# 23-24 HS Redistribution Topic – MSU Blog Cards Part 2

### NEG: Taxes L (Thank UMass-Amherst!)

#### Anti-Black Looting DA – A robot tax is symptomatic of the US as a predatory tax state.. The call to increase taxes to expand social services is a ruse because revenue will be aimed at paying back debt to health care providers rather than running essential services – turning case. Independently, prisons and police will be the enforcers – Black AI creators will be disproportionately targeted, which ensures gratuitous violence.

Wark 18 (McKenzie, Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at The New School in New York City. “Jackie Wang: Ghosts of the Civil Dead.” 3-19-18. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3695-jackie-wang-ghosts-of-the-civil-dead> //shree)

Filling prisons requires an expansion of crime, which calls for the criminalizing of populations deemed not to be innocent. Wang follows Huey Newton and the Black Panthers in seeing one of the key developments here a rise in the automation of labor leading to a surplus population, a mostly Black lumpen-proletariat. 4 The Black Panthers thought the tax state would expand welfare to keep a surplus population consuming, but instead what happened was an expansion of credit and mass incarceration.

The predatory state works in part through municipal plunder. Cities — and their tax-payers — end up footing the bill and taking the risk for so-called public-private development projects, meaning that the costs are socialized and the profits privatized. Such schemes are often examples of what David Harvey calls the spatial fix. When the property market crashes, cities step in with development projects to re-start accumulation. But when these stop working in turn, the city is left with the costs. Something like this happened in New York in 1975 and in Detroit in 2013.

In New York, what resulted was a political state of exception, where democratic oversight of the city’s finances no longer applied, resulting in an austerity regime aimed at paying back debt rather than running essential services. More recently, the city of Flint, Michigan has been without clean water for a thousand days and counting. In Detroit, the added wrinkle is that it was a form of high-risk borrowing — interest rate swaps — that caused the fiscal crisis in the first place. With municipal plunder, the city becomes a machine for extracting debt repayments from its citizens. Wang: “… the state is no ordinary borrower; it is a borrower endowed with the legal power to loot the public to pay back its creditors.” (173)

In cases like Ferguson, police power is deployed in the interests of finance. “In order to remain solvent, municipalities develop a parasitic relation to the people they are supposed to serve.” (175) Local governments struggle to raise tax revenue, and turn instead to borrowing, and to using the police and the courts to extract fees and fines, particularly from Black populations. In Texas 650,000 people are locked up for unpaid fines. In New Orleans judges are incentivized to levy fines. An Alabama judge forced people to donate blood to avoid going to jail for unpaid fines.

All of this is in some sense highly irrational, at least from the point of view of reproducing labor-power. It limits Black mobility, making urban space a carceral space. People are often captives in their home avoiding late fees and fines and unable to show up for work. In some places, there are private collection agencies, alcohol monitoring services, and private probation companies who can also levy court mandated fees, or insist on them even when the courts do not. In Ferguson, municipal fees were at 20% of the town budget at the time Black Lives Matter erupted.

Government moves from providing the social to enforcing security. There’s a delegitimizing of welfare based on a racism that casts Black people as a whole as deserving of punishment and subject to gratuitous violence. Wang acknowledges the critical force of Afropessimist writers such as Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton, for whom violence against Blackness is foundational, and not merely an exception, to the liberal respect for the individual legal subject. 5 For Afropessimists, Black enslavement is the essential condition of possibility of capitalism. Slaves were brought here to work and die. They were, and remain, a disposable rather than an exploitable population. The predatory state and municipal plunder are merely a wrinkle on primary historical practices and categories. For example, the emancipation of the slaves should in theory have converted chained slave labor into "free" wage labor, but anti-vagrancy laws were widely enacted to restrict Black mobility.

Wang combines this point of view with a Marxist one. She sees Black America as being both disposable and exploitable. She finds W. E. B. Du Bois already trying to negotiate this. After witnessing a lynching, he discovered the sadistic side of racism, and moved away from social science. Wang: “How terrible it must have been for W. E. B. Du Bois to realize he had mistaken dusk for dawn.” (309) Racial hatred has an irrational core, and trumps enlightened reason. One saw this in the Rodney King trial, where white jurors simply could not see a Black man being beaten by multiple cops, and saw instead a Black man “resisting.” This pattern repeats over and over in the acquittal of cops for murdering Black people, a situation police bodycams will not solve and may make worse.

On the other hand, perhaps not everything is explained by the violent maintenance of an irrational division of the population into white civil subjects and a Black population not recognized — and never recognizable — as fully human by even a liberal political order. Wang turns to Cedric Robinson’s work on racial capitalism. 6 For Robinson, racialism predates capital, and capitalism was not a universal force of modern rationalization. Marx was aware of the complexities, including those of race, within the social formation, but in the political writings, not in Capital. There he presents capitalist social relations more or less alone.

From Capital one gets a one-sided view of social formation that in actuality may include several modes of production, and where their interactions cannot be excluded without distorting our view of what the capitalist mode of production is and does. Capitalism appears as an homogenizing social process. What is lost from view is that the social formation is also differentiating. Capital exploits a homogenized class of wage laborers who are formally "free" to sell their labor. But that is just part of a social formation that differentiates free labor from unfree labor, and expropriates from the unfree.

One could get the impression from Marx that primitive accumulation on the backs of the unfree came first, but was rationalized into the exploitation of free labor. For Robinson, and for Wang, it is more helpful to see both kinds of relation operating together. Marx wrote as if the expanded reproduction of capital could take place entirely within its own circuits. For Rosa Luxemburg capital always requires an outside. 7 It depends on expropriation. David Harvey reframes Luxemburg’s thesis as accumulation by dispossession. 8 It’s an ongoing, rather than prior, condition. Wang follows Harvey in thinking it may happen in the over-developed world as much as in the colonial and formerly colonial peripheries.

Wang: “expropriation produces multiple categories of difference.” (118) This is a way of avoiding having our own political agency succumb to the very power that works by means of differentiation. There’s no advantage in arguing (for example) whether slavery is the sole basis of capitalism, or whether it is the theft of indigenous land. Or whether the disposable Black body is what is most excluded by differentiation from humanity, or the rapeable female body. Expropriation fractures the population.

The Afropessimists are right: it is surreal to imagine that Blackness could ever be included in the category of free liberal subject that is based in the first place on its exclusion. It takes nothing away from the specificity of that exclusion to bracket the claim that it is unique. Rather than the (eventual) inclusion of Black America, a more likely future is immiseration for all. Starting with Black populations, more and more marginal populations will be taxed, fined and garnished into funding the exclusionary urban development that excludes them. Capital as a mode of production may depend not just on prior or parallel modes of production that work by expropriation and dispossession. Maybe novel ones are emerging as well.

### AT: L – Taxes

#### Taxes alter privilege patterns. This inverts structural uniqueness – the US doesn’t do \*enough\* taxing. Alt comports with violent markets and reactionary politics

Grimalda ‘20

et al; Dr. Gianluca Grimalda, Ph.D. - Global Cooperation and Social Cohesion, Kiel Institute for the World Economy - “Egalitarian redistribution in the era of hyper-globalization” - #E&F – Review of Social Economy, Volume 78, 2020 - Issue 2 - Received 17 May 2019, Accepted 26 Dec 2019, available via https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00346764.2020.1714072

In this paper, we focus on the welfare state and in particular on the possibility of carrying out egalitarian redistribution. Section 2 reviews both theoretically and empirically the standard argument that there exists a trade-off between efficiency and equity in public economics. The idea underlying this argument is that equity is costly, because it must rely on forms of taxation that are distortive and as such produce welfare losses. Our account of theoretical and empirical analysis concludes that, up to the latest two decades, this argument was grossly overstated, and that countries could, in fact, achieve – or go close – to a distribution of resources that is considered to be fair without high efficiency costs. This has generated what we call the Informed Democratic Capitalism (IDC) approach to public economics, which rested on a ‘division of labour’ between markets – responsible to achieve efficiency – and the state – responsible of carrying out the necessary redistribution of initial resources to achieve equitable outcomes. Section 3 is devoted to reassessing this argument under the current hyper-globalization era. Many argue that globalization imposes a constraint on the capacity of the welfare state to perform and in particular to redistribute. We revise several domains of this thesis, including the so-called race-to-the-bottom in taxation, wage convergence across countries, immigration and the support for the welfare state and finally efficiency gains that may be reached as a consequence of globalization. Section 4 offers an overall assessment of the arguments in favour or against the thesis that globalization thwarts the welfare state. We note that in aggregate terms the state does not seem to have lost fiscal capacity. However, a race-to-the-bottom in some tax domains is undeniable. Even if this does not affect overall fiscal revenues, it may affect state capacity precisely in its ability to tax high-earners. Moreover, the sensitivity of international migration to tax rates may engender a brain-drain favouring low-income tax countries such as the US. Section 5 concludes that, even if it is far-fetched to say that the welfare state is unable to carry out its function in an era of globalization, its strategies and tools of intervention must be rethought in the twenty-first century.

2. Revisiting the efficiency-equity trade-off in public economics

2.1. The efficiency-equity trade-off and the public economics approach to economic policy

In this paper, we look at the debate on globalization and the welfare state from the angle offered by the public economics approach to policy. The foundations of this approach are given by two theorems of welfare economics, whose popularity is so widespread that they can be found in every mainstream first-year economics textbook. The first theorem asserts that perfect market competition will produce outcomes that are efficient in the sense of Pareto. An outcome is Pareto-efficient when no alternative feasible outcome exists that increases some individuals’ welfare without decreasing some other individuals’ welfare, given individuals’ initial endowments and technology. Therefore, perfect market competition entails that any agent in the economy, be she a firm or a consumer or a worker, maximizes her objectives given the economic constraints and the prices they are facing, and the resulting allocation of resources cannot be improved for someone without worsening someone else’s welfare. In other words, if one asks people to vote between all feasible alternatives, an allocation is Pareto-efficient if no alternative would be preferred at unanimity to that allocation. Kolm (1971) refers to that specific property of efficient allocation to be maximal for unanimity.

Pareto-optimality discards any inequality consideration, and consequently, in general, many allocations are Pareto efficient. In particular, even very unequal allocations of resources, where a small group of people ends up with a large share of resources and the rest ends up with a little share, is in general Pareto-efficient. The reason is that redistributing resources from the rich to the poor group would most likely reduce the rich’s welfare, and this suffices to qualify this move as ‘inefficient’.

Here is where the second theorem of welfare economics kicks in. It states that under some assumptions of regularity – namely, that the preference and production sets are convex-, any Pareto-efficient outcome in an economy may be achieved through a suitable redistribution of agents’ initial endowments and leaving competitive markets to achieve that specific allocation. This means that the social planner will be able to implement whatever final allocation of resources it desires by carrying out the redistribution of initial resources that is necessary to achieve the desired final allocation. The combination of the first and the second welfare theorem provides a foundation for what we shall call a ‘socio-liberal approach’ to productive efficiency and social justice. Simply stated, such a socio-liberal approach prescribes the state not to interfere with free competitive markets, except for correcting market failures such as externalities, imperfect competition and asymmetric information. This prescription rests on the optimality result of the first welfare theorem and on the idea that markets are adequate institutions to achieve efficiency in production and consumption. On the other hand, the state is supposed to intervene in the redistribution of agents’ endowments prior to the realization of market exchanges. The state is required to select the initial endowment that guarantees the attainment of the final allocation that is deemed to be most desirable, for instance, according to social welfare maximization such as the maximization of the interests of the most disadvantaged people in society, or some other criterion. More specifically, in democratic societies, the final outcomes should be those satisfying the citizens’ preferences over social justice. Accordingly, the state should implement the initial distribution of endowments that permits unrestrained free markets to reach those final outcomes maximizing citizens’ preferences. In general, the state will be required to carry out redistribution in initial endowments from the rich to the poor, in order to permit the final allocation of goods and well-being not to be too unequal.

To be sure, reality is more complex than what assumed by these two theorems, and many variables of this redistributive problem may be either difficult to ascertain – what are citizens’ preferences? – or difficult to implement – because of the natural conflict between interests of different groups in societies. The second theorem assumes that it is possible to redistribute initial endowments between individuals. The initial endowments in the general equilibrium framework consist of the initial share of natural resources, capital, and abilities that can be enhanced by education. In reality, the change of property rights on capital endowments would face fierce ideological and political opposition. The pacific land reforms in history are rare (see Deininger & Feder, 2003 for modern land reforms). The distribution of human capital is shaped by many factors, such as the characteristics of the school system and whether it is freely accessible or not, the segregation in cities and urban planning, the degree of assortative mating. Reforms of the school systems are difficult to implement and will influence the distribution of competences only in the next generation. Segregation in cities between rich and poor is difficult to avoid if land is private and inequality is high. It is also quite possible that, because of unforeseen shocks to the economy, the desired redistributive ‘target’ is somehow ‘missed’ by the market allocation. Regardless of these practical problems, the main idea stemming from welfare economics is one in which markets are held responsible for allocative efficiency, and democratic states are responsible to interpret citizens’ preferences for social justice. It may be argued that, to a large extent, the extension of the welfare state from 1945 to 1980 in most Western societies relied on this ‘division of labour’ between state and markets. Markets were of course regulated by public authorities and anti-monopoly institutions. However, the idea that markets should not be regulated for redistributive goals still applied. The main message is that the intervention of the state at the gross-income stage should be minimal.

2.2. Efficiency costs of redistribution and second-best allocations

The applicability of the second theorem of welfare economics in reality is uncertain because it crucially relies on lump-sum taxes to collect fiscal revenues. Lump-sum taxes are characterized by being invariant to markets transactions. From the theoretical point of view, lump-sum taxes have the great advantage of not changing at the margins people’s choices. Lump-sum taxes are thus desirable, from the theoretical point of view, because they do not engender welfare losses. In reality, nonetheless, only very rarely have lump-sum taxes been used. A major reason is that when they increase with individual endowments, for instance, skill levels, they violate basic incentives as shown by the result about the curse of talented people with first-best taxation in the Mirrlees (1986) model. If the state does not have full information on initial endowments and resorts to the private information provided by individuals, the individuals will have interest to cheat if the incentive constraints are not respected. The state will not have the true information undermining the powerfulness and even the implementation of a first-best redistribution. Of course, a head tax such as Margaret Thatcher’s infamous Community Charge in the 1990s is incentive-proof but is regressive. It weighs on poor people more than on rich people, in proportion of their income. Head taxes go in the opposite direction of what suggested by the second theorem of welfare economics. They increase the inequality of welfare with respect to the laissez-faire, and as such are considered unfair and have proved to be unpopular with the public. They should not be considered as a valid option.

The alternative to lump-sum taxes are taxes levied on labour income, consumption, savings, capital incomes, etc. However, these taxes will, in general, modify people’s decisions at the margin and thus distort their choices. A well-known result of public economics is that such distortive taxes will create efficiency losses in the society. The reason is that rational agents will modify their behaviour as a response to the introduction of taxes through the substitution effects, and these adjustments will create welfare losses. For instance, the income tax introduces a wedge between a worker’s marginal productivity and the marginal utility from leisure. This will result in a reduction in equilibrium of hours of work, which is not, under general conditions, optimal. Public economics states that the existence of these efficiency losses only permits the achievement of a second best solution for the economy.

The bulk of redistribution in modern states is then through taxes and transfers that are not lump sum and thus may distort agents’ incentives in markets. Technically speaking, these forms of taxation occur ex post – namely, after markets have brought about their outcomes-, rather than before, as advocated by IDC. In a second best world, it is then necessary to rely on taxation collected after market outcomes have come about, rather than before, to pursue fairness objectives. This can be justified under two perspectives. First, ex post intervention may be seen as a compensation for the fact that redistribution of initial endowments fell short of the target. Ex post redistribution through distortive taxes will put the economy in the interior of the first best (position) ~~frontier~~, although the distribution of well-being among individuals will be in general less unequal that in a laissez-faire economy. There is then a trade-off between efficiency and equity. Given the efficiency losses of redistribution, the state can only apply second best solutions to the problem of achieving an equitable allocation of well-being among citizens. Secondly, as argued by Atkinson (2015), ex post taxation is necessary to prevent that inequalities accumulated within one generation get transmitted to the next generation. Given that a generation’s initial endowment are, to a large extent, inherited through one’s family, ex post taxation is crucial to level the playing field across generations.

The debate over the magnitude of the efficiency losses caused by distortive taxation has been broad-ranging and marred with ideological dogmatism. Many right-wing politicians have relied on the so-called Laffer curve – named after the economist Arthur Laffer – to demand cuts in the income tax. The Laffer curve is based on the simple argument that total income tax receipts must reach a maximum for some tax rates, beyond which the mechanical effect of an increase of the tax rate becomes lower that the behavioural effect. These two effects have been put forward by Saez (2001). The first corresponds to the expansion of tax receipts that follows the raise in tax rate applied to the same tax base. The second effect captures the decrease of tax base following the tax increase. In the computation of the differential (dT) of a linear tax t on a tax base x(t), the former corresponds to dtx and the second to tdx. If, at the limit, the tax rate was set at 100%, no sensible person would work and therefore the tax collected would be zero. The argument of many right-wing politicians in support of a reduction of income taxes is, implicitly, that the current income tax rates are already beyond the maximum. In other words, tax cuts would incentivise individuals to work more, thus raising growth rates in the economy. This is a restatement of Okun’s (1975) well-known ‘leaky bucket’ argument. It is then crucial to gauge the magnitude of such efficiency losses introduced by distortive taxation, especially so for open economies.

2.3. The ‘third claim of welfare economics’

We here argue that the leaky bucket argument does not seem to bite much in a closed economy framework. We coin the new term ‘third claim of welfare economics’ to define the idea that the trade-off between efficiency and equity is only weak in practice. Our ‘claim’ alludes to the two theorems of welfare economics, which make the theoretical case for the existence of such a trade-off. Clearly, our claim has an empirical rather than a theoretical nature. It cannot have the force of a theorem but there is a body of reliable, accurate and consistent evidence that has sufficient to state the existence and substance of the argument.

What are the empirical estimates of the costs of redistribution? Preliminary descriptive evidence comes from Figure 1, which reports a simple scatterplot of data for GDP growth and the income share of the poorest 20% of the population for a sample of world economies. It goes without saying that GDP growth is a very imprecise measure of efficiency and the income share accruing to the poorest 20% is only one of the many possible measures of equity. Nonetheless, the evidence stemming from the graph is striking in showing a virtually flat relationship. Clearly, a more in-depth statistical analysis would be needed to control for possible confounding factors. Nonetheless, this graph suffices to show that equality and growth can and, in many cases, do go together. The most egalitarian countries in the world grew on average at similar rates as the least egalitarian ones. Moreover, this graph spans a period of hyper-globalization, hence it does not seem that globalization prevents the achievement of equity targets.

### AT: L – Taxes: Black Businesses

#### Perm best mobilizes resources towards black business creation and attacking systemic racism

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LOWER PERSONAL WEALTH INHIBITS BLACK BUSINESS CREATION

According to a 2018 study by the U.S. Small Business Administration, most entrepreneurs start their businesses using personal or family wealth. But the study finds that Black entrepreneurs are more likely to rely on personal credit cards to finance their business creation. This is due in part to barriers to bank loans and other sources of institutional capital, but is also the result of staggering inequalities that impact how much wealth is held by Americans of different racial groups.

According to our analysis of 2019 Census Bureau data, Black people with positive net worth have assets that are primarily tied up in real estate—mainly homeownership. But in the U.S., the homeownership rate varies significantly by race and ethnicity, and is lowest for Black people. According to the Census Bureau, in the third quarter of 2020, the homeownership rate for white non-Hispanic Americans was 75.8%, compared to 61% for Asian Americans, 50.9% for Latino or Hispanic Americans, and 46.4% for Black Americans.

Black families are not only less likely to own a home, but according to Brookings’s Hamilton Project, “their homeownership yields lower levels of assets.” Among homeowners, Black families’ median home value is $150,000, compared to $230,000 for white families. Black people are also underindexed in businesses, stocks, bonds, and other assets that can increase their net worth. In addition, assets that Black people hold have lesser value, lessening their ability to start businesses.

While increasing Black business ownership would certainly have a positive economic impact on Black households and communities, renewed fiscal support from federal, state, and local governments is needed to mitigate the racial wealth gap. Data and research show that on average, Black people have higher unemployment rates, lower earnings, lower rates of homeownership, and pay more for credit and banking services—all factors that result from a history of structural racism and contribute to vast disparities in wealth creation and accumulation between Black households and white households.

FEDERAL AND METROPOLITAN POLICY SOLUTIONS TO EXPAND BLACK BUSINESS

There is a causal relationship between discriminatory policy and wealth accumulation, and there is a direct correlation between wealth and business development. Business outcomes reflect a racial wealth gap that is shaped by racialized policies, including those created by the federal government.

We should look at the wealth gap as merely an indicator. “By focusing on the root of racial wealth inequality rather than fixating on the racial wealth gap, we can identify a path forward for creating a fairer and more sustainable economic and political system,” wrote the Roosevelt Institute’s Anne Price in a 2020 report aptly titled “Don’t Fixate on the Racial Wealth Gap.”

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s recent Martin Luther King Jr. Day remark that the U.S. economy has never worked fairly for Black Americans should reverberate loudly in the halls of federal policymaking. Inequality is a choice, and systemic racism involves a constellation of polices that racialize how resources are distributed. But just as systemic racism was built upon unjust policy, it can be deconstructed and replaced. Here are some potential ways to do so:

### Global UBI As Reparative Rightful Share

#### UBI, when reinterpreted as reparative rightful share, aligns material and affective power with incommensurable demands for reparative and distributive justice by empowering communities to set their own terms

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INTRODUCTION

Universalism has long been a cornerstone of claims to both resources and rights. Such claims range from the universal in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to more recent interest in universal social protection floors, universal health care and universal basic income within international development and social policy debates. Many of these claims for universalism, such as for human rights, are based on long-standing philosophical conceptions of a fundamental, universal and shared humanness. Others, such as that for universal social protection floors and universal basic income (UBI),1 are based not only on the administrative efficiency and political expediency of universal policy, but also on a long tradition of justice-based arguments around the universal nature of collective and historical wealth creation (Kropotkin, 1892/1955; Paine, 1796; Sloman, 2016). Indeed, though universal social protection in the form of guaranteed income or unconditional direct cash transfers has garnered increasing appeal as a social policy intervention around the globe,2 there has also been a revival of interest in the justice-based and rights-based case for universal and unconditional access to a share of national or global wealth (Fouksman and Klein, 2019).

Rights-based and distributory justice-based claims to universal payments have a long history, ranging from Thomas Paine's ‘universal inheritance’ (1796), meant to rectify the unjust distribution of land, through T.H. Marshall's (1950, 1963) writing about the right to economic security as a key part of full social citizenship, and extending to Guy Standing's proposal for a universal basic income framed as a ‘commons dividend’ (Standing, 2019). Within the field of international development, James Ferguson has argued that the rising popularity of cash transfers as a social policy tool in the majority world3 heralds a larger political shift. Ferguson terms this shift ‘a new politics of distribution’ — a politics in which people demand universal basic income as a share of collectively and historically created wealth (Ferguson, 2015), and make such demands on the basis of nothing more than physical presence (rather than contribution, or even citizenship) (Ferguson, 2021). In other words, ‘the entire production apparatus must be treated as a single, common inheritance’ (Ferguson, 2015: 186) — ‘a rightful share’. Such framings all underscore that wealth in society is largely collectively generated, and that as such all residents have a right to a share in that wealth — in particular both the wealth created by previous generations, and the benefit of commons such as natural resources. This socially generated wealth must thus be shared universally.

An emphasis on universal demands for a right to a share of collective production underscores the inherent structural injustices of wealth accumulation within capitalism. And though many universal basic income demands are national in scale, some theorists of universal distribution have contended with the global injustices of capitalism (and its history) by envisioning a global universal redistributory system. For instance, Ayelet Shachar (2009) has proposed the birthright privilege levy (a redistributive tax on people lucky enough to be born in rich countries that would aid those born in less affluent nations), and Philippe Van Parijs (2007) has made the case for global distributive justice, such as a global basic income, based on the coercive and restricting effect of national borders.

Yet the very universality of rightful share demands can still obscure what Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2009) refers to as the ‘race war of modernity’: the way historical and contemporary racism and coloniality lead to economic inequalities and insecurity. This is what David Harvey (2004), drawing on Marx's primitive accumulation, terms accumulation by dispossession (see also Coulthard, 2013). This relationship is made clear by the scholarship around ‘racial capitalism’ (Robinson, 1983), which shows that a core structural aspect of capitalism is differentiation via racial categories as the basis for exploitation and dispossession. Thus, while grappling with current inequalities, proposals for global universal redistributory systems still do not explicitly address both the historical and the ongoing injustices of the racialized nature of capitalism.

Another set of distributional claims, known as reparations, do seek to directly address the ongoing legacy of racial violence, slavery, genocide and colonialism. There are examples of reparations being made for such acts. For instance, in 2003 the British government made a payment of over £ 20 million in reparations to more than 5,000 survivors of the Mau Mau rebellion (Balint, 2016). After World War II, Germany was ordered to pay reparations for the Holocaust to Polish and Jewish survivors (Kelley, 2002). In 1989, the US was ordered to pay over US$ 1.2 billion to Japanese-American survivors of internment by the US government during World War II (Campbell, 2009). More recently, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal issued a decision that the Canadian federal government pay CA$ 40,000 per child impacted by the country's residential schools, totalling over CA$ 2 billion (Cultural Survival, n.d.).4 And in 2021, Germany offered Namibia € 1.1 billion in development aid as a gesture of reconciliation for the Herero-Nama genocide (Oltermann, 2021).

While in practice reparations have been largely administered in relation to concrete collective claims for monetary redress recognized by the state and judiciary (as in the examples above), reparations can also be integrated into larger redistributive systems in order to change unjust social and economic structures while providing an avenue for recognition and truth telling (Rubio-Marin, 2009). This is particularly vital because structures put in place during colonialism and slavery continue to pattern local and global societies and economies. For instance, racism which evolved during British colonization, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery and Jim Crow laws, has shaped and continues to shape racist norms, laws and policies underpinning the US economy and society (Darity and Mullen, 2020).

In her ethnography of Jamaica, Deborah Thomas (2011) sees reparations as more than monetary or procedural, and calls for a structural framing of distributional claims. This shifts reparations away from purely economic justice, and towards variegated forms of redistribution plus recognition, in line with what Thomas calls a ‘reparations framework for thinking’. Such a reparations framework for thinking compels a refocusing on how ‘the current structural inequalities have emerged and persist as a result of real and codified institutional discrimination rather than because of cultural “deviation” and “dysfunctions”’ (Thomas, 2011: 6). Thomas explores the links between contemporary economic inequality in Jamaica and slavery, for instance in the way provisioning practices by slave owners are linked to contemporary politics, or the way slavery's effects on family structures underpin culturalist views of poverty or violence. The key to a reparations way of thinking is the recognition of the continuity of historical and contemporary structures of oppression. A reparations way of thinking can thus enable demands for both recognition and monetary redistribution alongside structural reform.

This article places calls for redistributory and reparatory justice in dialogue, tracing points of overlap and friction. In particular, we juxtapose justice-based claims for the universal distribution of wealth generated by previous generations or via collective resources with claims for redress for the ways in which such wealth creation dispossessed and oppressed certain groups. Placing proposals for a universal rightful share based on claims of distributory justice within a reparations framework leads us to consider whether (re)distribution can be both universal and reparative of specific historical wrongs. In so doing, we also explore whether distributory justice can be rightful without being reparative of specific historical wrongs, asking if historical and ongoing racialized violence can be adequately addressed by focusing purely on class-based economic redistribution, which is often the main concern of distributional claims.

This article thus examines reparations as another form of distributive claim making, alongside — and sometimes in tension with — claims to universal redistribution of collective wealth. We do so via case studies of three forms of reparatory claims: reparations for slavery, for colonialism, and for the ongoing harms of settler colonialism. Through these specific cases for reparations, we consider whether reparations must form a part of any claims to what is rightful — and if so, whether universal redistributory schemes, such as basic income, can speak to reparative demands. Within these case studies, we focus on three broad themes: the intersection of race, class and capitalism; the limits of nation state boundaries for redress; and the importance of both symbolic and material recognition. We argue that providing avenues of recognition and redress of historical and ongoing injustice is an essential part of constructing claims to rightful shares of collective wealth — and thus that reparative justice is a key part of distributive justice.

REDISTRIBUTORY UNIVERSALISM AND REPARATIONS FOR SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

Calls for reparations for slavery and racially based dispossession and discrimination have a long history in the United States, dating back to the early years of European colonization and the triangular trade (Brooks, 2004), and encompass a broad variety of proposals, justifications and forms.5 Many of the arguments for race-based reparations in the US focus not only on the two and a half centuries of slavery in the US, but also on the economic ramifications of racial discrimination in the centuries after the formal end of slavery, which range from Jim Crow segregation laws to discriminatory housing policy, as well as the current racialized mass incarceration system (see for instance Darity, 2008). Advocates of targeted reparations based on race in the US point out that the roots of the US's current wealth lie not only in White democracy and institutions making up what Mills (1997) calls ‘the racial contract’, but also in ‘black plunder’ (Coates, 2014).6

Although reparations have been supported by a number of groups and in a variety of forms in the US, this case study will focus on the reparations agenda of the Movement for Black Lives. This is because some of the Movement's racial justice-based proposals specifically included a universal basic income as part of demands made by the Movement in 2015–17 (MacFarland, 2016; Warren, 2016), making it a particularly useful lens through which to think about the intersections and tensions between claims for universal and reparatory distributional justice. Dorian T. Warren, one of the authors of the demands, placed UBI not under the economic justice heading, but rather under the heading of reparations. Warren points out that a UBI would benefit the poor the most, and that it would thus be particularly helpful to the formerly incarcerated and to cashless poor Black people. The implication here is that Warren sees class and race as inseparable, precisely because the US is a society whose economic system is based on a history of slavery and economic exploitation, discrimination and incarceration on the basis of race.

The argument in favour of UBI as a form of reparations on the basis of the intersection of class and race in a post-slavery society is built on the acknowledgement that class exploitation and expropriation and race are closely tied. Because White Americans earn more on average (due precisely to this history of slavery and post-slavery discrimination), a universal basic income would be taxed back from the wealthy (and largely White) community. Its beneficiaries would be the poor, but due to this history of disadvantage, it would especially benefit Black communities in the US, which have disproportionately high rates of poverty and economic disadvantage.7 Beyond the intersection of class and race, Warren also points out that the universalism and unconditionality of UBI have essential advantages. Not only would universalism prevent a repetition of previous racially discriminatory social policies (such as the New Deal's purposeful exclusion of largely Black agricultural workers), but it would avoid the ‘paternalistic restrictions that rest on racist tropes’ (Warren, 2017b; see also Warren, 2017a) within current social policies, such as food stamps. Also crucial is the fact the UBI does not have a work requirement, particularly in light of the structural racism that continues to exclude Black communities from employment in the US. Indeed, other theorists of race-based reparations in the US have also made a similar case for universal social or distributory programmes that would lessen racial inequality by aiding all; for instance, Darity and Hamilton (2012) propose a federal work guarantee and child development accounts.

However, Warren goes on to acknowledge the limitations of the universality of basic income when understood as reparations. He points out that all too often, nominally universal policies exclude minorities, for instance by excluding formerly incarcerated populations. Yet even if a universal basic income were to be designed to be truly universal, Warren wonders if a UBI is simultaneously too broad and too narrow to address issues of racial injustice in a post-slavery society. It might be too broad in its universality — its net beneficiaries would be anyone below a set income level,8 which would include those that might be economically disadvantaged, but do not face racial discrimination and the injustices of living in a post-slavery society. Warren also worries that a universal basic income would allow the US to evade the question of direct investment in Black communities. In many ways, this point mirrors the feminist debates around basic income. While some feminist UBI advocates argue that a UBI would disproportionately benefit women and those engaged in unpaid care, others point out that it would also support men who chose to ignore or evade care work responsibilities, and make the case that there should be either special or additional support for carers.9

At the same time, Warren argues that a UBI's benefits could be too narrow because of its typical focus on citizenship rights. As he points out, many UBI models propose that the income goes to all of a country's citizens. However, what happens to immigrants who are not citizens, including immigrants who face racial discrimination? And what about incarcerated populations, who are frequently deprived of some citizenship benefits (such as voting rights)? Yet while Warren is correct that many UBI proposals have traditionally focused on citizens, this has recently shifted. James Ferguson's work on rightful shares has made the case that a universal payment should be disbursed not on the basis of citizenship, but rather on presence (or, to put it more practically, residence) within a nation state (Ferguson, 2021).

However, the issue of targeting on the basis of race in order to repair the damage done by slavery and post-slavery racial discrimination still remains. Warren's proposed solution is to establish what he terms U+BI (universal plus basic income). This is a form of targeted universalism, where a basic income is both universal, and there is an additional top up which is targeted towards racial minorities, and explicitly framed as reparations for slavery and racism. Warren's proposal for a U+BI as reparations, and his explicit tying together of UBI and reparations, raises a number of questions. Why adopt an explicitly universal policy such as UBI as part of the case for reparations, which are meant to explicitly target communities damaged by specific historical occurrences? Warren never directly addresses this question, but perhaps the inclusion (with modifications) of UBI within the Movement for Black Lives agenda points to unstated support for other advantages of a universal rightful share, in particular the justice-based arguments for universal ownership of collective wealth (see for instance Birnbaum, 2016; Sloman, 2018; Van Parijs, 1992). The proposal of U+BI also raises the question of whether this would be a true UBI, and if the ‘plus’ would undermine some of the advantages of universalism. In particular, if historically benefits targeted at disadvantaged groups have frequently been inferior to universal benefits and enjoyed lower levels of support, a U+BI might have the same disadvantage, which a UBI would avoid. Ultimately, this case asks: can a distributory policy framed as a rightful share be both reparative and universal at the same time?

A conceptual framework that provides some fruitful avenues into reconciling these tensions is the writing around racial capitalism. The study of racial capitalism underscores the ways in which race and capitalism have been historically — and continue to be currently — co-created and intertwined (Robinson, 1983), with slavery and ongoing racial dispossession as a key example.10 In the words of Jodi Melamed, capitalist ‘accumulation requires loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires’ (Melamed, 2015: 77). As such, scholars of racial capitalism point out that a focus on class, race or colonialism alone is insufficient to understand both the way capitalism has been constituted and the way it continues to operate today. Instead, race and racialization emerged both out of slavery and colonialism and also out of dispossession and proletarianization, and in turn racialized conceptions of social hierarchies enabled class-based exploitation and dispossession. This was not simply imposed by the ‘West onto the Rest’ (Hall, 1992: 275) in a ‘singular axis of power of colonized/colonizer’ (Virdee, 2019: 6), but also occurred within the West itself. An example of this is the way the Catholic Irish were racialized in industrial England in order to subdivide the working class and channel workers’ disaffection into racialized hierarchies (Robinson, 1983). Thus, alongside the racialization of non-European and colonized populations, which was used to justify both colonial conquests and slavery, came the racialization of parts of Europe, which was used to justify further exploitation.

For instance, Virdee (2019) demonstrates the way race was created by British economic elites in the Virginia colony in the 1600s (where unfree labour initially existed for people of both European and African origins) and was used as a foundational step to build a full slavery economy. In parallel, Virdee uses the example of anti-Irish sentiment in Britain to show the way in which ‘during the middle decades of the 19th century, these theories [of race] were increasingly pressed into service by the ideological apparatuses of the state to defuse the working class insurgency at home [in Britain]’ (2019: 18). By making Catholic Irish the ‘other’ with the categorization of ‘so-called inferior race of Celts’ (ibid.) based on biological features such as nose, chin, forehead and mouth shape, which in turn were linked with supposed inherent personality features such as violence and childishness, the working class in England was further subdivided. Anglo-Saxon men ended up with greater political and economic privileges while subscribing to exclusionary racialized nationalism, which allowed the Irish to be hyper-exploited on the basis of their seemingly inherent otherness.

This was to repeat itself with Eastern European Jewish communities in the early 20th century. Similar racialization of Irish, Southern and Eastern European, Jewish and Hispanic populations occurred in the US. Building on this, Nancy Fraser (2018) makes the case that besides exploitation of wage labourers, capitalism has also been entwined with racial oppression via violent expropriation (both of resources, such as land, and capacities, via slavery or other forms of unfree labour). Fraser argues that the relative political protections of the exploited depend on such hidden, race-based (and politically sanctioned) expropriation. Indeed, Fraser makes the case that expropriation in all forms is built on politically sanctioned distinctions that go beyond the construction of racial difference and include other categories of difference such as gender.

The history of racism is thus entangled with not only slavery but also nationalism, sexism, class mobilization and co-optation (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Theorists of racial capitalism make this point as a critique of a narrow focus on class within the study of capitalism. However, it can also help us understand the ways in which class itself is constituted out of race, and the ways in which race was used as the foundation of economic dispossession that aided class differentiation — both via slavery and other forms of expropriation, and with the formation of super-exploited11 and expropriated racially differentiated groups. Thus, if the super-exploited or expropriated classes within capitalism were themselves largely formed out of invented racial categorization and justified by racism, perhaps class-based reparations can also serve as reparations for racism and dispossession on the basis of race. Perhaps a redistributory UBI (that is, one that is funded through a taxation scheme which leads to the wealthy being net contributors, and the poor net beneficiaries) can be framed as rightfully redressing or repairing both the ravages and dispossession of capitalist accumulation, and also racial dispossession, both in societies that experienced slavery and those that did not but that still exploited certain groups on the basis of racial difference. By going to all and yet redistributing money away from capitalism's winners and to capitalism's victims, perhaps a universal redistributory policy such as UBI could be a reparative rightful share that redresses capitalism's class and race-based dispossession.

Yet at the same time, this economically reparative function could be undermined by a lack of recognition of specific historic wrongs (such as enslavement, expropriation and racial discrimination). As will be discussed in greater detail in the case studies that follow, reparations are not simply about economic compensation, but equally about recognition of such historical wrongs. Roy Brooks (2004) distinguishes between the settlement or tort model of reparations, a legal approach in which specific individuals compensate victims for their demonstrable losses, and the atonement model, which emphasizes reparative justice through collective apology together with material reparations that give weight to the apology. A UBI fits well into the collective nature of the atonement model of reparations. Yet, while a UBI might be able to fulfil some material redress through its redistributory function, it has rarely been framed as a collective apology from one group to another. Darity and Mullen (2020) advocate for a model of reparations that must include acknowledgement, redress and closure. While the intersectionality of class and race enable a more just redistribution of wealth to provide some amount of race-based economic restitution, it lacks concrete acknowledgement for racially based injustice, and thus cannot provide closure.

In short, if a key way in which UBI can serve as a rightful share of collectively generated wealth is precisely its universalism, how can both its universalism and its reparative functions be simultaneously acknowledged? How can a universal policy provide recognition of specific historical acts of injustice? As discussed in the sections to follow, the importance of recognition becomes a particular challenge when considerations of a rightful share move beyond the nation state, as in the case of post-independence reparations, and in contestation over sovereignty within settler colonial contexts.

REPARATIONS FOR COLONIALISM AND THE WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM

In considering a rightful global (re)distribution of wealth, it is hard not to reflect on the foundational violence, oppression and disruption that has played a large role in creating contemporary structures of global political, economic and military order. European colonization of the Americas, Asia, Oceania and Africa continues to be a key aspect of global inequality today. Reparations could right some of the wrongs of not only slavery and the slave trade but also colonization by European empires. In Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India, Shashi Tharoor (2017) draws on Minhaz Merchant's computation which demonstrates that, in return for profits made over 200 years of imperial rule, Britain could owe India up to US$ 3 trillion (as of 2015). Yet Tharoor argues for atonement over the actual payment of funds. He calls for a ‘symbolic reparation of one pound a year, payable for 200 years to atone for 200 years of imperial rule’ (Tharoor, 2017: 79). Tharoor's preference for atonement over financial settlement or fiscal compensation underscores the importance of the British recognizing the role of colonialism in their own and India's history — a recognition that is largely lacking. This preference can be critiqued for emphasizing recognition at the expense of redistribution (Fraser, 2005). However, Tharoor's point does draw attention to one of the major challenges for universalist notions of a rightful share such as a UBI: as discussed above, it does not necessarily provide recognition of historically specific forms of dispossession, such as colonization and related violence. Recognition can thus be conceptualized as an important part of distributive justice, because it not only acknowledges historical wrongs as a key consideration in making justice-based claims, but also provides pathways to address structural inequalities that were set up under colonial rule and continue today.

Recognition alongside monetary forms of redistributive justice is central to calls for reparations for European colonization. In contrast to Tharoor, others have called for actual compensation to be paid in full, such as in 2009, when the then-president of the African Union, Muammar al-Gaddafi, argued that African states should be given reparations amounting to US$ 77.7 trillion for European colonial plundering (Campbell, 2017). Muammar al-Gaddafi's request followed a long line of leaders from newly independent nations requesting reparative justice from the old European empires. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) sponsored the first pan-African conference on reparations for enslavement and colonization in 1993. This conference was headed by Nigerian Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola and published the Abuja Proclamation (N'Cobra, 1993) which called for:

the international community to recognize that there is a unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to the African peoples which has yet to be paid — the debt of compensation to the Africans as the most humiliated and exploited people of the last four centuries of modern history. … [It] further urges the OAU to call for full monetary payment of repayments through capital transfer and debt cancellation. … Convinced that the claim for reparations is well grounded in International Law, it urges on the OAU to establish a legal Committee on the issue of Reparations. … [It] serves notice on all states in Europe and the Americas which had participated in the enslavement and colonization of the African peoples, and which may still be engaged in racism and neo-colonialism, to desist from any further damage and start building bridges of conciliation, co-operation, and … reparation.

The reference to neo-colonialism in the Abuja Proclamation is particularly important, as it speaks to the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that were well underway in countries across Africa at the time the Proclamation was written. Structural adjustment included a range of policies majority world governments had to implement in order to receive aid to service international debt. These policies differed from country to country but focused largely on fiscal deficit, monetary policy, privatization of state assets and trade liberalization. Their effect was to destabilize many local industries, as well as to limit social investment, all furthering economic insecurity and inequality (Herbst, 1990; Moseley et al., 2010). The reference to neo-colonialism in the Abuja Proclamation reflects how structural adjustment deepened African countries’ economic dependence on former colonial powers and current hegemons. As such, the Proclamation was not only tied to past injustices, but was also a response to the continuation of past injustices into the present.

Perhaps the biggest global effort to demand reparations for colonialism came from the 2001 World Conference Against Racism held in Durban. The conference aimed to cover a diverse array of themes including reparations for slavery and colonization, but also to draft an action plan against racial discrimination including preventative measures such as education and international cooperation around the eradication of intolerance and racism. Couched within these diverse demands, reparations were part of a push towards unravelling structures of racism through both recognition and compensation.

Before most of the world's governments and their representatives met to negotiate the final declaration, over 4,000 NGOs met to collectively draft demands focusing on reparations for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery and colonization — all referred to in the NGOs’ draft document as crimes against humanity. Some governments rejected the NGOs’ draft because they felt the wording was too strong and because the draft also singled out Israel for ‘practices of racial discrimination against the Palestinians’ (Lyons, 2002: 1238). The next draft was prepared by governments, who changed the original demands for reparations significantly from reparations as payments to individuals, to payments made in the form of development funds. Specifically, these governments proposed:

reparations in the form of enhanced policies, programs and measures at the national and international level … through the creation of a development fund, the improvement of access to international markets of products from developing countries affected by these practices, the cancellations or substantial reduction of their foreign debt and a program to return art objects and historical documents to countries of origins. (Tan, 2007: 280)

The move from individual payments to development support was controversial. It watered down the NGOs’ position on reparations on three fronts. First, the move to development support was a break in the radical potential of payments made to smaller units, such as individuals or local communities, as individuals have no control over development funds, which are administered by the nation state or multilateral organizations. Also, such aid would remain controlled by and within structures set up by the former colonizers. There is now ample research that shows that loans, aid and development assistance have actually benefited donors more than recipient countries (let alone individuals), for instance via structural adjustment policies as well as poverty reduction strategies and trading agreements (Global Financial Integrity et al., 2015; Herbst, 1990; Klein and Morreo, 2019). Second, paying for development does not necessarily provide recognition of the crimes of former colonizers. Instead, former colonizers can provide development support under the banner of humanitarianism and never admit their role in historical and racial violence. Third, the move towards development support for only post-independence states was a major break with pan-Africanism that interlinked reparations for slavery and for colonization. By only focusing on the development of poor nations, development aid severed collective claims for redress made by both the diaspora of slavery and post-independence nations.

Hilary Beckles describes the shift to development support as momentous, one where ‘African leaders joined with the West to tear down the agenda of reparatory justice for Africans. In so doing, they allowed those who had committed this crime against humanity to walk free’ (Beckles, 2018: 188). The final declaration from the conference removed reference to reparations for colonization altogether, and instead encouraged nations benefiting from the slave trade to provide aid (Lyons, 2002). This emphasis on aid in lieu of reparations has continued: in 2021 Germany acknowledged the Herero-Nama genocide, but as part of this acknowledgement offered additional funding to aid programmes and pointedly ignored calls for reparations.

The strong opposition to calls for reparations from former colonizers and their Western allies is notable. These countries continued to push for development support commitments in order to avoid reparations. At the final preparatory session to the World Conference Against Racism in Geneva, the US sent diplomats to remove references to reparations and Israel (Lyons, 2002), and used the pledge of more aid to African countries as part of their negotiation to achieve this. This lobbying continued at the conference itself, where Western nations again attempted to persuade other governments to not have commitments to reparations feature in the final statement. These tensions continued after the conference. In 2005, Alpha Oumar Konare of Mali, who was then President of the African Union, renewed debates on slavery and colonization in African parliaments and called for reparations. The UK Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair, was concerned about the implications that such a request would have on the UK, and lobbied the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, to instead increase debt relief and aid as part of the ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign. Despite efforts from majority world activists and political leaders, calls for reparations were largely replaced by pledges from the West for more development support and aid (Campbell, 2017).

Western governments, academics and others use a variety of reasons to justify their opposition to reparations. Some argue that colonization was not a crime, and had positive effects for those colonized, such as establishing liberal institutions and national infrastructure. This ignores the extensive historical and contemporary work on the social, economic, ecological and political devastation wrought by colonialism, which continues in development policies that further racialize and dispossess populations (Pailey, 2020; Wilson, 2012).12 Another argument against reparations makes the case that people alive today should not be held accountable for the crimes of their ancestors. Yet if people do not want to be held to account for their ancestors’ crimes, then they must not benefit from the spoils of these crimes — spoils which continue to underpin global privilege (Pogge, 2008). Others make the case that reparations are not pragmatic, and the logistics are simply too difficult — such as the difficulty of identifying those who genuinely deserve to receive compensation for colonial exactions. Yet while enacting reparations is not always straightforward, reparations are already being made (Darity et al., 2010). Guidelines about who is eligible can be worked out through the judiciary, deliberation and survivor-led policy (Barkan, 2007).

Others claim that development aid given since independence has paid off anything owed.13 However, as noted above, development aid has notoriously benefited donors, is given at low amounts, and has continued neo-colonial dominance, all while being framed in charitable rather than in reparative terms by the West. As such, development aid makes claims to improving the human condition and doing good, but simultaneously can obscure the unequal relations underpinning systems of accumulation, dispossession and dominance. Of course, some forms of collective assistance may help repair the ways colonization disrupted and damaged collective processes and structures of colonized societies — for example, support for educational systems, governance arrangements and financial support for cultural revival (Bhargava, 2007; Tan, 2007). Still, the contemporary development apparatus is largely unable to support pluriversal ways of being, and thus carries risks of continued coloniality (Escobar, 2018).

All these points of resistance to reparations underscore a deep discomfort about the underlying challenges to the West's own myths about modernization and Western progress, which have justified inequality, power and domination (Biondi, 2003). However, problems remain around the concrete ways reparations would function in post-independence contexts. For example, if not development assistance and aid, then what mechanisms could be used to facilitate material redress to people? Would this material redress be made available to individuals via something like a global UBI, or as payments to nation states? If payments were made directly to individuals via a global UBI, would this be focused exclusively around former empire economies paying dividends to individuals in the majority world? Would more recently wealthy countries, such as South Korea, also contribute to this reparative global UBI? And how would such a mechanism connect with people that are stateless, or diaspora dispersed because of colonialism and slavery? Finally, how can the ‘transfer effect’ outlined by Darity et al. (2010) be avoided: that is, how can the majority world avoid reinvesting reparations payments back into structures that benefit its former colonizers?

Some scholars have proposed the idea of a redistributive fund administered by a global organization such as the United Nations, to act in part as a form of reparative justice (Blackburn, 2011; Pogge, 2008). Yet cosmopolitan mechanisms such as the UN system have themselves been critiqued for their risk of becoming supra-global mechanisms that reproduce coloniality via Western-centric and top-down designs of development, democracy and economic growth (inclusive or otherwise). Walter Mignolo (2000: 742) argues that the problem for cosmopolitanism models is how to ‘focus on the coloniality of power and the colonial difference produced, reproduced, and maintained by global designs’. But these challenges are not insurmountable, and considerations as to what decolonial options are available for administering direct reparations beyond the nation state boundaries could be pursed further. Claims for reparations for colonialism continue to be important. They offer pathways not only towards redress for the past, but also for radically altering global distribution in the present. In the words of Tan (2007: 284):

justice here and now, rather than justice then, demands the rectification of these disadvantages. It is not the fact that individuals have been wronged in the past that is calling for greater global redistribution, but the fact that they are being wronged now. They are being wronged now because of the imposition of unjust global arrangements on them, that is, arrangements that fail to treat them with equal respect and concern, independently of whether or not they were also wronged in the past.

It is hard to see how justice-based arguments for a rightful share of historically generated collective wealth can proceed without significant recognition of historical injustices such as colonialism. The arguments raised by proponents of redress for colonization show that recognition together with monetary forms of redistributive justice is needed to address the ordering of global economic, military and political systems that have long promoted Western power and prosperity over the majority of the world.

REPARATIONS AND AUSTRALIAN SETTLER COLONIALISM

Reparations are an equally important consideration in a settler colonial context. The foundation of the settler state rests on the conquest and settling of land, and the attempted elimination of the native (Wolfe, 2006). As Deborah Bird Rose has pointed out, ‘to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay at home’ (1991: 46). For instance, since Europeans first arrived in Australia in the late 1700s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have suffered attempts at elimination both through violent means and through processes of assimilation, which transform people's subjectivities and ontologies to align with those of the settlers (Klein and Razi, 2018). These processes of racial domination remain ongoing through oppressive state policies and institutional, legal and structural discrimination (Harris, 1993; Mills, 1997). Indeed, a major difference between a settler colonial and post-independence context is that in the settler colonial context, sovereignty has never been ceded and independence never given (Wolfe, 2006). As we will argue here, reparations for settler colonialism revolve around not just the recognition of the violence of past and ongoing colonization, but also the struggle for sovereignty to be honoured and for the unravelling of structures of settler colonialism.

This section uses a case study of oppressive welfare policies aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia to argue that a consideration of ongoing unjust structures of settler colonialism (such as the contemporary social security system) as well as issues of sovereignty are central to understanding the way reparative and distributive justice are intertwined in settler colonial contexts. In Australia settler colonial processes still continue through dispossession and attempts at elimination by the settler state. These include (but are not limited to) current welfare programmes, mass incarceration, the taking of children, and the denial of sovereignty and land rights (Klein and Razi, 2018; Watson, 2009). We highlight this ongoing process and underscore the need for reparative thinking when considering claims to rightful shares of collective wealth, via examples from Australia's current social security system.

There are two specific policies that, as this article goes to press, together further the ongoing injustices of settler colonialism, particularly in remote regions of the country. The first is the Cashless Debit Card. The Cashless Debit Card is a type of income management that quarantines 80 per cent of state benefits received by working-age people, and is justified on the basis of restricting alcohol and gambling purchases. It limits the amount of cash that can be withdrawn to 20 per cent of the total money recipients receive. A high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are put on the Card, and have reported that the Card makes the use and management of their meagre social security payments challenging, causing further financial difficulty and stress (Klein and Razi, 2018). Second, and intersecting with the Card, is the remote work-for-the-dole programme called the Community Development Program or CDP. It requires the same cohort of working-age participants, who are almost all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and receive a state payment, to attend manufactured ‘work-like’ initiatives for up to 20 hours a week for a payment well below minimum wage (Altman, 2015; Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). The requirements for CDP are harsher than the government's non-remote and mainly non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Jobactive workfare programme, because of its rules and because of the remote setting. This has resulted in CDP rates of non-compliance and non-attendance 30 to 40 times higher than in the Jobactive programme (Fowkes, 2016). People who do not attend what some in the programme term ‘make-work’ or ‘bullshit jobs’ (Graeber, 2019) lose their welfare money, and families go without.

Both of these policies further settler colonialism. While the programmes focus on behavioural deficiencies of the unemployed, the key cause of unemployment in the remote and regional areas such as the East Kimberley is the absence of formal jobs (KDC, 2013), and so the programmes are superfluous to their own stated policy objectives. These programmes also support the expansion of private and largely White capital, thus transforming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjectivities into sites of accumulation by dispossession. For example, the private company which provides the Cashless Debit Card profits from the project. Finally, underpinning these job-creation initiatives are specific (Western) norms as to how work is defined. While many Aboriginal peoples in and around Kununurra engage in productive work ‘on country’, undertaking customary (non-market) work for livelihood, this is not recognized or valued by the state. Such productive work activities have endured over a decade of critique by politicians, business leaders, policy makers and some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elite, who frame this work as being outside the ‘real economy’, and as promoting narratives about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander passivity, dysfunction and non-participation in work (Altman, 2014). Such discourse also ignores Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ engagement in other productive and socially reproductive activities such as unpaid care work and care of country. These types of work are overlooked, and bodies passed off as unproductive and unemployed are subsequently compulsorily forced onto punitive and conditional welfare schemes (Altman, 2019).

People on these programmes know what they are about. In the East Kimberley, the Cashless Debit Card is called the White card, as it is, in the words of one participant, ‘taking us back to the ration days’ (Klein and Razi, 2017: 7). Patty Gibson has framed this imposition and control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ welfare expenditure by the Australian state as the ‘re-imposition of colonial forms of governance’ when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, prior to the 1970s, ‘were not entitled to handle cash like other citizens and rationing regimes were used to control Aboriginal movement and labour, as well as to try and discipline people out of “Aboriginal” behaviours’ (Gibson, 2012: 63).

Klein and Razi (2018) link the polices of the Cashless Debit Card and CDP workfare to broader settler colonial processes in the East Kimberley region. For instance, Kununurra itself is a town created through the damming of the Ord River, which flooded over half of Miriuwung country, including important Miriuwung songlines — significant knowledge networks carried through generations about Miriuwung culture and land. This dramatic dispossession for accumulation has not benefited Aboriginal peoples; the scheme has resulted in only 260 (predominately non-Aboriginal) jobs (Grudnoff and Campbell, 2017). And as documented in the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Stolen Wages (Parliament of Australia, 2006), indentured and unpaid Aboriginal labour built the pastoral industries of the East Kimberley. Finally, many families suffered through Stolen Generation policies whereby their children were taken from them and used as slave or indentured domestic labour in settler households. In line with this history, people are now put on work for the dole — another form of indentured state labour programmes and income management.

A UBI in place of such workfare policies would be a vast improvement on these punitive social security provisions, both in terms of agency, economic security and distribution. However, if such a UBI is framed and understood not simply as an improved welfare or tax and transfer system, but rather as a form of distributive justice, then in this context it does not seem just or rightful that all people in Australia are entitled to claim the same share of collective wealth. A universal share of wealth funded by taxation would help redistribute material privilege, including to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Yet a UBI would not account for or recognize the violence, displacement of nationhood and denial of sovereignty that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples endure within the political economy of settler society. It also would not account for the ongoing attempts at assimilation by the settler state. Not accounting for the dark side of the making and maintenance of the Australian nation in calculations of what is rightful effectively renders settler colonialism as a past event, not an ongoing process. It is therefore important to think about reparations not just in terms of material redistribution, but also as a redistribution of power and control via sovereignty, as well as the unravelling of contemporary and ongoing structures of settler colonialism.

Calls for reparations are not new in Australia. There have been many such calls, including demands for individual compensation payments to stolen generations, and compensation for stolen wages from the slavery and indentured labour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. At the time of writing, only a nominal payment has been promised to stolen generations — and only after the progression of a court case brought about by survivors and families of the stolen generations. The Labor government went to great lengths to stamp out any possibility for reparations at the time of the 2007 apology for the stolen generations (Short, 2012), despite scholar Michael Mansell demanding AU$ 1 billion in reparations for colonization. In the 1970s, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, set up as part of the Black Power and Sovereignty movement, called for AU$ 6 billion and an annual percentage of GDP in reparations for lands not returnable (Altman, 2020; Newfong, 1972/2014). According to Newfong (ibid.: 142), ‘the figure of six billion was chosen in order to establish in the minds of the White men and their governments not only this right of prior ownership but also our right to compensation’. Only minor payments have been made for land dispossession. In Timber Creek the government funded a test case to calculate just terms of compensation for the loss of Native Title rights and interests over land in the Timber Creek Township. Justice Mansfield granted a ‘solatium’ at AU$ 1.3 million, over twice the real estate value of the land, based on the pain and suffering in relation to traditional owners’ spiritual detachment from the land and the impact of loss of a relationship with country on a person's sense of self.14

Any granting of compensation in Australia is often framed by the state and judiciary as an exceptional event and not linked to redressing the settler colonial process that underpins the compensation award. This is at odds with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ calls for reparations as a means through which the process of settler colonialism can be recognized, unsettled and destabilized (Newfong, 1972/2014). Equally, as demonstrated by the case of the East Kimberley, Aboriginal sovereignty is constantly in danger of being undermined by the settler state, often through punitive, workfarist social security policies. This danger can be partially avoided with more unconditional redistribution and welfare, but can only be fully eschewed via a recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty along with the dismantling of settler colonial structures such as the contemporary social security system. This means that a more just distribution and access to a rightful share of national wealth (for instance, via a UBI for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) would need to be one part of a broader reparations framework that also includes land rights, treaties, self-determination and the truth-telling of past and ongoing contemporary violence. Grants for collective community-led projects are also a way to make up for lost assets and associated inequality (Altman and Klein, 2017). These aspects together could begin to destabilize the structures of settler colonialism while honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty.

A UBI, perhaps in the form of something similar to the U+BI proposed by the Movement for Black Lives, could be a mechanism for just distribution as long as it also provides scope for recognition and the unravelling of ongoing settler colonial structures of repression and dispossession. It would be a way to replace punitive conditionalities on payments such as those attached to the Cashless Debit Card and CDP. But payments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need also to be controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves. In paying for the plus in the U+BI formulation, the Australian state would also need to acknowledge not just the past but also the contemporary violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, such as what has been done in the name of ‘welfare’.

Still, there is no universal solution for this redress. As Yaqui scholar Rebecca Tsosie argues, reparative justice ‘must account for the different historical experiences of Native nations with the Europeans that colonised these lands and it must address Native epistemologies …. There is no “uniform” theory of reparations that fits all cultures, all nations, and all peoples’ (Tsosie, 2007: 43). The same can be said about a reparative rightful share. In the settler colonial context, any implementation must avoid policy coloniality in prescribing top-down ‘models’ of redress. Honouring sovereignty means at the very least that Indigenous people lead these deliberative processes and implementation.

CONCLUSION

Calls for universal distributive justice shift the framing of policies like universal basic income away from the realm of poverty alleviation or welfare and into the realm of rights and claim making. Framing redistribution as aid, welfare or charity forecloses a recognition of the economic contribution made by past unacknowledged workers as well as those expropriated in the generation of capital, or simply the collective nature of the wealth generated by previous generations. A similar point can be made about international development, which is typically framed in charitable rather than reparative terms by the West. Yet shifting redistributory demands from welfare or charity to a universal ‘rightful share’ (Ferguson, 2015) or a social right to economic security (Fraser and Gordon, 1993; Marshall, 1963) still lacks the recognition of specific historical wrongs such as slavery and colonialism. It is this recognition that has been an enduring demand from post-independence nation states, from Black communities in the US around the ongoing ramifications of slavery, and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples asking for the telling of truth regarding the settler foundations of Australia.

We thus contend that a reparations way of thinking is needed within calls for universal distributory justice. This way of thinking also allows us to look [perceive] beyond race to other ways in which certain groups of people have been exploited and expropriated by others — namely, via gender. We do not have the scope to address the question of reparations and gender in this article, but given the historical and ongoing harms of patriarchy, in particular the ongoing free-riding and expropriation of women's unpaid care work and social reproduction (Fraser, 2016, 2018), and indeed the central role of patriarchy within capitalist production and accumulation (Bhattacharyya, 2018), a reparative way of thinking is also useful when considering what is rightful through a gendered lens (Rubio-Marin, 2009; Wells, 2014).

Recognition and redress through reparations are important for acknowledging not just past wrongs, but also the ways these wrongs underpin contemporary inequalities. Such historical wrongs engender race and class (and gender) relations that still have material and affective impacts today. In the post-independence case, we examined how unequal global systems set up under colonialism continue to underpin divisions between the majority world and its former colonizers. In the settler colonial case, we showed how dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continues through racialized punitive welfare programmes, the continued dispossession of lands and the denial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty. Racialized systems in the US set up under slavery still impact Black communities today, for example through mass incarceration, employment and educational outcomes and broader inequalities of both income and wealth.

There are intersections between redistributory universalism and reparative redress. In many cases, the links between class and race can be reflected in statistics of poverty. However, this can also hide the way in which race has been the grammar of unequal relations and has justified expropriation and exploitation in places like the US since colonization. This is also the case in Australia, where ignoring the ways in which race and coloniality have impacted and continue to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ignores aspects of settler colonialism that are not only about economic dispossession, but also about racism, white supremacy and patriarchy. Yet (re)distribution must be as much a key part of reparatory justice as is recognition. As Nancy Fraser (2003, 2005) has pointed out, recognition without redistribution holds the danger of displacing struggles for economic justice — an issue that Fraser argues has plagued feminism in recent decades (Fraser, 2005: 298). The negotiations between Namibia and Germany around the Herero-Nama genocide are another example: while Germany is willing to recognize the genocide, and give some additional development aid as part of this recognition, it has declined to term the accompanying payment ‘reparations’, fearing to set a precedent for other or larger redistributive claims to reparative payments. Fraser has argued that both recognition and substantive redistribution are equally essential parts of social justice; one cannot be forsaken in favour of the other. Here we have built on that argument to make the case that the two are in fact intertwined in justice-based claims for shares of collective wealth.

All three cases illustrate common themes. While the US is a post-slavery society, it is also a settler colonial state, and insights from the Australian case have resonance for Native Americans in the US who also have substantive claims for reparative justice. The US case gave us one possibility on how mechanisms of distributive justice can also do some measure of reparative work via universal, redistributive and individual payments framed as a rightful share. A U+BI contends with some of the issues of recognition and redress raised in this article. While it is universal in scope and rightful in framing, the addition of the plus includes recognition of specific historical ills in need of reparative justice. The Australian case also suggested avenues that could accompany reparations, showing how not just recognition but also sovereignty could include specific national truth-telling processes, returning of land rights and self-determination, along with a U+BI or other forms of reparative redistribution. These reparative packages would need to be directed by Indigenous peoples themselves. Decentralized and decolonial cosmopolitanism — such as a global UBI framed as reparations for colonialism and its after-effects — may help fulfil reparations for post-independence injustice. However, these payments need to also transcend nation state boundaries and connect with people that are stateless, or diaspora dispersed because of colonialism and slavery.

We have made the case that reparative justice must become a key part of conceptualizing claims for distributional justice or claims to a share of collective wealth. This is both for instrumental and intrinsic reasons. Universal forms of distributive justice that do not consider claims to redress can do damage, for instance if, in settler colonial states and post-independent states, a universal basic income is used to mute claims to more radical forms of redistribution as well as sovereignty or self-governance. At the same time, we contend that if claims to distribution are based on a historical case around the communal creation of wealth by past generations, then this view must also encompass the ways this wealth creation has been intertwined with a global history of racist expropriation. Thus, in conceptualizing claims to distributive justice, we must take into account claims for reparative justice, particularly as they highlight the limits of nation state boundaries and the importance of recognition and redress for past and contemporary harms. Only then can what is rightful also encompass the right to atonement and redress.