

Introduction: History, agency and the representation of 'race'

The 'balcony scene' during which the out-of-time drugs baron, Avon Barksdale, and his modernizing partner, Stringer Bell, reminisce about their errant childhoods is often hailed as one of the most compelling dramatic moments in *The Wire*.¹ Suffused in tragic foreboding of Shakespearian proportions, the two men, back-lit by the twinkling lights of Baltimore's World Trade Centre, corporate sky-scrappers, luxury hotels and bobbing gin-palaces, reflect on how good it feels to be looking at 'the view' from their own piece of million dollar water-front real estate. Barksdale recalls - nostalgically - that the two had once owned the harbor-front with nothing but their bodies and their spirits, by out-running security guards everyday for sport. Conceding to Bell's observation that their persecution had been the appropriate response from the police given that they were robbing stores, Barksdale nonetheless prompts him to remember the meaningfulness, and the pointlessness, of their actions. With wry humour, he reminds Bell of the day he lifted a badminton racket and a net even though they had no yard in which to play the game. The moment registers the contradictory meanings of property and ownership and the ways in which, in their various forms, they are bound into the bloody sinews of 'race' violence, poverty, addiction, corruption, lucre and speculative greed that constitute American capitalism.

All the while, the exchange remains framed by the just-out-of-focus glitter of Baltimore's thrusting urban redevelopment. The harbor-side lights project far beyond the narrative arc of the intimate drama to confirm – dully but literally – the place of history, and the place of the history of 'race', in cementing the tragically inassimilable lineaments of the dramatic moment. The two men do not need to say it but they both

know in their bones that long before it became the inaugural site of their own awakening to their dispossession, and then the poisoned site of their temporary overcoming, Baltimore's harbor was once the epicenter of America's domestic slave-trade. The co-ordinated business of racialised, and nationalized, human trafficking that boomed in the wake of the legal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, and which, through its intricate historical legacies, had helped to shape their fate, was anchored precisely here.

The imperative to acknowledge that embodied, yet also thoroughly historical, legacy has only intensified as Baltimore reels – at the time of writing this introduction - from the police killing of Freddie Gray, and the rioting that has followed, but most commentaries have willfully ignored making direct connections between America's slaving past and its present in this context. As an easier - perhaps - alternative, allusions to *The Wire* have peppered recent reflections and media reactions to what has unfolded. The drama *did* capture aspects of the complex interconnections between corruption, power, structural racism, economic exploitation, and the inevitable failures of liberally oriented progressive policy even to ameliorate the problems of urban Baltimore, and it was extraordinary that it did so. Ultimately, *The Wire's* narrative thrust was elegaic and redemptive, however, insofar as it confirmed that living beyond the law cannot be a viable alternative to trying valiantly to make one's way against the tide of racism and inequality. In the end, bourgeois moral values trumped the representation of politicised resistance. Neither did *The Wire* risk imagining what such resistance might achieve. Instead, rebellion was registered as a ruthless, and fatal, criminality that entranced and horrified in equal measure. *The Wire* did not engage directly with the history, solidarity and dialectics of political protest – violent or otherwise – its force was always both

constrained and enabled by its commitment to the reforming zeal of social realism. This is why the melancholy of *The Wire* has been able to offer a generalized and acceptable representational frame, or genre, for thinking about the ‘real’ events of Freddie Gray’s murder and the reaction to it but the moments where the drama did speak directly, and critically, to them were glossed. Even David Simon, the drama’s writer and producer, in a revealing initial knee-jerk reaction, chose to eschew activating the energies of his own art in favour of dismissing the rioters as senseless and criminal, and by appealing to them to just ‘go home’.²

But Simon’s efforts cannot close down the interpretive possibilities of his drama. The location for the three-minute balcony scene provided the narrative fulcrum between the first three and the last two series of *The Wire* by registering the fact that Baltimore’s postmodern harbor-front – exemplar of acquisitive aspiration - squats atop the historical geography of US slavery. The dramatic moment confirms the power of cultural production to speak to current socio-economic conditions, and it opens up a route into thinking about what a perspective shaped by the concept of ‘reparative history’ might mean or might suggest. This special issue of *Race and Class* is concerned with just this question, and how we can unpack those complex interconnections between past and present in the context of contemporary resistances to racism and the legacies of colonialism. In relation to slavery, if the call for reparations forces the contemporary world to face its slaving past, what does this do to the historical narratives which have structured those pasts? Moreover, for our purposes, how does ‘the reparative’ reframe those narratives, to make them speak? How, if at all, does it disrupt liberal narrative structures which seeks to domesticate and cauterize the radical histories of resistance to white supremacy?

History as Agency

To return to Baltimore, there is a history here that can be re-claimed and occupied. In a blistering article in the wake of the riots, Peter Linebaugh reminded readers of the power that a historical perspective on the present carries. Baltimore was the ‘capital of the domestic slave trade’ but this is only half the story.³ He notes the ‘ill-wind’ of resistance too by referencing Baltimore’s place in Frederick Douglass’ escape route from slavery. Irish dockers aided Douglass by finding him employment at Fell’s Point. This is the outlying part of Baltimore’s harbor where slave traders preferred to board their captives out of the way of judgmental on-lookers, and because obstructive African American stevedores were rendering the nation’s borders porous in more ways than one. Particularly significant for the purposes of this introduction, Linebaugh also remembers a perhaps less acknowledged story about Benjamin Lundy, the radical Quaker abolitionist, who, while based in Baltimore, dared to argue for unconditional emancipation for the first time. Lundy was a key influence on Garrison, and this influence was to ignite a further wave of abolitionist resistance, but he was not just a man of radical ideas. He also stood up physically to the violence of the slaveholders.

Linebaugh notes Lundy’s violent confrontation with Austin Woolfolk, Baltimore’s most notoriously successful slave trader.⁴ Woolfolk was outraged at Lundy’s slandering of him in his abolitionist magazine, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* and accosted him one day with fists and blows. Lundy pressed assault charges only to face humiliation from the ruling class. The Judge fined the slave trader one dollar, and gave a speech about the slave trade’s economic benefits to Maryland not to mention the

ways in which it helped to remove a ‘great many rogues and vagabonds who were a nuisance to the state’.⁵

Linebaugh’s timely reminder of this moment, a moment which registers ordinary racial oppression and resistance in solidarity, has more significance still if we excavate further that resistance. Woolfolk’s attack on Lundy was motivated by the latter’s exposure of his treatment of one of his enslaved captives.⁶ Woolfolk had shipped William Bowser, already confined in the pens as a runaway, on his slaver, the *Decatur*, bound for New Orleans in 1826. But Bowser, along with others, conspired to rise up and take the ship, and to sail for Haiti – and freedom.⁷ They nearly succeeded. The mutiny was successful but freedom was cut short when the *Decatur* was accosted by two American ships while the rebels were attempting to work out how to navigate. Finally, forced back into New York, Bowser, and his fellow mutineers, ran again. He was caught – the only member of the *Decatur*’s cargo to be captured – and brought to trial for the murder of the ship’s Captain and Mate. Woolfolk was so incensed by Bowser’s refusal to submit to his authority – despite his eventual capture - that he assaulted Lundy for slandering him and for publicizing the mutiny. He later turned up at Bowser’s hanging to berate pathetically the man that he regarded simply as his property only to be pushed out by the mob.

William Bowser has not taken his place amongst the canon of great resisters of slavery such as Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, or Madison Washington whose own mutiny on the *Creole* in 1841 was outstandingly successful, but his story registers the countless acts of rebellion that can be retrieved in the archive. That archive is indeed impoverished, partial and bequeathed from ‘above’, and the scandal of its scant

leavings needs to be acknowledged. One does not have to struggle too hard to read against its grain to find a myriad of stories like Bowser's – as many historians have already shown. One just has to choose to look, or rather to look for those resistant moments which puncture the silence of the racially oppressed in the ledgers, insurance documents, commissions, newspapers and testimonies which form the grim chronicle of the colonial records.

Mourning and Memory: Narrating History

Three weeks before Freddie Gray was murdered but amidst the media's focus on the everydayness of black killings by the police, a permanent monument commemorating the victims of the slave trades and slavery was unveiled, not far way, outside the United Nations building in New York.⁸ The event signaled the fact that slavery is finally being officially commemorated amidst the largely conservative and ahistorical analysis of relation between 'race' and injustice in contemporary Euro-America. Unsurprisingly, there is no room for rage, resistance, or politics in this auspiciously sited memorial. The monument makes no reference to Turner, Vesey, or Douglass let alone Bowser.

Entitled 'Ark of Return' (to where?) the starkly white, disjunctive but pointed linear lines of the modernist-inspired structure construct a coercive narrative trajectory for the visitor that does not aid her historical or geographical orientation. Perhaps this is intentional. Momentary confusion in the face of the sublime gives way, however, to its accommodation.

In recognition of the global scale of transatlantic slave trading, a carved map of the Atlantic commands the visitor to focus and to 'Acknowledge the Tragedy'. As they

move on, visitors encounter a classical sculpture of a disempowered African (black) man, clad in (white) biblical robes, lying prone in an oppressive small alcove. Below his body are the words, 'Consider the Legacy'. Signifying the untold suffering of the Middle Passage, its 'legacy' is left for the visitor to imagine. The final injunction, 'Lest we Forget', renders it difficult to understand what needs to be remembered and what needs to be forgotten except for a diffused notion of suffering and victimhood that has somehow been born with fortitude and resilience. While long overdue, the monument casts history within a choreographed narrative of mourning but leaves the visitor to work out what it means. It is both a packaging of memory, and a challenge to work out the shape of that memory – although its very form has circumscribed that shape in a myriad of ways.

The 'Ark of Return' is not singular in its memory narrative. The horrors of Euro-American labour extraction from slavery to the high imperial moment, to the contemporary demands of globalization are mostly made publically visible through a mournful aesthetic of trauma, where both the event being marked and the spectators who bear witness to this event are isolated from the wider totalizing narratives of both capitalist exploitation and resistances to it. Sublimity and awe may indeed be appropriate responses to the West's colonial crimes but they also, potentially, rip those crimes from their history, and freeze them as examples of excessive brutality whose relationship to the liberal state is antagonistic rather than constitutive. Our concept of 'reparative history' is thus one that recognizes the legitimacy of trauma in response to the dark history of modernity but which also foresees the limitations of trauma as the rarified space which neo-liberal hegemony not only accommodates but positively demands as a response. Once again, the black body comes to signify a spectral site of

shame, only here not in the service of abolitionist fervor but of sublime affect, quarantined from the present, ‘experienced’ but rendered without continuity to contemporary racialised labour practices and contemporary racist violence.

Back in 2011, a message was read from the UN Secretary General at the launch of the memorial project that would become the ‘Ark of Return’. Ban Ki-moon’s message made a set of concrete historical connections that would not be clearly conveyed in the final monument itself. Ban Ki-moon stated that the memorial would acknowledge the ‘crimes and atrocities committed over the course of four centuries’, ‘remind the world of those slaves, abolitionists and unsung heroes who managed to rise up’ and ‘serve as a call to action against contemporary manifestations of slavery’. He noted the historical transformation of slavery into other forms of coerced labour – ‘serfdom, debt bondage and forced and bonded labour; trafficking in women and children, domestic slavery and forced prostitution, including of children; sexual slavery, forced marriage and the sale of wives; child labour and child servitude’ – that continue into the present.⁹ Ban’s acknowledgement of multiple forms of exploitation speak to a connected if complicated history which, despite his sweeping assortment of coercive practices, is relevant in the context of the dominant narratives of traumatic memorialization.

It has frequently been noted that slavery and the slave trade are now being fairly routinely publicly commemorated in Europe and the US. Yet, as Joel Quirk notes, what is striking about the somber acknowledgments from political elites is the ways in which they mourn, ‘regret’, or remember slaving’s past as tragedy while quickly shifting the focus from the claims of this history to the supposedly more pressing problems of the present moment.¹⁰ A case in point is Tony Blair’s infamous speech, on the Bicentenary

of the British Abolition of the Slave Trade in 2006, in which he resolutely refused to apologise for slavery, and focused instead on what he described, far more vacuously than Ban Ki-moon, as ‘the problems of Africa and the challenges facing the African and Caribbean diaspora today.’ Blair went on repeatedly to highlight the need to ‘acknowledge the unspeakable cruelty that persists in the form of modern day slavery’ as a way of moving on quickly from the past.¹¹ It was widely recognized at the time that Blair’s carefully scripted evasion of any apology was in response to the pressure of the reparations campaign. Any direct admittance of culpability in slaving by the British state risked enhancing the threat of a possible legal claim.

As Quirk notes, elite hand-wringing about contemporary human trafficking has come to serve not as a way of forging historical connections but for actively preventing them from being made. This evasion is in no small part due to the political pressure of the reparations campaign which places a particular purchase on history, and on the history of ‘race’. The very existence of the campaign challenges the progressive onward march of freedom from below by demanding the recognition and repair of centuries of exploitation, expropriation, and violence not just by building monuments or by demanding financial payback. It also demands, and is engaged in, active exploration of the continuities between Euro-American racism, modern liberal democracy and neocolonialism in relation to a legacy of imperialism and the slave trade. That wider project is not only addressing the kinds of damaged histories that slave descendants inherit and through which they continue to live. It also involves engaging with the issue in its full geopolitical global context. It includes, therefore, exposing the ways in which slavery and the slave trade contributed to the modern industrial complex. Activists are

not simply naming key culprits, they are also naming the structures of governance at corporate, national and global level.

To remember slavery by uncritically picking up the mantle of elite white abolitionism in the name of stamping out contemporary human trafficking thus functions as a way of avoiding direct confrontation with the legacies of slavery and empire since it would involve facing a history that challenges the very foundations of Euro-American supremacy.

Perhaps then it is unsurprising that Ban Ki-moon's speech which had the potential momentarily to activate politically a memory of the past – as one bequeathing legacies of injustice but also of struggle - for understanding the present was ultimately punctured by his closing remark. Acknowledging contemporary 'reality' as a product of the past, he concluded, 'obliges the international community to bring perpetrators to justice and to continue pursuing with vigour its efforts to uphold human rights and human dignity'. That was in 2011. The current EU response to the mass drownings of African and Middle Eastern migrants in the Mediterranean is perhaps a sufficient comment on this statement.

Repair, Rescue, Rage

Thinking the present conjunction of fury on the streets of Baltimore, the melancholy trauma enshrined in the UN monument, the reactivation of the reparations campaign by CARICOM, and the mass drownings of African and Middle Eastern refugees in the

Mediterranean magnifies the potency of history, and the ways in which the histories of slavery and colonialism continue to be mobilised.

As the number of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean rose sharply in the summer of 2015 the direct result of the purposeful reduction of maritime rescue resources, analogies began to be made with the transatlantic slave trade. The abolitionist iconography of Middle Passage horror seemed almost too obvious a referent in its ability to convey the barbarity that was unfolding on the margins of Europe. A frustrated Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, named the events directly as akin the transatlantic slave trade.¹² The unfolding disaster ‘pricked the conscience’ of EU leaders who had, up until it became untenable, been so intent on securing their borders that the argument around ‘humanitarian rescue’ had been transformed from the need to recognise human life and dignity to one about so-called ‘push and pull’ factors. ‘Migrants’ continued to drown as a military approach designed to quash an ugly symptom of global labour exploitation foundered amongst associated questions of how to bring the perpetrators of human trafficking to justice, and what exactly should be done with those who manage to be rescued. The rescued have been quickly incorporated into an invidious racialised discourse of “us” and “them” to emerge as a threatening and dehumanized ‘swarm’ surrounding Europe.¹³ That discourse remained intact even in the context of heartening if complex responses of the populations of Europe to the photograph of the drowned Syrian child Aylan Al-Kurdi. The concept of the ‘refugee’ as ‘human’, and thus worthy of sympathy, especially in relation to women and children, left undisturbed the concept of ‘migrant’ as the threatening male ‘other.’

What is happening in the Mediterranean is clearly not a contemporary equivalent to the transatlantic slave trade. The rhetoric shows that the analogy is politically and ideologically powerful nevertheless. As critics have noted, it initially raked up, however belatedly, a sense of ‘abolitionist’ outrage – freighted with redemptive historical precedent - to justify military aggression as the humanitarian ‘solution’ to a contemporary problem of Euro-America’s own making.¹⁴ While this idea of military aggression receded in the context of the sheer scale of events in the Mediterranean, it emerged again in September 2015, where *The Sun* Newspaper’s “Wham Bam, Thank You Cam” headline applauded British military intervention in Syria in the context of solving the Refugee crisis.¹⁵

Understandably, many have been horrified by the glib use of the Middle Passage in the service of either eliding any responsibility to provide sanctuary for these refugees or using the language of ‘trafficking’ to suggest a criminal rather than a geo-political source of the turmoil in the Middle East. Suffice to say, in this context, that any links we may draw between these events and the history of slavery are fully cognizant of the abuse of history being employed by the gatekeepers of fortress Europe. In the case of Europe’s leaders, drawing these connections misrepresents and distorts both history and the contemporary moment.

A reparative history, however, is not one that would shy away from making the connection between historic slave trading and contemporary human trafficking and human smuggling because of the potential for its ideological appropriation or indeed because focusing on one moment risks deflecting attention from the other. Both arguments risk throwing the baby out with the political bathwater by ignoring the wider

historical context of both moments: imperialism. It would note that what is being remembered and mobilized by political elites, and what is shaping the ground of the debate, is not even the history of slaving, or, if it is, it is that history as it is structured by the progressive triumphalism of white abolitionism. The stated intent of the European Powers 'to disrupt the business model of the smugglers' through military force whilst remaining complicit in the racialised labour practices and human rights disasters facing those fleeing to Europe, has very specific historical echoes.

Britain and the US abolished their transatlantic slave trades in 1807/8 in a context of imperial war, and long before serious consideration of ending slavery itself was in sight. The US immediately protected its slave plantation complex by using the moment to enclose the seas in the name of legitimizing a domestic slave trade along its Atlantic borders - Baltimore boomed. Britain launched itself on an international crusade to persuade other European nations to abolish their trades. The British Abolition Act included an under-resourced naval humanitarian mission setting out instructions for the arbitration and punishment of illegally operating slave traders, and also short-term guidelines for what to do with kidnapped Africans rescued from the illegal ships. In the context of the Napoleonic wars, the British state had been purchasing enslaved Africans to serve their military interests in the Caribbean.¹⁶ With the prospect of this source of labour ending, the Abolition Act stipulated that rescued Africans would either be pressed into the Army or Navy or involuntarily indentured – in Sierra Leone or the Caribbean – for a maximum of fourteen years. In the Caribbean, colonial officials protested the arrival of un-enslaved but nonetheless bound Africans in the midst of their slave economies, arguing that they would be a disruptive element. They were

disruptive insofar as they quickly learned that their rescue meant that they would be treated *as if* they were enslaved, and they resisted.

To note the terms of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the current context is not simply to make trite historical analogies or to wallow in historical irony. Nor is it to take up the 'new abolitionist' and imperialist narrative that deplors the symptoms but misses the cause. It is rather to note a particular moment in forging the continuum of coerced, and raced, labour relations that developed within and out of slavery. The ancient practice of indenture-ship, that bound the first colonial labourers in the Americas was again tested on the 'rescued' Africans. It came to stand for emancipation in the British Caribbean between 1833 and 1838, and then structured the terms under which further huge waves of racialised labour migration arrived in the Caribbean through the nineteenth century and beyond. As Peter Linebaugh observes, the Maryland Judge who reminded Benjamin Lundy that the domestic slave trade helped to clear Maryland of 'a great many rogues and vagabonds' had used an ancient terminology. It was a terminology that had designated the sixteenth century unemployed as superfluous vagrants at a time when capital was creating an industrial labour force and criminalizing those who resisted, either actively or passively. Today's African migrants are not analogous to sixteenth century English peasants or to the eighteenth and nineteenth century enslaved or indentured Africans. They are, however, conceived of as modern 'rogues and vagabonds'. With their commons and cultures expropriated by imperialist war, politically induced famine and multinational land-grabs, they are subsequently drowned. If not drowned, they are criminalized for attempting to sail for what they perceive as freedom.

Campaigners for reparations might not want to speak about ‘modern-day slavery’ because discussions about modern slavery have too often had the effect of glossing or diluting a recognition of the history and legacies of slavery. The silence might be expedient but perhaps this is to concede too readily to the terms on which they are forced to debate. The language of the reparatory is constituted within the discourse of human rights that has itself transformed the political terrain. As many have observed, the idea of reparation is a concept of justice that has purchase in a world where the idea of revolution as a way of overcoming the past no longer seems a possible way of thinking about the future. David Scott notes, it is perhaps this context that has ‘made the language of trauma – and the memory work that sustains it – so arresting for thinking about the persistence of harms resulting from the perpetration of historical wrongs’.¹⁷

Scott is right insofar as trauma is a contemporary structure of feeling, which functions as a cultural dominant within which the reparative organizes modes of remembrance in relation to inherited experience. It structures cultural memory around guilt, loss and pain by producing divisive and fragmented conditions that work to legitimize, privatise and contain that structure of feeling within a redemptive narrative of ‘working through’. Yet reparative history is about more than contemplating injury or apportioning blame. It is about agency, and it can be wedded to a form of memory energized by the emancipatory activism, solidarity and political struggles of the past. Any form of politics begins with the articulation of a particular grievance but it does not need to become enmired there.

The concept of the reparative – thought historically – enables the work of mourning to be connected to the politics of material redress by refusing to understand the history of ‘race’, imperialism and slavery from the vantage point of contemporary progress and reason. The point here is to excavate histories of resistance, solidarity and collectivity as vital for the now. The liberal narratives, which would monumentalise and domesticate histories of slavery and colonialism, struggle with acknowledging the presence of black radicalism, black rebellion, anti-colonial struggle and the alternative cultural memories that are precisely being registered on the streets of Baltimore and in the voices of the Black Lives Matter movement. Reparative histories is concerned with grievance as the starting point of politics, with no easy relation to a restorative project but with recognising that grievance, that rage, as the agent of history. It is concerned with making ‘race’ visible, and with critically engaging with the giddy promises of liberalism, not in terms of the claims that liberalism makes for itself but with the radical re-appropriation of those claims by countless subjects of racialised capitalism. This project is, of course, an acknowledgment of those grievances but it is, concomitantly, an acknowledgment of the complex solidarities that were created in the struggles against slavery and colonialism. It is thus the dialectical interconnections between the colonies, the ex-colonies and the metropole which complicate discrete ethnocentric understandings of the past that underpin the essays in this collection.

The essays in this volume emerged from a research symposium, ‘Reparative Histories: Radical Narratives of ‘Race’ and Resistance’, held at the University of Brighton in September 2014. The rich set of discussions which materialised at this event confirmed our conviction that the idea of ‘reparative history’ is a challenging and productive one. As far as we are aware, there is no extant body of work concerning the idea of

reparative history. There is, of course, a long tradition of radical historiography. Indeed, one of our key questions concerned the nature and extent of the relationship between the so-called ‘reparative’ and the ‘radical’. As suggested by this introduction, the aim is not to offer any particular abstract, schematic or discrete definition of what the term ‘reparative history’ might, or should, mean. Instead, all of the papers here engage with the way in which the concept of ‘the reparative’ is necessarily shaped by the political, cultural, historical and social contexts in which it is constituted and mobilized. We chose *Race and Class* for reasons which should be obvious but nevertheless need articulation here in terms of the important tradition of radical black historiography with which this journal is so strongly identified. The focus in many of the essays in this issue on the importance of black workers as instrumental to the forging of a *class* politics which transformed understandings of race, agency and solidarity in the Metropole is one that was forged in the pages of this journal.¹⁸

It is our hope that these essays begin to map some of the ways in which dominant conceptions of ‘reparation’ are conventionally understood in these overlapping and related contexts, and how these meanings might be illuminated, complicated or contested.

In particular, we see the articles as a means to open up a discussion about what it means to turn to history in the appeal for recognition and redress in the present. In their different ways, these articles speak to questions of why the appeal to ‘origins’ remains such a powerful tool of oppression and of resistance, and how traditions of political struggle are currently being rearticulated. They also confront the power and pull of redemptive historical narratives, structured by the universalism of liberal sentiment,

and reflect on the consequences of replacing those narratives with those founded in 'rage', resistance and redress. In different ways, and with diverse approaches, all of the articles engage formally and substantively with the questions of relating the past to the present in the context of 'race', narrative and representation. Historically, they range from the late eighteenth century to the present, and they each engage the idea of reparation via analyses of historical and cultural representations rooted in particular histories and cultures, and of their legacies in the contemporary moment.

Priyamvada Gopal presents a radical reframing of the politics of 'universalism'. She shows how its varied deployment by post-colonial scholars tends to obscure the complex interconnections that are the legacies of colonialism. Her call for a sustained engagement with the neglected metropolitan criticism of empire that developed into a more full-throated anti-colonialism shifts significantly dominant historical paradigms. It overturns the still prevalent emphasis on political and intellectual influence as radiating outwards from the metropole towards the periphery. Gopal's article addresses the dubious and persistent divide between imperial past and multicultural present as one that enables an ongoing historical amnesia that segregates a majority 'indigenous' history from that of immigrants and minority communities. She argues that the project of developing a more demanding relationship to history—the very core of the reparative—must go beyond the notional largesse of 'including' ethnic and cultural minorities in concept of the national. One way of redressing this divide is through examining the question of anti-colonialism, more specifically, the dialectics of anti-colonialism. Much attention—both within imperial historiography and postcolonial studies—has been paid to the ways in which colonial subjects took up British ideas and turned them against empire when making claims to freedom and sovereignty. The

possibility of reverse impact, however, has been either curiously neglected or is, at best, notionally invoked, even as careful readings of a substantial archive point clearly to the existence of such influence particularly in relation to the emergence of British anti-colonialism which is often read as a simple outcrop of liberalism itself. Gopal thus draws attention to the dialectics of anti-colonialism which disturb the tired motifs of 'centre' and 'periphery', and thus she contributes to the theoretical framework for the essays which make up this special issue.

David Featherstone's article is an investigation of the particular ways in which black working class subjects of empire shaped elements of anti-colonial and labour politics in Britain and beyond. He argues that exploring the relations between labour organizing and processes of decolonization can assert forms of black radical agency that have been marginalized and ignored. This has important implications for whose agency, presence and role is recognized within processes of decolonization. The article explores forms of activism forged by seafarer's organizers from the colonies in interwar Britain. The focus is on Harry O'Connell, a seafarer from what was then British Guiana, who was to become one of the most prominent organizers of Cardiff's multi-ethnic seafaring community in the 1920s and 1930s. He was influential in struggles against the forms of 'white labourism' adopted by the National Union of Seamen. A committed communist, O'Connell drew on the networks of the Comintern-affiliated International of Seamen's and Harbour Workers (ISH) and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) to contest such racist labour policies whilst simultaneously negotiating the racialized forms of internationalism constituted through international communist networks. The article argues that activists like O'Connell made a significant contribution to the decolonization of the British labour movement by contesting white

labourism, and linking labour organizing to anti-colonial politics. Moreover, the article makes this contribution through a 'reparative' approach to understanding both the histories and geographies of labour.

Class is also central to Cathy Bergin's article which is concerned with the symbolism of working class and nationalist revolution that inspired black radicals in the US in the early 20th Century. The theme of interconnectedness which shapes many the articles in this special issue is investigated here through a study of the African Blood Brotherhood magazine, the *Crusader*. The article frames its reading of this text in relation to the Tulsa 'riots' of 1921, arguing that in this particular historical moment we can access the radical vision of the magazine in the context of the racial terror faced by African Americans. The *Crusader* shaped its powerfully articulated vision of black liberation through its trumpeting of the Russian Revolution and the Irish anti-colonial struggle. The article argues that despite, or because of, the complexities of negotiating 'race', class and colonialism, this material gives us access to a historically specific attempt to create a 'race'/class politics attuned to the challenges of confronting US racism by widening the parameters of African American struggles. Furthermore, the diverse, radical and anti-colonial politics of the *Crusader* can only be understood by recognizing the internationalist vision of the magazine and its eclectic politics of liberation.

Brian Kelly's article traces racialised labour practices in the United States back to the moment of Reconstruction. He locates the contradictions of 'freedom' for emancipated slaves in the context of the market forces which subverted attempts to give substance to that 'freedom'. His article directly engages the redemptive emancipation narrative to

shed light on the contingency of black emancipation and democracy. At full tide, the protracted and tumultuous process of slave emancipation that rolled out across the plantation societies of the nineteenth-century Atlantic world raised, with unprecedented force, prospects for a new era in human liberation that would transcend national boundaries and transform far-flung continents. Yet, as Kelly argues, across most of these societies, the great hopes of newly freed men and women were quickly and decisively dashed, and in many places the formerly enslaved slipped back into lives that were marked by enduring poverty, racial subordination, and harsh brutality. Focusing on grassroots black political mobilisation in the post-emancipation United States but situating their story in a wider Atlantic context, Kelly explores the ways in which the slaves' attempts to remake their world were frustrated and circumscribed under the 'free labour' regime that took shape after the Civil War. He argues that for scholars of 'race', and for historians anxious to contribute to popularizing 'reparative histories', the trajectory of US slave emancipation raises important questions about agency and constraint, about the relationship between struggles over 'race' and social relations more generally, and about the aspiration for self-determination and the durability of deeply entrenched structures of power.

Anita Rupprecht's article contributes to the task of further specifying the multiple legacies of slaving in the contemporary moment. It turns to what might seem like an unpromising archive – that of financial insurance. Thanks to the research of reparations activists, many large multinational insurance corporations have been forced to disclose their early profiteering from underwriting the transatlantic slave trade. The ways in which the insurance industry and its legal structures developed and adapted to the requirements of commodifying life for the purposes of forced migration, however, have

been little addressed. On the one hand, the analysis shows how this history illuminates further the conceptual lineaments and practices that were involved in the slave trade's processes of dehumanisation. On the other, it argues that if the marine insurance archive is read against its unpromising grain, and pitted against its antithesis, the archive of the revolutionary Black Atlantic, it also yields an irrepressible narrative of human agency and resistance.

All of these articles challenge dominant historical narratives in different ways.

'Reparative histories' is an organising concept for these articles. We are not giving a definitive gloss to the term, nor are we suggesting that its meaning is so fluid as to evade concrete articulations of how we understand the process of history-making as a deeply political project. The politics of the present moment demand a rigorous investigation of how certain stories of the past are mobilised, and how certain histories are shaped in the light of contemporary concerns. Whilst historiography has been cognisant of this process for some time, the current wider preoccupation with 'redress' explicitly asks historical questions which underline and emphasise this dialectical process. Moreover, this approach opens up a space for a radical rethinking of the paradigms that have hitherto organised our understandings of 'race', class, agency and colonialism.

¹ David Simon, 'Middle Ground', *The Wire*, Episode 11, Season 3, 2004. The scene can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OLUGer1KwI>.

² <http://davidsimon.com/baltimore/>

³ <http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/05/01/the-streets-of-baltimore/>

⁴ Woolfolk was the first professional slave trader to make extensive use of the coastal trade routes to transport slaves to Natchez and New Orleans. By the mid 1820s, his family

dominated the trade out of Maryland. Between 1819 and 1832, he shipped 2,228 captives south. Robert H Gudmenstad, *The Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade*, (Baton: Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), p. 29. See also Jack Lawrence Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860*, (Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 33-68.

⁵ *Niles Weekly Register*, May 19th, 1826, p. 205.

⁶ *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, January 2nd, 1827, p. 109-110.

⁷ The mutiny was widely reported. See for example, *Essex Register*, Salem, Massachusetts, May 22nd, 1826, p. 3, *City Gazette and Commercial*, Charleston, South Carolina, May 26th 1826, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Virginia, May 22nd 1826.

⁸For information about the ‘Ark of Return’ project see <http://www.un.org/en/events/slaveryremembranceday/memorial.shtml>

⁹ The UN Secretary General’s 2011 speech can viewed at <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=5070>.

¹⁰ Joel Quirk, ‘Reparations are too confronting: lets talk about ‘modern day slavery instead’, at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/joel-quirk/reparations-are-too-confronting-let-s-talk-about-'modern-day-slavery'-instea> (May 7th, 2015).

¹¹ Tony Blair, ‘The Shame of Slavery’, *New Nation*, November 27th, 2006.

¹² <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/prime-minister-matteo-renzi-defends-italys-response-migrants-drowning-mediterranean-1497254>

¹³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/calais-crisis-live-david-cameron-says-swarm-of-illegal-migrants-will-not-be-offered-safe-haven-10426083.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/17/mediterranean-migrants-slaves-history-military-action-eu-leaders-libya>

¹⁵ <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/6626787/PM-ordered-RAF-drone-that-killed-Brit-jihadis-in-Syria.html>

¹⁶ Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815*, (Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ David Scott, ‘Preface: Debt, Redress’, *Small Axe*, 18, 1 (March 2014), p. x.

¹⁸ The examples here are too numerous to detail, but instrumental to our race/class politics have been Ambalavaner Sivanandan "From resistance to rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain", *Race & Class* (23: 2/3 1981/ 1982); Manning Marable, “Rethinking Black Liberation: Towards A New Protest Paradigm *Race & Class* (38: 4 1997). See also Jenny Bourne’s timely account of the politics of race and belonging in the UK and the role of Institute of Race Relations at the frontline.of anti-racist education *Race & Class* (57:1 2015)