his subject: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” ([1903] 1982:15; see Chandler 2006; 2010). In this respect, contemporary postcolonial migration and refugee movements may be recognized as providing crucial sites for what Mbembe (2017) has tellingly depicted as “the Becoming Black of the world” (2017:6), whereby “the systematic risks experienced specifically by Black slaves during early capitalism have

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now become the norm for, or at least the lot of, all of subaltern humanity” (2017:4), in which “the term ‘Black’ has been generalized,” (2017:6) and there is a “tendency to universalize the Black condition” (2017: 4).

Furthermore, inasmuch as such objectification of human productive power and creative capacity is precisely what is at stake in Marx’s critique of the capital-labor relation, predicated as it is upon the commodification of the capacity for work (labor-power), the reduction of human beings into “human-objects, human-commodities, human-money,”—indeed, “human capital”—which was the essence of modern slavery, requires us to re-situate enslaved labor as the defining and constitutive limit for how we comprehend labor itself under capitalism. This, after all, is precisely what Marx describes in his analysis of the struggle over the working day. From the standpoint of capital, Marx ([1867]1976) clarifies, even for ostensibly “free” (waged) labor:

the working-day contains the full 24 hours ... Hence it is self-evident that the labourer is nothing other than labour-power for the duration of his whole life, and that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and by right labour-time, to be devoted to the self-valorization of capital, to be devoted to the self-expansion of capital .... But in its blind measureless drive, its insatiable appetite for surplus labour, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical limits of the working-day .... It is not the normal maintenance of the labour-power which determines the limits of the working-day; it is the greatest possible daily expenditure of labour-power here, but rather the greatest possible daily expenditure of labour-power, no matter how diseased, compulsory and painful it may be, which determines the limits of the workers' period of rest. Capital asks no questions about the length of life of labour-power. What interests it is purely and simply the maximum of labour-power that can be set in motion in a working day. It attains this objective by shortening the life of labour-power. ([1867]1976:375–376)

Marx’s scathing critique of wage labor is always haunted by the long shadow of slavery as its limit figure. Insofar as Blackness is inextricable from the historical experience of modern slavery as a kind of name, indeed a racialized branding for that historically specific limit of human objectification and commodification, we may begin to recognize that all labor under capitalism may itself be understood to be at least *tendentally* encompassed under this racialized sign as the antithesis of capital. If we comprehend labor to be the antithesis of capital, then to the extent that Blackness names the ultimate condition of labor’s subordination and subjection to capital, we need to recognize the tendency for *all* labor under capital to be pressed toward a sociopolitical condition of Blackness (or approximating Blackness), where Blackness does not name any kind of essential identity but the racialized sociopolitical condition of that subordination/ subjection. This may be taken to be a corollary to the proposition that enslavement is the limit figure for all labor under capitalism and that there is a tendency to press all labor toward that limit. Inasmuch as this dynamic is relational and tendential, and thus signals the larger workings of a system, we have an analytic that can encompass the full range of

sociopolitical differences and contradictions (racialized or otherwise) along a continuum of relative freedom/unfreedom.

## 2. Race, Difference, and the Abstraction of Labor

If Blackness is being emphasized here as a decisive analytic tool for ultimately unpacking the question of migration in general and migrant labor in particular, it is because Blackness is in fact necessary for apprehending *labor as such* under capitalism. Marx chose his words well. By evoking the *branding* of the flesh of enslaved African American labor, Marx tersely but precisely named the visceral corporeality and sheer cruelty of slavery's dehumanizing violence, while yet naming a more diffuse process of racialization whereby Blackness itself could be inferred to be both the result of a kind of sociopolitical branding as well as that very process of branding itself. Simply put, the production of racial distinctions in the modern capitalist world has itself been a continuous and ever-unfinished process of branding. Blackness (and race, more generally) has been quite simply an elemental and foundational figure for theoretically interrogating the sociopolitical production of *difference* within our capitalist modernity.

The theoretical stakes of this intervention revolve around what is necessarily a mutually constitutive engagement with race and migration, but they are not reducible to any ostensibly delimited question of "identity." In other words, the stakes here are emphatically not to apprehend "difference" as if it were merely an unfortunate or cumbersome, pre-political (quasi-natural) pretext for various properly political tactics of labor subordination and strategies of divide and rule, serving to undermine the unity of a presumptively unitary "working class." Rather, what is being proposed here is that we cannot adequately comprehend Marx's theory of labor under capitalism, as such, without further pursuing this inquiry into the puzzle of "labor in a white skin" and, concomitantly, labor branded as Black.

Capital can never extract from labor the abstract (eminently social) substance that is "value" except with recourse to the abstraction of labor power, which however can only be derived from the palpable vital energies of living labor. As an operative, indeed decisive, category of capital accumulation, labor power (abstract labor) never ceases to pertain to real flesh-and-blood (embodied, and hence, racialized) working people (concrete labor). As Marx ([1867]1976) explains:

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With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract.... There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogenous human labour, i.e. of human labour-power.... As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values—commodity values. ([1867]1976:128)

Marx affiliated concrete (variegated) labor with the use-value of the distinct products of that labor, and therefore with the whole heterogeneous panoply of positive, determinate, qualitative specificities—in short, with *difference* as such, and therefore with the historically specific and socially distinctive aspects of human life. In contrast, it was the systemic requirement for abstract labor as a generic form that served to elucidate the historically specific but global character of alienation, exploitation, and fetishism under capitalism. Notably, Marx discerned these global capitalist socioeconomic processes to be uneven in their development, and therefore, to be most abundantly evidenced in the United States.

Indifference toward specific labours conforms to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference.... Such a state of affairs is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society—in the United States. Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category ‘labour,’ ‘labour as such,’ labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society. (Marx [1858] 1973:104–05)

Remarkably, what for Marx was the epitome of “the most modern society,” or more precisely, “the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society” (as a virtually “pure” form of capitalist society)—the United States—was precisely a social formation that had been materially and practically built upon large-scale plantation slavery and a sociopolitical order of white supremacy. And it was here, where the branding of labor in the racialized “skin” of Blackness was likewise exceedingly advanced, that there emerged the purest form of the abstraction of “labor” as such, of labor “in general.”

In his account of the formation of capital, Marx establishes an analytical opposition between

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two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorize the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labour-power of others; on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour. Free workers, in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production. ([1867] 1976: 874)

In this regard, there is an emphatic heuristic contrast drawn between the figures of “free workers” (or “free labor”) and “slaves.” It is precisely this figure of “free” labor that serves to underscore the historically specific character of the emergence of labor power as the commodified objectification of the human capacity to work (labor in the abstract), which distinguishes the ostensibly contractual and purely voluntary transaction that is understood to transpire between owners of the means of production and wage laborers in the capitalist labor market. Nonetheless, these putatively “free” workers are scathingly depicted by Marx as those “who have nothing to sell except their own skins” ([1867] 1976:873). Moreover, Marx explains, referring specifically to the historical dissolution of feudalism, “These newly freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And this history, the history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.” ([1867] 1976:875). This indeed is one of the premier formulations by which we understand the concept of (“the so-called”) primitive accumulation: “So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital” ([1867] 1976: 874–875). Nevertheless, these processes of expropriation and dispossession, we know, just as Marx knew, were—and *continue to be*—coterminous with the generalization of the wage-labor relation. Their character as “prior” to capitalism proper is strictly apparent and is presented in this manner by Marx for analytical purposes. In fact, they were not only constitutive, historically, of capital and indeed necessary preconditions for the formation of a regime of capital accumulation, but they have co-existed with the more pure ideal type of capitalist labor relations throughout the ongoing history of “actually existing” capitalism, which has never ceased to be written in blood and fire.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, centuries of New World slavery cannot be reduced to a mere residual of some putative pre-history of “true” capitalist relations.

The racial branding of labor that Marx identifies in the context of New World slavery was a necessary and truly definitive feature of the brutality required for the subjugation of enslaved African /American labor but also for the elaborate sociopolitical and sociolegal machinations devised to produce the global fact of Blackness. Importantly, it can be argued that it was likewise this same branding, this same production of racialized difference, that served as a necessary predicate for the consolidation and perfecting of what Marx called “labor in the abstract.” Labor in the abstract—a figure of labor literally shorn of its humanity and stripped of all qualitative specificities—was literally possible



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historically only through the real stripping and degradation of the actual human life of the enslaved and colonized into a form of life that could be classed as virtually subhuman. To be rendered as labor in the abstract is to be reduced to labor and nothing but labor. This was the precise project of modern slavery. This of course is not to suggest that such a project was ever successfully fulfilled or completed. Enslaved people were never reduced to a condition so abject as to be shorn of its distinctly human subtlety and suppleness. To the contrary, the irrepressibly human creative powers and potentialities of enslaved African /Americans were not only a veritable font of continuous insubordination and rebellion but also a foundational source for the notion of freedom and the unfinished work of emancipation in our modern world.<sup>3</sup> Nor is it to suggest, on the other hand, that enslaved people were the ostensible owners and sellers of that distinctly capitalist commodity that Marx designated as labor power. However, there never could have emerged this social fiction of labor power—whereby the capacity to work could be rendered as if it were simply one more commodity for sale in the market—without a pre-history in which the myriad forms of concrete labor became reduced and generalized (indeed, abstracted) into a figure of labor in the abstract. For the historically specific emergence and consolidation of this peculiarly modern form of generic “labor,” slavery was constitutive. There was simply no more perfect approximation of the elusive figure of labor in the abstract than the social condition inflicted on enslaved people by modern slavery—that distinctly capitalist sociopolitical regime that worked assiduously and unrelentingly to reduce a whole category of human life into labor and nothing but labor.

The production of labor in the abstract, or labor “in general,” furthermore, depended upon concrete productions of sociopolitical difference, for which acts of physical, corporeal branding were merely a cruel punctuation to the more general branding of race. Once again, it needs clarifying that this is in no sense an essentialist proposition about “race” as any kind of “real” (pseudo-natural, phenotypic, quasi-biological) category of difference among distinct varieties of human being, but rather an insistence on the eminently social and political reality of race as a defining principle for the historical production of difference, inequality, and hierarchy within the global labor regime of capitalism. To make the point somewhat differently, then, the labor theory of value—which has always been in fact, more accurately, a value theory of labor (Elson 1979; see Turner 2008)—must be complemented with what we might posit to be a *racial theory of labor*.

The homogenized abstraction of labor-power could be generated only under the aegis of the social production of real heterogeneity and inequality, such as that which

W. E. B. Du Bois famously called “the problem of the color line” ([1903] 1982), or analogously, what Partha Chatterjee has designated as “the rule of colonial difference” (1993). In other words, the politics of the capital-labor relation—which appears to be merely a matter of narrowly “economic” relations—must always be understood in terms of the historically specific social and political production of difference (Roediger and Esch 2012). Capital’s apparent (economic) indifference to, or disregard for, the specificities of the terms of conditions for extracting the maximum

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surplus value is thus sustained only through the actual (political) struggles that *differentiate* living labor toward the end of maximizing its subordination and exploitation. Such a politics of difference at work within the genesis of abstract labor has always been inextricable from the real history of racial subjugation, for which slavery remains a primal scene.

### 3. Labor Mobility, Migrant “Illegality,” and Branding

Migration provides a key site for contemplating the mobility of labor “as such”—labor “in general,” or labor in the abstract—while simultaneously illustrating precisely how such mobility is in fact inexorably embroiled in the production of difference, particularly the spatialized difference that is produced by (“national”) state borders (De Genova 2016a; see also Ngai 2015; Sharma 2018). Put another way, there could be “no capitalism without migration” (Mezzadra 2011a). As the veritable source of all value, it is not unreasonable to say that labor power is the premier commodity in the global circuitry of capitalist exchange. Capital has made and relentlessly re-made the world in its own image, and according to its chaotic requirements—bursting asunder every apparent barrier in the creation of an ever more unobstructed global arena for profit-making and the continuous re-consolidation of a global division of labor. Moreover, necessarily, inevitably, and arguably, above and beyond any other commodity, there has also been a concomitant escalation in the mobility of labor-power (De Genova 2010, 2012, 2016a, 2016b). But in a world social order that delegates the expressly political tasks of subordination and coercion to more localized formations of more or less organized violence, the parameters of which are customarily demarcated by the borders of “national” state formations (Holloway 1994), the global movement of homogenized, abstract labor is finally embodied in the restless life and death of labor in a rather more “concrete” form—which is to say, actual migrant working men and women. While Marx restricted his use of the concept of “concrete labor” to refer to the heterogenous variety of specific forms of work that produced distinct products or contributions to the larger labor process, I adapt this distinction between abstract and concrete labor here to insist on the ways in which labor in the abstract is never be separable from its embodiment in living labor. The accelerated mobility of labor power is similarly inseparable, then, from the migration of actual (corporeal) human beings.

In the mass exodus of the Irish fleeing the potato famine of 1846, for instance, Marx notably recognized what he characterized as “a systematic process.” The Irish exodus entailed “a new way of spiriting a poor people thousands of miles away from the scene of its misery.” It also served, in effect, as “one of the most lucrative branches of [Ireland’s] export trade.” By exporting the labor power of its surplus population while also mobilizing the migrants themselves as a source of remittances, the exodus not only subsidized those left behind but further fueled migration by financing the travel costs of subsequent generations of migrants ([1867] 1976:862). From the opposite vantage point of the United States, Marx discerned with respect to Irish labor migration a concomitant importation—“the importation of paupers” ([1867] 1976:939). As Michael Burawoy (1976) classically demonstrated, migrant labor likewise entails a systematic separation of the exploitation of labor-power from the sites (and costs) of its reproduction. As with the mobility of capital itself, which exudes a pronounced indifference toward the particular

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forms of the labor process where it invests in favor of a maximization of surplus value, and is in this sense exceedingly versatile, so also with the human mobility of labor. Migrant labor mobility is a supreme instance of flexibility, compelled to regard the particular content of one or another type of work with relative indifference, and to render up its labor power wherever it may be required.

The inclination that Marx ([1867] 1976) discerned with regard to the mobility of capital to surmount any “legal [or other] extra-economic impediments to its freedom of movement” is yet another aspect of this versatility of migrant labor ([1867] 1976:1013). Nevertheless, depicting Ireland’s precisely colonial condition in terms of “a government... maintained only by bayonets and by a state of siege sometimes open and sometimes disguised” ([1867] 1976:863), Marx ([1870] 1971) also discerned how the “*forced immigration* of poor Irishmen” into the industrial cities of England had enabled the capitalist class to cultivate “two hostile camps” defined by the “profound antagonism between the Irish proletariat and the English proletariat,” whereby “the average English worker hates the Irish worker ... [and] regards him somewhat like the *poor whites* of the Southern States of North America regard their black slaves” ([1870] 1971:254, emphases in original).

For present purposes, it is likewise crucial to recall that even for those who come to be racialized as Black, we must guard against naturalizing what has always and everywhere been an historically specific sociopolitical process of *producing* them as “Black.” In this regard, Stuart Hall’s reflections on his experience as a Black *migrant* are quite poignant: “I’d never called myself black ever in my life.... So it was a discovery for me, a rediscovery [in Britain] of the Caribbean in new terms ... and a rediscovery of the black subject....I didn’t choose that. I had no alternative” (Hall and Back 2009:662). In other words, although the centuries-old racialization of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the New World was indisputably a defining crucible for the global/colonial racial formation of Blackness, it was nonetheless the postcolonial migrant encounter with Europe that was, in Hall’s account, tantamount to a migration into Blackness, a *re-racialization*, a subordination and subjection that was inextricable from the ongoing and unfinished business of (re-)producing racial distinctions and meanings.

The “Blackness” of racially subjugated migrants is therefore always something fundamentally new, to be continuously “discovered” by migrants as they endure and confront the larger social forces working to produce them as racial objects and thereby also as (re-)racialized subjects: thus compelling them to “re-discover” themselves racially. It is necessary, then, that we recognize the fundamentally *racial* character of migration within and throughout the world capitalist system, while also underscoring the contemporary salience of the figures of migration and refugee movements for destabilizing, de-naturalizing, and de-essentializing yet again the pernicious persistence of encrusted and ossified racial nomenclatures. The persistently racial salience of migration is as indisputable as is the pivotal importance of migration in demonstrating the profoundly unstable and historically mutable character of race as an eminently social construction, implicated always in unresolved sociopolitical struggles over its meanings

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and lived consequentiality. Thus, it is productive once more to insist on a conception of Blackness that exceeds the constrictions of the more rigid and conventional racial codifications that have been generated and sedimented historically.

The historical production of Blackness (and thereby, also whiteness) required the literal branding of the flesh of enslaved Africans. Furthermore, racialization itself has operated as a kind of branding. Such sociopolitical processes of branding have always required multifarious and reiterative operations, including of course those of the law, to truly accomplish the task of allocating and more or less resolutely attaching sociopolitical categories of difference to diverse varieties of human persons, and thus searing their racialized designations onto their bodies and identities. Analogously, we may begin to comprehend how other (ostensibly non-racial or race-neutral) forms of sociopolitical categorization and regimentation, such as ostensibly “national” differences come to operate as effectively racial categories of difference, or generic figures of “foreignness,” or indeed the durable designation of particular categories of migrants as “illegal,” also bear a compelling resemblance to branding. Without effacing the irreducible historical specificity of Marx’s discussion of modern slavery, it has indeed become increasingly common today, given our global postcolonial condition, that labor “in a black skin” presents itself also in “foreign” costume.

The putative “illegality” of migrants (or “asylum-seekers”) has become the single most prominent “problem” for immigration and asylum law and policy on a global scale during recent decades. Seldom does public policy debate consider precisely where and how this “illegality” came into being, however. Nonetheless, migrant and refugee “illegality” always has a history within each particular juridical and border enforcement context. One of the signature contributions of my previous scholarship has been the elaboration of a critical socio-legal framework for the historical and ethnographic examination of what I call *the legal production of migrant “illegality”* (De Genova 2002, 2004, 2005). One of the central hypotheses of this analysis has been to recognize that a spectacle of border policing in fact systematically distracts us from discerning how migrant and refugee “illegality” is truly generated elsewhere, through law and policy formulated and promulgated at a great remove from the actual physical/territorial borders of states (De Genova 2002, 2005, 2013). Indeed, it is the law that brands particular migrations and categories of migrants as “illegal.” Simply put, migrant *illegalization* is a process of sociopolitical branding.

Furthermore, the ethnographic study of present-day border policing and immigration enforcement practices confirms that such histories (much like the histories of racialization) are never finished. Rather than *faits accomplis*, established once and for all time, these diverse and historically specific productions of migrant and refugee “illegality” must continue to be re-produced through border struggles and ongoing practices of (re-)bordering. Another distinct but related feature of my scholarship is the elaboration of the concept of *deportability* and a sustained critical attention to what may be designated to be a global deportation regime (De Genova 2002, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2018; De Genova and Peutz 2010). These concepts help to elucidate how illegalized

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migrants' and refugees' susceptibility to deportation—the prospect of deportation, beyond the actual fact of deportation—contributes decisively in the production of migrant precarity in everyday life. In short, it is precisely deportability that plays a distinctly disciplinary role in the production of the conditions of possibility for migrant labor power to serve as a highly desirable commodity for employers, often converting what Marx called the “reserve army” of labor into an enthusiastically recruited labor force of choice.

Capital requires a surplus population to both absorb displaced workers but also serve as a pool of potential workers when production increases (Marx [1867] 1976:784). The operation of the reserve army of labor serves to discipline labor at the same time that it meets the requirements of capital accumulation on an expanding scale. “The over-work of the employed part of the working class swells the ranks of its reserve, while, conversely, the greater pressure that the reserve by its competition exerts on the employed workers forces them to submit to over-work and subjects them to the dictates of capital” (Marx [1867] 1976:789). The sociopolitical and legal branding of migrant labor as “foreign” and especially as “illegal” supplies a crucial disciplinary mechanism for managing all labor through a multiplication of the categories of difference that serve to decompose and fragment labor into competing rival factions riven by racialized antagonisms. Alternating mass deportations with a more or less permanent mass importation of illegalized and deportable labor has long ensured that the state’s mediation of migration through diverse tactics of border policing and immigration law enforcement provides capital with an exquisitely flexible “reserve army” of labor (De Genova 2016a).

Furthermore, the border-making and border-enforcing activities of immigration enforcement have been increasingly and pervasively relocated to sites within the “interior” of migrant-receiving states, such that illegalized migrants and refugees are made, in effect, to carry borders on their very bodies (Khosravi 2010: 97–120) as border enforcement and the prospect of deportation come to permeate the full spectrum of racialized everyday life activities and spaces. The global class politics of human mobility, which routinely transposes a transnational relation of capital and labor into the ostensibly insular “national” politics of “immigration” and border policing, continuously reinvigorates and reinvents racialized distinctions. Thus, the global class politics of human mobility ever increasingly instigates the consolidation of what Étienne Balibar ([1993] 2002) (among others) has depicted as “a world apartheid,” which institutes a “color bar” that now no longer merely separates the so-called center from periphery, or North from South, but effectively runs through all “national” state formations (1993] 2002:82). Thus, the branding processes of migrant illegalization generate open-ended sites not only for border struggles and immigration and refugee politics but also for unforeseen disputes over race, citizenship, and labor. As with the racial branding of Blackness that was a constitutive feature of the historical production of enslaved labor, so also does migrant “illegality” today entail a sociolegal branding that is crucial for the creation and maintenance of migration as a reliable, eminently mobile, flexible, and ultimately disposable source of labor power.

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Finally, let us recall Marx's poignant insight: "Labour in a white skin can never emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin" ([1867] 1976:414). Hence, we may begin to recognize how the sociopolitical production of difference, and the branding of diverse categories of laboring humanity into racialized "skins," has operated as an absolutely central and constitutive feature of labor's subordination to the requirements and mandates of capital accumulation, and thus the continuous (re-)production of labor-for-capital. Analogously, the sociopolitical and legal mediations of human mobility on a global scale—and thereby, the bordering of labor mobility as "migration"—thus becomes apprehensible as a comparable production of difference that brands various categories of labor as "foreign" if not "illegal." Hence, a contemporary corollary to Marx's axiom would seem to be: Labor in the prison inmate's uniform of citizenship can never emancipate itself where labor in the migrant's garb of "foreignness" is branded as "illegal" (De Genova 2013, 2017; see Sharma 2018). If, as Marx and Engels ([1848] 2008) famously proclaim in the final lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, the working people "of all countries" have "a world to win" ([1848] 2008:84), it may be all the more vital and more relevant than ever to recall another decisive and conceptually more ambitious proposition that precedes that resounding battle cry, and that migration serves continuously to verify: the working people of the world "have no country" ([1848] 2008:61).

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### Notes:

(<sup>4</sup>) Notably, the term "primitive accumulation"—a phrase that originated in the works of bourgeois political economists, which Marx referenced with derision for its euphemistic and misleading character and depicted more precisely as "the so-called primitive accumulation"—has over time reverted to widespread (unproblematized) usage, and has come to serve as a shorthand in Marxist scholarship for the violent processes that Marx exposes in his critique; see Marx ([1867]1976:873-874).

(<sup>2</sup>) There has been a robust Marxian debate around the contemporaneity of such violent processes of dispossession; see Bonefeld 2001; De Angelis 2001; Federici 2003; Harvey 2003; Mezzadra 2011b; Midnight Notes Collective 1990.

(<sup>3</sup>) Du Bois ([1903]1982) famously depicted the general aims of the strivings of "the American Negro" in a manner that anticipated that another world was possible: "to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to ... use his best powers and his latent genius." (p. 9; see Chandler 2006, 2010, 2013).

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