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# Revisiting Approaches to British Imperialism

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## ABSTRACT

The historiography of British imperialism has been dominated by two approaches: the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism. The Official Mind emphasises decisions made by key policymakers, focusing on decisions driven by crises in the periphery of the Empire that sped expansion in the nineteenth century. These officials were not dominated by sectional interests but guided by their own traditions in pursuit of the national interest. In contrast to the Official Mind, Gentlemanly Capitalism argues that British imperialism was not driven by peripheral forces but instead by the sectional interests of a political alliance between the aristocracy and the City of London at the heart of the British state. While the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism have been critiqued on historical terms, their theoretical problems have been neglected. This paper identifies key conceptual issues with both approaches, with a common problem being an absence of an account of the social origins of imperialism. Having outlined critiques of these theories, an alternative approach is offered that seeks to embed British imperialism in an understanding of its historically developed social relations.

## KEYWORDS

Gentlemanly capitalism;  
official mind; Britain;  
imperialism; state theory

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In 1978, E P Thompson critically savaged the work of fellow Marxist Louis Althusser, who had argued that historical research was a bourgeois pursuit, devoid of scientific and political value.<sup>2</sup> Thompson excoriated Althusser's work, describing it as 'the child of economic determinism ravished by theoreticist idealism'.<sup>3</sup> For Thompson, absent in Althusser's understanding of history and Marxism was any agency or contingency: the open character of class struggle had vanished and was replaced by theoretical determination.<sup>4</sup> Thompson instead emphasised the crucial importance of theory and history to each other. Neither was truly productive without the other.<sup>5</sup>

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The goal of this article is to renew the 'arduous confrontations' between theory and history by revisiting the main approaches to British imperialism.<sup>6</sup> The most common in British Imperial History remains what John Darwin refers to as 'chaotic pluralism', which rejects grand narratives of empire and treats the British Empire as an untidy assemblage of elements with no coherent logic.<sup>7</sup> This study focuses on two alternative approaches: the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism, which both retain a significance for British imperial history and are still widely used and debated within the discipline.<sup>8</sup> Criticisms of both approaches have tended to be historical rather than theoretical. Thus, the default position in rejecting these approaches is chaotic pluralism.

The paper argues that British Imperial History can benefit from further engagement with more recent Marxist state theory, which has been neglected by the discipline. Both the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism explicitly frame their arguments as rejections of early-twentieth century Marxism.<sup>9</sup> The re-evaluation offered here contends that British Imperial History lacks an appreciation of the historically constituted social relations that led to British imperialism. Moreover, the historical critiques levelled at these approaches are a consequence of fundamental conceptual problems deriving from this misapprehension of social relations.

The first section provides a context for the study of British imperial history, characterising the discipline as fragmented, dominated by a view of the chaotic pluralism of British imperialism. This section argues that recent British Imperial History has largely abandoned any attempt to understand the social origins of imperialism.

The second section considers the Official Mind. This approach, framed around the riddle of the partition of Africa, argued British imperialism derived from the mindset of key local officials responding to crisis in the imperial periphery and their desire to defend the empire from rival powers through further expansion. This section raises two theoretical issues with the Official Mind. First, the approach is dominated by an agential conception of decision-making. Second, but related to the first, the approach distinguishes between politics and economics, subordinating the latter to the former.

The third section outlines Gentlemanly Capitalism, which contends that British Imperialism was driven by the interests and culture of a financial elite, which had merged with the pre-capitalist landowning aristocracy. This section critiques two aspects of the approach. First, it provides no account of why elites form at all, only emphasising the importance of culture to explain continuities between elites. Second, there is no theorisation of the state within Gentlemanly Capitalism and therefore the state is treated simply as an instrument of a particularly powerful elite.

The final two sections draw on recent developments within Marxist state theory to develop an alternative model of British imperialism. These sections argue that the state must be understood in terms of capitalist social relations, which are fundamentally contradictory and crisis-prone. The state, in this

view, is a manifestation of an unstable class society that attempts to mitigate, delay or transform crisis using any means at its disposal. One of these means is imperialism. As such, imperialism can be understood as a strategy available to states to reproduce capitalist society from one day to the next. An alternative account of the origins of British capitalism and imperialism is then sketched out.

### The Chaos of British Imperial History

Gallagher and Robinson claimed imperial historians were ‘at the mercy’ of their own theories of imperialism, on which depended their ‘final interpretation’.<sup>10</sup> Tomlinson went further to say that ‘the most difficult problem facing imperial historians ... is to decide what they mean by empire’.<sup>11</sup> British Imperial History, however, appears to be largely absent theories of empire. The Whiggish view of the British Empire has fallen by the wayside but grand narratives continue to be habitually criticised within the discipline. Fieldhouse observed the fragmentation of a ‘Humpty-Dumpty’ discipline and argued that the ‘compleat [*sic*] imperial historian’, can no longer exist.<sup>12</sup> Porter, addressing Gentlemanly Capitalism, opposed the idea that ‘the economics of the colonizing power’s capitalism offer the key to the politics of empire’.<sup>13</sup> Darwin argued that the narrative of British imperial history resists neat typologies.<sup>14</sup> Even Marxist authors condemned the use of conceptual ‘great arches’ that obscured historical detail, rejecting ‘that a single conceptual thread can hold together what is tantamount to a ‘total’ history of Britain’.<sup>15</sup>

Approaches like the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism are seen as providing near-monocausal explanations of British imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>16</sup> Rejection of a prime force behind British imperialism is not entirely divorced from Seeley’s well-worn phrase on the expansion of England. However, British Imperial History now tends not to argue that the empire was accumulated by absence of mind but by multiple – and often contradictory – *sui generis* causes. This trend has only been accentuated in recent years with the development of New Imperial Histories and Global History.<sup>17</sup>

For Darwin, British imperial expansion, particularly in the Victorian era, was caused by a ‘chaotic pluralism’ of divergent interests.<sup>18</sup> British imperialism had

‘no logic at all. It looked like the booty of an obsessive collector whose passions had come with a rush and then gone with the wind, to be replaced in their turn by still more transient interests. The result was a pile of possessions whose purpose or meaning was long since forgotten, half-opened packets of quickly waning appeal, and new acquisitions made on the spur of the moment.’<sup>19</sup>

The emphasis here is on the ‘hard to measure and dangerously volatile’ influences on policy-making and its ‘habitual schizophrenia’.<sup>20</sup> Darwin contends that the British Empire was actually a ‘world-system’, thus incorporating elements of formal and informal imperialism, which grand narratives struggle

to comprehend.<sup>21</sup> As such, while it was ultimately ramshackle and hotchpotch, it remained intrinsically connected, though these connections were constantly changing.<sup>22</sup>

The approach of chaotic pluralism is empirical and inductive, focusing on a near-atomised historical record of British imperialism.<sup>23</sup> Such an approach tends towards discontinuity and incoherence. Darwin does point to enduring conceptions of national interest that crossed political and social lines.<sup>24</sup> This point is only tantalising, though, as these ideas could never be translated into broad principles, let alone policies.<sup>25</sup> The consequence of this view is a disordered discipline riven by and emphasising caesuras, periodisation, and geographic difference. To illustrate this point, one might look to the periodisation of the first, second or third British Empires<sup>26</sup>, or the second colonial occupation.<sup>27</sup> One could also look to the divisions within the Empire across its history: the declining value of the Caribbean colonies, the enduring oddity of India within the Empire, the riddle of expansion in Africa, and the difference between formal and informal empire.

As Cain and Hopkins point out, while discord might accord with the appearance of history, chaotic pluralism implicitly holds an ideological view of history that 'denies that there is a whole to be grasped'.<sup>28</sup> In other words, chaotic pluralism is vulnerable to the critique that it does indeed have a grand theory of the British Empire that the empire *as a whole* defies explanation. Chaotic pluralism therefore fails to consider why imperialism occurred at all. British imperialism, after all, is a historically particular phenomenon that has not existed across all time and space. Its existence cannot simply be taken for granted and must be understood in terms of the historical conditions that have continued to reproduce it for hundreds of years. As such, there is a puzzle at the heart of British Imperial History that is simply not addressed by chaotic pluralism.

The next two sections offer a critique of the two main approaches in British imperial history that have attempted to explain British imperial expansion in relation to the state.

## The Official Mind

*Africa and the Victorians* caused 'a revolution' in the historiography of the British Empire, a resurgence in British Imperial History, and a rejection of older theories of imperialism.<sup>29</sup> Along with Fieldhouse and Harlow, Gallagher and Robinson drove the economic turn of the 1950s, emphasising the role of commerce and industry in understanding imperialism.<sup>30</sup> By Robinson's account, the introduction of 'informal empire' and the 'iceberg' metaphor to the study of British imperialism brought about a 'seismic change' in the discipline.<sup>31</sup>

The Official Mind emerged as an explanation for African expansion at the end of the nineteenth century. Even by the 1880s, Africa was nearly worthless

to British officials, with 'all the powerful processes of social expansion ... passing that continent by'.<sup>32</sup> However, only twenty years later, nine-tenths of Africa had been occupied by European powers, with the British claiming a vast portion of the continent. The Official Mind acts as an aggregation of the worldviews of British state managers to understand how they made decisions. In this view, the state is autonomous from sectional interests, with key decision-makers geographically distributed but institutionally coordinated and culturally unified.<sup>33</sup>

The background to this riddle is the aversion to so-called formal empire by British officials. India, as a 'formal' part of the empire, stands as 'unnatural, almost improper' in understanding the extent of British influence. The formal empire was only the visible tip of the imperial iceberg, with the vast 'informal empire of trade and influence' below the waterline.<sup>34</sup> The riddle for Gallagher and Robinson was not why British imperialism expanded at the end of the nineteenth century. For them, the nineteenth century was characterised by the intensification of informal, or free trade, imperialism. As such, British officials were already committed to imperial expansion throughout the century. The riddle became why the official mind suddenly eschewed a preference for informal empire to construct a vast formal empire of direct rule on a continent in which they had no interest.<sup>35</sup>

It was the failure of radical Liberal and Marxist explanations for imperialism that the Official Mind explicitly sought to remedy.<sup>36</sup> These theories argued that financial interests impelled states to undertake violent imperial expansion in order to expand commerce, gain access to new markets and raw materials.<sup>37</sup> However, trade, investment and colonisation had 'continued to leave tropical Africa practically untouched; and yet it was tropical Africa that was now bundled into empire'.<sup>38</sup> This persisted even beyond the nineteenth century with officials viewing British African possessions as a liability and waste of resources.<sup>39</sup>

The Official Mind offered an answer to this riddle by placing its emphasis on the motives of decision-makers rather than on the objective causes of market forces.<sup>40</sup> It was these officials alone who made the decision to switch from informal to formal empire.<sup>41</sup>

'It was their high calling to mediate between jarring and selfish interests and to keep the state from being used as the tool of any of them ... Those who governed still thought of themselves as arbiters above the tumult, slightly contemptuous of the short-sighted business man, the impractical philanthropist and the ignorant populace alike.'<sup>42</sup>

The state here was a neutral arbiter of the national interest, not an instrument of a particular class or set of interests.<sup>43</sup> The composition of this ruling class was increasingly expert and decreasingly aristocratic. Policy remained the preserve

of a small, comingling elite, 'made at house parties, not by the man in the street or the man in the Stock Exchange'.<sup>44</sup>

However, absent is an account of the social origins of imperialism beyond the subjective worldview of a small elite. Gallagher and Robinson offer the definition that imperialism is a 'sufficient political function of the process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy'.<sup>45</sup> The Official Mind highlighted that taking the British Empire as a totality allows us to understand that economic forces exert pressure on imperial policy-makers that can lead to indirect and unexpected results.<sup>46</sup> However, the social origins of the impulse to empire are not incorporated into their account of the state, the existence of which is not explained either. There is no explanation for imperialism beyond the attitudes and judgements of key officials. As such, the riddle of imperialism remains and there is no explanation for why a society would conduct imperialism in the first place.

The Official Mind's motives for expansion in Africa are understood through the connections within the British Empire during this era. Conquests in Africa in the late-nineteenth century 'were little more than by-products of an enforced search for better security in the Mediterranean and the East'.<sup>47</sup> These decisions were made according to rules inherited from earlier officials. Foremost in their minds was protecting India:

'What decided when and where they would go forward was their traditional conception of world strategy. Its principles had been distilled from a century and more of accumulated experience ... Much of this experience confirmed one precept: that Britain's strength depended upon the possession of India and preponderance in the East, almost as much as it did upon the British Isles. Therefore, her position in the world hung above all upon safe communications between the two. This was a supreme interest of Victorian policy.'<sup>48</sup>

The trend of post-1880 expansion was guided by the importance officials placed on India and the threat posed to Britain's connection to India. In this view, British expansion after 1880 derived from a sense of British weakness, seeking to defend the empire and to avoid relative decline. The Official Mind therefore contains both Eurocentric 'strategic' and Africa-centric 'local crisis' explanations for the partition.<sup>49</sup> While describing it as 'attractive and powerful', Sanderson argues that it fails to properly explain all the annexations of the partition of Africa, including in West or Tropical Africa.<sup>50</sup> However, Sanderson fails to recognise the weight placed by Gallagher and Robinson on the general explanatory power of the Official Mind for British imperialism despite its focus on the riddle of African partition.<sup>51</sup>

Crucial to understanding the Official Mind, then, is that it is concerned only with the subjective views of officials in their decision-making. It does not seek to explain the origins of imperialism socially. These views are inherited institutionally, which the Official Mind does not explain their origins or process of



transmission. Continuity dominates in the mindset and practice of officials throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> Officials who direct the state determine the national interest and act to maximise it, ignoring sectional interests and treating formal and informal empire almost interchangeably.<sup>53</sup> However, there is no explanation of how the national interest is determined or even of what it might be constituted. The Official Mind emphasises that officials are not determining an objective national interest but rather distilling the memory and traditions of past generations in making that determination. Nevertheless, the problem is merely shifted back temporally: what explains this inherited wisdom? This approach is focused on the nineteenth century and the era of Victorian imperialism but the true origins of the official mind predate this period by centuries. In effect, the proverbial older boy told them to do it.

### **Gentlemanly Capitalism**

Gentlemanly Capitalism reimagined the origins of British imperialism and the distribution of power in British society. It provided an account of the development of British capitalism, placing the transition from an aristocratic elite to a financial elite in the mid-nineteenth century at the core of its analysis. This transition was mediated by so-called gentlemanly cultural mores, unifying aristocratic and financial elites.<sup>54</sup> This elite, particularly its social background, was the driving force behind British imperialism. The governing elite was, however, a sectional interest, divorced from Britain's industrial elite who were geographically provincial and politically peripheral.<sup>55</sup>

The advent of Gentlemanly Capitalism was seen, by some, as the demise of the Official Mind.<sup>56</sup> Though, while Cain and Hopkins agreed that an elite was the driving force behind British imperialism, their goal was to understand imperialism in terms of the social background of key decision-makers. In doing so, they replicated Hobson's view of imperialism that 'the final determination rests with the financial power', though without Hobson's anti-Semitism.<sup>57</sup> The similarities between the Gentlemanly Capitalism thesis and Hobson's argument have been remarked upon before. The authors themselves have highlighted the influence Hobson's approach had on their own.<sup>58</sup> Kennedy argues that Cain and Hopkins have merely regurgitated Hobson's theory 'with a pinch' of Schumpeter, with Veblen as another crucial influence.<sup>59</sup>

Numerous historical critiques of Gentlemanly Capitalism have highlighted the problem of inter-elite collusion<sup>60</sup>, the London-centrism of the approach,<sup>61</sup> and the problematic application of the approach.<sup>62</sup> This section raises two theoretical critiques. First, Gentlemanly Capitalism does not provide an account of the formation of the gentlemanly elite. It asserts that elites exist and identifies how they persist. Absent is an understanding of the social transformations that led to an elite becoming ascendant. Instead, Gentlemanly



Capitalism invokes pre-capitalist cultural factors to explain imperialism and continuity between elites. Second, the state is treated as a mere instrument of a particular fraction of wealthy individuals. The state has no autonomy: there is no distinction between the state and financial elites.<sup>63</sup> The state is merely a tool of the ruling class and therefore is not characterised as deriving from society more generally, or having intrinsic characteristics as a consequence.

For Gentlemanly Capitalism, 1815 began a period of transition initiated by the state to reintroduce vigour to the British economy and reorganise society to avoid unrest.<sup>64</sup> This transition was irreversible by 1850, which marked the reformulation of the ruling class. Landed interests, or 'the true aristocracy of birth', were penetrated by financial interests, 'the pseudo-aristocracy of wealth'.<sup>65</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the former was the junior partner, and the latter was dominant.<sup>66</sup> This elite adopted a gentlemanly character, deriving from the values and ideals of the established landed interests.

The origins of this elite and its significance for British imperialism derive from the historical development of British capitalism:

'Aristocratic power was in clear decline but that power and prestige devolved more upon a new gentlemanly class arising from the service sector than it did upon the industrial bourgeoisie. The landed aristocracy could mitigate their economic difficulties after 1870 only by reaching an accommodation with other forms of wealth, but the links they made were largely with non-industrial rather than industrial sources.'<sup>67</sup>

Gentlemanly Capitalism, then, is not concerned with the transformation caused by the much earlier advent of capitalist society. It begins *in media res* and the origin of the aristocratic elite is never explained. Instead, by the end of the seventeenth century the aristocratic elite 'had ceased to be a feudal aristocracy and were ready to embrace a market philosophy'.<sup>68</sup> Apart from the historical fact that the impersonal power of the market was already applying pressure to aristocrats and peasants over a century before the 1600s, there is no account provided of why the landed elite was suddenly willing to adopt a market 'philosophy'.<sup>69</sup> Ingham argues that Gentlemanly Capitalism fails to explain the significance of capitalist institutions or order and instead invokes 'gentlemanliness' to explain policy decisions.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Porter declares the approach 'a form of labelling than of analysis'.<sup>71</sup> The behaviour of the elite was conditioned by assumptions embedded in the *traditions* of the elite rather than any structural constraints imposed by capitalism. In other words, the global economy exists only as a cultural aspect of the elite's mindset.

Despite the claims of a 'non-ideological' definition of capitalism, Cain and Hopkins replicate a Liberal understanding of capitalism.<sup>72</sup> This view of capitalism provides no account of a fundamental change in the social order but contends that aristocrats rationally chose the course of optimal utility. The point here is not to critique the weakness of how 'capitalism' is used but to show that the historical origins of the elite and the emergence of capitalism are left

unexplained.<sup>73</sup> Rather than placing any meaningful importance on capitalism, the explanation for the coherence of the ruling class rests on its unique and unifying gentlemanly culture. As both Dilley and Ingham note, Gentlemanly Capitalism is not interested in capitalism but gentlemen.<sup>74</sup>

Gentlemanly Capitalism offers a sociological explanation for British imperialism rather than a social explanation. State managers shared a common background with landed and financial wealth, which formed the basis of their collective worldview and was sustained by elite intra-marriage, as well as common pastimes and leisure pursuits.<sup>75</sup> As per Fieldhouse, 'clubland shared common values'.<sup>76</sup> The aristocratic elite was pre-capitalist, holding distinct cultural mores and beliefs.<sup>77</sup> Schumpeter's influence is important to the approach here, by Cain's admission, through its stress on the significance of pre-capitalist social formations driving imperialism, albeit in different ways.<sup>78</sup> These mores were the basis for imperial expansion.

'The imperial mission was the export version of the gentlemanly order ... The empire was a superb arena for gentlemanly endeavour ... They took to paternalism as squires to the manner [*sic*] born, and they tried to recreate abroad the hierarchy which they were familiar with at home.'<sup>79</sup>

To join this elite, wealth was required but 'the acquisitive process' was vulgar.<sup>80</sup> Prestige was the true currency of the gentlemanly capitalist class.<sup>81</sup> The industrial elite was excluded from the inner core as they were too busy working in factories to permit the 'freedom necessary to gentlemanly status'.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, a banker's 'chief asset was not his immediate reserve of capital but his prestige'.<sup>83</sup> The maintenance of the power of this elite derived not from a material basis but rather from the transference of cultural values through social institutions and across generations. This means of power transmission is also the basis through which the elite could shape state policy for its own ends.

'Once a cosmopolitan monetary and financial policy had become established, the City could rely on the support of the Treasury and the Bank of England, whose own prestige and influence depended on their ability to control public expenditure and maintain the gold standard. This policy would not have been accepted so unquestioningly had the governing institutions and the City not shared the same gentlemanly culture.'<sup>84</sup>

This view is problematic when considering moments when the state acted against the interests of the elite. For example, with the repeal of the Corn Laws, British agriculture was left unprotected from global competition, severely diminishing the wealth and power of the gentlemanly elite within whose ranks remained the wealthy landowners who benefited so greatly from this protection.<sup>85</sup> Cain and Hopkins make reference to the growing population of Britain at this time to say that the state could not help but move towards liberalisation to sustain growth and avoid crisis.<sup>86</sup> However, if Gentlemanly

Capitalism is to have any explanatory power at all, we would see the state act against the national interest for the sectional interest of the elite.<sup>87</sup> Dilley identifies this as the problem of the 'smoking gun': there is no clear link between the sectional interests of the gentlemanly elite and the decisions taken by state managers.<sup>88</sup>

For Cain and Hopkins, the elite and the state act with coherence such that 'the barriers between business and government were no more than mobile Chinese walls'.<sup>89</sup> However, this is assumed rather than proven, which has caused problems for the approach historically.<sup>90</sup> For example, Phimister notes that Gentlemanly Capitalism fails to account for the partition of Africa where City interests simply did not exist.<sup>91</sup> White notes, in the case of post-war Malaya, the confusion within and between business and state interests that precludes a view of these interests as homogeneous.<sup>92</sup> Daunton claims that there was '*no [sic] cohesion*' to be found even within City interests, which is also argued by Dilley and Fieldhouse.<sup>93</sup> White, Zhang and Ingham also contend Gentlemanly Capitalism fails to explain cases where 'ungentlemanly' capitalists were crucial to the expansion and development of the British Empire.<sup>94</sup>

Cain and Hopkins argue that the elite were not 'a small, covert group who hijacked economic policy and made it serve their ends. On the contrary, they were acknowledged by contemporaries to be leading participants in the economy as well as ornaments of society, and their political prominence was both open and, in general, accepted.'<sup>95</sup> This defence does not avoid the charge of instrumentalism.<sup>96</sup> Just because the dominance of the state by sectional interests is well known does not mean that the state is not an instrument of that class fraction. Indeed, by admitting that other fractions exist, Gentlemanly Capitalism implicitly acknowledges that the state acts as an apparatus for whichever fraction is politically ascendant. The state, implicitly for Cain and Hopkins, is an inert vessel without an inherent social logic that can be picked up by an elite like an instrument. Crucially, this account also fails to explain why the state presents itself as representing an impartial national interest rather than the partisan interests of an elite.<sup>97</sup>

In response to a criticism by Daunton that Gentlemanly Capitalism lacks a robust account of the state, Cain and Hopkins declare, 'To the extent that we were unable to present a full account of power and authority in British society during the last three centuries, the criticism carries weight. Had an appropriate conception of the state been to hand, we would have grasped it with gratitude and relief.'<sup>98</sup> Quite what an 'appropriate' conception of the state looks like is hard to comprehend from their prose. There is little attempt made by Cain and Hopkins to engage with the literature on state theory to further substantiate the claims of Gentlemanly Capitalism. Had they done so, they would have discovered a literature rich with varied perspectives on the origin, form and activities of the state. Despite this admission,

Gentlemanly Capitalism is remarkably consistent across hundreds of years of history in its understanding of the state: only the elite changes and, even then, not much.

### **Imperialism, Class Struggle and Social Form**

The prior sections argued that extant approaches to British imperialism offer only partial accounts and fail to ask the most fundamental question: why does imperialism occur at all? This section advances an alternative approach to the state and imperialism, using more recent Marxist scholarship to develop an account that relies on the concept of social form. Here, social form refers to a way of conceiving fundamental social organisation manifest as social phenomena. The goal here is not to explain the entirety of the British Empire. Rather, it is to explain how an account of social form can be consonant with the contingencies of British imperialism, and to offer an explanation for imperialism that treats society as an organic whole.<sup>99</sup> This approach relies on scholarship that makes a return to Marx's view of capitalist social relations, bypassing earlier theorists of imperialism who did not have access to much of Marx's writing. This approach has been applied mainly in the discipline of British Politics, using historical methods.<sup>100</sup>

Accounting for the significance of social form allows us to ask why social phenomena, such as the state and imperialism exist at all.<sup>101</sup> It allows us to consider what impact the organisation of society has on the policy-making process. Where historians have identified the limitations of the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism, these derive from theoretical problems that struggle to explain how the development of capitalism, the policy-making process, and imperialism are conditioned by the organisation of society itself.

Central to Marxism is class struggle.<sup>102</sup> Kaye contends that this is the key contribution of British Marxist historians who sought to centre class struggle in their work, emphasising class as a relationship between people under constantly shifting historical circumstances.<sup>103</sup> Class struggle is not simply another factor to be considered along with the state, nor should it imply a sociological understanding of class that describes 'individuals sharing common experiences or life-chances or consumption patterns'.<sup>104</sup> Rather class struggle derives from a society that 'rests on the shifting sands of the contradictory labour/capital relationship'.<sup>105</sup> The struggle between capital and labour is a continuous feature of global society but is managed nationally by the state. However, struggle produces crisis, which manifests at a national level in a variety of forms, from 'balance of payments difficulties, fiscal crisis, low levels of productivity, political overload etc'.<sup>106</sup> Focusing on class struggle provides an opportunity to link the emphasis on contingency cherished by chaotic pluralism with a broader theory of imperialism based in an understanding of social form. With class struggle as the central abstraction, diverse manifestations and

causes of British imperialism can be traced back to the exploitative and crisis-prone nature of capitalist society.

As noted earlier, British Imperial History has neglected more recent Marxist approaches to the state and imperialism.<sup>107</sup> Even edited collections reviewing the scholarly impact of the *Official Mind* and *Gentlemanly Capitalism* largely ignore Marxist accounts.<sup>108</sup> Both approaches have addressed the problems faced by turn-of-the-century Marxists, who failed to link the partition of Africa and the 'empirical realities' of imperialism in the late-nineteenth century to their accounts of capitalist society.<sup>109</sup> There is substance to this criticism, especially by Gallagher and Robinson.<sup>110</sup>

Other criticisms, however, do not bear weight. Cain and Hopkins briefly consider Marxism but, they argue, this approach 'foundered on the insuperable difficulty of showing that the bourgeoisie (which in most readings meant the industrial middle class) had ever taken firm hold of the levers of power'.<sup>111</sup> This is a problematic account of the Marxist approaches Cain and Hopkins do choose to engage with as it rests on a strawman of these views.<sup>112</sup> For Marxism, the bourgeoisie does not refer to an 'industrial middle class' but rather the owners of the means of production, which is a far more expansive category. Moreover, the Marxists to which Cain and Hopkins refer claim that a financial fraction of capital, or monopoly group dominated by finance, has seized control of the state apparatus.<sup>113</sup> The problem of instrumentalism affects these early Marxist theories of imperialism as much as *Gentlemanly Capitalism*, as well as even more recent Marxist approaches.<sup>114</sup> These approaches seek to understand the behaviour of the state in terms of elites, rather than understanding political conflict in terms of the social relations that produce it.<sup>115</sup>

An ongoing scholarly debate, featuring both Marxist and non-Marxist accounts, preceding and contemporaneous with the publication of *Gentlemanly Capitalism* focused on the question of whether industrial or financial capital was politically ascendant over the British state, as well as what counted as financial or commercial capital.<sup>116</sup> These views, however, treat production and finance as antagonistic aspects of capitalist society.<sup>117</sup> One source of this problem derives from thinking in national terms. As Looker notes, British finance had established early on a 'vital coordinating role within an international circuit of production'.<sup>118</sup> The profits earned by British finance were not divorced from or parasitic on the realm of production but instead 'they became detached from any direct dependency on the performance of a specifically British industrial base'.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, it does not matter historically that a particular fraction or elite might have greater access to the levers of power than another. It is instead the view that these fractions are separate and incompatible forms of capital that is problematic.<sup>120</sup> As per Simon Clarke:

'The conflict between finance and industry is not so much a conflict between fractional interests as an expression of the contradiction inherent in the capitalist mode of production between the tendency for capital to develop the forces of production without limit, and the need to confine production within the limits of capital.'<sup>121</sup>

To present financial capital as distinct and separate from productive capital is to fetishise it, and therefore obscure social relations.<sup>122</sup> These individual fractions, then, all form only a partial aspect of the whole process of valorisation.<sup>123</sup> The state is the only institution through which the interests of capital-in-general can be realised. While individual policies or strategies may *appear* to favour one fraction of capital over another, this is 'an unintended consequence of policy and there is no necessary relation to their political representation'.<sup>124</sup> The satisfaction of particular interests is premised on the identification of the general interest.<sup>125</sup> This is not to suggest that the general interest is simply the aggregation of individual interests. In fact, the interests of capital-in-general confront individual capitals as an obstacle in the form of market competition. The state facilitates the imposition of market discipline on all classes through the sustenance of property relations and the power of money.<sup>126</sup> If we are to understand British imperialism then the state must be placed in this social context.

Ingham, for example, critiques non-instrumentalist Marxist approaches to explain the return to Gold in 1925.<sup>127</sup> This question has since been addressed by placing the importance of class struggle at the heart of the analysis. Kettell argues that a crucial element of the return to Gold was to depoliticise economic policymaking and conditions while imposing deflationary pressure on both capital and labour.<sup>128</sup> The return to Gold, in this view, was a means of increasing governing autonomy from both the demands of capital and labour while trying to resolve long-term problems of the British economy. Ultimately, this was unsuccessful as capital and labour resisted market pressures to improve productivity and the state could no longer resist the growing political pressure to abandon the Gold Standard.<sup>129</sup>

Another example of this approach can be found in the work of Copley, who focuses on the financialisation and liberalisation of the British economy from the late-1970s onwards. He argues, drawing on extensive archival research, that this process was not driven by ideological or sectional interests but was the result of short-term decisions made by British state managers to solve the profitability crisis facing the global economy by improving access to credit for British business.<sup>130</sup> This crisis, and the political decisions arising from it, can only make sense when placed in the context of the contradictory nature of capitalist society more broadly, rather than trying to understand it in terms of personal domination by powerful financiers.<sup>131</sup>

The key here is to understand how capitalist society itself conditions and constitutes state behaviour rather than to focus on where power *appears* to lie.<sup>132</sup> Capitalism is not simply a concept, it is not transhistorical, nor is it a

product of human nature to truck or barter.<sup>133</sup> It is a historically specific form of society, with profound implications for the organisation and structure of social relations.<sup>134</sup> For Marx, capitalism is characterised by the constant movement of value to create even more value, in new cycles on an ever-expanding scale. As such, we need to understand imperialism in terms of the capitalist state and, and more importantly, the social organisation of everyday life. A feature of capitalist social relations is that they 'assume a fantastic form different from their reality'.<sup>135</sup> The state is a good example of this, as Pashukanis' notorious question identified: why doesn't class rule exist simply and clearly as the subjugation of a small elite over the rest of society?<sup>136</sup> In effect, why does an apparently separate and impartial state exist at all?

The contemporary state is a feature of the sundering of political and economics facets of social life, a unique characteristic of capitalist society. The state appears as a distinct thing, standing as if autonomous from the rest of society, able to act with authority and sovereignty, and where all citizens are formally equal before it.<sup>137</sup> While the state is politically constituted nationally and territorially, it is a form of and conditioned by capitalist accumulation on a global scale.<sup>138</sup> As such, its apparent impartiality is the key means by which capitalist society is able to obfuscate the exploitation that consistently generates crisis. For Holloway, the state 'is a relation between people which does not appear to be a relation between people, a social relation which exists in the form of something external to social relations'.<sup>139</sup> The state's existence derives from and is a manifestation of those unstable social relations of production.

'Neither legal relations nor political forms [can] be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life ... the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy.'<sup>140</sup>

The state is premised on, and a form of, the crisis-prone nature of capitalism, a society perpetually and inherently riven by class struggle.<sup>141</sup> This is not the state as superstructure, reacting to the needs of the economic base. Rather, the state is a manifestation of class struggle, which cannot ever be solved, only managed.<sup>142</sup> The capitalist state, then, does not act in the interests of a particular fraction of capital but rather to sustain society more generally. Given the unstable nature of capitalist society, the state must constantly attempt to mitigate crises within its jurisdiction. States are, in effect, 'regulative agencies' implicated in the everyday reproduction of capitalist society.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, state managers are unable to conclusively determine what might sustain capitalist society, nor are they potent enough to ensure that their strategies are always successful. However, the state still remains a part of the global social relations that structure how it behaves and how it can behave.<sup>144</sup> Criticisms that point to 'experimental and



opportunistic' policies or diverse influences do not necessarily undermine the possibility of an overarching paradigm or grand narrative that can explain British imperialism over the long durée.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, as per Burnham, 'the fundamental tasks of state managers (from welfare to the management of money, labour and trade, etc.) therefore relate directly to ensuring the successful rotation of capital both nationally and internationally'.<sup>146</sup>

Imperialism is an immanent feature of the capitalist state but only available under particular historical circumstances. It is a strategy undertaken by the state to remove obstacles to the successful circulation of capital globally, and to improve conditions for capital within its own jurisdiction.<sup>147</sup> This is not to suggest that imperialism is purely and always a profit-seeking enterprise. In fact, the Official Mind is quite right to highlight the obscure origins of imperial policy. When considering the state as a form of capitalist social relations, imperialism becomes a means through which the state can avoid, mitigate, or transpose crisis.<sup>148</sup> Such a crisis should not be read as simply economic in nature, nor do capitalism's crises always appear as such. Instead, they manifest as fiscal, monetary, labour, geopolitical, etc. crises. Capitalism is crisis-prone, a consequence of its contradictory character, and this is saturated throughout the social fabric. As Marx noted, the circuit of capital, both specifically and generally, is vulnerable to stoppage and disorder at any stage, halting the process of accumulation.<sup>149</sup> Jonathan Saha, writing in this journal, has noted that an emphasis on contingency is built into Marx's approach and can adequately account for the diversity of and within imperialism.<sup>150</sup> Saha, noting that accumulation has been neglected in Imperial History in recent years, offers an account of Marx's method that explains the generation of inequalities, divisions within society and differing forms of oppression.<sup>151</sup>

This approach also allows us to consider the role played by domestic politics in considerations of imperialism beyond elite interests. A constant challenge to the sustenance of capitalist society is the agency of the working class.<sup>152</sup> Understanding British imperial history requires an understanding of the pressures on the state deriving from class struggle.<sup>153</sup> The Official Mind does not incorporate domestic issues into the calculations of key officials. In fact, it deliberately excludes them. Similarly, Gentlemanly Capitalism only incorporates domestic factors to explain elite re-composition.

The abstractions covered in this section permit an identification of the political and economic context within which imperial policy might be devised and implemented. When coupled with historical enquiry that appreciates the importance of contingency, the secrets of British imperialism can be revealed.<sup>154</sup> The next section applies this approach to sketch out an alternative account of the origins of the modern British state and its imperial strategies.

## The Origins of British Imperialism

The organisation of the British state derives from the emergence of capitalism in the collapse of feudal society, driven initially by the contradictions and class struggles of the feudal order. Out of these contradictions emerged a new class and a new social order. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the feudal land-lord class was transformed through civil wars, purges and the power of market forces.<sup>155</sup> Key to this process was the emergence of new social property relations in the countryside and the emergence of private property.<sup>156</sup> Where land had previously sustained the livelihoods of serfs, it now became a means for commercial activity. Serfs were ejected from the land and had to seek waged work as land was given over to pasture for commercial production.<sup>157</sup> This is a process referred to by Marxists as *primitive accumulation*: the process of separating producers from the means of subsistence.<sup>158</sup>

The new class of bourgeois landlord, which had absorbed much of the feudal aristocracy by the sixteenth century, derived its power from the accumulation of wealth, rather than feudal obligation and the direct threat of violence.<sup>159</sup> The power of wealth was as much a vulnerability as a strength, however. These new landlords were constrained by the power of the market, since they were now in direct competition to accumulate wealth. The state was central to this process. The transformation of social property relations saw the simultaneous transformation of the state, which acted to sustain this new social order. The dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century, for example, saw the seizure of the Catholic Church's holdings on a vast scale.<sup>160</sup> This property was seized by the English state and then sold to wealthy merchants and landlords to be turned over to commercial farming.<sup>161</sup> The immediate consequence of this was the enrichment of the English state and commercial landlords.<sup>162</sup> It was also an acceleration of a transformation that was well underway. The Catholic Church, the largest landholder in England, had been nearly liquidated, the serfs who worked its land had been transformed into unemployed workers. With the 1534 Act of Supremacy, the English state legally abjured the Pope, established the Church of England and set the monarch as its head. The English state had centralised its authority by neutralising its only competitor.<sup>163</sup> Over decades, the state had been transformed into a capitalist state.

The new English state had a different logic to the feudal monarchy. The organisation of power was highly centralised. In English feudal society, the monarch was the sole landowner, and all landlords were ultimately his tenants.<sup>164</sup> Practically, however, the monarch's power was severely constrained by the collective power of his tenants-in-chief, as well as the authority of the Church. This system of feudal tenure was abolished in 1660 but had become largely irrelevant by then. The state swiftly developed new capabilities and demands to test them.<sup>165</sup> The rule of law and the rule of money emerged as key elements of statecraft. The state had new powers because of the

establishment of private property: property could now be seized, bought and sold. Land had become a commodity, as had labour and money. However, the state was now vulnerable since it needed to manage and produce money, not just for itself but as the basis for social life. Money was far more important to the capitalist state than the feudal state. It was reliant on wealthy individuals to sustain itself and the rest of society. Not only did they provide tax revenues but also controlled the production of the goods required for social reproduction and paid the wages of workers. The state now also had to justify its own existence, which was accomplished through the invention of national identity, and with it the idea of the national interest as a means of securing some autonomy of action for the state.<sup>166</sup> Constant social pressure also led to the transformation of absolute to popular sovereignty, the opening up of the political franchise, and changes to the social composition of state managers themselves.<sup>167</sup>

The creation of new class relations and competition between the bourgeoisie under the rule of money meant that this new society had its own set of contradictions that imperilled its existence. First, under the new capitalist social relations, goods were produced for the market. The purpose of their production was to be sold, not to be used. Second, this led to competition within the bourgeoisie, who sought to cut costs, innovate new technologies and production methods, expand markets, etc. The consequence was the constant need for growth and the tendency to overproduction in capitalism: to expand production beyond the capacity of society to use those goods. These goods cannot be purchased, which means they cannot be produced profitably. If goods cannot be produced profitably, bankruptcy and unemployment result, leading to social and economic crisis.

This crisis tendency is inherent in the fabric of capitalist society. However, there are several ways that crisis can be mitigated or postponed. As noted above, the state emerged as a manifestation of the new capitalist social relations and so is implicated in their reproduction. Imperialism emerged as a strategy for sustaining those crisis-prone social relations. Competition between capitals manifested as competition between states internationally. The state engaged in imperialism to dominate trade relations, to guarantee monopolies, to destroy the commercial activity of competitors, to establish the rule of law and property rights, to stop other states from doing the same, to establish vassal states amenable to commercial exploitation, to provide access to cheap materials, to defend commercial interests, and so on. However, all apparently national capitals and states remain a part of the global circuit of capital. Competition itself, then, acts as a limit to the capacity of capital to valorise. The key here is not to think that a cabal of capitalists controlled the state to engage in imperialism. State managers make decisions in the mire of contradictory circumstances, often acting under ambiguous conditions and unsure of the outcome, that will also likely exacerbate their situation in ways they could never anticipate.

The earliest English imperialism was in Ireland. This can be distinguished from the dynastic or religious wars undertaken by the earlier feudal monarchy by scrutinising the motives and outcomes of these wars. The Hundred Years War, for example, was an inter-dynastic conflict, much as previous invasions of Ireland, centred on determining the suzerain and legitimate succession of part of what is now modern France.<sup>168</sup> Earlier invasions of Ireland by Norman and Angevin kings were to secure England and to establish Church power. Any land seized was granted to the English Crown as a fiefdom by the Catholic Church. Conquests beyond the Pale in Ireland from the fifteenth century onwards took on a commercial quality, with the establishment of the plantation system. This was like the process of primitive accumulation already taking place in England: peasants were ejected from their subsistence lands while new farmers from England and Scotland were transported to work these lands for commercial production.<sup>169</sup>

Subsequent acts of imperialism took on a similar pattern. British capitalists were eager to expand, impelled by the competitive pressures imposed by the market, and would often be aided by the English, then British, state. The colonisation of the Americas by British settlers aped Irish plantations, for commercial reason and often to disastrous effects. Slavery, too, was an innovation to rapidly deploy labour to the Americas following the extermination of the indigenous people and the limitations of indentured servitude.<sup>170</sup>

However, the broader context of post-fifteenth century imperialism was extreme competition between the European powers. England was a newcomer to an already-crowded field, where the Spanish had established dominance in the Americas. This had made the Spanish state monstrously wealthy and powerful. Early colonialism in this era was to establish profitable settlements that were able to produce commercially valuable goods. Regular conflict with other European powers was a consequence of this competitive environment. These colonial activities were inseparable from state power, which granted monopolies, invested in enterprises, waged wars and chartered privateers to harass the commerce of rival powers.<sup>171</sup>

The conquest of India began in exactly this pattern, and the English East India Company, founded in 1599, eventually came to dominate the whole sub-continent. The story of the East India Company reflects the transformation of British imperialism from commercial enterprise to territorial conquest, with the British state taking direct control of India in 1858.<sup>172</sup> The Empire itself began to transform from the mid-nineteenth century. The Official Mind's point remains valid: there was no direct financial interest in the newly conquered territories and no evidence that finance compelled expansion.<sup>173</sup> However, the shift in imperial policy held at heart a commitment to the broader interests of British capital. State managers were faced with novel challenges and so resorted to new imperial means.<sup>174</sup> As we have already determined, crises take many different forms and so an alternative explanation is

needed to fit facts with our understanding of social relations. Indeed, the wealth of Britain's so-called informal empire dwarfed its territorial empire even into the twentieth century.<sup>175</sup>

One impetus of the conquest of Africa was to frustrate the expansionism of rival states.<sup>176</sup> This strategy only exacerbated the problem, however, with inter-imperial rivalry twice reaching crescendo in the twentieth century. Intensified global competition and open class conflict persisted throughout the first half of the twentieth century with Britain experiencing recurring issues relating to poor productivity and the decline of industry.<sup>177</sup> However, imperialism was becoming an ineffective tool for Britain to manage these problems.<sup>178</sup> The end of World War Two saw a new US-led international economic architecture that disincentivised the strategy of territorial imperialism. Decolonisation swiftly followed, with the new Bretton Woods system rewarding participation in the US-led informal and depoliticised empire of globalisation over territorial conquest.<sup>179</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has offered a critique of established approaches to British Imperial History. It has argued that chaotic pluralism, the Official Mind and Gentlemanly Capitalism all suffer from their unwillingness to question the social origins of imperialism. For chaotic pluralism, this is a consequence of a broad rejection of grand theorising on empire and a view that the British Empire, as a whole, cannot be explained, leading to a continuing fragmentation of how the discipline understands itself and the Empire. For the Official Mind, the absence of an account of the social context of imperialism led to an agent-centric account of the state with no explanation for the origin of the official mind itself. Gentlemanly Capitalism also lacks an account of the social origins of imperialism and seeks explanation for the phenomenon by relying on an instrumentalist account of the state, arguing that a particular fraction of capitalists, urged on by their shared cultural values, impelled imperial expansion.

The paper argued that the absence of an account of social form was problematic for these approaches as it failed to answer the most fundamental question of why imperialism occurs at all. A Marxist account of the state was then offered, drawing on more recent scholarship, as well as Marx's views of capitalist society. It characterised capitalist social relations as class-based, exploitative, contradictory and crisis-prone. The state is a manifestation, or form, of these relations, implicated in managing and mediating recurrent crises. Imperialism, then, is a strategy available to state managers to solve, mitigate or transpose an extant or burgeoning crisis. Whether or not this approach convinces anyone, a more robust engagement between the disciplines that cover these empirical and theoretical questions can only enrich our understanding of British imperialism.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Andy Cohen, Pinar Dönmez, Kate Law, and Maia Pal for their insightful comments and feedback on various drafts of this piece. I'd also like to thank both reviewers for their helpful and supportive comments. All errors and omissions remain my own.
2. Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 105.
3. Thompson, *Poverty*, 204, 195–197.
4. Ibid, 299. Thompson coins the term '*Geschichtenscheissenschlopf*' to describe Althusser's approach. The word doesn't exactly make sense in German but Thompson presents it as meaning 'ahistorical shit'.
5. Thompson, *Poverty*, 230–231.
6. Ibid, 194.
7. Darwin, *Empire Project*, 3.
8. For the Official Mind, see, for example, Heinlein, *British Government Policy*; Morrison, 'Twin'; Westcott, 'Closer Union'. For Gentlemanly Capitalism, see, for example, Dumett, *Gentlemanly*; Schrauwers, 'Regenten'; Amini & Toms, 'Elite'.
9. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 40, 33; Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, 15.
10. Gallagher & Robinson, 'Imperialism', 1.
11. Tomlinson, 'Contraction', 70.
12. Fieldhouse, 'Humpty-Dumpty', 22, Burroughs 'David Fieldhouse', 6.
13. Porter 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 289.
14. Darwin 'Imperialism', 641
15. Barratt Brown 'Great Arches', 22. Barratt Brown attributes this notion of the 'great arch' to Corrigan and Sayer (1985). However, Corrigan and Sayer's use of the term derives from E P Thompson's (1965, 321, 330) usage in which he is objecting to the 'tidy platonism' of Nairn (1964) and Anderson (1964). See Ingham's (1995, 342) criticism of Gentlemanly Capitalism for the scorn he puts on grand narratives of British imperial history.
16. Darwin 'Imperialism', 641.
17. See, for example, Metcalf *Imperial Connections*, Ballantyne and Burton *Moving Subjects*, Howe *New Imperial Histories*, Burton *Trouble*, Kennedy 'Imperial History Wars'. For a critique of both see Potter & Saha 'Global History'
18. Darwin 'Imperialism', 627; *Empire Project*, 8.
19. Darwin, *Empire Project*, 5.
20. Darwin, 'Imperialism', 640.
21. Darwin, *Empire Project*, 1–20; *Britain and Decolonisation*, 25–33.
22. Fletcher et al, *Making Connections*, 802.
23. Saha, 'Accumulation', 2.
24. Darwin 'Imperialism', 622.
25. Ibid.
26. See, for example, Pagden 'Struggle', 34; Hinderaker 'Four Indian Kings'; Landsman 'Nation, Migration'; Marshall 'First and Second British Empires'; Harlow *Founding*.
27. Low & Lonsdale, 'New Order', 12–16.
28. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 331.
29. Wm Roger Louis, 'Introduction', 39; Fieldhouse, 'Imperialism'.
30. Burroughs, 'David Fieldhouse', 8.
31. Robinson, 'Wm. Roger Louis', 4.
32. Gallagher & Robinson *Africa*, 16–17.
33. Robinson & Seal 'Obituary', 123.

34. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, 8.
35. *ibid*:xxi; Gallagher & Robinson, 'Imperialism', 15; Mommsen, *Theories*, 101.
36. William Roger Louis (1976, 238–239) cites a review of *The Official Mind* by E H Carr in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 7th March 1975, which states that 'The writers seemed so frightened of being taken for disciples of Marx, Hobson or Lenin that they were unable to produce any coherent analysis of imperialism'.
37. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, xiii, 15fn1; Sanderson, 'European Partition', 3. For examples of these theories, see Hobson *Imperialism*; Hilferding, *Finance Capital*; Luxemburg, *Accumulation*; Bukharin, *Imperialism*; Lenin, *Imperialism*. For critical Marxist engagement with them see Milios & Sotiropoulos, *Rethinking Imperialism*, 9–32; Noonan, *Marxist Theories*, 15–96; Kettell & Sutton, 'New Imperialism', 244–245.
38. Gallagher and Robinson, *Africa*, 17.
39. Westcott, *Imperialism and Development*, 68, 72.
40. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*: xvi.
41. Darwin, 'Imperialism', 615.
42. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, 20–21.
43. Darwin, 'Imperialism', 615.
44. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, 23.
45. Gallagher & Robinson, 'Imperialism', 5.
46. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, 5.
47. Gallagher & Robinson, *Imperialism*, 462–463.
48. *Ibid*, 464.
49. Sanderson, 'European Partition', 4.
50. *Ibid*, 5–7; Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa*, 465.
51. Sanderson, 'European Partition', 5.
52. Gallagher & Robinson, 'Imperialism', 5.
53. *Ibid*, 6.
54. Cain & Hopkins, 'Afterword', 198.
55. Dilley, 'Elisions', 38.
56. Burroughs, 'David Fieldhouse', 7.
57. Hobson, *Imperialism*, 59; Etherington, *Theories of Imperialism*, 70. Hobson ([1902] 2005, 57), infamously, refers to finance being controlled 'chiefly by men of a single and peculiar race'.
58. Cain, 'J. A. Hobson'; Cain, 'Hobson Lives?', 103; Cain, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; Cain, 'Capitalism, Aristocracy and Empire'.
59. Kennedy, 'Imperial History Wars', 345. See, also, Dilley, 'Elisions', 37 and Cain, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 78 for this point.
60. Daunton, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; Tomlinson, 'Decline', 206–208.
61. Porter 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'.
62. Munroe, *Maritime Enterprise*; White, 'Government and Business'; *Business, Government*; 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; 'Ungentlemanly Capitalism'.
63. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 50.
64. *Ibid*, 52; Cain & Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas II', 2.
65. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 52.
66. *Ibid*.
67. *Ibid*, 125.
68. Cain & Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas I', 503, 515.
69. For a discussion of this transition, see Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', 'Origins'; Hilton, 'Agrarian Class Structure'; Fine 'Capitalist Development'; Wood, *Origin*.



70. Ingham 'British Capitalism', 345–346; Dilley, 'Elisions', 41.
71. Porter, 'Gentlemanly capitalism', 285.
72. Cain and Hopkins (1986, 503fn11) compare capitalism to the Loch Ness monster as it is 'hard to describe and impossible to capture'.
73. Ingham, *Capitalism Divided*, 341.
74. Dilley, 'Elisions', 40; Ingham *Capitalism Divided*, 345–346. However, for Ingham, even gentlemanliness does very little while, for Dilley, gentlemanliness only explains the how and not the why of imperialism.
75. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 50; Cain & Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas I', 509; Cain, 'Hobson Lives', 80.
76. Fieldhouse, 'Gentlemen', 538.
77. Schumpeter is important to the approach here through its stress on the significance of pre-capitalist social formations driving imperialism, albeit in different ways (Cain 2003, 78). Another obvious influence for the approach is John Hobson ([1902] 2005, 59), though certainly without Hobson's ([1902] 2005, 57) anti-semitism. Kennedy (1996, 345), for example, argues that Cain and Hopkins have merely regurgitated Hobson's theory 'with a pinch' of Schumpeter. Veblen is also a crucial influence. See, also, Dilley (2018, 37), Cain (1985, 1992, 103; 2007) and Etherington (2014, 70) for the classical influences on the approach.
78. Cain, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 78. See also Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, 84–85.
79. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 53.
80. Ibid, 46.
81. Cain & Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas I', 504–505; Cain & Hopkins 2016:47.
82. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 56, 134.
83. Ibid, 49.
84. Cain & Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas II', 5.
85. Cain & Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas I', 515.
86. Ibid.
87. Nicholls, 'Fractions', 74. This is also a criticism both Looker (1988, 10–11) and Saville (1988, 34–38) raise about the political compromise of the 1830s as described by Anderson (1964, 1987).
88. Dilley 'Elisions', 44–45. Cain and Hopkins (2016, 63) contend that a 'smoking gun' is not necessary to prove their central claims. Their view seems to be that identifying powerful decision-makers and their links with powerful financiers is enough. They claim that their goal is to provide an account that is 'plausible and illuminating', which, they say, is 'more difficult' than conclusively proving their central claims.
89. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 50.
90. Fieldhouse, 'Gentlemen', 534.
91. Phimister, 'Partition of Africa', 77. See also Porter, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 286–288.
92. White, 'Government and Business', 252; 'Capitalism and Counter-insurgency', 154.
93. Daunton, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 156; Dilley 'Elisions', 39–40; Fieldhouse, 'Gentlemen', 537–538.
94. White, 'Ungentlemanly Capitalism', 109–112; Zhang, 'British Imperialism', 126; Ingham, 'British Capitalism', 347.
95. Cain and Hopkins, 'British Expansion Overseas II', 18.
96. There is an ambiguity in the approach over the autonomy of the state. As outlined in this paper, the approach contends that a partisan elite governs the British state with its own interests and worldview. However, Cain (2003, 80) also suggests that the elite

- were not autonomous from the ideological and emotional fervour of others and that they always sought to act in their conception of the national interest. This latter view does not explain the origins of imperial expansion or state behaviour though, as such it is more vulnerable to Porter's (1990, 285) point of 'labelling' rather than explaining.
97. Clarke, 'Configurations', 5.
  98. Daunton, 'Home and Colonial', 353; Cain and Hopkins, 'Afterword', 198.
  99. Thompson, Poverty, 262.
  100. See, inter alia, Burnham (1990), (2003), (2006), (2007); Copley (2017), (2019); Donmez & Sutton (2020); Kettell (2004); Rogers (2009), (2012); Sutton (2015), (2017); Warner (2019). For work beyond the British case, see, for example, Donmez (2021); Moraitis (2020).
  101. Kettell, *Exchange Rate Policy-Making*, 14.
  102. Thompson, Poverty, 253.
  103. Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, 221–249.
  104. Burnham, 'Open Marxism', 225.
  105. Ibid.
  106. Ibid, 230.
  107. Ingham, 'British Capitalism', 341; Saha, 'Accumulation and Empire', 1.
  108. Dumett, *Gentlemanly Capitalism*, 7; Akita, *Gentlemanly Capitalism*; Louis *Imperialism*.
  109. Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 330–331; Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, xiii, 15fn1.
  110. Gallagher & Robinson, *Africa*, 17; Ingham *Capitalism Divided*, 117–127; Sanderson, 'European Partition', 3–4.
  111. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 5.
  112. As noted earlier, Cain and Hopkins, other than a single citation (2016: 142n41), do not engage with the debate running from the 1960s to the 1980s over the origins and composition of the British elite between both Marxists and non-Marxists.
  113. Lenin, *Imperialism*, 156; Bukharin, *Imperialism*, 152; Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, 119–120; Burnham, 'Communist Manifesto', 190.
  114. Daunton, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism', 122–127. See, for example, Aaronovitch, *The Ruling Class*; Anderson, 'Origins'; Leys, *Politics in Britain*; Ingham, *Capitalism Divided*.
  115. Clarke, 'Capital', 36.
  116. Barratt Brown, 'Great Arches', 30; Nicholls, 'Fractions', 75–76.
  117. Ingham, *Capitalism Divided*, 4–13, 137–138, 225–235; Ingham, 'Commercial Capital', 62; Anderson, 'Origins', 38–39; Anderson, 'Figures', 74; Nairn, 'Political Elite', 20–21; Nicholls, 'Fractions', 76.
  118. Looker, 'Shifting Trajectories', 16.
  119. Ibid.
  120. Bonefeld, 'Capital par excellence', 48.
  121. Clarke, 'Configurations', 2–3.
  122. Bonefeld, 'Capital par excellence', 52; Marx *Economic Manuscripts*, 36–37.
  123. Marx, *Capital Volume 2*, 109.
  124. Burnham, *Postwar Reconstruction*, 182.
  125. Clarke, *Keynesianism*, 124–127.
  126. Copley, 'Monetary sovereignty', 237.
  127. Ingham, *Capitalism Divided*, 229.
  128. Kettell, *Exchange Rate Policy-Making*, 5–9.
  129. Ibid, 166–167.

130. Copley 'Monetary sovereignty', 154, 161.
131. Ibid, 162.
132. Nicholls, *Fractions*, 83.
133. Marx *Capital Volume I*, 161.
134. Ibid, 179.
135. Marx *Capital Volume 2* 170.
136. Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism*, 78.
137. Holloway & Picciotto, 'Capital', 80.
138. Picciotto, 'Internationalisation', 217.
139. Holloway, 'Global Capital', 27.
140. Marx, *Contribution*, 21.
141. Burnham, 'Organisational View', 6.
142. Sutton, 'Depoliticisation', 211.
143. Clarke, 'State', 118.
144. Burnham, 'Marx', 110.
145. Darwin, 'Imperialism', 622.
146. Burnham, 'Marx', 110.
147. Sutton, 'Towards', 230.
148. Ibid, 232.
149. Marx, *Capital Volume 2*, 109.
150. Saha, 'Accumulation and Empire', 15.
151. Ibid. See, for example, Federici, *Caliban*; James, *Black Jacobins*; Phimister and Pilosoff, 'Wage Labor'; Whitehead, 'John Locke'; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.
152. Looker, 'Shifting Trajectories', 18–21.
153. Clarke, 'Configurations', 15.
154. Burnham, 'Marxism', 80–81.
155. Dimmock, *Origin of Capitalism*, 155.
156. Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', 30.
157. Wood, *Origin*, 77; Dyer, *Making a Living*, 349–362.
158. Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 705–706.
159. Dimmock, *Origin of Capitalism*, 106.
160. Bernard, 'Dissolution', 390.
161. Dobb, *Development of Capitalism*, 181–182.
162. Anderson, *Lineages*, 40; Hoyle, 'Origins of the Dissolution', 299.
163. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 66.
164. Wood, *Empire*, 20fn2.
165. Braddick, *State Formation*, 99.
166. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', 13–14; Braddick, *State Formation*, 72–80.
167. Copley, 'Monetary Sovereignty', 240.
168. Veach, 'From Kingdom to Colony', 22.
169. Canny, 'Origins of Empire', 8. See also Hechtner for the origin of the term 'internal colonialism' to describe this phenomenon in the British case.
170. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 3–29. As Williams notes, this was also the advent of the modern notion of racism.
171. Canny, 'Origins of Empire', 21–22; Braddick, 'English Government', 286–287.
172. Marshall, 'British in Asia', 487; Washbrook, 'India', 418–419.
173. Phimister, 'Empire', 77.
174. Platt, 'Imperialism of Free Trade', 306.
175. Gallagher & Robinson, 'Imperialism', 5.
176. Newbury, 'Partition', 626–628.

177. Burnham, 'New Labour', 127.
178. Tomlinson, 'Contraction', 70–71.
179. Ibid, 220.

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