

Introduction: Moral and Market disordering in the time of Covid-19

Cultural Dynamics
2021, Vol. 33(3) 145–161
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DOI: 10.1177/09213740211014304
journals.sagepub.com/home/cdy



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Abstract

This special issue composed of essays that brainstorm the triadic relationship between Covid-19, Race and the Markets, addresses the fundamentals of a world economic system that embeds market values within social and cultural lifeways. It penetrates deep into the insecurities and inequalities that have endured for several centuries, through liberalism for sure, and compounded ineluctably into these contemporary times. Market fundamentalism is thoroughly complicit with biopolitical sovereignty-its racializing socioeconomic projects, cheapens life given its obsessive focus on high growth, by any means necessary. If such precarity seemed normal even opaque to those privileged enough to reap the largess of capitalism and its political correlates, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic with its infliction of sickness and death has exposed the social and economic dehiscence undergirding wealth in the U.S. especially, and the world at large. The essays remind us of these fissures, offering ways to unthink this devastating spiral of growth, and embrace an unadulterated care centered system; one that offers a more open and relational approach to life *with* the planet. Care, then becomes the pursuit of a re-existence without domination, and the general toxicity that has accompanied a regimen of high growth. The contributors to this volume, join the growing global appeal to turn back from this disaster, and rethink how we relate to ourselves, to our neighbors here and abroad, and to the non-humans in order to dwell harmoniously within socionature.

Keywords

capitalism, care, Covid-19, love, markets, neoliberalism, race, socionature

A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of

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the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, “This is not just.” It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of South America and say, “This is not just.” The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.¹

Martin Luther King

Covid-19 has unambiguously peeled back the layers of socioeconomic inequality and sociocultural divisions globally. In stark terms it has revealed the gendered, raced and classed sacrifices and suffering endured by those unable to retreat from its ravages and secure themselves. Dis/ordering forces of capitalism, while offering wealth and wellbeing to some, have always been mediated by violence of various kinds generally involving the death and displacement of peoples as well as the disruption of traditional norms, cultures and institutions. The Covid-19 pandemic has multiplied the modes of disruption and cumulatively deepened insecurities at various levels—from local health and employment, to housing vulnerabilities, macro-economic shocks, systemic market strains and a global specter of unprecedented levels of debt and poverty (IMF 2020; IBRD 2020). Capitalist market forces that once forcibly brought together disparate worlds, identities and cultures now seem to be pulling globalization processes apart as its relentless process of accumulation breaches planetary boundaries, multiplies social, economic, ecological and climatic crises, sparks racist xenophobia and terror, and creates hospitable grounds for the transmission of zoonotic diseases such as this novel corona virus.

This volume comes in the wake of the calamitous fallout from COVID-19 and responds to a special call for critical reflections on transformations needed in the moral economy of markets. It is also anchored in a Duke University Bass project *on the Moral Economy of Markets: Constituting and Resisting Relations of Power* that sought to enquire into the nature and logic of capitalist markets—how they work, what their uneven effects are globally, and how people respond to and confront their incessant and voracious quest for growth as *the* vehicle for righting the economic crises affecting human and nonhuman, and indeed planetary wellbeing. In addition, the project sought to highlight the experiences and narratives of those thrown into various states of vulnerability, indebtedness, racial objectification and precarity. Overall, the project team examined the following key questions:

How do vulnerable populations reconfigure territories and lives with and against the incursions of marketizations and what can be learned from their experiences.

- In what ways do individuals and communities navigate, operate outside of and/or defy the market’s system of dependence and precarity to find creative means of resilience, sustainability and wellbeing?
- What lessons might be gleaned from modes of persistence, resilience and resistance that inform responses to planetary disasters, escalating inequalities, the

disintegration of traditional communities, the expulsions of peoples and species and the deadening of land and seas?

- What alternative narratives exist that may point the way toward a more equitable, just and sustainable future? And what might the role of markets be in this future?

Even before the onset of COVID-19, the imbalances and inequities generated by the uncaring and expulsive politics of neoliberalism upended communities around the globe, forcing them to imagine, explore, and build alternative ways of living and interacting. In our Bass Connections classes students explored some of these emerging alternatives. They ranged from the attempts to build various models of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) geared toward the affordable provision of organic and nutritious produce to the community, to community banking schemes where participants pooled their savings to procure short term loans among themselves, to examining the efforts by countries such as China to address environmental concerns as they push toward urbanization and advanced industrialization.

Given neoliberalism's centrality to the social and political crises (growing inequality, climate crisis, and ecosystem depletion, as well as the growing threat to democracy and the epistemological crises of "alternative facts" and information technology that turns people into products), it necessarily brokered our conversations. Some 50 years into the regime of neo/liberalism, it has become obvious that the Global South, and post-colonial states in particular, have suffered under its logic and the new moralities that it has engendered. As the relentless drive of unfettered markets has torn asunder the fabric of societies across the globe, states, governments, civic organizations, and labor unions have retreated or been dismantled, limiting or eliminating their capacities to serve as bulwarks against the predatory demands of the market logic. As Wendy Brown argued:

To speak of the relentless and ubiquitous economization of all features of life by neoliberalism is. . .not to claim that neoliberalism literally *marketizes* all spheres, even as such marketization is certainly one important effect of neoliberalism. Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo economicus*.² (p. 31)

These brutalities and complexities, according to Saskia Sassen and other analysts, have provided the rationale for budget cuts to social programs and public goods such as education, health, and environmental protection, and have effectively bulldozed the existing social infrastructures of the global South's economies. In the process, neoliberal rationalization has weakened already tenuous ties of citizens to States, overthrown home-grown moral economies, and even altered traditional diets by forcing local economies into the vortex of producing and consuming the "cheap" goods of industrialized agriculture while exporting their staple crops. Stephanie Black's film, *Life and Debt*, examines the results of [this] neoliberal structural adjustment in Jamaica, but [she] also makes clear that the story she tells could just as well reflect the experiences of the majority of the Global South. The film depicts farmers uprooting their crops and dumping their milk

and produce because they could not compete with the flood of subsidized corporate products, and because their produce could not meet the industrialized standards of size, weight, and appearance.³ Repeating a dynamic that plays out also in the Global North, farmers are brought under the sway of merchants, with the latter becoming the ‘new’ and more powerful socioeconomic classes.

Even as we speak of Global Souths, our imagination extends this rubric to cover the growing populations and regions in the more industrialized north where parallel dislocations and dispossessions have occurred. For example, Margaret Somers’s (2008) investigates the changed assemblage of citizenship through the lens of the 2005 debacle following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, in the US South. She compellingly shows the insecurities inherent in that State-society relationship, highlighted by the sharp disequilibrium between the State, the market and civil society. And as she demonstrates, these were conditions that existed even before the 1980s, the alleged start of neoliberalism in the Global North. Well before Katrina, the market—a “partner” grown powerful and enabled especially by the State—had successfully dragged the population into its neoliberal organizational logics, making survivability of citizen/subjects almost entirely dependent on the possession of “social capital,”⁴ which had been effectively denied them. Defined as the network of opportunities that accompany the social connections, “social capital” means that under the new dispensation individuals must rely on their personal networks to create opportunities for upward social mobility and recognition within this reshaped economy of power.

Thus, the neoliberal market works mainly against those without—those who lack credibility and profitable socioeconomic affiliations, key possessions in this era of biopolitical sovereignty.⁵ Yet explorations of the reconfigurations of citizenship and the changed forms of governmentality (in the Foucauldian [Foucault, 1978] sense)⁶ need to be complemented by discussions of the myriad ways that capital has attempted to resolve its recurrent crises of accumulation, whether through acts of dispossession of land and cultures, or other forms of what David Harvey calls Accumulation by Dispossession (ABD). These ABD processes are registered in the spheres of debt, housing, the degradation of the environment, the spread of dead seas, destruction of land through acts of [dispossession] and expulsions, and the search for new commodity frontiers.⁷ They also appear in the externalization of ecological disasters and plunderous extractivism of natural resources—gold, diamonds, oil, and gas—that make possible luxurious lives for the few who control these resources and those who benefit from them. All of these so-called value chain creations, upend economies of North and South and bring untold social and physical death and despair to humans and threaten all other life forms. Indeed, Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, with its extensive tracking of wealth and income inequality, posits a contemporary scenario that resembles the 19th century with a thin layer of oligarchs controlling the economy and using their influence to manipulate politics in a (self) class-interested manner. When these one percenters pass on their wealth to their scions; inheritance, Piketty predicts, will play a key role in recreating oligarchy, much as it did in the 19th century.⁸

COVID-19’s impact shows the intertwinement of racialization, gender and economic deprivation, and its accompanying consequences along a spectrum of illness and deaths. Moreover, it has produced the worst forms of inequality and hopelessness ever to have

visited the US.⁹ And it is worth noting that it wasn't simply in the US where these trends manifested; "runaway capitalism" even of the Chinese State variety posted similar trends in the growth of inequality. While aggregate incomes in China have undoubtedly increased spectacularly, so has inequality.¹⁰ Today, China's success story is equally characterized by the degradation of common resources like air and water and the growing disparities signified by the migrations of millions away from rural areas to urbanizing regions, where poverty and its attendant ills have become a defining feature.

It is no wonder that the concept of racial capitalism has gained such traction in recent scholarly work and in the scripts and pronouncements of activists. Originating with South Africanists like Bernard Magubane, as well as the early work of the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Oliver Cox's magnum opus, *Caste Class and Race*, and Cedric J. Robinson's 1983 exploration of the Black Marxist tradition, the use of the concept elucidates the organizational logic of capitalism as it first ruptures the bonds of feudalism, carrying along with it the seeds of racialism that would be deepened and magnified in Atlantic Slavery.¹¹ In other words, slavery, the racialization of Africans and others, became an essential part of the DNA of capital accumulation. Though many who embrace the concept of racial capitalism connect it to the thesis of Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, Dale Tomich (2020) reminds us that the "and" in the title, so central to the structure of the Williams's argument, still addresses both capitalism and slavery as two independent processes, which he then linked. Marx himself recognized this mutuality:

But as soon as peoples whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labor, the corvée, etc. are drawn into a world market dominated by the capitalist mode of production, whereby the sale of their products for export develops into their principal interest, the civilized horrors of over-work are grafted onto the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc. Hence the Negro labor in the southern states of the American union preserved a moderately patriarchal character so long as production was chiefly directed to the satisfaction of immediate local requirements. But in proportion as the export of cotton became of vital interest to those states, the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life in seven years of labor, became an actor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining a certain quantity of useful products, rather of the production of surplus value itself.¹²

Slavery capitalism in the US South and elsewhere is here recognized as a particular form of capitalism—slavery as constitutive of, not separate from, capitalism. This process of accumulation facilitated violent forms of extractivism, decimating both the environment and human bodies. At various moments of capital accumulation, from its colonial consolidation based on plantation slavery to more modern industrial profits derived from Fordist and post Fordist enterprises, the othering of bodies and the mutilation and transfiguration of nature have produced new forms of abjection. Such violence has been integral to these projects of development and progress. And indeed, such abjection has been spilling out of its familiar sites, which have historically demarcated the socioeconomic lives of people of color and the poor generally, to the unfamiliar and once relatively safe and secure places of America's varied classed and raced middle classes.

With COVID-19 now compounding and exposing these systemic inequities in the US and the wider world, there has been a renewed call for racial and social justice. Judging from the ongoing international marches of solidarity, minoritized peoples and their allies have seized the moment to air their anger, angst, and frustration, and have raised demands for systemic restructuring. In the wake of repeated murders of Black residents by members of US police, Black Lives Matter (BLM), the movement which began in 2013, became alive again, its demands for racial justice resonating in many parts of the globe, where racialized forms of violence where racialized forms of violence prevail. For the first time, the US based BLM tied violence against Indigenous Americans to the struggles of Blacks, including the projects of genocide that conditioned the mobilization of enslaved Africans to the plantation and other work sites in the Americas. In the wider global awakening, the struggle by various Native peoples against modern forms of settler colonialism was stimulated by and stirred this pervasive global consciousness of socio-racial oppression.

BLM sprang into action in the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer who, despite Floyd's plea of "I can't breathe," knelt on his neck for 8.46 minutes. Kneeling, which is often seen as an act of supplication, submission, or protest as in the case of the US footballer Colin Kaepernick to protest racism and the police killings of Black and Brown people, became an act of killing itself.

There is not just a haunting here of these earlier times-of slavery's fading forms and projects, but live traces- living flesh that continues to sustain the insatiable wants of the earth's inhabitants-not all equally of course. Hidden in plain sight, human trafficking, loosely called modern slavery, easily folds into our intimate networks-one's diet, of shrimps, fish, chocolate, various food crops, or one's consumption of fashion and electronics. Human trafficking, as a particular variant of forced labor, thrives as much under economic neoliberalism as chattel slavery did under plantation capitalism. As studies suggest, capital's forays have not only been devastating for those exploited and marginalized but also costly in terms of dollars and cents for the captains of industry! A recent Citibank study calculated that, since 2000, racial discrimination has cost the U.S as much as 16 trillion dollars since 2000.¹³

The demands emanating from these twin crises, Covid-19 and racial justice, seem to coalesce around the need for an economy that is more caring than what we have known and endured. where the unfettered market is given sacrosanct status. From calls in the US to "defund the police" in order to refund and reinvest in social services and community development, to demands for diversity in leadership among businesses, public and private, to a renewal of racial sensitivity to reduce practices of overt and subterranean racism, large and growing numbers of people seem interested in improving life for everyone, not just the privileged. We may well be witnessing a resetting that centers care and promotes the interdependence of humans and the environment. The question is: how are we to uncouple these various violent forms from the socioeconomic practices of governmentality and the market? Margaret Somer's solution of rebalancing the relations among states, the market and civil society, so that social connections among people are not embedded in market relations, is important to bear in mind but more structural change is definitely needed. A racial reckoning seems to be underway in the US; A concern and outrage about institutional injustice; and the renewal of the call for reparations to name a

few of the more prominent ones. In this moment of multiple interrelated crises, as we search for alternatives, we might enquire into the possible safeguards against a return to what is clearly an uncaring world economy boosted by a dystopian politics that centers the securitization of the nation-states (particularly those in the Global North) while the suppliant pleas of the dispossessed and marginalized within are ignored: all this as States innovatively reborder and expand their jurisdiction to keep at bay those seeking refuge allegedly from the “outside” (most of whom hail from the former colonies of the Global North).

A question of care

What does it mean to center “care” within the frame of economic wellbeing, and why does a focus on “care” matter? The recently published *The Care Manifesto* calls for such a recentring of “care.” It explores a three-pronged approach, (1) caring for; (2) caring with; and (3) caring about.¹⁴ The authors call for an ethics of care, a “promiscuous care,” that is to say a caring that embraces all areas of life and pursues all practices of reimagining life without the carelessness to human, nonhuman, and ecological life. Such a caring imagines kinship beyond the immediate family to include broader networks of citizen/subjects, networks and forms of friendship not built on social capital such as those contained in the rolodexes of our minds—“a what can you do for me-approach” central to the cultures of neoliberalism. New forms of kinship will require the invoking of the “we” and an embracing of the seemingly distanced “them”. This obviously will require a different question than who gets to be in or out. As the collective clarifies:

For us promiscuous care is an ethics that proliferates outwards to redefine caring relations from the most intimate to the most distant. It means caring *more* and in ways that remain experimental and extensive by current standards. We have relied upon ‘the market’ and ‘the family’ to provide too many of our caring needs for too long. We need to create a more capacious notion of care.¹⁵

This promiscuous care extends beyond the domains of the private to include community care. Consider the impact of the failed promises of sovereignty and commitment to health care that the US government made to Native Americans like the members of the Navajo nation. In early April of 2020, NBC news ran a story of a Native American doctor caring for Covid-19 patients in rural Arizona, mainly members of Navajo communities of whom roughly 30% suffer from severe water shortages.¹⁶ The story highlighted not only the sacrifices of the doctor but brought into sharp relief the sheer neglect and disregard for the wellbeing of these communities, and the high risks of the marginalized who live in them.

Indeed, according to the latest statistics, the Navajo community, which constitutes the largest reservation in the U.S., comprising 270,000 square miles with a population of roughly 173,000 residents in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, was by far, the worst hit area in the country by the COVID-19 epidemic. The tragic irony of a Navajo doctor trying valiantly to save lives amidst the decay of her community, serves as a visceral reminder of the enduring history of dispossession, displacement and consistent betrayal

of US native nations. Who benefits from US citizenship? In native lands, where sovereignty has been promised for centuries, a few crumbs fall from the government, but no trickle-down rewards from markets that otherwise direct the benefits to the top as they despoil the land.¹⁷ Communities hang on by a thread, distended in time, improvising while governments and markets count them out.

One reads of Navajos not waiting for government assistance nor depending on empty promises from distant bureaucracies. A grassroots organization known as Navajo and Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund provides water and food for significant sections of the population, as they fight to stave back the ravages of the virus, in order to protect the spaces of the community and the lives of its members. This certainly qualifies as community care. As the care collective stated, community care involves identifying the spaces and institutions that can sustain community relations, such as parks or libraries—environments that involve sharing of time and space thereby empowering the practices of democracy. In this way we can structure a new global politics representing a more ethical and productive form of cosmopolitanism, one that “. . . means being at ease with strangeness; knowing that we have no choice but to live with difference, whatever differences come to matter in specific times and places.”¹⁸

A focus on care entails a set of practices that unsettles the present condition, for it champions a fundamentally different imaginary in human-relations, and in humans' relations with nonhumans and the environment, than either the State or the market can offer. Its premise pertaining to the latter is not just the broad framework of a social, one may say a Polyanian, approach; but goes further in identifying a social order pock-marked by varied forms of racialization, social-classisms and gender. In short, it identifies the different locations that humans occupy on the spectrum of humanness. Once care displaces growth as the center of human existence, it follows that we must pay close attention to how care/lessness and inhumanness, of abjection and alienation, have been lived by particular populations. It becomes possible to situate how this juridico-economic system has worked to facilitate or produce dispossessive states of existence—of native populations, of black bodies—in the Americas, but also in Africa and the blackened elsewhere—where denigrated peoples endure at such gross disadvantages. Attention to care in this historicized manner illuminates the rhizomatic roots of a market logic that has now metastasized into the nooks and crannies of our everyday experiences.

Certainly, centering care stands a good chance of reconfiguring the idea of the moral economy of the market. Recall that the idea of the moral economy can be traced to the centering of common over private needs, of household connection over returns on investment from peasant labor processes, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot would say.¹⁹ Peasant production became hijacked through policies favoring export markets, particularly in countries considered “developing,” in the Global South. In the process the peasants themselves were relegated to households unable to produce sufficient subsistence and forced to enter the labor market as wage workers, or as casual labor in informal sectors.²⁰ This attention to growth has stymied the flourishing of alternative agricultural systems, e.g. alternative knowledge pertaining to crops soil, and disparaged them as traditional, non-modern, antiquated, and irrelevant while peasants have been (forcibly) encouraged to

adopt suspect high growth farming technologies, new agricultural methods of farming, as they become more incorporated into a market that preys on the vulnerable.

These outcomes are more often found in the spaces where marginality holds sway, both in parts of the Global North (where, for example, one in seven people face hunger as a direct result of their impoverished and marginalized existences) and in the Global South, where poverty and marginalization are defining features of lower income groups. Indeed, one report poignantly notes that in reference to scarcity amidst wealth in the Global North,

[Food insecurity] looks like a lot of things. . . It looks like empty cupboards in some households. It looks like having to choose between paying the electric bill or buying groceries in other households. There are a lot of families struggling to make ends meet, stretching money to cover costs, including food.

There is existential scarcity in the midst of plenty. In the US, the richest country in history, thousands now regularly line up for free food, as depicted in a photograph from a CNN newscast on November 30th last year. In short, all is not well, even among the wealthiest countries of the world. Fifty million US Americans will face food insecurity by year's end (2020). Meanwhile, the BBC reports that in England the poorest communities have suffered dramatically and the need for food is "massive." In the wake of Covid-19, England too has shown itself incapable of distributing its wealth in a fashion to avert devastation for those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. The same is occurring



Figure 1. Photograph taken by Michaeline Crichlow from CNN television news coverage, circa November, 2020.

in the US, where the number of people living in poverty has sharply increased as a result of Covid's impact on the economy. The problem is compounded in the formerly colonized countries of the Global South, the postcolonies, where abundance has bypassed most of their citizen-subjects. There, significant swaths of the population improvise through the general condition of scarcity, compounded by the pandemic's impact, but these are also conditions that have deep historical roots in the unequal relations between the Global North and South.

While the tendency for scholarship on these issues to focus on the Global North for solutions, it is precisely the marginalized peoples of the world who have developed survival strategies in response to the unique and various forms of ruination they have endured. And they may yet offer the most cogent alternatives to the regime of neoliberal markets. Four decades ago, Bill Warren (1980) stated in a different context, that those places lacking development were not sufficiently exploited by capital. Warren was, of course, extolling the virtue of high growth models of capitalist development. Yet, where Warren saw innovation heaped upon hopefulness and prosperity, we now witness capital's partialities and an acceleration of the sorts of disasters and ruination that have come to define the global situation in the age of neoliberalism and climate change. Without seeking to trivialize our passing present now, the spreading wretchedness of the earth and its peoples, even insightful comedians like Dave Chapelle may have identified some of the ironies amidst it all. In a monologue on Saturday Night Live, Chappelle addressed the growing impoverishment of whites during the pandemic, commenting on their declining life expectancy rates due to the diseases of despair, such as drug overdoses, and the ensuing rage which has spread through their communities. He felt their pain, he said. Reminding the audience of Ronald Reagan's characterization of Blacks as a welfare "queens" and drug addicts, he piped, "who does that sound like now. . . stimulus cheques, heroin?" He then reminded the audience of his deeper truth: "you don't know how to survive; black people are the only ones who know how to survive. . . You need us." Black people have experienced the ravages of the market logic for generations. Those "blues people"²¹ have a lot to teach those whites who now find themselves "blackened,"—ravaged by capital's brutal contractions, their flesh trampled, living in a world defined by despair. Chappelle continued, "you need to find joy, begin to care for each other and if you find you can't, then '*come get your nigga lessons.*'"²² But trampled whites not only have much to learn from Blacks and the other more vulnerable US and of other global communities. Chappelle also alludes to the need for alliances between peoples in the face of the brutalities unleashed by capital and an uncaring State.²³ A caring approach confronts the scenes of humans' subjection and subjugation-socionature, as Arturo Escobar refers to that relationship, and uses them to envision a way forward through community cooperation to resist the harsh blasts of unfettered markets and begin reframing alternative ways of living.

Care permits a sustainable re-existence of traditional peasant-based (and peasant inspired?) modes of life, founded on more harmonious relations to the land. It re/stores a market logic that is not entirely dependent on the paradigmatic growth models which require the wresting of agency or autonomy from people and places. It also reanimates peoples' capacities to forge new paths into the future. Indeed, "[O]nly by confronting the past and prioritizing the needs of those who have been most marginalized, violated and

negated by uncaring nation states will we be able to move forward into a more just future and cultivate a radically different way of relating to others and the world itself.”²⁴

Not simply an altruistic gesture, care can be grounded in a politics of activism that centers relationality as key to ontologies of being, becoming, belonging and conviviality. It necessitates a different kind of politics for its sustenance. In his most recent text, Escobar (2020) outlines his activist scholarly endeavors in Colombia with Indigenous and Black communities unpacking the concept. By relationality Escobar means. The relational, he defines as “the socionature configurations from the recognition of the radical interdependence of all living things, where nothing pre-exists the relationships that constitute it—is the great correlate of autonomy and communality.”²⁵ Naming such a politics, “Pluriversal” pitted against what he considers its opposite, “universal”, Escobar calls for projects that conjure a human ontology which promote a human defined by a sense of relational care. This type of care operates in diametric opposition to (and treats with deserving hostility) the uncaring politics of extractive, exploitative, and growth-centered capitalism. Citing the efforts of Black and Indigenous communities in Cali, Colombia, he discusses their cosmovisions (vision of life and, therefore, of worlds) as rooted in sense of territory that reflects their harmony with nature, humans and the spiritual. It is around these interdependencies that the struggle for territory exists. Escobar was told by a community leader, “[T]he economy is causing a mental deterritorialization among our young people.”²⁶ What did he mean? He meant the dislocation that happens in the “there” as when “[T]hey don’t just take people out of the territory, they take the territory out of the people—that is, they make people live according to individualized and commodified dynamics,” conditions which cause the decay of the communal worlds once known.²⁷ The market can be seen here as the displacement of a communal morality, based on traditional relationships, for another market-based morality, one that involves a veritable disposability of people and place.

This “Reflection on Markets, Race, and COVID-19” represents an attempt to explore, and find meaning in, what collective and individual experience living with this global pandemic might have to offer. Who is being dislocated by whom and why? Are all relationships reduced to some form of transaction? What morality is possible in this reality? In our current situation people seem to face an ever-present disposability, and the very concept of morality seems equally dispensable. The interrelated and overlapping triad of markets, race, the experiences of a pandemic such as COVID-19 has revealed deep fissures in our social. Yet, it has revived new visions of a more expansive and inclusive future.

Dirk Philipson, political economist and historian, examines the linked phenomena of climate change, systemic racism, and a global pandemic. He posits a “tragedy of the private,” as it inevitably “separates, exploits, and exhausts those living under its cold logic.” The systemic imperatives of capital’s market regime—to commodify, extract, grow, and exploit—have historically been justified by scarcity. Today, however, “we face an entirely different challenge. Not too little, but too much.” Informed by a burgeoning literature on degrowth, markets, and wellbeing economics, Philipson argues that while “our dominant economic systems continue to follow colonial extraction and brutal exclusion,” a life beyond growth, beyond mental and cultural imprisonment and the drudgery of wage labor, has become possible. Although the private “has repeatedly brought the world to the brink

of disaster,” the human capacity to create and cooperate can bring about “what others could only envision: a system focused on wellbeing of people and planet.”

In “Blacks Weather, Whites Climate” Mark Driscoll, intellectual historian and East Asia specialist homes in on what might well be our biggest collective challenge—the destruction of people and our ecosystems. His title evokes weather and climate as verbs. Driscoll contends that referring to COVID-19 as a pandemic confuses cause and effect. Whiteness is the pandemic. Building on examples ranging from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century climate changes that resulted from the White genocide of Indigenous peoples of the Americas to the 2020 all-White anti-COVID restriction demonstrations in Raleigh, North Carolina, Driscoll shows that it is White people’s actions that manipulated the climate. As such, they were “weathering” races and populations “dealing with the fallout from what W.E.B. DuBois called the ‘title to the universe claimed by White Folk.’” Driscoll specifies, as well, that White capitalism and markets “are saturated with coercion and unfreedom from beginning to end,” from the enclosure of the commons to slavery and racial terror. Contemporary prison labor by Black and other non-White inmates are used to uphold the system’s hegemonic position, considered the “most destructive to our natural environment and the most predatory on people of color.”

Social anthropologist Marisa Wilson’s essay, “COVID-19 and the Modern Plantation: Debunking the Moral Economy,” explores modern agricultural practices to analyze the concept of essential workers alongside the value of different types of labor. She inquires into who is deemed “worthy.” Wilson is concerned with the profoundly racialized hierarchies in modern capitalism’s formation of the “moral” economy. Reflecting on a widening critical literature of globalization and trade liberalization, Wilson investigates how the benefits of the system flow in massive proportion to corporations in the Global North. During crises like COVID-19, meanwhile, the injuries are most strongly felt by low-income people of color, oftentimes giving rise to “hunger pandemics.” Contrary to neoliberal claims about the superiority of industrialized agriculture, she finds that “mixed farming systems are better able to respond to external shocks than specialized farms.” In the global capitalist food system, its moral calculus to prioritize economic values over all other human/non-human relationships, inevitably fails the majority of the global population.

Steven Ratuva, political sociologist, challenges the standard economic lexicon in his article, “COVID-19, Communal Capital, and The Moral Economy: Pacific Islands Responses.” Ratuva addresses the central role of “communal capital” in the life and survival of Pacific communities. He juxtaposes communal modes of enterprise with dominant market systems, showing how producing for community consumption and sustenance has proven remarkably resilient and effective in responding to COVID-19’s economically paralyzing impacts. He underscores that the “predatory, expansionist, exploitative, and manipulative nature of neoliberalism” needs to be replaced by an economy that is communal and moral, one that serves everyone instead of solely the elites. Furthermore, Ratuva suggests that now is the time to push for transformative action for “the series of events linked to COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement has galvanized a new synergy for revolutionary change.”

How is COVID-19 experienced in intimate spaces and captured in visual art? “Reflections on Markets, Race, and COVID-19” also attends to the pandemic’s aesthetics. Documentary photographer Minh-Hoang Nguyen finds himself in a two-week

COVID-19 quarantine camp at the outskirts of Hanoi, Vietnam. He ruminates on alienation in an otherwise familiar environment. His piece, “Liminality, Third-Culture, and Hope in Quarantine Camp” casts light on a “third-culture” of globalization, one that, in his case, has strong ties to Vietnam and United States. Nguyen asserts that transitions can mold and establish identities. They create communities of hope and creativity outside a clear sense of belonging. COVID-19 here reveals itself as creating a possible experiential frame that can occasion a new belonging propelled by a shared sense of alienation.

Illustrator Antonia Santolaya, whose images are dispersed throughout this volume, suggests the inescapable idea of living with COVID-19 at home, regardless of a positive or negative result. It is another occupant, exploding in a mind-blowing manipulative fluorescent green, reminiscent of slime, a bouncing rubber ball, spiky, or spiny. Our new chewy “gummy bear”: food for thought.

“Play it Again, This Time with Meaning” is a short reflection by Patrick McHugh, independent research manager at the nonprofit advocacy organization North Carolina Justice Center. He maintains that the shocking level of violence and disregard for basic norms of civility and democracy we experienced between 2016 and 2020, while historically not without precedent, “holds the potential to challenge an economic system rooted in lies, theft, and oppression.” Despite its appalling shadow, this irreverent moment points to the increasing gulf between “economic-speak and reality.” McHugh dismisses narratives calling for a return to normal. Instead, he urges the reader to acknowledge modern capitalism’s predatory and racist nature in a collective effort to embrace the opportunities before us.

Dutch cultural economist Arjo Klamer’s essay “Another Economy Calls for Another Perspective” argues for opportunities to build a transformative economic system reaching beyond the market and government’s predominant narrow logics. Klamer shows that neither markets nor governments have conceptual or organizational room for families or communities or relationships. “There is no space to imagine a ‘we’ of any kind,” he says. Governments and markets cannot adequately, much less fully, home a human: they cannot “generate relations, a community, culture, care, or a sense of well-being.” Klamer intimates an expanded sense-making paradigm that allows for people to enter into social, rather than contractual, interactions.

Race, or, more precisely, the way racial identity and racialized lives are constructed, have, from the beginning, been an inextricable part of the history of so-called development. In *Jamaica and Black Freedom in a Time of Covid-19*, Maziki Thame probes articulations of race as they were shaped in the context of Caribbean plantation slavery and shows how they cannot be extricated from social class—power and wealth both inform and closely follow skin color. And yet, the devastating consequences of Covid-19 on poor and black lives in particular also open new opportunities for a de-colonized alternative re-existence in which, for the first time within the history of capitalism, Black Lives Matter.

For Claudia Milian, a LatinX Studies scholar, COVID-19 created an aperture to re-think and embrace friendship amidst crisis and uncertainty. Derailed by the pandemic’s onslaught, Milian’s part personal and part philosophical contemplation ponders how “social distance-trust-distrust organize the pandemic-everyday.” It is a negotiation fraught with contradictions and pain as much as an invitation for a more bonded way of being. “Friendly Moods”

is a celebration of human connection—of encounters and acts of kindness that are relational rather than transactional. What she calls “perilous times of isolation and dread” also posit opportunities for “holding friends dear and dearly holding the world,” a process that could lead to developing a “loving way of being and living.”

Death always “confronts us with the fragility of life,” writes cultural anthropologist, geographer, and social theorist, Nicholas De Genova. Yet COVID-19 does much more. It exposes the “unfathomable travesty” of how our own sociopolitical arrangements create “wildly exaggerated and grotesque disparities” in the ways illness, death, and suffering are experienced. Building on Marx and Foucault, De Genova explores a “racial theory of labor.” He appraises the “utter and abject disposability of human life”—unevenly distributed under capital. What is hastily referred to as “essential labor” routinely turns out to be “sacrificial labor”—expendable in our world of dissimulation—as people are literally forced to work themselves to death. The pandemic “sheds a glaring light” on the heightened precarity of life in racial capitalism: devalued, degraded, and disregarded. De Genova’s line of thought productively draws on philosopher Giorgio Agamben. He suggests that human life should not be defined by “modes of production” but by “form-of-life.” In this disruptive moment, there is a potentiality of life “no longer subordinated to the . . . merciless requirements of the regime of capital accumulation.”

Philosopher and Cultural theorist, Walter Mignolo concludes this collection of reflections by reminding readers of the profound difference between societies with markets and market societies, as Karl Polanyi (1944, 2001) put it. Prior to capitalism, “no economy has ever existed that, even in principle, was controlled by markets. . . . Gain and profit made on exchange never before played an important part in human economy” (Polanyi, 1944, 2001). This emergence of gain and profit as the organizing logic of modern societies, Mignolo posits, required a “colonial revolution,” simultaneously establishing “Western Civilization” and the “destitution of whatever threatened disruption,” such as Ancient cultures as well as traditional economies and non-Western epistemologies. Mignolo argues that the necessary reconstitution of the communal, centered on giving and reciprocity, not selfish gain and exploitation, will occur neither in existing nation-states nor their political and economic institutions. On the contrary, such systemic changes will require a decolonial reconstitution of communal places and exchanges.

As the editors of this volume, we, would like to express thanks and appreciation to all the contributors, many of whom were not involved in the original project on the moral economy of markets, but nonetheless generously agreed to share their time and thoughts with us. Our initial plan was to bring the authors into conversation with each other, respond, reflect on, and discuss each other’s contributions, and to include their respective reactions in the volume. But, with the humbleness that group efforts of this scale routinely tend to impart on its originators, we had to give up on this rather expansive vision. It is thus with particular gratitude that we want to thank Kathi Weeks who, quite late in the day, but never short on brilliant insights, agreed to serve as a kind of collective discussant of the entire collection. As readers will see for themselves, we were exceptionally fortunate in our choice, for her aggregate reflections provided both solid footing and illuminating brackets for a wide-ranging set of essays.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the editorial suggestions of Patricia Northover of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies, at the University of the West Indies, Mona Jamaica, who has been our general interlocutor on the Bass Connections project and also presented on debt (see <https://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/event/the-moral-economy-of-debt-unsettling-paradoxes-of-neoliberal-market-creeds-w-patricia-northover/>).

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. King (1967), "Beyond Vietnam." April.
2. Brown (2017) *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, 31.
3. Black (2001) *Life and Debt*.
4. Ibid.
5. Here I am gesturing to the correctives made by analysts such as Giorgio Agamben, and others who identify the exceptionalism of governing through the figure of "homo sacer" and the argument that biopolitics never left the politics of sovereignty behind. The concept of necropolitics introduced by Achille Mbembe suggests that we disavow assumptions that such governmentality is always or determined by a politics of life as conveyed in the notion of biopolitics—animated by developments on the African continent, but as we all know inhabits politics, whether in the US or in any part of the Americas, with long histories of State and parastate violence, intentional death, to cause to die, to put to death is the ever present underside of the politics of preserving life. See Michel Foucault (1978), Agamben (1998) *Homo Sacer*; Mbembe (2019) *Necropolitics*.
6. Governmentality, for Foucault refers to the "conduct of conduct," the institutions including the State but not restricted to that relationship, that shape the conduct of subject/citizens. So that government and the State are not the same. The idea of governmentality operates contrary to disciplinary power, seen as the purview of the sovereign. It focuses on the forms of power that focuses on the life of the population as a technology of control, whereby citizens and subjects so defined, conduct themselves accordingly.
7. Sassen (2015) *Expulsions*; Moore (2015) *Capitalism in the Web of life*.
8. Piketty (2014), *Capital in the 21st Century* (Pemberton, 2019).
9. See the documentary "Requiem for the American Dream."
10. The Documentary, *Capital in the 21st Century* suggests that those of the 1% increased by 2000% compared to the others by 800%, but these figures do not say much about the cost of living and the growing disparities among specific cities and regions.
11. Robinson (2000).
12. Karl Marx *Capital*, Volume I, 345 quoted in Dale Tomich (2020), "Capitalism in Slavery, Slavery in Capitalism: Original Accumulation, Slave Rent, and the Formation of the World-Market," forthcoming.
13. According to the study broken down as : \$13 trillion lost in potential business revenue because of discriminatory lending to African American entrepreneurs, with an estimated 6.1 million jobs not generated as a result; \$2.7 trillion in income lost because of disparities in wages suffered by African Americans; \$218 billion lost over the past two decades because of discrimination in providing housing credit; and \$90 billion to \$113 billion in lifetime income lost from

discrimination in accessing higher education. See <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/09/23/916022472/cost-of-racism-u-s-economy-lost-16-trillion-because-of-discrimination-bank-says>. But here again solutions to racialization involves undoing it since it is a veritable obstacle to economic growth. Here we see a recentering of the variable of growth without racialization. The humanization of capitalism.

14. The Care Collective (2020).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
16. <https://news.yahoo.com/navajo-doctor-caring-coronavirus-patients-085352304.html>
17. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/08/navajo-nation-coronavirus-pandemic>
18. The Care Collective, p. 95.
19. Trouillot (1988).
20. Tabak and Crichlow (2000); Hart (1985), “The Informal Economy”; De Soto (1989), *The Other Path*.
21. I am gesturing here to Baraka’s (1999, 2002) (LeRoi Jones) *Blues People*.
22. Of course, race does not explain everything. Social Class matters. But we recognize the poignancy of Chappelle’s claims.
23. Chappelle (2020), *Saturday Night Live*, November 7.
24. The Care Manifesto, 60.
25. Escobar (2020), 40.
26. *Ibid.*, 125.
27. *Ibid.* . . .

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