

**Archives of Defeat? A historical materialist analysis of the  
theological turn of Alain Badiou.**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a historical materialist analysis of the use of messianic discourses in contemporary theoretical and literary texts. It focuses on the way the recent 'theological turn' in Marxist theory relates to two major historical developments: the ascendancy of neoliberal capitalism and the perceived absence of any socialist alternative. In theoretical terms, it produces a symptomatic analysis of Alain Badiou and his attempt to re-invigorate communist militancy via the figure of Saint Paul. Rather than follow Badiou's avowedly atheistic turn to Paul, I undertake a materialist analysis of the texts of early Christianity in order to show that their style of ideological and political subversion is not incompatible with the egalitarian aims of Marxism. I extend this analysis of the radical potentiality of Christian discourses by examining the significance of messianic discourses in contemporary fiction in novels by Eoin McNamee and Roberto Bolaño. Both novelists deploy the conventions of crime fiction to narrate stories of revolutionary disillusionment and the impact of neoliberal economics in the north of Ireland and the Mexico-US border. My analysis focuses on issues of literary form and how the use of messianic imagery produces formal ruptures in the texts which trouble or disturb their manifest ideologies, notably the sense of revolutionary disillusionment and the notion that there is no longer any possibility of radical social change. The central argument is that the recourse to Pauline Christianity is not, as some scholars suggest, an archive of defeat for Marxism, but rather an entirely appropriate means to resurrect the idea of militant politics today. However, I argue that Badiou's avowed atheistic reading of Paul is not sufficient to sustain the claims that he makes for its political significance. The aim of the thesis is thus to explore and address some of the shortcomings of Badiou's position in order to defend the articulation of Marxism and Christianity, not by disavowing the messianic aspects of Pauline Christianity but by exploring their political and imaginative potential.

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Marxism is in crisis.’

*I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. (John 13.18).*<sup>1</sup>

This thesis sets out to explore the use of messianic discourses in contemporary theoretical and literary texts. It focuses on the way in which what has come to be known as the ‘theological turn’ in contemporary Marxist thought relates to two major historical developments of the present conjuncture: the ascendancy of neoliberal or late, globalised capitalism and the perceived degeneration and disappearance of the Socialist alternative. In theoretical terms, it produces a sustained analysis of the work of French Maoist philosopher Alain Badiou and his recent attempt to re-invigorate communist militancy via an engagement with the figure of Saint Paul (c.5 - c.67 AD).<sup>2</sup> In so doing, it examines Badiou’s long standing assertion that today ‘Marxism is in crisis.’<sup>3</sup> This claim was first expressed after the end of the militant “red years” (1966-76) and what he views as the reactionary termination of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1976.<sup>4</sup> It has acquired greater urgency in the wake of subsequent historical developments: the ascendancy of neoliberalism during the 1980s, the long-standing failure and ultimate collapse of the Soviet system, the embrace of capitalism by the Communist Party of China, and finally, the continued absence of any organized and wide-spread Marxist movement in the West, especially in the current conjuncture of an unresolved financial, and perhaps even ‘systemic’ crisis in capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Biblical texts used throughout this thesis are *The English Bible: King James Version. Volume One: The Old Testament*, ed. by Herbert Marks, (New York: Norton, 2012); *The English Bible: King James Version. Volume Two: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. by Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, (New York: Norton, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*; trans. by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels, (London: Continuum, 2009) p.182.

<sup>4</sup> The “red years” refers to the period of left wing militancy and armed struggle in Europe and Latin America galvanised by the student uprisings of 1968 and the emergence of the new left and various civil rights movements. The end of the Chinese cultural revolution and the failure of the Portuguese ‘carnation’ revolution are both events that lead Badiou to identify 1976 as the end point of this period. See Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. by David Fernbach, (London: Verso, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.182; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*; trans. by Ray Brassier, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2007); Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. by Alberto Toscano, (New York: Polity Press, 2007);

In literary terms, the thesis examines the significance of messianic discourses in contemporary fiction, focusing primarily on works by the Irish writer Eoin McNamee (b.1961) and the late Chilean writer, Roberto Bolaño (1953 – 2003). Both McNamee and Bolaño deploy the conventions of crime fiction to narrate stories of revolutionary disillusionment and the impact of the rise of neoliberal economics in the north of Ireland and the US-Mexican border.<sup>6</sup> The literary texts under investigation thus focus on border spaces that are conjoined with centres of capitalist development, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.<sup>7</sup> Historically speaking, the novels posit a link between the present period of market-driven economic restructuring and the revolutionary struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. Both writers thus produce a similar sense of historical periodization as that delineated in Badiou's theopolitical response to what he sees as Marxism's 'contemporary impotence.'<sup>8</sup> By addressing a literary genre (crime writing) which Marxist theory has generally viewed as ideologically conservative, this thesis focuses specifically on how the use of messianic discourses in these texts produce formal breaks and utopian configurations that contradict the manifest ideology of the text and that of authorial intent. My aim is to demonstrate how specifically Judeo-Christian concepts, iconography and narrative tropes emerge at critical junctures in works by McNamee and Bolaño. I focus on the way these messianic moments *go against the grain* of an apparently conservative cultural form and, particularly in the case of Bolaño, an authorial ideology of revolutionary disillusion. However, what is of crucial importance here is that the moments of formal rupture that I identify are characterised by the articulation of Christianity *and* political Marxism and therefore provide the means through which ideas of social justice and historical change can be envisaged today. As I demonstrate in the final chapters of the

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Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. by David Fernbach, (London: Verso, 2008); Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. by David Macey and Steve Corcoran, (London: Verso, 2010). For arguments regarding the systemic rather than transitory nature of the present global recession, see 'Critique Notes', *Critique*, 38:1, (2010), 1-9; Giovanni Arrighi and Joe Cleary, 'Up For Grabs', *Field Day Review*, Vol. 5 (2009), 122-137.

<sup>6</sup> Following the Marxist approach adopted in this thesis, the terminology used to describe the anti-colonial struggle in the island of Ireland will follow that of the leftist and anti-colonial Republican movements in the region. Thus rather than deploy the capitalised appellation 'Northern Ireland,' which re-inscribes the current constellation of forces whereby the six northern counties of Ireland are understood and treated as a given national entity within the United Kingdom, the terms used in this thesis will be 'northern Ireland', or 'the North.'

<sup>7</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origin of our Times*, rev.edn, (London: Verso, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Alain Badiou, 'Our Contemporary Impotence', *Radical Philosophy*, 181 (September/October, 2013), 43-47.

thesis, these progressive images and associations arise in unlikely and inauspicious spaces, offering a resource of hope in an era in which there is, as Perry Anderson has noted, apparently no 'collective agency able to match the power of capital [...]yet on the horizon'.<sup>9</sup>

The central proposition upon which the argument of this thesis is based is that messianic discourses, and in particular, Pauline Christianity, offer a way to re-imagine and re-energise the possibility of radical social change and political critique. This thesis deploys a historical materialist method, or what Badiou's erstwhile mentor Louis Althusser called, a 'symptomatic reading' to analyse the theoretical and literary texts under investigation.<sup>10</sup> Althusser develops the concept of symptomatic reading (*lecture symptomale*) in his analysis of the way in which Marx *transforms* the materials of analysis in *Capital* by focusing on gaps and contradictions in the discourses of political economy associated with Adam Smith and David Ricardo and also in the materialist transformations that Marx produced in relation to idealism of the Hegelian dialectic. In short, Althusser argues that what Marx demonstrates in *Capital* is that the processes of an apparently 'fair' exchange between worker and capitalist under the capitalist mode of production actually conceals a form of structural exploitation.<sup>11</sup> Marx's *Capital* is, as the subtitle reveals, a 'critique of political economy'. Marx did not thus simply invert Hegel by positing labour, rather than Spirit, as the source of economic and historical development. Rather, Marx's focus on the lapses and lacunae in political economy and German philosophy led to the development of a *materialist* conjunctural analysis of new and related concepts in the determination of any

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<sup>9</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Renewals' in *New Left Review* 1, Jan-Feb, 2000, 5-24, (p.17).

<sup>10</sup> Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. by Ben Brewster, (London: Verso, 2009), p.29.

<sup>11</sup> There is a vast amount of writing on Marx's method and his insights. Badiou was part of the Althusserian circle that re-read Marx during the 1960s. Although some elements of Althusser's thought are rejected by other Marxists, most notably the assumption of his putative structuralism, the basic argument that Marx transforms the insights of political economy to reveal structural inequalities intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production is invariably shared by other Marxists. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin, 1990); Ernest Mandel, 'Introduction' in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, pp.11-86; Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Ernest Mandel, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Derek Sayer, *Marx's Method: Ideology, Science and Critique in Capital*, (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979); David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, (London: Verso, 2010); Nancy Fraser, 'Beyond Marx's Hidden Abode', *New Left Review*, 86, (March-April, 2014), 55-72. For British Marxist debates both for and against Althusser, see E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, (London: Merlin, 1978); Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, (London: New Left Books, 1980); Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'', in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. by Ralph Samuels, (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 227-240; Stuart Hall, 'In Defence of Theory', *People's History and Socialist Theory*, pp.378-385.

given historical reality or social formation. These concepts include the means and modes of production rather than simply labour and labour power alone. Thus the aim of a symptomatic reading is not to recapitulate the manifest meaning of the object with which it works; rather, the aim is to produce new knowledge about the given object by focusing on the significance of contradictions and lapses within the material under investigation. Crucially this kind of critical practice goes beyond exposition or commentary in order further to develop the theoretical and conceptual framework of historical materialism.

Following Althusser's critical practice (discussed further below), this thesis sets out to produce a symptomatic analysis of Badiou's theses on Saint Paul alongside a materialist reading of novels by Eoin McNamee and Roberto Bolaño. My aim in doing so is first to identify and address some key tensions and contradictions in Badiou's work and then further to develop this critique via my discussion of McNamee and Bolaño, and the distinctive historical, political, economic and literary formations with which they engage. My overarching claim is that the recourse to Pauline Christianity is not, as some scholars suggest, an archive of defeat for Marxism, but rather an entirely appropriate means to resurrect the idea of militant politics today.<sup>12</sup> However, I argue that Badiou's atheistic reading of Paul is not sufficient to sustain the claims that he makes for its political significance. The aim of the thesis is thus to explore and address some of the shortcomings of Badiou's position in order to defend the articulation of Marxism and Christianity not by disavowing the messianic aspects of Pauline Christianity but by exploring its political and imaginative potential.

This not an uncontroversial argument to make as it goes against the grain of some key assumptions about political Marxism and historical materialism not least the notion that both are founded upon avowedly secular, disenchanted (post-Enlightenment) modes of critique. My argument therefore begins by demonstrating that the recourse to early Christianity does not contradict the egalitarian aims of Marxism. As Badiou notes, Pauline Christianity is traditionally viewed as an ideology of 'social conservatism' derived from Christianity's 'least open' and most anti-egalitarian practices: the hierarchical institutions

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<sup>12</sup> The messianic turn is viewed as evidence of a massive and problematic deviation with political Marxism by a number of scholars including Daniel Bensaid, Bruno Bosteels, and Alberto Toscano and Lorenzo Chiesa. I will discuss these writers' hostile response to Badiou's contribution to this 'turn' later in this chapter.



of the established Church.<sup>13</sup> This thesis thus sets out to investigate Badiou's 'lifting of a heel' or ostensible 'betrayal' of Marxist materialism in his celebration of the apparently idealist and conservative ideology of Pauline Christianity. By drawing upon materialist biblical scholars, I argue that the early Christian apocalyptic communities do not represent an ideology of social conservatism but rather represent an egalitarian practice amenable to the emancipatory aims of Marxism.

Secondly, my analysis of literary texts will demonstrate that it is precisely through religious imagery that ideas of radical social change and justice are often conceived in the cultural imaginary today. What I mean here and, indeed, what I will show throughout this thesis, is that a materialist engagement with early Christianity will demonstrate that it contains the 'incarnational resources' necessary for the resurrection of Marxism as a viable and popular project for the masses today.<sup>14</sup> On a broader level, my argument is that the militant example of Saint Paul, as announced most concisely in his letter to the Galatians, outlines a way to escape the ongoing political impotence of contemporary Marxism: 'There is neither Greek nor Jew, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ' (Galatians 3.28). What Paul is attempting to construct here is a new egalitarian collective of believers ('ye are all *one* in Jesus Christ'). This is a type of politics and social organisation which avoids the restrictive choice between the "Roman" way (a multiculturalist tolerant empire of legal rights and economic inequalities – 'bond nor free') and the "Jewish" way (ethnic fundamentalism, or Jewish-only messianism as the means to contest Empire). Saint Paul's political predicament is, I would argue, following Badiou, entirely our own: how to assert against today's "fundamentalist" terrorism and right-wing conservative nationalism, a concrete universal and egalitarian politics which can effectively oppose the corrupt monetary and thus abstract universalism of neoliberal capitalism. In a search for an open politics of generic equality Paul is thus our guide; he is, in Badiou's words, 'our contemporary.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Introduction: The Mystagogy of Revolution', Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*, trans. by Ellen Elias-Bursać, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), p.26.

<sup>15</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, p.4.

Badiou's philosophy has been systematically elaborated over the course of the last four decades. In his terms, this is an 'intervallic' period characterised by a reactionary 'restoration' of the forces of capital and the reversal of the populist and egalitarian struggles of twentieth century socialism.<sup>16</sup> Badiou's response to the rise of global capitalism, and what he describes as the 'senescent collapse of the USSR [and] the paradigm of socialist states,' is thus to follow Saint Paul's theory of soteriological universalism ('neither Greek nor Jew').<sup>17</sup> He advocates a politics of internationalism that is anti-statist and anti-vanguardist. Added to this is his argument that ideology represents a key terrain of struggle today. Like Paul's mission to disseminate the idea of universal redemption, Badiou argues that the ideological hegemony of discourses of competitiveness, individualism and the free-market must be contested by a resurrection of the egalitarian and collective ideas associated with communism:

The communist hypothesis remains the right hypothesis, as I have said, and I do not see any other. If this hypothesis should have to be abandoned, then it is not worth doing anything in the order of collective action. Without the perspective of communism, without this Idea, nothing in the historical and political future is of such a kind as to interest the philosopher. Each individual can pursue their private business, and we won't mention it again.<sup>18</sup>

Understood in this way, communism represents an ideal of egalitarian 'collective action' that is diametrically opposed to notions of 'individualism', 'private' interest and the competitive economics of capitalist 'business.' I will discuss the significance and also the contradictions of Badiou's conception of communism, and in particular his configuration of Saint Paul as an example for communist militancy today throughout this thesis. Indeed, one particular area of focus is the contradictory nature of his self-declared atheistic deployment of Paul and what I reveal to be the grounding of his theoretical edifice on a theological structure tied to a logic of messianic redemption. One of my major arguments is that Badiou's turn to Paul is not just determined by the historical context of late capitalism, but also by the fact this own philosophy contains a barely repressed theological substructure. It is for this reason that I describe Badiou's turn to Paul as *theopolitical*. Drawing upon

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<sup>16</sup> Alain Badiou, 'The Triumphant Restoration', trans. by Alberto Toscano, *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 13.3 (2005), 659-662; Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, pp.77-83, pp.111-112, p.116; Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, trans. by Gregory Elliott, (London: Verso, 2012), pp.38-42.

<sup>17</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.115.

materialist biblical scholarship, I also demonstrate how this turn to Paul and the theological substructure of Badiou's theory do not constitute a betrayal of Marxism's egalitarian aims, nor represent an archive of defeat but are entirely commensurate with the collective and emancipatory aims of Marxism. Each chapter thus considers the way in which theological discourses serve to articulate ideas of radical social change and justice today, paying particular attention to the way in which messianic discourses produce formal breaks, contradictory images and subversions of literary conventions and ideological expectations in the field of contemporary crime fiction.

In critical terms, this project intervenes within contemporary Marxist debates concerning what the Badiou scholar Bruno Bosteels calls 'the actuality of communism'.<sup>19</sup> It contests two related and influential Marxist perspectives on the theological turn, one of which views Christianity as entirely bound up both theoretically and historically with capitalist rationality (exemplified in the work of the Badiou scholars Bruno Bosteels and also Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano), and one which argues that Badiou's turn to religion offers an entirely ahistorical and thus anti-Marxist framework for political analysis (exemplified in the work of Daniel Bensaïd).<sup>20</sup> I argue that Badiou's Pauline turn is both more historically complex and more politically appropriate than these critical perspectives imply. One such reason for this is the significance of class and egalitarian politics in the practices of the early Church. Following the insights of materialist biblical scholars and practitioners of liberation theology, I set out to identify an intransigent egalitarian kernel at the heart of Pauline Christianity. The conception of early Christianity as a revolutionary collective of the radically equal is something which neither Bensaïd, nor Bosteels nor Toscano and Chiesa adequately address in their analyses. These critical responses will be addressed in detail in the following sections of this chapter. The symptomatic reading of Badiou's Pauline turn and the analysis of the ideological practices of early Christianity will take place in Chapters One and Two.

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<sup>19</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, London: Verso (2011).

<sup>20</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, pp.129-158; Bruno Bosteels, 'On the Christian Question', in *The Idea of Communism 2*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2013), pp.37-56; Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, 'Agape and the Anonymous Religion of Atheism', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 12:1, (2007), 113-126; Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', in *Think Again, Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward, (Continuum: London, 2004), pp.94-105.

In terms of my engagement with Marxist literary and cultural theory, the thesis engages with the cultural consequences that follow from Badiou's observation in *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism* that in the wake of the collapse of the socialist alternative, the globalizing force of multinational capitalism is increasingly configuring the world in terms of a 'world-market': 'This configuration imposes the rule of an abstract homogenization. Everything that circulates falls under the unity of a count [of] capitalist monetary abstraction.'<sup>21</sup> What Badiou is identifying here is an expansion of capital into previous uncommodified areas, a development that he sees as entirely consistent with Marx's nineteenth century predictions regarding the global reach of the 'automatisms of capital.'<sup>22</sup> Badiou's observation has profound consequences for anyone endeavouring to argue that art might offer a site of critical resistance to capitalism. If the world is increasingly configured as a 'world-market,' and if in cultural terms this entails an attendant extension of 'capitalist monetary abstraction' into almost all aspects of social and cultural life, then the notion of a high or autonomous art that exists outside the ever increasing extension of commercial logic into the sphere of culture, is ever more difficult to maintain.<sup>23</sup>

Fredric Jameson discusses the 'cultural logic' of this development in late capitalism in relation to the concept of postmodernism.<sup>24</sup> He argues that one of the characteristics of this new cultural logic is the partial collapse of the distinction between high and low cultural practices. For Jameson this is primarily symbolised by the rise of a type of 'aesthetic populism,' a development that is most pronounced in the emergence of "fun" architecture famously championed by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown's in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).<sup>25</sup> Yet the 'effacement' of the 'frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture,' as Jameson puts it, also has correlates in fiction, notably in the deployment of genre fiction, such as 'the murder mystery' story, by experimental writers such as Umberto Eco in *The Name of The Rose*.<sup>26</sup> In Jameson's terms, this type of

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<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism*, pp.9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.9-11, Alain Badiou and Jean-Claude Milner, *Controversies: A dialogue on the politics and philosophy of our time*, trans. by Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity, 2014) p.129.

<sup>24</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.2; Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown, *Learning From Las Vegas*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp.2-3; Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983).

novelistic development is significant for the way in which it no longer quotes the 'commercial' material or styles of genre fiction as a modernist such as James Joyce might have done, but rather how it incorporates this material into the very substance and form of the novel itself.<sup>27</sup> In critical terms, the apparent collapse of the time-honoured conception of the semi-autonomous cultural sphere is important because it calls into question the focus on the autonomy of art, aesthetic distance or estrangement as some of the key determinants of the politics of the text.<sup>28</sup>

This thesis examines novels that draw upon the conventions of the mass cultural genre of crime fiction. Both Eoin McNamee and Roberto Bolaño are award-winning authors celebrated for their literary experimentation yet both also work with the narrative conventions of crime fiction and its subgenres, the tropes of noir and the thriller in the case of McNamee and the police procedural in the case of Bolaño.<sup>29</sup> This conjunction of the popular and the innovative or experimental is an important element in my exploration of the political significations of these novels and the ways in which we might identify sites of resistance in an era in which there is seemingly no hinterland or space that operates beyond the logic of the market. My argument is that rather than adhere to older notions of aesthetic distance (the kind of position advocated by the Frankfurt School) or advocate an *a priori* model of the political valency of specific literary forms (the kind of position that underpins György Lukács' celebration of classic realism) we need to develop a more nuanced and historically sensitive approach.<sup>30</sup> My analysis here focuses on the significance of the use of particular literary genres and narrative conventions in highly specific literary,

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<sup>27</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp.2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp.47-51.

<sup>29</sup> Eoin McNamee is the winner of Kerry Group Irish Fiction Award 2015 for *Blue is the Night*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2014). Roberto Bolaño won the Premio internacional de novela Rómulo Gallegos (Rómulo Gallegos International Novel Prize) 1999 for *Los detectives salvajes*, (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1998). Bolaño was posthumously awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award 2009 for *2666*, trans. by Natasha Wimmer, (London: Picador, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962); Georg Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance', trans. by Rodney Livingstone, in Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London: Verso, 1980), pp.28-59; Fredric Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion', in Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp.196-213. For the Frankfurt school, see Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1979); Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by C. Lenhardt, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

cultural and political contexts and pays close attention to the ways in which the ‘formulae’ of genre fiction operate in the novels that I discuss to open up a space of social and political critique. The deployment of the conventions of crime writing in social and political contexts characterised by extreme forms of systemic violence (the north of Ireland and northern Mexico) reveals a range of ideological faultlines the elaboration of which further develops my critical evaluation of the promissory implications of Badiou’s Pauline turn.

With this in mind, I now want to introduce some of the key issues at stake in this thesis, namely the relationship between Marxism and religion and more specifically, the ways in which this thesis intervenes within contemporary Marxist debates concerning political militancy in the historical horizon of late capitalism and the viability of Badiou’s theological turn. In what follows, I discuss the place of religion in Marxist thought and outline the reasons for my decision to focus on the work of Badiou (rather than other scholars whose work has contributed to the theological turn). I then go on to delineate the critical and methodological framework that underpins the specific analyses of Badiou, McNamee and Bolaño developed in the following chapters. I also account for my focus on the use of the crime genre in McNamee’s and Bolaño’s work and my proposition that a materialist critique of literature opens up an important space for an analysis of the political and affective dimensions of Badiou’s return to St Paul. Critical scholarship on Badiou’s theory as a whole and also on the novelists and literary texts that I discuss is considered in detail in the corresponding chapters within the thesis.

### **Marxism, Capitalism and Christianity**

Economic inequalities and the exploitative practices of ‘moneychangers’ (Matthew 21.12) were a common concern in the early Christian tradition. There are prominent passages in the New Testament that highlight opposition towards unequal economic exchange. Most famously, there is the conflict in the Temple where Jesus ‘cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of moneychangers’, accusing these figures of turning the temple into a ‘den of thieves’ (Matthew 21.12-13). As the materialist biblical scholar Ched Myers explains, Jesus also offered a radical socio-economic ideology of

material redistribution.<sup>31</sup> This is symbolised in the two famous wilderness feedings in Mark 6.33-44 and Mark 8.1-9 where Jesus orders his disciples to distribute their resources to the community: 'they did all eat, and were filled' (Mark 6.42). The equation of the monetary economy with a form of thievery is continued in the Pastoral Epistles of the Pauline school. Here the adoration of money is viewed as the cause of social and ethical catastrophe: 'For the love of money is the root of all evil; and while some have coveted after it, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (I Timothy 6.10). As I demonstrate in Chapters One and Two, the discourses of the early Church are intimately bound up with practices of socio-economic equality.

Nonetheless, for Marx, religion and emancipatory politics are generally viewed as antithetical practices. Marx's famous and frequently paraphrased aphorism – 'Religion [...] is the opium of the masses' – from his 1843 *Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* has long set the general tone for this discursive division.<sup>32</sup> As the above quotation makes clear, for Marx, religion is a mere ideological palliative whose super-structural effect is to divert human attention from the underlying structural reality of economic and man-made exploitation. 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature,' he continues, 'the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.'<sup>33</sup> This depiction of religion as an ideological chimera that veils exploitative relations is continued in his discussion of commodity fetishism in *Capital* (1867).<sup>34</sup> In *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1845) Marx attributes an even more negative or reactionary significance to religion, arguing that bourgeois economists 'resemble the theologians.'<sup>35</sup> What Marx means here is that the attempt by modern economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo to defend capitalism as a natural development vis-à-vis the apparently 'artificial' mode of production of feudalism, resembles the way in which theologians argue that every other religion is a human invention while their own is an 'emanation from God.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, (New York: Orbis, 1995), pp.205-210.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, *Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (1843), <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>> [accessed 19 August 2015].

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, pp.163-177.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955), p.102.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.102.

In the field of sociology, Max Weber famously argued that a protestant ethic associated with Calvinism played a key role in the development of the 'spirit of capitalism' across Northern Europe.<sup>37</sup> This argument is elaborated in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Weber's focus is on the long-term impact of the Reformation on social and economic practices in Europe. His fundamental argument is that without the assurances of salvation provided by adherence to Catholic clerical authority, certain branches of Protestantism were beset by a type of psychological crisis and subjectivity that eventually produced conditions conducive to the accumulation of capital. This was most pronounced in Calvinism with its theory of the elect whereby a given share of the population were pre-destined for salvation while the rest were chosen for damnation. It was the inability of people to influence their own salvation that produced the acute psychological crisis so central to Weber's thesis. For the followers of Calvin, it was a person's duty to believe that they were chosen for salvation; for a lack of self-confidence was evidence of insufficient faith and a sign of damnation. Thus in place of priestly assurance of God's grace, a type of self-confidence emerged that received the necessary psychological support from the work of worldly successes, a type of work which was thus conceived as a vocation or calling (*Beruf*). In sum, Weber argued that this type of outlook, alongside the frugality associated with the other-worldly orientation of the believer, was conducive to hard work, accumulation and ultimately the development of capitalism.

With its focus on psychological causes and an attendant emphasis on the 'spirit' of capitalism, Weber's argument is founded, to a large extent, on a thesis of idealistic causation. This is of course very different from the basic materialist premises of Marxist theory. As Marx states in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859): 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.'<sup>38</sup> What this means is that the structuring principles and determinants that shape a social formation are not located in the realm of ideas or a type of 'spirit'; rather, it is social conditions, people's relation to the mode of

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<sup>37</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons, (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (1859), <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>> [accessed 19 August 2015].



production, that play the determinant role in how people think and act in the world. Unlike Weber's focus on the 'spirit of capitalism', a materialist approach would argue that such a 'spirit' is not the primary determinant of capitalist social formations. I will discuss issues of Marxist historiography in Chapter Three, especially the issue of primitive accumulation and the way in which such material practices play the key role in the development and regeneration of capitalism. Despite such epistemological differences, it is worth noting, however, that elements of Weber's thesis were partially anticipated by Marx in *Capital*:

For a society of commodity producers, whose general social relation of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material form bring their individual, private labours into relation with each other as homogenous human labour, Christianity with its cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e. in Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion.<sup>39</sup>

Marx's discussion of the 'bourgeois development' of Protestantism occurs as a passing reference during his discussion of the specificity of commodity relations and thus lacks the elaboration of Weber's more sustained, book length discussion. Marx's comment is also problematic due to the totalising conception of Protestantism as a bourgeois religion *in toto*. This is something that Weber, with his particular focus on Calvinism and other related sects, managed to avoid. Historically speaking, it is worth noting that Marx's conception of Protestantism is arguably hamstrung by the articulation of Protestantism with radical political movements of agrarian socialism in the early modern period. For example, the early reformation German theologian Thomas Müntzer extended Martin Luther's critique of institutional authoritarianism to the sphere of economics and social inequalities. Müntzer was a figurehead and rebel leader during the German Peasant War (1524-25). His leadership of the peasant movement was later celebrated by various Marxists, most notably by Friedrich Engels in *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850) and then by Badiou who sees Müntzer as an early embodiment of what he calls the 'communist invariant'.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, it is worth noting that puritanism played a key role in the most progressive politics experiments of the English Civil War (1642-1651) and its aftermath. To cite two famous examples, the Levellers, who emerged as a radical faction within Cromwell's New Model

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<sup>39</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, p.172.

<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. by Moissaye J. Olgin, (New York: International Publishers, 1966); Alain Badiou et François Balmès, *De l'Idéologie*, (Paris: Maspero, 1976), pp.66-67.

Army, sought to extend popular sovereignty via reference to natural laws derived from the bible, while more radical discourses of social and also gender equality, expressed by the Diggers, were also justified by reference to the bible and God's laws.<sup>41</sup> The point here then is that the simple equation of Protestantism with bourgeois practice is difficult to maintain both historically and theoretically.

Nonetheless, elements of this type of argument have been taken up by a number of contemporary Marxists as part of their response to Badiou's Pauline turn. The association between Christianity and capitalist rationality is made by two of Badiou's otherwise most prominent philosophical advocates, Bruno Bosteels and Alberto Toscano, both of whom have also translated Badiou's major works into English.<sup>42</sup> While these figures differ in their method, their basic argument is very similar: that the recourse to Saint Paul is unproductive since it actually colludes in the very economic and ideological practices that communist militancy seeks to contest. I will analyse each argument in turn.

Bosteels' argument draws upon the extension of Weber's thesis by the Argentine Freudian-Marxist León Rozitchner.<sup>43</sup> According to Bosteels and Rozitchner, the Christian ethic of worldly asceticism combined with and the religious idea of infinity functions to engender the productive logic of capitalist subjectivity:

Triumphant capitalism, the quantitative and infinite accumulation of wealth in the abstract monetary form would not have been possible without the human model of religious infinity promoted by Christianity, without the imaginary and symbolic reorganization operative in the subjectivity of the new religion of the Roman Empire.<sup>44</sup>

As the reference to 'the new religion of the Roman Empire' makes clear, Rozitchner and Bosteels focus on Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) as the embodiment of this new type of subjectivity that is conducive to the development of capitalism. The relationship

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<sup>41</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 1975), p.17, p.28, pp.132-3.

<sup>42</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*; Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, 'Agape and the Anonymous Religion of Atheism'.

<sup>43</sup> León Rozitchner, *La Cosa y la Cruz: Cristianismo y capitalismo. En torno a las Confesiones de San Agustín* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1997); Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, pp.129-158; Bruno Bosteels, 'On the Christian Question', in *The Idea of Communism 2*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2013), pp.37-56.

<sup>44</sup> León Rozitchner, *La Cosa y la Cruz: Cristianismo y capitalismo. En torno a las Confesiones de San Agustín*, p.9; Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, p.142.

between asceticism, religious infinity and capitalist accumulation is grounded in the fact that the renunciation of the flesh and of earthly pleasures enables the endless revalorization and recirculation of profit in an abstract way as capital, rather than in the sphere of consumption. In short, Christianity *per se* is seen here as a type of ideological practice that cannot be disarticulated from the economic logic of capitalism and commodity production. Thus in Bosteels' words, Badiou's turn to 'the figure of the saint' is problematic because it 'reveals the real difficulty of answering the demand for a political experience, including on a subjective level, that would be *essentially* different from the one it combats.'<sup>45</sup>

Bosteels' argument is a powerful rejoinder to the theological turn within contemporary Marxist theory. It highlights potential problems with Badiou and also the embrace of Saint Augustine by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*.<sup>46</sup> I will discuss Hardt and Negri and their relation to Badiou later. From a Marxist perspective, however, there are a number of problems with Bosteels' approach. Beyond the idealist grounding of an understanding of capitalist development in what Bosteels calls a 'psychic economy' rather than the materialist tradition of political economy, this approach is again problematized by a latent ahistoricism that is legible in three key ways.<sup>47</sup> First, while Bosteels and Rozitchner identify Saint Augustine as the key subjective figure in the development of this capitalistic 'psychic economy', they do not focus on the significance of class and egalitarian politics in the practices of the early Church in First Century Palestine. As I demonstrate in Chapters One and Two, the deployment of a materialist approach to the texts and practices of the early Church reveals an intransigent egalitarian kernel at the heart of Pauline Christianity. This is to say, early Christianity, prior to Augustine, is best understood not as a psychic economy of accumulation but rather as a revolutionary collective of the radically equal. Secondly, while many Marxists such as Giovanni Arrighi and Immanuel Wallerstein, have identified 'antecedents' of the capitalist mode of production in late medieval Europe, notably Florentine finance and the switch from merchant trade to finance by the Genovese, it is

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<sup>45</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, p.155.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, p.142.

unarguably incorrect to assume that in the much earlier period of the Roman Empire, which began to collapse in the fifth century AD, that the dominant mode of production was capitalist.<sup>48</sup> As Kevin Green notes, the Roman Empire had a relatively developed monetary system and some elements of technological innovation.<sup>49</sup> However, on the whole, the economic system of Antiquity and especially the Empire was not one predicated primarily on the production of commodities. As Moses Finley argues, economic actions in this period were modelled on an idea of how political virtue may be accrued via the expenditure of the surpluses from the management of a household (*oikonomia*).<sup>50</sup> In other words, economics was not primarily dedicated to the accumulation of surplus alone, but rather to the way that a surplus would enable one to live an ethical life. This differs from the practice of a larger capitalist market characterised by a logic of supply and demand and the economic imperative to engender surplus value, both of which are underpinned by commodity production.<sup>51</sup> Thus in the Ancient world, economic relations were primarily related to social concerns over prestige, virtue, power and the maintenance of political control. I will discuss the economic mode of production in First Century Palestine under Roman rule in the following chapters. Suffice to say that according to materialist scholar Fernando Belo, the dominant mode of production at this time was not capitalist, but sub-Asiatic, characterised by agrarian labour undertaken by peasants and slaves.<sup>52</sup> Bosteels and Rotzichner's focus on Christianity and the Roman Empire is thus anachronistic as it borders on a totalising conception of economic practices which does not address the specificity of different modes of production. I will address a more appropriate use of the Roman Empire as a historical allegory in relation to Badiou's conception of contemporary capitalism later. The third and final problem with Bosteels' approach is that under the conditions of late capitalism, there is arguably a split between the highly ascetic subjectivity that underpins the Weberian thesis regarding early modern capitalist production, and the narcissistic, pleasure-seeking,

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<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, pp.86-129; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

<sup>49</sup> Kevin Greene, 'Technological Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World: M.I. Finley reconsidered', *Economic History Review*, 53.1 (2000), 29-59.

<sup>50</sup> Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>51</sup> Dotan Leshem, 'Oikonomia Redefined', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 35:1, (March 2013), 43-61.

<sup>52</sup> Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell, (New York: Orbis Maryknoll, 1981), p.60.

permissive subjectivity elicited by late capitalist consumer culture. This type of split or contradiction has been observed and discussed in different political registers over the past decades, most famously by Daniel Bell in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* and also by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>53</sup> Bosteels' argument is thus beset by problems that exist at the level of historical validity and internal coherence within a materialist framework.

If Bosteels' approach is ultimately compromised by its latent ahistoricism, then the critique of the Pauline turn by Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano is more historically specific but equally totalising in its conception of religion. Chiesa and Toscano's primary target is Slavoj Žižek and his adoption of Badiou's celebration of Paul as an example for contemporary leftist militancy.<sup>54</sup> However, their argument about the 'productivity' of Paul for contemporary left politics arguably has value in relation to Badiou.<sup>55</sup> Not only was Badiou the first to erect Paul as the way to resurrect contemporary communist militancy, but also, as I noted above, Badiou's theological turn is central to Žižek's embrace of Christianity. Chiesa and Toscano's argument is that today Christian discourse is the preserve of the political right, and moreover, that Christianity plays a prominent role in the rightward turn in US national politics and its belligerent international ambitions. Writing before the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and during the US-led occupation of Iraq they argue that 'the open disclosure of [former US president] Bush's belligerent techno-theocratic ambitions' means that the 'adaptation of Christianity to contemporary left-wing politics is extremely untimely, if not straightforwardly counter-productive.'<sup>56</sup>

Chiesa and Toscano's observation about the deployment of religious discourse to justify US militaristic and economic practices is a point shared by other thinkers. As Michael Northcott states, the war on terror against militant Islam saw the Bush government explicitly develop the idea of the US military as 'servants of God's purposes.'<sup>57</sup> In Northcott's words, the Bush

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<sup>53</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Gregory Elliot, (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> For an excellent defence of Slavoj Žižek religious turn, see Anna-Maria Murtola, 'Materialist theology and anti-capitalist resistance, or, "What would Jesus buy?"', *Organization*, 19.3 (2012), 325–344.

<sup>55</sup> Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, 'Agape and the Anonymous Religion of Atheism', p.113.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, pp.113-114.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Northcott, "'An Angel Directs the Storm": The Religious Politics of American Neoconservatism', *Political Theology*, 5.2, (2004) 137-158, (p.138).

administration attempted to 'present America's past as a sacred story in which freedom and democracy are seen as divine gifts which America is privileged first to discover and then to bequeath to the world at large.'<sup>58</sup> In this context, God's bequest was seen by the Bush administration as an extension of US led capitalism via the practices of military intervention.<sup>59</sup>

The articulation of neoliberal capitalism, conservative politics and Christianity in the USA, however, has a longer historical legacy than the war on terror. As the British theologian John Milbank observes, late capitalism appears 'to need to buttress itself with the approval and connivance of actual religion.'<sup>60</sup> In the USA, this began, as a variety of scholars point out, in the 1970s when the Republican Party began to form a tactical alliance with the Christian right.<sup>61</sup> Samuel Hill and Dennis Owen argue that the 'new political religious right' emerged as a reactionary response to the rise of secular humanism and the spread of liberal values that became more prominent following the struggle for civil rights and feminism.<sup>62</sup> For Evangelical Christians such developments engendered a 'fear of moral and spiritual deterioration.'<sup>63</sup> This rightward movement has found a constituency among the rural poor, the semi-skilled and blue collar workers who are traditionally seen as the natural population of the left.<sup>64</sup> It is partly for this reason that Badiou, like many other former students of Louis Althusser, has begun to rethink the traditional class-based associations of political subjectivity.<sup>65</sup> Such developments in political ideology have parallels in Britain, albeit without the explicit articulation of right-wing populism with Christianity. For example, during the 1980s Stuart Hall famously analysed the rise of support for Thatcher among sections of the working class, despite her attacks on trade unions and British

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.139.

<sup>59</sup> Anna-Maria Murtola, 'Materialist theology and anti-capitalist resistance, or, "What would Jesus buy?"', p.328.

<sup>60</sup> John Milbank, 'Paul Against Biopolitics', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 25 (7-8), (2008) 125-172, (p.126).

<sup>61</sup> Samuel Hill and Dennis Owen, *The New Religious Right in America*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982; Mark Taylor, *After God*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); William Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity: American Style*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Hill and Dennis Owen, *The New Religious Right in America*, p.15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*; Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward, (London: Verso, 2001), pp.95-103; Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, pp.79-80; Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, (London: Verso, 1979).

industrial labour.<sup>66</sup> And we can see a further variation of this right-wing populism in the recent electoral rhetoric of the British Conservative Party with its discourses of hard-working families and the Conservatives as the 'party of working people.'<sup>67</sup> This is not to say that socio-economic struggles are no longer a site of political mobilisation on both a micro and macro level. As the British Marxist Andrew Smith notes, various forms of creative resistance to economic exploitation continue to occur in the contemporary workplace, including the ever growing service economy, which now makes up over 80 per cent of the British labour force.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, as I discuss in Chapter Four, the continental rise of nominally socialist regimes in Central and Southern America, known as *la marea rosada* or pink tide, is partly derived from an upsurge of resistance to policies of neoliberal economic restructuring.<sup>69</sup> However, what the examples of conservative populism suggest is that rather than positing a natural link between socio-economic position and political ideology, Marxist theory must examine the way political ideology emerges in a way that is discursively produced or interpellated.<sup>70</sup>

The focus on ideological interpellation is an important development in Marxist theory. Indeed, if one analyses the socio-economic shifts that provide the historical context for the rise of the 'new religious political right,' then one can see that the ideological alignment of Christianity and US neo-conservatism is neither inevitable nor necessary. As Žižek notes, the rise of this right-wing articulation in the US takes place in the context of a rightward shift in politics, characterised by attempts to de-regulate economic transactions, undermine trade union power and cut state spending on social welfare.<sup>71</sup> His argument is that highly funded Evangelical Protestant groups step into the void left by what Michael

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<sup>66</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without guarantees', in *Marx: A Hundred Years On*, ed. by B. Matthews, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), pp.57-84; Stuart Hall, 'The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism amongst the theorists', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp.35-74.

<sup>67</sup> Matt Dathan, 'General Election 2015: David Cameron declares the Tories the 'party of working people' as he unveils tax giveaways and goodies in manifesto', *Independent*, (14 April 2015), <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/general-election-2015-david-cameron-declares-the-tories-the-party-of-working-people-as-he-unveils-tax-giveaways-and-goodies-in-manifesto-10175346.html>> [accessed 23 August 2015].

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Smith, 'On Shopworking', *New Left Review*, 78, (November-December, 2012), 99-113.

<sup>69</sup> John Beverley, 'Latin America after 9/11: Geopolitics and the Pink Tide', *Berfrois*, (6 January 2012), <<http://www.berfrois.com/2012/01/john-beverley-latin-americas-pink-tide/>> [accessed 20 August 2015].

<sup>70</sup> See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press), pp.85-126.

<sup>71</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*, (London: Verso, 2009), pp.33-4.

Hardt calls the 'withering' of secular forms of civil society and in particular the old support systems tied to welfare capitalism and the social networks of trade unions.<sup>72</sup> A similar argument about the recent rise of political Islam in the context of rapid socio-economic transformations is made by Tariq Ali and the Marxist RETORT collective headed by T.J. Clark.<sup>73</sup> Here structural adjustment programmes in places like Egypt are seen to have provoked a crisis of secular nationalism characterised by privatisation of state owned institutions, a reduction in public expenditure and widespread immiseration. The effects of this spiral of poverty are no longer offset by policies of welfare and state expenditure because such forms of public investment are precisely the types of socio-economic practice reversed by structural adjustment programmes. Millenarian despair is thus left to smoulder in the archipelago of third world slums which become a fertile recruiting ground for political Islam. I will analyse the way a similar process of economic restructuring plays a key role in the resurgence of certain violent and misogynistic practices in the femicides of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico in Chapter Four.

It is important to note that in the same historical period that the articulation of Christian institutions with US neo-conservatism begins to take place, a different and more progressive type of political articulation of Christianity also becomes prominent in Latin America. I refer here not just to the rise of Liberation Theology that is famously symbolised by the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellin, Colombia in 1968, but moreover to the rise of revolutionary movements that were understood in the context of, and energised by Christian discourses.<sup>74</sup> For example, in Colombia during this period, Christian figures including the priest Camilo Torres Restrepo (1929-1966) played a major role in recruitment for the National Liberation Army (ELN), the ideological base of which was

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid; Michael Hardt, 'The Withering of Civil Society', in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, ed. by Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp.23-39.

<sup>73</sup> RETORT, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, (London: Verso, 2005), esp. pp.16-37 and pp.171-196; Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, (London: Verso, 2002).

<sup>74</sup> See Gustavo Gutiérrez *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis, 1973); Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. by Paul Burns (New York: Orbis, 1987).



constituted by Torres' Christian Marxism.<sup>75</sup> Torres died in battle as a serving member of the guerrilla army.

Liberation theology also played a significant role in the left wing insurgencies of Central America during the 1970s and 1980s. In Mexico, in the early 1970s, one of the major political movements and guerrilla insurgencies was the Party of the Poor (*Partido de los Pobres*, PdIP). Led by the left-wing theologian and school teacher Lucio Cabañas Barrientos (1938–1974), this movement viewed its struggle in Christian terms.<sup>76</sup> Following the pioneering works of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff, the Spanish born Jesuit Jon Sobrino developed the liberation theology stance on the preferential option for the poor in the context of the Frente Maribundo (FMLN) insurgency in El Salvador. Like Gutiérrez and Boff, Sobrino argued that the only route to Christ and “word made flesh” was through the historical Jesus of Nazareth whose mission had been amongst the poor and subaltern populations of Ancient Palestine. Thus for Sobrino, redemption – both political and spiritual – was conceived primarily in terms of a revolution amongst the poor in El Salvador and Latin America in general, a poor who were and still remain, in Sobrino's terms, a ‘crucified people’ awaiting a new Kingdom or egalitarian social order.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of the alignment of theology and left wing politics in this period emerged in Nicaragua. Here, the Marxist priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal, along with many other liberation theologians, played a major role in developing popular support for the Sandinista revolutionary war. Cardenal was later appointed as the Minister for Culture in the Sandinista government between 1979 and 1987.<sup>78</sup> I will discuss the ideological significance of Cardenal's innovations in poetry, the work of Boff and liberation theology in general and how they relate to the utopian configurations in Roberto Bolaño's fiction in Chapter Four. And in Chapter Two, I will also demonstrate how messianic discourses play a key role in one

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<sup>75</sup> Alejandro Sánchez Lopera, ‘Camilo Torres Restrepo: La posibilidad de una moral insurgente’, in *Genealogías de la colombianidad. Formaciones discursivas y tecnologías de gobierno en los siglos XIX y XX*, ed. by Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Restrepo, (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2008) pp.134-170.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Avina, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 169-176; Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico's Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 195.

<sup>77</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. by John Drury (London: SCM, 1978); Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. by Paul Burns (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, ‘Con Ernesto Cardenal’, *Amanecer: reflexion Cristiana en la Nueva Nicaragua*, 3 (1981), 15-16; John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp.67-72, pp.82-85, pp.94-101.

the contemporary political movements celebrated by Badiou, the Mexican Zapatistas (EZLN).

Chiesa and Toscano's assertion is that the Pauline turn is 'counter-productive' because Evangelical Protestantism has played a role in securing hegemonic consent for neo-conservative ideology in the United States. However, as the previous discussion shows, this argument is undercut by an analysis of the way in which Christianity also played a key role in mobilising left wing political militancy in this same period.

Another influential argument against Badiou has been made by Daniel Bensaïd.<sup>79</sup> In Bensaïd's 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event,' the religious underpinnings of Badiou's thought are criticised for two key reasons. Firstly, in terms of its analytical value, theology is viewed as an entirely ahistorical mode of analysis; and secondly, politically speaking, theology is viewed as a paradoxical or even contradictory development due to the apparent hierarchical nature of religious discourse:

The militant summoned by the 'rare' if not exceptional idea of politics seems to be haunted by the Pauline ideal of saintliness, which constantly threatens to turn into a bureaucratic priesthood of Church, State or Party. The absolute incompatibility between truth and opinion, between philosopher and sophist, between event and history, leads to a practical impasse. The refusal to work within the equivocal contradiction and tension which bind them together ultimately leads to a pure voluntarism, which oscillates between a broadly leftist form of politics and its philosophical circumvention. In either case, the combination of theoretical elitism and practical moralism can indicate a haughty withdrawal from the public domain.<sup>80</sup>

Bensaïd's argument is that Badiou's theory is grounded on the conceptual framework of a miraculous event. Understood in this way, political uprisings are seen to emerge *ex-nihilo*, in other words they lack any concrete determinations. The problem with this, for Bensaïd, is that it sunders Badiou's idea of communism from the Marxist focus on history and the social contradictions and conditions that give rise to class conflict. He argues that one major

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<sup>79</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', in *Think Again, Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward (Continuum: London, 2004), pp.94-105. Bensaïd has made various related criticisms of Badiou, most recently in the special edition of the journal *ContreTemps* entitled 'De quoi le communisme est-il le nom?' which Bensaïd co-edited in 2009. See *ContreTemps: Revue de critique communiste*, 4 (décembre 2009). This is a reference to the French title of Badiou's *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, see Alain Badiou, *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?* (Paris: Lignes, 2007). Bensaïd's work is drawn upon by a number of other thinkers when engaging with the merits of Badiou's political strategy, see Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, (London: Verso, 2011), pp.1-41; Alex Callinicos, 'Alain Badiou and the idea of communism,' *Socialist Review*, 49 (2013), 326-344.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p.101.

consequence is that Badiou is unable to theorise the contradictions and weak points of a social formation wherein class struggle and political action might take place; the apparent absence of historical focus means that his theory lacks strategic power and his work thus leads either to a blind 'voluntarism' or a retreat from practical politics in the 'public domain.' Moreover, Bensaïd asserts that the religious underpinnings of this miraculous framework mean that Badiou's conception of politics is ultimately hierarchical and elitist; the figure of the saint is distinct and elevated above the common human, thus producing a type of politics marked by a distance between the masses and leaders. This is the meaning of the 'bureaucratic priesthood of Church, state or party.'

By focusing of voluntarism and bureaucratic and philosophical elitism, Bensaïd's argument operates by drawing upon two traditional manoeuvres within Marxist criticism, both of which identify a lacuna vis-à-vis the relationship between a theory and the masses. These manoeuvres focus on a leftist and a rightist deviation. The focus on voluntarism refers to Lenin's denigration of 'leftism' as a spontaneous, anarchistic and 'infantile disorder' or deviation.<sup>81</sup> This type of politics is seen as divorced from the masses because it does not engage in strategic historical analysis and the patient labour of building revolutionary consciousness and a mass movement. The second, rightist deviation is associated with a critique of Stalinism. Here the distance from the masses emerges in the location of political truth in the realm of a bureaucratic cadres of experts in theory or philosophy. Like Badiou, Bensaïd was a militant during the French *événements* of May 1968. Unlike Badiou's turn to Maoism, however, Bensaïd subsequently joined the Trotskyist group *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*. In line with the Trotsky's famous criticisms of Stalin, much of Bensaïd criticism of Badiou emerges from a denunciation of the latter's apparent 'unsettled score with Stalinism.'<sup>82</sup> In short, Badiou's theory is problematic because it avoids 'having to examine Maoism's historical record and its relations with Stalinism in greater depth.'<sup>83</sup> Bensaïd's argument is that the failure to address the hierarchical nature of such Stalinist legacies means that Badiou's work is fatally undermined by a tendency towards anti-

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<sup>81</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, "'Left Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder', in *Selected Works: Volume 3*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), pp.371-460.

<sup>82</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?*, trans. by Max Eastman, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1937) Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p.103.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, pp.103-104.

egalitarian practices. The debates within Trotskyism are beyond the remit of this thesis. However, one way to address the substance of Bensaïd's accusation is to examine Badiou's recourse to theology and his celebration of Paul as an example for contemporary communist militancy. As I argue in Chapters One and Two, when approached in a materialist manner, Pauline Christianity will be shown to be a practice of the radically equal. Thus rather than see the theological turn as an index of hierarchical tendency within Badiou, I would argue that such an alignment bespeaks an attempt to maintain the egalitarian and emancipatory kernel of Marxist theory. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that Bensaïd uses theology as a means to identify an anti-egalitarian strain in Badiou's work. In his book *Walter Benjamin sentinelle messianique* ('Walter Benjamin: the messianic watchman', 1990), Bensaïd himself draws upon the messianic theories of Benjamin in order to suggest that historical processes are dominated by the class struggle but in a way that is contingent and not predetermined.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, in *Le pari mélancolique* (*The Melancholic Wager*, 1997) he draws upon Lucien Goldmann's reworking of Blaise Pascal's theological notion of a wager in order to argue that Marxism and the class struggle must proceed by making wagers on the chance of future victory.<sup>85</sup> When understood in this context, Bensaïd's attack on the theological grounds of Badiou's theory thus seems to exhibit a striking series of contradictions. I now want to examine what is arguably his more significant argument: the putative lack of historical focus in Badiou's theological turn. My argument is that Badiou's turn to Paul does contain a key historical focus and that this historical focus both responds to and attempts to intervene critically within the situation of late capitalism.

### **A Pauline Present?**

Badiou's turn to Saint Paul is an aspect of his critique of contemporary economic, political and ideological practices associated with the current period of neoliberal capitalism. His reference to Paul as 'our contemporary' thus suggests that late capitalist social formations exhibit features that resemble the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire arguably reached its peak at the start of the second century AD, around half a century after Paul's death. At this stage, Rome was one of the largest Empires in human history. The allegorical significance

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, *Walter Benjamin sentinelle messianique*, (Paris: Plon, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, *Le pari mélancolique*, (Paris: Fayard, 1997).

of Badiou's turn to Rome is to be found in that fact that one of the major ideological discourses that corresponded to imperial rule was that Rome was '*imperium sine fine*': 'an empire without end.'<sup>86</sup> What this meant was that neither time nor space limited the Empire. This idea is famously expressed in Virgil's *Aeneid* when Jupiter discusses with Venus the future power that Rome will command: 'to these do I nor bound nor period set.'<sup>87</sup> As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri thus observe, the prevailing ideological discourses suggested that the Roman Empire was a 'boundless, universal space' that had no outside.<sup>88</sup>

Badiou's point in drawing an allegorical comparison with the almost ubiquitous reach of imperial Rome then is not to suggest that the Empire is a form of capitalism *avant la lettre*; this anachronistic tendency is what undermines Bosteels and Rotzinger's accounts of early Christianity.<sup>89</sup> Rather, by comparing the present with ideological discourses positing the geographical and temporal infinity of the Empire, Badiou is attempting to highlight new social developments in a critical way. As I highlight above, his argument in *Saint Paul* is that the world is 'fulfilling one of Marx's inspired predictions: the world finally configured, but as a market, as a world-market.'<sup>90</sup> Badiou notably refuses the appellations of 'postmodern capitalism' and argues that this globalising trend is nothing new: 'contemporary capitalism possesses all the features of classical capitalism.'<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, his examples of how the world becomes a 'world-market' correspond to a number of trends that are analysed by other 'postmodern' Marxists. Badiou observes the tendency of capital to commodify ever new areas of cultural and social life:

Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market. The capitalist logic of the general equivalent and the identitarian and cultural logic communities and minorities form and articulated whole.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Pat Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p.16; Christopher Kelly, *The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.3-5.

<sup>87</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by David West (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2003) 1.278

<sup>88</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, p.11.

<sup>89</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism*, p.7.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, pp.9-15.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, pp.10-11.

Badiou's focus on cultural identities as site of commodification under capitalism's increasingly global and 'homogenizing' reach thus corresponds to arguments made by David Harvey, Fredric Jameson and also Hardt and Negri.<sup>93</sup> For these thinkers, the commodification of cultural practices is a symptom of capitalism's attempt to maintain high rates of economic growth that were hampered in the 1970s by the rigidity of long-term and large-scale investments in durable goods under Fordism-Keynesianism. The turn to cultural practices is part of a wider shift to products that have a shorter turnover time, what Harvey calls post-Fordist 'flexible accumulation.'<sup>94</sup> It also bespeaks the way in which capitalism now attempts to find new opportunities for commodification once the modernization process is complete and capital can no longer expand via the spatial fixes of imperial conquest as analysed by Lenin at the start of the twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> This process reaches its height in the contemporary conjuncture via what Hardt and Negri call the commodification of affect, wherein the logic of the marketplace permeates life itself to the degree that almost everything in our social life, from our Amazon browsing history to social media, and participation in sporting events, are incorporated into the production of surplus value via the potential of advertising revenue.<sup>96</sup> It is here then, in the increasing commodification of areas of social and cultural life that the historical significance Badiou's recourse to Paul and the Roman Empire becomes clear. As I note above, the key feature of the Empire was the sense that it had no outside, neither temporal nor spatial. By focusing on the way in the commercial logic extends into all spheres of social life and by comparing this to an earlier 'stage' of historical development, Badiou's theological turn thus highlights the way that Marxism can still continue to offer both a critical historical analysis and the means to endow us with a new heightened sense of our place in the global system.

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<sup>93</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*.

<sup>94</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, pp.142-152, pp.171-172.

<sup>95</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp.48-50.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, pp.292-3. It is also worth noting that Badiou's frequent observation of today's 'rapid concentration of capital under the leadership of finance' chimes with the argument made by Arrighi that in periods of decline in manufacture and trade, capital repeatedly turns to financial speculation as a means to maintain growth. See Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p.9; Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*

Indeed, this allegorical turn to the ancient world also bespeaks a type of ideological critique that seeks to contest contemporary celebrations of globalised capitalism as marking the end of history. This is an argument popularised by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Men*.<sup>97</sup> Drawing upon Alexandre Kojève reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Fukuyama's argument is that with the collapse of communism, history culminates in liberal capitalism, which, with its increasingly global and universal reach, no longer participates in a Hegelian dialectic of overcoming.<sup>98</sup> Badiou's discussion of Paul then is an example of what he himself would call an 'intervention' within contemporary political and ideological discourses.<sup>99</sup> By highlighting the comparison with first century Palestine under Roman imperial rule, Badiou's argument about Paul allows us to question the prevailing liberal theses regarding the progressive nature of the contemporary global order. Indeed, his more recent analyses of the Arab Spring and anti-austerity protests in Europe, entitled *The Rebirth of History*, make this sense of intervention even clearer.<sup>100</sup> When understood in this context, his theological turn cannot thus be reduced to a form of ahistoricism à la Bensaïd.

Badiou's critical and allegorical use of Paul arguably extends further than this. In his eyes, Paul's unprecedented achievement was to have introduced a new, universalistic discourse into the world of late antiquity that was distinct from the other dominant ideological outlooks that constituted human subjectivity during this period. The ideological break announced by Paul relates to the prevailing discourses of the 'Greek' and 'Jew' in the letter to the Galatians. According to Badiou, the discourses that Paul declares to have been crucified with Jesus are firstly, that of the wise man: the Greek philosophical ideology of man's proper and natural place within the order of the cosmos (*phusía*); and secondly, that of the prophet: the Jewish discourse of exceptionality that seeks to decipher signs that indicate the providential arrival of miracles that are the unique property of a given ethnic group.<sup>101</sup> In contrast, Paul announces the discourse of the apostle. The distinctive feature

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<sup>97</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Men*, (London: Penguin, 1992). See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

<sup>98</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Men*, pp.xxi-xxii, pp.58-70, pp.287-290.

<sup>99</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism*, p.31.

<sup>100</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, esp. p.15.

<sup>101</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism*, pp.40-44.

of the discourse of the apostle is that it refuses the idea of mastery central to the other ideological discourses, 'whether it be through direct mastery of the totality (Greek wisdom), or through mastery of a literal tradition and the deciphering of signs (Jewish ritualism and prophetism).'<sup>102</sup> By refusing these ideas of mastery, Paul's concept of the apostle – a servant borne out of a relation to the son, rather than the discourse of mastery pertaining to an extant or metaphorical father, whether philosophical or ethno-religious – signals the Christian idea of kenosis. This is an idea of emptying and sacrifice whereby salvation comes not from traditional positions of power but rather from the position of the lowly human and the socially excluded. As Paul puts it, as Jesus, God 'made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men' (Philippians 2.7).

In Badiou's terms the apostolic and kenotic logic of Paul 'is to show that a universal logic of salvation cannot be reconciled with any law, be it one that ties thought to the cosmos, or one that fixes the effects of exceptional election.'<sup>103</sup> Paul thus offers a new way of being in the world that is distinct from the law of philosophical *phusis*, the natural cosmic totality, and the law of exception, the closed ethnic community.

By focusing on Paul's unprecedented ideological gesture, Badiou's celebration of Paul as 'our contemporary' thus speaks critically to ideological and political discourses in the present conjuncture. In other words, Badiou is referring here to metaphysical discourses that equate market competition with human nature and prevailing right-wing political responses to neoliberal global capitalism. Neoliberalism refers to the proposition that free markets, entrepreneurialism, private property and an ethic of individual choice should be the guiding principles of politics and economics.<sup>104</sup> On the whole, the effect of these types of neoliberal practices is to de-politicise economics, which is in turn transformed into a technical exercise. As William Davies puts it, neoliberalism represents 'the disenchantment of the political by the economic.'<sup>105</sup> Or in Badiou's terms from *Saint Paul*, 'the word "management" obliterates the word "politics."'<sup>106</sup> Neoliberalism as a theory has a variety

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>104</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), p.6.

<sup>105</sup> William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, (London: Sage, 2014), p.156.

<sup>106</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.12



of origins, mostly within developments of twentieth century economic thought, yet one of its major unifying features is the basic assumption that economic competition is the groundwork of human behaviour.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, as thinkers such as Fredric Jameson and William Davies explain, this high on metaphysical association of market competition with human nature is one of the foremost justifications and arguments made regarding neoliberalism by its proponents.<sup>108</sup> The basic premise of Gary Becker's famous assertion - 'I am saying that the economic approach provides a valuable unified framework for understanding all human behaviour' - is thus shared by other major figures involved in different trends of neoliberal theory such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman.<sup>109</sup> Approached in such metaphysical terms, neoliberalism is understood as the most natural and harmonious form of social organization.

When viewed in the context of Badiou's assertion of Paul's contemporaneity, these discourses can be seen to parallel the 'Greek' cosmic philosophy of *phusía*, the natural attribution of man's proper place in the totality of the cosmos. It is for this reason then that Badiou celebrates Paul's attempt to posit a new idea of social organisation and human subjectivity. The need for this Pauline break is all the more urgent because he sees that this conception of the market as inevitable and natural has also permeated 'the European "Left"' which in Badiou's eyes 'has sunk into an irreversible coma' since the late 1970s:

François Hollande? German Social Democracy? Spain's PSOE? PASOK in Greece? The Labour Party? All these parties are now overtly the managers of globalised capitalism.<sup>110</sup>

The point here is that ideas of equality and socio-economic redistribution, traditionally associated with social democracy and socialism, have been now replaced by the rhetoric of 'competitiveness' or the 'market economy', ideas which relate to, and highlight the

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<sup>107</sup>William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, pp.20-21; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp.263-267.

<sup>108</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp.263-267.

<sup>109</sup> Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behaviour*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.14; Friedrich August von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (London: Routledge, 1944), p.93; Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>110</sup> Alain Badiou, 'Eleven points inspired by the situation in Greece,' trans. by David Broder, *Verso Blog*, 9 July 2015, <<http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2111-alain-badiou-eleven-points-inspired-by-the-situation-in-greece>> [accessed 14 August 2015].

ideological hegemony of the logic of neoliberal or ‘globalised capitalism.’<sup>111</sup> In other words, what Badiou is referring to here is the development of what Tariq Ali describes as the ‘extreme centre’: an ideological convergence point where the established political left and political right in both Europe and the USA unite behind a free market, pro-business and anti-union agenda.<sup>112</sup> This then is the reason for Badiou’s assertion that one of the major sites of political struggle today must be on the terrain of ideology and in particular, the attempt to re-legitimise ideas of equality, socio-economic re-distribution tied to communism.

The urgency of a neo-Pauline attempt to posit new, egalitarian ideas of human sociality is also indexed by the broadly rightward response of the political class to the ongoing financial crisis. Despite some populist gestures such as limits on bankers’ pay, one of the main economic responses in Europe is the reduction of pay and pensions in public sector employment.<sup>113</sup> To this is added a discourse of a ‘crisis’ in relation to migration. This takes place both in the United States in relation to migrant labour from central and southern America, and in the European Union, vis-à-vis the arrival of people escaping war and conflict via Mediterranean Sea routes.<sup>114</sup> In Britain the discourse of a “migrant crisis” is particularly acute, with references by the Prime Minister David Cameron to a ‘swarm’ of migrants seeking to enter Britain via the French port at Calais.<sup>115</sup> This type of rhetoric takes place against the backdrop of on-going attempts by the Conservative Government to re-negotiate the right of free movement of labour within the European Union. Despite certain ostensible differences regarding membership of the European Union, the political response in Britain follows Ali’s notion of the ‘extreme centre’: the electoral rhetoric of ‘British jobs for British workers’ and attendant arguments regarding a tough stance on immigration are shared by the two major political parties, Labour and Conservative.<sup>116</sup> So, although the

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<sup>111</sup> Alain Badiou, ‘Our Contemporary Impotence’, p.45; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, pp.6-11.

<sup>112</sup> Tariq Ali, *The Extreme Centre: A Warning*, (London: Verso, 2015).

<sup>113</sup> ‘Critique Notes’, *Critique*, 38:1, (2010), 1-9 (p.3).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p.3; Theresa May and Bernard Cazeneuve, ‘Migrants think our streets are paved with gold’, *Daily Telegraph* (1 August 2015), < <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/11778396/Migrants-think-our-streets-are-paved-with-gold.html>> [accessed 23 August 2015].

<sup>115</sup> Jessica Elgot and Matthew Taylor, ‘Calais crisis: Cameron condemned for ‘dehumanising’ description of migrants’, *Guardian* (30 July 2015), <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/30/david-cameron-migrant-swarm-language-condemned>> [accessed 23 August 2015].

<sup>116</sup> Deborah Summers, ‘Brown stands by British jobs for British workers remark’, *Guardian* (30 January 2009), <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/jan/30/brown-british-jobs-workers>> [accessed 23 August 2015].

origins of the economic crisis reside within the trading mechanisms of financial speculation, the major political response of the 'extreme centre' has been austerity economics in relation to public spending and an ideological and political focus on issues of migration and population. Emergent developments of the parliamentary left, including Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and Sinn Féin in Ireland seek to offer an alternative to this dominant trend, yet they remain emergent forces.<sup>117</sup> I will examine the limits of Badiou's response to these types of politics, in particular their attempt to enact a new form of socialism via the state in Chapter Four when I discuss a major inspiration for Podemos: the Latin American *marea rosada*.<sup>118</sup> In general then, the dominant ideological tendency within mainstream politics is thus to express an ideology of ethnic privilege rather than a re-distributive socio-economic critique. These responses thus parallel the exclusivist communitarian discourses noted by Paul.

The major point here then is that *pace* Bensaïd, Badiou's turn to Paul does not bespeak an ahistorical development within Marxism. As I have shown, his Pauline turn engages critically with, and demarcates certain significant developments in late capitalism. Indeed, one of the major justifications for turning to Badiou in this thesis is because his work constitutes a new and influential turn within Marxism that endows us with a critical sense of our place within the world of late capitalism. The central argument of this thesis is that the theological turn within Marxism is not an archive of defeat, but rather an entirely appropriate means to re-imagine and re-energise Marxist politics today. This thesis thus challenges the reductive view of the theological turn by figures such as Bensaïd, Bosteels, and Chiesa and Toscano. With this in mind, the following section further explains the rationale for my decision to focus primarily on the work of Badiou (rather than other scholars whose work also turns to theology) and discusses my use of and engagement with

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2015]; Patrick Wintour and Alexandra Topping, 'Change rules on migrant workers, says Ed Miliband', *Guardian* (21 June 2012), <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jun/21/change-rules-migrant-workers-miliband>> [accessed 23 August 2015].

<sup>117</sup> Seamus Milne, 'Syriza can't just cave in. Europe's elites want regime change in Greece', *Guardian* (1 July 2015), <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/01/syriza-cave-in-elites-regime-change>> [accessed 23 August 2015].

<sup>118</sup> For a recent critique of the parliamentary and statist style of politics see Alain Badiou, 'Our Contemporary Impotence'. For the influence of Latin American developments on *Podemos* see Pablo Iglesias, 'Understanding Podemos', *New Left Review*, 93 (May-June 2015), 7-22; Pablo Iglesias, 'Spain on edge', *New Left Review*, 93 (May-June 2015), 23-42.

literary culture, in particular contemporary crime fiction, to assess the theological turn within Marxist theory.

### Why Badiou?

In terms of academic scholarship, Badiou's work constitutes a profoundly influential moment in materialist contributions to the recent theological turn within critical theory.<sup>119</sup> Thus a major justification for the focus on his work on Saint Paul and communism is that it is now a fixture in contemporary debates within critical theory.<sup>120</sup> Beyond the criticisms I have outlined above, it speaks powerfully to theorists engaged with the reformulation of left-politics via theology. Badiou's Saint Paul was first published in French in 1997, thus it constitutes the chronological "start" of the materialist and leftist turn towards theology.<sup>121</sup> Badiou's turn to Paul is now a constant source of reference for subsequent interventions in this field by figures such as Slavoj Žižek, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and Giorgio Agamben.<sup>122</sup> Following Badiou, the figure of the Saint is now a central motif in such theorists' searches for a model for contemporary political militancy.

I discuss Žižek's work and his relation to Badiou in Chapters One and Two. As I noted above, his work on Paul is largely indebted to the insights offered by Badiou. I will also draw upon elements of Agamben's reading of Paul and messianic logic throughout this thesis. However, it needs to be stated here that despite his sustained engagements with Walter Benjamin, Agamben is not a Marxist.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, from a Marxist point of view Agamben is often problematic. Despite his evocative writings and deconstructions of received

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<sup>119</sup> For earlier examples emerging from Lacanian psychoanalysis see: Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Bonnie Honig, 'Ruth, the Model Emigree: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration,' in *Cosmopolitics*, ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp.192-215. In Latin America, from a more Freudian approach, see: León Rozitchner, *La Cosa y la Cruz: Cristianismo y capitalismo. En torno a las Confesiones de san Agustín*.

<sup>120</sup> See Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London: Verso, 2012).

<sup>121</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l'universalisme*, (Paris: PUF, 1997).

<sup>122</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000); Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: or why the Christian legacy is worth fighting for* (London: Verso, 2000); Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012); Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, trans. by Patricia Dailey (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2005); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004)

<sup>123</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*; Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. by Liz Heron, (London: Verso, 2007).

‘Western’ dualisms relating to power, politics, and life, his work is often tainted by a latent ahistoricism. Agamben is primarily a philosopher of potentiality, or what he calls ‘whatever being’.<sup>124</sup> In sum, he sees this potentiality as the ontological destiny of humans as linguistic beings. This is because his philosophy is ultimately grounded on a reading of the paradoxical role of the shifter or deixis in post-Saussurean linguistics.<sup>125</sup> His epistemology is thus linguistic rather than historical and political.

Hardt and Negri also look to the example of Saint Augustine and Saint Francis in their attempts to re-conceptualise communist militancy. In a similar manner to Badiou, they posit a comparison between the totalising logic of late capitalism and that of the Roman Empire. Their work is a powerful addition to Marxist engagements with contemporary capitalism. However, there are significant problems with their approach that mean that it has not been chosen for sustained analysis in this thesis. Hardt and Negri are arguably correct that the Bishop of Hippo would be dumbfounded by the level of corruption in the ‘Empire’ of contemporary capitalism. Unlike Augustine however, they argue that our pilgrimage on earth is absolutely immanent, that there is no transcendental space. This focus on immanence in their work is dependent on Baruch Spinoza, in particular his argument that the world is determined by the neutral monism of substance. In other words, for Spinoza there is no transcendent space, no division between god and nature, or mind and body. Understood in this way, Hardt and Negri argue that capitalist empire is the immanent scene of communist development. This is because Hardt and Negri view the totalising and increasingly social developments of contemporary capitalism as developing the productive forces in a way that is increasingly socialised. What Marxists would call the basic contradiction between socialised labour and private ownership thus becomes untenable in their view. Accordingly a new type of political recognition of this socialised mode of production is almost inevitable; according to their logic, this is the movement or recognition that would constitute communism. One problem with this type of approach is

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<sup>124</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.1, p.86.

<sup>125</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. by Karen Pinkus and Michael Hardt, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp.16-7; Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. by Liz Heron, (London: Verso, 2007), pp.52-3. See also Justin Clemens, ‘The Role of the Shifter and the Problem of Reference in Giorgio Agamben’, in *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life*, ed. by Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron, Alex Murray, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp.43-65.

that it is highly mechanical. It has no real concept of mediation, or how political ideology or class consciousness is developed. Secondly, as Badiou notes, this kind of logic is politically untenable as it also results in 'authorizing the belief that the worse it gets, the better it gets.'<sup>126</sup> In other words, the greater the development of capitalism and its attendant methods of exploitation and immiseration, the more immanent the development of communism. As we have seen in the current financial crisis and the brief rise and then disappearance of movements such as Occupy, the immanent emergence of communism has not yet taken place.

Another justification for focusing on Badiou is political. The critical power and passion of Badiou's turn to Saint Paul and his related invocation of the 'communist hypothesis' as the unsurpassable political horizon for humanity, has played a central role in orientating recent debates and acts of political resistance under the conditions of late capitalism in general and during the ongoing structural crisis referred to by certain Marxists as the 'systemic crisis' in global capitalism in particular.<sup>127</sup> Following Badiou's provocative equation of communism with the Platonic *eidos* or the good, first announced in his book, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (2005/2008 in translation) and subsequently developed in a variety of different publications, a conference entitled 'The Idea of Communism' organized by Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek was held at Birkbeck College, London in March 2009.<sup>128</sup> The original plan for the event expected an attendance of 180. The critical passion and clarity of Badiou's work, articulated within the determinant historical conjuncture of a profound socio-economic crisis, has thus revived faith in communism as a name that guides radical political and philosophical action. The papers from 'The Idea of Communism' conference were published by Verso.<sup>129</sup> Following this success, a further conference in New York took place. Featuring another keynote address by Badiou, the proceedings were screened live by Verso via the internet and later published in the collection, *The Idea of Communism 2: the New York Conference*.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. by Steve Corcoran, (London: Verso, 2006), pp.44-5.

<sup>127</sup> 'Critique Notes', *Critique*, 38:1, (2010), 1-9 (p.1).

<sup>128</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, pp.115-117.

<sup>129</sup> Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *The Idea of Communism*, (London: Verso, 2010).

<sup>130</sup> Slavoj Žižek (ed.) *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference*, (London: Verso, 2013).

In more directly political terms, a further justification relates to the connection between Badiou's theoretical work and concrete practice. Badiou's first major theoretical work was *Theory of the Subject*, which took the form of a series of seminars between January 1975 and June 1976. The book seeks to work out first, the logic of the student and worker uprising of May 1968 in France, an uprising that Badiou's theoretical practice will later conceptualise as an 'event', and second, the patient labour of fidelity to this event during the 1970s, what Badiou will call the work of the political 'subject', and which in this instance took the form of French Maoism. 'That which we name "Maoism",' states Badiou, 'is less a final result than a task, a historical guideline. It is a question of thinking and practising post-Leninism.'<sup>131</sup> I will discuss Badiou's theoretical concepts of event and subject, along with the significance of French Maoism in the next chapter. Suffice to say here that what Badiou is referring to in this quotation is a problematic development in the Leninist party form. In 1968 this was expressed by the French Communist Party's alignment with the parliamentary path advocated by the then Prime Minister Georges Pompidou. The effect of this decision was to dissipate the populist political energy of the May uprising: the subsequent elections in June 1968 saw the rightist Union for the Defence of the Republic become the first party in the French Republic's history to obtain an absolute parliamentary majority. In Badiou's eyes such a development signified the need to form a new type of political organisation that would not divorce the vanguard intellectual cadre (the Leninist party) from the revolutionary masses on the street.

In light of the *événements* of May 68 and his related investigations, Badiou co-founded L' *Organisation Politique* (L'OP), a self-described post-Leninist political organization in France. L'OP was active between 1985 and 2007 and regularly published a paper whose title, *La Distance politique*, signifies Badiou's opposition to the statist and parliamentary form of politics.<sup>132</sup> The aim of L'OP was direct action with the working masses and in particular, *les sans papiers* who were viewed not as immigrants but rather as workers.<sup>133</sup> Badiou's work thus escapes the rather tragic condition of 'Western Marxism' as analysed by Perry

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<sup>131</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.182.

<sup>132</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward, (London: Verso, 2002), pp.95-105. See the website for L'Organisation Politique, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20071017153201/http://orgapoli.net/>> [accessed 20 August 2015].

<sup>133</sup> *La Distance politique*, 19-20 (April 1997), 7.

Anderson.<sup>134</sup> According to Anderson one significant trend in Marxism since the end of the Second World War has been the gradual divorce of theory from a practical relationship with the masses and class struggle.<sup>135</sup> As Neil Larsen and Terry Eagleton note, the relocation of Marxist theory to the almost solipsistic sphere of academia is a defining feature of the otherwise seminal works of the key Anglophone Marxist, Fredric Jameson.<sup>136</sup> I draw upon Jameson's re-working of Althusser's theory of ideology and symptomatic reading in relation to literary texts later in this chapter.<sup>137</sup> However, the main theoretical focus of this thesis is the work of Alain Badiou. This is because, unlike Jameson, theory and political practice remain closely and crucially aligned in his work.

In more recent years, Badiou's work and the influence of L'OP have also played a role in a broader international context. Beyond his recent writings on the Arab Spring and European opposition to austerity politics, and the use of his concepts to analyse the Occupy Movement by Jodi Dean, the prime example of L'OP's and Badiou's influence is arguably the Latin American *Grupo Acontecimiento*.<sup>138</sup> This group has drawn upon Badiou – as is indexed in their name, *acontecimiento* meaning 'event' – in order to engage with one of the few contemporary political struggles celebrated by Badiou: the Mexican Zapatistas. Badiou's work thus follows the revolution in philosophy announced by Marx's 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach: 'Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.' The aim of Marxism is thus not simply analysis, but rather analysis tied to political intervention whose final aim is radical and mass-based social change in the name of the communist hypothesis. As Badiou states: 'For Marxism, seized from any point that is not its effective operation which is entirely of the order of politics within the masses, does not deserve one hour of our troubles.'<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, (London: NLB, 1976).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.106.

<sup>136</sup> Neil Larsen, 'Foreword: Fredric Jameson and the Fate of Dialectical Criticism', in Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986. Volume 1: The Situations of Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp.ix-xxiv, (pp.x); Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985*, (London: Verso, 1991), pp.62-63.

<sup>137</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (London: Routledge 2006), chapter one, pp.1-89.

<sup>138</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*; Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, (London: Verso, 2012); Grupo Acontecimiento, <<http://grupoacontecimiento.com.ar/>> [accessed 20 August 2015].

<sup>139</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.128.



An engagement with Badiou's work on Paul and communism is thus of signal importance. It permits greater analytical purchase on the current historical conjuncture and provides awareness of the stakes at play in key debates regarding critical theory and contemporary politics. As Göran Therborn has noted in his survey of contemporary responses to late capitalism, the theological turn led by Alain Badiou is one of the major and 'most surprising theoretical developments in left-wing social philosophy in the past decade.'<sup>140</sup> In Terry Eagleton's words Badiou 'is perhaps the most eminent philosopher of our time.'<sup>141</sup>

### Literature, philosophy and politics

Badiou is the author a number of experimental novels, plays and operas (*Almagestes* [1964], *Portulans* [1967], *L'Écharpe rouge* [1979] and *Ahmed le subtil* [1984]). In the early 1980s his play, *L'Incident d'Anticoche* drew upon the apostolic debate between Peter and Paul over soteriological universalism. This play had an almost pedagogic function in that it was primarily concerned with debating, in a theatrical setting, the ways to create a mass-based post-Leninist political party. Literary production is thus important for Badiou. On the one hand, this is because literature constitutes one of the four domains whereby truth emerges: '[t]he fact is that today – and in this respect things haven't budged since Plato – we know only four types of truth: science (mathematics and physics), love, politics and the arts.'<sup>142</sup> Badiou then produces literature as much as he discusses politics, mathematics and love since, as a Platonist, these constitute the key domains of truth. Equally, the turn to literature is important for Badiou since he draws upon literature and art in his political writings in order to illustrate his political and philosophical concepts of the event and the subject. This is especially the case in relation to Stéphane Mallarmé. In his philosophical magnum opus, *Being and Event*, Badiou uses the contingency of the dice throw from *Un coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard* to signify his philosophical concept of the aleatory event.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, he uses the image of the vanishing siren from a variety of Mallarmean

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<sup>140</sup> Göran Therborn, 'After Dialectics' in *New Left Review*, 43 (2007), 63-114 (p80).

<sup>141</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), p.44.

<sup>142</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2*, trans. by Alberto Toscano, (London: Continuum, 2009) p.71.

<sup>143</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham, (London: Continuum, 2010), pp.191-198. See also Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Un coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard' ('A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance') in *The Poems of Mallarmé*, ed. and trans. by Keith Bosley, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp.253-297.

sonnets to argue that the revolutionary politics must be vigilant of the facts of 'historical contingency.'<sup>144</sup>

This final point is significant because it indexes the way in which Badiou's approach to politics is strictly dialectical. That is to say, the focus on cultural forms and the way in which they can represent and produce understandings of historical reality is testament to an approach which refuses any type of mechanical conception of the key materialist axiom of Marxism: that social being determines consciousness. While exploitation and inequality may be objective facts of existence or 'being' to use Badiou's terminology, these conditions themselves do not mechanically lead to class consciousness or political militancy. With his constant focus on the ways in which a militant political subject is developed and sustained, Badiou's work testifies to the way in which political agency develops not just from economic conditions alone, but also from the ways in which an individual understands such conditions. That is to say, what is crucial is how the individual is positioned in ideology, or, in a slightly different way, how historical reality is mediated by ideology.<sup>145</sup>

To be clear, my argument in this thesis is *not* that the literary texts of McNamee and Bolaño produce revolutionary subjectivity. Despite the famous arguments of Lukács and Brecht over the relative political merits of realism and modernism, a direct relationship between the consumption of literature and revolutionary or radical subjectivity is arguably very rare. Two rare but major examples of this type of subjective interpellation would be the theatrical spectacle of sovereign decapitation in the Renaissance tragedy, as analysed by Franco Moretti, and the use of poetry, *testimonio* and popular music in the Central American revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s, as analysed by John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman.<sup>146</sup> These cultural forms are referenced in the novels by McNamee and Bolaño that constitute the primary objects of reference in Chapters Three and Four. I will discuss

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<sup>144</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.82.

<sup>145</sup> This is indeed an argument put forward by Marx in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. While the 'material transformations of the economic conditions of production' constitute the ultimate structure of historical change and class conflict, Marx frequently acknowledged that it is in 'ideological forms' – he cites 'the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic' – 'in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.' See Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (1859), <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>> [accessed 19 August 2015].

<sup>146</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs taken for wonders: essays in the sociology of literary forms*, trans. by Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, David Miller, (London: NLB, 1983), esp. Chapter One; John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*.

the ideological signification of these types of forms in the historical context of late capitalism in the relevant chapters.

The approach to the relationship between literature and politics that I want to develop here is underpinned by the concept of literature as an 'ideological form' or ideological practice that mediates understandings of history. By ideology, and here I quote Louis Althusser, I refer to the imaginary relationship that a literary text has to its real conditions of existence. What this means is that in ideology, the reality of history is 'inevitably invested in an imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.'<sup>147</sup> The focus is thus not simply on a Platonic mimesis of objective reality, but rather on the way literary texts relate to and produce an experience of a given reality. This means that both the content of the text and the literary form itself, are, as Fredric Jameson puts it, 'ideological acts' which invent 'imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions.'<sup>148</sup>

It is for this reason that Alan Sinfield proposes that Marxism *must* pay attention to literature and what he calls 'cultural production' in general:

It is through such stories, or representations, that we develop understandings of the world and how we live in it. The contest between rival stories produces our notions of reality, and hence our beliefs about what we can and cannot do. That is the reason why governments seek to control what is written and said, especially when rendered insecure by war or some other difficulty [...] The stories through which we make sense of ourselves are everywhere. In the media, they are not just articles and programmes labelled 'fiction' and 'drama,' but in those on current affairs and programmes labelled science, religion and the arts, and those specified as education and for children.<sup>149</sup>

Sinfield's focus on cultural production highlights the way that individuals understand the world via the mediatory practices of ideology. This is not say, however, that this type of approach to culture and literature overlooks the formal qualities or the distinctive character of literature. This is the primary reason why Alain Badiou's style of reading

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<sup>147</sup> See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, pp.85-126; Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster, (London: Verso, 2005), pp.233-4.

<sup>148</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (London: Routledge 2006), p.64.

<sup>149</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, (London: Continuum, 2004), pp.26-7.

literature, what he calls ‘inaesthetics’, is *not* adopted in this thesis.<sup>150</sup> On the one hand, Badiou’s literary engagements centre almost exclusively on a corpus of avant-garde modernists, or what he designates as examples of ‘aesthetic autonomy’: Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarmé, Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett.<sup>151</sup> For Badiou it is in this avant-garde tradition that Marxism can energise its critical powers by estranging doxa and moving towards knowledge or truth. On the other hand, his focus on literary ‘autonomy’ is often hamstrung by the fact that he seeks to find examples of theory in art. In so doing he collapses two distinct objects or problematics: art and politics. In other words, he does not respect the relative autonomy of distinct social and cultural practices.<sup>152</sup> For example, in his multiple discussions of Mallarmé’s poetry he frequently begins by enacting what he calls a ‘translation’ of a poem.<sup>153</sup> What this means is that Badiou flattens out the syntactic style of the poem and re-writes the poem in what he calls its ‘latent prose’ form.<sup>154</sup> In effect, Badiou abolishes the distinction between poetry and prose. So when Badiou discusses and quotes *Un coup de des*, for example, he erases the unique typographical arrangements of font size and type.<sup>155</sup> This even takes the form of adding new tercets to Mallarmé’s poetry in order to illustrate his arguments about philosophy and politics.<sup>156</sup>

In contrast, my approach to literature in this thesis does not attempt simply to search for examples of Badiou’s theory in a literary text. While I focus on messianic imagery, I am not looking at the texts as mere examples of Badiou’s vision of Pauline universality and attendant concepts of event and subject. Rather, this thesis stresses the fact that attention must be brought to bear on the way that an ideological representation of reality occurs via the articulation of content, literary form, and the given historical moments of the text’s production and consumption.

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<sup>150</sup> Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. by Alberto Toscano, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid; Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, trans. by Alberto Toscano and Nina Power, (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003).

<sup>152</sup> For a similar critique of Badiou’s approach to literature see Jean-Jacques Lecercle, ‘Badiou’s Poetics’ in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward, (London: Continuum, 2009), pp.208-217; Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Badiou and Deleuze Read Literature*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.92-116.

<sup>153</sup> Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. by Steve Corcoran, (London: Continuum, 2006), p.109.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, pp.109-110; Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.93.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p.93.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p.90.

The focus on the ideological significance of literary form and its relation to historical conditions is significant because like Badiou's celebration of 'aesthetic autonomy', most Marxist cultural theorists view crime fiction as the antithesis of aesthetic practice. 'Detective fiction,' as Franco Moretti puts it, 'is literature that desires to exorcise literature.'<sup>157</sup> This is because crime fiction is viewed as a formulaic genre that 'gravitates towards the ending.'<sup>158</sup> What Moretti means here is that the crime story is so overwhelmingly focused on finding the 'univocal meaning' of the 'solution' to the crime that inaugurates the drama, that the vast bulk of the intervening storyline becomes a mere 'deviation.'<sup>159</sup> In so doing, 'it abolishes the Kantian "finality without aim" and introduces an obligatory path for our reading.'<sup>160</sup>

Kant's famous definition of the aesthetic emerged from his discussion of the distinction between aesthetic and teleological judgement.<sup>161</sup> This kind of approach to art was subsequently developed by the Russian formalists whose attempt to constitute the study of art as institutional discipline was grounded on distinguishing the specific nature of the art's object of knowledge.<sup>162</sup> In literature, the distinction was to be found in poetic, rather than ordinary language. The aesthetic effect of literature is seen as a process of '*ostranenie*' whereby poetic language 'estranges' or 'defamiliarises' habitual language. While this definition of literature emerges in formalism, it still informs many Marxist approaches to art.<sup>163</sup> In his discussion of crime fiction, Moretti follows the Frankfurt School who see the Kantian notion of art as demarcating a space of political radicalism.<sup>164</sup> In alienating practical aims, art exemplifies a utopian practice by challenging the means-end rationality of

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<sup>157</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, p.146.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p.148.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p.148.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p.149.

<sup>161</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

<sup>162</sup> For an example of the formalist approach to literature, see Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' [1917] in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) pp.5-24

<sup>163</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*; Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*; Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans.by Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001) pp.151-156; Alain Badiou, 'The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process' in *The Age of the Poets and other writings on Twentieth Century Poetry and Prose* ed. and trans. by Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2014) pp.111-131.

<sup>164</sup> For a discussion of the Frankfurt School's engagement with Kantian ideas, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*, (New York: Free Press, 1977).

capitalist institutions. As Adorno puts it: 'beauty is like an exodus from the world of means and ends, the same world to which beauty owes its objective existence.'<sup>165</sup> For Moretti, crime fiction lacks such redemptive and critical power precisely because it is mass-produced, and moreover, because its formulaic nature actually reflects the 'demeaning and repetitive nature of alienated and exploitative commodity production on the Taylorist assembly line.'<sup>166</sup> By imposing a well-worn formula on fresh material, crime fiction thus produces an entirely different effect than that envisaged under the Kantian definition of aesthetic effect.

A similar problem regarding crime fiction is highlighted by Marxists focused on literary realism. This is an argument made by both Fredric Jameson and Bruno Bosteels in relation to the roman noir.<sup>167</sup> In their eyes, the noir novel seeks to reconstruct the new social relations of the urban setting it seeks to represent. Jameson's famous example here is Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles as it emerges from the Depression in the late 1930s and 1940s, while Bosteels focuses on Paco Ignacio Taibo II's Mexico City during the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. However, for both Jameson and Bosteels, the ability of the roman noir genre to produce an aesthetic depiction of a social totality is undercut by the generic nature of the text. What they mean here is that the genre's dependence of a repetitive formula ultimately prevents crime fiction from attaining the depiction of a historic totality. This is because the generic nature of the crime formula, which is repeated in virtually every novel by the writer, means that there is no real sense of historical development, particularly in relation to the character through whom such changes are focalised: the detective. Thus rather than see crime as part of a larger and emergent historical totality, the social world is reduced to a repetitive struggle between good and evil. The problem with this is that it represents social reality in metaphysical rather than historical terms.

Thematically and especially structurally, the crime novel is also seen to depend on a concept of legitimation and its putative relationship to law, order and social acceptability. This is indeed the most conventional method of approach undertaken by Marxists such as

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<sup>165</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.402.

<sup>166</sup> Franco Morreti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, p.135.

<sup>167</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'On Raymond Chandler', *Southern Review*, (Summer 1970), pp.624-650; Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, pp.253-272.

Stephen Knight and Ernest Mandel.<sup>168</sup> They interpret the final formulaic restoration of an earlier imbalance as a means of conservative recuperation, or a strategy of subversion and containment.

In short, then, the tradition of crime fiction fails, according to the above critics, either to attain literary merit or to express the complexities of life in a style worthy of realism. I do not want to question the delineation and distinction given to literature as an object of knowledge. This type of definition is useful because it does signify the specificity of literature as a distinct object of knowledge. As Andrew Smith notes, a political reading of culture must 'first pass through a sensitive interpretation of cultural practices in their own terms.'<sup>169</sup> What this means is that an analysis of form and the specificities of literary style, and in particular their deviations, developments or contradictory deployments, is the most germane way in which a materialist reading of culture can deduce the playing out of political, ideological or social conflicts within a literary text.

However, what is interesting about the approaches discussed above is that despite the basic grounding of Marxism in historical materialism, these approaches are often highly prescriptive, committing what the Althusserian Pierre Macherey would call a 'normative fallacy'.<sup>170</sup> That is, they measure a given text against an ideal model that may have emerged in entirely different historical context. In so doing, they fail to address the specificity of the text under investigation and also the determinate conditions that brought it into existence.

Indeed, as Lucy Burke notes, to envisage literature in terms of a series of homogenous genre-dominated fields whose ideological articulation of the social whole can be read formally or thematically in terms of immutable generic or formal conventions ignores the way individual texts constantly redefine the rules and received practices of a genre.<sup>171</sup> Like

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<sup>168</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, (London: Macmillan, 1980); Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, (London: Pluto, 1984).

<sup>169</sup> Andrew Smith, *C.L.R. James and the Study of Culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.27.

<sup>170</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) p.77; Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985*, p.11.

<sup>171</sup> Lucy Burke, 'Genetics at the Scene of the Crime: DeCODING *Tainted Blood*', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 6 (2) (2012), 193-208, (pp.200-1); Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures: popular culture and post-modernism*, (New York; London: Routledge, 1989), p.46; Thomas O. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre: a comparative study of generic instability*, (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p.19

canonised literature, it is also true that crime fiction produces differences and deviations that disturb the abstract or generic criteria of its own demarcated literary field.

In order to examine such differences and deviations, this thesis thus follows the Althusserian materialist method of a symptomatic reading.<sup>172</sup> That is to say, it looks at the way a text attempts to provide a formal and imaginary resolution to the historical issues it addresses. However, rather than simply attend to the manifest narrative structure of a text or to normative conceptions of what a text should do, it pays attention to the contradictions, or what Alan Sinfield calls the 'faultlines', within a text.<sup>173</sup> In other words, the analysis of literary texts in this thesis focuses on the specificities and contradictory interactions of different social and cultural practices that go into the make-up and production of the very text and by extension, the ideological effect of the text as a whole. It is by reading these conflictive images and meanings within the text, what Macherey calls the 'opposition between elements of the exposition and levels of the composition,' that one can discover not only the ideology of the text, its imaginary relation to the historical real, but also real historical difficulties and conflicts whose existence is archived in the contradictions and conflicts captured in the text.<sup>174</sup> That is to say, an awareness of contradiction rather than unity of closure must form a central part of literary analysis. Indeed, as Macherey notes, an individual text is a product of a 'real diversity of elements.'<sup>175</sup> This diversity of elements relates to the historical content, the manifest literary form, but also the way an individual text relates to, incorporates and perhaps also re-configures other styles and forms from outside its own specific genre. As I have already noted, the novels under investigation draw upon religious discourses. Moreover, McNamee's work also incorporates references to Renaissance tragedy while Bolaño's contains elements of the cultural traditions associated with the armed struggle in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>172</sup> See Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*; Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, (London: NLB, 1976); Thomas Rudman, "'The Place You Don't Belong': Border-Crossing and Ambivalence in the Northern Irish Noir-Thriller', in *Border Crossings: Narration, Nation and Imagination in Scots and Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. by Colin Younger, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), pp.249-269.

<sup>173</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: cultural materialism and the politics of dissident reading*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>174</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p.87.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, p.49.



As this last example suggests, a further implication of the symptomatic approach is the fact that criticism must also focus on the way the ideological effect of a text or form of literary representation differs according to the given historical conjuncture. The effect of the text or a literary style depends, in part, on its specific socio-historical situation. In other words, the significance of a piece of work is not immanent to the work itself; while a certain cultural practice may have been ideologically conservative in one period or in one geographical location, this does not necessarily entail that it will have the same ideological significance in a different historical period or space.<sup>176</sup>

The latter point is of particular significance for any critical engagement with the crime genre. This is because during what Badiou calls the post-1970s period of neoliberal 'restoration,' the crime novel has become a popular form of literary expression for various communist militants and left figures. Rather than manifest conservative tendencies, these examples of 'left sensationalism' have, in Lucy Burke's words, produced 'some very uncompromising forms of social critique.'<sup>177</sup> Key examples here include Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Subcomandante Marcos in Mexico, Ernesto Mallo in Argentina, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo in Sweden, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán in Spain, and David Peace in Britain.<sup>178</sup> The point here then is that while the crime genre has traditionally been viewed as type of conservative cultural form by Marxist literary critics, such an understanding of the genre is unquestionably complicated by the significance of the genre in the current historical period.

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<sup>176</sup> A good example of this is sport and specifically cricket. Traditionally understood as an ideological practice of imperialism, the game also attained a different ideological signification when played in the colonies. This is an argument associated with C.L.R James, see *Beyond a Boundary*, (New York: Pantheon, 1983). For a reading of James which focuses specifically on the articulation of sporting and literary forms and cultural politics, see Andrew Smith, *C.L.R. James and the Study of Culture*, esp. pp.22-40.

<sup>177</sup> Claire Fox, 'Left Sensationalists at the Transnational Crime Scene: Recent Detective Fiction from the US-Mexico Border Region', in *World Bank Literature*, ed. by Amitava Kumar, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp.184-200; Lucy Burke, 'Genetics at the Scene of the Crime: DeCODING *Tainted Blood*', p.201.

<sup>178</sup> See, for example, Paco Ignacio Taibo II and former leader of the EZLN, Subcomandante Marcos, *The Uncomfortable Dead*, trans. Carl Lopez (New York: Serpent's Tail, 2007); former militant, Ernesto Mallo's Inspector Lescano trilogy of which two novels are currently available in translation, *Needle in a Haystack* trans. Jethro Southar (London: Bitter Lemon Press, 2010) and *Sweet Money*, trans. Katherine Silver (London: Bitter Lemon Press, 2011); Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo's, Martin Beck series of ten novels published between 1965 and 1975 under the title *The Story of a Crime*; Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's series of novels featuring former communist private investigator Pepe Carvalho, and David Peace's *Red Riding Quartet*: 1974, 1977, 1980 and 1983.

The recent use of the crime genre by left wing writers suggests that it is perceived, at least by the authors themselves, as a type of radical or politically committed literary form. However, this thesis aims to interrogate this notion of radicalism and crime fiction in a more complex manner. As I noted earlier, both McNamee and Bolaño display a similar sense of historical periodization as that of Badiou, and the novels by both figures draw upon messianic imagery to narrate the rise of neoliberalism and the crisis of socialism. However, one further justification for the choice of these authors is that they relate to these historical developments in a more ambivalent manner than the novelist cited above. As I demonstrate in Chapters Three and Four, the ideological aim of the respective authors is either to depict the present in terms of historical stasis, wherein decisive political change is impossible (McNamee), or to disavow socialist political militancy as a youthful, ethical error (Bolaño). My reading of the texts will show that the aims of both authors are undermined by striking contradictions whose ideological significance and relation to messianic discourses will be explored in detail in the relevant chapters. The transformations of knowledge produced by my reading of the literary texts will thus be used both to support Badiou's messianic turn but also to rework some potential problems in his work, notably his position regarding the obsolescence of the vanguard and the incompatibility of socialism with the state.

### **Chapter Outline**

In methodological terms, the argument of the thesis develops by way of a close examination of a series of contradictions or ideological fault-lines in the works under investigation. In Chapters One and Two, this begins with Alain Badiou's declaration that his embrace of Paul is atheistic and post-Leninist. Chapter One thus commences with a symptomatic reading of how Badiou's method of analysis and recourse to Saint Paul under the conditions of late capitalism follows a similar series of historical and political manoeuvres as that of Lenin in the early twentieth century in his analyses of monopoly capitalism and the strategic problems with Second International politics. This is an important argument to make because in my later analyses of politics and ideology in Europe and Latin America in Chapters Three and Four, I highlight the way that ideas traditionally associated with Leninism, in particular vanguardism and the conquest of state power, still constitute the foundation for both practical forms of contemporary political mobilisation

and popular imaginations of historical change in the realm of contemporary literature. Chapter One then proceeds to outline Badiou's key theoretical concepts of event and subject. In the process, I examine the significance of Badiou's configuration of Paul as a 'subjective figure of primary importance' and a 'poet-think of the event'.<sup>179</sup> Arguing against Daniel Bensaïd's assertions that Badiou's theory lacks historical and political validity, I point out that a reading of the key concepts of event and subject in light of biblical narrations of Paul's conversion and mission mean that Badiou's work offers a decisively active rather than passive orientation towards politics and history. In other words, Badiou's turn to Paul is not an archive of defeat, but rather a helpful way to address problems in contemporary communist politics and in certain lacunae in Badiou's own theory.

Chapter Two follows on from this symptomatic reading of Badiou by focusing on his avowedly atheistic turn to Paul. Foregrounding the indissoluble relationship between his political-historical theorisation of communism and its dependence upon a temporal structure of redemption, I argue that Badiou's work is entirely bound up with the messianic logic of Judeo-Christianity. In other words, I argue that his turn to Saint Paul is not only historically determined by the conditions of late capitalism, but also internally determined by the fact that his theoretical and historical edifice is structured by a theopolitical logic. In the final section, I then draw upon materialist biblical scholars to argue that this type of alignment of communism with Christianity does *not* bespeak a fundamental betrayal of the egalitarian aims of Marxism. Deploying a historical materialist method to approach the mediation of early Christian politics by the cultural forms and styles of the New Testament writings, I argue that the ideological practices of the early Christian apocalyptic communities represent an egalitarian and subversive message that is amenable to the politics of Marxism.

The final two chapters then proceed to examine the way messianic discourse (religious imagery, iconography and conceptual structures) infuses literary narratives about the post-1970s period of revolutionary disillusionment that is so central to Badiou's thought. Chapter Three focuses on Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras*, a noir-inflected literary response to the war between the IRA and British State in the 1970s and what official governmental

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<sup>179</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.1-2.

discourse depicts as the new-fangled world of peace and economic prosperity in the north of Ireland. It situates McNamee's work in relation to a series of debates regarding literature and politics in the 'post-Troubles' period. A significant feature of McNamee's writing is its concern with ideas of historical change. In almost every novel by McNamee the drama culminates in the death of a child; his world is not so much one of new starts, but one where an older and invariably politically tainted generation outlive the young.<sup>180</sup> As I argue, this recurrent literary motif of parents outliving their children is symptomatic of an ideological crisis regarding history and periodization. While this use of the noir genre may then be seen as engaging critically with official discourses of a 'fresh-start', symbolised by the Peace Process and the commercial regeneration of the North, McNamee's texts are arguably problematic for historical materialism in that they seemingly depict the present as the end of time, a time of death and atrophy. Such a world seems barely portentous for the return of socialist militancy and historical transformations demanded by Badiou.

However, by deploying a symptomatic method, the chapter seeks to analyse the significance of a key contradiction that besets the representation of historical stasis in *The Ultras*. The novel's attempt to represent the *ambivalent historical stasis* of contemporary northern Ireland – in particular the entrenchment of traditional forms of communitarian division and the persistence of 'dark forces' within the security services in the new and officially celebrated era of cross-community power-sharing and peace – is shown to be undercut by figurations of the messianic which are linked to decisive and apparently unresolved moments of *historical change* from the revolutionary struggle of the 1970s. The significance of messianic discourses in this text is important for my argument regarding Badiou. Firstly, the coding of a right-wing military figure in messianic terms is shown to produce a type of class treachery: when configured in messianic terms, the maverick army captain Robert Nairac becomes aligned with ideas of militant socialism. This is drawn upon to support my central argument that Christianity is best understood as a practice of the radically equal and thus that Badiou's turn to Paul is not a betrayal of Marxism's egalitarian aims. Secondly, the specific articulation of messianic hope with the maverick practices of a

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<sup>180</sup> I'm referring here to McNamee's writing for an adult audience. Parents bury their children in the following novels: *Resurrection Man* (London: Picador, 1995); *The Blue Tango* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002); *The Ultras* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005); *Orchid Blue* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010); *Blue is the Night* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).

military figure are drawn upon to suggest a partial re-working of Badiou's decision to abandon the vanguard as a model for contemporary politics.

In my final chapter on Roberto Bolaño, I consider the use of messianic discourses in his literary depiction of the neo-liberal transformations in Mexico, notably the rise of the maquiladora industry along the Mexico-US border and the femicides of Ciudad Juárez. Like McNamee, Bolaño is an interesting case study with which to test out my basic hypotheses regarding Christianity and Marxism. As I demonstrate, this is because Bolaño embodies a type of subjective disposition that Badiou describes as Thermidorean. What I mean here is that Bolaño, a former Trotskyite, displays a type of conservative renunciation of his past political convictions by arguing that the revolutionary struggles of the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America were an ethical disaster. I situate Bolaño's political ideology and literary style in relation to major political and literary developments in the region, notably the near continental rise of left-wing governments and opposition, both political and cultural, towards these changes by figures previously involved with the armed struggle. Focusing on the police procedural section of *2666*, I highlight the way in which Bolaño's authorial ideology is contradicted by images of justice and messianic revelation that are articulated with the legacy of the revolutionary struggle that Bolaño manifestly seeks to disavow. My discussion of *la marea rosada* and the way it is partially prefigured in Bolaño's *2666* offers a way of rethinking Badiou's opposition to the state.

My focus on the contradictions and fault-lines in the selected novels is significant because they suggest that the texts of the two chosen authors are not as historically ambivalent and politically pessimistic as they may first appear. Rather, the contradictions highlighted in my analysis will be used to argue that the ideology of the novels actually bespeak a barely repressed longing for historical change and justice that can only be expressed or embodied in an articulation of messianic discourses with socialist practices. What ensues is a materialist critique. In order to endeavour to complete the demands of this type of approach, each chapter offers a sustained and detailed approach to the primary objects under investigation (Badiou, his Pauline turn, the epistles of Paul and the Gospels, novels by McNamee and Bolaño). This necessitates a comprehensive discussion of the historical, political, cultural, intellectual and literary formations with which each specific object engages. A thorough investigation of all these attendant factors is necessary if one is to

make any kind of satisfactory attempt to follow the materialist method and examine the significance and means by which each object engages with the historical situation to which it responds at both its moment of production and consumption. In sum, this thesis sets out to develop Badiou's argument regarding Saint Paul in a more radical, theopolitical manner. The central argument is that the turn Paul is not an archive of defeat, but rather a helpful way to re-think the viability of Marxist politics in the present.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ‘Paul: Our Contemporary’: A symptomatic reading of Alain Badiou in the light of Saint Paul.

For me, truth be told, Paul is not an apostle or a saint. I care nothing for the Good News he declares, or the cult dedicated to him. But he is a subjective figure of primary importance. [...] For me, Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure. He brings forth an entirely human connection, whose destiny fascinates me, between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is this rupture’s subjective materiality.

If today I wish to retrace in a few pages the singularity of this connection in Paul, it is probably because there is currently a widespread search for a new militant figure – even if it takes the form of denying its possibility– called upon to succeed the one installed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, which can be said to have been that of the party militant.

When a step forward is the order of the day, one may, among other things, find assistance in the greatest step back. Whence this reactivation of Paul. I am not the first to risk the comparison that makes of him a Lenin for whom Christ will have been the equivocal Marx.<sup>1</sup>

In his *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* from which the above passage is taken, Alain Badiou celebrates the militant subjectivity of Saint Paul as means to reimagine and ‘reactivate’ communist politics for the twenty first century. According to Badiou, Paul is the bearer of the ‘invariant traits’ of intransigence (‘militant’) and innovation (‘poet-thinker’) that can be called upon in ‘the search for a new militant figure [...] to succeed the one installed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks.’ His return to Paul is prompted by his assertion that there is a historical crisis in Marxism and that this crisis is related to the perceived failures of the Leninist party form, primarily the limitations of the organizational practices of the vanguard party (‘the party militant’).

Theorised by Lenin in *What is to be Done?* (1902), the vanguard party consists of an elite intellectual cadre of ‘professional revolutionaries’ whose vocation it is to develop the

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.1-2.

revolutionary subjectivity of a working class movement that has been hitherto limited to reformist demands expressed by trade-unions.<sup>2</sup> True to its militaristic etymology, the vanguard approach envisaged politics as a form of revolutionary war based around the conquest of the nation state and the defeat of national class antagonists. With the successful capture of state power by the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917, the vanguard party quickly emerged as the dominant organizational form of communist politics during what Badiou calls 'the short twentieth century.'<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the October Revolution, this sequence of politics endured until the termination of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the closure of the European "red years" in 1976.<sup>4</sup> This political sequence is characterised by what Badiou calls a 'passion for the real' by which he means an urgent desire to confront the violent antagonism that structures society.<sup>5</sup> This passion for the real, in his view, 'provides the key to understanding' the 'short century' of 'revolutionary politics.'<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s, this violent antagonism was manifest not only in the Cold War antagonism between the East and the West, but also in trade union militancy in the UK, the European "Red-Terror" led by the German Red Army Faction and Italian Red Brigades, and the national liberation and socialist forces of the Provisional Irish Republican Army whose legacy is the focus for Eoin McNamee's novel *The Ultras*. Across the Third World and especially Latin America, the 'passion for the real' is also manifest in the numerous socialist insurgencies and rightist *coups d'états* and dictatorships that constitute the historical object for much of Roberto Bolaño's fiction. In 'Mauricio 'The Eye' Silva', a short story from Bolaño's *Last Evenings on Earth*, the protagonist states that 'violence, real violence, is unavoidable, at least for those of us who were born in Latin America during the fifties and were about twenty years old at the time of Salvador Allende's death. That's just the way it goes.'<sup>7</sup> The reference here is to the violent military *coup* led by General Augusto Pinochet that overthrew the socialist regime of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973.

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<sup>2</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, (Moscow; Progress Publishers, 1973), pp.39-41.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. by Alberto Toscano, (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp.32-3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp.32-3.

<sup>7</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *Last Evenings on Earth*, trans. by Chris Andrews, (London: Vintage, 2007), p.131.



In all these cases, Badiou argues that the passion for the real in the twentieth century has been wholly associated with the violence of war. As he notes, 'the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the movement of liberation of the people and so on, have all been in the form of war.'<sup>8</sup> The passion for the real thus maintains a direct link to what Marxists see as *the* real and thus determinant feature of all social formations: class and, in this particular case, class *struggle*, or more precisely, class *war*.

Badiou's argument is that while the organizational form of the vanguard was thus successful in the struggle against national class enemies and colonial occupation, this militaristic model of politics was finally undercut by its own internal contradictions.<sup>9</sup> The vanguard party, appropriate for the assumption and maintenance of state power, was unable to represent and mobilise the multiple subjectivities of their respective civil societies; it proved ill-suited to the dialectical working of proletarian dictatorship, the withering of the state and the communist aim of co-operative worker self-management. A good example of this problem is the post-revolutionary crisis of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. While the Sandinista Front was able to assume power in 1979 following a protracted revolutionary war, the alignment of the party with socio-economically progressive forces in the Church led to schisms with the party's female wing over abortion and birth control. Similarly, the national-popular signifier of Augusto Sandino, an emblematic figure of Spanish speaking mestizo opposition to North American imperialism during the 1920s, symbolically alienated the English speaking Afro-Caribbean population and the Indigenous Miskitus of Nicaragua's Atlantic coast. As the US orchestrated counteroffensive intensified and the economy spiralled into decline, these internal divisions were exacerbated and the Party's ability to represent 'the nation' was fatally undermined. The Sandinistas lost the election in February 1990.<sup>10</sup> Badiou's assertion that 'Marxism is in crisis' thus emerges from the perceived failure of the vanguard party-state and the limitations of a violent politics tied to the passion for the real. 'So the question [today] is,' he asks, 'what is a revolutionary

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<sup>8</sup> Ward Blanton and Susan Spitzer, 'A Discussion of and around *The Incident at Antioch*: An Interview with Alain Badiou' *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*. Vol.3 No.2. (Summer 2010) <<http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v3n2/pdfs/badiou.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2015] (p.9).

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.109.

<sup>10</sup> John Beverley, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) pp.94-95; Charles Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp.34-35.

politics when it's not war?'<sup>11</sup> In his insistence on a new beginning for communism, Badiou's approach to politics is thus anti-statist, anti-vanguard and internationalist; it is directly opposed to the monolithic party-states of the short twentieth century and their characteristic passion for the real.

It is for precisely these reasons that Badiou invokes Saint Paul: 'as Paul magnificently puts it, "Do not be conformed to the present century, but be transformed by the renewal of your thought"' (Romans 12.2).<sup>12</sup> Commonly known as the apostle of the nations (*ethnē*), Paul was an evangelical missionary who is associated with the dissemination of the redemptive message of Jesus Christ among Gentiles as well as Jews. The particular synthesis of intransigence and innovation celebrated in the allegory of Paul is thus the apostle's radical foundation of, and insistence on universal salvation. Arguing against the prevailing ethnic, socio-economic, or gendered variables that determined salvation in the ancient world, Paul's 'foundation of universalism' finds its most programmatic articulation in his letter to the Galatians: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ' (Gal. 3.28). Prior to Paul's intervention, the redemptive message of Jesus of Nazareth had primarily been understood as referring to groups of poor Jews within Roman occupied Palestine. It is only via the *ex-centric* labour of Saint Paul, his evangelical mission outside the geo-political entity of Ancient Palestine, that the message of redemption takes on a mass-based and universally representative address: 'ye are all one in Jesus Christ'. As Boris Gunjević notes, what Paul puts into practice is a universal extension of the radical community of equals announced by Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Thus the various apocalyptic communities that he organised in Asia Minor were opposed to the hierarchical reality of the Roman Empire. For Paul, the *latreia* or liturgical life, means that social hierarchy is inverted so that most oppressed and lowest receive the highest honour: 'God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member' (I Corinthians 12:24).

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<sup>11</sup> Ward Blanton and Susan Spitzer, 'A Discussion of and around *The Incident at Antioch: An Interview with Alain Badiou*', p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, p.110.

<sup>13</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Introduction: The Mystagogy of Revolution', in Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*, trans. by Ellen Elias-Bursać, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), pp.7-42 (p.26).

Despite the vast historical distance then, Badiou's central argument is that the 'reactivation of Paul' can address the failures of twentieth century Marxism and the attendant absence of any widespread Marxist movement today: 'when a step forward is the order of the day, one may, among other things, find assistance in the greatest step back.'<sup>14</sup> The 'step back' to Paul thus represents two key turning points in the history of revolutionary subjectivity. The first is that a particular sequence of politics, dominated by the vanguard party, has ended: 'the last century,' notes Badiou, 'is finished, really in the political field'.<sup>15</sup> The second is that the 'order of the day,' 'the step forward,' is to discover a new and universally appealing form of political militancy: 'we have to do something really new.'<sup>16</sup>

While broadly supportive of the logic that underpins Badiou's 'reactivation of Paul', the opening two chapters of this thesis develop a materialist critique of his particular conception of Paulinism through an identification and symptomatic analysis of two key contradictions in his work. The first is that despite his search for a militant figurehead for an era of post-Leninist politics, Paul is actually configured and understood by Badiou via a structural homology with Lenin himself. The second is that while Badiou argues that the political force of Paulinism must be grounded in a type of atheism, the logic of his argument is ultimately dependent on a religious and specifically Judeo-Christian structure of redemption. That is to say, the notion of a '*reactivation* of Paul' might better be understood as a redemptive *resurrection*.

The nature of these contradictions is encapsulated in the quotation with which this chapter opens and, in a sense, they prefigure the key arguments that I want to develop in what follows. In the above quotation, Badiou begins by stating that the subjective militancy he identifies in Paul can be drawn upon as a political solution to the perceived failure of Leninism. 'There is currently a widespread search for a new militant figure', he observes that will be called upon 'to succeed the one installed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, which can be said to have been that of the party militant.' Badiou repeats and develops this claim in a number of different texts regarding

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<sup>14</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.2

<sup>15</sup> Ward Blanton and Susan Spitzer, 'A Discussion of and around *The Incident at Antioch: An Interview with Alain Badiou*', p.2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p.2

the political history of communism and I will discuss this in more detail later.<sup>17</sup> However, what is so striking about his historical narration of militant subjectivity in this extract is that it is immediately contradicted. Two sentences after declaring that Pauline militancy constitutes a supersession of Leninism, he actually posits a direct comparison between the two: 'I am not the first to risk the comparison that makes of him a Lenin for whom Christ will have been the equivocal Marx.' Badiou begins by invoking Paul in order to overcome Leninism but almost immediately undercuts this by invoking a structural homology between the two figures. In other words, his conception of Paul in the 'comparison' above actually configures Lenin as the Marxist equivalent of Paul. It is Paul who takes the original message of Jesus and revolutionises the parochial equivocations of the original Jewish disciples, what Badiou calls ethnic identitarianism, into a universalist practice of emancipation: 'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh through love' (Galatians 5.6). Thus, if the equivocation in Marx is to be found in the narrow, class defined notion of political militancy led by the urban working classes of the more-advanced capitalist nations of Western Europe and that of Jesus and the original disciples in the ethnic exclusivism of early Judaism, then Lenin's universalist extension of Marx's message to the semi-periphery of the world system in "backward" Russia is comparable to Paul's soteriological universalism that includes Gentiles as well as Jews. Badiou outlines the significance of Lenin in exactly these terms. The term 'proletariat' was central to Marx's attempt to discuss universality or generic humanity; under this term 'Marx thought possible the emancipation of the whole of humanity.'<sup>18</sup> For Marx, the victory of the proletariat in the class struggle would represent the complete destruction of the entire class structure that had hitherto dominated human history.<sup>19</sup> Yet the term proletariat also represented 'the possibility of an identitarian instrumentalization:' the First and Second Internationals along with German Social Democracy saw themselves almost exclusively as 'the party of the working class.'<sup>20</sup> According to Badiou, what was so unique about Lenin and later Mao, is that 'they were always careful to block any identitarian drift in the word.' Thus Lenin, in his pamphlet from

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<sup>17</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, pp.109-11.; Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, pp.79-82

<sup>18</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p.79.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Samuel Moore, (London: Penguin, 2015), pp.2-3, pp.17-20.

<sup>20</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History* p.79.

October, 1917 'The Crisis Has Matured', observes that if the 'crucial point' for revolution has 'undoubtedly arrived,' then this is because a significant fraction of the peasantry has risen up alongside the Soviets of workers and soldiers: 'a peasant revolt is developing' observes Lenin and it is this observation, not simply the spread of Soviets in the urban centres, that marks the revolutionary nature of the conjuncture for Lenin.<sup>21</sup> Understood in these terms, the 'subject of the revolution' notes Badiou, 'is therefore the *whole* people.'<sup>22</sup> A similar process of generic rather than 'identitarian drift' is what Badiou champions in Saint Paul: 'Paul's unprecedented gesture consists in subtracting truth from the communitarian grasp, be it that of a people, a city, an empire, a territory or a social class.'<sup>23</sup> It is important to note here that the grounds for comparison go beyond universalizing 'gestures' regarding the generic nature of a truth. Badiou also makes a formal comparison regarding the type of militant interventions made by both figures. Later in the text, when he discusses the historical context and style of Paul's Epistles, he describes them as 'militant documents' or 'interventions'.<sup>24</sup> 'From this point of view,' he continues, Paul's Epistles 'are more akin to the texts of Lenin than to Marx's *Capital*.'<sup>25</sup>

My point then is that the comparison between Lenin and Paul is not a simple mistake or equivocation on the part of Badiou. Following the materialist approach adopted in this thesis, I argue that this comparison is a *determinate* contradiction. That is to say, this political-historical contradiction is symptomatic of the fact that Badiou is actually performing a type of Leninist manoeuvre himself. Let me explain what I mean here in slightly more detail. In terms of Badiou's post-Leninism, there is arguably no question that some of his criticisms directed at the vanguard model of politics associated with Bolshevism, in particular the transformation of the sphere of national politics into an authoritarian one party-state, offer powerful advancements on the limits of this form of political mobilisation. On a wider historical level, Badiou's argument is that the world of late capitalism is one 'configured' as Marx predicted, as 'a world-market,' and thus this increasingly globalised world includes new dynamics, such as the pre-eminence of

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<sup>21</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, 'The Crisis Has Matured', in *Revolution at the Gates: Selected Writings of Lenin from 1917*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2002), pp.133-141 (p.134).

<sup>22</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p.79.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.31.

multinational rather than national capital, that must be addressed with new types of international based communist politics.<sup>26</sup> However, this type of approach is interesting because it is not an entirely dissimilar procedure and response to that of Lenin at the start of the twentieth century. To recall, Lenin saw imperialism and monopoly capitalism as new signs of economic development that required a different strategy than that offered by the socialism of the Second International, grounded in the reformism of social democratic parliamentary parties and trade unions.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, terminologically and conceptually speaking, Badiou frequently refers to the present stage of global capitalism as a form of neoliberal 'restoration,' modelled on political sequences from the nineteenth century. To begin with, Badiou refers here to the defeat of the French Revolutionary cycle in 1815 and the conservative period of Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830).<sup>28</sup> On a wider European level, this restoration period is also associated with the Conference of Vienna (1814-15) and the conservative alliance of the European Great Powers following the Napoleonic wars. Finally, Badiou also relates the present period to the political sequence that emerged following the defeat of the Paris commune of 1871.<sup>29</sup> In his terms, this refers to a waning of revolutionary impulses and progressive politics and the spread of monopoly capitalism via the processes of imperialist expansion until the October Revolution of 1917.

The major point here is that conceptually speaking the notion of a restoration suggests not so much a transcendence but rather a blockage of historical processes.<sup>30</sup> What this means then is that the social and economic contradictions that led to the current conjuncture have not been fundamentally transformed or modified; they are simply blocked, or repressed. In other words, the conditions of exploitation that led to class struggle in the 1970s continue to exist under the surface of the current period of neoliberal restoration and conservative reaction. It is no surprise then that elements of the earlier class struggle re-emerge in new and unexpected forms. As I argue in Chapter Four, this is the case with *la marea rosada*, the near-continental shift to the left in Central and South America, where

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<sup>26</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.9-10. Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, pp.53-57, pp.68-70.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*; Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest stage of Capitalist Development*, (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.83, p.116.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.111.

<sup>30</sup> This is a point developed in a different context by the subalternist Althusserian scholar John Beverley whose engagement with Alain Badiou I discuss in Chapter Four. See John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp.100-101.

political parties often led by figures who participated in the failed revolutionary struggles of the 1970s and 1980s now hold power. Indeed, in the wider cultural imaginary that I explore in the literary texts, the notion of vanguardism is still crucial to any representations of decisive historical and political change. While the vanguard tradition plays a significant role in images of redemption in Roberto Bolaño, it is perhaps in Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras* that the political force of vanguardism is most striking. While McNamee attempts to depict the post-Troubles era in the north of Ireland in terms of a 'ghostly infrastructure' that is determined by the unfinished legacy of the British state's dirty war during the 1970s, the articulation of crime fiction with messianic discourse actually contradicts this sense of stasis.<sup>31</sup> As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, the novel is actually energised by a type of utopian 'maverick dreamtime.'<sup>32</sup> Thus right-wing military figures are reimagined in terms of class treachery, and radical social change, forestalled by the liberal ecumenism of the peace process, is still envisaged as possible via the tradition of the vanguard left.

If the extract above is notable for what this thesis will demonstrate to be a determinate contradiction in terms of politics, then a similar process is also legible regarding religion. We can begin here by noting that Badiou's notion of 'a step forward' for communism is predicated upon a retroactive temporality: the 'step forward' is to be achieved via 'the greatest step back.' As I outlined above, this temporal sense of anticipation regarding the ability 'to step forward' seeks to redress the failures of earlier sequences of communist politics, notably Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Overall, however, such anticipation over a future sequence of communist politics depends upon a twofold retroactive logic: firstly, a retroactive truth about the limits of Bolshevism in order to escape the repetition of past failures; and secondly, in the 'reactivation' of a type of militancy that necessitates an even greater historical 'step back': the 'step back' to Saint Paul. What is interesting in the retroactive invocation of the latter is that recourse to Paul is in fact a reactivation of a specifically a *messianic* figure. This is significant because the messianic itself has a distinct type of temporality that is dependent upon a *redemptive* contraction of the past into the present. Thus the idea that the possibility of communist militancy requires a redress of the

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<sup>31</sup> Eoin McNamee, *The Ultras*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p.10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.251.

failures of history invites a comparison with the Marxian appropriation of Pauline messianism by Walter Benjamin in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of temporality, messianic exception takes place when a present-day engagement in social struggle draws its political energy *not* simply from a vision of a "better" chronological future, but from a desire to redeem *past* defeats or repressed historical failures. In his attempt to articulate the messianic with communist politics, Benjamin argues that support for radical social change is best mobilised through a messianic process of temporal contraction: 'our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.'<sup>34</sup> What he means here is that the politicisation of the working class is 'nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than liberated grandchildren;' this is to say, a militant working class sees itself as 'the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden.'<sup>35</sup> For Benjamin, the politicization of the working classes is thus not achieved via promises of future progress predicated upon a chronological conception of linear historical development. Rather, a truly transformative political moment occurs when the flashing memory of an 'oppressed' past, a denial or failure from a previous epoch, is taken up, or as Benjamin puts it, 'redeemed' in the present.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the past must be 'recognized by the present as one of its own concerns.'<sup>37</sup> The retroactive temporality of redemption, the return of the past as a concern for the present, thus undermines or suspends the dominant notion of time as a chronological and progressive movement forward.

If Badiou's atheistic recourse to Paul constitutes an attempt to redeem the failures of militant socialism during the short twentieth century, then it is interesting that the very structural mechanics through which he attempts 'to step forward' are predicated upon a barely repressed Judeo-Christian logic of redemption. The presentation of an atheistic

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<sup>33</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.245-255. For other readings of Badiou in relation to Benjamin see Eric Santner, 'Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud and the Matter of the Neighbor' in Slavoj Žižek, Eric Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Enquires in Political Theology*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), pp.76-133; Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), pp. xiv-xvii.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p.244.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. pp.251-2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp.253-4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.247.



reactivation of Paul is therefore contradicted by a configuration of messianic redemption as the structural mechanics that underpins Badiou's retroactive history and attendant approach to social change.

Badiou's argument is dependent on a religious substructure and crucially this is not simply because his materialism and vision of Marxism draws upon the figure of Paul but also because his work – in a much broader sense – is structurally dependent upon the temporal configuration of redemption. The recognition of the significance of religious discourse to his work has been asserted by many thinkers, and also supporters of Badiou, namely Slavoj Žižek and also Hollis Phelps, the latter of whom aptly describes Badiou's work as oscillating 'between theology and anti-theology.'<sup>38</sup> However, I would argue further that the *chiasma* of a declaration of atheism and the dependence of his theorisation on a distinctly religious structure is also best understood as a determinate contradiction. In order to develop the implications of this contradiction, we need to return to the practices of the early Church. This is because – as I will argue throughout this thesis - they contain an intransigent egalitarian kernel that cannot be divorced from Badiou's conception of communism as generic equality. What I mean here and, indeed, what I will show in the final section of this chapter, is that a materialist engagement with early Christianity demonstrates that it contains the 'incarnational resources' necessary for the resurrection of Marxism as a viable and popular project for the masses today.<sup>39</sup> The importance of a materialist engagement with texts of the early Church is, I would argue crucial to this procedure. While Žižek and Phelps among others may be correct in their diagnosis of repressed theological core at the heart of Badiou's entire philosophy, their work arguably does not attend sufficiently to the object under investigation - Christianity. The basic mechanics of their argument revolve around *abstract* notions of resurrection, faith and the miracle and how these anti-philosophical practices constitute the framework and language through which Badiou conceives of his concepts of the event and the subject. While these observations are of course important, such approaches do not pay sufficient attention to the actual texts and historical practices of the early Church. By engaging with materialist and Marxist biblical

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<sup>38</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of Saint Paul', in Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, (London: Verso, 2000), pp.127-170; Hollis Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology*, (Durham: Acumen, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Introduction: The Mystagogy of Revolution', p.26.

scholars whose work focuses on the ideology of the early Christian texts, my contribution to this debate is to give a much more precise and *historical materialist* reading of the relationship between Christianity and Marxism in the recent recourse to Pauline thought by figures such as Badiou. Indeed, by analysing the way in which messianic discourses work against the grain of conservative literary forms to narrate the possibility of political justice in Chapters Three and Four, I will outline the way in which the contemporary cultural imagination which mediates our understanding of history, is not only dependent on, but also energised by ideas of redemption. The importance of this type of emancipatory revelation produced by a materialist critique of such texts is important because the novels under investigation in this thesis set out to narrate the ongoing period of political retreat which since the 1970s has witnessed, in Badiou's words, the widespread 'denial of the possibility' of communism.<sup>40</sup> My reading sets out to show that texts that depict historical stasis (McNamee) and the impossibilities or ethical errors of revolutionary and Marxist politics (Bolaño) can be shown to be contradicted by ruptures in form that configure the possibility of historical change and justice via messianic discourses. This is, I would argue, evidence that the recourse to theology by Badiou is not an archive of defeat but rather an appropriate means of resurrecting the communist hypothesis.

I have opened this chapter with an analysis of the contradictions in Badiou's conception of Paul as 'our contemporary' in order to foreground some of the central arguments with which this thesis is engaged, in particular the incarnational resources offered by messianic Christianity for contemporary communist politics and the continued importance of the vanguard as a model for radical politics today. The overall argument of this thesis is that a materialist reading of Badiou and wider cultural responses to the political crisis since the 1970s will show that Christianity does indeed offer the incarnational resources necessary for the resurrection of communist politics. Indeed, as the Marxist biblical scholar Fernando Belo states in his reflection on the experience of failed revolutions in Chile and Portugal during the 1970s, we must 'be more alert to certain impasses in contemporary Marxism [...] and more disposed to accentuate the aspect of messianic power.'<sup>41</sup> Thus my argument

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<sup>40</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell, (New York: Orbis, 1981), p.xiv.

is that the recourse to Paul is not a symptom of political defeat. Rather, a materialist critique of the three objects under investigation - Badiou's historical and political recourse to Paul, the practices of the early Church, and contemporary cultural texts that correspond to the political periodization offered by Badiou – will demonstrate that Christian messianism offers the means to almost literally re-enthuse (*en theos*, “to have God in you”) Marxism and radical politics. What I want to do in this chapter then is to explore how the messianic logic of Pauline Christianity can be understood as the paradigmatic structure upon which Badiou's theory is grounded and how the early Christian apocalyptic communities represent an egalitarian practice amenable to the contemporary practice of Marxism. This involves a related critical engagement with the dominant paradigms of Badiou studies, in particular the debates around theology and anti-theology or philosophy and anti-philosophy in his work.

### **‘Love what you will never believe twice:’ event and subject in Alain Badiou<sup>42</sup>**

To begin, then, I would like to contextualise my reading of Alain Badiou and Saint Paul in relation to the key concepts of event and subject. These concepts are important because they constitute the central philosophical and political foundations for Badiou's work. Once I have established the meaning of these terms, I will then examine the implications of Badiou's recourse to Saint Paul (‘poet-thinker of the event’) as a means further to develop the use and significance of these concepts in his work. As will become clear later, my analysis will suggest that most scholarly responses do not fully attend to the complex Pauline structure that underpins Badiou's *oeuvre*.

As the title of his 1988 magnum opus *L'Être et l'Événement* (*Being and Event*, English translation, 2005) suggests, the concept of the event refers to a new and radical singularity that is irreducible to the given order of being within the world.<sup>43</sup> In short, Badiou's ‘being’ stands for the extant material order of knowledge accessible to the human within a given historical period or social formation, or what he calls a ‘situation’.<sup>44</sup> In terms of politics, and here I follow Badiou's own personal and favourite example of France during the 1960s, such a ‘situation’ would be the traditional forms of political mobilisation such as trade-

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<sup>42</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.324.

<sup>43</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham, (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.24, p.104.

union reformism with its stated goal of economic advancement for workers within – but crucially not against – the overall framework of liberal welfare-capitalism. An ‘event’, such as the sudden uprising of workers and students in May 1968, in contrast, is a radical and disruptive *excess* of this given historical moment that contains the potential for humans to direct themselves to something *beyond* the material given of the situation. For Badiou, the events of May 1968 were, as he himself later confessed, a veritable ‘road to Damascus’.<sup>45</sup> It was with these events that he began to rethink his earlier, less insurgent philosophical position that had developed under the tutelage of his avowed master, the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser.<sup>46</sup> In May ’68 the new, non-hierarchical mobilisations of militant workers alongside radical intellectuals were characterised by demands for, and action towards, the entire overhaul of the capitalist-state. In this process, the uprising outlined a radically *new* programme of political action that did not rely upon the pre-given forms of politics that dominated the existing historical situation in France. That is, the actions of this new alliance of militant workers and radical intellectuals relied neither upon the traditional Bolshevik vanguard party style directorate led by a cadre of intellectuals in the French Communist Party, nor upon a trade-unionist conception of class that was merely economic and dedicated towards self-improvement within the capitalist relations of production.

Badiou took inspiration from the radical and non-hierarchical forms of *political* alliance and organization that had emerged between French workers and intellectuals during the events of 1968, and their critique of an orthodox understanding of class struggle as a mere *economic* category determined by one’s position in relation to the means of production. It was in this context that he began to develop of new form of fidelity to the transformative logic of these events. The concept of the subject describes this fidelity. ‘I name subject not the [extant] individual but what the individual is capable of [following an event],’ he

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<sup>45</sup> Bruno Bosteels, ‘Can Change Be Thought? A Dialogue with Alain Badiou’, in *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*, ed. by Gabriel Riera (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp.237-261 (p.237).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pp.242-243; Peter Hallward, “‘Theory from Structure to Subject’: An Interview with Alain Badiou”, trans. by Steve Corcoran in *Concept and Form: Volume Two. Interviews and Essays on the Cahiers pour l’Analyse*, ed. by Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, (London: Verso, 2012), pp.272-290, (pp. 272-276). It is worth noting here that along with Althusser, Badiou also cites Lacan and to a lesser degree, Foucault, as key influences on his philosophy. See Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, pp. 5-7.

states.<sup>47</sup> If an event is a type of unforeseen happening, a rupture or hazard, or to use Althusser's terms, an aleatory 'encounter', then the wider conceptual relation that the event has with a subject is dialectical; an event outlines 'a new possibility which can open the individual to a new subjectivity.'<sup>48</sup> What is taking place in the relationship between an event and subject then is the opening of a new possibility or what Badiou calls 'a new creation:' 'it is always a question of how we can do something that is bigger than us, which is more important than what we commonly do.'<sup>49</sup> For Badiou, the dialectical relationship between an event and a new subject in May '68 was thus the development of French-Maoism that also drew upon a similar series of political experiments in the early years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. 'The politics of the French Maoists between 1968 and 1976,' he states, 'tried to think and practise a fidelity to two tangled events: the Cultural Revolution in China and May '68 in France.'<sup>50</sup> This fidelity meant that the French Maoists

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<sup>47</sup> Ward Blanton and Susan Spitzer, 'A Discussion of and around *The Incident at Antioch*: An Interview with Alain Badiou', p.4.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.4; Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, ed. by François Matheron and Oliver Corpet, trans. by G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006). Both Slavoj Žižek and Bruno Bosteels highlight the correspondences between the theoretical and political focus of Althusser and Badiou. To recall, Badiou was a member of the Althusserian circle that re-read Marx in the 1960s. This group also included Pierre Macherey, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière and Jacques-Alain Miller. Along with other figures of this group, notably Miller, Badiou went on to edit the Althusserian-Lacanian journal *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. In terms of the theoretical relationship between Althusser and Badiou, Žižek's focus is primarily on the links between Badiou's concept of the subject and Althusser's famous discussion of the subject and ideology in 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus'. Although his general engagement with Badiou often focuses on the subject, when discussing the relationship to Althusser, Bosteels focuses on Badiou's concept of event and Althusser's aleatory materialism. Notably Bosteels argues that Badiou's concept of the event is taken up by Althusser in his later writings on aleatory materialism and the philosophy of the encounter. In other words, his argument is that Badiou tacitly influences Althusser. However, Bosteels' argument here is somewhat hard to uphold. This is because while Badiou discusses the Greek atomists and ideas of the clinamen during the lectures in the late 1970s that constitute his *Theory of the Subject*, he only really starts to explicitly develop the concept of the event in the late 1980s in *Peut-on-penser la politique?* (1985) and *L'Être et l'Événement* (1988). Moreover, as a number of Althusserian scholars such as Goshgarian, Ipola and Montag have recently pointed out, a simple demarcation between an early and late Althusser, with the late Althusser focusing on a new concept of aleatory materialism is hard to maintain. This is because similar issues also arise in his early work, notably his 1962 essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, p.128, p.145; Bruno Bosteels, 'Translator's Introduction' in Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, pp.vii – xxxvii, (pp.xiv-xv, esp. n.19, pp.336-337); Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) pp.77-80, pp.169-170, pp.238-9; G.M. Goshgarian, 'Translator's Introduction' in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, pp.xiii-xlix; Emilio de Ipola, *Althusser: el infinito adios*, (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2002); Warren Montag, 'Rancière's Lost Object', *Cultural Critique*, 83, (Winter 2013), 139-155, (p.143).

<sup>49</sup> Ward Blanton and Susan Spitzer, 'A Discussion of and around *The Incident at Antioch*: An Interview with Alain Badiou', (p. 3).

<sup>50</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.42.

began 'to practise politics (in particular the relation with the workers) in an entirely different manner from that proposed by the socialist and trade-union traditions.'<sup>51</sup>

While the focus of this thesis is on politics, it is worth noting that as a general rule, Badiou enumerates four *génériques* or conditions within which an event or 'new way of being' normally takes place.<sup>52</sup> These are politics, love, science and art:

[T]he event [...] compels us to decide a *new* way of being. Such events are well attested: the French Revolution of 1792, the meeting of Héloïse and Abélard, Galileo's creation of physics, Haydn's invention of the classical musical style [...] But also: the Cultural Revolution in China (1965-67), a personal amorous passion, the creation of Topos theory by the mathematician Grothendieck, the invention of the twelve-tone scale by Schoenberg.<sup>53</sup>

In each of these cases, the event is characterised by a sudden break with the order of the world. Accordingly, a transformation in politics becomes imaginable only through the decisive rupture of a rebellion or 'Revolution'. As I noted in my earlier discussion of the political uprising in Paris during May 1968, an impersonal force seemingly takes hold of individuals in a given political situation and forces or 'compels' a decision regarding change in the world. Love, similarly, becomes something that erupts suddenly; it is an encounter or sudden and shocking 'meeting' that necessitates a new type of subjectivity marked by the endurance of a loving relationship. In addition to the suffering and perseverance of Abélard and Héloïse whose love was deemed unacceptable by both family and religious orders, Badiou also celebrates the obstinacy of Samuel Beckett's Winnie and Willie in *Happy Days*.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, the new in art and science are configured as eureka moments or Kuhnian paradigm shifts which create an entirely new approach to the object under investigation.

As I note above, the singularity and thus unpredictable nature of the event means that for Badiou, such examples of historical change are almost irreducible to all calculation. The event is something that emerges in excess of the pre-given conditions in the prevailing situation. Slavoj Žižek follows Badiou's model to underline the radical significance of the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>54</sup> Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. by Peter Bush, (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012); Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962).

French Revolution.<sup>55</sup> As Žižek, notes, the heightened social tensions of the historical were well known at the time: economic crisis, especially regarding fiscal revenues had begun to engender political and ideological conflicts between the Monarchy and the aristocracy on the one hand, and the Third Estate on the other. However, no amount of knowledge and foresight before 1792 could have envisaged the rise of the Jacobins, the democratic and mass-based politics that they inaugurated and the abrupt end to the *ancien régime*. Badiou's historical reference for the event of the French Revolution is not then 1789. This marks the emblematic intensification of an already extant class conflict with the recall of the Estates General and the increasingly irreconcilable demands of the Monarchy towards a recalcitrant Third Estate. Rather, the event that Badiou nominates is 1792: the republican and egalitarian high-point of the revolution marked by the decrees of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety on the 'maximum'.<sup>56</sup> What Badiou's theory of the event thus seems to indicate for politics is that while Marxism must analyse given conjunctures and attempt to intervene in what Althusser, following Lenin, called the 'weakest link' in the capitalist-imperialist chain, the taking place of a revolution can neither be predicted scientifically nor reduced to the extant forms of social being in the world.<sup>57</sup> This of course dovetails with the task of Marxist revolutionary politics. For the ultimate aim of Marxism is not simply proletarian victory in the class struggle, but rather the abolition of class structures *in toto*; the aim is a classless social formation. Thus radical political events are not simply scientific facts of heightened class antagonism that can be deduced or predicted prior to a given political processes; but rather an event inaugurates the 'active process' of something emerging that is radically new, what Badiou calls the 'production of political novelties'.<sup>58</sup>

Badiou thus theorises change with reference to the rupture produced by an unforeseen event. It is perhaps no surprise then that his conception of politics and history ultimately turns to the Damascene transformation of Saint Paul. However, before I consider the way in which the example of Paul can offer us a productive and perhaps more complex way to

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<sup>55</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, p.130.

<sup>56</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.97.

<sup>57</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), pp.87-128, (pp.94-101).

<sup>58</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p.87.

understand event and subject in relation to the potentiality for communist politics today, (more complex than both Badiou and his various critics envisage), I want further to elaborate the philosophical means through which Badiou defines his key concepts.

For Badiou, concepts such as the event and the subject emerge from a strictly materialist and dialectical epistemology. 'I would submit that my system is the most rigorously materialist in ambition that we've seen since Lucretius,' he declares.<sup>59</sup> Like Lucretius and the ancient Greek atomists then, he argues that the nature of all being is to be understood as originating in an atomistic void. Being *qua* being for Badiou is thus originally multiple and inconsistent, without any order or divine purpose. That is to say, being, at its most fundamental, is a chaos that he terms 'inconsistent multiplicity'.<sup>60</sup> Despite its atomistic grounding, this materialist stance is distinct from the dominant strands of Western philosophy. Following Plato's *Parmenides* and the foundational thesis that 'if the one is not then nothing is', ontological thought has traditionally considered that being or *what* is, is essentially one, while what appears or *presents* itself in the world, what is there, in other words, is multiple – a series of ones.<sup>61</sup> For a materialist such as Badiou, however, such monist comprehensions of being lead to an unacceptable return of idealism and theology. As such, he opens *Being and Event* with a decisive philosophical and materialist choice: 'We find ourselves on the brink of a decision,' he writes, 'a decision to break with the arcana of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried.'<sup>62</sup> He thus re-asserts Parmenides' thesis but with a decisive change of accent: 'if the one is not,' then '(the) nothing is'.<sup>63</sup> In other words, if there is no original unity or consistency to being ('if the one is not') then being is that which is without a predicate, it is without an original purpose or

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<sup>59</sup> Alain Badiou, 'Being by Numbers: Lauren Sedofsky Talks with Alain Badiou', *Artforum International* 33.2 (1994), 84-87, 118, 123-24 (p.123). It is significant to note here that in terms of politics, Badiou's philosophical turn to the atomists is entirely in keeping with Marxism. Marx wrote his thesis on Epicurus, 'On the Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature,' 1841. In addition to 'The Three Sources of Marxism' arguments made by Lenin (German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism), the Althusserian school of which Badiou was a part also emphasised what Étienne Balibar calls the 'four masters:' Epicurus, Rousseau, Adam Smith and Hegel. See Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2014), p.7.; Vladimir I. Lenin, 'Marx: A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism', in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works Volume 1*, (Moscow: Progress, 1977) pp.15-39 (p.19); Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, pp.256-263.

<sup>60</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.25.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.23. Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.23.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.36.



original identity. That is to say, being is not a thing ('the no thing is'). For Badiou then, being is to be understood as that which 'in-consists'; it is not the product of a divine plan, 'a One', but is, at its most elementary, pure multiplicity. 'The one', as he argues, '*is not*'.<sup>64</sup> Considered then as a no-thing, being – an inconsistent multiplicity – is thought of and named by Badiou, as an atomistic 'void'.<sup>65</sup> Denying that the origin of being lies in a notion of a divine one, this materialist stance towards being ostensibly confirms the atheistic stance he expresses at the beginning of his book *Saint Paul*.

Badiou's argument here outlines the way in which he is attempting to provide a materialist ontology for Marxist thought. What is of major interest to Badiou is the way in which humans attempt to understand the nature of being and thus to live in a meaningful way in the world. In other words, how do humans render this inconsistent and multiple being consistent or ordered? According to Badiou, the social practices of humans do not generally register being *qua* being in an unmediated form, rather humans, in thought and in social actions, elucidate being in a comprehensible way for theory and practice. In other words, rather than present being in its inherent multiplicity, social practice, whether scientific, philosophical or political, actually undertakes what Badiou terms an 'operation' whereby the multiple and inconsistent elements of being are *presented* in a way that is intelligible, or in other words, consistent.<sup>66</sup> That is, what is thought about any experience or object does not take the form of chaotic atomistic elements or the inconsistent multiplicity that makes up being *qua* being. Instead we are presented within thought with a series of apparently unified objects or experiences that take the form of knowledge. To use the terms offered by Badiou in his later *Logics of Worlds*, the atomistic void or nothing is made up of 'inexistents' while the order of being and knowledge recognises some elements as having 'existence'.<sup>67</sup> For example, when we consider what is a living being we envisage something with what is deemed an 'existence': a person or perhaps an animal such as a cat (to take one of Badiou's examples) and not a mass of undifferentiated atoms or a cluster of chemical reactions which would be inexistent.<sup>68</sup> Or when we consider the social

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.58.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>67</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2*, pp.321-4.; Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p.56.

<sup>68</sup> Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, trans. by Robin MacKay, (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), pp.62-3.

formation of a given nation-state, to take another example, we often think of it in terms of its citizens, its geographical boundaries and its laws and not groups of undocumented migrants say, who may reside in the state but are not protected by law.

This act of presentation, whereby the multiple and inconsistent or inexistent elements of being are divided into unitary bodies of knowledge and given 'existence', constitutes what Badiou calls a 'situation'. A situation is thus a structured presentation of multiplicity.<sup>69</sup> Following Plato's equation of mathematics with ontology, Badiou uses the example of set theory mathematics to describe the process. Thus in any type of situation a type of counting takes place of all elements that are deemed to belong. The count gives each element 'existence.' To continue with the previous examples, in the situation of living beings, all the elements of being that can be considered as living beings such as animals, plants and their minimal elements, living cells, are counted as belonging to the situation; they have existence. At the same time, other elements of being that are not considered to be living – for instance, atoms and the “inert” physico-chemical materiality’ that actually makes up the minimal elements of living cells but are themselves not, strictly speaking, alive – are excluded from the situation of living beings; they are not counted and thus remain inexistent.<sup>70</sup> Or, in terms of a political situation, the nation-state functions in a way that 'counts' all of its citizens, and it can do this in a variety of different ways, for instance, by counting place of birth, passports, oaths, or citizenship tests. These citizens are often divided into intelligible sub-groups, thus there are 'workers,' 'pensioners' and 'students' to name but a few general examples. As Oliver Harrison points out, what is important to note here is that the measures that a particular social formation uses for counting its members (citizens) may mean that in certain situations some elements or groups are not included or some not are deemed to fully belong.<sup>71</sup> For example, some members are not counted equally (the working class in capitalist social formations, women under patriarchy, or poor peasants and indebted labourers in the Sub-Asiatic mode of production of Ancient Palestine) and some may not count at all (non-citizens, such as *les sans papiers* in contemporary France, or disabled people in the UK prior to the recognition of their rights

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<sup>69</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.24.

<sup>70</sup> Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, p.71.

<sup>71</sup> Oliver Harrison 'Revolutionary Subjectivity in post-Marxist thought', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2010), p.143.

in the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act). These latter groupings thus remain, in Badiou's terminology, politically inexistent.

As the reference to inexistence makes clear, Badiou's conception of a situation is thus one that is fundamentally unstable. The fact that any situation is the result of a count which neither contains nor concerns itself with all the inexistent elements that make up the atomistic void in its inconsistent multiplicity means, and this point is crucial, that every situation is lacking in some way. The void then resides at the centre of every situation, but it is, in Žižek's Althusserian terminology, an 'absent centre'.<sup>72</sup> This is because the established situation is predicated upon the exclusion of the void or the inexistent parts. 'At the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being,' writes Badiou, 'there is a "situated" void around which is organised the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question.'<sup>73</sup> However, in certain 'historical situations', or what he also calls 'evental sites', the void makes a return.<sup>74</sup> Such a return inevitably disrupts the positive order of being in a situation for it discloses the inexistent elements that had hitherto been excluded. This disruption caused by the return of the void is what Badiou names as an event: 'the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, is to name the situated void of that for which it is an event.'<sup>75</sup> In terms of the concerns of this thesis, the condition of politics is useful to illustrate precisely what Badiou means here by an event:

Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name "proletariat," the central void of early bourgeois societies. For the proletariat – being entirely dispossessed and absent from the political stage – is that around which is organized the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital.<sup>76</sup>

In politics, an event reveals that a given situation, the social formation of 'early bourgeois societies,' has excluded certain groups of people: 'the proletariat'. In Badiou's words, these people are termed 'inexistents'. The 'evental site' or 'historical situation' in this case would be the exploitative capitalist factory system. However, the event itself is not guaranteed by the site itself, but rather by something in excess of the site: the attempt to

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<sup>72</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*.

<sup>73</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.68.

<sup>74</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.175.

<sup>75</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.69.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.69.

resist dispossession and exploitation via political resistance. A political event is thus an uprising of workers who attempt radically to transform the exploitative conditions of production. The event of Marx lies then, for Badiou, in the radical declaration that ‘there is a revolutionary workers’ movement.’<sup>77</sup> Marx is understood as an event because the declaration of a ‘revolutionary worker’s movement’ is seen as an attempt to give existence to something which had hitherto remained inexistent in the sphere of politics. Badiou is thus working through the logic of Marx’s definition of the proletariat as ‘the nothing that should be everything.’<sup>78</sup> Their labour creates value and social power yet in socio-economic terms they are themselves powerless. This is because their labour power is alienated and sold as a commodity to the capitalist. What is encountered in the political event of worker uprisings against capital then is the void of the situation of capitalist social formations.<sup>79</sup> A political event is then a restitution of the existence of the inexistent; an attempt by the inexistent (the proletariat) to assert their maximum existence in the world. The eruption of the inexistent that signifies an event thus disrupts the normal order of being or situation. Moreover, the attempt of the inexistent to assert maximum existence in the world, leads to the potential for a new conception of being itself, in this case, the radical community of equals that is communism.<sup>80</sup>

While Badiou’s conception of the event designates the return of the void of a situation and the possibility of the creation of something new, the ability of the new to endure is not guaranteed solely by the taking place of an event itself. This is because Badiou views an event as something that is aleatory and ephemeral; an event often disappears as quickly as it emerges. As I noted in the introductory chapter, Badiou likes to use Stephane Mallarmé’s

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<sup>77</sup> Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p.57.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Marx, *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, (1843) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>> [accessed 24 August 2015].

<sup>79</sup> One can see here the link between Badiou’s theory and that of his erstwhile Althusserian colleague, Jacques Rancière. Similar to Badiou, Rancière argues that any social formation is based upon an essential exclusion that relates to the way the respective parts of the community are counted within the social whole. Politics takes place then via a similar type of evental interruption or what Rancière calls a ‘disagreement.’ This happens when the parts that are not counted fight for inclusion or recognition. This disagreement is produced by ‘the part that has no part’, the working class, for example; ‘the parts of the community that are not real parts of the social body.’ See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.21. For Badiou’s discussion of his own work in relation to Rancière, see Alain Badiou, ‘Rancière and Apolitics’, in Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. by Jason Barker, (London: Verso, 2011), pp.114-123.

<sup>80</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, pp.55-6.

poem, '*Un coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard*' ('A Throw of the Dice will never abolish Chance') to illustrate the temporality of an event.<sup>81</sup> Here the 'spray' of the empty maritime space potentially signifies the event of both a dice throw by a ship's captain and also the disappearance of the ship itself; the trace of these occurrences has all but vanished from the ocean surface: 'nothing will have taken place but the place.'<sup>82</sup> A similar ephemeral temporality is also legible in Saint Paul. The flashing light that blinds him on the road to Damascus vanishes as soon as Jesus has delivered his message (Acts 9. 3-8). The event is thus conceptualised as a 'kind of flashing supplement that happens to a situation.'<sup>83</sup> Like the spray on Mallarmé's ocean surface, or the blinded Paul, however, it leaves behind a 'trace' that requires investigation.<sup>84</sup> The nature of an event's undecidability also relates to the concept of a situation. If an event signifies that something has been excluded from a given situation, then logically speaking, the event itself is 'undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself.'<sup>85</sup> For example, the reasons for proletarian revolt and communist revolution are not shared by the dominant ideology in the historical situation of bourgeois societies; for the capitalist, a fair exchange is paid for the labour of the worker. So, if an event thus outlines a brief break with the dominant order of the world, or a given historical situation, then what is important for Badiou is how humans respond to such breaks and the traces that the event leaves behind. He is interested here in the conditions that enable people to continue to engage with the logic of an event. The significance of an event, its rupturing of the given historical situation, must thus be picked up by and given an 'interpretative intervention', or what he names in relation to the example of Saint Paul, a 'thought practice'.<sup>86</sup> The work done to sustain the break with the historical situation and the radical restructuring of how humans subsequently live their lives necessitates a type of discipline or ethical consistency. Badiou uses a strange ethical formula to describe this

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<sup>81</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, '*Un coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard*' ('A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance') in *The Poems of Mallarmé*, ed. and trans. by Keith Bosley, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp.253-297; Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp.191-198.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, pp.296-7; See also Alain Badiou, 'A Poetic Dialogue: Labîd ben Rabi'a and Mallarmé', in Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. by Alberto Toscano, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp.46-56; Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, pp.74-83, pp.90-7.

<sup>83</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.71.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.71.

<sup>85</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.181.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.181; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.1-2.

process: 'love what you will never believe twice'.<sup>87</sup> As Ed Pluth notes, what he means here is that one should attempt to maintain a fidelity to something that may be difficult or even impossible to justify from the standpoint of the dominant ideology of the situation.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, for Badiou the event cannot be reduced to the logic of the situation at all. Thus what is required is a process of intransigent interpretation that puts into practice the logic of an event: 'the process of recomposing, from the point of view of the interruption, another place and other rules.'<sup>89</sup> It is this undertaking that Badiou names as the work of the 'faithful subject'.

The faithful subject thus undertakes a labour of investigation into the consequences of an event. This necessitates a commitment to the logic of the 'eventual supplement', a process that Badiou calls fidelity.<sup>90</sup> This act of fidelity or investigation into the consequences of the event marks a radical change in the individual and it is this that constitutes the subject. For an event brings forth something previously indiscernible (inexistents) into a situation. The act of fidelity undertaken by the subject thus consists of establishing the meaning of a new situation in relation to previously uncounted elements. The subject initiates 'a set of procedures which discern, within a situation, those multiples whose existence depends upon the circulation of an eventual multiple.'<sup>91</sup> An example of a subject would thus be French Maoism. In Badiou's eyes, French Maoism refers to the attempt to work through the logic of the events of May 1968, in particular the alliance of students and workers. A key characteristic of this was thus the attempt to develop a new type of political organisation that did not maintain the division between mental and manual labour that was so characteristic of the Leninist vanguard.

By producing an understanding of a new situation on the basis of the inclusion of previously occluded elements, the faithful subject thus participates in what Badiou calls a truth procedure: 'a truth is the organized product of an event.'<sup>92</sup> The aim of the faithful subject is the 'organization' of a new situation based upon the inclusion of the formerly excluded

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<sup>87</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.324; Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.52.

<sup>88</sup> Ed Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), pp.1-2.

<sup>89</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.259.

<sup>90</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.41.

<sup>91</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.232.

<sup>92</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p.81.

multiple or inexistents. The situation needs to be remade so that the truth of an event can be worked out and made into a norm. Here Badiou makes a distinction between truth and knowledge. Every situation has a pre-existing body of knowledge, or dominant ideology, which is used to understand the situation. Badiou calls this an 'encyclopaedia.'<sup>93</sup> The event, by definition, does not 'belong to the language of the situation' or the prevailing body of knowledge.<sup>94</sup> Thus, establishing the truth of an event, being a faithful subject, demands something greater than adherence to custom and extant knowledge: 'fidelity is not the matter of knowledge. It is not the work of the expert; it is the work of the militant.'<sup>95</sup> The act of fidelity towards a previously occluded or uncounted element within a situation means that the subject is by definition different to the individual of the situation that preceded the event. In this service to a truth procedure, the subject is no longer considered an individual; rather, in Badiou's terms, it is an 'immortal'.<sup>96</sup> The subject participates in a truth-process which goes beyond the mere finitude of human existence: 'The militant,' he writes, 'enters into the composition of this subject, but once again it exceeds him (it is precisely this excess that makes it come to pass as immortal).'<sup>97</sup>

Badiou's theory of historical change is then bound up with his dual notions of event and subject. Despite the anti-dialectical or aleatory conceptualisation of the event, the relationship between event and subject operates in a dialectical manner: a subject does not precede but rather comes into existence following an event. In terms of Marxism, however, there is a potential problem with Badiou's grounding of politics in a conceptualisation of the event as a resurgence of the ontological void. As I noted above, Badiou argues that politics is a condition for philosophy. Yet it also appears that his conception of communism as a politics of 'generic' equality is premised upon his conception of an eventual resurgence of the atomistic void or inexistents within a given situation.<sup>98</sup> The truth of politics is thus given credence by ontology. The first problem with this is that Badiou's ontological grounding of communism thus becomes not too dissimilar from the elision of metaphysics and social organisation in the equation of competition with

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<sup>93</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p.328.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.329.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.329.

<sup>96</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.55.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.43; Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p.507, p.511.

<sup>98</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.113.

human nature by the neoliberal thinkers outlined in the introductory chapter. The second problem with this type of approach is that it seems to collapse the distinction between politics and philosophy. As Ernesto Laclau notes, the void is essentially a mathematical or philosophical notion.<sup>99</sup> Grounding politics in a conception of the void may suggest that all humans are equal or offer a sense of universality as indistinct or generic humanity. However, in the sphere of Marxist politics the idea of universality arguably comes about in a very different manner to that of philosophy or mathematics. Taking the case of the Polish Solidarnosc workers movement in Gdansk during the 1980s, Laclau notes that their original demands were particular (pertaining to labour issues) rather than abstract or universal (pertaining to Polish society or humanity as a whole). However, since their demands were articulated in a repressive context, the Solidarnosc movement became a symbol for a variety of other demands that the state socialist regime could not accommodate. In the sphere of politics, Laclau thus sees universality operating via the process of hegemonic articulation. That is to say, under certain circumstances a set of particular demands often assumes a symbolic representation of universality. As Laclau puts it, 'a certain remnant of particularism cannot be eliminated from [Solidarnosc], but because those symbols [of Solidarnosc] served to represent a large set of democratic equivalential demands, they become the embodiment of universality as such.'<sup>100</sup> Laclau's point then is that politics does not relate to the universal or the void in the same way as ontology.<sup>101</sup> One of my aims in this Chapter and also Chapter Two is show how the embrace of Christianity by Badiou offers a way to resolve this potential shortcoming. Although Badiou is correct to highlight the universal quality of Pauline Christianity, I will demonstrate that this type of universality is best understood as articulated in relation to a political and socio-economic particularity: the poor and socially excluded groups of in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor.

In terms of the internal coherence of Badiou's argument, it is significant to note here that despite the materialist grounding of Badiou's ontological argument, his conceptual and terminological framework is profoundly religious. For example, Badiou refers to the *faithful* subject and configures this subject in terms of immortality. Moreover, the immortality of

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<sup>99</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'An Ethics of Militant Engagement' in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward, (London: Continuum, 2009), pp.120-137, (pp.125-126).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, pp.126-127.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p.125-126.



the subject is conceived as deriving from an 'excess,' an infinite truth that is far greater than the finitude of human existence.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, during a discussion of the immortality of a subject in *Logic of Worlds*, he concedes that the concept of the event 'has always been linked to the doctrines of Grace.'<sup>103</sup> If Badiou's theory of the subject is so bound up with a notion of transcendence and the transformation of an individual's life into something greater and more meaningful than hitherto experienced in a given situation, then it is little surprise that his 'materialism of grace' embraces Saint Paul as the 'poet thinker of the event.'

I now want to look at the example of Paul in more detail. This is because the historical reactivation of Paul as a political figure to redeem the failures of Leninism leads to a number of important implications that require further investigation. These implications arise from the deployment of a messianic figure to embody the subjective practices of communist militancy today and the attendant relationship that a messianic figure has with the concepts of event and subject. What I want to suggest in the rest of this chapter, is that if one reads Badiou's turn to Paul symptomatically, then the way he configures his concepts of event and subject begin to take on a slightly different type of signification. My argument is that a reading of Paul as a 'subjective figure of primary importance', or, as 'the poet-thinker of the event', will provide us with a far more politically viable conception of Badiou's theory and its relation to the ongoing crisis or political impotence of Marxism that began, in Badiou's eyes, in the 1970s.<sup>104</sup>

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The recourse to Paul as a means to re-enthuse militant politics raises some important questions with regards to political agency and the ways in which we conceptualise major systemic change. On the one hand, if the novelty and ruptural change of an event can only be fully instituted through a post-evental intervention by a subject, then does Badiou's celebration of a messianic figure mean that the practice of contemporary politics in the apparently post-evental world of today is merely a form of passive intransigence where we patiently await the redemptive arrival of a new event to emerge? In this sense, an event,

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<sup>102</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.43.

<sup>103</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, p.512.

<sup>104</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp. 1-2.

to quote Saint Paul, would arrive like a ‘thief in the night’ (I Thessalonians 5.2). As I noted in the introduction, this sense of passivity and immanence emerges in the articulation of Christianity and Marxism in Hardt and Negri. On the other hand, is it possible, in our current apparently non-evental world, to undertake a redemptive act of subjective intervention in relation to past events of which we have no or little direct experience? I ask this because the event to which Paul is a subject is, for Badiou, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notably, Paul was neither one of the original disciples; nor did he have any direct experience of the living Jesus nor the event of his resurrection following the crucifixion on Golgotha. His vocation as an apostle emerges sometime after the Christ event. As Badiou puts it: ‘Paul has no historical legitimacy. He is not one of the twelve apostles. He knew nothing of the Lord’s life. He caused many problems for the historical center in Jerusalem.’<sup>105</sup> Yet, it is Paul who, for Badiou, is the true subject of the Christ event: the truth process that is instituted in the world via the subjective labour of Paul is the ‘foundation of universalism’. In other words, Paul is not so much a passive figure but an active subject who takes up and develops the logic of an earlier event: the resurrection of Christ.

My key task in the following discussion, then, will be to defend the thesis that by drawing upon Paul, Badiou’s vision of radical political subjectivity is not one that is necessarily passive; the Pauline subject does not simply await messianic arrival. This is because the relationship between event and subject in the case of Saint Paul is arguably more temporally complex than a simple or direct dialectical succession of one by the other. As I shall demonstrate below, Pauline Christianity operates in relation to a type of doubled time of eventual newness. In more explicitly political terms, my argument is that the lesson from Paul is that for real historical change to occur in the world, an event or revolution must strike twice. This notion of a revolution striking twice will also be drawn upon to highlight the problematic nature of Badiou’s invocation of Paul as a supersession of Leninism. As I will show, such a doubled temporality of revolution is precisely what Lenin argued in 1917.

In critical terms, the following section will also intervene within contemporary debates concerning the work of Badiou and his ability to conceptualise historical and political change. Beyond the central premise of this thesis, that *pace* Daniel Bensaïd, recourse to

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.32.

religion is not an archive of defeat, the following discussion will contest two divergent, yet influential, responses to Badiou. The first response, exemplified in the work of Peter Hallward and also Daniel Bensaïd himself, foregrounds the anti-dialectical and ruptural reading of the event at the relative expense of the subject.<sup>106</sup> According to this view, Badiou's conception of the event is best understood in terms of a form of flash politics.<sup>107</sup> As such, Badiou's conception of historical change, based on a supposed punctual or *ex-nihilo* arrival of an unforeseeable event, cannot provide a comprehensive conjunctural analysis of the historical contradictions that lead to social change. Furthermore, this type of miraculous, evental newness also entails a problematic puritan form of 'politics without politics'.<sup>108</sup> According to the logic of this approach, the political subject, in an act of fidelity to a future event, passively awaits this sacral arrival in order to justify their engagement in the struggles of the present. As a consequence, the subject refuses to partake in the compromising and dirty work of "day-to-day" politics.<sup>109</sup> The second response, exemplified in the work of Ed Pluth and Bruno Bosteels, emphasises the integral and historical role of the subject in Badiou's conception of ruptural novelty.<sup>110</sup> In this reading, historical change is viewed – to use Badiou's own terms – as the result of a 'materialist dialectic' or 'subjective torsion', wherein the consequences of an event are subsequently worked upon by a subject who attempts to reconfigure the structure of a given situation.<sup>111</sup> As such, the poetic *forçage* of the subject is seen as the key operator of newness in the world.

While the latter theorists offer a more dialectical and, in terms of the discussion above, unarguably more materialist approach to Badiou, this thesis argues that Badiou's vision of historical change, read symptomatically through the example of Saint Paul, can be employed in a way that is more complex than either of these two prevailing interpretations imply. One important reason for this is the specific historical context of Paul as the subject of the Christ event and the attendant temporality of the foundation of universalism. That is to say, the temporal relationship between event and subject in the paradigmatic example

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alan Badiou and the Miracle of the Event'.

<sup>107</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alan Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p.98.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p.100; Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, pp.284-291.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, pp.284-291.

<sup>110</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, pp.77-109; Ed Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*, pp.108-125.

<sup>111</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, p.1; Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.148-157.

of Paul is perhaps less straightforward than that considered by Pluth and Bosteels. Indeed, a similar notion of a more complex historical relationship between event and subject is also revealed by the novels under investigation in this thesis. Here a redemptive and asymptotic temporality of subjective torsion within the novels seems to work upon repressed yet insistent demands of earlier, occluded events from the 1970s. Building upon my criticism of contemporary cultural texts that narrate the political battles of the 1970s, my argument is that the radical Pauline gesture would indeed be to return to these past events in order to redeem their failures. What I would suggest then, is that while the role of the subject is central to notions of historical change, the lack of eventual happenings since the “red-years” of the 1970s requires a critical re-consideration of the temporal relation between event and subject. The following consideration of Badiou’s use of Saint Paul as a model for communist politics today will thus expose two key points for intervention: firstly, how this religious model calls into question any simplistic and temporally proximate association between an event and the subject that follows it; and secondly, the extent to which his theory is still bound up with a form of Leninism. As I will show, the notion that an event must happen twice is exactly the point argued by Lenin in relation to the year of 1917. In order to get a sense of these issues, I now want to turn to the narrations of Paul’s conversion in his Epistles, but firstly, the Acts of the Apostles.

### **‘A materialism of grace:’ Saint Paul and the dual time of revolutionary redemption<sup>112</sup>**

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined around him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes opened, he saw no man: but they

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<sup>112</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.81.

led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither eat nor drink.

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias [...] And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightaway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ (Acts 9.1-24).

As the miraculous nature ('suddenly there shined round him a light from heaven') of Paul's conversion illustrates, Paul's encounter with the Lord is characterised by an unforeseen ('he saw no man') and abrupt rupture ('suddenly') with a previous order of being. As I noted above, such an aleatory occurrence is entirely appropriate, since for Badiou an event is defined by a 'totally incalculable' break or non-dialectical 'caesura.'<sup>113</sup> Ostensibly, Badiou's association between a quasi-miraculous inexplicability and the event *qua* newness in the world seems quite logical. If the (*ex-nihilo*) arrival of the new via an event could be delineated from the pre-existing body of worldly knowledge (Badiou's 'situation'), then nothing new would actually have taken place. This is evident in the case of Saint Paul. After 'three days without sight' and 'certain days with the disciples,' the previously feared persecutor – 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord' – undertakes an 'amaz[ing]' subjective transformation. With his eyesight returned he becomes a faithful subject of Christ's resurrection. He abandons his earlier life as a Pharisee and 'persecutor' of the disciples and sets out to 'preac[h] Christ.' In the process he begins to institute a new procedure of universal and infinite truth that will later be known as Christianity. Unlike the pre-constituted and particular subsets of communitarian belonging which had previously characterised life in ancient Palestine, access to redemption in Pauline Christianity was open to all; it was based upon a declaration of faith in the event of

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<sup>113</sup>Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.17; Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp.xxvi.

the resurrection (Jesus 'is very Christ') and unrelated to any form of pre-existing ethnic belonging ('he confounded the Jews which dwelt in Damascus'). As the religious metaphor of Pauline Christianity suggests then, the event, in Badiou's own terms, arises from an 'order of grace'.<sup>114</sup>

At this point then, one can see how the example of Saint Paul as 'poet-thinker of the event' can be understood in terms of the philosophical nomenclature outlined above. The historical situation is the divided social formation of ancient Palestine where salvation is both exclusive ('Jewish') and determined hierarchically, by a caste of 'high priests'. The evental site of the Christ event is the dead body of Jesus. The event is the resurrection of Jesus, a miraculous event which bespeaks the idea of a new life. The faithful subject is Paul. The shocking new truth that he outlines, a truth that 'confounded the Jews,' is the idea that Jesus is 'very Christ.' It is this messianic appellation that leads to the novelty of universal salvation: Paul will 'bear my name before the Gentiles' states the Lord (Acts 9.15).

What is important to note here is that while Paul is spoken to by Jesus and then recuperates with the disciple Ananias in Damascus, the extract is notable for the relative lack of instruction given to Paul following the Damascene encounter. 'Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do,' says the Lord to Paul. In Damascus, the disciple Ananias lays his hands on Paul and simply says: 'be filled with the Holy Ghost' (Acts 9.17). There is little here then, in terms of direct instruction to Paul regarding the universalist intervention that he will soon make; in the Acts this is notably delivered to Ananias and *not* Paul (Acts 9.15). Paul's own account of his calling emphasises the radical absence of instruction even further by highlighting the singular break with the identitarian Jewish 'situation' of the early Jesus movement. While Luke, the author of Acts, tries to integrate Paul into the ecclesiastical institution whose development he has been narrating, Paul accentuates his own independence. In his own account, Paul himself insists that after his encounter with Jesus he 'conferred not with flesh and blood'; there is no direct meeting with Ananias and no talk of baptism with Jewish disciples in Damascus (Galatians 1.16). Rather Paul recounts going straight to Arabia, out with the Jewish 'situation,' without any type of meeting with the disciples, before turning back to Damascus and later

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<sup>114</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.71.

Jerusalem to meet Peter and the original twelve (Galatians 1.17-18). The first point to draw from this is the significance of understanding Paul as a faithful subject. The extract from Acts is notable for the repetitive use of 'suddenly' and 'immediately', as if the notion of conviction was instantaneous. However, while Paul's life undergoes a dramatic transformation after his Damascene encounter, this is *not* simply due to an immediate seizure by a truth-process that is announced by an event. For Badiou, the new truth procedure of soteriological universalism that is worked out by Paul emerges rather from his role as a subject, through a 'thought practice' or poetic development of the *logic* of the event's encounter.<sup>115</sup> This is the process of 'interpretative intervention' that designates the faithful subject. Thus, *pace* Hallward and Bensaïd, one can begin to see here that the emergence of newness in the world does not immediately take place with an event alone.

What is interesting about the case of Paul, moreover, is that the revolutionary nature of his 'interpretative intervention' cannot be grasped without understanding how it is determined in a materialist manner not just by the event, but also by the site and the situation. Badiou insists that the event can never be reduced or understood in relation to the logic of the situation: Paul's 'discourse is one of pure fidelity to the possibility opened by the event. It cannot, therefore, in any way (and this is the upshot of Paul's antiphilosophy) fall under the remit of knowledge.'<sup>116</sup> Yet by drawing on Badiou's conception of Paul as 'poet-thinker of the event' we can see that only a more *materialist* and *impure* version of the event can capture the true radicalism of Paul's rupture.<sup>117</sup> This is legible in a number of ways.

To begin, Paul's radicalism can only be grasped when one investigates the symbolic significance of the evental site, the desert road or what Badiou calls the anonymous space outside Damascus.<sup>118</sup> That the resurrected Christ speaks to Paul here is important because it signifies that there is no sacred site for the Messiah. In other words, the Messiah is no longer a recluse in the purified space of the Jerusalem temple nor the 'synagogues in Damascus' as understood by the 'high priests;' instead he resides in an impure space accessible to all the people. This is significant for the appearance of a Messiah outside such

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<sup>115</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.2.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p.45.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

a sacred space constitutes a violation of a key feature of what Badiou would call the Jewish 'situation' in Ancient Palestine: the purity code that has its origins in the laws of the Torah. According to the prevailing Israelite paradigm, the newly emancipated Jews received the Torah on Mount Sinai. As Wayne Meeks and John Fitzgerald note, 'liberation and law thus went hand in hand'.<sup>119</sup> It is here that the notion of Israel as a chosen people can be truly understood: liberation from slavery in Egypt meant that they were now set apart from the corruption of surrounding cultures and their idolatrous social practices. The only way to ensure freedom was thus to maintain adherence to the law and attendant practices of purity. The true scandal of Paul's relation to Jesus thus can only be grasped when one begins to see how this scandal is only legible in relation to the determinant logic of the prevailing situation.

Second, on the road to Damascus, the resurrected Christ appears not to a pre-existing believer, but, crucially, to an avowed enemy of 'the disciples' – Saul, the Pharisee. Accordingly, Paul thinks through the logic of this encounter in relation to the situation (his hostility to the Jesus movement) and develops a new and significantly *universal* way of interpreting the distinctiveness of the Christ event. The singularity that is the Christ event becomes universal in its address because, as the conversion of an enemy of Jesus (Saul the Pharisee) suggests, access to the redemptive message of the resurrected Christ is not closed and exclusive, but is, instead, open to all. The relation between the event and the situation of Paul's previous hostility, 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord' is significant here. 'I persecuted the Church of God,' he states (Galatians 1.13). Notably, Paul's earlier zealous destruction of the Church is premised entirely on the notion of purity and adherence to Jewish law. According to the traditions of Jewish law, the proclamation of a crucified figure as God's anointed one was contrary to the laws of Deuteronomy (21.23): 'for he that is hanged is accursed of God, thy land be defiled.' As an 'accursed' and thus unclean man, comprehension of Jesus' messianic status was thus unthinkable according to the state of the Jewish situation. Paul recollects this in his letters where he ties his previous actions as a persecutor to his adherence to the demands of the law and respect for the traditions of his ancestors (Galatians 1.13-14; 3.13;

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<sup>119</sup> Wayne. A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, 'Introduction' in *The Writings of Saint Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, (London, New York: Norton, 2007), pp.xiii-xxviii, (p.xxv).



Philippians 3:6). Indeed, even when he discusses the significance of the eventual resurrection, Paul himself acknowledges that the notion of a crucified Christ is an absolutely scandalous 'stumbling block' (*skandalon*) to Jews (I Corinthians 1.23). What is important here then is that the radicalism of the event cannot be understood without a corresponding comprehension of the determinant role of the pre-existing situation. With his conversion to an impure God, the new Pauline subject reorganises previous understanding of the world in a way that reflects the differential logic of the event in relation to the prevailing situation: 'We have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world,' states Paul apropos the new messianic community, 'the offscouring of all things' (I Corinthians 4:13). The context of an accursed Christ and the accursed, kenotic messianic community thus accentuates the impure materialist determination of Paul's gesture by the situation.

The true radicalism of Paul thus consists in his conviction that the whole legal aspect of the Torah had been cancelled with the revelation of the accursed Jesus, a figure who appears outside the sacred space of the temple, as the Messiah. The determinant relationship between event and situation is clear: the significance of Paul as a subject of the event is marked by his renunciation of the situation, the legal tradition that had previously been so central to his life. Paul instead argues that adherence to law is death and new life is to be found in faith. Such a position was even scandalous to extant members of the Jesus movement, including Peter, with whom Paul repeatedly clashed, especially at Antioch (Gal 2.1-21). What thus constitutes the grounds for salvation for Saint Paul then is faith and fraternal love (*agape*) rather than adherence to law. The new life signified by the event of the resurrected Christ demands a new way or practice of life grounded in faith. This is the 'interpretative intervention' undertaken by Paul as a faithful subject to the Christ event. What thus impresses Badiou is that Paul manages to formulate a negation of the old world or 'situation' by organising a disciplined and logical relation to the nature of the event. This faithful subjectivity is characterised by the statement 'no...but' and is derived from Paul's famous phrase: 'for ye are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom 6.14):

We maintain in fact that a rupture on the basis of an event always constitutes a subject in the divided form of a 'no...but,' and that *it is precisely this form that bears the universal*, because the 'no' is the potential dissolution of closed particularities (whose name is the 'law'), whereas the 'but' indicates the task, the faithful labor, of

which the subjects of the process opened by the event (whose name is 'grace') are the co-workers.<sup>120</sup>

The transformative development of a universal occurs then by the 'faithful labor' (sic) or creative work of a subject in relation to the taking place of an event. As Badiou puts it: 'Paul draws from the conditions of his "conversion" the consequence that one can only begin from faith, from the declaration of faith.'<sup>121</sup> Indeed, this literal notion of subjective *poïesis* is, as I mentioned above, the nominative term through which Badiou refers to Saint Paul: 'the poet thinker of the event.'

However, the crucial missing element from Badiou's account of Paul is that the latter decisively draws upon the pre-existing situation as well as the event to justify his position. In addition to his own religious experience, he argues that God's equal acceptance of Gentiles through faith is pre-figured in scripture: this is the case of the Jewish patriarch Abraham. Abraham is briefly mentioned by Badiou in Saint Paul. However, this takes place in passing as Badiou discusses Marcion, the first and second century proponent of Christianity as a complete rupture with Judaism.<sup>122</sup> However, Badiou's reference to Abraham here is simply to say that Paul 'feels an affinity' with Abraham.<sup>123</sup> This statement is immediately followed by the assertion: 'That Paul emphasizes rupture rather than continuity with Judaism is not in doubt.'<sup>124</sup> By immediately emphasizing 'rupture' here Badiou thus fails to address the concrete reasons for the 'affinity' with Abraham. For Paul, however, the reasons for this affinity are not only clear, but moreover, decisive to his own practice. The distinctive feature of Abraham was not adherence to law or symbolic purity rites but his faith in the Lord (Galatians 3.6-14; Romans 4.2-25). Indeed, Abraham's encounter with God predates the covenant and attendant purity laws announced on Mount Sinai. Paul is thus able to draw upon Abraham to justify his own stance on gentiles and soteriological universalism. As Paul argues, the distinctive feature that marks the

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<sup>120</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.67-8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, pp.17-8.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, pp.35-6; Marcion, 'The Antitheses', in *The Writings of Saint Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, (London, New York: Norton, 2007), pp.286-288; Adolf Von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien*, trans. by J.E. Steely and L.D. Bierma, (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1990).

<sup>123</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul* p.35.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p.35.

foundational relationship with the Lord and thus ensures access to salvation for both gentile and Jew, is not law, but faith.

Badiou is correct to note that Paul bases very little of his justification on knowledge of Jesus' life. Paul's key reference *vis-à-vis* Jesus is the logic of the Christ event. For Paul, Jesus' resurrection signified the vicariousness of death and this was the clearest expression of God's wisdom and power (I Corinthians 1.24). In this focus on the 'scandal' of Christ, one can see that Paul's position is that of Badiou's militant; his justification is diametrically opposed to the dominant order of knowledge regarding salvation. Thus it is no surprise to note, as the biblical scholars Wayne Meeks and John Fitzgerald remind us, that 'the whole history of Paulinism has been a history of controversy'.<sup>125</sup> Yet, this controversy is also grounded in Paul's subversive reading of scripture, his privileging of the faith of Abraham over adherence to law. Abraham's triumph over death, his ability to sacrifice his son, Isaac, who is subsequently saved, is due, Paul argues, to his faith in the Lord: 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness' (Romans 4.3). Paul thus sees the 'faithful Abraham' as pre-figuring and justifying the stance he takes regarding universalism and faith (Galatians 3.9). This is a link that is, of course, made by Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>126</sup> His discussion of Abraham's faith takes its title, *Fear and Trembling*, from Paul's discussion of faith in Philippians (2.12) – 'continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling' – and also from Paul's foundational experience, 'trembling and astonished' (Acts 9.6), at Damascus.<sup>127</sup>

The absence of any discussion of the significance of Abraham in relation to Saint Paul is a point of criticism raised by many theology scholars, who often view Badiou's reading of Paul as a form of disavowed Marcionism.<sup>128</sup> Denounced by the early Church fathers, Marcion argued in his *The Antitheses* that Jesus marked a complete break with the Jewish

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<sup>125</sup> Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, 'Introduction' in *The Writings of Saint Paul*, p.xxv.

<sup>126</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Alastair Hannay, (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>127</sup> In a discussion of truth in *Logic of Worlds*, Badiou draws upon Kierkegaard and his grounding of truth in sheer belief. However, the precise link between Abraham and Paul is neither acknowledged nor discussed. See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, pp.427ff.

<sup>128</sup> Daniel Bell Jr. 'Badiou's Faith and Paul's Gospel: The Politics of Indifference and the Overcoming of Capital,' *Angelaki* 12(1), (2007), 97-111; Adam Kotsko, 'Politics and Perversion: Situating Žižek's Paul' *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 9(2), (2008), 43-52

deity of scripture.<sup>129</sup> A key source for Marcion was Paul's designation of the opposition between law and grace. Badiou follows the early Church fathers' stance on Marcionism by labelling it as a heresy.<sup>130</sup> However, by refusing to engage with the links between Paul and the Jewish situation, and by asserting that the Christ event marks a 'pure beginning,' Badiou arguably follows the logic of Marcion.<sup>131</sup> As Dominik Finkelde notes, Badiou 'arrives [...]not so much at Paul, but at Marcion.'<sup>132</sup> In terms of the present discussion, the key point here, however, is not so much Badiou's Marcionism but the significance of Paul's radicalism. As his subversive reading of Abraham makes clear, Paul's radical gesture is one that follows or is pre-figured by a number of extant traditions. Despite his lack of interest in the life of Christ, this type of subversive reading of scripture arguably mirrors the battles that Jesus himself undertook against the Pharisees during his own lifetime. Thus the significance of Paul's radical break can only be fully comprehended via the event of Jesus *and* the situation of Jewish history.

While this point corrects the idealist vision of Badiou as a thinker of miracles as presented by Hallward and Bensaid, it also enables the redress of criticisms of Badiou's Pauline turn by other religiously oriented critical theorists. In contrast to Badiou's focus on Christianity, figures such as Giorgio Agamben and Simon Critchley, have tried to praise Paul as a radical Jew or an author of Jewish political theology.<sup>133</sup> On the one hand, such approaches are perhaps more historically correct; Paul never talks about Christianity only being 'in Christ' (Galatians 3.28). Yet on the other hand, these accounts only serve to express the scandal of Paul vis-à-vis Judaism in an even greater manner: Paul's interpretation of Abraham is indeed a complete affront to the dominant Jewish ideology of adherence to law. His faith-based universalism is a true break with the Jewish situation in First Century Palestine. Thus while he may not have considered himself a Christian, his universalism ultimately constitutes the ground for a new religion: Christianity. Understood in this way, Paul's act enables a more rigorously historical materialist reading of Badiou's theory; the example of

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<sup>129</sup> Marcion, 'The Antitheses', in *The Writings of Saint Paul*, pp.286-288; Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien*.

<sup>130</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.35.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p.49.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Hollis-Phelps, *Alain Badiou; between theology and anti-theology*, p.140; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul* p.49. Simon Critchley also levels a similar charge at Badiou, see *Faith of the Faithless*, pp.200-202.

<sup>133</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*; Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless*, pp. 157-8.

Paul shows that the logic of newness necessitates some kind of material and impure relationship with history as much as with an event. For newness to emerge in the world, one must, as Badiou argues, proceed from the event; this procedure, however, involves an interrogation of the material logic not just of the evental happening, but also in Paul's case, of the pre-figurations of the historical situation itself.

A further emendation to Badiou's thought and critical responses to it can also be taken from a reading of Paul. It is significant here to note that the choice of Paul as the 'poet thinker of the event' also reveals an important temporal *décalage* in Badiou's theory of historical change. If Paul functions as a paradigm for the faithful subject in general, then this *décalage*, I would argue, is useful for historicising the explicit political reactivation of Paul in the present. In his book *Saint Paul*, the original event that both Badiou and Paul draw upon in terms of historical newness is, of course, the resurrection of Jesus. 'The Christian subject', states Badiou, 'does not pre-exist the event he declares (Christ's resurrection).'<sup>134</sup> The idea of a new truth, in this case, soteriological universalism, thus emerges for Badiou and also for critics such as Bosteels and Pluth, via a dialectical relationship between event and subject. However, while the new life promised by soteriological universalism breaks with the prevailing situation of death under adherence to Jewish law, the important point to note here is that Badiou can only talk about the miraculous nature of the Christ event via recourse to its *doubled* state: the foundation of Christianity following the amazing conversion of Saint Paul (Acts 9.1-22). Indeed, in a passing reference, Badiou notes that the Damascene encounter 'mimics the founding event.'<sup>135</sup> Rather than a simple dialectical relationship between the flashing interruption of a singular event and the subsequent labour of a subject, the reiteration of the original evental miracle in the later case of Saint Paul seems to suggest that there is a more complex interrelation between event and subject and the temporality of historical change at work in Badiou. Suffice to recall here that Paul has no direct experience of the precise historical situation of Jesus: he was a Pharisee, an ideological enemy and persecutor of the Jesus movement; nor does Paul have direct experience of the evental site: Jesus' death;

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<sup>134</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.14.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.17.

moreover, he does not directly experience the event of the resurrection for he is not an original member of the apostles and does not visit the tomb.

The crucial point to be drawn from this then is as follows: what the temporal doubling and the attendant *décalage* between the original Christ event and the later historical change instituted by Pauline Christianity seems to suggest is that the change that issues forth from the interpretative interrogation of an event can be achieved only if an event, as it were, happens twice. Or, alternatively, real change occurs if a past event is taken up, or redeemed, so to speak, at a later date by a subject who has no direct experience of the original event itself.

It is significant to note here that the dual temporality of the eventual newness is legible in the very narration of Paul's conversion and mission. Despite the lack of personal experience, the narratives of Paul's conversion in both Acts and the Epistles actually recapitulate the symbolic structure of Jesus' mission as recounted in Mark's gospel. As a number of materialist scholars note, Mark's Gospel is constructed around a highly symbolic narrative and geographic movement from the 'wilderness' (Mark 1.13) or desert (*erēmos*), to the geographical and political centre: Jerusalem (Mark 11-16).<sup>136</sup> The construction of Mark's text is indeed divided into two narratives of this very same movement: Mark 1.1 – 8.21, culminating in the dispute over scriptural interpretation with the Pharisees; and then in Mark 8.22 – 16.8, culminating in the climax of his campaign with the attack on the Temple in Jerusalem and the crucifixion.<sup>137</sup> As Myers and Gunjević explain, in the semantic field of Mark's early Palestinian readers, the desert is crucial.<sup>138</sup> Not only does it denote site of a community in flight, like Israel, Jesus is tested there (Mark 1.12-13), but it is, in ideological and socio-economic terms, the site of the socially and politically insignificant: the rural poor. Jesus's messianic mission thus begins in the periphery with the rural poor in Galilee. With the growth of the multitude around him, he moves from the margins of society to contest Jewish power in the geopolitical centre: the temple in Jerusalem. By constructing the locus of the messianic movement outside the traditional space of Jerusalem, where all

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<sup>136</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, pp.125-6; Boris Gunjević, 'Pray and Watch – The Messianic Subversion', in Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*, pp.241-269, (p.248, pp.257-258).

<sup>137</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.226, p.235, p.290, p.404.

<sup>138</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Pray and Watch – the Messianic Subversion', pp.257-258.

nations would one day be redeemed (Psalms 69.35; Isaiah 60.10-14), Mark's Gospel thus 'subverts key elements in the prevailing cultural code' of Palestinian Judaism.<sup>139</sup> It is here, in the subversion of the prevailing structures of power, that one can begin to understand the radical egalitarian core of Christianity. What Gunjević and Myers are arguing is that the ecclesial setting of Christianity is the Church of the poor. In other words, the narration of Jesus in Mark is one that when read in materialist terms, can be understood as a radical tale of political resistance. As the liberation theologian Jon Sobrino puts it, the fundamental orientation of Christianity emerges from the struggle of the rural poor against 'poverty and exploitation.'<sup>140</sup>

Paul's subversive turn towards Gentiles rather than Jews follows a similar symbolic movement. In the narration of Acts and also the Epistles, the messiah calls to Paul outside the symbolic space of the urban centre: the light falls on Paul when he is outside Damascus. The ex-centric nature of Paul's mission is made even clearer in his letters: rather than move to the urban centre and convene with the 'flesh and blood' in Damascus, Paul states that his first mission was to the even more peripheral geography of Arabia. Indeed, even in the more conservative narration in Acts, his movement to the centre recapitulates the subversive practice of Jesus. Much like the ideological and later physical overturning of scripture by Jesus vis-à-vis the Pharisees and then temple authorities in Jerusalem, Paul's declaration at the synagogue that Jesus 'is very Christ' produced a similar confusion: he 'confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus' (Acts 9.22). This break with the centre is re-emphasised when he finally confronts the original apostles. His meetings with the political centre of the early Jesus movement are characterised by profound disputes over the 'apostleship of the circumcision' (Galatians 2.8). This takes place at both the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Galatians 2.1-10) and his dispute with Peter at Antioch (Galatians 2.11). The political symbolism of the 'wilderness/temple polarity' that characterises Jesus' mission for materialist scholars such as Myers and Gunjević is thus doubled in Paul.

The complex notion of a doubled or dual time of the event is in fact precisely the way in which Paul's practice can be understood as messianic. Christ's resurrection was not for Paul

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<sup>139</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.126.

<sup>140</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, trans. by John Drury, (New York: Orbis, 1978), p.12.

a singular event, rather it was 'the first fruits' of what would soon be the final eschatological harvest (I Corinthians 15.23-24). Consequently Paul believed that Christ's second coming was imminent: 'the time is short' (I Corinthians 7.29). It would occur in his own time or that of his converts: the 'present time' was nothing more than a 'remnant according to the election of grace' (Romans 11.5). In terms of temporality then, Paul's messianic 'remnant' bespeaks a conception of time that is characterised by a sense of splitting. This is a point argued persuasively by Agamben in *The Time That Remains*, the title of which is in fact a re-translation of the '*ho nyn kairos*' or 'present time' from Paul's letter to the Romans.<sup>141</sup> In this text Agamben demonstrates that the hopeful potentiality of Paul's messianic remnant, the '*ho nyn kairos*,' is best understood as promissory division of time into two different epochs. Broadly speaking, the first epoch is characterised by the order of *chronos* or calendar time.<sup>142</sup> Spanning the era between the original divine creation of the human world and the announcement of this world's end, the first epoch concludes with the arrival of the messiah. In Paul's vision the messianic event is, of course, the act of resurrection. The second epoch, in contrast, ends the procession of chronological time. Marked by a *parousia* or full presence which is configured in the return of the messiah, the second epoch heralds both the redemptive completion of humanity, a contraction of time, and its subsequent end – the eschatological termination of the earthly space of humanity is accompanied by the redemptive arrival of a new, heavenly kingdom.<sup>143</sup>

The hopeful potentiality of the remnant is, according to Agamben, developed out of Paul's notion of living in a time that divides this long-standing temporal division. Following the post-resurrection ascension of the Christ into heaven, the human subject is left to wait for the return or second coming of the Messiah. The return or re-capitulation of the messianic event signals the redemptive completion of an earlier promise – the end of the world and the arrival of the divine kingdom. As such, the remnant – the exceptional division between two times - is considered by Agamben to be the actual, promissory moment of messianic time. In the wait for a messianic return via an act of temporal re-capitulation, this dualistic structure of time is, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, charged to the point of explosion.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, p.143.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p.63.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, pp.69-70.

<sup>144</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', pp.253-4.



The present is orientated towards the past in the search for a sign that will reveal the return of the Christ. Indeed, Agamben's discussion of Paul in *The Time That Remains* also includes an exploration of the messianic politics of Walter Benjamin. Foregrounding Benjamin's hopeful notion of *Jetztzeit* ("now-time"), Agamben argues that Benjamin's theory of historical redemption constitutes a secret appropriation of Saint Paul's messianic notion of the '*ho nyn kairos*' or 'present time'/'time of the now.'<sup>145</sup> Much like Agamben's reading of Paul's remnant, Benjamin's mediation on *Jetztzeit* in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* concludes with a similar sense of imminence that is taken from the Pauline idea of redemption: 'for every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.'<sup>146</sup> This sense of imminence again discloses a more complex and specifically divided notion of time in relation to Paul; the actual moment of messianic return would complete the promise of the first arrival, contracting the divided time by a process of redemption. Following the insights of Agamben's reading of Benjamin, Žižek aptly describes 'Pauline temporality [as an] "already but not yet;"' the first messianic event has 'already' taken place, but the real truth of this event – universal salvation – and the real arrival of the divine kingdom, are 'not yet' here.<sup>147</sup>

The overall point here then is that the choice of Paul as 'poet-thinker of the event' necessitates a more complex understanding of the way historical change takes place in the model offered by Badiou. This more complex messianic dual time of eventual newness, the "already but not quite yet," is even evident in the temporal structure that marks the actual Damascene conversion from Acts. While the sudden and blinding Damascene encounter may constitute a miraculous event, the truthful consequences of this aleatory happening will only become clear in the future-anterior. However, this future-anterior does not take place immediately after the event; Paul is firstly 'three days without sight.' This is followed by a further temporal *décalage* in the narrative: following his blinding, Paul proceeds to recuperate with the 'disciples which were at Damascus'. Despite the constant use of terms such as 'suddenly' and 'straightaway' the temporal immediacy of the account in the Acts, "the already", is contradicted by a notable series of delays, "the not quite yet". Thus the

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<sup>145</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, p.143.

<sup>146</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p.255.

<sup>147</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 2003), p.9.

shocking arrival of the new discourse only emerges when Paul sets out 'certain days' later as a faithful subject of the resurrection's redemptive power to spread the word that Jesus was 'very Christ'.

If one understands Pauline temporality in this more complex and specifically messianic manner, then two important consequences emerge from Badiou's choice of Paul as the subjective figure capable of resurrecting communism today. First, the vocation of a contemporary Pauline militant is that of *poïesis*. That is to say, the Pauline militant is active and evangelical in their work. Thus the reactivation of Pauline subjectivity does not aim at assuaging contemporary political fears with the reassuring message of an imminent messianic arrival from a heavenly domain. To be sure, while Paul undoubtedly saw himself as living in the final days of the eschatological remnant, this did not produce passivity but rather an avowedly evangelical mission. His faith based conviction that 'all are one in Christ' saw him dedicate the rest of his life to the elaboration, dissemination, and practical organisation of such an idea. While a follower of Badiou such as Slavoj Žižek may thus view the current economic and ecological crisis as a Pauline sign of 'living in end times', this does not equate to a repudiation or disengagement with direct political action in the present.<sup>148</sup> This position of radical disengagement is often advocated by Žižek who partly follows Agamben by celebrating the literary example of Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, in particular Bartleby's repetition of the statement: 'I would prefer not to.'<sup>149</sup> Radical passivity is envisaged here as a means to decouple oneself from the all-consuming nature of contemporary capitalism. However, what the above discussion demonstrates is that the true Pauline act consists in an active subjective labour and political invention. In other words, the Pauline response demands a resurrection, in the present conjuncture, of a universally appealing and egalitarian practice among the masses. Indeed, the allegorical turn to Paul speaks precisely to the post-evental times of the present when over a whole generation has elapsed since the events of May 1968 and the European "red years." Paul, as Badiou emphasises, has 'no historical legitimacy;' he was not a member of the original

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<sup>148</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living In End Times*, (London: Verso, 2010)

<sup>149</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p.10, p.342, pp.381-385; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.48; Giorgio Agamben, 'Bartleby, or on Contingency' in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp.243-271.

disciples and his mission is marked by profound battles with the political centre of the nascent Jesus movement over the position of Gentiles and the idea of universalism. Yet, it was this figure, with little or no personal experience of the living Jesus that was able to produce a new and universally appealing discourse. Thus contra Bensaïd, Bosteels and Chiesa and Toscano, who all see the religious turn as marking a historical as much as political lacuna in Badiou's thought, the configuration of Paul as *the* militant subject for our contemporary conjuncture is grounded upon an entirely apposite historical foundation. The turn to Paul is not an archive of defeat but rather a historically justifiable allegory that engages directly with Badiou's attempt to produce something new and radical in an inauspicious, post- or even non-evental conjuncture.

The second point is that the messianic temporality of 'already but not yet' positions Paul in a very similar position to the revolutionary practice of Lenin in 1917. As Slavoj Žižek notes, the distinctive argument of Lenin following the overthrow of Tsarism in February 1917 was that Russia stood 'between two revolutions.'<sup>150</sup> The February revolution had left Russia as one of the most democratic countries in Europe: there was an unprecedented level of political mobilization, a free press and freedom of organization. Yet Lenin's argument was that for this eventual explosion of freedom to take hold and become permanent, a second revolution was necessary. What Lenin outlined was thus a type of political gap that needed to be bridged if the gains of the revolution were to succeed in the long term:

This gap is the gap between revolution *qua* the imaginary explosion of freedom in sublime enthusiasm, the magic moment of universal solidarity when "everything seems possible," and the hard *work* of social reconstruction which is to be performed if this enthusiastic explosion is to leave its traces in the inertia of the social edifice itself. This gap [...] is the very space of Lenin's unique intervention: the fundamental lesson of revolutionary materialism is that revolution must strike twice.<sup>151</sup>

What Žižek is highlighting here is the fear that the failure to institutionalise the gains of the revolution under a new political form or organization that would match the democratic and egalitarian aims of the revolution might unwillingly provide the ground for a return of Tsarism via a *coup d'état* (as was attempted in the subsequent Civil War) or a victory of

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<sup>150</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Introduction: Between the Two Revolutions', in *Revolution at the Gates: Selected Writings of Lenin from 1917*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2002), pp.1-12.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p.7.

bourgeois parties in liberal-democratic parliamentary elections. Lenin's argument, and ultimate success in making a revolution 'strike twice,' was thus an attempt to ensure that the radical social change announced in the February Revolution would endure in a meaningful way.

This reading of Lenin's intervention enables a return to Badiou's original historical-political reference to Paul. As I noted earlier, Badiou's argument that Paul would redeem or supersede the failures of Leninism is immediately contradicted by the structural homology he draws between Lenin and Paul. If one follows Žižek's argument however, then the determinate nature of this contradiction can be made clear. Žižek's fundamental point is that politically and historically speaking, one can only really understand Paul if one understands him 'as a Leninist.'<sup>152</sup> There are a number of reasons for this claim. Firstly, there is the temporal and political significance of Lenin's response. Žižek summarises Lenin's argument for a second revolution as follows: 'Revolution is already behind us, the old regime is out, freedom is here – *but* the hard work still lies ahead.'<sup>153</sup> The temporal splitting of Lenin here is entirely the same as the messianic temporality – 'already but not yet' – of Saint Paul. Indeed, what Žižek stresses is that just like Lenin's subjective response to the event of the February Revolution, Paul's mission to the Gentiles and his construction of new communities in Asia Minor under the banner of universal salvation via faith constitutes a similar attempt to institutionalise and do the 'hard work' that followed the logic of the Christ event.<sup>154</sup>

Second, like Paul's distance from the prevailing Jewish based ideology of the original twelve disciples, Lenin's argument regarding the unique chance for revolution was met with contempt by the vast majority of his party. *Pravda* dissociated the Bolshevik Party from Lenin's 'April Theses' and no prominent leader within the party supported his demand for revolution.<sup>155</sup> As Nadezhda Krupskaya, his wife and fellow Bolshevik leader stated, 'I am afraid it looks as if Lenin has gone crazy.'<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, p.7

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>155</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Introduction: Between the Two Revolutions', p.5.

<sup>156</sup> Neil Harding, *Leninism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p.87.

Thirdly, the subjective nature of Lenin's stance at this time also draws a decisive parallel with what Badiou calls the subjective militancy of Paul. Lenin's position in 1917 elicited two types of objection. First, that a second revolution was not a social necessity. This was an evolutionist type of Marxism which envisaged social change as operating according to laws of historical development. Karl Kautsky expressed this position most clearly in his argument that the first stage towards socialism in Russia necessitated a coalition of bourgeois and proletarian parties to accelerate the development of capitalism and the objective conditions for socialist revolution.<sup>157</sup> The second objection, was normative: that the revolution would be undemocratic as the majority of the populace supported the Socialist Revolutionaries and not the Bolsheviks. Despite ostensible differences, both of these responses actually coincided in their search for a type of objective guarantee for political practice. This need for a guarantee was a position that Lenin denounced in 'The Crisis Has Matured'.<sup>158</sup> As Žižek notes, Lenin's argument was that the objective conditions for revolution could never be guaranteed and that revolutionary practice was undertaken in a militant way, by an 'engaged agent'.<sup>159</sup> What is notable about this type of engaged response is that it is exactly this type of subjective commitment, grounded in militancy rather than objective knowledge from the dominant ideology of the situation, which Badiou celebrates in Saint Paul and all faithful subjects.<sup>160</sup>

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This chapter has provided a symptomatic reading of Badiou's turn to Saint Paul. In particular, it has addressed three related points. Firstly, that Badiou's recourse to Paul cannot be fully understood as a type of post-Leninist gesture. As I have shown, Badiou's method of analysis and recourse to Saint Paul under the conditions of late capitalism follows a similar series of

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<sup>157</sup> Massimo L. Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution*, (London: Verso, 1990), pp.218-9.

<sup>158</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, 'The Crisis Has Matured'.

<sup>159</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Introduction: Between the Two Revolutions', p.8

<sup>160</sup> It is interesting to note here that this 'fundamental lesson of revolutionary materialism' has echoes for the recent reversals of the Arab Spring. Here the 'sublime enthusiasm' of the radical multitudes in Tahir Square was quickly reversed, first by the democratic elections which returned a conservative Islamist regime, and secondly, by the return of military rule with the US sponsored *coup d'état* led by the head of the Egyptian Armed Forces, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The return of a military figure to the head of state thus completed a reversal of the 2011 revolution which overthrew the former military leader and dictator, Hosni Mubarak. Badiou himself has written about this revolution in *The Rebirth of History* which was first published in French in 2011. In this text he again outlines his Pauline stance on contemporary communism as something that must be universal in reach and internationalist. Yet he maintains that the Leninist model is inappropriate for the present. The reversal of this revolution and its failure to 'strike twice' seem to question this stance.

historical and political manoeuvres as those of Lenin in the early twentieth century in his analyses of monopoly capitalism and the strategic problems with Second International politics. Following this, I have argued that a reading of the key concepts of event and subject in light of biblical narrations of Paul's conversion and mission mean that Badiou's work offers a decisively active rather than passive orientation towards politics and history. The previous point then returned us to the issue of Leninism in that I argued that the type messianic temporality associated with Paul – 'the already but not quite' – is similar to Lenin's conception of a revolution needing to strike twice. Despite his attempt to move beyond Lenin, one key conclusion from the arguments made in this chapter is that Badiou's turn to Paul is still related to a type of Leninist operation. This is significant because when I address cultural representations of radical social change in Chapter Three, I will demonstrate that ideas associated with Leninism, namely vanguardism, still play a central role in how we imagine decisive political transformations. In the following chapter, I extend this symptomatic reading of Badiou by highlighting the way in which his very history and definition of communism are grounded on a redemptive substructure. In other words, I will argue firstly, that Badiou's vision of communism is essentially theopolitical, and secondly, that this theopolitical grounding in Christianity does not contradict the egalitarian aims of Marxism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ‘For ye are all one in Christ Jesus’: Alain Badiou, communism and the politics of redemption.

As both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek note, one of the most common and powerful liberal and anti-Communist arguments is that Marxism is ultimately a secularised messianic theory of historical deliverance.<sup>1</sup> What this line of reasoning suggests is that Marxism, despite its apparent materialism, is really a ‘shamefaced religion [...] which does not wish to know its own name.’<sup>2</sup> According to Žižek, the means to escape this type of liberal blackmail is not so much to reject its fundamental premise, but rather to fully endorse its grounds. In Žižek’s eyes the solution is to argue that not only is it correct to posit a ‘direct lineage from Christianity to Marxism’, but, moreover, that one must also argue that ‘Christianity and Marxism should fight on the same side of the barricade.’<sup>3</sup>

In light of these arguments, this chapter sets out to outline, in a strictly materialist way, why Christianity and Marxism must ‘fight on the same side of the barricade.’ It provides a historical materialist reading of both Badiou’s theorisation of communism and the texts and practices of the first century Church. In the process I make two major arguments. Firstly, I demonstrate how a messianic eschatology or ‘direct lineage from Christianity to Marxism’ can be read in Badiou’s discussion of the communist hypothesis. Secondly, by drawing upon materialist biblical scholarship, I argue that early Christianity is best understood as a practice of the radically equal. In other words, my point is that the political and egalitarian aims of Marxism are not opposed to the apocalyptic politics of early Christianity. By highlighting the radical aims of early Christianity, my intention is to demonstrate that the theological turn within contemporary Marxism is neither an archive of defeat nor a betrayal of the egalitarian aspirations of communism.

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p.117; Slavoj Žižek, ‘St Paul; Or, The Christian Uncoupling’, *The European English Messenger*, Volume VIII/2, (Autumn 1999), pp.45-49, (p.45).

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p.117.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘St Paul; Or, The Christian Uncoupling’, p.45.

One of the central aims of this chapter is to elucidate the essentially Pauline operation that underpins Badiou's conception of communist politics. My criticism thus proceeds via a symptomatic reading of his work and his avowed atheism in particular; my aim is to shed light upon the workings of an unattributed redemptive structure at the centre of his political analysis. This is important because my analysis of his conception of communism will reveal some of the basic and unattributed religious underpinnings of his argument and thus set the scene for the debates regarding the egalitarian kernel of early Christianity that concludes this chapter. Before this can be achieved, I firstly want to assess the ways in which scholars have approached the relationship between philosophy and religion in Badiou's work. This is important because it allows me to highlight the way in which my own approach differs from extant scholarship. As I will demonstrate, one of the major problems with these approaches is that they fail to engage either directly, or, in a materialist manner, with the necessary object: Pauline Christianity.

### **Critical responses**

The reading of Badiou that I am proposing here is an attempt to move beyond the two divergent responses to his engagement with Christianity that have emerged in recent scholarship on his work. The first type of response follows Badiou's own description of himself as a materialist and thus atheist philosopher, while the second emphasises the disavowed religious underpinnings of his thought.

The first type of approach is best exemplified in the work of Peter Hallward. For Hallward, Badiou is, above all, a philosophical figure whose reasoning is based entirely on an atheistic approach:

No one, perhaps, has taken the death of God as seriously as Badiou. He aims to take Nietzsche's familiar idea to its absolute conclusion, to eliminate any notion of an originally divine or creative presence (however "inaccessible" this presence might remain to the creatures it creates), and with it, to abolish an original intuition of Life of Power.<sup>4</sup>

Hallward's argument is that Badiou can only be understood as an avowedly atheistic thinker for whom the notion of 'God' is utterly at odds with his philosophical project. As such he defines his philosophy as 'anti-antiphilosophy':

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, p.7.



The difference between religion and antiphilosophy is slight. Antiphilosophy is a rigorous and quasi-systematic extrapolation from an essentially religious *parti pris*. Antiphilosophy is religion in philosophical guise, argued on philosophical terrain.<sup>5</sup>

Hallward is the author of *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* which is commonly viewed as the most comprehensive study of Badiou's work to date.<sup>6</sup> If Hallward's examination of Badiou's work in this vast text is exhaustive then it is notable that his comments on Badiou and Paul are less sustained. In a book of over three hundred pages, Hallward devotes less than three pages to *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*.<sup>7</sup> For Hallward, Paul is merely a 'pertinent illustration' of the eventual constitution of a subject and a truth procedure.<sup>8</sup> Despite the relative lack of interest in the significance of this text, Hallward's terms of engagement with Paul mirror the atheistic expression of Badiou: 'For me, truth be told, Paul is not an apostle or a saint,' he writes. 'I care nothing for the Good News.'<sup>9</sup> Indeed, for Badiou, religion can never be a condition for a philosophy of truth. To begin, Paul's discourse around religion and resurrection are of a 'mythological context' and thus do not fall into the four conditions of truth designated by Badiou.<sup>10</sup> At this point then, Hallward's staunchly philosophical approach to Badiou appears justified. Indeed, Badiou actually identifies Paul with the practice of anti-philosophy that Hallward describes as wholly antithetical to Badiou's approach. Unlike the philosopher, Paul 'writes neither system nor treatise, nor even really a book. He propounds a speech of rupture, and writing ensues when necessary.'<sup>11</sup> If Paul fails to demonstrate a generalizable hypothesis and verifiable rule that would be associated with a philosophical investigation of truth, that is because he depends upon an enunciative position conferred by the 'mythological context' of divinity to give authority to his claims: 'But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man, For I neither received it of man, nor was I taught by it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ' (Galatians 1.11-12). Badiou is at great pains to demonstrate that Paul's thought is not philosophical. Discussing Paul's failed attempts at conversion among the Athenians at the Areopagus, Badiou notes that Paul's problem was

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> Hollis Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology*, p.121.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, pp.108-110.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.108.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.1

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.108.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.31.

his 'antiphilosophy': 'the contempt in which he holds philosophical wisdom.'<sup>12</sup> Although I have already offered a critique of Badiou's tendency to collapse ontology into politics, it is worth stating here that for Badiou, materialist philosophy is not about the production of universal truths. Philosophy's focus on the universal is dependent upon the emergence of universal truths in the four conditions of politics, love, science and art. Philosophy operates then organizing and elucidating the general rules and logic of these truths. Quoting August Comte, Badiou defines the philosopher as someone who 'specialized in generalities'.<sup>13</sup> Thus Paul is an 'antiphilosophical theoretician of universality' because 'he assigns his thought to a singular event, rather than a set of conceptual generalities':

That this singular event is of the order of a fable prohibits Paul from being an artist, or a scientist, or a revolutionary of the State, but it also prohibits all access to philosophical subjectivity, which either subordinates itself to conceptual foundation or auto-foundation, or places itself under the condition of *real* truth procedures. For Paul, the truth event repudiates philosophical Truth, while for us the fictitious dimension of this event repudiates its pretension to real truth.<sup>14</sup>

Paul's status as an anti-philosopher is thus predicated upon two conditions. Firstly, the 'fabulous' nature of the Christian event lacks a realistic and human grounding. As he states, 'it is rigorously impossible to believe in the resurrection of the crucified'.<sup>15</sup> And secondly, because this event and attendant type of soteriological universality is achieved through subjective faith or mere declaration alone rather than via the 'conceptual' elaboration of philosophical generalities. Indeed, as Bruno Bosteels notes, the distinctive feature of anti-philosophy is the anti-dialectical tendency that is found in theological ideas of an unforeseen and unforeseeable encounter, such as that of Paul's Damascene moment. The characteristic of anti-philosophy is the importance of 'the unmediated, disconnected, and wholly subjective nature of the truth of an event.'<sup>16</sup>

Hallward's argument then is that the figure of Paul cannot be considered as central to Badiou's theory for the position of the Saint is that of the anti-philosopher. What is interesting here, however, is that these anti-philosophical terms, the 'wholly subjective' response to an unforeseen and anti-dialectical event, 'disconnected' from the situation in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.27; Hollis-Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology*, pp.132-138.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.108.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.108.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>16</sup> Bruno Bosteels, 'Radical Antiphilosophy', *Filozofski vestnik* XXIX (2), (2008), 155-187, (p.182).

which it takes place, are precisely the ways in which Hallward and Badiou describe the concept of the event. In other words, as Bosteels himself concedes, the language and conceptualisation of event and subject lead to an inevitable a 'temptation' to read Badiou in religious terms.<sup>17</sup> This is a position that is taken up and developed by Simon Critchley.<sup>18</sup> His position is emblematic of the other dominant approach to Badiou. *Contra* Hallward, this approach focuses on the disavowed religious underpinnings of Badiou's entire *oeuvre*. Critchley's main argument is that there is no reason why religion cannot be understood as the guiding paradigm of 'ethical consistency' demanded of the faithful subject by Badiou in his book *Ethics*, even if religion is conceived as anti-philosophy.<sup>19</sup> 'If it is granted that religion, at least for Saint Paul [...] is antiphilosophical, then I do not see why it cannot be a condition for ethical action. Obviously, for Paul, Pascal, and others, such as Luther and Kierkegaard, religion plays *precisely* this role and it is privileged *because* it is anti-philosophical.'<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Critchley argues that the privileged role of Paul in understanding the relationship between subject and event means that religion is actually the paradigm for *all* ethical action and truth procedures in Badiou's work. As he puts it: 'precisely because of the exemplary way in which the logic of the event plays itself out in relation to Paul, namely, that Paul's notion of grace shows most clearly the subjectivity of the event, religion is perhaps the paradigm of ethical action, a paradigm upon which the other four conditions should be modelled.'<sup>21</sup>

The critical significance of Critchley's assertion of religion as the 'paradigm' or overarching condition in Badiou's work can be seen in the response that this argument elicited from Hallward. Attacking Critchley's position, Hallward argues that while Badiou may draw upon anti-philosophy, notably in the work of Jacques Lacan, Badiou is fundamentally opposed to religion. Asserting the Platonic co-ordinates of Badiou's thought, Hallward states that 'the *real* model of Badiou's four conditions [is] not religion but that most anti-hermeneutic of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.179, pp.284-5.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Critchley, 'On the Ethics of Alain Badiou', in *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and its Conditions*, ed. by Gabriel Riera, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), pp.215-235. This text was first published as 'Demanding Approval: On the Ethics of Alain Badiou', *Radical Philosophy*, 100 (2000), 16-27.

<sup>19</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.48

<sup>20</sup> Simon Critchley, 'On the Ethics of Alain Badiou', p.224.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.224.

disciplines, *mathematics*.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, Hallward is on strong ground here. Badiou describes himself as a Platonist and frequently refers to Lacan, along with Althusser, as one of his theoretical masters.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, however, Hallward's position on Badiou, grounded as it is in references to Plato but crucially Lacan, is revealing for both the symptomatic oversights and language that he uses. Rather than engage directly with Paul and the Judeo-Christian legacy, Hallward, dismisses religion via references to Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.<sup>24</sup> In other words, he fails to engage with the actual object under investigation. His position is constructed via the denunciation of thinkers whose Jewish and non-Marxist stances are incompatible with Badiou's focus on Christianity and communism. Moreover, the very language that Hallward uses symptomatically repeats the religious charge he attempts to correct. 'Badiou's work permits no equivocation on this point,' writes Hallward with the voice of unwavering conviction.<sup>25</sup> Thus while he fails to address the actual religious materials that are required to make such a pronouncement, his denunciation of Critchley is itself absolute. Indeed, his definition of mathematics as the 'most anti-hermeneutic of disciplines' itself suggests that Badiou's work is justified by a type of transcendental force (mathematics) that cannot be overcome by any type of human or worldly equivocations. What I am suggesting here then is that Hallward's reading becomes polemicized into a dogmatic religious stance itself. Indeed, this is perhaps unsurprising for Critchley's response to Badiou is not unusual; there are a number of critics who view Badiou's philosophy as heavily indebted to theology.

The Marxist literary scholar Jean-Jacques Lecercle observes that Badiou's philosophy is based on 'a kind of negative theology.'<sup>26</sup> Lecercle makes this observation due to the fact that the key concepts associated with an event – the undecidable, the rupture, the generic, and the indiscernible – suggest that truth exists 'outside meaning' or verifiable

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Hallward, 'Ethics Without Others: A Reply to Simon Critchley on Badiou's Ethics', *Radical Philosophy*, 102, (2000), 27-30, (p.27).

<sup>23</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, pp.6-7.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Hallward, 'Ethics Without Others: A Reply to Simon Critchley on Badiou's Ethics,' p.28.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.29

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Jacques Lecercle, 'Cantor, Lacan, Mao, Becket, *même combat*', *Radical Philosophy*, 93, (1999), 6-13, (p.8).

knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Like Critchley he then proceeds to argue that religion constitutes the fifth condition for Badiou:

There is not only an ontology, there appears to be a theology in Badiou. For what is more “eventual” in his sense than the Resurrection? Does it not puncture the old situation, and change it for the good? Is it not undatable in terms of its encyclopaedia? Does it not engineer encounters, provoke conversion? Is not faithfulness close to faith, as the French ‘fidelité’ is close to ‘les fidèles’? (Badiou claims the word is borrowed from the category of love, but this smacks of Freudian denial.) Cannot every single term of his system of concepts be translated into religious terms, so that we have no difficulty in findings equivalents in Badiouese for terms like ‘conversion’, ‘grace’, ‘the elect’, and so on? Does not he himself recognize this by hailing St Paul as the archetypal figure of the subject of a truth process?<sup>28</sup>

The theological as much as ontological diagnosis offered by the Marxist Lecercle is also shared by a number of philosophers of religion and biblical scholars. In his text, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, Oliver Marchant observes that many of Badiou’s key concepts have ‘a somewhat Christian ring.’<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the theology scholar Hollis Phelps argues that the heated debate between Critchley and Hallward is symptomatic of the fact that Badiou’s philosophy oscillates between ‘theology and anti-theology.’<sup>30</sup> Like Marchant and Lecercle, he repeatedly highlights the use of religious terminology in Badiou’s conceptual universe but he also adds to this by noting how Badiou’s ‘traces the lineage of the event, intervention and fidelity through a group of anti-philosophers.’<sup>31</sup> These include Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jacques Lacan, but also religious figures such as Blaise Pascal and his theory of the wager, and also Kierkegaard whose work Badiou draws upon in *Logics of Worlds* in a vein similar to Saint Paul, to outline ‘the connection that Kierkegaard establishes between choice as a cut in time and the eternity of truth as subjective truth.’<sup>32</sup> The mediating role that theology is seen to play in the elaboration of Badiou’s philosophy and politics is a point shared by the radical theologian but liberal political thinker, John Milbank. In his article ‘The Return of Mediation, or The Ambivalence of Alain Badiou,’

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.11. For a similar argument, see Peter Dews, ‘States of Grace: The Excess of the Demand in Alain Badiou’s Ethics of Truths’, in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward, (London: Continuum, 2009), pp.106-119.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver Marchant, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.124.

<sup>30</sup> Hollis Phelps, *Alain Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology*, pp.121-123.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.154.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.154; Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p.425.

Milbank notes that Badiou's work is characterised by a sense of 'ambivalence.'<sup>33</sup> This derives, Milbank argues, from the dependency of a 'secular socialist' on Christianity and in particular, Kierkegaard, to outline the theory of the event.<sup>34</sup> Thus, for Milbank, Badiou's work is ultimately grounded on a 'latent Christian metaphysics.'<sup>35</sup> The theopolitical underpinnings of Badiou are also noted by the biblical scholar Graham Ward who remarks that Badiou's reading of Paul makes Badiou 'one of our best defenders of the Christian faith.'<sup>36</sup>

A similar charge of religiosity is also levelled at Badiou by arguably his most vociferous ally, Slavoj Žižek. As Žižek notes, it is interesting that Paul's religious encounter functions as the ultimate example of an event for Badiou. It is Paul to whom Badiou dedicates a whole book yet religion itself is not one of the four truth procedures listed by Badiou.<sup>37</sup> Thus like Lecercle and Critchley, this observation leads Žižek to argue that religion is, in fact, the 'symptomal torsion' that underlies and unifies all of Badiou's thought on historical change.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the miracle like quality of Badiou's vision of change means that religious revelation in general and Pauline thought in particular actually constitutes the 'unavowed paradigm' of Badiou's thought as a whole.<sup>39</sup> As Žižek argues, the sudden shock of a quasi-religious revelation constitutes the formal model or process through which Badiou outlines how a new 'Truth' emerges in the world while religion itself is excluded from being one of the 'acknowledged parts or subspecies' of 'Truth' as a whole.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike Badiou, Žižek is more explicit as to the religious foundations of his own thought. While his work is partly indebted to the fusion of the messianic and the political in Walter Benjamin, Žižek frequently cites three Judeo-Christian references in order to highlight the radical potential of Christianity for progressive politics. To begin, Job is envisioned as the first example of ideology critique. The power of Job, argues Žižek, lies in his refusal to accept

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<sup>33</sup> John Milbank, 'The Return of Mediation, or The Ambivalence of Alain Badiou', *Angelaki*, 12(1), (2007), 127-143.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.130, p.133.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.136.

<sup>36</sup> Graham Ward and B Daniels, 'The Academy, the Polis, and the Resurgence of Religion: An Interview with Graham Ward', *The Other Journal* 12, 2008, <<http://theotherjournal.com/2008/11/18/the-academy-the-polis-and-the-resurgence-of-religion-an-interview-with-graham-ward/>> [accessed 25 August 2015].

<sup>37</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p.130

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.141.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.185, p.141.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.141.

the numerous causal explanations for his suffering. What emerges from Job's refusal therefore is an act that 'lay[s] bare the basic discursive strategies of legitimizing suffering.'<sup>41</sup> Secondly, the suffering of Christ on the cross, an act that is prefigured by Job, is deemed as inherently subversive by Žižek. The key moment here is Jesus's cry of 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27.46). Žižek views this as subversive for it reveals a radical absence at the heart of the Christian faith. At this moment, Žižek argues, the figure who dies, at least in symbolic form, is not so much God the son, the human figure of Jesus, but rather God the father, the omnipotent figure of traditional divinity, for at this moment 'Christ himself commits what is, for a Christian, the ultimate sin: he wavers in his Faith.'<sup>42</sup> Žižek's reading of both Job and the Crucifixion are derived from the work of the catholic theologian G.K Chesterton, a political conservative and also the writer of the *Father Brown* detective novels. As Chesterton writes:

When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God. And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay (the matter grows too difficult for human speech), but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed himself for an instant to be an atheist.<sup>43</sup>

Chesterton's argument here is that Christianity is haunted by a perverse secret, a secret 'which the greatest saints and thinkers have justly feared to approach,' that renders it more radical than any of the other religion.<sup>44</sup> Christianity is 'terribly revolutionary', he argues, for it 'is the only religion on earth that has felt that impotence made God incomplete'.<sup>45</sup> What Chesterton is suggesting here is that in its most sublime moment of tragedy, God truly becomes man. Thus Jesus is not only a political rebel but also a theological rebel, he undermines traditional ideas of divine power: 'Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king.'<sup>46</sup> A key revolutionary feature of the Christian theology then, is what Žižek and the Marxist theologian Boris Gunjević, identify

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<sup>41</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, p.125.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>43</sup> G.K Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), p.145.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.145.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.145.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.145.

as a 'God in pain.'<sup>47</sup> Approached in these terms, one can see that this sort of democratic version of Christianity, where the human and suffering figure is the true hero, justifies the articulation of Christianity with communism, rather than what today would appear to be the more politically insurgent religion of militant Islam. As the Islamic scholar Mona Siddiqui notes, the fundamental *theological* distinction between Islam and Christianity lies in their respective relationships to the idea of a transcendent.<sup>48</sup> According to Siddiqui, the central Christian idea of God as Man, and a suffering man at that, negates the fundamental distinction of theology, the gap between the human and the divine.<sup>49</sup> Christianity thus hollows out the mysterious and utterly ineffable kernel that constitutes theology. This is a problem for Siddiqui who argues that only the absolute alterity of Allah enables a true sense of the divine wonder.<sup>50</sup> In her terms then, Islam, unlike Christianity, is distinctly theological for its profoundly transcendental character. While Siddiqui may be correct in her diagnosis, from a Marxist perspective the conclusion to be taken from her argument is quite different; the radical subversion of Christianity, the notion of a 'God in pain', is far more easily articulated with the egalitarian aims of the communist community of equals. Understood in these terms, it is no wonder that figures such as Žižek and Badiou turn to Christianity rather than Islam in their theopolitical resurrection of communist militancy today.

In sum what both Job and the Crucifixion represent for Žižek is a challenge to dominant symbolic order, or what the psychoanalytical Žižek calls 'the big Other'. This refers to a complex idea developed by Jacques Lacan and it requires much greater elaboration than I can offer here.<sup>51</sup> In short, however, the big Other represents a type of overarching order of signification that functions to give meaning and authority for the psychoanalytical subject. The problem for humans is that they do not see this structure as the product of human sociality and belief. In Marxist terms then Žižek's argument is that for radical change to happen, humans must challenge and overthrow the dominant ideology (the prevailing manifestation of the big Other). It is no surprise then that Žižek's third example is derived

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<sup>47</sup> Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević, *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*.

<sup>48</sup> Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims & Jesus*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), pp.231-234, pp.242-248.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.245-248.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.245-246.

<sup>51</sup> See Jacques Lacan, 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp.146-178.



from Badiou and centres on the foundation of Christian universalism by Saint Paul.<sup>52</sup> Like Badiou, Žižek sees in Saint Paul a radical challenge to the prevailing symbolic order, a challenge that must be resurrected today: 'what we need today is the gesture that would undermine capitalist globalization from the standpoint of universal Truth, just as Pauline Christianity did to the Roman global Empire.'<sup>53</sup>

Žižek's reading of Christianity is thus useful for the correspondences it forges between the contemporary struggle for equality and the radical and potentially egalitarian practices that inhere within the Christian legacy. Yet despite these insights, Žižek's relation to Badiou is hamstrung by a conceptual fallacy. The problem with his reading of Badiou emerges from Žižek's conception of the event. This conceptualisation operates by conflating ideas of the new, the truth and historical change into an instantaneous articulation of revelation with truth and conviction. This is manifest in Žižek's constant re-writing of Badiou's event as a 'Truth-Event'.<sup>54</sup> As the capitalisation and also the syntactical conjunction of the two words here register, Žižek envisages the relationship between the new and the truth as something *immanent* to an event as a miraculous happening. This literal re-writing of Badiou's key terms indexes a difference between the thought of Badiou and that of Žižek. For Badiou, the truth and the event, as testified by their conceptual separation, are two distinct ideas that emerge at different times. As I argued earlier, for Badiou the truth arises from a procedure known as a 'truth process' and not from a sudden revelation. 'For truth,' writes Badiou, 'is a process, and not a revelation.'<sup>55</sup> The 'truth' that develops from Badiou's event is, then, as I argued above, worked out and worked upon through the post-evental labour of a subject. Indeed, the doubled time of Saint Paul's messianic subjectivity emphasises the complex temporality that inheres within Badiou's theory even more. While the event may herald a break with a given order of the world, what this break actually means can only be decided upon later by a subject. Indeed, this notion of a decision taken by a subject and the related notion of a temporal delay is clearly stated in my earlier quotation of the four *génériques* from Badiou's book *Ethics*. To recall Badiou states here that 'the event [...]

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<sup>52</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'St Paul; Or, The Christian Uncoupling', pp. 45-49.

<sup>53</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p.211.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.128, pp.144-5.

<sup>55</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.15.

compels us to *decide* a new way of being'.<sup>56</sup> As the inclusion of the verb 'to decide' indicates, the truth of an event does not emerge, at least not temporally, in an immanent way with the event itself. While the event 'compels us' to towards change, this 'new way of being' emerges in a time that is post-evental, it follows the decision and creative labour of a subject.

An equally influential argument regarding the religious foundations of Badiou's work is also made by Daniel Bensaïd. Like Žižek, Bensaïd states that Badiou offers 'a philosophy haunted by the sacralisation of the eventual miracle.'<sup>57</sup> However, what for emerges as a point of strength for Žižek, is for Bensaïd, an index of political and historical bankruptcy: 'the "rare" if not exceptional idea of politics seems to be haunted by the Pauline ideal of saintliness, which constantly threatens to turn into a bureaucratic priesthood of Church, State or Party.'<sup>58</sup> Bensaïd has been a long standing critic of the Althusserian school. As early as 1974 he participated in the collection of a far left, Trotskyist critique entitled *Contre Althusser*.<sup>59</sup> His objections to Badiou are thus partly the result of his political opposition to French Maoism. However, his argument regarding the religious underpinnings of Badiou's philosophy are insightful. The 'pure voluntarism' of the militant decision taken in relation to a miraculous event produces 'a philosophy of majestic sovereignty.'<sup>60</sup> What Bensaïd is pointing out here is the proximity of Badiou's thought to that of Carl Schmitt's theory of the sovereign exception, which according to Schmitt himself is 'analogous to the miracle in theology.'<sup>61</sup> Bensaïd appears to be on strong ground here. As Badiou himself acknowledges, a similar charge was levelled at him by the former member of the ultra-left '68 group *Noir et Rouge*, Jean-François Lyotard: "Lyotard said that I was an absolute decisionist, a sort of new Carl Schmitt.'<sup>62</sup> This is also an argument that is made by Giorgio Agamben. His prolonged meditation on Schmitt and sovereignty includes Badiou in a genealogy of the concept of exception.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the similarities between Badiou and Schmitt have been

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<sup>56</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.41. Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p.97.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.101.

<sup>59</sup> Denise Avenas, Daniel Bensaïd et al., *Contre Althusser pour Marx*, rev.edn. (Paris: Passion, 1999).

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p.101, p.105.

<sup>61</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. by G. Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p.36.

<sup>62</sup> Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens, (London: Continuum, 2004), p.174.

<sup>63</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp.15-29.

addressed at length in an article by Colin Wright.<sup>64</sup> If Bensaïd is thus correct in his diagnosis of a religious kernel at the heart of Badiou's philosophy, then what is problematic about his argument is the rightward political articulation that follows. According to Bensaïd, Badiou's theopolitical position is anathema to the egalitarian aim of Marxism for 'saintliness,' Bensaïd's argument suggests, entails a practical and theoretical 'elitism' that demarcates a profound gap between the philosopher and the masses.<sup>65</sup> This is apparent not only in his equation of Christianity with Stalinism, 'the bureaucratic priesthood of the Church' but also in the comparison he draws between Badiou and the conservative figure of Schmitt. This type of approach thus mirrors the traditional leftist attack on Althusser as a high priest of theoretical elitism.<sup>66</sup> There are, however, two fundamental problems with Bensaïd's approach. First, as Colin Wright notes, despite the formal similarities between Schmitt and Badiou, there are a number of crucial differences.<sup>67</sup> If both are critics of parliamentary liberalism, then these criticisms are made from entirely antithetical positions: Schmitt is an authoritarian absolutist while Badiou is a communist radical. Similarly, Schmitt's favoured form of political agency for the sovereign is the state while Badiou is radically anti-statist. Secondly, Bensaïd's conception of Christianity is entirely conservative and hierarchical. It posits a radical distinction between leaders and masses that is partly derived from a traditional conception of divinity as transcendent and absolute in its alterity to the human. However, to approach Christianity in this way is to fail to engage directly with the object itself. As I noted above in my discussion of Žižek, even conservative thinkers such as Chesterton are able to admit that Christian theology is haunted by the 'dark' and 'revolutionary' secret of divine impotence. Indeed, I would argue that a properly materialist reading of the early Church, Paul and the Gospels, will reveal that it is energised by an intransigent egalitarian kernel that is entirely commensurable with the political aims of communism. Thus while I agree with many of the identifications of a religious substructure in Badiou's thought by the critics above, what I want to argue is that these responses are ultimately compromised by a failure to engage directly with the necessary object:

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<sup>64</sup> Colin Wright, 'Event or Exception?: Disentangling Badiou, or, Towards a Politics of the Void', *Theory and Event*, 11.2, (2008), [http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v011/11.2.wright.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory_and_event/v011/11.2.wright.html) [accessed 25 August 2015].

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p.101.

<sup>66</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*.

<sup>67</sup> Colin Wright, 'Event or Exception?: Disentangling Badiou, or, Towards a Politics of the Void'.

Christianity. In the following sections of this chapter I thus want to outline two key arguments. First, that Badiou's communist hypothesis operates according to a decisively redemptive temporality. That is to say, rather than approach his theopolitics in an abstract and distinctly nominal manner, whereby concepts such as faithful subject can be vaguely equated with religious discourse, I want to outline the concrete logic of a distinctly redemptive substructure in his definition and history of the communist hypothesis. Secondly, rather than uncover glimpses of the radical nature of Christianity via an engagement with conservative thinkers such as Chesterton, I want to look at the way materialist and Marxist readings of the early Church can reveal a more profoundly egalitarian message at the heart of Christian theology. While this "revelation" will provide the grounds to highlight why the recourse to Paul by an atheist Marxist is a determinate contradiction, it will ultimately provide the grounds to contest the arguments of Bensaïd, Bosteels, and Chiesa and Toscano, namely, their suggestion that the recourse to theology is an archive of defeat for Marxism. In contrast, my argument is that Christianity does offer the incarnational resources necessary for the production of revolutionary subjectivity.

### **The Communist Hypothesis: the structure of political redemption**

Badiou defines the communist hypothesis as a 'pure Idea of equality' which has been a historical invariant since the slave revolts of Spartacus in antiquity.<sup>68</sup> However, for Badiou, the notion that 'communism is the right hypothesis' emerges in its most profound form in the modern era, with the egalitarian high points of the French Revolution.<sup>69</sup> What is important here is that despite the flourishing of the communist idea in political modernity, most notably in the short twentieth century, Badiou ultimately argues that communism as a practical reality has still yet fully to take hold:

What do we mean by 'communism'? As Marx argued in the *1844 Manuscripts*, communism is an idea regarding the destiny of the human species. This use of the word must be completely distinguished from the meaning of the adjective 'communist' that is so worn-out today, in such expressions as 'communist parties', 'communist states' or 'communist world' – never mind that 'communist state' is an oxymoron, to which the obscure coinage 'socialist state' has wisely been preferred,

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<sup>68</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.100.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p.100.

Even if, as we shall see, these uses of the word belong to a time when the hypothesis was still coming-to-be.<sup>70</sup>

This passage appears to advocate a type of purification of the meaning of communism; a return to an original idea that needs to be differentiated from the ‘worn-out’ meaning of the term in use today. However, this idea of communism is also notable for the sense of messianic temporality that inheres in its proposed definition. As I discussed in Chapter One, the messianic temporality of Paul is distinguished by a sense of an “already, but not yet.” In the definition above, one can immediately see in emphasis on the early work of Marx, the *1844 Manuscripts*, a notion of an ‘already.’ Similarly, the ‘not yet’ is represented by the condensed narration of the failures of twentieth century communism; the ‘oxymoronic’ idea of a communist *state* means that the true instantiation of communism can only be envisaged in an anticipated future: it is ‘still coming-to-be.’

As the materialist biblical scholar Ched Myers notes, the precise sense of futurity offered by Judeo-Christianity is a promissory time that emerges from a ‘radical apocalyptic dualism’.<sup>71</sup> In literal terms, apocalypse signifies revelation. So, rather than simply signify a fallen world, Myers’ focus on dualism highlights the fact that apocalyptic discourses in the ancient world posit an opposition between a fallen world and a new, redeemed world. In short, the new redeemed order of the Messiah that will be realised in the future is fundamentally opposed to the old order of tradition and inequality. The temporal relationship here is not one that is simply grounded in historical or linear development, but one that is politically dualistic, divided into two abruptly distinct times. ‘You are all children of the light and children of the day,’ states Saint Paul in his discussion of the early Christian community awaiting ‘the coming of the Lord.’ ‘We do not belong to the night or to the darkness’ (I Thessalonians 4.13; 5.5). This apocalyptic dualism of ‘children of light’ versus ‘children of darkness’ is repeated in various other texts by Paul and the Pauline school and it functions to reinforce the sense of solidarity and promise among the early Christians.<sup>72</sup> Paul’s reference to a metaphoric ‘armour’ in I Thessalonians – ‘since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.98.

<sup>71</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, pp.101-4.

<sup>72</sup> See: II Corinthians 6.14-7.1; Romans 13.12; Ephesians 5.3-14; Colossians 1.13.

helmet (5.8) – augments the radical divide of apocalyptic discourse even further, suggesting a war or struggle between the ‘children of light’ and those of darkness.

It is precisely this vision of radical dualism and the attendant promissory discourse of a redeemed future that is legible in Badiou’s vision of the communist hypothesis as a ‘still coming-to-be.’ To recall, Badiou follows the early Marx in regarding communism as ‘an idea regarding the destiny of the human species.’ The sense of teleology (‘destiny’) here is not something that is part of the short-term, everyday instrumental rationality of modern life but rather it is something vast and significant that it marks out a decisive rupture in the history of humanity as whole (‘the destiny of the human species’). From a secular position, one can undoubtedly argue that these ideas, such as a purifying return to the early, philosophical Marx subtracted from scientific and historical deviations of Stalinism and anti-humanism, and the splitting of the world history into two hostile camps via the narrative of class struggle, are numerous within the history of Marxism. However, the messianic temporality that I am outlining here is significant precisely because Badiou *is* making the argument that a religious and distinctly messianic figure, Saint Paul, must be ‘reactivated’ in order to resurrect the communist hypothesis in the post-Soviet social formations of late or globalised capitalism.<sup>73</sup>

The importance of this promissory conception of communism is such that the lexicon of messianic teleology takes on grammatical correlates. The communist hypothesis is described by Badiou as ‘still coming-to-be’. As the whole sentence reads: ‘Even if, as we shall see, these uses of the word [communist state, communist party], belong to a time when the hypothesis was still coming-to-be.’ In terms of its vast, collective promise (‘the destiny of the human species’), the pronouns used by Badiou shift here to the second-person plural: the ‘we’ produces a grammatical effect of shared promise and collectivity. The messianic elements of arrival and future anticipation that underpin Badiou’s definition become clearer in his use of tense. The significant observation here revolves around the use of the gerund. The collectivist and forward-leaning grammar of the sentence (‘as we shall see’) is finally pulled in a new and potentially opposite direction by the grammatical use of the past gerund: ‘was still coming-to-be.’ What is significant here is that from the

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<sup>73</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.2.

perspective of the speaking subject, the hypothesis seems fully completed or, technically speaking 'perfected.' That is to say, the failure exemplified by the communist states means that the message of the communist hypothesis, 'the pure idea of equality', can now, and is now, able to begin to assert itself. In other words, following the dissolution of the perverse historical and political articulations of the term communism with the iniquitous practices of state socialism in the Soviet Union and other 'oxymoronic' statist developments, the true emancipatory message of communism can now be redeemed or revealed. In this sentence, time is no longer a linear flow, or sense of chronology but something that is complete and, in the messianic terms used by Benjamin, thus ready to explode.<sup>74</sup> As Paul puts it: 'at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace' (Romans 11.5). The true meaning of communism as 'a pure idea of equality' is now able to be revealed. But the same action that is grammatically 'perfected' is still kept open: while the true message may now be released from the distortions of its historical articulation, the practice and actualization of the communist hypothesis in material form is obviously 'still coming-to-be.' As Badiou states, our task in exploring the history of the communist hypothesis is so that 'we can assure the new existence of the communist hypothesis, both in consciousness and concrete situations' today.<sup>75</sup> Much like my earlier discussion of the numerous dualistic temporal complexities legible in Paul, one can see here then that Badiou is reliant on a type of messianic future anterior, the true practice of communism will only be realised in an anticipated future. That is to say, Badiou's vision of communism is an entirely promissory discourse. The very choice of lexicon here with its ongoing sense of futurity – 'still coming-to-be' – envisages communism as an as yet unrealized practice. It is here then, with this sense of political disappointment and failure that Badiou turns to Saint Paul. And it is here, in the conjunction of a promissory temporality of a politics 'still coming-to-be' and an articulation of communist militancy with the messianic figure of Saint Paul that one can begin to glimpse the determinant significance of Paul in Badiou's initial arguments about the definition of the communist hypothesis. This can be comprehended further if one understands the determinant role of Paul in various historical moments of regeneration.

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<sup>74</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', pp.253-254.

<sup>75</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.117.

In *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, Simon Critchley addresses the recent theological turn within critical theory. Critchley engages with a number of theorists including Badiou, Agamben and most notably Žižek.<sup>76</sup> What is interesting for the concerns of the present debate is that Critchley notes that historically speaking, Saint Paul's central political and theoretical legacy has always been one of reformation and re-birth. 'It is the attempt to clear away the corruption, secularism, and intellectual sophistry of the established church and to return to the religious core of Christianity,' observes Critchley, 'that is tightly bound up with its oldest extant documents, Paul Epistles.'<sup>77</sup> Critchley's argument here is that Paul is invoked or, more precisely, that Paul functions as a figure through which 'corrupt' traditions can be contested and overthrown in order to reactivate a true and original message. 'Since the times of his quarrel with Peter and the Jewish Christians, Paul has been the zealot foe of tradition's authority and the opponent of any and all forms of authoritarianism,' he claims.<sup>78</sup>

Critchley's argument about Paul is well-founded. As the biblical scholar Wayne Meeks observes, if Paul is 'the most holy apostle' then he is also and repeatedly 'the apostle of the heretics.'<sup>79</sup> So, Paul is invoked by Marcion against the Apostolic Fathers, by Augustine against the Church Fathers and then, most divisively, by Luther against the venality and corruption of the Church during the Reformation. 'Paulinism has proved to be a ferment in the history of dogma,' notes the Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack.<sup>80</sup> 'Everywhere it has been Paul,' he continues, 'who produced the Reformation.'<sup>81</sup>

Understood in these terms, it is no surprise then that Badiou turns to Paul in order to re-enthuse the communist project. Indeed, the very structural mechanics of Badiou's attempt to define the communist hypothesis follow the redemptive Paulinian characteristics or re-birth and re-beginnings. To recall, Badiou's initial definition of the communist hypothesis takes place via an immediate recourse to the 'oldest extant documents' of communism, the *1844 Manuscripts*. In the process, Badiou not only attempts to 'clear away the

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<sup>76</sup> Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, (London: Verso, 2012).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.155.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.156.

<sup>79</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, 'Epilogue: The Christian Proteus', in *The Writings of Saint Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, (London, New York: Norton, 2007), pp.689-694, (p.689).

<sup>80</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol.1, trans. by Neil Buchanan, (New York: Dover, 1961), p.136.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p.136.



corruption' practised by twentieth century communist party-states, but he also attempts to 'clear away' what Critchley might call the 'intellectual sophistry' of this type of politics; Badiou notably advocates a linguistic purge of all adjectives – 'state', 'party' – readily associated with twentieth century communism in a manner that suggest that such 'oxymoronic' logic (Badiou) vitiates the emancipatory 'core' of Marxism. Even to associate the word or message of communism with such adjectival terms is a seeming perversion of the original hypothesis: for Badiou communism is a 'pure idea of equality' and such adjectival nominations corrupt this idea for they bespeak the fallen practices of recent history. As I argue in my analysis of the novels by Eoin McNamee and Roberto Bolaño and the particular social formations of the north of Ireland and the Mexico-US border, Badiou's attempt to purge communism of such legacies is sometimes problematic; his stance regarding nationalism, the conquest of state power and vanguardism arguably require a more nuanced historical and geopolitical approach. What I demonstrate in the following chapters is that the articulation of messianic discourses with images of social justice and radical historical change also takes place via an articulation with the very practices that Badiou hopes to do without. In other words, what my cultural and political analyses will demonstrate is that such practices – statism, nationalism and vanguardism – do not necessarily contradict the egalitarian aspirations of socialism and communism.

However, in terms of the present debate regarding Badiou's definition of the communism hypothesis, it is clear this definition operates by a type of purification and return to an original message. If Badiou's aim is to overcome the failures and defeat of communism via a return to the emancipatory core of the hypothesis, then Paul is an entirely appropriate choice to exemplify this type of militant activism. In other words, what I am beginning to outline here is that Badiou's avowedly atheistic stance is somewhat compromised by the fact that his very conception of communism is underpinned by a type of Pauline logic. In order to highlight the way that Badiou's thoughts on communism are deeply rooted in a Pauline modality, I now turn to Badiou's history of the communist hypothesis. As I demonstrate, Badiou's history of communist politics is also grounded on a type of temporal structure that is essentially redemptive.

### Subjective fidelity as political redemption

Despite the identification of communist invariants since the time of antiquity, Badiou's history of the communist hypothesis is decidedly modern:

Since the French Revolution and its gradually universalist echo, since the most radically egalitarian developments of that revolution, the decrees of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety on the 'maximum' and Babeuf's theorizations, we know (when I say 'we', I mean humanity in the abstract, and the knowledge in question is universally available on the paths of emancipation) *that communism is the right hypothesis*. Indeed, there is no other, or at least I am not aware of one. All those who abandon this hypothesis immediately resign themselves to the market economy, to parliamentary democracy – the form of state suited to capitalism – and to the inevitable and 'natural' character of the most monstrous inequalities.<sup>82</sup>

Badiou draws an immediate connection here between two historical moments: what he sees as the 'inaugurat[ion of] political modernity' (the French Revolution) and the present historical conjuncture (late capitalist social formations dominated by 'the market economy,' 'parliamentary democracy' and a dominant ideology which naturalises 'monstrous inequalities').<sup>83</sup> Between these two distinct moments then, Badiou follows a relatively orthodox historical schema by delineating a unified historical period ('political modernity') that is marked by the dominance the capitalist mode of production whose political ascendancy is symbolised by the destruction of the *ancien régime* during the French Revolution. If on first glance, Badiou's primary historical periodization here is thus relatively orthodox, then upon closer inspection his delineation of historical difference is arguably more interesting for alignment it makes regarding politics rather than history. In contrast to the chronological historical distinctions between the collapse of the *ancien régime* at the end of the eighteenth century and late capitalism in the twenty-first century, the primary distinction he posits here is one of politics. It is the idea of communism which demarcates a true historical difference in 'political modernity'. 'Since this the French Revolution,' he writes, 'we know [...] that communism is the right hypothesis.' There is no liberal historicist narrative of progression regarding the spread and achievements of capitalism here. Badiou's argument is that the key division within political modernity is not

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<sup>82</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, pp.97-8.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.100.

that of historical chronology, between past and present, but rather one of politics: a class based antagonism over the struggle for communism.

Badiou then proceeds to outline the history of communism in the modern period, and again this discussion of political antagonism takes the form of dualistic splitting. Firstly he outlines the sequential temporality of the hypothesis' recent history and secondly he sets down the demands that this history places upon the present. These two features – history and the demands of the present situation – are synthesised in his provocative use of historico-political narrative: 'We need a historical fresco on which to situate our efforts,' he argues.<sup>84</sup> This fresco is split into two complete sequences of the communist hypothesis and accordant intervals of conservative reaction or restoration and unbridled capitalist expansion, which he interprets as fearful responses by the dominant classes to earlier instances of emancipatory populism. The first sequence dates from the Republican high point of the French Revolution to the Paris Commune, roughly 1792 – 1871.<sup>85</sup> During these years the main 'object was to organize the popular movement' in the form of strikes, uprisings and armed insurrections.<sup>86</sup> This sequence was abruptly halted by the violent defeat of the Paris Commune when the failure of the communards to organize on a national level enabled the counter-revolution to organize an efficient international military response.<sup>87</sup>

The second sequence spanned the years 1917 (the Russian Revolution) to 1976 (the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and also the global militancy that unfolded around the years 1966-1976, with the French *événements* of May 1968 as its epicentre). The problematic terminus of the Paris Commune dominated this second sequence. How to achieve and then maintain victory for the *longue durée*? The Leninist vanguard party with its military tactic of iron discipline was, according to Badiou, generally accepted as the historical resolution bequeathed by the earlier impasse. Unsurprisingly, this sequence ended due to the problems engendered by the historical methods that had resolved the failures of the first sequence. The vanguard party, appropriate for the assumption and

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.105.

<sup>85</sup> Badiou's example from the Republican high-point of the Revolution is Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety and its law of the 'maximum', *ibid*, p.97.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.106.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.107.

maintenance of state power, proved ill-suited to the dialectical working of proletarian dictatorship, the withering of the state and the communist aim of co-operative worker self-management. In Badiou's terms, the experimental attempts to create new spaces of politics different to the bureaucratic or centralized management of the state that erupted in May '68 and during the Chinese Cultural Revolution symbolised the inadequacy of the party in developing 'new forms of organization and action that embraced intellectuals and workers in the same political vision.' The party form was ultimately unable 'to make the communist hypothesis endure [...] outside the logic of the seizure of power.'<sup>88</sup>

Between these two sequences, between Marx and Lenin, and also since the mid-1970s to the present day, the communist hypothesis has been subdued by the triumphant forces of its adversary. Badiou names such periods 'intervallic', or moments of conservative 'black reaction' or 'restoration.'<sup>89</sup> As one can see by the use of the term 'intervallic,' Badiou's periodization reflects the logic of his political and philosophical theory. In his historical fresco of political modernity, semantic emphasis is placed on the types of subjective fidelity that follow communist events: the key political sequences emerge after events such as the French Revolution and then the Russian Revolution. Periods of capitalist expansion are given less significance or truth value, they are intervallic. The interval between the Paris Commune and the First World War was witness to unbridled capitalist expansion across the globe, what Lenin named as the period of monopoly capital and imperialist expansion.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the last forty years of expanding neo-liberal globalisation, where even nominally socialist parties have accepted the 'logic' of the free market, have signalled a retreat in the vitality and popularity of the communist hypothesis. In the periodizing terminology of contemporary Marxism, this is the period of late capitalism or postmodernity.<sup>91</sup> Where monopoly capitalism was based upon the imperial advances of the European nation states to produce new markets for capital, late capitalism is characterised by a more globalising reach led not so much by the nation state but by multinational capitalism: 'Today we've

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp.110-1.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.83, p.111, p.116.

<sup>90</sup> Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest stage of Capitalist Development*, (London: Penguin, 2010); Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *The Jameson Reader*, ed. by Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.277-287, (p.278).

<sup>91</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

reached the point of saturated globalization, or globalization that's in the process of becoming saturated.'<sup>92</sup>

Importantly, for Badiou, what is distinctive in these intervals of capitalist expansion, and in the general response of political elites to the historical manifestations of the communist hypothesis as a whole, is the repetitive and fear-induced attempt of the elites to overcome the popular demands of an earlier epoch. These attempts are characterised by Governmental proclamations of a moral malaise within society, purportedly induced by the emancipatory demands of the earlier popular movement, which the state must redress.<sup>93</sup> In response to the threat of proletarian revolution that had emerged with the Paris Commune, not only did the French state massacre thousands of communards, but other European nations began to fortify themselves against a similar spectre. Germany, Austria and Russia formed the conservative alliance known as the European Three Emperors' League of 1873 and across the continent, there was the rise of anti-liberal, intrusive states, which aimed to restore "moral order" after the political event of the Paris Commune.<sup>94</sup> Crucially, this historical schema allows us to identify an objective contradiction in relation to neo-liberal capitalism today. While the current economic order of neo-liberalism may theoretically aim at the dismantling of the post-war welfare state consensus and social democracy, when faced with the need for practical responses to social unrest, governments who champion free market reform simultaneously advocate an expansion of the disciplinary powers of the state. It is precisely this contradiction that positions crime fiction as fertile territory for Marxist cultural criticism today. For what is interesting about the examples of crime fiction that I analyse in this thesis is the degree to which they exhibit formal ruptures with the conventions of the genre. Rather than mechanically reproduce ideological legitimacy via an association of justice with the forces of the state, the narrations of the post-1970s conjuncture in novels by Bolaño and McNamee are interesting precisely because they often depict the forces of the state as perpetrators of crime and violence. One of the central literary arguments of this thesis is then that under such historical conditions, the formal ruptures in crime fiction emerge as a key locus for

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<sup>92</sup> Alain Badiou and Jean-Claude Milner, *Controversies: A dialogue on the politics and philosophy of our times*, trans. by Susan Spitzer, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p.129.

<sup>93</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, pp.77-85.

<sup>94</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*, (London: Abacus, 2004), pp.201-2, pp.357-9.

understanding the way in which cultural production registers and interacts with questions of historical change.

Such is the general thrust of Badiou's history of the communist hypothesis. In terms of the theopolitical concerns of this thesis, his historical fresco contains, however, an important notion of temporality, which needs to be elaborated in relation to the concerns of this chapter. Badiou's hypothesis, and mobilizing theme, is of course related to *The Communist Manifesto*. While Marx and Engel's text aimed to agitate for international proletarian militancy, the vast majority of the *Manifesto* arguably consists of a revolutionary paean to the historical novelty of capitalist production.<sup>95</sup> In Marx's luminous depiction, capital accumulation and the boundless expansion of the commodity form universally dissolve the old social order via the process of 'constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation.'<sup>96</sup> Marx's three adjectives here: constant, uninterrupted, everlasting, denote, as Perry Anderson perspicaciously observes, an empty, homogenous historical time whose temporality is not Marxist. 'Each moment,' Anderson writes, 'is perpetually different from every other by virtue of being *next*, but – by the same token – is eternally *the same* as an interchangeable unit in a process of infinite recurrence.'<sup>97</sup> Badiou's temporal schema, in contrast, 'subsumes a different history and different events' than Marx's celebration of planar bourgeois development.<sup>98</sup> As summarised above, Badiou's fresco foregrounds the political agency of communism rather than capital in a curvilinear schema whose repetitive metaphors of 'trajectory' and 'sequence' are redolent of Marx's more comprehensive conception of historical time as a parabola, or an outwardly expanding circle and not a straight line moving seamlessly forward.<sup>99</sup> As Marx notes in the *Grundrisse*, the 'point of flowering' of a

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<sup>95</sup> 'The bourgeoisie [...] has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.' Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Samuel Moore, (London: Penguin, 2015), p.6

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>97</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', *New Left Review*, 1/144, (March-April 1984), pp.96-113 (p.101)

<sup>98</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, (London: Verso, 2008) p.101.

<sup>99</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', p.101.

mode of production is based on a determinate trajectory, which 'fades after flowering and as a consequence of flowering.'<sup>100</sup>

Badiou's argument is based upon a sequential trajectory that unites historical analysis with political strategy. His arrival at the present impasse, when no objective forces of communist militancy can be said to exist in the West, is, however, pressured by a sense of *anticipation* over the next sequence: 'The task facing us today,' he writes 'is to bring the communist hypothesis into existence in a different modality from that of the previous sequence.'<sup>101</sup> Importantly, this temporal sense of anticipation and its relation to an earlier failure is reminiscent of Badiou's depiction of the repressive historical responses of the dominant classes to prior explosions of communist populism. Indeed, the structural mechanics of Badiou's sequential fresco in general seems to unfold via the redress of earlier epochs in order not to repeat them. Thus, Lenin is to be understood as a faithful subject of the Paris Commune of 1871. His development of the vanguard party as the effective means to seize and then hold power following a counter revolution 'resolved the question bequeathed by the first sequence, and especially by the Paris Commune, which had been its apogee and end: the question of victory.'<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Mao, the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the radical experiments of May '68 in France are to be read as faithful subjects of the event of the Russian Revolution and specifically the vanguard party form that was so decisive in the establishment of proletarian dictatorship. While Mao placed great emphasis on the need for a revolutionary party, he also maintained a faith in the self-capacity of the masses. In contrast to Lenin, Mao argued for an organic relationship between intellectuals and the masses. His argument was that intellectuals, by virtue of their profession, may be epistemologically dissociated from concrete material experiences of exploitation and the practice of struggle. Hence the development of the concept of the 'mass-line' whereby the masses are deemed to have a more correct appraisal or knowledge of the situation than intellectuals.<sup>103</sup> Badiou thus interprets Mao's denunciation of the reactionary developments within the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution as an

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<sup>100</sup> Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, Notebook V. (1858), <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch10.htm>> [accessed 22 July 2015].

<sup>101</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.115.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.108.

<sup>103</sup> Mao Tse Tung, 'Rectify the Party's Style of Work', in *Selected Works; Volume 3*, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 35-51, (pp.37-39); Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, pp.88-89.

attempt to redress the ossification of the vanguard party form and the 'centralized management of the state'.<sup>104</sup> The principle aim of Maoism, whether Chinese or French, was thus to rediscover communism's basic origins in the popular struggles of the masses.<sup>105</sup> Understood in these terms, Maoism, despite the ultimate failure of the Cultural Revolution, is a type of practice that aims to redeem the limits of Bolshevik vanguardism.

What is taking place in Badiou's history of the communist hypothesis then is a distinctly *redemptive* form of political temporality. Each faithful subject in the history of the hypothesis aims to work out a retroactive truth regarding a past event in order to redeem the practice of communism in the present.<sup>106</sup> Thus the Leninist vanguard represents an attempt to redeem the failures of the Paris Commune while Maoism aims to redeem the limits of the vanguard party-state. This type of temporality thus plays out Benjamin's theorisation of redemption. The communist hypothesis outlines a sequential process of politics whereby each sequence is generated, not simply by a vision of a better future, but rather by an attempt to redeem or overcome past failures. At this point then, I would argue that Badiou's political theory is decidedly *theopolitical*. This is not because his various concepts such as the event and the faithful subject can be translated in an abstract manner with religious ideas such as grace or fidelity. This is the type of argument offered by the numerous theorists discussed above. What I have identified, rather, is that his very conception and history of the communist hypothesis is predicated on a distinctly redemptive structure. Indeed, his current attempt to develop a new sequence of the communist hypothesis follows this very structure. In order to avoid the repetition of previous failures, Badiou's demand for a contemporary mobilisation of the communist hypothesis is grounded on two key points: firstly on the need for an ideological struggle to re-legitimise discourses of equality; and secondly, on an attempt to find a new type of post-Leninist politics that addresses the failures of the vanguard party state associated with twentieth century socialism. I will assess the viability of his demand that contemporary politics must be anti-statist, anti-vanguard and internationalist in later chapters. The key

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<sup>104</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.110

<sup>105</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, pp.216-217.

<sup>106</sup> The notion of Lenin as a subject of the Paris Commune and Mao as a subject of Lenin is an observation that is also made by Oliver Harrison. However, his impressive account of Badiou does not address the redemptive substructure of this type of subjective fidelity. See Oliver Harrison 'Revolutionary Subjectivity in post-Marxist thought', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2010), p.151.



point here, however, relates to the temporal structure of Badiou's communist hypothesis. As is clear, anticipation of a future modality of the communist hypothesis depends upon the establishment of a *retroactive* 'truth' in relation to an attempt to redeem past failures. In short, the history of the communist hypothesis operates via a structure of redemption.

**'Dying in order to live:' situating the contradictions in Badiou's Pauline turn<sup>107</sup>**

The revelation of a redemptive structure at the heart of Badiou's theory thus enables a further two points to be made. Firstly, the determinate nature of Badiou's contradictory recourse to Paul can now be made clear. To recall, Badiou states that he views Paul as an atheist. Indeed, the recourse to Paul is, of course, historically motivated; Badiou's alignment of the ancient world with the present is part of a critical argument against liberal narratives of progress or the end of history. However, there is arguably more at stake in the selection of Paul here. As I have shown, his very theory and history of the communist hypothesis is based on a redemptive structure. When approached in these terms then, it is no surprise that a messianic thinker is configured as a 'subjective figure of primary importance' and the 'poet-thinker of the event'.<sup>108</sup> In other words, what I am suggesting is that Badiou's turn to Paul is both historically motivated and determined by the theological and specifically redemptive structure of his theory. Indeed, it is worth noting here that in his ideological attempts to attempt re-popularise communism as a political idea today, Badiou repeatedly celebrates an example of politics that, when analysed in detail, is itself decidedly messianic. I refer here to the Mexican Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

Badiou celebrates the 1994 uprising of the Zapatistas for their attempts to develop a new form of politics that is both anti-vanguard and at a distance from the state.<sup>109</sup> However, the political development of the Zapatistas in Chiapas is arguably unintelligible without an awareness of the tradition of popular religiosity and liberation theology in the region. As John Ross notes, the peasants of Chiapas 'have never lacked for prophets in the way they

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<sup>107</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*, ed. by Juana Ponce de Leon (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), p.20.

<sup>108</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.111; Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, p.104.

have lacked for land and bread and liberty.’<sup>110</sup> Like many other historians, Ross enumerates multiple examples of local popular uprisings that were articulated with Christian discourses. During the 1970s, Mexico was marked by a period of politics known as the ‘dirty war.’ At this period, the state fought against and disappeared numerous activist and Marxist guerrillas that had emerged following the massacre of workers and students by the state at Tlateloco in 1968. These developments form part of the historical material that Roberto Bolaño draws upon in his fiction.<sup>111</sup> During this period, various Maoist organisations tried and failed to develop a revolutionary base among the rural poor in Chiapas. One of the reasons for this failure was the absence of any direct involvement with the popular traditions of religiosity of the local peasantry. As Subcomandante Marcos, the former leader of the EZLN recounts, the revolutionary groups failed due the use of what locals called ‘la palabra dura,’ ‘the hard word’ of Marxist social theory that was alien to the religious discourse and outlook of the locals.<sup>112</sup>

Since 1967 the rural population of Chiapas had fallen under the ministry of the Bishop Samuel Ruiz whose experience of poverty in the area provoked his conversion to liberation theology. ‘I came to San Cristóbal to convert the poor, but they converted me,’ says Ruiz of his own history in Chiapas.<sup>113</sup> Ruiz quickly became the central figure in the development of struggles for land rights and basic needs such as health and education. As part of their process of mobilization, the Zapatistas not only worked with Ruiz, but secretly recruited the numerous indigenous deacons that the Bishop had trained in order to spread the catechism of the preferential option for the poor.

In order to avoid the pitfalls of ‘la palabra dura,’ the Zapatistas began to couch their very discourse and recruitment process in biblical parables and messianic prophecies. As

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<sup>110</sup> John Ross, ‘The EZLN, A History: Miracles, *Coyunturas*, Communiqués’, in Subcomandante Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation*, trans. by Frank Bardacke and Leslie López, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), pp.7-16, (p.8).

<sup>111</sup> See Roberto Bolaño, *Los detectives salvajes*, (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1998); Roberto Bolaño, *Amuleto*, (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1999).

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Carmen Castillo and Tessa Brisac, ‘Historia de Marcos y de los hombres de la noche’, in Adolfo Gilly, Subcomandante Marcos and Carlo Ginberg, *Discusión Sobre la Historia*, (Mexico: Taurus, 1995), pp.131-142, (pp.137-138).

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Ana Carrigan, ‘Afterword: Chiapas, the First Postmodern Revolution’, in Subcomandante Marcos, *Our Word Is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*, ed. by Juana Ponce de Leon (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001) pp.417-444, (p.424).

Subcomandante Marcos tellingly writes in a story entitled 'Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds, a Storm and a Prophecy': 'the very oldest of the old in the villages tell of a man named Zapata who rose up for his own people and in a voice more like a song than a shout, said "Land and Freedom!" And these old folks say that Zapata is not dead, that he is going to return.'<sup>114</sup> As this vision of revolution as religious sublimation ('a voice more like a song than a shout') makes clear, the discourse of the EZLN is characterised by a sense of vertical time and messianic return. In this example of contemporary political resistance, an example championed by Alain Badiou, the discourse of the militant is energised precisely by the discourses of Pauline Christianity that this thesis envisages as the means through which revolutionary subjectivity can be resurrected on a wider scale. This to say, the above seems to refuse the criticism of Badiou made by Bensaïd, Bosteels, and Toscano, respectively, that the recourse to Christianity is a symptom of Marxism's political weakness, or what this thesis names as 'an archive of defeat'. Moreover, it also highlights the potential power for a more concrete embrace of Christianity than the atheistic embrace of Paul by Badiou himself; the example of the EZLN here seems to suggest that it is via the concrete practices of Christianity, 'word made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1.14), that militant politics can be developed and harnessed to concrete political action in the present.

Badiou's celebration of the EZLN also raises another point regarding the other contradiction I identified regarding his approach to Lenin and Paul in the previous chapter. Badiou turns to Paul, and also the EZLN, in order to exemplify the potential for a new type of politics that will redeem the failures of the Leninist vanguard model. Badiou grounds his intervention on the argument that the dissemination of an idea of communism is of primary importance for this will begin the necessary struggle of combating the ideological hegemony regarding the free market as the most appropriate economic structure to guide human sociality. In addition, Badiou argues that any contemporary form of communist politics must be anti-statist, anti-vanguard and internationalist. The example of the EZLN is interesting here. The EZLN constantly argues against a form of top-down, hierarchical politics led by intellectuals. Their principle of government is one of a mass line, or popular democracy, what they call *mandar obedcer* (govern by obeying). However, in terms of the organisation, the Zapatista

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<sup>114</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, 'Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds, a Storm and a Prophecy', in *Shadows of Tender Fury*, pp.31- 51, (pp.45-6).

movement is dependent upon a military vanguard. It is the Zapatista *Army* of National Liberation. It is the army command that still assumes ultimate control of the rebel communities during red alerts and it was the *armed* uprising in 1994 that succeeded in bringing the world's attention to the struggle of the rural poor in Chiapas. Indeed, in 1994, when the EZLN was at the height of its popularity, the aim of the EZLN was not to keep a distance from the state, but rather to march to Mexico City and install a new, democratic regime.<sup>115</sup> I will discuss the relationship between the state and left guerrilla forces in Latin America in Chapter Four. Suffice to say at present, that the historical decrease in popularity and power of the EZLN since the early nineties in Mexico tallies with the increased distance it has taken from issues of the state. In terms of internationalism, the EZLN draws upon international volunteers to aid the development of its autonomous communities in resistance and has convened international meetings, most notably the 1996 Encounter for Humanity Against Neoliberalism. However, the EZLN is also, as its name reveals, a *national* liberation movement. They articulate communism with Christian discourse and a notion of messianic nationalism. They are named after the popular peasant leader of the Mexican revolution of 1910, Emiliano Zapata.<sup>116</sup>

In sum, what this analysis seems to suggest then is that Badiou's abandonment of the Leninist model of politics – the vanguard – may appear premature. Undoubtedly the example of the EZLN's *mandar obedeciendo* obviously signals a departure from the strict separation of leadership and masses as theorised in Lenin's *What is to be Done?* However, the military vanguard remains central to attempts at radical social change. I will develop this argument in Chapter Three. Indeed, it is arguable that the Leninist form of politics that Paul is invoked to overcome cannot actually be reduced in *toto* to the strict and anti-democratic procedures of Lenin's theorisation of the vanguard in 1902. As my earlier discussion from Chapter One of his 1917 text, 'The Crisis Has Matured' (a text favoured by Badiou) makes clear, the key indication of a revolutionary conjuncture for Lenin was the

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<sup>115</sup> EZLN, 'First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle: Today we say "Enough"', in *Shadows of Tender Fury*, pp.51-54, (p.53).

<sup>116</sup> The Zapatista uprising in the South of Mexico in 1994 was also intended to coincide with a simultaneous uprising in the North of the country led by the EZLN's northern front, the Villista Front of National Liberation (FVLN). This name refers to the other major leader of the radical forces in the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa. I will discuss the legacy of Villa in Chapter Four. See Carlos Tello Díaz, *La rebelión de las Cañadas: Origen y ascenso del EZLN*, (Mexico: Planeta, 2005), p.246.

relatively autonomous development of class consciousness among the most exploited sectors of the population – the peasantry – who were not the traditional subject of mobilisation by the working class orientated Bolsheviks. Indeed, Badiou's own political group, L'OP extends the logic of Lenin's search here by attempting to focus attention not simply on French workers but rather *les sans papiers*. It is for these reasons then that I identified Badiou's stance on Lenin and Paul as a determinate contradiction. To recall, Badiou firstly celebrates Paul as means to overcome the Leninist vanguard and yet then proceeds to place the two figures in direct comparison vis-à-vis Jesus and Marx. As the discussion above makes clear, this contradiction is determinate for it is motivated by the fact that the types of contemporary politics that Badiou envisages as Pauline and post-Leninist are arguably still tied to certain forms of military vanguardism; moreover, as his support for the EZLN makes clear, military vanguardism can still be viewed in a progressive manner today. I will highlight and develop this argument further in Chapter Three in my discussion of McNamee's *The Ultras*. Indeed, in terms of the conceptual meaning of vanguard, it is notable that much like Paul's ability to stand outside the situation of late antiquity, Badiou's contemporary fidelity to the communist hypothesis and opposition to the neo-liberal consensus, logically places his own politics *beyond* the frontiers of the present historical situation.

The centrality of discourses of messianic nationalism in the interpellation of revolutionary subjectivity by the Zapatistas also highlights the way in which while internationalist and universal in principle, communism requires a process of ideological articulation with other social practices and ideologies in order to function as a concrete political practice. This is a point argued by other post-Althusserians such as Étienne Balibar and Ernesto Laclau whose attempts to amend Badiou's work to the more practical reality of everyday political organisation focus on the way that an idea of communism *per se* has rarely succeeded as the *sole* mobilising force of progressive political movements.<sup>117</sup> Rather communism is often historically articulated with struggles against dictatorship (Fidel Castro's July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement in Cuba), with a nationalist and anti-imperialist cause (early Maoism in China),

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<sup>117</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'An Ethics of Militant Engagement' pp.125-127, p.131; Étienne Balibar, 'Communism as Commitment, Imagination, and Politics', in *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2013), pp.13-36, (pp.16-21, pp.33-35).

as an explicit national liberation movement (the Nicaraguan Sandinistas or today's Mexican Zapatistas), or civil rights struggles (the Black Panthers).<sup>118</sup>

In terms of Badiou's theory, the significance of this materialist notion of articulation (in this case of communism with a national liberation movement) is that politically speaking, one cannot just proceed from the event alone (the return of the void understood here as demands for radical socio-economic change), but rather one must look at what Laclau calls the 'mutual contamination' of the event with its situation (the articulation of communist ideas in political movements coded in terms other than simply communism).<sup>119</sup> Indeed, this was similar to my argument about Paul in Chapter One: his radicalism could not be understood without the symbolic framework of the historical situation with which he broke. Indeed, the aim of Chapters Three and Four is to develop the contradictions identified in Badiou's theory by exploring the way Pauline discourses articulate communist ideas with notions of the vanguard, nationalism and the conquest of state power. If I have hereto set down some of the arguments for why Badiou's work is best understood in theopolitical terms and how the contradictions in his work will be explored in this thesis, then I want to end this chapter by identifying the materialist and egalitarian kernel of early Christianity.

### **'For ye all are one in Jesus Christ:' the intransigent egalitarian kernel of Christianity**

For materialist biblical scholars such as Fernando Belo, Ched Myers and Boris Gunjević, the narrative practices of the early texts of the Christian Church are best understood as an example of radical or 'subversive' cultural practice.<sup>120</sup> In the dialectical approach of these scholars, the Gospels both reflect and constitute (by re-narrating the original events) the early Christian movement. As Belo states apropos Mark's Gospel: 'As proclaimer of the subversive acts, the narrative makes it possible to read them, enlarge upon them, and extend them. The narrative thus has an important and unappreciated role to play in a [future] revolution.'<sup>121</sup> The cultural form of the Gospels and Paul's Epistles were a narration of the early Jesus movement. The Epistles were first read by the new apocalyptic

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<sup>118</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, (London: Verso, 1979), p.160.

<sup>119</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'An Ethics of Militant Engagement', p.131.

<sup>120</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.121; Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, p.32; Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – The Messianic Subversion', p.241.

<sup>121</sup> Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, p.32.

communities in the years following the death of Jesus, while the Gospels, especially the synoptic trio of Mark, Luke and Matthew, were produced and read in the midst of widespread political despair that followed the failed Jewish Revolt 66-70 AD.<sup>122</sup> What Belo thus means in the quotation above is that these early writings broadly sought to address and provide a type of reassurance to the nascent Christian movement. In the Althusserian terms that are also adopted by Belo and Myers, the texts seek to provide an imaginary resolution to the problems of constructing an egalitarian collective in a period that is marked by vast inequalities, imperial occupation and the recent defeat of a ethno-nationalist uprising.<sup>123</sup> It is via this type of methodology that one can begin to situate the famous paradox of Mark's gospel. This paradox refers to the fact that characters, such as the disciples, whom we expect to recognize and follow Jesus in an appropriate way consistently fail to do so, while others, including those opposed to Jesus, such as the Roman centurion at Golgotha, manage this feat (Mark 15.39).<sup>124</sup> For materialist scholars, this paradox is an attempt to provide an imaginary solution to the failure of the recent Jewish uprising. In other words, the real ideological significance of this paradox is the suggestion that the Jewish nationalist uprising was not the real or true form of political resistance to Roman Imperial rule; rather a different and more radical type politics, that expressed by Jesus, is the real solution, and the moment for this type of uprising is still to come. This is why Gunjević argues that the key messages of Mark are practices of preparation for future revolutionary mobilisation and struggle: 'watch and pray'.<sup>125</sup> I now want to elucidate in more detail the reasons why materialist biblical scholars view the early Church as an apocalyptic collective of the radically equal.

Much like the significance of the situation and articulation in the discussion of Paul in Chapter One, I want to begin this section with an examination of Paul in terms of his situation prior to the Damascene event. To recall, before his conversion Paul was a

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<sup>122</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – The Messianic Subversion', pp.262-3, 268-9; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, pp.443-4.

<sup>123</sup> For discussions of their materialist methodology derived from Althusser and Althusserian ideas in Jameson and Eagleton, see Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, pp.7-37; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, pp.26-36, p.92.

<sup>124</sup> Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, 'The Gospel According to St. Mark', in *The English Bible: King James Version. Volume Two: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. by Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, (New York: Norton, 2012), pp.77-80, (pp.77-78); Rowan Williams, *Meeting God in Mark*, (London: SPCK, 2014), pp.29-45.

<sup>125</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – The Messianic Subversion', esp. p.254.

prominent member of a rival Jewish sect, the Pharisees and a staunch persecutor of the early Church (Philippians 3.5-6). An understanding of the ideology of the Pharisees and the attendant significance of Paul's conversion to a life 'in Jesus Christ' is important here because it will illustrate the radical, egalitarian and universal message that is symbolised by Pauline Christianity.

During Paul's lifetime and prior to the Great Revolt of 66 AD, the Pharisees were a relatively small Jewish sect. Much like the early Church, their aim was to democratise the dominant symbolic purity code of Palestinian Judaism that had developed out of the covenant paradigm with Yahweh.<sup>126</sup> This purity code had its ideological grounding in the notion of Israel as the 'chosen' people, set apart from surrounding cultures and their idolatrous practices. As Fernando Belo observes, this code or what he calls the 'pollution system' related to practices in three sites: first, the 'table' (the production and consumption of goods); second, the 'house' (kinship and community relations); and third, the 'sanctuary' (the temple and priesthood).<sup>127</sup> While this focus on pollution aimed at maintaining the covenant and by extension, correct social cohesion, the class dynamics of the social formation produced a series of key divisions that divided as much as they solidified Palestinian Jews. An examination of the site of the 'table' or spheres of production and consumption as dominated by the ruling Sadducee elite and challenged by the Pharisees and then the followers of Jesus makes this antagonism clear. Following the Marxist focus on the dialectical relationship between base and superstructure, any such examination must first situate itself in relation to the dominant mode of production within a given social formation.

As Fernando Belo observes, the social formation of First Century Palestine was organized around a production system known as a 'subasiatic mode of production.'<sup>128</sup> This is a type of agrarian economy which depended on peasant and slave labour. The majority of direct economic activity thus took place in rural villages. However, as part of a class system, ownership of the vast majority of rural produce was concentrated in a class of non-producers, large landowners and a smaller mercantile class. Lacking an elaborate internal

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<sup>126</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, pp.76-77, pp.82-83.

<sup>127</sup> Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, p.38, p.50ff.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p.60.



market of production and consumption, and overseen by imperial rule from Rome, the ruling elite monopolised the state apparatus and often depended upon direct military and political control as well as a strict ideological code in order to suppress resistance. Thus the primary class antagonism was expressed at the level of the rural-urban divide. In Chapter One I outlined how this was articulated at both a narrative and symbolic level in the movements of Jesus from the periphery to the centres of social power in Mark's Gospel and also in Paul's ex-centric geo-political practice. Under such repressive political conditions, it is no surprise then that social struggles, as Belo notes, primarily took the form of peasant insurgencies and rural guerrilla movements articulated in the prevailing discourses of Jewish messianism.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, it is here that one can see the importance of the ideological relations around the Jewish pollution code in the class struggle of the time.<sup>130</sup>

In first century Palestine, the ruling urban power bloc was dominated by the Sadducees whose social base mainly consisted of large landowners.<sup>131</sup> Thus, in terms of the articulation of the 'table' or economic production with the ideological pollution system, they were invariably able to acquire grains that were domestic and hence pure. In this the Sadducees followed Leviticus 11.38 which states that if water is poured on seed it becomes unclean. This was important because agriculture formed a key component of the economic base of the social formation of ancient Palestine. In years of poor harvest which were plenty, economic compulsion often forced poorer peasants to import cheaper foreign food sources from areas such as Egypt. In effect, the Sadducee elite assumed that only the priestly elite could and should comply with the demands of purity. Thus in practice they expressed an exclusivist interpretation of the covenant which was drawn upon to justify the hierarchical social formation of the time.<sup>132</sup>

The origins of the struggle between the Pharisees and the ruling Sadducees originated in debates about the foundations of divine authority. The key issue here is the Pharisaic oral tradition known as the halakah:

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, pp.83-4; Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – the Messianic Subversion,' pp.264-266.

<sup>130</sup> Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, pp.60-1

<sup>131</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.76.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p.76.

The Pharisees, as other groups, engaged in interpretation of the written Torah [...but] distinguished themselves from other groups by a peculiar claim for the authority of their traditions and, by extension, for the authority of Pharisaic traditions. They established their right to interpret authoritatively by placing themselves in a chain of tradition going back to the original revelation of Torah at Mt. Sinai and then by putting the content of their interpretive activities into that very revelation. This they did by telling a myth which reports both Written and Oral Law were revealed on Mt. Sinai [...] Such claims to authority put them implicitly in competition with the other groups that claimed and had legislative authority, the priests and their supporters, the Sadducees.<sup>133</sup>

As this makes clear, the foundation of the ongoing dispute between Sadducees and Pharisees was located in the opposition between the authority of scriptural conservatism (Sadducees) and arguments in favour of a mixture of scripture and oral tradition (Pharisees). In the case of the ideology of purity and the pollution code, the Pharisees argued that Pentateuchal doctrine only applied to seed detached from the soil, thus one could observe the code and still purchase foreign grains.<sup>134</sup> In effect, the Pharisaic challenge to Sadducean interpretation of Leviticus was an attempt to liberalize the interpretation of the pollution code.

If the Pharisaic position on production symbolised a more liberal ideology and social practice, then the limits of their position was exposed in the challenges produced by the more egalitarian position of apocalyptic groups such as that led by Jesus. Despite their attempt at democratisation, the Pharisees encountered resistance from the masses over the enforcement of Sabbath prohibitions on sowing and harvesting on the seventh day and in the seventh year.<sup>135</sup> Such prohibitions engendered obvious hardships for the subsistence economy of a peasant. The social solidarity of the Pharisee was thus limited and their class basis was rooted more in the small but ascendant artisan class whose economic status was not as desperate as that of the peasant.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the popular limits of the Pharisaic 'liberalism' is indexed in the three challenges made against them by Jesus in Mark's Gospel. Each confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees revolves around the consumption of unclean food and crucially, the significance of the Sabbath. This comes to a climax in Mark 2.23-28, when Jesus and his followers justify the procurement of grain on the Sabbath due

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<sup>133</sup> Sheldon R. Isenberg, 'Millenarianism in Greco-Roman Palestine', *Religion*, 4, (1974), 26-46, (p.32).

<sup>134</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.77.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, pp.75-7.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p.76.

to a situation of hunger. Ched Myers names this a highpoint of Jesus' campaign of 'civil disobedience.'<sup>137</sup> Politically speaking, this refusal to adhere to Sabbath prohibitions bespeaks an egalitarian and radical social practice: the purity code is overturned by Jesus in the name of basic material needs. So, while the Pharisees offered an abstract notion of democratisation, the practices of Jesus were grounded in a more concrete practice of egalitarian solidarity with the poor. As Myers notes, Jesus' opposition to the Pharisees is grounded in his observation that despite their ostensible populism, they merely constitute an extension of the Jerusalem establishment: similar to the Sadducees, the Pharisees conceal economic exploitation by displays of public piety.<sup>138</sup> The textual practice of the Gospel thus draws upon and subverts the dominant economic, political and ideological practices in First Century Palestine.<sup>139</sup>

Returning to Paul then, the first point to make here is that with his conversion from the Pharisaic tradition, Paul moved from what could be described as a type of liberal ideology, to a more radical, egalitarian outlook. Such an understanding obviously mitigates more conservative readings of Paul by biblical scholars such as Gerd Theissen.<sup>140</sup> Theissen argues that Paul's politics is actually one of accommodation between higher and lower classes.<sup>141</sup> His argument is founded on dispute regarding the culinary privileges in table customs amongst the *ekklēsia* in Corinth. According to Theissen Paul apparently resolves the dispute by arguing that the rich may indulge in the luxuries of meat privately, while sharing the more austere meal of bread and wine with the poor in public during the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11.33-34). Theissen appears to make a valid point here. However, there is arguably a much broader point being made about social class and the early Christian communities taking place in this letter. Paul's opening argument and his overall address in this letter is used to highlight that of those who were 'called [...] not many were of noble birth' (I Corinthians 1.26). The significance of Paul's intervention here then is in the attempt to follow the preminence of the poor as narrated in the Gospels and the egalitarian

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, pp.159-161.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p.222.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p.121; Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, p.32; Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – The Messianic Subversion,' p.241.

<sup>140</sup> Gerd Theissen, 'The Strong and the Weak in Corinth', in *The Writings of Saint Paul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. by Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, (London, New York: Norton, 2007), pp.610-623.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, pp.622-3.

practices of the nascent Jesus movement: 'God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things' (I Corinthians 1.27-28). Rather than simply accommodate class division, Paul actually criticises the distinctions made via the table practices of the *ekklēsia* in Corinth: 'do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?' (I Corinthians 11.22). Indeed, the very novelty of Paul's soteriological mission is found in the way that it subverts the prevailing articulation of class division with ideological codes of purity. In effect, Paul undertakes an even more radical extension of Jesus' subversion. Following his Damascene conversion and the 'grace given to me by God,' Paul not only abandoned the practices of the Pharisees, but he also universalised the redemptive practice of Jesus and became, in his words, a 'minister of Jesus Christ to the gentiles' (Rom. 5.15-16). Contra Theissen, Paul's God is a God that struggles against social hierarchy and works primarily in the interests of the poor. The articulation of conversion with a radical and egalitarian mission are thus key to a materialist conception of Paul.

Understood in these terms then, one can see the limitations of the charges offered against Badiou's theological turn by Bensaïd, Bosteels and Chiesa and Toscano. Rather than justify a form of elite priestly rule (Bensaïd) or provide the cultural grounds for capitalist rationality (Bosteels) and contemporary American imperial aggression (Chiesa and Toscano), the ideological practice of the Gospel is one which draws upon and subverts the exploitative economic, political and ideological practices in First Century Palestine. The egalitarian and radical ideology of such texts thus suggests that rather than constitute an archive of defeat, the return to such practices by materialist thinkers is in no way incommensurate with the political aims of communism.

The focus on the class dimensions of Paul's conversion also enables a redress of certain criticisms put towards Badiou's theory of communism. I refer here to problems regarding a relative lack of attention on Badiou's part to political economy and the grounding of so much of his work in ontology. While Badiou celebrates Marx as a political event, there is, as Žižek notes, a striking lack of engagement with the critique of political economy in his work.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, as I noted in Chapter One, Badiou often displays a tendency to collapse

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<sup>142</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Answers Without Questions' in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2013), pp.177-206, (p.195).

politics in ontology. As Laclau argues, this means that he cannot distinguish between the way universalism operates in the political practice of Marxism (by a process of hegemonic articulation) and how universalism relates to an ontological notion of the void in philosophy.<sup>143</sup> However, by reading Badiou's example of the militant figure for contemporary struggle (Saint Paul) in materialist terms, one can see that the radical significance of Pauline Christianity is profoundly marked by a discourse of socio-economic critique. In terms of political ideas of universality, what I mean here is that the notion of universality is articulated with the egalitarian demands of the socially excluded and the poor. Indeed, so significant is the importance of this universal opening represented by Saint Paul and its articulation with a discourse of socio-economic equality, that it can be registered in formal terms as much as in the content of the texts of the early Church.

As Gerald Hammond and Austin Bosch note, a dramatic actantial switch takes place in the Acts of the Apostles. From Chapters 6 onwards, the narrative focus shifts from the original twelve disciples, headed by Peter, to new figures, such as Stephen and Philip, and most centrally, Paul who, in the words of Hammond and Busch 'becomes the undisputed hero of Acts' second half.'<sup>144</sup> Crucially, this actantial switch is articulated with two key narrative developments: first, the resistance of the group around Peter to the conversion of Gentiles; and second, their betrayal of the Church's early economic policy of material redistribution. According to Hammond and Bosch, Luke's Gospel and the Acts focuses overwhelmingly on a message of liberation for the poor and socially marginalised groups of the ancient world.<sup>145</sup> While there are numerous examples within Luke of Jesus relieving lower class figures from economic disaster and social isolation, Hammond and Bosch observe that the formal shift in protagonists during the Acts registers the centrality of this radical message at a more profound, textual level. In terms of content, the majority of the Acts deals with the practices of the new community of the Church following the death of their leader, Jesus. In materialist terms, there is thus a focus on ideology, political organisation and socio-economic practices of the new community of disciples. Contrary to the totalising

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<sup>143</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'An Ethics of Militant Engagement,' pp.125-127.

<sup>144</sup> Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, 'The Gospel According to St. Luke', in *The English Bible: King James Version. Volume Two: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. by Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, (New York: Norton, 2012), pp.124-130, (p.128).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p.127.

post-Weberian alignment of Christianity with capitalism *per se* (rather than Weber's argument about certain developments in Protestantism), as is the case with Bruno Bosteels, the key point to observe here is that a central feature of the early Church is the focus on radical equality: as soon as the Church is established, the members give up private ownership of their possessions and share 'all things in common,' enabling a 'distribution' of resources 'unto every man according as he had need' (Acts 4.32-37).

In terms of Saint Paul and discourses of socio-economic equality, the key actantial switch takes place in relation to the break with the practice of socio-economic equality. During Chapter 6, the twelve give up the material practice of service and redistribution and instead, focus on the ideological dissemination of Christ's message alone: 'It is not pleasing that we should leave the word of God and serve tables' (Acts 6.2). Thus they appoint seven administrators to manage this material service and subsequently devote themselves 'continually to prayer and to the service of the word' (Acts 6.4). In so doing, the twelve demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus' ministry which is defined in Luke as the mission of service, in particular of material resources to the poor: 'he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? But I am among you as he that serveth' Luke 22.26-27). As Hammond and Busch argue, the significance of this betrayal is made clear in the actantial rupture that proceeds the abandonment of material service. At this point, the twelve thus loose importance and the Acts switches focuses to new figures such as Paul and his mission to the gentiles. In terms of socio-economics, however, it is crucial to note here that the narration of Paul's early mission at Antioch is bound up with the practice of re-distribution. The only detail that Luke offers about this period is the prophecy of an impending famine in Judea and the collection for believers there which will be delivered by Paul (Acts 11.27-30). Paul's universal mission 'thus begins with his administration of a charitable collection for the poor in Jerusalem – precisely the task that the Twelve had renounced.'<sup>146</sup>

A similar sense of Paul's radical and democratic openness is also legible in the stylistic analysis of his letters. This is an argument undertaken by Wayne A. Meeks who draws upon

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p.128.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyphony. For Bakhtin, human identity is essentially dialogical. Bakhtin's argument about dialogism is a substantial addition to materialist theory and requires much greater elaboration than is possible here. In short, however, dialogism means that values emerge and are legible only through a process of dialogue, which understood in its full significance, means through social interactions and often struggles over meaning.<sup>147</sup> Bakhtin's essentialist focus is also notable for the fact that he argued that such dialogical moments are most likely to come to light in certain historical conjunctures, notably during the collapse of centralising or authoritarian structures. Bakhtin is as much a literary scholar as social theorist and thus his key examples are Rabelais during the Renaissance and Dostoevsky during the decline of Czarist power in late nineteenth century Russia.

Drawing upon Bakhtin, Meeks notes that a similar process of polyphony and dialogism takes place in Paul's Epistles, most notably in the debate around table customs in Corinthians 8-10. What is interesting here, notes Meeks, is that when Paul is apparently called upon to give 'his authoritative directive as founder and apostle, and where he speaks with full consciousness of his apostolic authority, he does so through the curious indirection of polyphony.'<sup>148</sup> Meeks identifies at least seven different social voices in debate during Paul's elaboration of the problems of table customs. These include Paul's own voice, the traditions of Scripture, the logic of early Christian tradition and the parties at Corinth amongst others. While Paul's debate cannot be seen as a 'conversation without boundaries,' the key point to be taken from Meeks' insight is that the stylistic element of Paul is determined by the new radical community of equals that constitute the early Christians: 'he employed this polyphonic style because the kind of ethic demanded by the action of God in the crucified and risen Messiah is one in which all voices get a hearing.'<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. by Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>148</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Polyphonic Ethics of the Apostle Paul', in *The English Bible: King James Version. Volume Two: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. by Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, (New York: Norton, 2012), pp.1244-1255, (p.1250).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.1254.

The substance of Meeks' argument is also given a more radical feminist development by Brigitte Kahl in a reading of the letter to the Galatians.<sup>150</sup> Noting that Paul is often viewed as a patriarchal figure, Kahl explains that the switch from hierarchical relations of slaves and freemen to horizontal relations of equality ('ye are all one in Christ') in Galatians 3.28, precipitates a 'decentering' of gender relations.<sup>151</sup> By focusing on faith rather than ethnic belonging, Paul breaks with the notion of salvation being the preserve of the seed of Abraham. The biological foundation of a male line of descent, which is physically marked by the rites of circumcision, is thus broken by the baptismal or faith based logic of Paul: 'if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Galatians 3.29). In other words, people become seeds of Abraham via faith not by descent. The crucial point made by Kahl is that 'the counter-patriarchal logic of his theology immediately starts to re-shape the language Paul uses.'<sup>152</sup> This begins in Galatians 4, immediately after the egalitarian declaration ('ye are all one in Christ', 3.28) which constitutes the key political message of the letter. Here Paul begins to discuss the construction of the new community via reference to female mother figures, in particular those who beget children without a male: Mary (4.4), and Sarah (4.21-31). Most notably, he describes his own role in female terms, comparing his apostolic mission to that of a mother in 'the pains of childbirth' (4.19). Kahl's point then is the radical politics of early Christianity also pertains to gender relations and moreover, that the significance of this 'gender trouble' is legible at the level of language and imagery.<sup>153</sup> I return to this discussion in my reading of Bolaño's literary response to the femicides of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico in Chapter Four.

The determination of revolutions in form and style by the radical content of the early Church is also a point made by Eric Auerbach in *Mimesis*.<sup>154</sup> Auerbach's stated 'goal' in this text was to examine the way the 'common life of mankind on earth [...] begins to be visible.'<sup>155</sup> While his favourite examples of such a humanistic realism are of course Dante

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<sup>150</sup> Brigitte Kahl, 'No Longer Male: Masculinity Struggles Behind Galatians 3.28', in *The English Bible: King James Version. Volume Two: The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, ed. by Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, (New York: Norton, 2012), pp.1200-1207.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p.1202

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p.1203.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p.1207.

<sup>154</sup> Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1957).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p.488.



and Zola, it is interesting to note that Auerbach's initial discussions circulate around Christianity and the way in which the New Testament constituted a decisive rupture with the cultural traditions of classical antiquity: 'It was the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles'.<sup>156</sup> What Auerbach means here is that prior to the New Testament there was a distinct 'separation of styles' which marked a hierarchical refusal to view the masses as serious subjects worthy and also capable of meaningful action in the world: 'everything commonly realistic, everything pertaining to everyday life, must not be treated on any level except the comic, which admits no problematic probing.'<sup>157</sup> However, the incarnation of a messiah among the lowly masses in the New Testament breaks with the farcical depiction of the masses in classical antiquity. What is so unique for Auerbach is that the Gospels actually give a central dramatic role to common figures, especially in the moments of highest drama such as the crucifixion and Passion. Unlike the contemporaneous rhetorical histories of Tacitus or the comedies of Petronius, both of whom 'look down [on historical events] from above,' the major event of Jesus' arrest is played out in relation to Peter's denial.<sup>158</sup> Here not only are lowly figures such as a fisherman and bystanders in the crowd given direct discourse, but Peter is given great psychological depth. Auerbach follows Adolf Harnack in describing Peter's denial as a form of 'pendulation'.<sup>159</sup> Despite the humble background of a fisherman, Peter is given a tremendous role in being the first to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, and then leader of the disciples of the messiah. Unlike the others, his faith allows him to follow Jesus following his arrest. Yet, while faith had provided such earlier inspiration, when he is challenged by the crowd and at the very moment when he can attest his faith, he trembles for his life and the pendulum swings: he flees terrified and is overcome with remorse. What is significant about this scene is that the first time in literature a lowly figure attains 'the image of man in the highest and deepest and most tragic sense.'<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p.39, p.490.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p.36.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p.36.

Auerbach's argument regarding the formal innovations of the New Testament is one that is 'rooted from the beginning' in the materialist determinant of the Jesus movement itself: what is unprecedented he notes is 'God's incarnation in a human being of the humblest social station, through his existence on earth amid humble everyday people and conditons.'<sup>161</sup>

The novelty of form and its determination by a radically new historical content is a point that is also developed by Myers and Gunjević. As they note, the Gospel of Mark is a 'literary novum:' 'Mark found no one literary genre in the surrounding culture that would fully suit his purposes, neither Hellenistic eulogy nor heroic epic. Because he was convinced that Jesus of Nazareth had inaugurated an ideology and practice that was wholly unprecedented.'<sup>162</sup> In general, the content is tragic: the narration moves towards the dramatic crescendo of the crucifixion of the Messiah. In the original text by Mark, there is no direct narration of an encounter with the risen Jesus; the final narration of the Passion ends with a message to return to the original site of Galilee as the women who arrived at the tomb 'fled' in fear (Mark 16.8).<sup>163</sup> Historically speaking, the narration of the risen Jesus (Mark 16.8-20) is added at a later date. Although the text draws upon the Jewish cultural practice of apocalypse by demarcating a political dualism between the unjust practices of the ruling Jewish and Roman order and the subversive and egalitarian practices of Jesus, the lack of a risen Jesus in the original text suggests that is no simple apocalyptic revelation that will provide assurance of an easy victory. Despite this, Mark entitles his work: 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ' (1:1). The nomination is interesting then for it accentuates the unique and subversive cultural form even further. Gospel (*euaggelion*) is a Hellenistic expression that is translated literarily as 'glad tidings,' yet it was also a technical term for 'news of victory', particularly in military battles.<sup>164</sup> Klaus Wengst describes the use of this rhetorical tradition in the Roman Empire as a form of cultural propaganda that promoted a benevolent image of Rome, especially in the imperial territories.<sup>165</sup> What is

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p.36.

<sup>162</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.101, p.443; Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – The Messianic Subversion', p.243, p.269.

<sup>163</sup> Rowan Williams, *Meeting God in Mark*, pp.47-8.

<sup>164</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.123.

<sup>165</sup> Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. by John Bowden, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp.7ff.

interesting about the Rome in this period was that such propaganda attempted to eulogise Caesar as a divine figure. The ascension to power was always occasion for 'glad tidings' of celebrations and sacrifices. Myers quotes *The Dictionary of the New Testament* in order to highlight this:

Because the emperor is more than a common man, his ordinances are glad messages and his commands are sacred writings [...] He proclaims euangelia through his appearance [...] the first euangelium is the news of his birth.<sup>166</sup>

Thus by declaring *euaggeliou* of Jesus Christ, Mark's gospel engages in a subversive strategy that challenges imperial authority. Unlike the genealogical beginnings of Matthew and Luke, Mark's opening directly announces the start of a battle with Rome. However, as the tragic and incomplete nature of text's content makes clear, this is battle that is unfinished. Mark is written just after the fall of the Jewish Revolt and decimation of the temple by the Roman forces. Indeed, the symbolism of the cross is not an abstract referent of suffering, as is commonly assumed, but rather a specific imperial punishment given to insurgents.<sup>167</sup> Indeed, for Myers and Gunjevic, the intended audience of Mark's Gospel were the early followers of the Jesus movement who had just witnessed the Roman defeat of the Jewish nationalist uprising. Despite such an inauspicious context, the text remains a subversive call for action, as Myers notes, 'the empty tomb symbolises that Mark's story, like its subject Jesus, had not ended but lives on.'<sup>168</sup> Mark's Gospel is ultimately a type of cultural form that attempts to produce and continue the struggle of discipleship. It begins with an invitation: 'Come ye after me' (1.17) and ends with an invitation again to follow 'he goeth before you into Galilee: there ye shall see him' (16.7). The demand to return to the rural periphery of Galilee is thus a call to continue 'radical discipleship' and social practice amongst the poor in the world.<sup>169</sup>

As I have demonstrated above, it is this call to social practice amongst the poor that is taken up and radically extended by Saint Paul. When approached in materialist terms then, one can see that the alignment of communism with the practices of the early Church is not so

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<sup>166</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.123.

<sup>167</sup> Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, (London: Westbourne Press, 2013), pp.xxviii-xxix.

<sup>168</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, p.449.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p.403, p.411, p.439.

much an archive of defeat, but rather an articulation of contemporary politics with an equally radical movement whose central aim was fundamental social change.

In light of the arguments made regarding Badiou's Paulinism in both this chapter and chapter one, I now want to turn to an examination of how messianic discourses offer utopian and subversive re-workings of perceived political and cultural expectations in literary renderings of the post-1970s period of revolutionary disillusionment. In the following chapter I outline the way in which Eoin McNamee's representation of the legacy of the 'dirty war' in the north of Ireland during the 1970s draws upon messianic images and how these contradict the manifest depiction of historical stasis and political disenchantment. I will draw upon the reading of McNamee to further extend the critique I began to make in the chapter vis-à-vis the Zapatistas and Badiou's decision to abandon vanguard politics.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ‘Maverick dreamtime:’ ideologies of form, religious discourse and primitive accumulation in northern Irish Noir Fiction.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter further develops my consideration of the articulation of Marxism and Christianity in Badiou’s work elaborated in Chapters One and Two. It does so via a close critical analysis of Eoin McNamee’s northern Irish noir crime thriller *The Ultras* (2004), alongside a comprehensive discussion of the historical, political, cultural, intellectual and literary formations with which it engages. This encompasses a critique of the dominant paradigms of Marxist historiography and Irish literary criticism, and focuses in particular upon the significance of the dirty war of the 1970s and the negative position of the thriller form in debates over aesthetics and political change in the North. Drawing upon the Althusserian critical practice of symptomatic reading outlined in the introduction, my reading of the novel identifies and explores the implications of a provocative discrepancy between the text’s levels of representation and figuration. In so doing, I set out to show that the novel’s attempt to represent the *ambivalent historical stasis* of contemporary northern Ireland – in particular the entrenchment of traditional forms of communitarian division and the persistence of ‘dark forces’ within the security services in the new and officially celebrated era of cross-community power-sharing and peace – is undercut by figurations of the messianic linked to decisive moments of *historical change*. Paying particular attention to McNamee’s engagement with the generic conventions of crime fiction and their articulation in the novel with previously radical cultural forms such as Renaissance tragedy and messianic Christianity, I argue that the formal contradictions and faultlines that I identify open up a critical space within which to re-work and further develop Badiou’s Pauline response to the crisis of twentieth century communism.

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<sup>1</sup> Eoin McNamee, *The Ultras*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p.251. All future references to this novel will appear in parenthesis within the text.

### **‘The legacy of history’**

With its dedication towards a ‘fresh start’, the reconciliatory stance of the 1998 Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement signalled an attempt to move beyond the violent political, “religious” and “ethno-sectarian” divides of Northern Irish history.<sup>2</sup> After almost 30 years of civil war and almost half-a-millennium of struggle over Irish independence, the historic developments of the past decade and a half have seemingly embodied the long held hope of the British and Irish States to ‘remove the conflict’ and, in the words of The Joint Declaration on Peace, issued on 15 December 1993, to overcome ‘the legacy of history’.<sup>3</sup> The transformation of these hopes into the reality of a ‘fresh start’ is best exemplified by institutional developments in the spheres of politics and law and order. Thus for governments on both sides of the Irish Sea, the power-sharing agreement between previously warring Irish Republican nationalists and Unionist loyalists, the reformation of the highly militarised and *de facto* loyalist Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) into the new Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and the historic acceptance of its jurisdiction by the leading Republican Party, Sinn Féin, are generally celebrated as evidence of a progressive movement towards a more open and prosperous liberal-democratic and law-abiding community.

In a preface to a collection entitled *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Irelands* (2001), the then Irish President Mary McAleese heralded the Agreement’s attempt to move beyond the exclusionary and violent separations that had scarred both unionist and nationalist communities in the North. Celebrating the advent of a new era of ‘equality and parity of esteem’, McAleese hailed the creation of an inclusive constitutional framework within which ‘both main traditions can come together to work for their mutual benefits’.<sup>4</sup> The notion that a ‘solution’ to the identitarian divides had finally been found, that the Province could now step forward into the daylight of modernity, has also been echoed

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<sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland Office, *The Good Friday Agreement*, 10 April 1998, <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf)> [accessed 12 August 2015].

<sup>3</sup> *The Joint Declaration of 15 December 1993 (Downing St. Declaration)* <<http://web.archive.org/web/20130404221626/http://dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=8734>> [accessed 12 August 2015].

<sup>4</sup> Mary McAleese ‘Preface’, in Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd, *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Irelands*, (Cork: Cork University Press in association with the Centre for Cross Border Studies Armagh, 2001), p.vii-x, (p.vii).

across the water in Great Britain. In an interview with the *Belfast Telegraph*, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared the northern Irish political settlement an inspiration all 'round the world'.<sup>5</sup>

In keeping with the prevailing neo-liberal narratives of market-liberalization that dominate Parliamentary politics in the North Atlantic, the optimism of both the British and Irish states has been brought together in a key ideological narrative: that the mutual benefits of peace are to be achieved through economic advancement.<sup>6</sup> In the case of northern Ireland, this sentiment is perhaps best captured, as Peter Shirlow notes, by the recent metamorphosis of war-marked Belfast into a site of global living. After intense economic investment, the city, with its new waterfront developments, has been transformed into a modern if generic cosmopolitan locale whose new-fangled opulence signals a state of relative normality and security that is a far cry from the violence of the past.<sup>7</sup> "Look at this town. Look at this whole place," implores the police officer, Mallon, in McNamee's *The Ultras*. "Things are all changed now" (p.12). The sense of relief that 'things are all changed now' reoccurs throughout the genre of Emerald Noir. As Gerry Fegan, the repentant ex-paramilitary protagonist of Stuart Neville's *The Twelve*, observes, Belfast is now populated by 'students and young professionals' who frequent the new 'designer boutiques, restaurants and wine bars' to 'buy overpriced coffee without fear'. In other words, the city now 'belongs', as Fegan notes with some relief, to people who were probably not 'even born when they scraped body parts off the streets with shovels'.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the promissory discourses of economic advancement and the sense that 'that things are all changed now', the commercial benefits of peace in the North have yet to break-down the long-standing divide of the 'two-traditions' paradigm of northern Irish society. This type of 'communitarian' divide reductively views the recent violence in terms of an obdurate sectarian antagonism upheld by two mutually opposed populations.<sup>9</sup> More

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<sup>5</sup> David Gordon, 'Tony Blair: Northern Ireland peace is an inspiration to the world', *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 September 2010 <<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/tony-blair-northern-ireland-peace-is-an-inspiration-to-the-world-14933852.html>> [accessed: 19 October 2011].

<sup>6</sup> Peter Shirlow, 'Belfast: A segregated city', in *Northern Ireland after the Troubles*, ed. by Colin Coulter and Michael Murray, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp.73-87, (p.73).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Neville, *The Twelve*, (London: Harvill Seeker, 2009), p.27.

<sup>9</sup> Stefanie Lehner, *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature: Tracing Counter-Histories*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.99.

strikingly, however, this communitarian outlook or, in Shirlow's words, 'institutionalised sectarianism' is, in fact, enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement itself. 'The fact that members of the Northern Ireland Assembly must designate themselves as nationalist, unionist, or other and that all decisions must have majority support from both nationalist and unionist blocs,' observes Shirlow, 'means that the capacity of alternative political interpretations is hindered.'<sup>10</sup>

The entrenchment of this older ideological paradigm does not end with the institutions of elite politics. The institutionalisation of these ideological divides in the Agreement and the Assembly at Stormont is also replicated geographically in the residential margins of the province. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, six new "peace walls" or interfaces between working class loyalist and nationalist communities have been constructed and eleven existing barriers have been extended in Belfast alone.<sup>11</sup> With the number of 'peace walls' throughout the province now greater than during the Provisional IRA's aborted war of national liberation (1969-1997), the proliferation and hardening of established social and cultural divides suggests that the official discourses of economic new dawns and cross-community progress have yet actually to cross let alone break-down the internal borders of the North's troubled past.

In addition to these institutional and ideological contradictions, repeated accusations of 'dark forces' operating in the security services against Sinn Féin have served to highlight the sense of historical ambivalence further. The revelation that accusations of a Republican spy ring scandal at Stormont in 2005 were actually the product of British agents who had infiltrated Sinn Féin was widely viewed as evidence of a plot to destabilise the power-sharing government by security elements opposed to Sinn Féin.<sup>12</sup> And more recently, a variety of claims about political policing and attempts to protect the British state from investigation into accusations of historical collusion with paramilitary forces in the war against the IRA, along with the arrest of Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams in 2014, have led to

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Shirlow, 'Northern Ireland: a reminder from the present', in *The End of Irish History: Critical Approaches to the Celtic Tiger*, ed. by Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2003), pp.192-207, (p.196).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Shirlow, 'Belfast: A segregated city' p.79; Jonathan Tonge, *Northern Ireland: Hot Spots in Global Politics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p.212.

<sup>12</sup> Henry McDonald, 'Donaldson "was not the only spy in Sinn Féin"', *Observer*, 18 December 2005, <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/dec/18/uk.northernireland>> [accessed 13 August 2015].



suspensions over the extent to which the underlying political forces in the North have moved on since 'the Troubles'. Adams was released without charge. However, the fact that this very public detention took place in the midst of a European election campaign in which Sinn Féin was expected to make influential gains in the South and in the wake of the party's signature to US proposals for an independent truth recovery process which unionists and the British government refused, suggested to many people that policing in the North had yet to overcome the violent legacy of the past.<sup>13</sup> For Republicans, this event signalled, in the words of the Deputy First Minister and former IRA commander Martin McGuinness, that 'dark forces' continued to operate within the PSNI. With McGuinness' identification of 'dark forces' apparently based upon evidence offered by what he called 'reform' elements inside the same police force and the lack of any 'new evidential material' cited as one of reasons for the Public Prosecution Service's refusal to pursue dated and unproven charges against Adams, a threatening sense of historical ambivalence seems to counteract all attempts at 'reform.'<sup>14</sup> This sense of ambivalence was heightened by the recent call of the Police Ombudsman, supported by Sinn Féin in this instance, to prosecute the same PSNI chief constable who oversaw Adam's detention, Matt Baggott, for failing to release police files on over sixty killings that suggest British collusion with paramilitary forces.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Donald, 'Northern Ireland talks collapse as main unionist parties reject Haass proposals', *Guardian*, 31 December 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/31/northern-ireland-talks-collapse-as-main-unionist-parties-reject-haass-proposals>> [accessed 12 August 2015]; Gerry Adams, 'The Jean McConville killing: I'm completely innocent. But what were my accusers' motives?', *Guardian*, 7 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/07/jean-mcconville-killing-gerry-adams-innocent-accusers>> [accessed 13 August 2015]; Henry McDonald, 'Gerry Adams's arrest a bid to influence elections, says Martin McGuinness', *Guardian*, 1 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/01/gerry-adams-arrest-martin-mcguinness-elections-northern-ireland>> [accessed 12 August 2015].

<sup>14</sup> Henry McDonald, 'Martin McGuinness and Sinn Féin on the horns of a policing dilemma', *Guardian*, 2 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/02/martin-mcguinness-sinn-fein-horns-policing-dilemma>> [accessed 12 August 2015]; Henry McDonald, 'Gerry Adams: I complained formally over police detention', *Guardian*, 7 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/07/gerry-adams-complains-to-police-ombudsman-over-detention>> [accessed 12 August 2015]; <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/02/martin-mcguinness-sinn-fein-horns-policing-dilemma>>

<sup>15</sup> Henry McDonald, 'Northern Ireland police chief faces legal action over unreleased Troubles files', *Guardian*, 3 June 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jun/03/northern-ireland-police-chief-matt-baggott-legal-action-troubles-files>> [accessed 12 August 2015]; Henry McDonald, 'Gerry Adams arrest defended by Northern Ireland police chief', *Guardian*, 6 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/06/gerry-adams-arrest-defended-northern-ireland-police-chief>> [accessed 12 August 2015]

‘This Agreement is about your future’ reads the Belfast declaration.<sup>16</sup> Yet, far from overcoming the legacy of the past, the ‘future’ dawn signalled by the politics of the coercive state apparatus seem devoid of the utopian co-ordinates that the Agreement announces.<sup>17</sup> The point here then is that intransigent shards of past history, especially at the level of politics, continue to preclude the fresh start hoped for in official declarations of reform. In other words, the totemic signals of new economic development and celebratory rhetoric from the two governments are contradicted by the persistent return of a disavowed history and the sense of a barely repressed threat from ‘dark forces’ in the security forces. “‘What could be more sinister than a rural policeman with a baton in his hand?’”, muses the police officer Mallon, in a more cynical and ultimately ambivalent turn in his discussion of the peace process from *The Ultras*. “‘Longheld generational hatred and misunderstanding mixed with fear in his eyes. The smell of teargas. The sense of events taking a turn that no one could have predicted, events spiralling out of control’” (p.12).

It is precisely these persistent notions of ‘longheld generational hatred’ and ‘events spiralling out of control’ that this chapter’s analysis of McNamee’s *The Ultras* sets out to explore. McNamee is a central figure in the emergent literary field of Emerald Noir.<sup>18</sup> Along with writers such as Glenn Paterson and more recently Stuart Neville, McNamee draws upon the ‘rank, allusive narrative’ form of the noir-thriller to engage with the vast transformations of the province.<sup>19</sup> Despite the official political rhetoric of progress and the celebrated economic development of Belfast, Emerald Noir is broadly characterised by a striking suspicion of what Eoin McNamee himself has called ‘the noble ends of justice, or reconciliation, or anything else so civic-sounding and unattainable.’<sup>20</sup>

*The Ultras* seems to express this sense of suspicion in its characterisation of the self-styled ‘rogue cop’ Blair Agnew (p.36). The narrative follows this disgraced former RUC officer in

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<sup>16</sup> Northern Ireland Office, *The Good Friday Agreement*, 10 April 1998, <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf)> [accessed 12/08/2015]

<sup>17</sup> Stefanie Lehner, *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature*, pp.98-99.

<sup>18</sup> See Thomas Rudman, “‘The Place You Don’t Belong’: Border-Crossing and Ambivalence in the Northern Irish Noir-Thriller’, in *Border Crossings: Narration, Nation and Imagination in Scots and Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. by Colin Younger, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013) pp.249-269.

<sup>19</sup> Eoin McNamee, *Resurrection Man*, (London: Picador, 1995), p.233.

<sup>20</sup> Eoin McNamee, ‘Hand-held narrative’, *Guardian*, 30 April 2004, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/30/news.comment>> [accessed 12 August 2015].

his investigations into to a 'ghostly infrastructure' behind the celebrated era of progress (p.10). This refers to a series of unresolved extra-judicial killings undertaken by members of the security forces, including Agnew, during the 1970s. It is here that we can get a sense of how reconciliation, justice or historical change are problematic within this example of a noir narrative. While he admits to involvement in the bloodshed of the 1970s, the novel offers no real evidence of historical development or ethical transformation in his behaviour in the present day. In both the 1970s and the post-Troubles era that constitutes the novel's present, Agnew's investigations are overseen by elusive figures tied to the British security apparatus: the MI6 chief Clyde Knox in the 1970s, and the police officer Mallon in the present.

What is so interesting about *Emerald Noir* and *The Ultras* is that the thematic focus on unsolved crimes from the war, along with repetitive metaphors of temporal border-crossings between past and present, intersect with the noir-thriller form to produce a series of ambivalent messages that often exceed or contradict the text's attempt at narrative closure. As I have argued elsewhere, the ghostly hauntings and final recourse to a type of 'older', 'Troubles-era' extra-judicial violence to restore order and thus provide an imaginary resolution to these novels, articulates a sense of insufficiency within the current rhetoric of temporal beginnings as well as the new institutional arrangements of the North.<sup>21</sup> Rather than demarcating a progressive movement towards the 'noble ends of justice [...] or anything else so civic sounding,' these texts thus seem to be caught up in state of historical stasis, or as Eamonn Hughes has described it, a state of 'limbo'.<sup>22</sup>

*Emerald Noir* largely follows an orthodox noir trope in narrating a fictional outsider and their struggle against forces representing the past, for example, Gerry Fegan in Stuart Neville's *The Twelve* and Ken Avery in Glenn Patterson's *That Which Was*. In contrast, McNamee's attempt to reveal a 'ghostly infrastructure' (p.10) behind the narratives of social progress has been characterised by an exploration of controversial historical figures from "the Troubles" – the Loyalist Shankill Butcher Lenny Murphy in *Resurrection Man* (1994) and then Robert Nairac in *The Ultras*. This type of "faction" is continued in his *Blue*

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Rudman, "'The Place You Don't Belong': Border-Crossing and Ambivalence in the Northern Irish Noir-Thriller' in Colin Younger ed. *Border Crossings: Narration, Nation and Imagination in Scots and Irish Literature and Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp.248-269.

<sup>22</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Limbo', *The Irish Review*, No.33 (Spring 2005) pp.138-141.

*Trilogy*.<sup>23</sup> In these novels, McNamee adopts an earlier historical focus. The drama in these novels centres on the legal and political corruption associated with the post-war Northern Irish Attorney, General Lance Curran. Viewed through the theoretical lens of Marxism, Curran arguably emerges as a type of Lukácsian mediocre figure through which the pre-history of “the Troubles” is explored.<sup>24</sup> And in terms of literary lineage, McNamee’s use of the noir thriller to produce ‘factions’ of historical events and characters has led to frequent comparisons with the works of James Ellroy and David Peace.<sup>25</sup>

The central historical figure from *The Ultras*, Robert Nairac, was a military intelligence liaison officer for the RUC Special Branch and the SAS during the 1970s. As the novel suggests, this was a period of ‘chaotic events, bombing, sudden and inexplicable death’ (p.87) that is now commonly referred to as the ‘dirty war’ in Ireland.<sup>26</sup> On the night of Saturday 14 May 1977 during his fourth tour of Ireland, it is alleged that Robert Nairac was abducted from the Three Steps Inn at Drumintree, South Armagh whilst conducting undercover operations against the IRA. Two days later, on Monday 16 May, the Provisional IRA released a statement announcing that they had ‘arrested’ and ‘executed’ him after an ‘interrogation in which he admitted he was an SAS man.’<sup>27</sup> Nairac’s body has never been found and his fate is still a mystery. Nairac is thus named as one of a number of IRA victims known as the “disappeared”. These cases are under investigation by the PSNI’s Historical Inquires Team and continue to play a prominent role in current political debates within the North and beyond.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Eoin McNamee, *The Blue Tango*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2001); *Blue Orchid*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2007); *Blue Is The Night*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Georg Lukács formulates the concept of the mediocre hero in *The Historical Novel* trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Merlin, 1962). The concept refers to a figure whose life experiences and capacity to traverse different social realms are expressive of structural relationships within the social totality and their historical development.

<sup>25</sup> Declan Hughes, ‘Fixed in the ghoul-light of murder’, *Irish Times*, 23 October 2010, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/fixed-in-the-ghoul-light-of-murder-1.667693>> [accessed 12 August 2015]; Martin Doyle, ‘Eoin McNamee: a capital crime writer’, *Irish Times*, 26 June 2015, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/eoin-mcnamee-a-capital-crime-writer-1.2263876>> [accessed 12 August 2015].

<sup>26</sup> Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War*, (London: Arrow Books, 1991); Niall O’Dochartaigh, “‘Everyone Trying”, the IRA Ceasefire, 1975: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?”, *Field Day Review*, Vol. 7 (2011), 50-77.

<sup>27</sup> In Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War*, p.172.

<sup>28</sup> Henry McDonald, ‘Funeral held for IRA ‘disappeared’ man’, *Guardian*, 14 November 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/nov/14/funeral-ira-disappeared-man-brendan-megraw>> [accessed 14 August 2015].

Since the late 1970s, a number of IRA operatives have been imprisoned and subsequently released on appeal for participation in Nairac's murder and disappearance. Claims have circulated that his body was either buried in Ravensdale Forest across the border in the South or put through a mincer at a nearby meat processing factory. Despite the posthumous award of a George Cross, 'a buzz of rumour and hearsay' surrounds Nairac's activities in the north of Ireland during the dirty war (p.73). A variety of 'whistle-blowers' including Colin Wallace, a former Army intelligence officer, Fred Holroyd, a former intelligence liaison officer, and John Weir, a member of the UVF and a former officer in the RUC's anti-terrorist unit, the Special Patrol Group (SPG), have repeatedly alleged that Nairac was involved in the Dublin-Monaghan bombings of 1974, the cross-border murder of the IRA commander John Francis Green in January 1975 and the Miami Showband massacre in July 1975.<sup>29</sup> These accusations were repeated in the 1993 Yorkshire Television documentary, *Hidden Hand*, while Ken Livingstone used his maiden speech as an MP in the Houses of Commons in 1987 to suggest that 'it was likely' that Nairac had organised the UVF Miami Showband Massacre.<sup>30</sup> Such episodes of the dirty war along with the aborted "shoot to kill" inquiry by John Stalker are frequently related to MI5's attempts to subvert the left-wing Labour administration of the 1970s.<sup>31</sup> I shall discuss the significance of these issues in relation to the question of Marxist historiography and the concept of primitive accumulation later in this chapter.

*The Ultras* is clearly based on extensive historical research. McNamee has worked through a similar body of material as Nairac's biographer, John Parker, and the relatively sympathetic investigative journalist Marin Dillon, as well as the work of more accusatory historians and journalists tied to Holroyd and Wallace such as Paul Foot and Duncan

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<sup>29</sup> Fred Holroyd and Nick Burbridge, *War Without Honour*, (Hull: Medium, 1989); Duncan Campbell, 'Victims of the "dirty war"', *New Statesman*, 4 May 1984, pp.8-10; Duncan Campbell 'Booby Traps and Bank Raids: Dirty War Part II', *New Statesman*, 11 May 1984, pp.12-14; Duncan Campbell, 'Terror Tactics: Dirty War Part III', *New Statesman*, 18 May 1984; Paul Foot, *Who Framed Colin Wallace?*, (London: Pan Books, 1990); Affidavit of John Weir, 31 January 1999, <[https://wikispooks.com/wiki/Document:John\\_Weir\\_Affidavit](https://wikispooks.com/wiki/Document:John_Weir_Affidavit)> [accessed 12 August 2015].

<sup>30</sup> *Hidden Hand: The Forgotten Massacre*, First Tuesday, Yorkshire Television, first screened ITV, 6 July 1993; Ken Livingstone, *You Can't Say That: Memoirs*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), pp 294-6; Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War*, p.211.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Foot, *Who Framed Colin Wallace?*, pp.37-114; Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) p.41; Niall O'Dochartaigh, "'Everyone Trying'", the IRA Ceasefire, 1975: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?', *Field Day Review*, Vol. 7 (2011), 50-77.

Campbell.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, most of these figures are referenced in the novel itself. One of the central characters, David Erskine, an expert in PysOps and central figure in what is known as the 'corridor', the location of the various 'intelligence agencies [...] MRU, PsyOps, 14<sup>th</sup> Int, MI5' at Theipval barracks, is arguably a fictional amalgamation of Holroyd and Wallace (p.42).

Unlike the rather definitive yet competing conclusions of the historical accounts of Nairac's life, *The Ultras* arguably follows the work of writers such as James Ellroy and David Peace in its ambivalent response to both the history and central character it portrays. As McNamee states in an interview: 'you would expect to acquire some intimacy with your subject, but Nairac resisted enquiry and intimacy. At the end of the book I adopted Nietzsche's dictum that when you look long into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you. Substitute void for abyss and you have the way I felt about Robert Nairac.'<sup>33</sup>

What is interesting about this statement is that the lack of 'intimacy' declared by McNamee is actually contradicted by the narrative drama of the novel: the text, like Blair Agnew, remains 'all wrapped up in Nairac, all wrapped up in the past' (p.12). Indeed, it is this sense of being 'all wrapped up in the past' that finally sets McNamee's work apart from other examples of Emerald Noir. Despite the 'persistent rumour' and infamy that has accrued to Nairac's legacy since his disappearance in 1977 - 'that he led death squads. That his body had been spirited away' (p.251) - the present day Agnew remains obsessed with the 'different agenda' represented by the 'dead captain' (p.37):

Agnew did not want to leave it alone. He felt that there might be a correspondence between the confession that he had given and the documentation that he had collected relating to Robert' (p.144).

Rather than attempt to break free from the violence of the past, Agnew thus seeks meaning for his own life in the rumours and histories associated with Nairac: 'Agnew did not want to leave it alone.'

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<sup>32</sup> John Parker, *Death of a Hero: Captain Robert Nairac, GC and the Undercover War in Northern Ireland*, (London: Metro, 1999); John Parker, *Secret Hero: The Life and Mysterious Death of Captain Robert Nairac*, (London: Metro, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> In Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland: The Place of Art/The Art of Place*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2005), p.88.

If there is a type of salvation offered in the novel, then I would argue that this is to be found neither in a conventional atonement for past crimes nor in a renunciation of the 'structure of dread' that emerges around the violence attributed to Nairac. More controversially, salvation is promised *through* Nairac himself:

'There were those who did not believe that Robert was dead. There were those who believed that he had been spirited away [...] They needed Robert to help them dream their way through this' (p.13).

As this quotation reveals, the primary reason for the text's concern with the 'past' is that Agnew's investigation of the dirty war during the 1970s produces a type of 'maverick dreamtime' or messianic energy around a vanguard, militant figure from this period: 'they needed Robert to help them dream their way through this'. The messianic and political significance of being 'all wrapped up in the past' not only distinguishes this novel from other examples of Emerald Noir, but also justifies the extended focus on *The Ultras* in this thesis. While the novel engages with exactly the same historical period as that discussed by Badiou, its configuration of messianic energy also chimes with his recent Pauline turn. Focusing specifically on the ideological dimensions of McNamee's engagement with the crime form (and its articulation with other traditions and literary formations), the central theoretical argument of this chapter is that a materialist analysis of the novel allows us to re-work both the historical grounds and conclusions of Badiou's decision to abandon the violent politics of the real that characterised twentieth century communism. My aim is to explore the ways in which the contradictions and types of formal rupture produced by the novel's representation of this apparently unfinished history or 'maverick dreamtime' can be used critically to extend Badiou's Pauline response to this same period of political crisis. This returns us to the central premise of this thesis: that the theological turn is not so much an archive of political defeat, but rather a means through which to envisage and enact an end to the deadlock of contemporary politics. As I will show, the messianic figuration of an apparently right-wing figure in relation to images of leftist politics serves to fortify my earlier argument about the egalitarian foundations and intransigent materialist kernel of Pauline Christianity. My critique of *The Ultras* thus sets out to demonstrate the political importance of Badiou's reading of 'Paul [as] our contemporary' and, in so doing, counters the work of theorists such as Bruno Bosteels and Daniel Bensaïd who interpret this turn

towards theology as a symptom of political weakness on the part of contemporary communist thinkers.

These are difficult arguments to make, not least in the specific context of northern Ireland, marked as it is by dominant liberal-democratic celebrations of peaceful economic advancements and the not unrelated political, historical and religious obfuscations tied to the history and significance of what is pejoratively known as ‘the Troubles’. In order to get a sense of the stakes involved in my discussion of *The Ultras*, I want to begin then with a short, analytical comparison with another example of the genre, Glenn Patterson’s *That Which Was* (2004). Published in the same year as McNamee’s *The Ultras*, *That Which Was* also focuses on the hangover from the dirty war of the 1970s. As a character in Patterson’s novel notes, ‘there are a lot of damaged people walking about this city’ and both he and McNamee engage with these ‘damaged people’ and their relationship to the celebrated but fragile sense of peace in the post-Agreement North.<sup>34</sup> However, as I demonstrate below, what I identify as the neoliberal solution of *That Which Was* is quite precisely the type of solution that my reading of *The Ultras* seeks to challenge.

**‘The same handful of incidents cropped up in every book he had ever looked at on the subject’: free markets and conservative reaction in *That Which Was*<sup>35</sup>**

Patterson and McNamee are often presented in oppositional terms both in relation to their very different literary styles but also in identitarian terms – McNamee’s grew up in Kilkeel, a small town south of the Mourne Mountains in a catholic community and Patterson in a protestant community in Belfast. These differences are encapsulated in Patterson’s denunciation of the glorification of violence and attendant depiction of Belfast as a ‘necropolis’ that he identifies in McNamee’s debut novel *Resurrection Man*, a judgement that arguably reflects the contrasting perspectives of the communities in which they were raised and Patterson’s explicit desire to reject the “language of Ulster Loyalism and Irish Republicanism.”<sup>36</sup> In *That Which Was* and *The Ultras*, however, Patterson and McNamee both endeavour to explore the legacy of this period of violence. As such, there are now a

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<sup>34</sup> Glenn Patterson, *That Which Was*, London: Penguin (2005) p.67. All future references to this novel will appear in parenthesis within the text.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>36</sup> Glenn Patterson, ‘Reclaiming the Writing From the Walls’ in *The Independent* 11 9 September 1994.



number of scholarly responses to *Emerald Noir* that compare and arguably conflate the novels on the grounds that they both engage with an ethics of remembrance.<sup>37</sup> Thus Eamonn Hughes elides their aesthetic and thematic differences in order to emphasise an apparently shared commitment to bear witness to the past:

Despite their many differences, of style, tone, content and motive, both novels can be thought of [...] as memorial works' writes Hughes, 'not simply because they seek to remember the past, but more because they recognise the damage incurred by forgetting or trying to forget it.'<sup>38</sup>

Stefanie Lehner offers a similar response: 'Trying to take account of the full weight of memory, both works confront the damaging effects incurred by archive fever':<sup>39</sup>

...while acknowledging the pain that encumbers the process of remembrance, they both also recognise what Derrida (1995:51) calls "the violence of forgetting": the crime of wiping away the traces of a past that would be much rather forgotten or erased, but still has many questions to ask of that which is to come.<sup>40</sup>

One of my central aims in the following discussion is to challenge this alignment of the novels as 'memorial works' whose ultimate value is to be found in the difficult but ethical imperative to remember or rather *not* to forget. In their overarching focus on ethics, Hughes and Lehner fail to attend to the crucial question of mediation. While both accounts refer briefly to the thriller form, their readings ultimately collapse the cultural into the ethical, privileging the latter over the former. In failing to foreground the significance of narrative form and genre in mediating these memorial reflections on the past, neither critic is in a position to address the very different ideological positions and 'imaginary resolutions' encoded in each novel.

Patterson's *That Which Was* is underpinned by a comedic narrative structure that is articulated alongside an expression of the North's new found ecumenism inextricably related to the ideology of economic advancement that I describe above. The novel concludes at Christmas in the year 2000 with the celebrated visit of the then US President Bill Clinton to the Odyssey Complex, one of the new waterfront developments noted by

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<sup>37</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Limbo' in *The Irish Review* no.33 (Spring, 2005) pp.138-141; Stefanie Lehner, *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature*, esp. Chapter Four "'Measuring Silences": The Northern Irish Peace Process as *Arkhe-Taintment*' pp.98-114

<sup>38</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Limbo' p.141

<sup>39</sup> Stefanie Lehner, *Subaltern Ethics in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Literature*, p.114

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Peter Shirlow in his discussion of the economic changes that characterise contemporary Belfast. Indeed, the Odyssey Complex, and its economic articulation of the North's entrance into daylight of modernity, plays a key signifying role throughout the novel, not least in the conclusion of the novel that seemingly proposes that the troubles of the past will be mitigated by a neoliberal future.

The narrative follows the efforts of a Presbyterian Minister turned detective hero, Ken Avery, in his quest to help another apparently repentant ex-killer, Larry, who thinks that he might have killed three people during the 'one long horror movie' of violence that was the 'Northern Irish seventies' (p.66). Larry's inconclusive vacillations around the possibility that he is a killer stem from his related and seemingly preposterous claim that he subsequently had his memory erased by the British security services: 'But messing about with people's memories,' despairs Avery, 'it's like something out of John Le Carré'(p.104)

Despite his reference to John Le Carré and the sense of incredulity that it implies, Avery's subsequent investigation into Larry's role in 'the Northern Irish seventies' begins to uncover real historical events of Le Carré-esque proportions:

[ ... ] fake laundries and secret agents running massage parlours.....the brave – or foolhardy – SAS captain, captured so deep in enemy territory and buried somewhere so deep that to this day no trace of him had ever been found; his earlier alleged involvement in the Dublin and Monaghan car bombings (pp.104-6).

The final reference here is to Robert Nairac, whose 'brave' or 'foolhardy' involvement in this 'horror movie' is, as I discuss above, at the centre of McNamee's *The Ultras*. However, by the end of *That Which Was*, it appears that what Avery has really been witnessing is Larry's descent into a type of mental illness rather than the darker secrets of real history:

The deceased's estranged wife had explained to them [the police] that he had a history of delusion and depression. Sometimes in order to carry out the fatal act the would-be suicide needed to feel he was being pushed to it. Chances are, Larry had been looking for a corner to be backed into (p.265).

The pathologisation of Larry's fixation with the past shifts the focus from the collective to the individual, from systemic violence (the claims of brainwashing, state collusion in terrorism and extrajudicial murder) to subjective despair. Moreover, it does so in a manner that seeks to disarticulate one from the other – Larry is presented as a 'would-be suicide' looking for reason to die rather than someone whose suicidal impulse has a relationship to

the traumatic consequences of living in the midst of a longstanding and brutal conflict. Nonetheless, as Eamonn Hughes notes, Avery's ultimate uncertainty as to the validity of Larry's claims seems to indicate that there is enough ambivalence about the past to 'suggest that not all mysteries can be resolved.'<sup>41</sup> However, in terms of the present discussion of economic and historical progress, what is interesting about *That Which Was* is that the novel suggests that such a backward focus is ultimately destructive. Avery's investigation jeopardizes his own relationship with his wife and young family while Larry's illness culminates in suicide. Importantly, this suicide, and the attendant recognition of Larry's illness, precludes the planned-for climax to the investigation: a spectacular disruption of Bill Clinton's visit to Belfast's new Odyssey complex during December, 2000 in the final year of his presidency.

The Odyssey complex – 'officially the country's premier entertainment venue', to use the words of the Northern Irish Tourist Board – plays an important role in the ideological significations produced by the novel.<sup>42</sup> The first reference to it is comedic. Whilst walking through the city centre a group of German tourists ask Avery about the location of the Waterfront Hall. In the process, their 'spokesman' 'awkwardly' reveals their ultimate disappointment in finding no reference to 'the Troubles' in the new-fangled city centre of Belfast: 'where is *everything*, you know?' Avery's interaction here is both empathetic, 'in Berlin, Belfast's erstwhile wall-twin, he might ask the same thing', yet at once revealing in his almost childlike enthusiasm for the sense of *novum*: 'He told them there was an even bigger arena, the Odyssey, now being built just across the mouth of the Lagan from the Waterfront. Worth a look at least' (pp.17-18). The second major reference to the Complex crystallises the issues of generation and economics even further. Attending to a dying man at the behest of his daughter, Avery is told that her father once worked in the 'old ropeworks' near East Bread Street.

'Oh, it's all changed round there, said the daughter. Who'd thought, a golf shop? That right, Daddy? It's like that big thing they're building now in the middle of the shipyard. – That big thing was the Odyssey: cinemas, restaurants, and home for the city's instant ice-hockey team. – How many people do you think's going to get work out of that?' (p.90)

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<sup>41</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Limbo' p.140 in *The Irish Review* no.33 (Spring, 2005) pp.138-141

<sup>42</sup> Northern Irish Tourist Board, <http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/search.aspx?Keywords=odyssey> [accessed 21 August 2015]

The post-industrial nostalgia of the old man's daughter is not shared by Avery. Yet the significance of the Odyssey Complex in relation to questions of family and the new retains its force, for later in the novel, upon hearing of 'Clinton's Christmas Odyssey', Avery 'decided that he would move heaven and earth to be there. Take Ruth out of school early, bring her with him. A real live American president in her own backyard. A *brand spanking new arena*. She would love it' (p.170).

By the time of 'Clinton's Christmas Odyssey', however, Avery's near obsession with Larry's claims about the past has precipitated a domestic break-down: Avery's wife Frances has moved out of the family home taking Ruth and her new born brother with her. That Avery gives up his plan for Ruth and instead, decides to interrupt Clinton's show in order to present Larry's historical claims to the media, maintains the parallel drawn between nostalgia, childhood and the dizzying prospects of historical change signified in relation to the Odyssey Complex throughout the novel. However, when Avery finally realises that 'he had been played for a fool' by Larry, the interruption of 'Clinton's Christmas Odyssey' event does not take place (p.265).

The penultimate chapter of the novel thus takes place on the day of Clinton's Odyssey visit which, in the utopian imaginary of the Belfast Agreement, is packed not only with 'members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly [who] stood and chatted across party lines' but also with children who 'played in an area roped off in front of the platform' (pp.259-60). The Odyssey thus offers an ecumenical and promissory image of the North's futurity, all of which is brought together by the 'platform' given to global political and economic power in the figure of the US president.

Beset by a bout of food poisoning from a pack of old sausages that he had defrosted in the microwave for dinner the night before, Avery initially watches these utopian images on television: 'the plan was not to go too early' (p.263). The choice of sausages is important here. Firstly, they are the preferred choice of food for Ruth, Avery's daughter; and second, they correspond to the alleged end-point of the 'foolhardy SAS captain' Nairac whose body was rumoured to have been put through a meat processing plant by the IRA. With the food-poisoned Avery unable to drive to the Odyssey, Larry thus takes the wheel of Avery's car and it is at this moment that his duplicity is revealed.

This moment of anagnorisis follows Aristotle's classic definition of revelation as 'a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune'.<sup>43</sup> Faced with Avery's hostility at his duplicity, Larry jumps to his death in the neighbouring electrical substation. In the meantime, Avery does not proceed to the arena and is overtaken by illness. Yet in the process of his sickness he is crucially able to get the historical 'shit out of his system' (p.264). A type of purging thus takes place, both metaphorical and physical. Avery is freed from the remnants of the dirty war and history, precipitating a Yuletide reunification with his young family. The restorative logic of the novel's comedic conclusion, articulated with the success of Clinton's visit, a leading figure in the peace-process and arguably the leading political figure of neoliberal globalisation in this period of history, thus suggests that the novel's imaginary resolution to the social problems of the past is to be found in the nexus of reconciled families and free markets. The future of North's cross community power-agreements, the local politicians 'who chatted across party lines' in front of playing children, is thus secured via a purging of history and the playing out of specific economic narratives.

This association between traditional family values and the free market recalls the contradictions identified in Badiou's periodization of the present as a period of conservative restoration or reaction in Chapters One and Two of this thesis. However, what is arguably more important here is that this reading of the promissory elements of neoliberal discourse, expressed via the mediations of literary form, directly situates the historical reality of present day life in the North in relation to the forces of capitalist modernity that prevailing interpretations of the earlier violence seemed to preclude. As Richard Kirkland has aptly observed, the North has long been a 'byword for all that is most restrictive, least constitutive and ultimately fossilised in cultural exchange.'<sup>44</sup> Within the mainstream British political discourse of the broadsheet newspaper, Kirkland notes, the instinctive response to events such as impasses over power-sharing negotiations or the violence around Orange Order parades is one of wilful incomprehension. This response ultimately leads to a vision of the conflict and its legacy in the reductive terms of an a-

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* ed. and trans. by James Hutton, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), p.46

<sup>44</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects*, (Liverpool: University Press, 2002), p.2.

historical moralism captured quite appositely in the question that Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd critique in their essay: 'Why can't you get along with each other?'.<sup>45</sup>

Patterson's version of Emerald Noir ultimately offers a promissory image of the North that is secured by its integration into the circuits of global capital. The ideological signification of the novel's terminus in the Odyssey Complex ('the country's premier entertainment venue') can be further developed in a Marxist context if we attend to the symbolism attributed to Homer's narrative of Odysseus's return home following the bloodshed of Troy. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer offer an interpretation of *The Odyssey* that positions Odysseus as the 'prototype of the bourgeois individual.'<sup>46</sup> Odysseus' status as the emblematic figure of bourgeois individualism is based on a reading of his epic struggle against the mythical forces of nature: 'Homeric narrative,' they state, is 'a description of the retreat of the individual from the mythic powers.'<sup>47</sup> In this liberation from the tradition of 'mythic powers', Adorno and Horkheimer posit that Odysseus exhibits the formative processes of secular or instrumental rationality that enabled the ascetic and disenchanted pioneers of Protestant capitalism to renounce earthly pleasures and turn nature into a source of production. As Marxists, however, Adorno and Horkheimer view this type of liberation or Enlightenment in dialectical terms. The ability of modern human beings to dominate nature emerges at the cost of the repression of their own internal nature; the awareness that man 'himself is nature.' 'Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken.' And they continue:

for the substance which is dominated, suppressed, and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than that very life as functions of which the achievements of self-preservation find their sole definition and determination: it is in fact, what is to be preserved.<sup>48</sup>

They thus configure their reading of capitalist subjectivity and modern rationality in the pessimistic terms of offered by Max Weber, a figure whose work I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. Adorno and Horkheimer focus in particular on Weber's famous

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.4; Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, "'Why can't you get along with each other?'" Culture, Structure and the Northern Ireland Conflict' in *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, ed. by Eamonn Hughes, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), pp.27-43.

<sup>46</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.43.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.46

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp.54-5

thesis on the economically productive consequences of disenchantment from *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and his essay, *Science as a Vocation* in which he envisages the resurrection of disenchanted gods in the form of depersonalized technical forces which re-embody the eternal struggle of myth in the modern world.<sup>49</sup>

In *That Which Was*, the self-abnegating emblem of bourgeois rationality, Odysseus, has been transformed into the space of consumption and entertainment. The Odyssey Complex, 'worth a look at least', is a post-industrial space that, as I note above, confounds the older families of Protestant West Belfast: 'it's all changed round there, said the daughter [...] How many people do you think's going to get work out of that?'. Yet it is arguably this shift to consumption and to the apparently unbounded sense of possibility to which it is allied that bespeaks the very (post) modernity of contemporary Belfast. As Fredric Jameson observes, the dominant neoliberal ideology of late capitalism is grounded on the assumption that the market and individual consumer choice should be the guiding principles of economics and politics, noting that the 'the slogan of the market and its accompanying rhetoric was devised to secure a decisive shift and displacement from the conceptuality of production to that of distribution and consumption'.<sup>50</sup> The ideological power of this movement from production to consumption is grounded in the assertion that human nature itself is reflected in the workings of the market and only fully realised when market forces prevail, re-envisioning choice and agency as consumer choice and spending power.<sup>51</sup> In the Introduction to this thesis I explained how this type of outlook can be understood in relation to Badiou's use of Pauline allegory from the Letter to the Galatians. The association between human nature and the market competition in neoliberal ideology parallels the 'Greek' philosophical discourses of *phusía*, the idea of man's natural and proper place in the cosmic order of the universe. By positing a different type of universalism that was not grounded upon the hierarchical logic of philosophical mastery, but rather upon a horizontal sense of fraternity ('ye are all one in Christ', Galatians 3.38), Paul sought

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<sup>49</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001); Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* ed. H.H.Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans.by Fredrick. G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T Press, 1990)

<sup>50</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.266.

<sup>51</sup> This is evident in Gary Becker's assertion that 'the economic approach provides an invaluable, unified framework for understanding all human behaviour'. See Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.14.

to overcome the ideological dominance of this type of naturalistic discourse. As I noted, Badiou's focus on Paul here emerges from his own attempts to contest the ideological hegemony of neoliberal discourse. A central part of Badiou's contemporary political strategy is to re-invigorate or re-legitimise ideas of equality by arguing that communism is the right hypothesis. The importance of this type of ideological struggle can be read in the way in which neoliberal discourses operate to provide imaginary solutions to the violent history that Patterson explores in *That Which Was*. In the climatic spectacle of political and cultural entertainment offered by the new Odyssey Complex in Belfast, one can see how the ideological alignment of metaphysics and free market consumption offers forth the apparent potential for man to be reconciled to his inner nature; the long war of the mythical forces, whether Homeric or sectarian, is now overcome.

Understood in this way, Patterson's novel arguably offers a neoliberal resolution to the 'long horror movie' of the seventies in the postulation of a relationship between economic progress and the North's new entrance into the peaceful world of liberal democratic modernity. For Marxists such as Badiou and Jameson, however, this type of association between a reconciled nature and the free market, is one of the central targets for critique, and it is, in part, this ideology of economic and ethical naturalism that my reading of McNamee's *The Ultras* sets out to challenge. In what follows, I develop a reading of McNamee's novel that troubles the progressive narrative of social, economic and cultural maturation and its comedic resolution in the Odyssey Complex that is offered in *That Which Was*. My aim here is to highlight how both the ambivalent legacy of "the Troubles" and the attendant contradictions in *The Ultras* – in particular the coding of the mythical right-wing figure from the dirty war in terms of utopian images of socialism – bespeak the fact that in the North, it is not simply ideology but also politics that constitutes a structure in dominance, or key site where Marxist analysis must focus its analytical gaze. This discussion provides the framework for my subsequent reworking of Badiou's historical analysis and particularly his rejection of the vanguard.

**'That someone would see things for what they were': Revelation and the Messianic Turn in McNamee's *The Ultras***

The promissory articulation of new birth and economic renewal in *That Which Was* ultimately appears to affirm the conservative ideology often attributed to the crime genre.



Patterson's novel concludes with a restoration of the status quo. Avery is reconciled with his wife and the threat posed by the eruption of the violence of the past into the present is defused both by the explanation of Larry's behaviour in pathological terms (his 'history of depression and delusion') and his suicide, a socially symbolic act of purgation that enables Avery to move on, unencumbered. McNamee's *The Ultras* offers a very different ideological solution to the legacy of the dirty war and in so doing departs from the conventions of the genre of the *roman noir* with which it engages. Whereas conventionally this form offers some type of resolution or justice, however partial or private as in the novels of Raymond Chandler, *The Ultras* refuses this kind of closure. Instead we are faced with a kind of 'void' that obscures the truth behind Nairac's activities and the meaning that we might attribute to them. By the end of the novel neither Mallon, the police officer nor Blair Agnew, the private investigator, is able to 'put an end to the Nairac story':

They [the state] could have practised policies of containment [...] But the lost Nairac was encroaching on them. Agnew thought of him as existing in maverick dreamtime. They wanted rid of him. He was the source of persistent rumour. That he led death squads. That his body had been spirited away. That we was still alive somewhere, in deep cover, awaiting an unknowable outcome. That he knew who they were and what they dreamed of (pp.250-1).

While Nairac's body cannot be found, his physical disappearance does not function in the same way as that of Larry in *That Which Was*. The 'lost Nairac' remains the 'source of persistent' and politically unfathomable 'rumour': 'the dreaming still lingered.' Even in the new era of peace, with its official programmes to leave behind the 'legacy of the past,' the 'Nairac story' cannot be kept silent. Unlike Avery's final 'I really can't say' with which his conversation with the past is brought to an end in *That Which Was*, the rumours about Nairac can neither be managed, contained nor laid to rest. In this respect, the ideology of *The Ultras* differs dramatically from the promissory and neoliberal inflected resolution of Patterson's *That Which Was*. There is no clear ideology of 'containment' in relation to the mysterious life and disappearance of Nairac as is the convention within the crime genre. If the crime form has historically taken the notion of legal and historical legitimation as its object, then *The Ultras* manifestly refuses this. Indeed, in terms of form, the only way in which *The Ultras* can come to a close is with the suicide of Agnew's teenage daughter Lorna at the novel's end in the millennial year 2000. In McNamee's novel, the new generation can neither outlive nor escape the encroachment of the past. In this respect, we can see how

the novel articulates a sense of the historical stasis that besets the North. There is no definitive structural transformation in the novelistic chronotope. The world of *The Ultras* is, rather, one in which notions of time and development are confused; the present 'awaiting an unknowable outcome' is simultaneously menaced and energized by a past that is 'still alive somewhere'. It is a world of 'maverick dreamtime'.

This sense of an inability to lay the past to rest is manifest in the narration of Lorna's suicide at the novel's conclusion that follows the same structure and narrative style as the imaginative re-enactment of Nairac's last known movements in the opening chapter of the novel. Both sections return almost obsessively to images and intimations of darkness, obscurity and concealment, culminating in Lorna's prayer like litany; 'to hang your hair over your face to hide you. That to hide you that to hide you' (p.256). Lorna's death actually implies that the 'necrotic darkness' behind Nairac's earlier death retains its determinant force in the present era of peace. In other words, the tragic nature of her suicide signifies that the darkness of the past with which the novel begins is still present at the text's conclusion. As Lorna's reveals, 'I can't help thinking about Robert I look at his photograph I look into his eyes. I can't see anything there' (p.255). As I argue later in relation to the messianic temporality that structures the narrative, her death is pre-figured by that of Robert's.

The key point at this stage, however, is that at the level of both content and form, *The Ultras* is unable to provide any kind of imaginary resolution to the questions it raises. Despite the parallels with *That Which Was*, the significance of the final suicides in both novels differs sharply. One offers a sense of futurity; Larry's death liquidates the North of the material presence of the older generation and thus liberates the present generation from what the novel suggests is a history of madness. In contrast, *The Ultras*, with its sense of 'maverick dreamtime,' indicates that the figures of the future, the children, are still not only caught up with but also powerless in the face of 'the necrotic darkness' of the past.

The aesthetic effect of this type of 'maverick dreamtime' in *The Ultras* is thus to produce an ideological representation of the present that is arguably much more politically and historically ambivalent than that offered in Patterson's *That Which Was*. In its articulation of economic festivities with the occasion of a new birth at Christmas, the comedic conclusion of *That Which Was* differs greatly from the tragic structure of *The Ultras*. 'The

world was born into hope with each and every one of our children,’ muses Avery upon the birth of his baby son (p.201). The comedic conclusion of Patterson’s novel thus suggests that the possibility of liberation from the mythical legacy of sectarian history can be achieved via what Badiou would call a form of ‘obscurantist’ historiography.<sup>52</sup> This is because Avery’s ‘hope’ for the future is ultimately predicated upon the non-admission of historical crimes of state collusion in violence against the Left and also interlaced with the re-marketing of the North as a site for foreign economic investment. This type of ideological resolution is thus politically and historically untenable for Marxism. With the suicide of Larry, the problematic figure from the dirty war, and the birth of a new child, it suggests that the legacy of the dirty war is to be left behind and a new start is available in the US and British backed world of capitalist economics. The subsequent reconciliation of the hero with his wife and Presbyterian congregation at this moment thus highlights the novel’s ideological appeasement of the dark, reactionary forces at play in social world of the “post-Troubles” hangover.

In contrast, McNamee’s novel ends with a moment of tragedy that is haunted by earlier literary figurations of the violent effects of historical crisis. The key image here is the suicide of Agnew’s daughter, Lorna and her drowning on the littoral border of the Irish landmass. We can identify allusions here both to the death of Cordelia on Dover beach in the Jacobean tragedy *King Lear* and to the poetics of cultural, psychological and linguistic breakdown expressed in T.S. Eliot’s ‘Death by Water’ in *The Waste Land*, a poem which like McNamee’s novel itself reflects – amongst other things – upon the effects of war and its social and cultural aftermath.<sup>53</sup> I will discuss the wider significance of the articulation of these literary forms with the noir aesthetic of *The Ultras* in more detail later in this chapter. For the moment, however, it is important to note that both these allusions derive from literary and cultural formations that emerge in moments of historical crisis. Jacobean tragedy articulates the crisis in sovereignty that marks the development of capitalism in the early modern period. Likewise, the politically conservative modernism associated with Eliot

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<sup>52</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of Worlds*, p.58.

<sup>53</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A.Foakes, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition (London: Arden, 1997; T.S Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

emerges, in part, as a cultural response to the first prolonged period of global crisis at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

The '[inter]textual density' (p.5) of McNamee's novel has complex and contradictory effects not least in relation to a critical evaluation of the ideological dimensions of its narration of the 'dark matter' of systemic violence that underpins the history it attempts to relate. The allusions to *Lear* and to the poetic style of *The Waste Land* in Lorna's final narrative seemingly reiterate and reinforce the sense of historical stasis that dominates the narrative both formally and thematically. Shakespeare's play describes the destruction of a once unified realm and ends without offering a clear sense of what is to come and Eliot's poem bespeaks a sense of cultural atrophy and political pessimism. However, these allusions also constitute an alternative figuration of history that actively disrupts the liberal narrative of progress and maturation proffered in *That Which Was*. The conclusion of Patterson's novel in the Odyssey Complex with its associated symbolism (homecoming and the ending of a story) is entirely continuous with late capitalist discourses of the end of history. In other words, for all that the novel celebrates the North's entrance into a new future, this is a future that can only be imagined in terms of the present: economic globalisation that has been liberated from the madness of older generations in the suicide of Larry. In contrast, *The Ultras* plays out the limits of neoliberalism via literary references to political and socio-economic history. To go back to Jacobean tragedy is to go back to the early days of the modern period, to the early days of capitalism. But this is not cyclical; the instability of the present and the messianic framing of Nairac means that there is still something left to come.

#### **'They were looking for narrative qualities': Irish literary studies<sup>54</sup>**

At this point then, I would like to contextualise my reading of the Emerald noir-thriller in relation to recent publications within Northern Irish literary studies by figures such as Gerry Smyth, Eve Patten and Eamonn Hughes. These works are important because they outline a perceived inadequacy within certain fictional responses to cultural identity in the North, in particular the sense that life in the North remains 'all wrapped in the past'. In contrast to the backward look of McNamee, these scholarly responses set out to demarcate the

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<sup>54</sup> *The Ultras*, p.84

boundaries of a new critical terrain through which adequately to explore the complexity of the contemporary North. While the explicit importance of culture in debates about the new social formation of the post-Troubles North may appear to correlate with Badiou's depiction as the ideology as the contemporary structure in dominance, I will begin to show that the political level continues to produce a series of determinate contradictions in both cultural and social life in the North. My initial concern, however, is to question the Kantian underpinnings of Irish literary studies before going on to suggest that this criticism itself does not fully attend to the contradictory practices of mass cultural forms such as the noir-thriller.

Over the past few decades, criticism of Northern Irish literature has frequently centred on the search for new aesthetic forms which, in Gerry Smyth words, could help 'develop new languages and new perspectives as a contribution to the imagination of change.'<sup>55</sup> For the humanist Smyth, the traditional use of the thriller in the North 'tends towards melodrama and a sort of voyeuristic violence in which stock characters and images are recycled in more or less disabling ways.'<sup>56</sup> Smyth's search for a 'new' authentic form of representation has centred, therefore, on a demand for novelistic styles that could help 'break out of the orthodoxies which had fed and sustained the conflict.'<sup>57</sup>

The attempt to dismantle the sectarian divides through which the North has frequently been envisioned is shared by Eve Patten. In her essay, *Fiction in Conflict: the North's Prodigal Novelists* (1995), Patten celebrates new novelists such as Frances Molloy, Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson who subvert the 'received images of Northern Irish society from British, Irish or American sources.'<sup>58</sup> Similar to Smyth's search for the 'new', Patten advocates what she terms an 'overdue exploitation' of 'postmodern' literary techniques such as 'perspectivism, ambiguity and displacement' when narrating the North.<sup>59</sup> While this search for the new is shared by Patten and Smyth, Patten's celebration of the 'postmodern' differentiates her approach from that of the traditional humanist

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<sup>55</sup> Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction*, (London: Pluto Press, 1997) p.116

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.123.

<sup>58</sup> Eve Patten, 'Fiction in Conflict: the North's Prodigal Novelists', in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Iain A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp.128-148, (p.129).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.129.

stance of Smyth. Nonetheless, the conclusions that both scholars draw are very similar. According to Patten 'representations of contemporary Northern Irish self-image' cannot be found in the stable narratives based on outmoded, binary allegiances.<sup>60</sup> Instead, a more acute awareness of the modernity of the North in terms of a 'sustained constitutional and psychological identity crisis' is required.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst Smyth and Patten approach the object of literature from very different theoretical perspectives, their shared emphasis on the need for a new historical focus in contemporary Irish literature is important. One of the major virtues of this is the endeavour to understand and evaluate literary production in a new social and political context. Considering the Marxist orientation of this thesis, a critical focus on the historical and material determinants of literary production is a welcome development. However, despite the critical focus on historical change and the related need for 'new perspectives' within fiction, contemporaneous literary experiments with the noir-thriller in the North by figures such as McNamee have received a more ambivalent critical reception. While Eamonn Hughes and Elmer Kennedy-Andrews have celebrated the ironic fusion of gothic and Chandler-esque motifs in McNamee's bleak narration of Belfast in *Resurrection Man*, McNamee's work has been criticised by Smyth for an alleged failure to provide any 'new perspectives' on the changing local landscape of contemporary Northern Ireland.<sup>62</sup> While ostensibly dealing with the problems of paramilitarism, McNamee's fictionalisation of the Shankhill Butchers in *Resurrection Man*, Smyth notes:

reveals itself as another reactionary response to the 'Troubles', interested not in sectarianism (nor indeed in the more significant agendas of state sovereignty which underpin sectarianism in Northern Ireland) but in some inscrutable darkness at the heart of the self. The local matters only in so far as it can be incorporated into a larger existential overview, as some sort of evidence for the human condition.<sup>63</sup>

Read in this way, McNamee's noir aesthetic seems almost as reductive and non-organic as the much maligned "Troubles-trash" thrillers which Smyth laments for their stereotypical

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.129.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pp.129-30.

<sup>62</sup> Eamonn Hughes, "'Town of Shadows': Representations of Belfast in Recent Fiction", *Religion and Literature*, 28. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1996) pp.141-160; Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the north*, (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction*, p.123.

characters, 'melodrama' and 'voyeuristic violence.'<sup>64</sup> Indeed, since the explosion of violence in 1969, the thriller form has been one of the popular forms through which the "Troubles" have been represented. As Eve Patten notes, the growth of the "Troubles thriller" has led to one of the most profitable literary industries in the North since the violence began.<sup>65</sup> Despite its vivid evocation of a suspenseful sense of emergency, Smyth's dismissal of the thriller form has been shared by other critics. For Kennedy-Andrews 'the reductive nature of popular fiction [sic]', with its 'genre-based' formulaic narrative conventions means that the thriller form has 'given wide circulation to unhelpfully simplified ideas and images of the Northern Irish conflict.'<sup>66</sup> Similarly, for Eamonn Hughes, the clichéd stereotypes of the genre eschew any sustained concern with the specificities of the province as a distinct place. In "Troubles-trash" thrillers, the geography of Northern Ireland is, as Hughes notes, merely a void, 'a blank space filled by novelists and film-makers with stock properties' of crazed terrorists, tribalism and violent hatred.<sup>67</sup> In Tom Clancy's *The Patriot Games* (1987) for example, Belfast, and indeed Northern Ireland as a political-geographical whole is, continues Hughes, 'left completely out of the account' despite the fact that 'events there fuel the plot'.<sup>68</sup>

What is interesting about these accounts however, is that while they frequently call for a 'new' type of ironic postmodern 'perspectivism' (Patten; Kennedy-Andrews) or 'imagination' (Smyth), their model of criticism is ultimately based, as Richard Kirkland notes, on a dual and arguably paradoxical demand for more 'utopian' and 'realistic' narratives.<sup>69</sup> Critics such as Smyth and Patten conceive popular narrative forms such as the thriller in terms of their generic sameness; a sameness that they deem to be inadequate to the task of authentically representing the (post)modernity of contemporary northern Irish society. This kind of prescriptivism exhibits the tendency towards what Pierre Macherey terms the normative fallacy (as discussed in the Introduction).<sup>70</sup> To recall, this 'fallacy' is produced when a given text is measured against an ideal and abstracted model of what it

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>65</sup> Eve Patten, 'Fiction in Conflict: the North's Prodigal Novelists', p.128.

<sup>66</sup> Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969*, p.41.

<sup>67</sup> Eamonn Hughes, "'Town of Shadows': Representations of Belfast in Recent Fiction", pp.141-2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.142.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), p.78.

<sup>70</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p.22.

ought to be. In this instance, the crime form is viewed either as an imperfect model for representing contemporary northern Irish culture because it lacks 'realism' or because it is not appropriately optimistic or 'positive' in its representations. As Macherey insists, the problem with this kind of critical demand is that it is unable to attend to the determinate conditions that underpin the production of the text; for instance, this approach precludes an analysis of the reasons why the narrative may exhibit particular contradictions.<sup>71</sup> While arguing for more realistic and socially progressive interpretations of the North then, such approaches actually fail to engage with the determinate historical reasons as to why individual literary texts produce particular ideological solutions to the history of conflict they explore.

According to scholars such as Smyth and Patten then, the dominant thriller-based traditions of Northern Irish fiction fail to express the complexities of life in the north. This type of response recalls the Frankfurt School's Kantian position on art and its attendant view of mass culture as 'degradation'. The generic formula of the crime thriller thus exhibits a lack of creativity and the kind of innovation that a Kantian vision of the aesthetic demands. According to the Frankfurt School such repetitive diversions, produced on a mass scale and in line with the monotonous formula of the genre, exemplify neither a form of subjective or "creative" labour on the part of the producer nor a particular danger or resistance to the dominant social order.<sup>72</sup> As Franco Moretti argues, this type of genre fiction lacks the resources of critical thought or resistance for its formulaic nature reflects the 'demeaning and repetitive nature of alienated and exploitative commodity production on the Taylorist assembly line.'<sup>73</sup> It is this 'repetitive' and simplifying tendency to bluntly articulate the Manichean dualisms of good and evil, along with the rendering of the Anglo-Irish conflict in a diversionary narrative, that has attracted much criticism from Irish literary scholars. Such a Manichean approach, it is argued, fails to move beyond the "two-traditions" paradigm through which the North is reductively and traditionally envisaged. From the purview of this critical position (which has a degree of traction within Irish Studies), the mass cultural forms of the troubles thriller and its modern development in Emerald Noir are frequently reproached for their reactionary re-inscription of the dualisms

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp.130-1.

<sup>73</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, p.135.



that demarcated the conflict as well as for their failure, in both ethical and aesthetic terms, to outline the insufficiency of their artistic craft when faced with the theme of war and violence.

According to this position then, the diversionary nature of these cultural products as well as their formulaic characteristics apparently renders them ineffective either as a form of cultural dissonance or as an ethical engagement with the decades of violence in the North. Moreover such mass cultural forms are also deemed ineffective in terms of what Badiou himself would call 'literature that thinks'; there is apparently no event or rupture, at least not in terms of literary form, in these types of diversionary entertainment. Instead of resistance, ethics and the difficulty of critical thinking, we have recuperation and endless repetition of the same<sup>74</sup>.

Despite its focus on new perspectives, the first major problem with this kind of wholesale rejection of mass cultural forms is an underlying a-historicism. What I mean here is that this type of position within Irish studies has yet to investigate the determinate historical context of its ultimate grounding in a Kantian framework. In light of the prodigious expansion of culture under the conditions of late capitalism and the increased integration of the aesthetic with the market – a development that so interests Badiou and Jameson – the vision of aesthetic autonomy underpinning this tendency in Irish studies appears increasingly romantic. Historically speaking, the level of literary and cultural production is influenced by a changing set of relations between the other levels of society in which they are produced. As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the paradoxical dissolution of culture's autonomy and in its prodigious expansion in consumerism, advertising, entertainment industries, commodity reification and media technologies means that mass culture has become even more influential in postmodern cultural production than during the years of the Frankfurt School's defence of high modernism. Rather than ground an understanding of literature and its radical properties in terms of the ideological outlook from an earlier era, what I am suggesting is that under the conditions of late capitalism, certain mass cultural texts as much as canonical texts can produce differences and deviations which disturb the abstract criteria of a demarcated literary field and ideologies

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<sup>74</sup> Alain Badiou, 'What Does Literature Think?', *The Age of the Poets*, pp.132-140.

of form. To envisage literature in terms of a series of homogenous genre-dominated fields whose ideological articulation of the social can be read formally or thematically in terms of immutable generic or formal conventions ignores the way that contradictions in individual texts constantly redefine the rules and received practices of a genre. My argument in this thesis is that it is precisely this type of formal rupture in contemporary examples of crime fiction that enable a reading of them as dissonant ideological products. Indeed, by drawing upon Lee Horsley's *The Noir Thriller* and its delineation of the distinctive characteristics of the noir form, I have argued elsewhere that Emerald Noir offers move away from the binary codes of the "Two-traditions" narrative.<sup>75</sup> In the traditional detective or crime story, there is, as Horsley notes, often a stable triangle of detective, victim and criminal. The noir-thriller breaks with this convention: 'the treacherous confusions of his role and the movement of the protagonist from one role to another constitute key structural elements in the noir narrative.'<sup>76</sup> The break-down or slippages between these positions can be read in *The Ultras*.

Agnew's liminal status, the sense that he no longer belongs, neither temporally nor politically – his avoidance of the new 'town-centre bars' and his tendency to 'to work his way towards the periphery' in search of the salvation offered in memories of Nairac –, constantly re-configures him as an unstable and dramatically fluctuating figure within the text. Agnew is, on the one hand, a hybrid of the detective-criminal. In the process of his investigation, Agnew becomes certain 'that he had sufficient evidence, in addition to his own eyewitness statement, to place Robert Nairac at the scene of the Miami Showband massacre' (p.9). Yet this sense of being 'all wrapped up in the past' exposes the reader to Agnew's own complicity with the dirty war: "'You done your crime. You done your time,'" the police officer Mallon tells him. "'Same as half this fucking town. Let it go'"(p.12). However, his refusal to 'let it go' marks out his distance from the state and its attempt to move on from the legacy of the past. In so doing, Agnew embodies the characteristics of the classic noir detective. He maintains a code different to his contemporaries: 'But Agnew thought it was more complicated than that. They [the state] wanted to put an end to the

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Rudman, "'The Place You Don't Belong'", p.249.

<sup>76</sup> Lee Horsley, *The Noir Thriller*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p.10. For a similar account of the differences between the classical detective novel and the noir form, see Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction', in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. by Richard Howard, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp.42-52.

Nairac story' (p.250). And it is for this reason that he himself begins to take on the characteristics of the victim: "'You don't want to draw too much attention to yourself from them boys,'" Mallon warns him. "'Next thing you'll get the knock on the door, some DI sticking the warrant card in your face, we require you to answer enquires regarding breaches of the Official Secrets Act.'" (p.70). Indeed, his 'search for the lost captain' leads him to the realisation that all other witnesses to Nairac's activities are now dead, presumably at the hands of the state itself: 'That's the point, Agnew. It wasn't far away. The unfortunate demise of RJ, otherwise known as Bob Kerr, took place nine miles from where we're standing, and this caravan site is the very place that Bob was heading for when he met his end'" (pp.70-2).

The effect of this slippage and its disturbance of any clear-cut sense of subject position are of signal importance when considering the literary articulation of identity in the "post-Troubles" North. On a formal level, the dramatic switch between the different character positions of crime fiction in *The Ultras* indicates that identity is not consistent nor bounded, but unruly. Unlike the exclusionary narratives of the "two-traditions", which frequently depict the North in terms of two opposed and homogenous subjectivities, the heterogeneous and unstable role of the noir hero breaks down the binary framework of formal oppositions from which the conflict has long been imagined. In so doing, *The Ultras* depiction of Agnew's heterogeneous sense of identity arguably tempers Smyth's dismissal of the noir thriller form.

An awareness of the "Troubles" thriller as a heterogeneous space of tension and 'struggle' between different ideologies outside the text is also a point forcefully argued in a recent addition to Irish literary studies by Aaron Kelly.<sup>77</sup> Drawing upon Fredric Jameson's theory of the 'political unconscious', Kelly observes that the imaginary resolutions of mass cultural literary texts relating to the "Troubles" are fractured by a series of formal instabilities and antinomies. Thus rather than view the mass cultural form of crime fiction as an example of conservative ideology, Kelly notes that the formal contradictions within the "Troubles" thriller mean that each novel should be envisioned as a 'contestatory cultural process'.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Aaron Kelly, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland since 1969: Utterly Resigned Terror*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.11.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.11.

Kelly's work marks a powerful intervention and in this context can be read as a rebuttal to the work of Smyth and others. One of his major theoretical moves is to develop Jameson's comment that the conspiracy form emerges as a new way to express an aesthetic sense of the social totality under the conditions of postmodernity. One initial effect of this move is to situate the North firmly within the contemporary socio-economic context of late capitalism, thus refusing the reductive view of life in the province as an expression of pre-modern atavism. While this sense of the North's postmodernity is in keeping with the debates made thus far in this chapter, his theoretical intent is not dissimilar to the Marxist methodology of this thesis. Despite his recourse to Walter Benjamin's reading of modernism and mass culture in essays such as 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Kelly's theoretical approach ultimately follows Jameson's Lukácsian belief in the didactic ability of certain types of realist literature to produce an awareness of the social totality via the mediation of aesthetic form.<sup>79</sup> In so doing, Kelly champions the 'new languages' and conspiratorial drama of McNamee's *Resurrection Man* as a 'utopian' text for its ability to provide an awareness of the totality of the complicated political reality of the North as well as for its reflection of Manuel Castells' vision of late capitalism as a type of network society. It is in this elision of the concept of 'utopia' and totality, however, that Kelly's work loses some of its critical focus. To recall, for Jameson, the utopian element of a text is really an expression of non-alienated labour.<sup>80</sup> Thus Jameson champions the sense of artistic creation expressed at the level of form and language à la Henry James and Ernest Hemmingway respectively, or, as in mass culture, via images of labour undertaken for cultural pleasure rather than dull economic compulsion.<sup>81</sup> The "mad" scientists of 1950s disaster movies constitute Jameson's key example here while Sherlock Holmes or, as I suggest in this chapter, the 'different agenda' of Robert Nairac may suffice for crime fiction.<sup>82</sup> The problem with Kelly's work then is that it exhibits a type of theoretical collapse between utopian wish image and the concept of a totality that aids the cognitive mapping or analytical purchase of the reader. Moreover, his celebration of *Resurrection Man* in

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<sup>79</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.211-244.

<sup>80</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp.404-416.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp.404-5, pp.409-412.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, pp.404-5.

terms of the way its content reflects the urban sociology of Castells fails to attend to specifics of aesthetic form and style in production of knowledge. His interpretation of McNamee thus hampers both the possibility of outlining the key Marxist distinction between theory and practice and an analysis of the relative autonomy of art and the attendant issue of mediation.

A reading of *The Ultras* following Kelly's focus on the conspiracy form, however, does, enable us to highlight further shortcomings in Smyth's approach. It is interesting to note that similarly to the portrayal of Agnew, the depiction of Nairac's identity is equally unstable. Nairac's role as 'the PsyOps man' aligns him to the investigative work of the detective (p.218). Yet this subject position is disturbed not only in his murderous legacy, but in that he too takes on the characteristic of the victims that he has apparently liquidated: 'David thought that Robert was taking on the characteristics of one of those targets. There was the accumulation of detail which led you away from the centre, from the facts of a life' (p.112). Again, David's character exhibits a breakdown of the traditional triangle of victim-criminal-detective. An expert in black-ops and perpetrator of domestic abuse, when David finally worries that his dealings with Nairac mean that his 'ethical remit is being exceeded', he too is incarcerated by the British state (p.191).

On the one hand, this repetition of an unstable sense of identity in both the 1970s and the current era of peace may suggest that McNamee cannot actually identify the historical changes signalled by the Belfast Agreement. It is arguable, on the other hand, however, that this sense of repetition among the characters registers a different type of historical understanding that is not only attentive to conspiracies tied to the state but also to the determinate contradictions that beset discourses of the North's postmodernity.

The repetitive breakdown of individual identity in *The Ultras* indexes the way that the normal ideology of form tied to noir fiction is again ruptured in the text. Unlike the conventional resolution of the genre, the attribution of guilt and crime to an individual in McNamee's text does not change the overarching structure of criminal disorder. The same 'structure of dread' that first came to light during the 1970s continues today. If the multiple and repeated designation of unstable and complicated subjective identities fails to aid the resolution to the crime, then this suggests that the ideology of *The Ultras* points to a more structural cause of the violence. Rather than the aberrant morality of a singular individual

then, what these transformations in form suggest is that the crime is related to the role of the state in the dirty war of 1970s. That criminal identity is not singular or individual but rather structural is thus crucial. Read in this way, the dramatic structural movements of the noir-thriller form in *The Ultras* can be seen to articulate a more subtle sense of the complexities of historical change than has hitherto been acknowledged.

As I note above, if the commercial regeneration of Belfast city centre signals a new, ecumenical opening of northern Ireland's public sphere into the liberal modernity of economic globalisation, then certain ideological and political practices of the new cross-community power-sharing era bespeak a more ambivalent sense of historical stasis that contradict the official discourses of progress. Two key features crystallise this sense of stasis most powerfully: firstly, the entrenchment of what Badiou's Pauline theses would identify as 'communitarian' divides between nationalist and unionist communities within the province. These are evident in both elite and subaltern domains: in the mainstream politics of the Northern Irish Assembly at Stormont and also in the working-class communities at the residential and economic margins of society. And secondly, the accusations that 'dark forces' not only remain within the coercive state apparatus but that they also continue to prosecute their earlier war against the socialist and national liberation forces of the Provisional IRA via a type of politically motivated policing against the *de facto* political-wing of the IRA, Sinn Féin. It is arguably these kind of practices and the sense of historical ambivalence that they create which provide the determinant context for the contradictory cultural developments of Emerald Noir. Read in these terms, the multiplication of unstable character formations in *The Ultras* somewhat undermines Smyth's belief that McNamee cannot deal with 'agendas of state sovereignty' nor the question of historical change. Indeed, the double articulation of time and the focus on the persistent structural 'threat looming' (p.185) from the past are interesting in dialogical terms because they suggest that the celebrated peace-process of today is actually characterised by a state of historical limbo wherein real change is still not forthcoming.

The identification of these contradictions that beset the official discourse that 'things have all changed' is important because it outlines the way in which my own argument intervenes with cultural and political debates regarding the North and its particular situation vis-à-vis wider historical developments. I want now to elaborate on these debates, both local to the

North and in relation to Marxism as whole, for they provide an opportunity to delineate the stakes involved in my analysis.

### **‘Greek and Jew’: culture, politics and markets in the contemporary North**

In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Badiou observes that ‘monetary abstraction’ and the ‘false universality’ of capital have ‘absolutely no difficulty accommodating the kaleidoscope of communitarianisms’ that now proliferate in the current world of late capitalism.<sup>83</sup> Badiou’s argument is predicated upon the historical connection he draws between the situation of Saint Paul and that of late capitalism. This allegorical re-working of the false opposition between ‘Greeks and Jews’ and the understanding of the relationship between such ‘communitarianisms’ and the market as an ‘articulated whole’ is expressed as the fulfilment of ‘one of Marx’s inspired predictions: the world finally configured, but as a market, as a world-market.’<sup>84</sup> With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the attendant spread of the market into previously recalcitrant terrains and cultures, there is, as Badiou observes, no longer any space or hinterland that operates outside the logic of the commodity. For Marxists, this tendency towards expansion and constant innovation is a principle of capitalism and thus a longstanding trend within capitalist modernity.<sup>85</sup> Yet this process reaches its height in our contemporary conjuncture with the kind of commodification of identity and culture described by Badiou and also Jameson in his analysis of late capitalism. In the case of the North of Ireland, this tendency of cultural identities to become the ‘material’ for commercial ‘investment by the market’ is witnessed in a growing travel industry in which the logic of the marketplace permeates history itself to the degree that everything from trips to view murals on the Falls Road and the Shankill, often in the Black Taxis that were previously used to transport guerilla fighters, are incorporated into the production of surplus value.<sup>86</sup> With the decline of the socialist programme of Sinn Féin then, the North in general has increasingly witnessed the extension of capital in its own terrain.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the articulation of the Belfast Agreement with the promissory discourses of the free market is testimony to the ways in which modern day

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<sup>83</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.6-7.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, pp.9-11.

<sup>85</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*.

<sup>86</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.10-11.

<sup>87</sup> James Smyth, ‘The Road to God Knows Where: Understanding Irish Republicanism’, *Capital and Class*, 86 (January 2005), 135-158.

practitioners of a metaphysical naturalism or *phusía* vis-à-vis the economy are increasingly able to integrate 'the identitarian and cultural logic of communities or minorities' into 'the uniform prerogatives of the market', even when these were once the site of anti-colonial and socialist struggle.<sup>88</sup>

My point is not so much that Republicanism is now inextricably bound to the market, but that with the loss of its militant form of politics and its attendant ideological shift, its oppositional status is clearly reduced. I have argued against the totalising extent of Badiou's dismissal of the nationalism and the vanguard in Chapter One of this thesis. Indeed, the argument in this chapter is that the destabilising and utopian significance of the 'maverick dreamtime' from *The Ultras*, tied as it is to the unfinished legacy of the vanguard struggle of the 1970s, suggests that left nationalism still offers a concrete space through which enthusiasm for the communist hypothesis can be reinvigorated. Thus while the North is evidently integrated into the circuits of global capital, I want to argue that this is not a smooth process, indeed, the contradictions that I will identify still demarcate the space of political antagonism and the potential for ideological intervention in the development of class consciousness.

What is perhaps most useful and remarkable (in today's context) about the debates in Irish Studies around the politics of form, is the recognition of the key role played by ideology in the current social formation of the North. Beyond totemic developments tied to the entertainment industry such as the Odyssey Complex, recent developments in literary criticism are suggestive of the way in which a once oppositional or counter-hegemonic literary aesthetic has become bound up with official discourses of reconciliation and historical progress. These developments are important because they outline the political significance accorded to cultural practices and their potential role in producing at the very least an imaginary (re)solution to the binary divisions that characterise the North.

One can identify the changing political significance of culture in the North in the recent 'sabbatical' of Field Day, the counter-hegemonic left-nationalist project, and the rise, during the same period, of the more liberal democratic Cultural Traditions Group. Founded in 1988, the Cultural Traditions Group consists of a number of figures from academia, the

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<sup>88</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.10-11.



local arts administration, education, broadcasting and publishing. The group was set up and funded by the Central Community Relations Unit in Belfast, which is overseen by the Northern Irish Office.<sup>89</sup> Tasked with outlining the 'cultural diversity' project of the Community Relations Council, the chairman of the Cultural Traditions Group, Maurice Hayes has expressed the philosophy of the Group in the same depoliticized multicultural terms that characterise Anglo-Irish government responses to the North: 'The Group's philosophy involves a general acceptance of the validity of all cultural traditions, the importance of tradition in the creation of a sense of identity, the importance of group identity as a means of self-fulfilment and to give a sense of security to the individual'.<sup>90</sup> The Cultural Tradition Group thus aims to reassure communities as regards their identities and traditions in the hope that this will bring about reconciliation. While group identity and tradition is foregrounded, this philosophy is ultimately predicated on the individual as the locus of meaning. As Kirkland rightly notes, this position envisages political success via a respect for and 'celebration of each individual's own cultural position and a willingness to celebrate that of one's fully individuated neighbour.'<sup>91</sup> This reframes understanding of the conflict and political divides in the North in terms of individuals and apolitical notions of cultural respect rather than structural relations of inequality and power.<sup>92</sup> Read in this way, the group's association with the liberal democratic project of the British state as well as its focus on the 'security of the individual' as the final ground for political success bespeaks the way the use of culture here 'forms part of a wider hegemonic process' that is tied to the practices of late capitalism and neoliberalism that I have discussed above.<sup>93</sup> The fact that this type of response actually bespeaks a type of barely repressed politics is revealed in the words of Irish historian Roy Foster (a leading member of the group) and his argument

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger*, (Harlow: Longman, 1996) pp.112-3; Wesley Hutchinson, 'Le gouvernement britannique et les traditions culturelles en Irlande du Nord.' *Etudes irlandaises*, Printemps, 1995, pp.165-75.

<sup>90</sup> Maurice Hayes, *Whither Cultural Diversity?* Belfast: Community Relations Council (1991) p.19

<sup>91</sup> Kirkland, pp.113-4

<sup>92</sup> Alan Finlayson, 'The Problem of "Culture" in Northern Ireland: A Critique of the Cultural Traditions Group' *The Irish Review* (Winter/Spring 1997); Bill Rolston, 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict', in David Miller (ed.) *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (London: Longman 1998) pp.253-74; Michel Savaric, 'Political Correctness Applied: Multiculturalism in Northern Ireland', paper presented at *The PostcolonialismS/Political CorrectnessS Conference*, Casablanca, (12-14 April, 2001) <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/casablanca/savaric2.html> [accessed 1 June 2015]

<sup>93</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965: Moments of Danger* (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p.112.

that cultural diversity does not necessarily lead to conflict. Arguing against any form of historical determinism, he endeavours to show that nationalism and cultural exclusivism are in fact recent phenomena, tied to the developments unique to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and are thus far from inevitable:

The very notion of indivisible sovereignty is now being questioned; feasible or not, the concept of dual allegiance and cultural diversity are surely associated. Other areas where comparative history study might open up new perspectives involve the practice of jurisdiction over designated individuals rather than specific territories: allegiance, in a sense, as an option rather than an imposition. Already it is being suggested that ethnic identification might be interpreted in a more flexible and contingent way, which might query the old zero-sum game, and break up some of the supposed congruencies. We might even be beginning to question whether nationalism need imply the politics of old-fashioned separatist republicanism.<sup>94</sup>

As Michel Savaric observes, Foster's reference to Republicanism is significant in that it gives the impression that therein lies the only cause to the 'problem' in the North.<sup>95</sup> This state backed investment in art thus underlines the extent to which contemporary cultural production in the north is mediated by hegemonic discourses that articulate notions of communitarian reconciliation and historical progress with the type of individualist ideologies associated with the free market.

While the membership of the Cultural Traditions Group does not include the Irish Studies scholars discussed above, it is interesting to note that its focus on multiculturalism and culture's role in overcoming the legacy of the conflict chimes with many of the central concerns of Irish literary criticism. An investigation into fictional representations of the North that offer a pluralistic transcendence of fixed boundaries of culture is a longstanding concern of Eamonn Hughes. Hughes has written repeatedly on the politics of literary representations of the North and thus his conception of literary mimesis is central to the arguments he makes.<sup>96</sup> His introduction to *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, with its revealing subtitle 'Northern Ireland – border country', is useful here. Drawing upon

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<sup>94</sup> Roy F. Foster, 'Inaugural Lecture' in Maurana Crozier (ed.), *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland: Varieties of Irishness and Proceedings of the Cultural Traditions Group Conference* (Belfast: Queen's University Press, 1989) pp.19-20

<sup>95</sup> Savaric, 'Political Correctness Applied: Multiculturalism in Northern Ireland' op.cit.

<sup>96</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Leavis and Ireland: An Adequate Criticism?' *Text and Context*, Autumn (1988) pp.112-132; Eamonn Hughes, '"Town of Shadows": Representations of Belfast in Recent Fiction.' *Religion and Literature*, vol. 28 (2-3) (1996), pp. 141-160; Eamonn Hughes, 'Limbo' in *The Irish Review* no.33 (Spring, 2005) pp.138-141;

theories of hybridization and narration by the post-colonial scholar, Homi Bhabha, Hughes argues that while the North is internally bordered, it is, however, more importantly, 'a modern place with the pluralities, discontents, and linkages appropriate to a modern place.'<sup>97</sup> For Hughes then novelistic representations of identity in the North 'must always be formed on terms of intimacy with whatever one chooses to regard as the other.'<sup>98</sup> Consequently, the validity of Hughes's analysis as a whole rests on the fundamental component of mimesis and the particular relationship between truth and pluralism in the North, or the 'intimacy' that one cultural identity shares with the 'other.' This attempt to escape the binary codes that have traditionally structured understandings of the conflict is thus not dissimilar to the liberal aspirations of the Cultural Traditions Group.

While Hughes' focus on the multiple material determinants of identity is worthy of praise, it is in the second move of his arguments that problems emerge for a Marxist critique. Hughes' focus on 'intimacy with the other' ultimately leads only to a prescriptive conclusion wherein the value of good literature from the North is ultimately evidenced by the ability of a text to overcome the apparently limited epistemological and aesthetic value of the "sectarian" discourses that constitute the original determinations of the text's production. Hughes' approach ostensibly appears to partake in a Kantian conception of public reason.<sup>99</sup> However, the ultimate grounding of his position in a liberal multiculturalism obfuscates the way that cultures, as ideologies, have a political meaning. This approach therefore cannot hope to attend to the opposing political aspirations of the protagonists of the conflict as this model of multiculturalism deems all cultures and cultural traditions to be legitimate. As such, it inevitably avoids any direct or meaningful engagement with the historical and structural causes of the conflict as well as the problematic implications of viewing Loyalism/Unionism and Republicanism as cultural and political equivalents.<sup>100</sup> It thus operates on the principle that an accommodation or reconciliation between the different

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<sup>97</sup> Eamonn Hughes, 'Introduction: Northern Ireland – border country', p.3

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp.3-4

<sup>99</sup> See Immanuel Kant, 'What is Enlightenment' (1784), trans. Mary C. Smith <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html> [accessed 23 August 2015]

<sup>100</sup> See Bill Rolston 'What's Wrong with Multiculturalism? Liberalism and the Irish Conflict' in David Miller (ed.) *Rethinking Northern Ireland* (London: Longman, 1998), pp.253-74

cultural traditions and political heritages is something to which we should aspire in both literary and ethico-political terms.

Such evidence of culture's increasingly central role in the reproduction of social formation of the North indexes the importance of recent responses by Marxists regarding ideology and concepts such as the market, individualism, the collective and communism. As Badiou and Jameson have observed, one of the key sites of critique in late capitalism must be around the ideological grounding of the concept of the market. With formerly left-wing parties such as the British Labour Party embracing the logic of neoliberalism, Jameson argues that the metaphysical association of market competition with human nature by free market ideologues is 'the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged; [this] is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time [...] If we let this pass [...] then socialism and Marxism will have effectively become de-legitimated'.<sup>101</sup> Jameson aligns his position here with Stuart Hall's work on Thatcherism, and the fact that at the current moment political struggle must be waged over the legitimacy of concepts. This focus on concepts chimes with Badiou's ideological conception of the present period of political contestation, particularly the importance of asserting the existence and viability of the communist hypothesis: 'If this hypothesis should have to be abandoned, then it is not worth doing anything in order of collective action. Without the perspective of communism, without this Idea,' he continues, 'nothing in the historical and political future is of such a kind as to interest the philosopher. Each individual can pursue their private business and we won't mention it again.'<sup>102</sup>

One major consequence of this focus on ideology as a key terrain of struggle is the fact that the respective works of Badiou and Jameson highlight the way in which cultural practices and identities play an increasingly important role not only in the generation of surplus value, but also in the legitimation of the neoliberal status quo. As I discussed previously, Jameson argues that in recent decades culture has undertaken a 'prodigious expansion throughout the social realm, to the point where everything in our social life – from economic value and state power to the very structure of the psyche itself – can be said to

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<sup>101</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press (2001) pp.263-4

<sup>102</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, London: Verso (2010) p.115

have become ‘cultural’ in some original and untheorized sense’.<sup>103</sup> What Jameson means here is that there has been a break down in the old Weberian model of modernity in which the arts functioned as an autonomous or semi-autonomous sphere separate from the economic and political spheres of instrumental reason. In terms of the historicization of the Kantian framework discussed earlier, the theory of aesthetics as non-instrumental reason, or teleology without purpose, has been radically dissociated from the historical context in which such an outlook emerged. This sense of art’s radical autonomy emerged in the early phase of modernity and is most readily associated with the twin developments of the capitalist mode of production, in particular its focus on abstract and instrumental metrics of value, and also the advances of science and philosophy which, in their own ways, gradually divorced the cultural sphere from its association with traditional forms of authority such as the church or the static hierarchies of the pre-capitalist *Gemeinschaft*. Power and social solidarity have thus become more explicitly articulated with a new economic logic rather than the customs and traditions of an earlier age. As Jameson observes, the socially symbolic role of art as a means of securing social cohesion and re-enforcing social power in the modern period thus became less direct or less perceptible. The concept of the autonomy of culture, ‘the construction of some heightened space wrested from the society itself’, emerges then when this same society is, in Jameson’s words, ‘in the process of being industrialized and organized bureaucratically.’<sup>104</sup>

Such a focus on the historical grounding of culture and in particular its key role as a structure in dominance today, tallies with Badiou’s repeated focus on the increasingly totalising logic of commodity relations in the era of late capitalism. ‘All that exists in this world are things – objects for sale – and signs – the abstract instruments of sale and purchase,’ he writes, ‘the various forms of money and credit.’<sup>105</sup> Despite his celebration of aesthetic modernism – Beckett, Mallarme, Rimbaud, are key examples – the admission that cultural ‘signs’ and practices now increasingly function as part of the instrumental logic of ‘sale and purchase’ is indicative of the fact that the historical grounds upon which such a celebration of aesthetic autonomy can be made are now more and more untenable. Today cultural forms, including apparently progressive and avant-garde practices that once

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<sup>103</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.48.

<sup>104</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.202.

<sup>105</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, p.55; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, pp.9-11

formed part of the arsenal of counter hegemonic movements and critical theory, are increasingly incorporated within market and state logic. In the words of *The Ultras*, the exercise of political and economic power today is enthused by cultural practices, by 'theatrical principles' (p.86).

### **Cultural Production and Primitive Accumulation: politics as structure in dominance**

Despite the various forms of investment in culture that I have outlined above (economic, political, intellectual, leftist and liberal), what is apparent is that the solution to the historical divisions and social and economic inequalities that traverse the North of Ireland has yet to be found in the articulation of culture and the logic of the free market. It is also important to remember here that this ideological suturing of the North's economic ecumenism is still far from being stable. The social formation of the North remains beset by ongoing forms of political division in both elite and subaltern domains. Furthermore, civic discourses of law and order are still haunted by the return of 'dark forces' who continue to wage their earlier war against Republicans. While local political arrangements thus continue to divide, political intervention from outside the North arguably plays a key role in suturing together the symbols of social and economic development. Indeed, as Peter Shirlow has noted most of the funding for this 'economic development' has not emerged from the free market per se, but rather from state or super-state investments and grants via Britain, the United States and the EU.<sup>106</sup> Thus the totemic emblems of the North's economic (post)modernity, the Waterfront developments on the Lagan and the Odyssey Complex, are symptomatic of the fact that the political force embodied by the liberal democratic state stills plays an essential role in contemporary economic processes. Such developments arguably necessitate a reading of the modernity of the North that remains attentive to wider questions of the global political economy and materialist analysis as understood in the specific context of the North's postcolonial position.

Seamus Deane's comments on the North capture both the local expression of this global development, and the residual stain of the 1970s and accordant antagonisms quite concisely:

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Shirlow, 'Belfast: A segregated city', p.42.

The two communities in the north...wish to speak the same language of economic development while also adhering to different cultural languages. And both experience the same plight – of being told that their communities must surrender the archaic language of difference – because it is irrational, improvident, insusceptible to civilization – and surrender it to a more controlled and controlling language of ecumenism that will permit economic development to proceed and a sad history to be left behind as nothing more than object of tourist pleasure.<sup>107</sup>

This passage forms part of Deane's discussion of the way in which contemporary politics in the Irish Republic has embraced a de-politicized 'language of ecumenism' tied to the dominant neoliberal discourses of 'economic development'. That Deane identifies a similar trend in the North is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, this locates the North within wider, international socio-economic developments and thus precludes a reductive understanding of the social formation there in terms of sectarian atavism. That the political antagonism between the 'two communities' is now 'surrendered' or dissipated by the logic of 'economic development' is again testimony to the way that Badiou's allegorical deployment of Paul captures the constellation of forces in the current conjuncture; communitarian identities and contemporary capitalism increasingly form what Badiou calls an 'articulated whole'.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, the increased integration of the North into the circuits of global capital seems to suggest that the current constellation of forces does not match the unstable formation or sense of historical 'crisis' of the 1970s and 1980s which had precipitated Deane's identification of the North as the potential site for a radical re-working of Irish nationalism.<sup>109</sup> It was this reason, indeed, that justified the formation of Deane's left-nationalist group, the Field Day Theatre Company in the 1980s: 'the political crisis in the North and its reverberations in the Republic had made the necessity of a reappraisal of Ireland's political and cultural situation explicit and urgent.'<sup>110</sup>

It is in the context of the failure of the IRA's war of National Liberation and the liberal democratic consensus around the Belfast Agreement that we can understand Deane's later pessimism expressed in his references to the marketization of 'cultural difference', and the attendant 'surrender' of the Republican project in the North 'to a more controlled and

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<sup>107</sup> Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.163.

<sup>108</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.11.

<sup>109</sup> Seamus Deane, 'Introduction', in Deane (ed.) *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p.3.

<sup>110</sup> Seamus Deane *Ireland's Field Day*, (London: Hutchinson, 1985) p.vii.

controlling language of ecumenism that will permit economic development to proceed.’<sup>111</sup> Despite the obvious narrowing of horizons, it is striking that Deane’s language here bespeaks a more ambivalent and unstable conjuncture. Deane’s use of the term ‘being told to’ suggests that the ecumenical trends in the North are in fact part of a disciplinary process, not so much the result of a natural process but part of an ongoing practice of coercion from the state where the present is configured in terms of a ‘surrender.’ This points then to the need for an analysis of the present conjuncture that is more attentive to the contradictory practices deriving from the level of politics that constitute this coercive project of ‘economic development’.

In contrast to the liberal discourse of recognition and cultural tolerance that underpins The Cultural Traditions Group, Deane and Field Day have traditionally viewed the situation within the North as one of colonial oppression. ‘Field Day’s analysis of the (Northern Irish) situation,’ he writes, ‘derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis.’<sup>112</sup> Moreover, in one of the last publications produced by Field Day, Deane called for an explicit re-engagement with the concept of revolutionary nationalism, positioning Field Day as the antithesis of the revisionist historians and cultural critics within the new field of Irish Studies, whose chief aim, he argued, was ‘to demolish the nationalist mythology’.<sup>113</sup> Deane made this statement in his introduction to a collection of international Marxist analyses of Anglo-Irish relations featuring essays by Eagleton, Jameson and Said. As Kirkland notes, one of the intentions of Field Day here was ‘to present Irish nationalism as part of a larger and more inclusive debate designed to deny a reading of it as anomalous.’<sup>114</sup>

The hostility that this collection elicited in the work of liberal scholars such as Eamonn Hughes, highlights the way that this type of Marxist approach diverges from the revisionist strands of Irish Studies with its focus on an apolitical version of multicultural pluralism.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Seamus Deane, ‘Introduction’, in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, ed. by Seamus Deane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p.6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>114</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger*, p.139. This is a reference to the description of Ireland as ‘an anomalous state’ by deconstructionist Irish postcolonial scholar, David Lloyd. See David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, (Dublin: Liliput Press, 1993).

<sup>115</sup> Eamonn Hughes, ‘To Define Your Dissent: The Plays and Polemics of the Field Day Theatre Company’, *Theatre Research International* 15:1 (1990), pp.67-77; Shaun Richards, ‘Field Day’s fifth province: avenue or



It is perhaps here then, in its fusion of Marxism and socialist nationalism, that Field Day comes closest to the theological underpinnings of this thesis. Its attempt to forge a new political state is grounded in their mythological concept of the fifth province of Ireland as 'the secret centre [...] the place where all oppositions were resolved.'<sup>116</sup> This image of unity is grounded in a mythical and transcendent location beyond the four provinces of Ireland. For Kirkland the resolution offered by this 'secret centre' indexes the way that the Field Day project parallels the messianic aspirations of Walter Benjamin's Marxism.<sup>117</sup> While this fifth province stands outside time and geography as the space wherein Benjamin's long catastrophe of history can be 'resolved,' it also focuses on a resolution in terms of a 'transcendent' idea or horizon that recalls Badiou's version of communist hypothesis as the ultimate and unsurpassable horizon for politics. Like the materialist practices of Paul and the early Christian Church, however, my argument in this thesis is that the key aim must be that of heaven on earth. To achieve this type of intervention, two key types of intervention are required: first, an awareness of the contradictions of the given situation and the points of weakness in the social formation; and second, an attempt to mobilise the masses in a way that chimes with their own concerns and languages. In terms of the former, I am not arguing here that the contemporary North exhibits the same level of antagonistic contradiction or militant politics as witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s. This is evidently not the case. However, it is evident that the North is still fissured by a series of determinate contradictions that are dominated not so much by ideology but by politics. And it is these unfinished legacies, legible in the formal ruptures and utopian impulses around political figures from the past that I want to identify in *The Ultras*.

### **A 'newness to the crime, a modernity to it'**

This focus on the (post)modernity of the North and its current contradictions thus returns us to *The Ultras*. As Agnew notes, one of the things that attracts him to Nairac is the sense of 'newness to the crime, a modernity to it' (p.21). McNamee himself, in a declaration of authorial intent, echoes this sentiment in an interview: 'writing about Ireland in that way

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impasse' pp,146-7 in Eamonn Hughes (ed.), *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, Buckingham: Open University Press (1991)

<sup>116</sup> M.P. Hederman, 'Poetry and the Fifth Province,' *The Crane Bag* 9:1 (1985) 107-115, (p.110)

<sup>117</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger*, Harlow: Longman (1996) p.145

was always a way of saying that the war there took place in a global context, was not a *sui generis* outbreak of internecine malice.' 'It was,' rather,

[...] the first war of the new century in its anticipation of surveillance culture, subordination of the media and the new warfare. (The five torture techniques [sic.] used in Long Kesh in the early seventies as developed by the CIA and taught to the British in 1971 were the ones we saw at Abu Graib-an administrative practice, not a one-off).<sup>118</sup>

In McNamee's scheme of things, 'the Troubles' are not only best understood as a 'war' then, but as a specifically 'new' type of 'warfare' that no longer constitutes the North as the site of atavistic, pre-modern hatreds, but rather as something quintessentially modern: 'the first war of the new century'. *The Ultras*, indeed, makes frequent reference to this sense of temporal and political novelty with discussions of 'the six techniques' of torture used in Long Kesh and later adopted as part of 'The War Terror': the intelligence operatives on 'the corridor' in Thiepval Barracks 'saw themselves in terms of being pioneers' (p.27).<sup>119</sup> However, in terms of the historical materialist focus of this thesis, what is most striking about McNamee's attempt to present Ireland as part of a new 'global context' is the fact that what the novel actually references is not so much the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but rather a broader, covert war led by a 'right-wing conspiracy' in British Intelligence against the threat of a more troubling form of *class* war: what the novel calls the 'communist menace' (p.86).

It is here then that the issues raised by my reading of the novel correlate with certain developments in Marxist theory, most notably the focus on primitive accumulation as the extra-economic means through which neoliberal policies attain their historical dominance. In *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Silvia Federici argues against the traditional view that primitive accumulation is a necessary precursor for capitalism.<sup>120</sup> In his discussion in *Capital*, Marx refers to primitive accumulation as a series of violent processes of accumulation via dispossession that constitutes the 'pre-history of capital'. These processes include the expropriation of land from a peasant population which

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<sup>118</sup> Peter Wild, 'What Lies Beneath: Peter Wild interviews Eoin McNamee', *Dogmatika* 8 June 2007, <https://dogmatika.wordpress.com/2007/06/08/what-lies-beneath/> [accessed 25 August 2015].

<sup>119</sup> See Iain Cobain, *Cruel Britannia: A Secret History of Torture* (London: Portobello, 2013), esp. chapter 5.

<sup>120</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

in turn leads to the creation of a landless proletariat, enclosures of common lands and also, in its most extreme and systematic form, colonialism. In Marx's eyes, it is these extra-economic processes that provided the historical groundwork for the ascendancy of capitalism as the dominant mode of production. 'So-called primitive accumulation,' writes Marx, 'is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as primitive because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital.'<sup>121</sup> In contrast to Marx's vision of this process as the 'pre-history of capital,' Federici argues that primitive accumulation is a fundamental characteristic of capitalism per se; that capitalism, in order to perpetuate itself, requires a constant infusion of expropriated capital derived from sources other than wage labour:

A return of the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation has accompanied every phase of capitalist globalisation including the present one, demonstrating that the continuous expulsion of farmers from land, war and plunder on a world scale, and the degradation of women are necessary condition for the existence of capitalism in all times.<sup>122</sup>

Federici's argument has a broad historical reach, yet her re-working of primitive accumulation as a 'necessary condition for the existence of capitalism in all times' signals an important theoretical reconsideration of certain tendencies within Marxism and related analyses of the Irish conflict. Federici's analysis highlights the need to rethink the historicist implications of Marx's vision of primitive accumulation as part of the 'pre-history' of capital. Marx was acutely aware of the violent characteristics of capitalist development. The 'history' of capital, he states, 'is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.'<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, it is arguable that Marx saw this as a necessary 'starting point' on the road to socio-economic and political progress.<sup>124</sup> The violent expropriation of small-scale producers from the land and the subsequent processes of proletarianization and industrial production engendered the material conditions for the liberation of humanity from scarcity and necessity. Not only could humanity now dominate the material world on a hitherto impossible scale, but the massing together of exploited workers in the factory system would aid a new type of socialisation and political awareness that would be conducive to a

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<sup>121</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, (London: Penguin, 1990), pp.874-5.

<sup>122</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, p.12.

<sup>123</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, p.875.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.875.

more collective organisation of production and social relations. This highlights the key materialist dialectic of Marx, for structural forces interact with the exploited agents of capitalist production – the proletariat and the masses – in a way that offers the possibility of a political supersession of the capitalist social formation.

In a slightly different manner, the capitalist mode of production receives sustained attention in *The Communist Manifesto*, mostly in terms of its historical achievements.<sup>125</sup> Marx's discussion of the 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation' in *Capital* also seems to focus on the determinate forces of the economic structure in its assumption that the violence of capital's birth pangs would be increasingly replaced by a disciplining of labour that would emerge with the working of economic laws.<sup>126</sup> The critique of political economy exhibited in Marx's *Capital* arguably offers the most comprehensive and perspicacious account of the logic of accumulation and surplus value under the capitalist mode of production. The focus here then is overwhelmingly on structure: the mode of production, the logic of commodity, tendencies and laws of accumulation. This type of analysis is a necessary precondition for any Marxist critique of social inequality. However, Marx's assumption that primitive accumulation was part of the pre-history of capital, and the underlying progressive historical narrative upon which his analysis is grounded, is arguably wrong. Federici's argument about the centrality of primitive accumulation for all forms of capitalist accumulation has gained credence in recent years from various readings of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its relationship to contractions within the neoliberal economy. These analyses of 'disaster capitalism' or forms of 'accumulation via dispossession' have been made by Marxists and non-Marxists alike.<sup>127</sup> Crucially, the discussion of Iraq in such texts has precipitated a type of retroactive focus on earlier examples of primitive accumulation. One of the most frequent and important historical pre-cursors for these contemporary comprehension of primitive accumulation as 'war and plunder' is the overthrow of the socialist regime of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 and the alignment of the subsequent Pinochet regime with the neoliberal ideologues of the

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<sup>125</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>126</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*.

<sup>127</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2008); David Harvey, 'The New Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession' in *Socialist Register* 40 (2004), pp.63-87; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.152.

Chicago School. As I discuss in the following chapter, this historical development is one of the key determinants of Roberto Bolaño's radical use of crime fiction. It is significant then that in the description of the war in Ireland during the 1970s, *The Ultras* draws upon the example of Chile as part of the attempt to comprehend the mystery of Nairac:

David saw right-wing coups of the period following broad theatrical principles. Men in ornate uniforms brandishing pistols. Smoke coming from the presidential palace. Prisoners massed in football stadiums. Events were played out according to certain paradigms that were generally understood. Scenes of pity and cruelty. (p.86)

Although David decides that 'none of these things applied to the ultras', it is precisely this sense of a war against the 'red menace' of socialism that orientates the actions of the MI6 agent Knox in the novel. As I will argue later, the 'air of the sublime' that David associates with the ultras is determined by the fact that the novelistic depiction of Nairac actually articulates his actions in the ultra group in a utopian manner that relates to a messianic practice tied to socialism; he is then, as David partly realises, 'subject to higher principles' (p.86).

In this context, Federici's argument about primitive accumulation is important for two key reasons. First, the focus on violence and dispossession as a means to open up new markets for capital investment tempers any Marxist approach to the North that is underpinned by a type of progressive narrative of economic development. A key example here would be Tom Nairn's *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*. Nairn's account of contemporary nationalism is an influential text within European and American Marxism. Originally written in the 1977, his analysis of northern Ireland makes note of the anti-imperialist narrative of the IRA and the alignment of some of its elements with socialism.<sup>128</sup> However, Nairn ultimately foresees a solution to the conflict in the development of an 'ordinary bourgeois group in Ulster' around a type of 'Ulster Nationalism' which would overcome the 'quasi colonial ruling elite of landowners and military gentleman' with the ideology of 'bowler-hatted "inarticulacy"'.<sup>129</sup> With the development of an 'ordinary bourgeois' class, Nairn envisions that the identitarian struggle in the North will dissipate into a type of classical socio-economic antagonism between labour and capital. While Nairn's account of nationalism is powerful, this type of analysis is predicated upon a

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<sup>128</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: NLR, 1977) pp.230-2; pp.248-9.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.242

progressive narrative of economic development that fails to take into account the continuing role of primitive accumulation and thus cannot attend to the ways that political struggles around socialism do not emerge in a mechanical way due to contradictions between the forces and relations of production.

The need to move beyond the reductive economic basis for socialist struggle and attendant mechanistic understandings of social change brings us to the second key point. Marxist conceptions of the class struggle have traditionally been centred on the organisation and struggle of the masses. As I argued in Chapter One, this kind of engagement with the aim of transformative political action is central to any type of work that is to be considered Marxist. Indeed, Badiou's provocative turn to Saint Paul and the recent analyses of workplace politics by figures such as Andrew Smith take the issue of political resistance as their object.<sup>130</sup> Beyond the famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, this type of approach receives its most programmatic statement in the dramatic crescendo to *The Communist Manifesto*: 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite'<sup>131</sup> In the terms of Federici's analysis, however, awareness of class war necessitates sustained focus on the agency of the representatives of the capitalist classes as much as the organisations and agency of workers. One important consequence of this approach then is that it renews the dialectical kernel of the materialist outlook by focusing on the interactions of agency and structure alike. What is particularly important about the case of the dirty war in 1970s is that the political agents that require analysis here are not just those of socialism, but also the organisations and figures who act as class representatives of the capitalist mode of production. In other words, the 'right-wing coups of the period' and their attendant ideologies and political practices, what the novel calls their 'theatrical principles', require analysis as much as the structural forces that constitute the mode of production of late capitalism itself.

McNamee's representation of the war in Ireland during the 1970s in relation to the class struggle against the communist menace is significant because it again harnesses the themes of the novel to the political and historical concerns of this thesis and my attempt to re-work and extend Badiou's theorisation of the crisis of communist politics. In this

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<sup>130</sup> Andrew Smith, 'On Shop Working' *New Left Review* 78 (November-December 2012), 99-113.

<sup>131</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.52.

context, Aijaz Ahmed's contention that 'we should speak not so much of colonialism or postcolonialism but of capitalist modernity, which takes the colonial form in particular places and times' suggests that Marxists must take far greater account of the violent means through which the forces of capital have attained dominance in the present.<sup>132</sup> What I am suggesting, in other words, is that the reasons for the crisis of communist politics in the 1970s is not so much the result of internal contradictions within the vanguard modality of political organisation, but, rather, the result of the deployment of the vanguard method by ultras within the British state as part of its longstanding colonial project in Ireland. Moreover, in Ahmed's terms, the deployment of the vanguard method in this colonial or postcolonial terrain of the North was an integral feature of the process of late capitalist modernity itself. In other words, primitive accumulation played a central role in the birth pangs of neoliberalism in Britain and Ireland.

It is a well-known fact that during 'The Troubles' the British government publically referred to the IRA as criminals and gangsters. This official policy of normalisation and criminalization veiled the deployment of SAS operatives such as Nairac in the *de facto* dirty war of the 1970s. However, in private, and, most strikingly, in discussions with their cold war allies in the US, British ministers referred to the IRA as 'Marxist guerrillas' whose aims were similar to Latin American socialist national-liberation movements such as the Nicaraguan Sandinistas.<sup>133</sup> This private admission of the socialist and national liberation politics of the IRA is arguably far more historically accurate than the discourse of criminality that marked the public rhetoric of respective British governments. The articulation of the politics of communism with a type of nationalist mythology is one of the key elements that I have discussed in my materialist re-working of Badiou's theological turn thus far in this thesis. McNamee's depiction of the North of Ireland since the 1970s in terms of a war against a 'red menace' that is understood in the 'visionary terms' of Nairac and 'men who dealt in allegories' thus immediately connects *The Ultras* to the central elements of analysis in this thesis.

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<sup>132</sup> Aijaz Ahmed, 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality', p.7 in *Race and Class*, Vol. 36 No. 3 (1995) pp.1-20; Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>133</sup> Ken Livingstone, *You Can't Say That: Memoirs*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).

Since the peace-process members of the IRA have been convicted for work with Marxist rebels in Colombia. However, in the specific context of primitive accumulation and Anglo-Irish relations, it is important to note that the use of the term ‘the ultras’ in McNamee’s novel directly relates to the revelations of the aforementioned “whistleblowers” from the British intelligence and security services. As figures such as Holroyd, Wallace and also Peter Wright have attested, the killings attributed to Nairac in the novel form part of a plot to undermine a ceasefire between Britain and the IRA that had been negotiated by the leader of the Labour Party, Harold Wilson. These atrocities were part of a wider campaign by rogue elements in MI5, named, it must be noted, as the ‘the ultras’ by Wallace, to destabilise the Wilson government under the Operational title of Clockwork Orange.<sup>134</sup> For senior officers in MI5 such as Peter Wright, and for members of the Tory establishment such as Airey Neave, a close confidant of Margaret Thatcher, and Sir David Sterling, the founder of the SAS and later figurehead in the anti-left paramilitary group GB75, Wilson was a suspected Soviet agent and his apparent appeasement of the IRA and the Trade Unions bespoke an attempt to turn Britain leftwards. As part of a project of political destabilisation, the ultras were thus implicated in acts of collusion with Loyalist terror groups, tacit support for the 1974 Ulster Worker’s Council Strike that brought down the Sunningdale Power sharing agreement between nationalists and unionists in the Province, and a political smear campaign against senior Labour politicians and Trade Union figures.<sup>135</sup> Whilst these initial allegations were strongly denied, later admissions by, and investigations into, the activities of the RUC and security services have subsequently corroborated many of the claims.<sup>136</sup> In the cultural sphere, MI5’s attempt to subvert Harold Wilson’s Labour government during the 1970s became a key focus for the British Left’s engagement with the North. Ken Loach’s prize winning film, *Hidden Agenda* (1990), takes the form of a political thriller or conspiracy to represent these events.<sup>137</sup> McNamee’s work also repeatedly returns to this sense of conspiracy. Parts of his representation of the Shankill Butcher, Lenny Murphy in

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<sup>134</sup> Paul Foot, *Who Framed Colin Wallace?*; Ken Livingstone, *You Can’t Say That: Memoirs*, p.296-299.

<sup>135</sup> Paul Foot, *Who Framed Colin Wallace?*; Duncan Campbell, ‘Victims of the “dirty war”’ pp.8-10 in *The New Statesman* (4/5/1984); Duncan Campbell, ‘Dirty War Part II: Booby traps and bank raids’ pp.12-14 in *The New Statesman* (11/5/1984); Duncan Campbell, ‘Dirty War Part III: Terror Tactics’ pp.10-11 in *The New Statesman* (18/5/1984)

<sup>136</sup> Ken Livingstone, *You Can’t Say That: Memoirs*, pp.297-298.

<sup>137</sup> *Hidden Agenda* dir. By Ken Loach (Hemdale Film, Enterprise and Cineplex Odeon, 1990).



*Resurrection Man*, allude to a dark current within the British security forces that used the war in the North as a cover to pursue wider political aims.

It is increasingly apparent then that during the 1970s the North was the terrain where the war against the IRA was partly underpinned by an attempt to transform the capitalist mode of production and the social formation of the United Kingdom. What groups like Field Day see as a 'colonial crisis' then, must be placed within a historical hermeneutic tied to the social formation of late capitalism whose dominant mode of production, neoliberal capitalism, is supplemented and secured by the extra-economic forces of war and primitive accumulation.

What this historical appraisal indicates is that the reasons for the success of the present day liberal democratic social formation in the North, expressed most frequently in the rhetoric of the free market, cannot be sought in the market itself. As the recent global financial collapse and related contortions in property speculation in the "Tiger Economy" of the South testify, the market is actually beset by key structural weaknesses. The centrality of state intervention and forms of primitive accumulation in the establishment of the current social formation in the North thus highlights the fact that what we have at present is still not a free market. Moreover, these institutional interventions continue to play a determinate role in the perpetuation of long-standing social, economic and communitarian divisions.

In order to get a better sense of these issues, I want to turn now to the last section of this chapter and an extended discussion of a short passage from the latter half of *The Ultras*. In this passage – which acts as a narrative fulcrum in the text – Clyde Knox, the head of British MI6 in Northern Ireland, reflects upon dirty war during the 1970s and the role that Robert Nairac is imagined to have played in these events. This was a period when the official policy of the British State in relation to the IRA was one of criminalization. This policy was of course contradicted by the facts of the dirty war: the covert use of Special Forces in illegal killings and rendition, collusion with Loyalist terror gangs, new methods of interrogation and torture, wide-spread surveillance, the dissemination of false information against potential political enemies and the control of the media. It is the deployment of such practices of violence and control in the current "war on Terror" which provide the justification for McNamee's own view of "the Troubles" as 'the first war of the new

century'. In the Marxist terminology outlined above, these constitute part of the process of primitive accumulation whose political legacy continues to play a determinant role not only in the contradictory framework of the North but also, as I will now show, in the novel itself.

**'A sense of historical connection': literary form and messianic utopianism**

It was springtime. Knox had seedlings in pots on the windowsill of his office. He liked to encourage the view of himself as a keen amateur gardener. A potterer about in gardens with a shapeless hat. A man given to certain homespun wisdoms. However, in private moments he admitted to himself that his position had lineage. There was a constitutional tradition of conspirators. Men who found themselves at the centre of swirling heresies and felt obliged to act. He felt a sense of historical connection. He could empathize with seventeenth-century figures. He felt a sense of connection with their labyrinthine plots, their Jacobean glooms. He could see himself plotting, forging documents in flickering candlelight driven by mournful conviction.

He felt that there were analogies with the current political landscape. The communist menace. You were aware of currents in foreign affairs, malign influences. The threat looming in the East.

He heard that Robert [Nairac] was increasingly active along the mid-border area in Portadown. He found that people believed anything they heard about Robert. They yearned after him. They sought the lonely perfection of the conspirator. (pp.184-5)

In the passage above, McNamee subjects the 'homespun wisdoms' of British identity and official narratives of the state's role in the North of Ireland during the 1970s, to a twofold aesthetic strategy of defamiliarisation that operates at both the level of content and aesthetic form.<sup>138</sup> In terms of aesthetic form, the rupture or radical exhaustion of the crime form played out in the novel resonates at the level of language itself; 'He heard that Robert was increasingly active along the mid-border area and in Portadown. He found that people believed anything they heard about Robert. They yearned after him. They sought the lonely perfection of the conspirator.' Knox's interior monologue here exposes ideological faultlines in the interplay between our generic expectations of the crime genre and the nature and provenance of the crime that the novel explores. Instead of a factual establishment of identity and the restoration of order by a figure of law, we are witness to

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<sup>138</sup> For a discussion of British propaganda in this context, see Liz Curtis, *Ireland: The Propaganda War*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

a search for meaning on the part of the masses ('they yearned after him'), a desire for order that can only be framed in terms of popular faith ('people believed'). In *The Ultras* the normal procedures associated with the attribution of responsibility, guilt and criminality do not so much fail but rather emigrate to different cultural fields: into rumour ('he heard'), into popular belief ('people believed') and into uncertain political allegiance ('the mid-border area'). The problem then is not so much that of truth, but rather the means through which this truth is established or grasped. So, while McNamee's novel takes the notion of legal and historical legitimation as its object, it is ultimately unable to produce any literary or historically acceptable form of legitimation. In terms of literary form then, the conclusion of this extract breaks with the cultural assumptions of the form. The truth behind Nairac's identity and role cannot be resolved in the official or traditional legalistic terms of the crime genre; the only available discourse through which to understand Nairac and the historical changes associated with his work is that of popular faith: 'people yearned after him. They sought the lonely perfection of the conspirator'.

This sense of the troubling of language and form is also played out in the ways in which this passage renders the British state, personified here in the MI6 agent Knox, via a longstanding ideologically freighted image of national identity: the English gentleman gardening in 'springtime'. This seasonal image of the garden encourages ideas of national culture as an organic, timeless, natural entity. The holism of culture, community and tradition is metaphorically illuminated here in the visibility of 'springtime' light. The cyclical time of the seasons in the garden brings to light an idea of the nation and its people as one both temporally and spatially. In terms of the events in north of Ireland during the 1970s, this image chimes with the official state discourses of normalization via-à-vis the IRA: that the violence enacted by Republicans was nothing but common criminality, lacking in any decisive political content that could trouble the stable vision of the landscape of the Union as imagined in the ideology of British nationalism. Thus the natural cycle of seasons, their endless and certain repetition, offers an enduring sense of identity whose primary reference is natural temporality rather than (man-made) history: 'It was springtime'. This feeling of timeless unity is reinforced by the spatial metaphor of garden. The fecund image of 'seedlings' and plants balanced in an organic totality operates as a metaphor for benign social cohesion, a hopeful conservative ideology of the holism of culture and community

that constitutes a unitary collective experience of the people: witness the gentleman gardener who adheres to the lowly familiarity of 'homespun wisdoms'. Unity is thus disclosed in the practices of everyday day life, a type of shared 'pottering' amateurishness that transcends any major class divide and obviates the fact of violent political contestation as propounded by the IRA. It is then the benign paternalism of the secret service figure, acting as the 'keen amateur gardener' of 'homespun' tradition, which ensures the unity of the Union. The forces of law and order weed out the common criminality of the IRA, therefore ensuring that the official view of 'the Troubles' is one that transcends the divisions of politics.<sup>139</sup> The garden metaphor, which spatializes and flattens out the historical life of the people, thus bespeaks the official ideology of normalization.

The metaphoric use of terrestrial space to visualise the nation and its people is a long-standing feature in discourses of nationalism. As the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha aptly observes, the 'recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression'.<sup>140</sup> But what is arguably more important about this image of landscape is not so much its longevity as a mediatory element in ideologies of nationalism, but rather the fact that this metaphor of visibility itself begins to shine a 'flickering' light on a very different narrative presence in the extract. While the metaphor of the garden is closely tied to discourses of English nationalism and, in this case, the Union between Great Britain and 'Northern Ireland', it is significant to note that the cultural use of horticultural imagery as a symbol for the political community begins to gain prominence in early modern Britain during the late Elizabethan era and more intensely during the Jacobean period. In contrast to the notions of collective cohesion expressed via an ideology of nationalism, the crucial thing to note here is that this image of the garden is ultimately ambivalent: the garden is only configured in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama with a simultaneous conception and fear of corruption.<sup>141</sup> As is well known, one of the major cultural preoccupations in the works of Kyd, Marlowe,

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<sup>139</sup> For another aesthetic use of this metaphor in relation to British nationalism and agents of the state, see John Le Carre, *The Constant Gardener* (London: Hodder, 2007).

<sup>140</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.205.

<sup>141</sup> See Bruce Bohrer, *Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Shakespeare and Webster is the representation of a dislocated social order: 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark' declares Hamlet in perhaps the most transparent and programmatic statement from Jacobean tragedy.<sup>142</sup> While the representation of corruption is the major theme of Jacobean drama, the notion of corruption and social chaos is also repetitively configured in the metaphorical practices of language. In the materialist terms that I laid out in the last chapter, what I mean here is that such linguistic practices must be seen as part of a dialogical relationship with official ideologies of a stable and naturally ordered Elizabethan World Picture.<sup>143</sup> Rather than consolidate such ideologies, the ambivalence of this garden metaphor and the thematic focus on corruption index the underlying social and class struggles that become legible in what Voloshinov would call the 'multiaccentuality' of the sign.<sup>144</sup> So, in the tragic form of *The White Devil* by Webster, 'the darkest of Jacobean tragic poets', social and moral disorder is not only referred to in the actual murderous and deceitful action of the plot but also via metaphors of darkness and corruption where a 'fair garden' has been changed into 'poisoned herbs'.<sup>145</sup> And this type of imagery even pervades the more light-hearted dramatic form of comedy. Recall the famous words of the villain Don John, Shakespeare's malcontent and 'bastard Prince' from *Much Ado About Nothing*, as he curses his brother, the Prince of Aragon: 'I'd rather be a canker in a hedge, than a rose in his grace.'<sup>146</sup> Thus the garden metaphor, which seems to indicate a sense of organic unity and order, also signifies not only a worrying fascination with corruption and social collapse but also a dialogical – and ultimately antagonistic – relationship to the dominant discourses of sovereign power in this period.

Returning to the extract from *The Ultras* then, it is significant, therefore, that the very discourse of state power as expressed by the British MI6 Agent captures quite precisely the sense of ambivalence and incompatibility of meaning that is elaborated in the history of the garden metaphor above. So, while the passage begins with a sense of the timeless ('certain homespun wisdoms') and the benign ('a keen amateur gardener'), the

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<sup>142</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), Act I, SC.IV, 90.

<sup>143</sup> See E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Random House, 1959)

<sup>144</sup> V.N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.11.

<sup>145</sup> M.C. Bradbrook, *John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p.1.

<sup>146</sup> William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* ed. A.R. Humphreys, (London: Arden, 1981), Act I, SC.III, 25.

configuration of British national interests in the North of Ireland in terms of such horticultural practices brings to light the distracting presence of another signifying history that disturbs the stability of the conservative discourses of Knox and the official policy of normalization. The postulate of unity as expressed in the garden is undercut by the divergent meanings attached to the metaphor. As the extract proceeds the garden metaphor is suddenly caught up in a 'private' admission of 'swirling heresies' and 'conspirators' that are imagined via reference to the literary tradition and 'labyrinthine plots' of early modern British drama: 'Jacobean glooms'. The mutual confrontation of these conflicting meanings in Knox's discourse signals a striking incompleteness. It is as if Knox's discourse itself, conceived self-consciously in the stylised manner of literary affect by the character himself ('He liked to encourage the view of himself as a keen amateur gardener'), is subjected to the 'internal distantiating' or contradiction that Althusser and Macherey identify in literature.<sup>147</sup> In Althusserian terms, it is this very incompleteness that is of importance for critical analysis. For the effect of this conflict of this meaning, I would argue, is to offer the critical reader a new way to interpret the ideologies that determined British involvement in Ireland during the 1970s. Knox's original intent is seemingly obstructed or contorted by the ideological elements he deploys; in trying to express one meaning, he finds himself ideologically constrained to express another. Thus, Knox and the British State, with their discourses of law and order and attendant policies of criminalization and normalization officially want to represent the events in the North as a type of criminal problem (as signified quite appositely in the pejorative and dominant signifier for the war: 'the Troubles') that had no real political validity or distinction from common criminality. This is one meaning of Knox's nationalistic rendering of the work of the state: the landscape of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is configured as a timeless, unified, natural collective that transcends any fundamental political or class divides among its constituents. The force of the law and order, imagined here as a gardener, acts by rooting out any criminal element without fundamentally altering the political balance of the state. Yet Knox finds himself forced to represent (on account of certain contradictions inherent in the ideology and policies of the British state) the actions of the state not only in terms of criminal 'plotting'

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<sup>147</sup> Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art – in Reply to André Daspre' p.233; Pierre Macherey, *Towards a Theory of Literary Production*.

itself, but via reference to a decisive period of primitive accumulation, political revolution and civil wars during the 'seventeenth century' that laid the groundwork for the rise of capitalism in Britain.<sup>148</sup>

The effect of this ideological divergence is thus to suggest that the events in northern Ireland during the 1970s were, in reality, not simply a marginal issue of criminality but rather part of a significant shift in contemporary politics and society that parallels the decisive and bloody changes of the 'seventeenth century'. As Christopher Hill notes, during this period the British Isles were 'famous throughout Europe for the violence of its politics.'<sup>149</sup> Between the start of Elizabeth I's reign in 1558 and the Revolution of 1688, the 'only English sovereign who had not lost one of his parents at the hands of the executioner was Charles I'; and Charles I would himself encounter this very fate during the Civil War.<sup>150</sup> This was the age then of heightened class conflict exacerbated by an economic crisis in Western Europe and new agricultural and commercial revolutions whose most iconic political expression of what Engels called 'the long fight of the bourgeoisie against feudalism' came in the English Civil War (1642-51).<sup>151</sup>

The 'historical connection' that the English gentleman Knox feels with the period of primitive accumulation and political crises of the 'seventeenth century' suggests, therefore, that the events of the 1970s are not then simply an issue of law and order between opposing religious groups, but rather a decisive periodizing conjuncture in the political history of capital. Following this reading then, the individual utterance or framing of the conflict in Ireland in terms of competing religious groups or common criminality is, I will argue, best grasped as a symbolic move that bespeaks a wider political confrontation between social classes.

Rather than view McNamee's works then as a 'reactionary response to the Troubles' and incapable of imagining historical change, I would argue that a materialist reading of the articulation of the overdetermining noir thriller form of *The Ultras* with the ideology of form of Jacobean tragedy offers a precise historical configuration of the North today. The

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<sup>148</sup> See Christopher Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.119

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.119

<sup>151</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'The General Crisis of the European Economy in the seventeenth century' in *Past and Present*, (1954) 5 (1):33-53; Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

reference to ‘Jacobean gloom’ in the extract above can also be read here as a self-referential gesture by the author. McNamee’s novel is itself framed by an intertextual reference to *King Lear*. Pleading guilty to participation in the madness of the dirty war, what Mallon calls ‘accessory to mayhem’, the young Agnew enacts a personal type of absolutist dissolution or *ab-solus* (p.21). In the midst of the state of exception of the 1970s, his confession produces a type of institutional break-down: it is the agent of law who is charged and incarcerated on ‘conspiracy to murder’ (p.141). The novel’s plot is structured around the subsequent tragedy of this fallen detective’s relationship with his duty-bound daughter Lorna who dies, like Cordelia, on the liminal terrain of the beach at the novel’s end. The relationship to the form of Renaissance tragedy is important. Indeed, in arguably the last real moment of politically committed literary scholarship, that not unsurprisingly took place at the high point of Thatcherism, Marxist theorists such as Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore and Franco Moretti argued that the greatness of Jacobean tragedy, and Shakespearean tragedy in particular, lay not in its timeless evocation of universal values of “man” mediated via English heritage, but rather in its revolution in form.<sup>152</sup> The content of these tragedies repeatedly depicts a conflict between sovereign absolutism and aristocratic reason. In short, simply by following his nomination, the absolute monarch causes the break up (the *ab-solus*) of the entire body politic. In earlier English tragedies such as Norton and Sackville’s *Gorbuduc* (1562) the social catastrophe caused by Kingly excess or absolutism is ultimately contained by a final sense of restoration achieved by aristocratic reason.<sup>153</sup> In formal terms then, the sovereign madness of the King is checked by a dramatic structure, often the logical commentary and vision of future peace announced by a chorus of nobles. So in *Gorbuduc*, the tyranny of the King’s absolutism (his abdication), is prevented from destroying reason per se. In the last scene, Eubulus, the noble ideologue for the Elizabethan World picture, re-states the arguments for political order rejected by *Gorbuduc* at the beginning. This means that the drama itself, and by extension, the Elizabethan world picture, escaped the catastrophe it depicted. However, in Shakespearean tragedy this formal restitution, and by extension, the ancient cultural and

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<sup>152</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield eds. *The Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines*; Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorbuduc: Two Tudor Tragedies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).



political authority of the noble class is refused: at the end of *King Lear* for example, we hear only banal and illogical comments by the nobility on the 'excellent foppery of the world.'<sup>154</sup> What this shift in dramatic form suggests then is that the authority and formal function of the loyal and reasonable nobles is beginning to break down. This loss of cultural and political authority, in both content and form, means that ideology of form of Jacobean tragedy is one of radical political negation bound up with a sense of historical crisis. As Dollimore states, 'Shakespeare may announce the dawn of bourgeois civilization, but not by prefiguring it. On the contrary, he demonstrates inexorably how, obeying the old rules, which are the only ones he know, the world can only fall apart.'<sup>155</sup>

This crisis of this choral structure is mirrored in *The Ultras*. The final words of the novel are the suicide note of the loyal daughter, Lorna. Worse than what Moretti calls the 'chilling stupidity' of Edgar's conclusion to *Lear* as a mere 'sad time', Lorna's suicide note exhibits a break-down of linguistic structure. Reason is lost:

Each to his own Robert had to learn his own secrets I had to learn mine but I think his secrets were about killing people lots of people and mine are *just sad secrets* a bit pathetic really that you learn to stop them getting near to you to stop them feeding you when you don't want. That to wear big clothes to hide you...To hang your hair over your face to hide you. That to hide you that to hide you. (pp.255-6)

As I argue earlier in this chapter the intertextual references that haunt the narration of history in *The Ultras* draw our attention to the fact that far from constructing an image of the present as the end of history, it yields a complex and troubling notion of the present as shot through with images and allusions to historical crisis. To talk about the present in these terms is to give it a sense of historicity. As I point out, this complex rendering of the past in the present differs markedly from the ultimately ahistorical imagination of the North's future in the economic and political terms of the neoliberal present that are legible in Glenn Paterson's *That Which Was*.

The reference to 'Death By Water' in the narration of Lorna's death from *The Ultras* thus bears further scrutiny. This section of *The Waste Land* exhibits the most formally organized moment in the poem (the ten line stanza compressed into four rhyming couplets)

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<sup>154</sup> Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1.SC II.

<sup>155</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, 'Introduction' to J.W.Lever, *The Tragedy of State: A Study of Jacobean Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. vii –xvii, p.xiii.

suggesting that this section offers a sense of meaning or significance. This is initially heightened by the fulfilment of Madame Sostostri's earlier prophecy: 'fear death by water'. And this sense of prophecy and pre-figuring is echoed in *The Ultras*. For Lorna's death here repeats that of Nairac at the novel's start. Yet the promise of ultimate religious meaning or didacticism is finally refused by the poem. All that Phlebas' death signifies is that the physical fact of death and decay will triumph over everything: 'Gentile or Jew/ O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,/ Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.' This nihilistic conclusion is partly repeated in *The Ultras* with Lorna's suicide note:

'When I was small I hid in the dark and they called but I did not come out. Each to his own Robert had to learn his own secrets I had to learn mine but I think his secrets were about killing people lots of people and mine are just sad secrets a bit pathetic really that you learn to stop them getting near to you to stop them feeding you when you don't want' (pp.255-6).

While the reference to Eliot at the novel's conclusion ostensibly highlights the nihilistic 'secret' of Robert, it is arguable that Lorna's suicide note inverts the formal organization that sets apart 'Death by Water' from the rest of *The Waste Land*. In the suicide note, what is striking is the collapse of syntax and crisis of form. More importantly then, what should thus be taken from the use of the modernist literary form here is the significance of the ideology of form as an attempt to provide an imaginary solution to the problem of historical and social change. The articulation of the formal failure of the crime novel with the literary form of modernism returns us to a type of debate about social periodization and historical crises. Indeed, Eliot's argument about his use of the mythical method in his poetry arises from his sense that the novel form no longer suffices: 'If [*Ulysses*] is not a novel, that is simply because the novel is a form that will no longer serve.'<sup>156</sup> Eliot locates the crisis of the novel in the context of a history that has transformed into a 'panorama of futility and anarchy': 'the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter.'<sup>157</sup> With the concatenations of capitalism, the age of the self-regulating organic society for Eliot was thus left behind. And so too, the conception of the realist novel as the dominant cultural form of this earlier era; the sense of a possibility of form that is brought together in the

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<sup>156</sup> T.S.Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' in *The Dial*, LXXV (Nov.1923), pp.480-83; rep in *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robert Demming (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp.268-71, p.269.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p.269.

chronotope embodied by the transformation of the mediocre hero is replaced by Eliot with the mythical method. If *The Ultras* can still imagine time, then, I will suggest that this is because it also draws upon the messianic cultural form.

What is thus significant in this context is the fact that the text's description of Nairac as a 'feral...looming, mythical figure' who haunts the rural borderlands constructs him as an avatar of the mythological figures of Irish nationalism such as the hunter-warriors Finn McCool and Cúchulainn. In the context of literary modernism and the mythical method, the novel configures Nairac in terms redolent of Yeats' 'rough beast' from his poem about the anti-colonial struggle in Ireland, *The Second Coming*. Indeed, by stating that Nairac was 'not at the periphery but at the centre of things' the novel re-works famous opening lines of *The Second Coming* about the falconer's gyre and the centre falling apart. As the text reiterates, Nairac was himself a keen falconer, it was his falcon that Ken Loach used in *Kes* in 1969 and with what McNamee call his 'larcenous stare' of a 'bleak eyed raptor', it is suggested that Nairac himself stalks his human prey in a manner similar to the falcon itself.<sup>158</sup> What these references mean is that it is only by returning to the "atavistic" beliefs of the nationalist past, beliefs that contemporary Irish literary critics and Anglo-Irish politicians alike have symbolically excluded, that one can begin to grasp a sense of the 'truth' about the present. If the contradictions and forms of the novel thus suggest that *The Ultras* can imagine historical change, then I would argue that its use of another cultural form, Pauline messianism, also offers a way of conceiving political action.

In the previous chapters I outlined the way that the dramatic content of the story of Christian messianism, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality among the masses and the highest and most sublime tragedy, shattered the classical tradition of literary-cultural styles in the ancient world. This is evident in the narration of the two key elements of Christianity: incarnation and the promissory notion of the Passion. The incarnation of a messiah among the lowly masses breaks with the farcical depiction of the masses in classical antiquity; the *dramatis personae* of the Gospels are not only of lowly station, fishermen and peasants, but their faith in Jesus, as discussed in reference to Peter's denial, sees them represented in the highest and most tragic sense. In similar terms, the sublime

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<sup>158</sup> *Kes* dir.by Ken Loach (United Artists, 1969)

tragedy of the passion, with its ultimate promise of salvation, breaks down the classical barriers of style by fusing tragedy with the comedic promise of redemption. It is noticeable then, that in the extract above, Nairac is the object of intimate energy and religious fervour on the part of the masses: 'He found that people believed anything they heard about Robert. They yearned after him.' As I now argue, both the unique quality of the novel's very structure – the failure of the crime form to provide a rational conclusion –, and the contradictory nature of its depiction of historical stasis via figurations of dramatic historical change and utopian politics is ultimately tied to the narrative energy that derives from the theological coding of Nairac.

A distinctive element in Christian messianic discourse is the notion of *figura*.<sup>159</sup> In its universalistic break from the confines of Judaism, Christianity played down the ethnic specificity of the Old Testament. In Christianity the history of the Jews assumes the appearance of a series of "figures" or prophetic announcements for the coming of Jesus. The major effect of this figural interpretation was to produce a vertical sense of time where all episodes are linked to Divine Providence. This new sense of vertical time dissolves a horizontal or chronological conception of causality. According to figural logic, the here and now are no longer links in a chronological chain of unfolding connections but are rather something which has always been and which will be fulfilled in the future. It is this verticality that provides the hermeneutic key to historical understanding in Christianity. For example, the sacrifice of Issac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Jesus. The latter fulfils the promise that was announced in the former. Thus the vertical time of messianic fulfilment is, in Auerbach's terms, eternal and 'omni-temporal'.<sup>160</sup>

It is significant then that *The Ultras* commences with a figuration of Nairac and his last known movements which follows this specifically Christian vertical time. Thus the opening chapter of *The Ultras* intersperses a variety of distinct chronological events – the last known moments of Robert's life; the scene in the car park at the Three Steps Inn the following morning; the rumours of his fate; Robert's earlier military practice; the link to the murders of John Francis Green and the Miami Showband; his pre-pubescent experiences with his father - into a sense of a pre-destined and eternal present that is emphasised by the use of

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<sup>159</sup> Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Anchor, 1957), p.42.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. pp.12-14, pp.64-5.

the shifters 'here', 'now', 'this' in a concluding sentence about pre-destination: 'He had known that it would end *here* but he had not known until *now* that it could end like *this*.' (p.8). Chronological or secular time seems to be suspended here and what emerges instead is a sense of temporal exception or fulfilment, what Auerbach calls omni-temporality.

In terms of religious allusion, arguably the most significant event here is the dialogue with his ophthalmist father that takes place during a pedagogical dissection of a cow's eye 'when Robert was eleven' (p.6). His father's insistence on being 'watchful' and on the meaning of words, - ('he would get Robert to look up words in the dictionary and repeat back what was written there...Sclera meaning stiffness'), - is a stylistic trope that reoccurs throughout the novel and, rather crucially, in Nairac's last moments as narrated in the final sentences of the opening chapter: 'he remembered dissecting an eye with his father. He was tired and confused. There is evidence that he had experience difficulty in comprehending the world for some time...He closed his eyes. Lacrimae meaning tears. Nocturnal meaning of the night.' (p.8)

The primary religious allusion here then is the 'forsaken' figure of Christ at his crucifixion. On the one hand, this moment from the Passion signifies both the abandonment of the Son by the Father and the controversial fact of Jesus' human form in that he is deserted by divinity at his most desperate hour: 'My god, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15.34). But on the other hand, and following the logic of vertical time, this event also contains the very radical quality of Christianity itself. Not only is the sublime moment of the Passion ignominious, the Messiah crucified like a common rebel, but the question of human weakness articulates the emancipatory element of incarnation: divinity embodied in a fragile human being of the lowest social standing. And a similar significance accrues in the opening of *The Ultras*. Robert, the Army Captain and apparent dark centre of a right-wing plot of British nationalists is actually configured in the novel in terms of the myths of Irish nationalism and thus becomes a very intimate figure of redemption for the masses. Witness the repeated use of the first name: 'people believed anything they heard about Robert'. In his last moments he kneels for an ignominious death at the hands of lacklustre and confused group of executioners, 'the gun misfiring four times', yet the 'collective moan' that issues from his executioners assumes a type of 'devotional quality' (p.6). And as the description of the 'four misfires' is repeated 'again and again', suspending the secular

chromos of causality even further, the messianic thematic of this scene becomes clear: recalling the ocular discourse of his father, the 'darkness beg[ins] to fall for Robert' (p.8).

The religious 'mystery' (p.5) of this type of mimesis is accentuated in that it pre-figures the suicide of Agnew's anorexic daughter Lorna at the novel's conclusion in the year 2000. The battery of signifiers accompanying Lorna's death recall the death of her surrogate 'brother' Nairac: she leaves a suicide note, read by her father, which speculates on the meaning of the word *ultra* and on the provenance of Nairac. Once more, this connection between the messianic figure and a lowly, infirm outcast recalls the radical mission of Jesus among the poor and disabled outcasts of the Ancient World. This sense of prefiguration in fact emerges in the novel's first encounter with Lorna. Focalised through the words of her father, Agnew, she is described as 'a medieval saint, a pale-face post-pubescent with her martyrdom depicted in an ancient stained-glass window' (p.16). That this episode takes place in chapter two, directly after the narration of Nairac's death and in the context of Agnew's arrival at her house 'as the light began to fade' – a reference to the earlier 'darkness [that] had begun to fall for Robert' (p.8) – and during a conversation with his estranged wife about Lorna herself suffering 'blackouts', emphasises this sense of the 'pietistic' vertical time even further (pp.14-18).

It is in part this type of religious figuration of Nairac that must be considered as one of the determinate reasons why the generic procedures of the crime novel begin to collapse in *The Ultras*. For the hermeneutic of vertical time is characterised by an attempt to link events from different contexts and times. In so doing, the exegetic principle of Christianity often removes the thing narrated from its very context, thus the reader is also forced to divert attention from the sensory occurrence of the thing told toward its meaning. Despite the notion of authority bestowed by religion, Christianity thus demands a dynamic type of historical hermeneutic based upon spiritual faith rather than empirical fact. It is no surprise then that the overall structure of *The Ultras* is manifestly episodic, jumping from one narrative focalization to another as much as it shifts abruptly between different historical times. There is little in the way of the causal logic of secular time. It is no surprise then that one of the most repeated phrases in *The Ultras* is that of 'there was a sense' and, moreover, that the language of the text, as highlighted most strikingly by Lorna's suicide note above, is full of changes and dramatic shifts between tenses and subject positions. The precise

elaboration of causality and rational establishment of fact that characterises crime fiction is as redundant here as adherence to linguistic and syntactical conventions. But what is arguably more significant for the theopolitical dynamism of this thesis is that the messianic code of *The Ultras* ultimately transforms the representation of a right-wing coup. In other words, Nairac is configured as a utopian image of left vanguardism.

The utopian political significance of the messianic code is clear in the way that Nairac himself seems to embody the carnivalesque code that Gunjević identifies as the anti-hierarchical and subversive core of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem amongst the hysteria and fear on Psalm Sunday.<sup>161</sup> As the novel recounts, it is during the 'barely contained psychosis' of the 1970s:

'that Robert's name started to come up in the debrief. Soldiers talked about a tall officer carrying a shotgun who would come up in the debrief...He led lost patrols home...The appearance of an emissary among weary and frightened troops. Men who were almost ready to believe anything. Nairac talked to them as equals. He told them to call him Bob. He wasn't a crap hat' (pp.87-9).

Nairac's dramatic appearance here follows the traditional messianic structure of the sudden and redemptive arrival of an 'emissary' with no sense of causal or horizontal temporality: 'the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night' (I Thessalonians 5.2). The dramatic about face from one extreme to the other – the sudden and promissory Pauline shift between 'night' to 'day' – is captured here as Nairac's emergence produces a 'reported increase in religious observance among the troops' (p.89). Yet this type of redemptive arrival is arguably more significant for its revelation of the intransigent egalitarian core at the heart of the Christian doctrine. Even in the rigidly hierarchical structure of the military, and even in relation to an apparently right-wing figure, the messianic code produces a carnivalesque subversion of such divides. Not only do we witness the material fact of an officer talking to the 'frightened troops...as equals' but, moreover, this sense of solidarity with the lower classes finds expression in the common vernacular style through which this equality is expressed: 'call him Bob'; 'he wasn't a craphat'.

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<sup>161</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'Watch and Pray – The Messianic Subversion', pp.258-9.

If the religious energy around Nairac subverts the calcified hierarchies of the military, then the contradictory theopolitical figuration of this right-wing historical figure becomes clearer, however, in the direct associations that this religious code forges with the politics of socialism. The opening chapter's depiction of vertical time is again useful here and in particular the specific reference to the bovine vivisection carried out by Nairac and his father. In addition to the crucifixion, there is a second religious allusion here, notably, the messianic animal Behemoth that is to be eaten at the banquet of the righteous, an episode that will take place upon the return of the Messiah heralding the eschatological fulfilment of time. This sense of feasting and finality pre-figures Nairac's alleged end-point in a sausage factory. However, the novel also configures the outdoor adventurer Nairac in reference to the two other messianic animals from the banquet of the righteous, the bird, Ziz, and the fish, Leviathan. It is these messianic references that forge together the connections between Christianity and socialism within the novel.

Towards the end of the text, *The Ultras* includes a depiction of Nairac fishing a monstrous pike: a 'vivid import from the beginnings of the world' (p.233). This reference to the Leviathan is interesting for a number of related reasons. Firstly, it takes place just before he heads to his death at The Three Steps Inn, at a time when Nairac himself has begun to realise that 'he was starting to resemble one of the photo-fit pictures' of military targets in the dirty war. And secondly, the capture of the fish, 'a barbarous misanthrope', is interspersed with Nairac overhearing a couple having sex in the woods next to the river (p233-4). His subsequent discarding of the fish upon witnessing the sexual encounter plays out ancient debates about the physiology of the blessed at the *eschaton*. As Agamben has observed, the risen body was problematic for medieval theologians since the biological functions of sex and nourishment constitute a temporal function that contradicts the discourse of heaven as the end of time.<sup>162</sup> That the principle functions of animal life – nutrition and generation – are rejected here is suggestive therefore of the fact that Nairac is best understood in eschatological terms.

What is more important, however, is the political significance of this messianic code. For the references to the other messianic animal, Ziz, situate Nairac as ally of his apparent class

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<sup>162</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by Kevin Atnell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) pp.17-19



enemies: the socialist forces of the IRA. In terms of content, the novel seems to suggest that rumours of Nairac sympathies with the IRA are misplaced and part of his military subterfuge: 'There was the attraction of the lie, of transgression. Agnew knew that Robert had been in the habit of telling friends and colleagues back in England that he had penetrated the PIRA brigade structure. That he was in fact a brigade commander, an assertion that would be denied by all intelligence agencies on the ground' (p.135). Yet, when read in terms of the figural hermeneutic that characterises Robert, Nairac's 'transgression' becomes starkly political. Robert's first encounter with a falcon takes place when he hunts hares as a school boy. In the process he witnesses a falcon hovering above his target and 'as he watched, the hawk folded its wings and descended on the hare, dark accelerant, the hare killed at first impact, the falcon resting on top of the corpse for a moment, shrugging to correct the nap of its feathers' (p.76). Crucially, this event prefigures the latter IRA ambush of the British Intelligence Operation in Four Square Laundry Van which is not only narrated to David by Nairac, but crucially takes place in the Ardoyne area of Belfast where Nairac 'spent some time' and according to David, has 'some sympathy' for the locals: "'PIRA ambush," Robert said. "Fired down on them. Through the fucking roof. Fucking SLRs they had"' (p.189).

Throughout the novel, Nairac is referenced in relation to militant left movements of Badiou's short twentieth century. During his operations with Special Forces, Robert imagines he and his comrades as left wing partisans: 'Like Tito's men with sheepskins around their shoulders, ammunition belts.' (p.164). Towards the end of the novel, Mallon opines that he may have deliberately sabotaged the plans of the UVF Miami Showband Bombing in order to provide a tactical coup for the IRA: 'Robert put an anti-handling mechanism on it [the device]. That the whole point was to take out Jackson [the UVF leader]' (p.216). And finally, the text's recollection that 'Robert began college in September 1968' is significant in the fact that right-wing figures within the British military frequently mention Nairac in relation to militant groups that emerged after the failure of 68: the Red Army Faction or 'Baader-Meinhof grouping and their operations in Germany involving bomb attacks' and 'Patti Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army. What strangeness, he seemed to be saying' (p.145; p.88). The thematic estrangement of Nairac from his right-wing origins, as captured in the reference to Patti Hearst, whose kidnapping precipitated

an ideological volte-face towards militant socialism, is also legible in literary metaphor via images of homosexuality and it is this that completes the political significance of the contradiction I have identified vis-à-vis Nairac's utopian coding.

A variety of critics have noted the way *The Ultras* highlights Nairac's affinity with the lower classes via boxing whilst others make reference to the literary representation of his homosexuality. While these are accurate empirical observations, the literary and political significance of these elements within the text have not been accounted for. Crucially, they relate to the question of class betrayal and, in the language of Bloomsbury, the threat of civilizational crisis. As Alan Sinfield observes in his essay 'Queers, Treachery and the Literary Establishment', the figure of the upper class homosexual played a 'strikingly contradictory role' in post-war British class society.<sup>163</sup> During this period, the 'homosexual, leisure-class literary intellectual' was feared due to the levelling consequences envisaged as a result of their dalliances with working class men. The upper-class homosexual was perceived as a 'Trojan horse within the citadel of cultural power, smuggling in the class enemy.'<sup>164</sup> And as Sinfield reveals, for homosexual writers such as Christopher Isherwood and Denton Welch, the disruption of class distinctions was indeed one of the major attractions: 'What I in fact started to encounter was the German working class: and there was an escape there from the upper-middle class to which I belonged' recalls Isherwood 'And I wanted to be with these boys, not really just for sexual reasons, nearly so much as to escape into another sort of world.'<sup>165</sup> In *The Ultras* we see this type of other worldly, class disruption in Nairac's homosexuality. During leave, he visits working class pubs in Kilburn, London 'pubs which were described as known PIRA haunts.' It is here that Robert is 'enveloped' in a masochistic tryst with a 'large dark man' in the 'ill-lit' and 'filthy toilet' (pp.203-6). The sexuality of the Old Ampleforthian and Army Officer sees him fall into the very 'filth' that threatens to 'envelope' his class background. And this sense of homosexuality as a metaphor for class treachery takes on greater significance in the episode of homosexual abuse chartered in the novel: the MI5 Agent Walmsley and his assault on a schoolboy Nairac during the school holiday to West Germany (pp.82-3). Walmsley's references to the solemnity of 'service to

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<sup>163</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* Second Edition (London: Continuum, 2004) p.80.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., P.78.

one's country' and the 'cunning' threat of the Stasi 'wait[ing] in the long grass' in this context recalls the other great cultural reference to class betrayal and sexuality that takes place at the height of the cold war: the defection to the USSR of two British diplomats, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. As Sinfield notes, what was so upsetting for the literary establishment was that Burgess and Maclean were homosexuals and that they came from a section of London where literature and politics converged. As Sinfield states, this cemented the feared link 'between communist treachery and homosexuality, and between them and the high-cultural establishment'.<sup>166</sup> As in post-war literary culture then, the significance of homosexuality in *The Ultras* is that of class treachery and betrayal.

The point here then is that the subversive coding of the 'maverick dreamtime' associated with Nairac means that his messianic and sexual configurations contradict the imaginary representation made by the text. My reading of *The Ultras* undoubtedly locates its representation of historical stasis of the North in terms of the determining level of politics and primitive accumulation which are expressed here as the unfinished legacy of the dirty war from the 1970s. However, the configuration of the central messianic figure of this practice in terms of class treachery and socialist vanguardism suggests that the cultural imaginary can still only really envisage such decisive and utopian action in relation to a tradition of left politics. Thus the articulation of crime fiction with theological discourse in *The Ultras* is not so much an archive of defeat, but rather a form of 'maverick dreamtime' that re-imagines social change in the tradition of the vanguard left.

### Conclusion

McNamee's representation of the dirty war of the 1970s as the determinant extra-economic pre-history of the present neoliberal era seems to suggest that the reasons for the crisis of radical politics since the 1970s are not solely the product of internal contradictions specific to the vanguardist modality of twentieth century socialist politics. According to Badiou the ongoing historical impasse of communist politics emerged as the result of internal contradictions specific to the vanguardist party form which was ultimately unable to transform its grip on state power to an egalitarian practice of collective politics. This failure in the political practice of socialism was, to recall, one of the reasons for the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, pp.87-8.

Chinese Cultural Revolution and thus constitutes the ground for Badiou's continual fidelity to this Maoist event. However, in the case of the north of Ireland, what arguably determines the ambivalent stasis of the present conjuncture is the lasting presence not so much of communitarian conflict or failures tied to the vanguard model of the IRA, but rather the successful deployment of the vanguard model itself as a means to enact class war by the forces of right. What we witness in *The Ultras* is a type of 'ultra secret' class war executed by a 'right-wing conspiracy' of 'dark forces' in the security apparatus who, and this point is crucial, successfully employed vanguard methods to effect decisive historical change against 'the red menace' of socialism. This is the historical 'outcome' of 'the ultras' and their 'death squads' led by Special Forces operatives such as Nairac. As I have argued, this sense of 'war as subtext' obviously necessitates a reworking of what Marxists, in their discussion of the extra-economic determinants of class struggle, call 'primitive accumulation' or 'accumulation by dispossession'.<sup>167</sup>

Such a reading also seems to suggest a second point: that certain aspects of this type of historically decisive militant practice should not be abandoned in theoretical and strategic debates about contemporary communist subjectivity and historical change. Nairac is coded in messianic terms within the novel; he is a figure who produces devotion amongst the masses. Indeed, it is worth thinking about the articulation of messianic energy with a military figure at the level of the textual consumption and in particular the kind of imaginative excitement which readers derive from the contemplation of one of the most physically brutal instances of human experience. This link between the libidinal gratification of literary consumption and the increasingly unimaginable violence, fear and deprivation described in *The Ultras* is important because it foregrounds some important questions about Badiou's rejection of vanguard militancy. My reading of *The Ultras* identifies a major contradiction between its representation of historical stasis and a figuration of messianic energy and historical change in relation to a character within the military. This reading of the text suggests that the cultural imaginary is still structured by a political horizon whose key utopian feature involves acts of individual militant sacrifice that are tied to the collective project of the revolutionary left; dominant ideologies of individual freedom are

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<sup>167</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, p.873; David Harvey, 'The 'new' imperialism: accumulation by dispossession'; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p.152; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*

thus still able to be re-worked or articulated with a sense of collective responsibility or action. If the present conjuncture thus contains the persistent image and libidinal attraction of military sacrifice in the mass cultural realm, then my point is that this type of political subjectivity still resonates with the desires of the masses who occupy both the central stakes in, and the object for, Marxism. On an imaginative level then, the political modality of vanguard militancy still exists as the utopian horizon for contemporary cultural thought.

The reading of McNamee's *The Ultras* developed through this chapter sets out to trouble the prevailing ideological and political discourses that celebrate progressive narratives of historical development and the current articulation of peace with neoliberal investment in the North. It has demonstrated that the current 'post-Troubles' world is beset by a type of historical stasis or 'ghostly infrastructure' from the past. My reading locates this representation of historical stasis in relation the determining instances or level of politics and primitive accumulation which are expressed here as the unfinished legacy of the dirty war from the 1970s. However, the configuration of the central messianic figure of this practice in terms of class treachery and socialist vanguardism suggests that the cultural imaginary can still only really envisage such decisive and utopian action in relation to a tradition of left politics. Thus the articulation of crime fiction with theological discourse in *The Ultras* is not so much an archive of defeat, but rather a form of 'maverick dreamtime' that re-imagines social change in the tradition of the vanguard left.

If the transformations of knowledge produced by my materialist reading of the novel thus generally support Badiou's theological turn, then the specific articulation of messianic hope with the maverick practices of a military figure consequently necessitate a partial re-working of his decision to abandon the vanguard as a model for contemporary politics. In what follows, I want to extend this critique of Badiou. Chapter Four sets out to analyse the use of religious imagery in Roberto Bolaño's use of the police procedural to narrate the violent consequences of neoliberal restructuring at the Mexico-US border. The symptomatic reading that I provide in this chapter, along with my analysis of related political trends in the region will be drawn upon critically to examine another feature of Badiou's Pauline moment: the rejection of the state.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Pre-figurations of *la marea rosada*? Reading against the grain of Roberto Bolaño's police procedural: Latin American Thermidoreans, apocalyptic discourses and utopian configurations in the state.

### Introduction: Shit in Heaven

There is an interesting scene in the opening section of Chapter Four, 'The Part About the Crimes', of Roberto Bolaño's 2666 in which a journalist from Mexico City talks to a priest in the northern border city of Santa Teresa.<sup>1</sup> Santa Teresa is Bolaño's fictional referent for Ciudad Juárez, Mexico's northern industrial powerhouse whose miracle of export led economic growth is juxtaposed with the ongoing horror of the drug war and *el feminicidio*.<sup>2</sup> *El feminicidio* or femicide refers to the mass killing of women in Juárez, the vast majority of the victims being working class employees of foreign-owned *maquiladoras* (assembly plants). The killings, which are characterised by extreme sexual violence and physical mutilation, are generally accepted to have begun in 1993. The number of victims, however, is contested. In 2005 Amnesty International estimated that over 370 women had died since 1993.<sup>3</sup> A more recent article in 2014 in the UK *Guardian* gave a figure of 1,400.<sup>4</sup> The majority of these cases remain unsolved. Local law enforcement agencies have been criticised by human rights groups for institutional and 'systemic failures' in their investigations, including negligence, cover-ups and the propagation of disinformation about the crimes, often blaming the victims for being out late at night or frequenting 'questionable' areas such as nightclubs or dark alleys.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roberto Bolaño, 2666, (London; Picador, 2009) pp.378-379. All future page references are to this edition of the novel and will appear in parentheses within the main body of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Bowden, *Juárez: Laboratory of our Future*, (New York: Aperture, 1998); Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields*, (New York: Nation Books, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, 'Mexico: Justice fails in Ciudad Juárez and the city of Chihuahua', (28/02/2005) <<http://www.amnestyusa.org/node/55339?page=show>> [accessed 15 August 2015].

<sup>4</sup> Ed Vulliamy, 'Painted back to life: Brian Maguire's portraits of the victims of Mexico's 'feminicidio'', *Guardian* 4 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/04/brian-maguire-portraits-victims-mexico-feminicidio-ciudad-juarez>> [accessed 15 August 2015].

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, 'Mexico: Justice fails in Ciudad Juárez and the city of Chihuahua', (28/02/2005) <<http://www.amnestyusa.org/node/55339?page=show>> [accessed 15 August 2015]; Juila Estela Monárrez Frago, 'The Victims of Ciudad Juárez Femicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities', in *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*, ed. by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.59-69.

2666 is hailed by many critics for its ethical engagement with *el feminicidio*<sup>6</sup>. This perception of the novel is often associated with Bolaño's stylistic innovations and attributed to his re-enchantment of aesthetic or literary sensibility in an era in which such notions are purportedly in decline.<sup>7</sup> The notion here is that a reinvigoration of the avowedly anti-utilitarian conception of art for art's sake counteracts the kind of monetarisation of value that characterises the differentiation of lives that do and do not matter in late, neoliberal capitalism. However, what is interesting about the conversation between the journalist, Sergio González, and the unnamed priest is that rather than situate art as the last bastion of ethical resistance in the world of late capitalism, the source of critique, or of what Badiou might call a 'truth,' emerges instead from an explicit articulation of Christianity with Marxism and the degraded, mass cultural form of the police procedural subgenre of crime fiction. What is more, this conversation marks a key formal shift in this part of the novel in that it contains the first mimetic revelation of the 'crimes against women' by an identifiable character: the unnamed priest (p.379). I want to focus here on the nature of this shift because it condenses some of the main elements with which this chapter and thesis is concerned, in particular the critical value of Christianity for progressive politics and the significance of religious metaphor in contemporary literature that deals with the post-socialist conjuncture.

Sergio González is an 'arts writer' at the large 'Mexico City newspaper *La Razón*' (p.376). Recently divorced, González has taken to writing for other sections of the paper in order to boost his income. Thus in July 1993 he is sent to Santa Teresa in order to report on a figure known locally as 'the Demon Penitent' (p.367). In the months of May and June 1993, the Penitent had desecrated a number of local Churches, 'urinating and defecating on the altar, as well as decapitating almost all the statues in his path' (p.367). During the frenzy of one attack, he murders two people who attempt to restrain him. Despite this, the main sources of fascination and investigation are not so much the violence directed towards the victims,

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<sup>6</sup> Jean Franco, Andrew McCann and Tram Nguyen all read the novel in this manner. Their contribution to scholarship on 2666 is discussed at length below.

<sup>7</sup> For discussions of Bolaño's apparent re-enchantment of literature as an institution, Jonathan Lethem, 'The Departed', *New York Times*, 12 November 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/books/review/Lethem-t.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>> [accessed 26 August 2015]; Janet Maslin, 'The Chilean Novelist in his Literary Labyrinth', *New York Times*, 12 November 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/13/books/13masl.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 26 August 2015].

but rather the physical and psychological perversity of the suspect: 'The priest didn't seem scandalized by or upset by the damage [...] But the quantity of urine alarmed him. Shoulder to shoulder, like Siamese twins, the inspector and the priest examined every corner where the Penitent had urinated, and the priest said at last that the man must have a bladder the size of a watermelon' (p.368). When González meets the police inspector leading the case, the earnest Juan de Dios Martínez, he discovers that the policeman's focus lies in the putative psychological cause: sacraphobia. 'The deaths were accidental,' states the inspector, whose investigation brings him into contact with the director of psychology at the Santa Teresa asylum. 'The Penitent just wanted to vent his rage on the images of the saints' (p.378). It is the peculiar urinary and gastrointestinal expression of this sacraphobic 'rage' that provides the opportunity for the police to proceed logically towards an identification of the suspect:

He can't get around on foot without attracting attention, said the inspector. His piss stinks [...] If he lives alone, he can come back smelling like shit, since it doesn't take him more than a minute to get from his car to his base of operations. If he's got some woman at home or his folks, he must change his clothes before he goes in. Makes sense, said the police chief (p.371).

González, the reporter from *La Razón*, (Reason), arrives in the city to 'make sense' of this peculiar case for the paper's readership. It is interesting that his focus on the dirt ('shit') of the Penitent is offset by his overall 'sense' of the city: 'the change of scene suited him perfectly. [...] The] bright blue skies, almost a metallic blue [...] cheered him up instantly. The people in the airport and later on the city streets struck him as friendly, relaxed, as if he were in a foreign country and seeing only the good side of its inhabitants' (p.376). González's 'bright' impressions here are entirely commensurate with the 'reasoning' of official neoliberal discourses of economic progress that emerged in tandem with the growth of the 'foreign' owned, export-led *maquiladoras*: 'he thought of [Santa Teresa] as a hardworking city with very little unemployment' (p.376).<sup>8</sup>

The conversation with the priest thus marks an interesting break in these 'reasoned' attempts to 'make sense' of life in Santa Teresa. For when he interviews the priest,

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<sup>8</sup> See Charles Bowden, *Juárez: Laboratory of our Future*.



González is told to 'take a good look around, because in his opinion the church-desecrator-turned-killer wasn't the worst scourge of Santa Teresa' (p.376):

It was thanks to this priest, the second and last time they met at the church, that Sergio González learned that crimes other than the Penitent's were being committed in Santa Teresa, crimes against women, still mostly unsolved. For a while, as he swept, the priest talked and talked: about the city, about the trickle of Central American immigrants, about the hundreds of Mexicans who arrived each day in search of work at the maquiladoras or hoping to cross the border, about the human trafficking by *polleros* and *coyotes*, about the starvation wages paid at the factories, about how those wages were still coveted desperate who arrived from Querétaro or Zacatecas or Oaxaca, desperate Christians, said the priest (which was an odd way to describe them, especially for a priest), who embarked on the most incredible journeys, sometimes alone and sometimes with their families in tow, until they reached the border and only then did they rest or cry or pray or get drunk or get high or dance until they fell down exhausted. The priest sounded like he was chanting a litany (pp.378-9).

In a similar manner to the theological coding of the truth around Robert Nairac discussed in the previous chapter, the true nature of the *real* crime in Santa Teresa ('crimes against women') is not so much uncovered by investigative police procedures of reason and deduction, but rather brought to light by a kind of theological revelation. The normal procedures of truth and meaning that characterise the crime genre, and in this specific instance, the police procedural, have re-located into a different cultural field. Not only is it the character of a priest who first speaks about 'crimes against women,' but the theological nature of this revelation is expressed at the level of form in the priest's very 'odd' and 'incredible' style of speech: 'the priest sounded like he was *chanting a litany*' (my emphasis).

This re-location of the source of truth from the practices of detection to those of religion becomes even clearer when one examines the role of the police in more detail. In terms of the conventions of the police procedural, the protagonist or agent of justice and truth is normally the corporate agent of the state: the police institution itself. However in 2666 the local police have little or no interest in the dead women. The vast majority of the police officers express their misogyny in jocular speculations about the numerous and creative ways in which a man might rape a women, including slitting the navel to make a new orifice into which one would 'stick in his dick' (pp.460-1). 'Women are like laws, they were meant to be broken,' jokes another officer, and thus in the eyes of the police, almost any given

murder victim must be 'practically a whore' (p.553, p.460). This symbolic violence spills over into a reproduction of the crimes under investigation when the police themselves use jail cells to gang rape the staff of a nightclub (p.401). And at the start of Part Four, when González talks to the priest, their primary object, like other secular institutions such the press, is not the death of women, but rather the case of the Penitent: 'But the question is how we stop all this. Any ideas? For now, station an officer in each church and wait for the Penitent to make his next move' (p.371).

Crucially, the peregrination of meaning regarding the femicides, from the secular institution to the religious, is also articulated with a key political determinant. In the midst of their conversation, González talks of his own literary background and asks the priest 'Do you like to read, too?' (p.379). Having asked this question, González is momentarily distracted by a lot across the street from the Church 'where big red flowers were blooming'. And at this very moment, he receives a reply: 'Liberation theology, especially said the priest. I like Boff and the Brazilians. But I read detective novels, too' (p.379).

Not only then does the priest speak in 'odd ways' but his litany is politically 'incredible' in that the revelation of the femicides is located, or to take the horticultural metaphor, 'blooms,' within a larger and arguably 'red' or Marxist totality. For the priest versed in the Christian Marxism of Leonardo Boff, the femicides are unintelligible outside a broader structural narrative of poverty, socio-economic exploitation at the *maquiladoras*, the rural-urban divide, human trafficking and the pain and promise of migration.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the links between these and the sense of totality that he conveys is legible in the very syntactical recapitulation of his 'chant': all these issues are condensed into a single sentence lasting over eleven lines. What seems to be taking place here, therefore, is an articulation of truth with a decidedly theopolitical determinant.

In the context of the symptomal focus on form and style that characterises the materialist critical practice deployed throughout this thesis, it is important to emphasise that this intersection of religion and politics is also in evidence at the level of narrative form. As I note above, the historical object of 'The Part About the Crimes,' if not the whole novel

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<sup>9</sup> Leonardo Boff is a Brazilian theologian whose work is central to liberation theology and the championing of the rights of the poor in Latin America. See Leonardo Boff, *Los sacramentos de la vida*, (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1977); Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*.

itself, is *el feminicidio*, the mass killing of women in Ciudad Juárez. Yet, until the conversation between González and the priest, all references to what the Priest reveals to be the 'higher priority' of 'crimes against women' in this part of the novel have taken place at the level of diegesis. That is to say, for the first twenty five pages of the chapter there is no direct mimetic reproduction of the words or dialogue of a single named character in relation to the femicides. The only references to the killings take place diegetically via the narrator. Unlike the totality that is immediately produced by the revelations of the left-wing priest, the focus on the killings by the narrator is, on first inspection at least, individual rather than structural. The diegetic references to each individual dead female do not narrate the act of killing in real time, nor reveal the killers. Rather the narrative focuses on the discovery of each individual corpse. What is notable in these instances is that the narrative voice is markedly different from the sublime chant of the priest, characterised instead by the kind of detached and dispassionate style of the post-mortem reports: 'According to the medical examiner, she had been stabbed to death. There was unmistakable evidence of rape. She must have been twenty-five or twenty-six. Her skin was fair and her hair was light colored' (p.360).

The narrative tone of this section, and the way its characteristic detachment ultimately amounts to what Carlos Walker calls, a 'tone of horror,' is a key focus for much scholarship on *2666*.<sup>10</sup> According to the influential Latin American literary critic Jean Franco, this type of 'horror' emerges from the marked distance or play of 'contrast' between the apparent object of the diegetic narrative (the dead women) and the banalities of everyday police work on the part of the actants, a banality that, as I highlighted above, borders on either utter indifference or complicity.<sup>11</sup> As Franco puts it:

If this section shocks, it is precisely because of the contrast between the thingness of the bodies and the life that goes on in however bizarre a fashion like the farcical story of the bodyguard, Lalo Cura, the public assassination of Isabel Urra, the police search for the Iconoclast who breaks images in Santa Teresa's churches and all the other stories, reports, television programs that coincide with the killings.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Carlos Walker, 'El tono de horror: *2666* de Roberto Bolaño', *Taller de Letras*, 46 (2010), 99-112.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Franco, 'Questions for Bolaño', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol.18. Nos. 2-3 (December 2009), 207-217 (p.215).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.215.

Franco's discussion of Bolaño here takes place against the background of her overarching concern that serious literature has entered a period of crisis. While she draws upon Foucault in her earlier analyses of literary representations of women in Mexico, something that I will discuss in relation to the femicides later, her engagement with Bolaño is very much in the spirit of the critique of the 'culture industry' by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School.<sup>13</sup> In short, Franco is concerned with the way in which standards of literary value have been lost by the market orientated logic of late capitalism and the attendant and historically unprecedented expansion of mass culture: 'the book trade favors chick lit and manga,' she laments, and 'Twitter replaces commentary.'<sup>14</sup> With her focus on the 'shocking' power of the narration of the femicides in 2666, the underlying premise of her argument regarding Bolaño is ultimately a defence of the traditional Kantian theory of the aesthetic, a theory which also underpins the work of the Frankfurt School.<sup>15</sup> The narration of everyday experience and language ('life that goes on') is defamiliarized by the contrast with the detached depictions of over one hundred corpses ('the thingness of the bodies') in this part of the novel. Despite the chilling 'thingness' and subject matter, her argument is that Bolaño's style has re-enchanted the institution of literature, or what in Latin American literary theory is known as the 'the lettered city.'<sup>16</sup> Franco's Kantian outlook is shared by a number of other critics. The defamiliarizing 'thingness of the bodies,' produced by the detached tone of the narrator, is something that is also emphasised by Tram Nguyen:

The scope and range of these femicides are mind-numbing. They pummel the reader. Told in the cold detached tone of a forensic report, these reports commit a form of violence that is slow and accretive. They steadily gain power with accumulation and repeating, reminding us of the pervasiveness and ubiquity of violence against the female sex.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Jean Franco, 'Questions for Bolaño', p.207.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the Frankfurt School's engagement with Kantian ideas, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. and ed. by John Charles Chasteen (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Tram Nguyen, 'Travelling Sovereignty: Counter-Crossing Bolaño with Derrida', *The Comparatist*, 36, (May 2012), 24-42 (p.36).

Similarly, for Andrew McCann:

The repetitiveness and lack of variation with which the text sets out schematic, forensic accounts of the crime scenes – including details of sexual violence and mutilation – suggest a neutral, instrumental perspective that has no power to deflect from the threat of violence.<sup>18</sup>

With their conception of ‘repetition’ as a force that ‘pummels’ (Nguyen) the reader, the central feature of all these approaches is the focus on the defamiliarizing effect of the detached voice of the narrator. In other words, the text can be interpreted as ‘pummelling’ the reader precisely because the narrative tone seems to reinforce the systemic culture of violence that it depicts. The process is one of paradox whereby detachment does not so much produce the relief of distance, but rather serves to bring the ‘threat of violence’ closer.

Yet if the prevailing narrative form is ‘repetitive’ (McCann) or ‘slow and accretive’ (Nguyen) and if it is this that, in the words of Franco, ‘shocks’ the reader by bringing the threat of violence closer, then it is interesting that the religious style of the priest’s revelations (‘the priest sounded like he was chanting a litany’) is enough to rupture this form. Not only does the conversation with the priest mark a break in the epistemic privileging of diegesis, but the sudden acceleration of pace and the condensation of the political totality of Santa Teresa into a single sentence lasting eleven lines breaks with the ‘lack of variation’ and ‘slow accretion’ of details that has hitherto characterised the narrative style. In other words, the theopolitically styled revelation of the femicides and their place within a larger totality suddenly takes on a heightened and intense sense of meaning that is encoded at the level of form and even syntax itself.

This discussion begins to outline the way in which the ideology of the novel corresponds to the overarching investigation of the conjunction of Christianity and Marxism in this thesis. I would also suggest that beyond the formal rupture effected by this kind of theopolitical revelation, Christian discourse also plays an important role in relation to the critique of the ideological representation of contemporary Mexico as an economic success story. Indeed, the articulation of a theological discourse around the Penitent in relation to the official

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew McCann, ‘Discrepant Cosmopolitanism and the Contemporary Novel: Reading the Inhuman in Christos Tsiolkas’ *Dead Europe* and Roberto Bolaño’s *2666*’, *Antipodes*, (December, 2010), 135-141, (p.138).

economic miracle of Santa Teresa offers a sense of critical perspective that is also legible at the wider level of politics and historical change.

Franco and others are undoubtedly correct to observe how the play of contrast between the extreme violence of the murders and the indifference that accompanies their discovery produces a sense of 'shock'. However, my argument is that there is more at stake in 'the bizarre' use of the story of the Penitent. For a start, one needs to approach the significance of the characters in this scene in relation to production of the novel as a whole. The character Sergio González, whose journalistic investigation of the Penitent actually engenders the priest's revelation, is actually a fictionalisation of the eponymous real life left-wing journalist and novelist Sergio González Rodríguez. González is the author of *Huesos en el desierto* (*Bones in the Desert*), which is considered by Bolaño and others, to be the definitive account of the killing of women in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>19</sup> In an essay about Sergio González Rodríguez, Bolaño outlines the friendship between the two writers and in particular the role that the former played in the construction of *2666*. 'I don't remember now what year it was when I began to correspond with Sergio González Rodríguez,' writes Bolaño. 'All I know is that my fondness and admiration for him have only grown with time. His technical help – if I can call it that – in the writing of my novel [...] has been substantial.'<sup>20</sup> In terms of literary production, the point here then is that the truth of Ciudad Juárez as mediated in Bolaño's *2666* is partly determined by the 'technical help' of Sergio González. Thus the revelation of a truth regarding the femicides and its articulation via a conversation between the priest and a figure who represents the key source of Bolaño's own knowledge of Juárez is by no means insignificant in the context of the narrative.

The second justification for foregrounding the theological elements of the text relates to the question of literary form. In the same essay about Sergio González Rodríguez, Bolaño raises the question of genre in relation to the femicides of Ciudad Juárez.<sup>21</sup> '*Huesos en el*

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<sup>19</sup> Sergio González Rodríguez, *Huesos en el desierto*, (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2006); Roberto Bolaño, 'Sergio González Rodríguez, in the eye of the storm', *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles and Speeches, 1998-2003*, ed. by Ignacio Echevarría, trans. by Natasha Wimmer (London: Picador, 2011) pp.231-2; For a discussion of the relationship between Bolaño and González, see Marcela Valdes, 'Alone Amongst the Ghosts: Roberto Bolaño's *2666*', *The Nation* 19 November, 2008, < <http://www.thenation.com/article/alone-among-ghosts-roberto-bolaño-s-2666/>> [accessed 15 August 2015].

<sup>20</sup> Roberto Bolaño, 'Sergio González Rodríguez, in the eye of the storm', p.231.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.232.

*desierto*' writes Bolaño is a 'metaphor for Mexico and the Mexican past and the uncertain future of all of Latin America.'<sup>22</sup> It is a book, he continues that is born out of 'the apocalyptic tradition,' which, along with the mass cultural 'adventure story,' now remain as 'the only possible ways of approaching the abyss' of late capitalist social formations in the region. As McCann notes, it is not difficult to read Bolaño's comments here as an implicit claim about his own novel.<sup>23</sup> The title, *2666*, is itself overloaded with religious and specifically satanic signification and, as I outline above, the apocalyptic revelation of the priest overtakes the conventionally restorative and procedural processes of the crime genre that characterises Part Four. Indeed, *2666*, like most of Bolaño's work, undoubtedly embraces both of these forms, for the crime genre arguably constitutes one part of the broader 'adventure tradition' identified by Bolaño himself. What remains to be fully explored then, is the way in which the 'apocalyptic tradition,' apparent in the case of the Penitent, functions critically. In other words, how does the narrative of Penitent enable us 'to approach the abyss' of Latin America's socio-economic present?

One way to approach this question is to situate the narration of defecation and sacrilege within the history of Christian debates about the body. What the 'apocalyptic tradition' of the Penitent section arguably makes reference to are the medieval debates on the physiology of the blessed. The problem faced first by John Scotus Erigena and then later by Thomas Aquinas was the identity between the body of the resurrected and the body of man in life and by extension the conception of eternity vis-à-vis the temporal limits of human life on earth.<sup>24</sup> As Giorgio Agamben notes, these treatises on the integrity of the body of the resurrected were beset by a striking aporia, or what in Marxist terms would be described as a contradiction.<sup>25</sup> This aporia emerged from the conception of heaven as *Parousia* or full presence, where death is absent and 'humanity had reached its

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.232.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew McCann, 'Discrepant Cosmopolitanism and the Contemporary Novel: Reading the Inhuman in Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*', p.138.

<sup>24</sup> Iohannis Scotti Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae), Liber Quartus, Scriptorum Latini Hiberniae Volume XIII*, ed. by Édouard Jeuneau and Mark A. Zier, trans. by John J. O'Meara and I.P. Sheldon-Williams, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995); Thomas Aquinas, *The "Summa Theologica" of St Thomas Aquinas, vol. 21, Part III (Supplement) QQ. 69-86*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1912).

<sup>25</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by Kevin Attell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 17-19.

preordained number.’<sup>26</sup> Thus what was problematic for the medieval fathers was the logical implication that emerged from the resurrection of the redeemed body with the natural biological functions of generation and nourishment. For if humans were to eat and to procreate, then this would suggest a sense of history marked by change and growth which, by rights, was impossible according to the conception of heaven as the end of human time. The conception of eternity was thus beset by the unassimilable inclusion of a form of time; a temporal logic operated in a space that was, by definition, extra-temporal. One major problem that emerged from this was that if the risen were to continue to eat and procreate, then not only would paradise be overpopulated with bodies, but it would also be full of excrement. Hence the acerbic observation of William of Auvergne: ‘*maledicta Paradisus in qua tantum cacatur!*’ (‘Cursed Paradise in which there is so much defecation!’).<sup>27</sup>

I would argue that it is precisely this sense of a ‘cursed paradise’ overloaded with ‘so much defecation’ that this section of the novel is attempting to portray in the tale of the Penitent. The landscape of Santa Teresa, a ‘sketch of the industrial landscape of the Third World,’ is as much a city of neoliberal economic progress as of death (p.294). ‘This is a big city, a real city,’ observes a local character during a discussion of the killings. ‘We have everything. Factories, maquiladoras, one of the lowest unemployment rates in Mexico’ (p.286). As I noted in my discussion of the fictional arrival of Sergio González in Santa Teresa, this is a refrain that is repeated throughout the text. Dialogically speaking, what this type of discourse refers to is the official celebration of Ciudad Juárez as a city of economic miracles where high rates of productivity and employment bespeak Mexico’s departure from the ‘landscape of the Third World’ to the First World of economic modernity. I will outline the significance of Ciudad Juárez in relation to modernization and the North American Free Trade Agreement later in this chapter. Suffice to say at present that the world that Mexico has officially entered with its new-fangled productivity and post-patriarchal labour arrangements, where women overwhelmingly outnumber males in the *maquiladoras*, is the world of late capitalism that in the famous words of Francis Fukuyama marks the ‘end

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Agamben, *ibid*, p.18.



of history'.<sup>28</sup> Fukuyama's theory of the end of history is grounded in a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as popularized by Alexandre Kojève, a figure who Agamben notably draws upon in his discussions of temporal aporias such as the physiology of the blessed in *The Open*.<sup>29</sup> As I discuss in Chapter One, Fukuyama's argument is that with the collapse of communism, history culminates in liberal capitalism, which, with its increasingly global and universal reach, no longer participates in a Hegelian dialectic of overcoming. And as Jacques Derrida remarks, it is in this conception of liberal capitalism as the redeemed terminus of human history, that Fukuyama's own discourse of late capitalism can be seen to be fundamentally grounded in a rightist appropriation of the eschatological mechanics of Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

When approached in these terms, the use of the Penitent in 2666 takes on a heightened sense of significance that is not fully accounted for in the prevailing academic responses to the novel. Rather than simply participate in a process of aesthetic defamiliarization, I would argue that the story of churches despoiled by shit and urine bespeaks a critical deployment of religious discourse in relation to the celebratory ideologies of late capitalism. Arguably, what is taking place here is an acerbic rebuttal of the sacred celebrations of Mexico's entry to the economic eschaton of liberal capitalism. If the police do not take the deaths of women seriously, then the apparently worthwhile and honest investigations of the official representatives of the state in the sacred spaces of the city takes place amongst an overwhelmingly 'acid smell [...] the smell of piss' (p.370). What this suggests is that the narratives of Mexico's economic progress cannot offset the dirty truths of violence and exploitation that accompany this self-same historical development. In other words, in the ideology of 2666, arguments about the economic paradise of Santa Teresa/Ciudad Juárez 'come back smelling like shit' (p.371).

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<sup>28</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Men*, (London: Penguin, 1992); Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the "Phenomenology of Spirit"*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

<sup>29</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Men* pp.xxi-xxii, pp.58-70, pp.287-290; Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, pp.9-16.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.60-61.

## The Argument

To posit such an alignment between Marxism and Christianity at a key moment of formal rupture and narrative revelation in the novel is to read against the grain of Bolaño's oft cited description of his work as "a letter of farewell to my own generation".<sup>31</sup> In his acceptance speech for the Romulo Gallegos prize, Bolaño discusses the central relationship between his literature and the political struggle for socialism undertaken personally and by others of his generation during the 1970s:

to a great extent everything that I have ever written is a love letter or a letter of farewell to my own generation, those of us who were born in the '50s and who chose at a given moment to take up arms (though in this case it would be more correct to say "militancy") and gave the little that we had, or the greater thing that we had, which was our youth, to a cause that we believed to be the most generous of the world's causes and that was, in a sense, though in truth it wasn't.

Needless to say, we fought tooth and nail, but we had corrupt bosses, cowardly leaders, an apparatus of propaganda that was worse than that of a leper colony. We fought for parties that, had they emerged victorious, would have immediately sent us to a forced-labor camp. We fought and poured all our generosity into an ideal that had been dead for over fifty years, and some of us knew that: How were we not going to know that if we had read Trotsky or were Trotskyites? But nevertheless we did it, because we were stupid and generous, as young people are, giving everything and asking for nothing in return. And now nothing is left of those young people, those who died in Bolivia, died in Argentina or in Peru, and those who survived went to Chile or Mexico to die, and the ones they didn't kill there they killed later in Nicaragua, in Colombia, in El Salvador. All of Latin America is sown with the bones of these forgotten youths.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of the focus on Marxism and crime fiction in this thesis, Bolaño's comments here are significant because he seems to suggest that not only was his generation's 'militancy' a youthful error ('stupid and generous, as young people are'), but that in practice socialism would have been an ethical and political disaster. Victory for the left in Latin America, in Bolaño's words, would have led to an equally repressive or, moreover, an even worse form of servitude ('forced labour camps') than that of the authoritarian regimes that the numerous socialist insurgencies of the 1960s and 1970s set out to combat. As I discuss below, Bolaño's own disavowal of his political past would follow a subjective position that

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<sup>31</sup> Roberto Bolaño, 'Caracas Address' in *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles and Speeches, 1998-2003*, ed. by Ignacio Echevarría, trans. by Natasha Wimmer, (London: Picador, 2012), pp.28-37, (p.35).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.35.

Alain Badiou describes as Thermidorean. That is to say, Bolaño seems to follow a reactionary political trajectory that is characterised by a subjective abandonment of fidelity to radical political practice. Understood in these terms then, the crime fiction of Roberto Bolaño, much like that of Eoin McNamee, appears an inauspicious place to seek out an ideological representation of recent history that would be amendable to contemporary Marxist practice. Unlike other Latin American and Hispanic left figures such as Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán who took up crime fiction as part of a continued if less militant response to the victory of repressive state forces and the historical rise of neoliberal free markets as the dominant economic practice of late capitalism, Bolaño's engagement with the genre appears to suggest that 'nothing' of any political worth 'is left of those young people' who fought for socialism. However, as I show in my critical analysis of *2666*, Bolaño's expressions of authorial intent are interesting because they are contradicted by a continued reliance in his text on the legacy of such 'young people' to provide an image of ethical action and justice in the fallen world of late capitalism, a fallen world that reaches its political nadir in the femicides of young female factory workers in Ciudad Juárez. That is to say, Bolaño's attempt to disavow socialist politics is undercut by the embodiment of justice in his novels with figures associated with socialist insurgencies from the 1970s. As I argue below, this contradiction can be related to wider historical developments notably *la marea rosa* or 'pink wave' of contemporary socialist governments in Latin America led by veterans of the insurgencies from the 1970s. I will build upon these arguments in order to re-formulate some of Badiou's arguments about nationalism and the state.

If, in the words of Roberto Bolaño, 'Latin America is sown with the bones' of those 'forgotten youths' who fought for socialism, then my literary analysis of his crime novels will show that far from representing a type of ethical disaster, it is in the type of socialist practices embodied by such youths that images of justice are to be found. Moreover, I would argue that the affective and redemptive economics of novels such as *2666* and *The Savage Detectives* can *only* be located in the specifically Messianic tradition of the revolutionary left in Mexico and Latin America. This is a tradition that Bolaño explicitly disavows in his description of his work as a valediction to an apparently 'deathly' tradition

of socialism but which, as I will show, infuses and breaks through his writing at crucial junctures.

In what follows, my aim is to identify the mechanisms of a discourse of redemption in Bolaño's work by way of a close analysis of some of the ideological fault-lines that traverse his narrative practice. In the broader context of the argument of this thesis, my aim is to explore the ways in which my reading of Bolaño and the specific contexts (historical, social, economic, political and literary) which underpin the production of his work enable a re-working of Badiou's position on the state and the question of nationalism. As will I argue, the formal breaks of *2666*, especially in relation to the police procedural style of 'The Part About the Crimes' are both indexes of the problematic cultural developments tied to the logic of neoliberal economics but also configure a utopian response to these developments. This utopian configuration draws upon the old messianic traditions of the armed struggle with which Bolaño was himself involved and serves to produce a type of political and cultural imaginary that speaks or 'writes back' against the patriarchal discourses that have re-emerged in the neoliberal landscape of northern Mexico. This is to suggest that the egalitarian and feminist articulation of messianic Christianity with Marxist politics offers us a different perspective on the significance of the theopolitical turn. Rather than an 'archive of defeat', we might view this conjunction of Christianity and Marxism as a means to imagine ethical action in the present. I also want to argue here that the utopian construction of the state and the tradition of left militancy that I identify in Bolaño's work pre-figures the new leftward shift in Latin America known as *la marea rosada*. This discussion further develops my critique of Alan Badiou's anti-statism and its implicit eurocentrism. I want to begin, however, with a discussion of Badiou's concept of Thermidorean subjectivity. This is important because it provides an importance conceptual and contextual framework in relation to which Bolaño's rejection of Marxist politics can be evaluated. It thus sets the scene for the arguments that are developed in the rest of this chapter.

### **What is a Thermidorean?**

In a number of his political writings, Badiou discusses an ideology of conservative political reaction that he names 'Thermidorean'.<sup>33</sup> 'Thermidorean' he notes, is 'the name of a subjectivity that deploys itself within the space of [a revolutionary] termination'.<sup>34</sup> The term 'Thermidor' is originally derived from the French Revolutionary calendar: the hot month of summer from the Greek *thermos* ('heat'). Yet in the context intended by Badiou, 'Thermidorean' refers more specifically to the ideological legacy of the 'Thermidor reaction': the overthrow of the radical Jacobin Committee of Public Safety on 9 Thermidor Year II (27 July 1794).

On this date, the National Convention revolted against the Jacobin ideology of virtue and the attendant 'Reign of Terror' which had been employed to defend the new Republic against counter revolutionary mobilisations. In a speech to the National Convention on 5 February 1794, Maximilian Robespierre had set down the Jacobins' justification for the combination of virtue and terror. By this date, the Federalist revolt and Monarchist Vendée uprisings had been pacified and the threat of invasion by the Austrians, Prussians and British had receded, yet Robespierre emphasized that only the combination of virtue (an ideological commitment to equality and the mass politics of republican citizenship) and terror (coercion against the enemies of these ideals) could ensure the security of the Republic in the given historical situation; while its most overt enemies had been subdued, the Republic was still threatened by the crisis of enemies subverting it from within: 'If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is virtue,' declared Robespierre, then 'amid revolution it is at the same time virtue and terror.'<sup>35</sup> For the Jacobins, virtue constituted the ideological practice that would cement the new mass-based politics of the French Republic against the corruption of wealthy elites (what Robespierre called 'the monstrous opulence of a few families').<sup>36</sup> Terror represented the means to maintain virtue when faced with a counter-revolutionary war led by reactionary forces. As Louis Antoine de Saint Just famously asked: 'What do those who want neither Virtue nor Terror want?'

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<sup>33</sup> Alain Badiou, 'The Courage of Obscurantism', *The Symptom*, 11, (Spring 2010), <<http://www.lacan.com/symptom11/?p=163>> [accessed 26 August 2015]; Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. by Jason Barker, (London: Verso, 2011), pp.124-140.

<sup>34</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p.127.

<sup>35</sup> Maximilian Robespierre, 'Report on the Principles of Political Morality (5 February 1794)' in *University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization, Volume 7: The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, ed. by Keith M. Baker, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp.368-384, (p.374).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.370

His answer is well-known: they want corruption; a return to individual interest and personal enrichment as the dominant ideology, in short, a reactionary reversal of the Jacobin's republican aim of egalitarian and collective social organisation.<sup>37</sup>

The Thermidor, however, signalled the end of Jacobin republicanism. On 10 Thermidor, Robespierre, Saint Just, Georges Auguste Couthon and nineteen other leading Jacobins were executed without trial. On the following day, the Thermidorean Convention executed a further 71 figures, the largest tally of the entire Revolution.<sup>38</sup> The Thermidor thus signalled the beginning of a 'counter-revolutionary terror', and a reversal of the populist goals of 1792-94 as enshrined in the radical constitution of 1793.<sup>39</sup> The reversal is evident in the new constitution of Year III. Unlike the mass enfranchisement witnessed in the Jacobin high-point of 1793, the new constitution ensured that only active citizens could appoint voters resulting in an enfranchised population of only 30,000 for the entire nation; similarly, Article 366 reversed the mass-based politics characterised by the radical Parisian force of the sans-culottes: 'Every unarmed gathering shall be dispersed.'; Article 364 defined politics as a practice of individuals and parliamentary elites rather than the practice of collectives: 'No association may present [petitions] collectively, except the constituted authorities, and then only for matters within their justification'; and article 361 regulated the functioning of culture and language with the aim of disbanding the collective ethos of mass politics: 'No assembly of citizens may call itself a popular society.'<sup>40</sup> The Thermidor thus opened a 'sequence wherein constitutional repression was backed up by an anti-popular vision of the State.'<sup>41</sup>

What the Thermidorean reaction achieved then, was the termination of the political sequence of the Jacobins. Crucially, the removal of the Jacobins was justified by a subtraction of the appellation of terror from its social and historical context. Whereas the Jacobins viewed terror as the means to ensure the defence of the revolution, for the Thermidoreans it was posited as an absolute and unpalatable expression of mass politics in *toto*. As Badiou writes: 'We will say that "Thermidorean" names the subjectivity which,

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<sup>37</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, pp.25-26.

<sup>38</sup> Badiou, *Metapolitics*, pp.134-5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.125

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp.125-6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.126.

whenever a political sequence terminates, renders it distinctly unthinkable through the disarticulation of its statements, and to profit of statification, calculable interest and placement.<sup>42</sup> Thus in the case of the French Revolutionary Thermidor, the 'statements' or ideology of the Jacobin political sequence – terror, virtue – were sundered or 'disarticulated' from their historical and social situation – defence of the Revolution from its enemies. For the Thermidoreans, terror was to be understood not as a historically and socially constituted practice but, rather, as the unacceptable metaphysical essence of mass politics; any organisation of politics in relation to the collective and in the name of a common good would inevitably end in the evil of terror. The aim of politics was thus to prevent this evil, to maintain the traditional 'placements' of the social formation: political power ('stratification') for the elite who must be free to pursue their 'calculable interest' of economic accumulation, and quiescence for the masses. Jacobin Republicanism, premised as it was on the masses and a conception of virtue as 'equality and full rights of citizenship,' was thus disqualified from the practice of politics. The effect of this metaphysical outlook, this historical disarticulation, was to make any theoretical comprehension of the historical moment of Jacobin ideology 'unthinkable'. 'Virtue,' as Badiou observes, was subsequently 'replaced by a statist mechanism upholding the authority of the wealthy.'<sup>43</sup> In political terms then, the appellation 'Thermidor' signifies a retreat from the radical and popular aims of a revolution, a retreat which often renders unthinkable, or symbolically excludes, the very ideologies and practices upon which the revolutionary sequence was premised.

It is precisely this sense of conservative betrayal and historical disarticulation that Badiou attempts to convey in his use of the term 'Thermidorean' when he attempts to describe the end of the second sequence of the communist hypothesis in France. While he elucidates the original emergence of the term's signification in the French Revolution, Badiou's real aim is to outline the ideological transformations of the mid-1970s, notably the break with Marxism signalled by what became known as the French 'New Philosophers'. His particular focus is the neoconservative conversions of a new group of intellectuals, Andre Glucksman, Bernard Henri-Levy and Stéphane Courtois, who, in

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.136.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.125.

Badiou's words 'abandoned every inventive political prescription, every genuinely progressive, critical function, in an attempt to make inroads into the realms of the mass media' and the 'parliamentary process' of Francois Mitterand's Keynesian government of 1981.<sup>44</sup> As with the Thermidorean Convention of Year III of the French Revolution then, the abandonment of egalitarian and collective politics by the New Philosophers coincided with a turn towards the private, 'calculable interest' of wealth and parliamentary prestige.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of the general argument of this thesis, it is worth noting here, as Ed Pluth observes, that in his elaboration of a type of reactionary subjectivity defined as Thermidorean, Badiou is undertaking a critical form of historical engagement. As Pluth puts it, Badiou is interested 'in mapping out the resemblances among different historical periods.'<sup>46</sup> This is not to say that Badiou is collapsing or flattening out the empirical facts of historical difference, rather, as Pluth notes, Badiou is attempting to produce a 'theory that details the structures within which subjects appear.'<sup>47</sup> This point brings us back to one of the major criticisms made of Badiou's work by scholars such as Bensaïd: his apparent ahistoricism. However, as this discussion indicates Badiou's theorisation of subjectivity is not ahistorical. Much like his historically grounded attempt to produce new forms of politics and strategy for communism that will resonate in the new, multinational world of late capitalism, his assessment of the different structures within which subjects appear indicates that his engagement with the key Marxist aim of revolutionary agency is tied to an analysis of determinant historical horizons and structures. If one of the dominant subject positions today is that of a Thermidorean, and if this bespeaks a type of betrayal of a previous subjective commitment to egalitarian politics, then it is no surprise that Badiou celebrates the faithful and intransigent example of Saint Paul as a 'contemporary' figure for radical politics.

Indeed, one of the most compelling features of the New Philosophers' argument against Marxism emerges from what Badiou calls 'a personal Thermidor'.<sup>48</sup> For the authority of the arguments put forward by Glucksman and others is partly founded on the fact of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>46</sup> Ed Pluth, *Alain Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.3

<sup>48</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p.124



autobiography and incontestable 'personal' experience: each figure claims to have been a Maoist militant, and specifically a former member of *Gauche Prolétarienne* (GP) during the red sequence in France between 1965 and 1975. Each figure thus claims personally to have experienced the inevitable ethical disaster or terror that radical politics apparently produces. Formed in 1969, the GP interpreted the *événements* of 1968 as a dress rehearsal for an imminent revolution; the ongoing worker and student struggles in the immediate aftermath of 1968 were viewed as evidence of the pre-revolutionary situation in France.<sup>49</sup> The political organization and ideology of GP was thus based upon a prognosis of immediate revolutionary upheaval and the group envisioned its tactic of political agitation as a type bridge-building between workers and intellectuals under the Maoist slogan of 'serving the people'. During its four brief years of existence, the group published a variety of analyses of the French situation starting with a call to arms in '*Vers la guerre civile*' in 1969 right up to a more apocalyptic '*La nouvelle jacquerie*' in 1973. As the prospect of revolution in France became less and less likely, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution appeared doomed to failure, the shift in the balance of forces towards the capitalist social order was mirrored by a similar shift in politics and theory. With the French conjuncture increasingly incompatible with the ideology of GP, the group disbanded in 1973. While some members of GP turned towards armed struggle, and others such as Jacques Rancière maintained a type of fidelity to popular politics via historical enquiry, figures such as Glucksman, and eventually Courtois, had become increasingly sceptical of the progressive nature of popular politics. They began to argue that communism and any emancipatory project would inevitably descend into a totalitarian nightmare of 'crime, terror, repression.'<sup>50</sup>

The intellectual impetus for this 'new philosophy' of history came with the 1973 publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, an autobiographical account of life in Soviet labour camps.<sup>51</sup> The historical experience of Solzhenitsyn and the empirical

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<sup>49</sup> Warren Montag, 'Rancière's Lost Object', p.145; For a detailed account of this period, see Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s*, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Stéphane Courtois *et al.*, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999)

<sup>51</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. by Thomas P. Whitney, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974).

particularities of Stalinism were subsequently hypostasised in a metaphysical formula by Glucksman who argued in *Master Thinkers* that totalitarian terror finds its intellectual justification in the writings of Marx and Hegel.<sup>52</sup> Once the apparently incontrovertible link between Marxism and totalitarian violence was made, then the new philosophers were able to posit an apocalyptic and inevitable link between the Soviet camps of the 1930s and the revolt of French students and workers between 1965 and 1975. It is precisely here then that the work of the New Philosophers produces the type of disarticulation of the political sequence in France from its specific historical and social context. By arguing that all types of socialism and collective politics were founded upon an inherently terroristic logic, the New Philosophers themselves engaged in a totalising logic. In separating the activism of French students and workers in the factory occupations of 1965-75 from their own historical situation, the approach of the New Philosophers served to flatten out history and geo-politics into one single type of logic. Their position, as Badiou aptly summarises it, is thus inherently metaphysical: 'Every will to inscribe an idea of justice or equality turns bad. Every collective will to the Good creates Evil.'<sup>53</sup>

Understood then as a metaphysics of good and evil, what Badiou outlines in the new philosophers is a type of outlook that ultimately produces a politics of 'stodgy conservatism'.<sup>54</sup> 'The underlying argument,' he notes, 'is that the construction of an egalitarian society is so unnatural an enterprise, so contrary to the human animal's instincts, that advancing in this direction is impossible without appalling violence.'<sup>55</sup>

### **'The Paradigm of Disillusion': Thermidorean subjectivity and the case of Latin America<sup>56</sup>**

Badiou's theory of a 'personal Thermidor' has recently been taken up and examined in the context of contemporary Latin American politics by John Beverley.<sup>57</sup> If Badiou's discussion of Thermidoreans takes place in a European setting that has historically shifted rightward since the 1970s towards conservative reaction and neoliberal hegemony, then Beverley's

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<sup>52</sup> Andre Glucksman, *Master Thinkers* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980)

<sup>53</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.13

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>55</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p.124; Alain Badiou, 'The Communist Idea and The Question of Terror', in *The Idea of Communism 2*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2013), pp.1-12, (p.3).

<sup>56</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p.95.

<sup>57</sup> John Beverley, 'Rethinking the Armed Struggle in Latin America', *boundary 2*, 36.1 (Spring 2009), 47-60; John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, pp.95-109.

intervention, in contrast, is located in the context of the rise of a new series of left-wing governments across Latin America: *la marea rosada*, or the ‘pink tide’ that has engulfed the continent over the past decade. I will discuss the significance of this new, ‘pink’ type of statist socialism in relation to Badiou below. However, what is interesting for this chapter’s focus on Bolaño and his public disavowal of the socialist struggle of his youth, is that it chimes with a number of contemporary apologetic narratives made by repentant ex-guerrillas and leftist figures from the 1970s and 1980s. More broadly speaking, what is perhaps more significant about such narratives of repentance, is that they are often combined with a critique of the current leftist regimes of *la marea rosada*. ‘There is a relation,’ writes Beverley, ‘between how one thinks about the armed struggle in Latin America and how one thinks about the nature and possibilities of the new governments of *la marea rosada*, even where these have explicitly moved away from the model of armed struggle.’<sup>58</sup> Beverley names this repentant movement away from the model of armed struggle as the ‘paradigm of disillusion.’<sup>59</sup>

A pertinent example of this paradigm is Beatriz Sarlo, a onetime advocate of the armed struggle in Argentina. Writing in an op-ed for the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, she makes an argument that links the ethical ‘mistakes’ of the armed struggle in the 1970s to the *marea rosada* today:

*Muchos sabemos por experiencia que se necesitaron años para romper con estas convicciones. No simplemente para dejarlas atrás porque fueron derrotadas, sino porque significaron una equivocación* [Many of us know from experience that it took years to break with these beliefs [in revolutionary struggle]. Not simply to leave them behind because they were defeated, but because they were a mistake].<sup>60</sup>

With her backward focus and reference to the amount of time (‘years’) it took to abandon the belief in armed struggle, Sarlo creates a sense of political authority that is based upon personal experience and a process of maturation that provides critical distance and relief from this earlier ‘mistake.’ Her comments here also take place in the context of her critique of the neo-Peronist populism of Nestor Kirchner’s left-leaning Argentine government that

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.95.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.96.

<sup>60</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, ‘Kirchner actúa como si él fuera un soberano’, *La Nación*, Argentina, 22 July, 2006 <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/825386-kirchner-actua-como-si-el-fuera-un-soberano> [accessed 7 August 2015]; also cited in John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11* p.95. My translation.

emerged following the economic crisis of 2001, and also that of his successor and wife, Cristina Fernández Kirchner. According to Sarlo, it was precisely this populism that fed her own immature illusions of the armed struggle.<sup>61</sup> A similar denunciation of populism and its political illusions is also expressed by Elisabeth Burgos. Like Sarlo, Burgos performs a type of Thermidorean renunciation of her erstwhile political commitment to revolutionary socialism. Burgos was the wife of Régis Debray during his collaboration with Che Guevara and also a collaborator with the Guatemalan revolutionary Rigoberta Menchú, co-authoring the latter's famous testimonial account of the armed struggle in Guatemala.<sup>62</sup> In recent years however, Burgos has moved away from the politics of her youth and denounced what she sees as the 'populism' of Hugo Chavez, comparing it to that of the right-wing French nationalist, Jean Marie Le Pen. Burgos thus combines her disillusion with the armed struggle with an active participation in the opposition to Chavez and his successor, Nicolas Madero.<sup>63</sup> This is a position and political trajectory that she shares with the ex-Venezuelan communist guerrilla, Teodoro Petkoff, who ran against Chavez in the 2006 elections.<sup>64</sup> What is significant about all these Thermidorean examples then, is that they are premised on a type of political historicism that interprets the development of political reason in terms of a quasi-biological process of maturation.

If the paradigm of disillusion thus rests on what Beverly calls a type of 'coming-of-age narrative,' then it is interesting that this alignment of revolutionary politics with a romantic adolescence is also encoded in many contemporary cultural and literary texts which engage with this very same period. Beverley cites the famous example of the repentant hit-man, el Chivo, from the Mexican film *Amores Perros*.<sup>65</sup> The film concludes when el Chivo, a former university professor who abandoned his wife and young daughter to join the armed struggle in the 1970s, attempts to make a reconciliation with his daughter. What is significant about this conclusion is that at this moment, the shabbily dressed and bearded figure who physically resembles Karl Marx, appears clean shaven. The point here is that he

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.96.

<sup>62</sup> Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. by Ann Wright, (London: Verso, 1984).

<sup>63</sup> Javier Pereira, 'Elizabeth Burgos: "Chávez puede llegar a ser más perverso que Fidel"' *El Nacional*. Venezuela, 7 October 2003, <http://www.cubanet.org/htdocs/CNews/y03/oct03/07o6.htm> [accessed 7 August 2015].

<sup>64</sup> Beverley, p.96; Teodoro Petkoff, *El chavismo como problema*, (Caracas: Editorial Libros Marcados, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Beverley, pp.99-100. *Amores Perros* dir.by Alejandro González Iñárritu (Lionsgate, 2000).

has given up, both practically and symbolically, the revolutionary past: 'The implication is that his decision to join the guerrillas was both immature and unethical,' writes Beverley, 'a kind of sin like incest and adultery (the moral centers of the other two stories of the film) that he must now attempt to make amends for.'<sup>66</sup>

A similar ideology of conservative resignation is manifest in a range of recent literary texts. The prime example from Mexico is arguably Jorge Volpi's *El fin de la locura* (2003).<sup>67</sup> This text narrates the *événements* of Badiou's May 68 through the eyes of Anibal Quevedo, a Mexican psychoanalyst residing in Paris during this period. In the process of the story Quevedo meets not only many of the key intellectual figures associated with the 'red years', such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, but also a fellow Mexican, Rafael Guillen, who will later become Subcomandante Marcos, the leader of the Zapatistas. The narrative thrust of the novel progresses historically and attempts to mark out the political and ethical folly (*locura*) of both radical French philosophy and psychoanalysis, and related developments in politics. As the title of the novel suggests, the conditions that led to the armed struggle are now over (*el fin*), and moreover, the period of armed struggle was best understood as a type of disease or madness (*locura*) that can and, more importantly, must be cured. *El fin de la locura* thus displays a variation on the picaresque or Bildungsroman novel. As the *pícaro* (Quevedo) reaches maturity he begins to repent of his earlier escapades; in a shift from romance to irony, he makes peace with his enemies and sets out to write his story as an example to others.<sup>68</sup>

Volpi's novel forms part of his self-identification as a member of *la generación del "crack"* ('the crack generation'), a Mexican literary movement primarily associated with five novels and a manifesto published in 1996; *Memoria de los días* by Pedro Ángel Palou, *Las rémoras* by Eloy Urroz, *La conspiración idiota* by Ricardo Chávez Castañeda, *Si volviesen sus majestades* by Ignacio Padilla and *El temperamento melancólico* by Volpi.<sup>69</sup> In terms of the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.100.

<sup>67</sup> Jorge Volpi, *El fin de la locura*, (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European culture*, trans. by Albert Sbragia, new edn. (London: Verso, 2000); John Beverley, 'Lazarillo and Primitive accumulation: Spain, Capitalism and the Modern Novel', *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Spring 1982), 29-42.

<sup>69</sup> See Pedro Ángel Palou, *Memoria de los días* (Mexico: Planeta Mexicana, 2003); Eloy Urroz, *Las remoras* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2002); Ricardo Chávez Castañeda, *La conspiración idiota* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2003);

current debate regarding politics and history, the appellation of the movement is significant. The name of Volpi's movement consists of a temporal referent (generation), and a multi-accentual Anglophone referent "crack". As the speech-marks suggest, the phonics of the word crack relates to the notion of a break or rupture. Additionally, the word also, and more provocatively, relates to crack cocaine, arguably *the* major consumer narcotic of late capitalism. It is no surprise then that Volpi views his literature as part of a break with the earlier Boom movement of Latin American literature and the politics associated with this movement. The key protagonists of the Boom, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortázar and the young Mario Vargas Llosa, and also their literary styles, in particular Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963), were closely bound up with support for the guerrilla struggles inaugurated by the Cuban Revolution.<sup>70</sup>

Much like the political narratives of the repentant guerrilla then, Volpi's literary intervention is closely tied up with his opposition to the revolutionary struggle of the 1970s and its resurrection in the current leftward turn in Latin America. In his *El insomnio de Bolívar*, a survey of Latin America on the eve of the Bicentennial of its independence, Volpi describes *la marea rosada* as an '*epidemia regional*' or a 'regional epidemic.'<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the metaphor of illness from *El fin de la locura* is deployed again here when Volpi concludes that the infirmity (insomnia) of the emblematic figure of nineteenth century Latin American independence, Simon Bolívar, will finally be cured once the regional epidemic of Latin America leftism and its generational follies cease to exist. The solution, or cure, is to be found in a future incorporation of Latin America within a pan-continental US-led liberal *pax-Americana*: 'Perhaps the only way to realize Bolívar's dream is to abandon Latin America.'<sup>72</sup> The broad Anglophone reference, both phonic and literal, in the notion of *la*

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Ignacio Padilla, *Si volviesen sus majestades* (Mexico: Nueva Imagen, 1996); Jorge Volpi, *El temperamento melancólico* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Ben Ehrenreich, 'The Crack Up', *The Nation* (16 April 2010) < <http://www.thenation.com/article/crack/>> [accessed 12 August 2015]; Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Jean Franco, 'Julio Cortázar: Utopia and Everyday Life', *Julio Cortázar en Barnard*, ed. by Mirela Servodidio and Marcelo Coddou. Special issue of *Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica*, 10-11 (1985), 108-118; Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1975).

<sup>71</sup> Jorge Volpi Escalante, *El insomnio de Bolívar; Cuatro consideraciones sobre América Latina en el siglo XXI*, (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2009), p.134.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.148.

*generación del "crack"*, is thus revealed to be a break that itself dreams of Latin American disillusion under the rule of US hegemony.

It is in this context that John Beverley celebrates Roberto Bolaño for his 'refusal to buy into the paradigm of disillusion, noting that 'his semiautobiographical' novels and his 'neopicaresque characters' are neither 'remorseful' nor 'repentant': 'they make do in world not of their choosing [...] and sometimes, they find ways to get revenge on their victimizers.'<sup>73</sup> Beverley's observation here is arguably insightful in relation to a series of relatively early texts such as *Estrella Distante* (*Distant Star*) and *Chile Nocturno* (*Chile By Night*).<sup>74</sup> Written in the 1980s and unpublished until his breakthrough in the 1990s and early 2000s, these novellas focus on the legacy of the right-wing coup in Chile in 1973. In both texts, the semiautobiographical characters Arturo B in *Distant Star* and the unnamed youth in *Chile By Night*, work to exact vengeance on military and ideological figures tied to the rule of Augusto Pinochet. Indeed, in the crime fiction narrative of *Distant Star*, we arguably see a type of imaginary ideological redemption of the history of Chile's violent entry into the world of neoliberalism. This takes place when Arturo B, a writer, finally joins forces with an ex-policeman from the socialist Allende regime, Abel Romero, in order to apprehend a notorious military figure tied to the disappearance of a number of leftists in the wake of the coup. While Beverley's view of Bolaño here has some merit, I would argue that his thesis is harder to defend when faced with Bolaño's focus on Mexico in 2666, and when one examines his fiction in relation to his own comments on his work, the state of contemporary Latin American literature and the leftward turn of *la marea rosada*.

To recall, in his acceptance speech for the Romulo Gallegos prize (cited above), Bolaño describes his work as an attempt to say 'goodbye' to the armed struggle undertaken by his 'own generation': 'we fought tooth and nail [...] We fought for parties that, had they emerged victorious, would have immediately sent us to a forced-labor camp.'<sup>75</sup> Bolaño's justification for this 'letter of farewell' is thus grounded in personal experience ('we fought') and an ahistorical and nigh-on metaphysical equation of communism per se with totalitarian terror ('forced-labor camp'). Understood in this way, it is clear that Bolaño's

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<sup>73</sup> Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.140, n.6.

<sup>74</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *Estrella Distante* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1996) and *Chile Nocturno* (Barcelona: New Directions Publishing, 2000).

<sup>75</sup> Roberto Bolaño, 'Caracas Address', p.35

view of his own writing is configured in precisely the terms and procedures that Badiou and Beverley identify as Thermidorean. Moreover, his stance on contemporary Latin American literature is more politically problematic than Beverley is able to concede. For example, in the last interview before his death in 2003, Bolaño publically cites his affection for the reactionary figures of Volpi and *la generación del “crack”*: ‘Among the young writers, I am very interested in [...] Volpi and Ignacio Padilla.’<sup>76</sup> Crucially, this statement follows his earlier justification for a series of public attacks on Latin American literary institutions, especially the Romulo Gallegos prize:

My fight with the jury and the organizers of the prize was due basically to their expectation that I blindly endorse [...] their choice without having participated. Their methods, transmitted to me by phone by a Chavista pseudo-poet, too closely resembled the deterrent arguments of the Casa de las Américas (Cuba). It seemed to me that eliminating Daniel Sada or Jorge Volpi in the first round was an enormous mistake [...] I called them [the jury] neo-Stalinists among other things.<sup>77</sup>

As this suggests, Bolaño’s attack on the Latin American literary establishment is grounded on political as much as literary criterion. For him the new types of Latin American socialism (*Chavismo*) not only fail to appreciate great literature, but do so in a way that mirrors the previous generation of Castro style ‘Stalinism.’ His denunciation of what one might here call the cultural representatives of *la marea rosada*, the ‘Chavista pseudo-poet’, further indicates the extent to which he remained critical of the left in his final years. Indeed, in the same interview, he proceeds to mock the more committed literature of the crime writer and left-wing historian Paco Ignacio Taibo II who he describes as ‘Pol Pit.’<sup>78</sup> For Bolaño, the thing that most ‘bores’ him is the ‘empty discourse from the left.’

If these expressions of authorial intent thus question Beverley’s celebration of Bolaño, then one can arguably see how this rejection of the legacy of militant socialism operates at the manifest ideological level of *2666*. A sense of ‘the empty discourse from the left’ is legible in the first references to the femicides in *2666*. In Part One of the novel, an Italian literary scholar, Morini, is reading a copy of the communist paper *Il Manifesto*. The paper includes

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<sup>76</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, trans. by Sybil Perez, (New York: Melville, 2009), p.120.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp.97-98.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.121.



‘an article about the killings in Sonora’ (p.43). What is initially interesting about this, the very first reference to the femicides, is that it is framed by a reference to the Zapatistas:

[the article] was written by an Italian reporter who had gone to Mexico to cover the Zapatista guerrillas. The news was horrible, he thought. [...] Then he thought about the reporter from *Il Manifesto* and it struck him as odd that she had gone to Chiapas, which is at the southern tip of the country, and that she had ended up writing about events in Sonora, which, if he wasn’t mistaken, was in the north, the northwest, on the border with the United States. [...] For an instant, Morini felt a wild desire to travel with the reporter. I’d love her until the end of time, he thought. An hour later he’d already forgotten the matter completely (p.43).

Rather than focus on the return of the armed struggle, the narrative seems instead to suggest that the key issue at present in Mexico is the ‘horrible news’ from the north of the country. Indeed, by emphasising the vast geographical distance between Chiapas and the northern border, the extract emphasises the disarticulation between contemporary political movements and what is positioned as the real issue of exploitation and suffering. However, what Bolaño sees as the ‘empty discourse from the left’ does not just relate here to the Zapatistas, but also, I would argue, to the comfortable European leftist Morini. Much like the professional indifference and patriarchal subjectivities of the police represented in Part Four, his concern is transitory (‘an hour later he’d already forgotten the matter completely’) and articulated with a sense of erotic desire for the female reporter (‘I’d love her until the end of time’). Bolaño’s real life contempt for politics of the left is thus repeated here at the manifest level of the text.

We can get another sense of this by examining the way in which Bolaño’s novel also adopts a similar type of medical imagery as that of Volpi in *El fin de la locura*. For example, Oscar Fate, the Afro-American journalist, is hampered by a recurring nausea. In one of Bolaño’s earliest depictions of Fate, the unexplained nausea initially precludes the journalist from conducting an interview with the ex-Black Panther leader Barry Seaman (the fictional referent for the real life figure of Bobby Seale):

Then he rang the buzzer and an irritated voice asked what he wanted. Fate identified himself and said he’d been sent from *Black Dawn*. Over the intercom he heard a little laugh of satisfaction. Come in, said the voice. Fate crawled up the stairs. At some point he understood that he wasn’t well. Seaman was waiting for him on the landing.

“I need to use the bathroom,” said Fate.

"Jesus," said Seaman.

The living room was small and modest and he saw books strewn everywhere and also posters taped to the walls and little photographs scattered along the shelves and the table on top of the TV.

"The second door," said Seaman.

Fate went in and began to vomit. (p.243)

The passage foregrounds a disjunction between Fate's desire to interview an old militant figure of the Left ('he'd been sent from *Black Dawn*') and his diminished ability to succeed ('Fate crawled up the stairs'). Likewise, in describing Seaman's present day room as 'small and modest' and filled mostly with memories of the past ('little photographs scattered along the shelves'), the scene emphasises the discrepancy between the formerly redemptive and revolutionary power of the left ("Jesus," said Seaman') and its present malaise ('he wasn't well').

A similar relationship between illness and political lineage occurs in relation to a number of other characters. For example, Amalfitano, the visiting professor at the University of Santa Teresa is besieged by hallucinatory voices and wonder whether he should admit himself to an asylum when he returns to Spain (p.332). Crucially, Amalfitano's biography mirrors that of Bolaño. He is a political exile from Pinochet's Chile.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Olegario Cura Expósito, the young police officer born in the Sonora desert in 1976 and bastard son of a disappeared revolutionary from Mexico City, is 'looked at [...] like he was some kind of idiot' by his fellow police officers for his refusal to engage in their misogynistic culture (p.558). Indeed, to his colleagues he is seen as embodying a type of mental illness which is captured by his nickname, 'Lalo Cura' or 'madness' (*la locura*) (p.438). I will discuss the full significance of Lalo Cura in relation to formal breaks within 2666 in more detail later. Suffice to say at present, however, that in this reference to madness, the narration of Lalo ostensibly follows the overarching association of left politics with a type of sickness.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> For a reading of the relationship between Amalfitano, Bolaño and epistemological privilege vis-à-vis political history, see Herman Herlinghaus, 'Placebo Intellectuals in the Wake of Cosmopolitanism: A "Pharmacological Approach to Roberto Bolaño's novel 2666', *The Global South*, 5.1, (Spring 2011), 101-119.

<sup>80</sup> For a reading of political defeat in Bolaño's other major novel, *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), see Philip Derbyshire, 'Los detectives salvajes: Line, Loss and the Political', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol. 18, Nos. 2-3, (December 2009), 167-176.

As this discussion suggests, it is difficult to sustain Beverley's defence of Bolaño. Although, as I demonstrate below, it is possible to read against the grain of Bolaño's statements of authorial intent in order to locate utopian and redemptive configurations of the legacy of the armed struggle in the inauspicious world of 2666. Before developing this reading of Bolaño and exploring its implications for my critique of Badiou, it is useful first to examine the historical context of *la marea rosada*, and then the particular social and economic developments that characterise the recent history of Ciudad Juárez. My discussion of the latter focuses specifically upon labour relations and their articulation with patriarchal discourses of Mexican nationalism, and takes in the prevailing scholarly responses to the violence at the US-Mexican border. The following discussions of the historical and political context within which Bolaño's novels intervene thus set the scene for my final argument: that a symptomatic reading of the formal breaks in 2666 reveals the way in which this novel prefigures the politics of *la marea rosada*.

### ***La marea rosada: an event in the situation of the state?***

The term *marea rosada* or *marea rosa* is generally used to describe the recent leftward political shift in Central and Southern America over the past decade and a half. In 2005, the BBC reported that out of 350 million people living in South America, three quarters were living under a leftist government.<sup>81</sup> At present, in 2015, at least twelve countries in South and Central America are governed by either socialist or centre left governments.<sup>82</sup> In terms of the debate above, it is worth noting that a number of major figures within these governments, for example Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil and, José Mujica, the former president of Uruguay, were once participants and in the case of the latter two, arrested and imprisoned, for their participation in the armed struggle during the 1970s.

The *marea rosada* movement is varied in character, but its origins can roughly be traced back to the violent urban uprisings in Venezuela (the *sacudón* or *Caracazo*, literally 'the shaking' or 'shaking of Caracas') in February and March, 1989 and the subsequent

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<sup>81</sup> James Painter, 'South America's leftward sweep', *BBC Online*, 2 March 2005, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4311957.stm>> [accessed 25 August 2015].

<sup>82</sup> Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru, Costa Rica.

emergence of Hugo Chávez as a populist political leader, culminating in his election victory almost a decade later in 1998.<sup>83</sup> The *Caracazo* was a response to a wave of neoliberal reforms undertaken in Venezuela, notably the rolling back of state social programmes and subsidies for consumable goods such as gasoline.<sup>84</sup> A similar structure of economic crises, widespread immiseration and the rise and subsequent electoral victories of leftist parties followed in Brazil after the devaluation of 1999, and then in Ecuador in 2000 and Argentina in 2001, both of which were shaken by dramatic economic collapses.

As Beverley notes, the continental spread of this leftist electoral tide – victories in Bolivia, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and more recently, Chile – accelerated following 9/11, when the United States turned its attention away from the region, and ‘Latin American states began to shift away from an identification with both the geopolitical and economic frameworks of the Washington consensus.’<sup>85</sup> It is here then that one can locate the meaning of Beverley’s intervention. His recent book, *Latin Americanism after 9/11*, is an attempt to think through and analyse the leftward shift in the region. In terms of historical context, his argument is that *la marea rosada* was able to emerge for two key reasons. Firstly, he notes that the social dislocations produced by economic crises tied to neoliberal reforms were felt in Latin America roughly a decade before the global economic crisis that began in 2008. Secondly, he argues that the ability to develop a leftist response to such conditions was enabled by the new, geopolitical focus on the Middle East by the USA. Whereas the US had sponsored and actively intervened to support right-wing regimes during the numerous Latin American insurgencies of the 1970s, and 1980s, the emergence of Islamic terror since 2001 served to re-align the focus of US political and military strategy.

Beverley interprets this new movement in the terms offered by Badiou:

the *marea rosada* has the character of what the French philosopher Alain Badiou calls an “event”; that is, something unexpected, unpredicted, radically contingent and overdetermined, but which, in that very contingency and overdetermination,

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<sup>83</sup> John Beverley, ‘Latin America after 9/11: Geopolitics and the Pink Tide’, *Berfrois*, 6 January 2012, <http://www.berfrois.com/2012/01/john-beverley-latin-americas-pink-tide/> [accessed 23 August 2015].

<sup>84</sup> Margarita López Maya, “The Venezuelan Caracazo of 1989: Popular Protest and Institutional Weakness”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol.35, No.1 (2003), 117–37.

<sup>85</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.7.

opens up a new, unforeseen, and unforeseeable series of possibilities and determinations.<sup>86</sup>

In concrete terms, what Beverley means here is that the leftward turn marks an ‘unexpected’ break with the long-standing historical situation of US hegemony and the power of the Washington consensus – the spread of free market policies overseen by the US state and international agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank, both of which have headquarters on the eastern seaboard of the United States of America. As Beverley notes, these governments are not exactly socialist; the appellation *rosada* or pink signifies the heterogeneous nature of this movement, many governments, such as the Kirchner regime in Argentina, are more of the centre-left than socialist. However, at moments of crisis, when faced with attempted coups by reactionary groups, these governments support each other, often via new regional bodies such as UNASUR (*Unión de Naciones Suramericanas*) and ALBA (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*). More crucially still, socialism, and in some instances, communism, is viewed as the essential political horizon for such movements. The Bolivian government headed by Evo Morales, a government championed by the Badiou scholar Bruno Bosteels, is headed by the party MAS: *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism).<sup>87</sup> Following what they view as ‘five centuries of structural inequality,’ MAS define socialism as a new form of conquest: ‘the conquest of equality, the redistribution of wealth, the broadening of rights.’<sup>88</sup> And if socialism is the immediate aim of this movement, then the ultimate goal or what they call ‘the general horizon of the era’ is, in the words of the vice president Alvaro Linera, ‘communist.’<sup>89</sup>

Moving beyond the interpretation offered by Beverley, I would argue that *la marea rosada* is also an event precisely because it breaks with the powerful anti-statist trend that is expressed by figures such as Badiou and also by scholars in the field of subaltern studies of which Beverley is a major figure. As I noted in the Introduction to this thesis and also in Chapters One and Two, Badiou’s present anti-statist position is not only a product of the traditional Marxist aim of the final withering away of the state, but also an aspect of an

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, (London: Verso, 2011).

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Bruno Bosteels, ‘The Leftist Hypothesis’, in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. by Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, (London: Verso, 2010), pp.33-65, (p.63).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.63.

argument about the political failure of twentieth-century vanguard-party states to represent and mobilise their respective populations. The anti-statist response – the practice of politics at a distance from the state – is something that is exemplified in recent years by the Mexican Zapatistas, a group supported by Badiou. Indeed, it was precisely this assumption about the failure of leftist states in Latin America fully to express the will of the people, and in particular the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, which led to the rise of subaltern theory as a leftist critique of the state from within academia.<sup>90</sup>

What is interesting about *la marea rosada* then, is that it sees both the electoral success and the conquest of the state as a means to bring about socialism. Rather than forestall the socialist project, constitutional reforms and referenda have been employed by successive governments in order to extend the democratic participation of the people and the representative reach of politics. Following constitutional reforms endorsed by democratic mandate in 2009, Bolivia, for example, now recognises itself as a plurinational state. Debates over the “Indian question” and the attendant alienation of large sectors of the population who do not fit into the traditions of a Spanish-speaking mestizo nationalism are thus in the process of being resolved *within* the constitutional and democratic processes of state power articulated and controlled by leftist movements.<sup>91</sup> The eventual nature of these developments is witnessed in the subjective transformations of many Marxist figures once so critical of the statist limitations of national popular and socialist insurgencies in Latin America. Thus John Beverley’s work in subaltern studies is now closely aligned with a way of thinking of the new possibilities for the development of socialist practices under the auspices of the state in *la marea rosada*:

It seems worth remarking that today, some twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and “actually existing socialism,” a majority of the population of Latin America lives under democratically elected governments that identify themselves as “socialist” in one way or another. To put this another way, the only place in the

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<sup>90</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, pp.110-111.

<sup>91</sup> It is worth noting here that such demands for a plurinational constitution and recognition of autonomy were demanded by the Mexican Zapatistas in the San Andres Accords with the government in 1996. These accords took place following the military failure of the EZLN and ultimately the talks broke down and such reforms were not instituted. Unlike in Bolivia, the EZLN’s inability and/or refusal to assume state power, whether in the movement away from the earlier politics of armed struggle in 1994 and then later in its boycott of electoral politics in 2006, has meant that constitutionally and nationally, the demands of the EZLN have not yet been put into practice.

world today where socialism, even as a rhetorical possibility, is on the agenda is Latin America.<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, many of the key political figures responsible for such reforms, such as the vice President of Bolivia, Álvaro García Linera, were once vehemently opposed to the assumption of state power. Following the successes of the various constitutional reforms, García Linera now argues that is indeed the command of the country's state apparatus and its articulation with a leftist politics agenda that offers the chance to develop the communist hypothesis in more concrete terms at this present moment in time:

When I enter into the government, what I do is validate and begin to operate at the level of the state in function of this reading of the current moment. So then, what about communism? What can be done from the State in function of this communist horizon? To support as much as possible the unfolding of society's autonomous organizational capacities...To broaden the workers' world, to potentialize forms of communitarian economy wherever there are more communitarian networks, articulations and projects.<sup>93</sup>

The argument put forward by Garcia Linera is not that the assumption of state power is in itself the telos of communism, but rather that the success of the democratic and constitutional processes in 'broadening' and institutionalising the egalitarian and popular gains of *la marea rosada* can reveal the way in which the state can still be harnessed by progressive politics whose aim is the actualisation of the communist hypothesis.

Such subjective and political transformations arguably bespeak the eventual nature of *la marea rosada*. Indeed, the governments of *la marea rosada* are made up of subaltern groups (indigenous groups, for example) and political and social movements that originate well outside the traditional parameters of institutional politics (anti-statist guerrillas such as the Uruguayan Tupamoros, or the coca leaf farmers in Bolivia). What is significant about this leftward shift is that as these groups have, in Ernesto Laclau's Gramscian turn of phrase, 'become the state,' the principles of socialism, and moreover, the idea of communism, as an ultimate horizon for political practice, have not been abandoned.<sup>94</sup> The 'becoming state' of the subaltern in Latin American then, is not a moment of Thermidorean reaction; in this

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<sup>92</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.8.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Bruno Bosteels, 'The Leftist Hypothesis' p.63.

<sup>94</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2007) p.261, n.27. Like Beverley, Laclau broadly supports this regional movement, see, Ernesto Laclau, 'Deriva populista y centroizquierda latinoamericana', *Aporrea*, (10 October, 2006), < [www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a26046.html](http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a26046.html) > [accessed 23 August 2015].

it differs drastically from Badiou's diagnosis of the rightward shift of many disillusioned revolutionaries in Europe. Its dedication to what Alvara Linera calls the 'communist horizon' stands in marked contrast to the broader political abdication of many European socialist and social democratic parties who now offer no alternative to the free market. *Pace* Badiou then, *la marea rosada* arguably highlights the way in which the state can still be used in certain historical situations to develop the struggle for radical social change. Thus when the subaltern scholar and proponent of the anti-statism of the Zapatistas, José Rabasa asserts, apropos *la marea rosada* that 'the state cannot be conceived outside its role of protecting and administering capital, whether in the mode of safeguarding international finance or in the mode of a socialist administration of capital', it is clear that he fails to engage with the profound historical transformations made by the leftward shift in the region.<sup>95</sup> As Laclau puts it, 'the political and economic outlook of Latin America is today more promising than at any other time in recent history.'<sup>96</sup>

Perhaps the broader point to be made here is that Badiou's resolutely anti-statist programme is marred by a certain eurocentrism. While this is indexed by the previous discussion of contemporary developments in the region, it can also be located in his ahistorical approach to the case of vanguardism and socialism in Latin America more generally. To recall, Badiou's critique of vanguardism and the articulation of socialism with state institutions comes from his analysis of the European and Asian situation during the twentieth century. In particular, he is critical of the counter-revolutionary actions of the French Communist Party in its support for a policy of normalisation and parliamentary resolution in the wake of May 1968 and in a broader move, he critiques the limit of the Soviet style vanguard party-states following the failure of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. While he is undoubtedly correct to offer such critiques, it is worth noting that one of the most original and appealing features about the revolutionary movements in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century was that they signified a new and potentially different form of socialism to that of the Russian and Chinese models so central to Badiou's analysis. Badiou does of course draw upon the contemporary example of the

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<sup>95</sup> José Rabasa, *Without History: Subaltern Studies, the Zapatista Insurgency, and the Specter of History*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), p.251.

<sup>96</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'Deriva populista y centroizquierda latinoamericana' [www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a26046.html](http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a26046.html) [accessed 23 August 2015].



Zapatistas and has spoken of his youthful exuberance for Castro's Cuba.<sup>97</sup> However, when he simply reduces the limits of Cuban communism to the 'outmoded conception of politics' tied to the Soviet 'style figure of the Party-State,' he forgets that in the early days of the Cuban revolution, prior to the imposition of a crippling economic blockade by the United States, one notable aim of Castro and the Cuban model was to move beyond the problematic limits of what Che Guevara derisively called 'goulash communism.'<sup>98</sup> One of Guevara's main arguments against this 'un-flavoursome' variety of communism came in *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, where he argued against the prescriptive nature of the Soviet model.<sup>99</sup> For Guevara, the Soviet Union remained wedded to outdated modes of cultural and ideological practice, especially socialist realism, which neither resonated with the masses nor related to the exigencies of the given historical situation and popular traditions in Latin America. The super-structural focus of Guevara was also repeated in a number of later Latin American insurgencies. Rather than exhibit a vulgar economic model of social development, the armed struggles in Latin America sought to develop revolutionary subjectivity through the use of popular traditions and cultural practices. The *poesia militante* of Ernesto Cardenal and his *poesia taller* written by peasants in Nicaragua, along with the rise of *testimonio* narratives by Central American guerrilla fighters as means to raise popular consciousness meant that the old divides between intellectual and manual labour and country and city were increasingly broken down during the revolutionary struggle.<sup>100</sup>

Thus by failing adequately to address the specificity of the Latin America context and the historical situation of Cuba in particular, especially the reasons for the latter's movement towards the Soviet Union as a major trading partner, Badiou ultimately engages in a type of ahistorical and totalising conceptualisation of the vanguard and state socialist tactics

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<sup>97</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, p.106, pp.125-6

<sup>98</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.104; Michael Löwy, *The Marxism of Che Guevara: Philosophy, Economics, Revolutionary Warfare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. by Peter McClaren, trans. by B. Pearce, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), p.111.

<sup>99</sup> Ernesto Guevara, 'Man and Socialism in Cuba, Letter from Major Ernesto Che Guevara to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine, March 1965', in *The Che Reader* (Minneapolis: Ocean Press, 2005), p.23.

<sup>100</sup> For an example of *testimonio* see *I, Rigoberta Menchú* for an example of *testimonio*; Ernesto Cardenal, *Vuelos de Victoria*, (Nicaragua: Editorial Nueva America, 1987); Ernesto Cardenal, *Pluriverse: New and Selected Poems* trans. by Donald D. Walsh (New York: New Directions, 2009). For a recent discussion of Cardenal see Stephen Henighan, *Sandino's Nation: Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramirez Writing Nicaragua, 1940-2012* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014).

which obscure the historical particularities and partial successes of this model when employed in Latin America. To recall, Guevara's main defence of the guerrilla *foco* was one that had precise historical and local specificity. According to Guevara, and also Régis Debray (who, like Badiou, was a student of Louis Althusser), Latin America exhibited the objective or structural conditions for political change in the extreme levels of poverty, inequality, racism, underdevelopment and authoritarian rule.<sup>101</sup> However, what was missing were the subjective or superstructural conditions. In Guevara's analysis, the masses were trapped by a type of passive resignation that was not ontological, but rather historically determined: firstly, by the threat and fear of the military force that had crushed earlier rebellions, such as that of Sandino in Nicaragua during the 1930s, or the Villista and Zapatista forces in the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20; and second, by the long standing legacy of colonial and racist violence. Indeed, in pre-revolutionary Cuba, prior to its alignment with Castro's 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, even the Communist Party was an advocate of reformism rather than revolution, favouring economic modernization and the "necessary" development of a national bourgeoisie.<sup>102</sup> Under such conditions, Guevara argued that the development of a revolutionary spark was necessary to give the people the confidence to rise up. This was the role of the guerrilla, who, simply by surviving an armed engagement with the police or military, would provide evidence that it was possible to resist authoritarian rule. Guevara's argument was that the guerrilla was simply a 'small motor' that would ignite the 'large motor' of society.<sup>103</sup>

The reference to Cuba and vanguardism undoubtedly raises the question of democracy which remains a problem for the Cuban model. However, as Beverley notes, the opposition between armed struggle and democracy has its origins in the central ideological argument of Cold War counterinsurgency, as it does today in relation to the War on Terror.<sup>104</sup> Historically speaking while the vanguard model, in Cuba at least, did not offer enough space to the question of democracy as expressed in electoral or even peaceful terms, the vast

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<sup>101</sup> Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* [1963] in *The Che Reader* (Minneapolis: Ocean Press, 2005); Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution: Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, trans. by Bobbye Ortiz, (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

<sup>102</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.97.

<sup>103</sup> Ernesto Guevara, *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, Letter from Major Ernesto Che Guevara to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine *March 1965*, *The Che Reader* (Minneapolis: Ocean Press, 2005), p.23.

<sup>104</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.104.

majority of armed movements in Latin America took place either against military dictatorships, such as the Batista regime in Cuba or the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua, or in the context of de facto one party rule, such as that of the PRI in Mexico which responded to the threat of radical politics with repression and often outright murder, as witnessed in the Tlateloco massacre of students and workers in 1968. In such historical situations, the legal avenues and electoral paths towards social change were for the most part unavailable. Indeed, it is arguable that Guevara's overall model of the *foco* was not in itself essentially anti-democratic or formally incompatible with the egalitarian content of the communist hypothesis; for only a general insurrection or oppositional movement amongst the 'large motor' of the masses would, in his eyes, ensure victory. In light of the evidence above, I would follow Beverley and argue that despite the authoritarian tendency ascribed to Cuba and more recently Hugo Chávez, on balance, the Latin American armed struggle 'went in the direction of democracy.'<sup>105</sup> Thus contra Badiou's almost blanket refusal to engage with the state and vanguard organizations, and contra Bolaño's totalising vision of the armed struggle as an inevitable step towards the terror of 'forced labor camps,' my point is that the legacy and significance of the armed struggle is far more complex than these approaches suggest. Indeed, the emancipatory tendency of the Latin American struggle is also notable at a more international level. It is worth remembering here that the Cuban model served as an inspiration and provided material support for other liberation movements across the globe. Suffice to mention here Cuba's crucial role in supporting the victorious struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and in particular its vital military intervention in the defeat of the South African army in Angola.<sup>106</sup>

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One of the major aims of this chapter is to situate Bolaño's Thermidorean outlook and the ideology of his novel 2666 in the context of Latin American politics. In literary terms, this chapter focuses on Bolaño's literary representation of Mexico and the femicides of Ciudad Juárez. Unlike the majority of other Latin American states, the government of Mexico, like another major recipient of US military aid, Colombia, remains right of centre. Indeed, as I show below, for the past-half century, the ruling political class in Mexico has almost

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.105.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p.104.

invariably been authoritarian and/or neoliberal. My major literary argument is that despite his Thermidorean ideology, the formal breaks and utopian configurations in 2666 can be viewed as pre-figuring or gesturing towards the politics of *la marea rosada* as a type of ideological solution to the historical problems of governmental repression and present-day socio-economic exploitation in the northern industrial city of Ciudad Juárez. The following discussions in this chapter develop the way Bolaño's representation of Mexico and its relationship to the new articulation of Latin American socialism with the state can be deployed in relation to the concerns of Alain Badiou. In order to get a better sense of the political issues at stake here, I want to discuss the significance of the anti-statism of the Mexican Zapatistas. As I noted in Chapter Two, Badiou closely aligns his current political strategy with the examples offered by groups such as the EZLN. If the previous discussion of *la marea rosada* highlighted the limits of Badiou's theorisation of the communist hypothesis in relation to Latin America, then it is also useful briefly to note the problematic anti-statism of the Mexican Zapatistas.

The Zapatista uprising in 1994 set out to challenge the Mexican state by military means. However, when faced with the overwhelming fire power of the Mexican armed forces, the Zapatistas resorted to a form of democratic anti-statism, focusing their efforts on developing links with civil society and constructing autonomous communities within the state of Chiapas. In the 2006 presidential elections, they refused to endorse the centre left candidate of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who promised a type of Mexican variant of *la marea rosada*. Instead, they promulgated what they called, *la otra campaña* (the other campaign): a campaign that would run parallel to the presidential race but fight outside the institutions to form an extra-parliamentary bloc across the country. The other campaign argued for abstention from the presidential race which was between the overwhelming favourite of the PRD and the incumbent right-wing *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN). The Zapatista aim was to radicalise civil society and disengage politics from a corrupt state apparatus. By forming a powerful anti-statist left bloc, the Zapatistas hoped that a PRD victory would allow their radical position to gain greater political traction within Mexican society.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, pp.116-7.

However, what happened was that the anti-statist absenteeism of the Zapatistas contributed, in some measure, to a PAN victory. The Zapatista programme split support for the left candidate and the PRD failed to achieve the electoral majority that was expected. As Al Giordano observes, the PRD may have won a slight majority in the 2006 election, yet the majority was so narrow that it enabled the electoral commission to manipulate the voting totals, as it had done when the PRD were on course to win the 1988 elections, and give victory to the PAN.<sup>108</sup>

The result, as John Beverley notes, was devastating for the Mexican left – both the PRD and the Zapatistas. The re-election of the PAN enabled the party to deploy the state apparatus against civil society, imposing extra-judicial tactics against drug cartels and crushing trade union rights and most notably, deploying the army to crush the Oaxaca commune, a popular government led by teachers and PRD supporters that had lasted longer than the Paris Commune of 1871. As Beverley notes, the new PAN government proceeded to ‘portray itself, in a society increasingly threatened – because of the very neoliberal policies the PAN [had previously] propagated – by economic and social decomposition and organized crime, as the defender of law and order.’<sup>109</sup>

Despite initial protests, the election led to a drop in support for the PRD which has produced a number of splits in the party, notably when the presidential candidate Lopez Obrador himself left the party. Equally, the election and relative failure of the other campaign has seen the Zapatistas lose political authority. The main political opposition that emerged following the 2006 election was not extra-parliamentary, but rather the old, authoritarian *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) whose seven decade one party rule was finally ended in 2000 partly as a result of the original Zapatista uprising. In 2012, the PRI won the presidential elections and the Zapatistas have since suffered a major loss in the resignation and withdrawal of their leader Subcomandante Marcos. It might be argued that their failure to organise in relation to the state has provided the grounds for their loss of influence. In 1994, following their declaration of war, the first order of which was ‘advance to the capital of the country, defeat the Mexican federal army [...] and permit the liberated peoples to elect, freely and democratically, their own administrative authorities,’

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<sup>108</sup> See Al Giordano, ‘Mexico’s Presidential Swindle’, *New Left Review* 41, (September-October 2006), 5-27.

<sup>109</sup> John Beverley, *Latin Americanism After 9/11*, p.117.

over one million people took to the streets in Mexico City to march in support of the EZLN.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, by 2007, following the disaster of the other campaign, the EZLN was resigned to holding public meetings, numbering little more than one hundred, in small social centres in the state of Chiapas. Unlike the re-alignment of leftist opposition vis-à-vis the state in *la marea rosada*, the anti-parliamentary method taken by the left in Mexico has precipitated a decline in political authority. While the Zapatistas may practice a principled opposition to the state and thus receive support from intellectuals such as Badiou, the theoretical stance has arguably led to crucial strategic errors, for their message and methods no longer resonate among the masses, which are, to recall, both the object and subject of communist politics. In order to examine how the literature of Bolaño, a figure critical of both the Zapatistas and the left in general, offers a different way of imagining politics in Mexico, I now want to examine the precise historical context of Ciudad Juárez, in particular the much heralded *maquiladora* economy, and how the forms of violence expressed in the femicides relate to long standing representations of women within the Mexican nationalist imaginary.

**‘We have everything. Factories, maquiladoras, one of the lowest unemployment rates’:  
neoliberal developments in Mexico**

In 1965, the Border Industries Program (BIP) was signed by the governments of the US and Mexico. The aim of the BIP was to bring US industries and in particular, *maquiladoras* (assembly plants), to the Mexican side of the border. In the previous year, 1964, the Bracero Program, an agreement which permitted seasonal agricultural employment of Mexican nationals in the US had come to an end. The BIP was thus conceived as a panacea for the problem of rising unemployment in the border area.<sup>111</sup> The BIP was also attractive to the interests of US capital: following concessions from the Mexican government, US firms were exempted from national tariff payments and thus were able to exploit cheap Mexican labour by shipping parts for assembly across the border to the *maquiladoras* and then exporting the finished product back to the USA. By 1985, the spread of the BIP

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<sup>110</sup> Subcomandante Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), p.53.

<sup>111</sup> Harry W. Ayer and M Ross Layton, ‘The Border Industry Program and the impacts of expenditures by Mexican Border Industry employees on a U.S. Border Community: An empirical study of Nogales’, *The Annals of Regional Science* Volume 8, Issue 2 (June 1974), 105-117.

program meant that the *maquila* industry had become Mexico's second largest source of income from exports, behind petroleum.<sup>112</sup>

The spread of the BIP program by this stage, however, requires an understanding of broader social transformations within Mexico and in the wider international arena in general, transformations which stem from what is commonly termed the neoliberal turn. In 1982, Mexico was afflicted by the peso crisis: rampant inflation and an unstable currency led to a vast increase in foreign debt. Mexico thus turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank as a means to restructure the debt problem. While these international liberal institutions imposed a series of structural adjustment programmes, the extent of the reforms undertaken in this period were not simply the result of foreign interventions aimed at market reform; rather, the turn towards neoliberalism during the 1980s in Mexico took place in a conjuncture where one key internal determinant was, in the words of Miguel Angel Centeno, the 'technocratic revolution' that took place in the Mexican political class.<sup>113</sup> What Centeno's term tries to convey here is the dramatic and far-reaching changes ('revolution') that took place in the politics of the ruling party, the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, formerly the PRM, *Partido Revolucionario Mexicano*). From the 1920s until its defeat in 2000, the PRI was the only party to rule Mexico. Both the longevity and legitimacy of the PRI had amazed many political analysts; other post-revolutionary regimes, in the Soviet Union and Cuba, for example, lacked its level of international recognition. It was for this reason that in 1990, the now Nobel prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa, a onetime Castro supporter and later neoliberal ideologue, named Mexico 'the perfect dictatorship.'<sup>114</sup> One of the major reasons for the PRI's success was its Comtean approach to social organization. Following the theory of organic positivism associated with the French philosopher, Auguste Comte, the PRI attempted to realise the

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<sup>112</sup> Ellwyn R. Stoddard, *Maquila: Assembly Plants in Northern Mexico*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1987) p.2.

<sup>113</sup> Miguel Angel Centeno, *Democracy within Reason: Technocratic Revolution in Mexico*, (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). See also: Peter H. Smith, 'Leadership and Change: Intellectuals and Technocrats in Mexico', in *Mexico's Political Stability: The Next Five Years*, ed. by Roderic Ai Camp, (Boulder: Westview, 1986) pp.101-117; Nicholas P. Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), especially Chapter Five 'Neoliberal Governmentality: Social Change, Contested Identities, and Rebellion', pp.127-152.

<sup>114</sup> 'Vargas Llosa a 20 años de "México es una dictadura perfecta"' in *Terra* (07/10/2010) <<http://noticias.terra.com.mx/mexico/politica/vargas-llosa-a-20-anos-de-mexico-es-una-dictadura-perfecta,6cf97e40b62df310VgnCLD200000bbccceb0aRCRD.html>>[accessed: 14/08/2014]

Comtean ideal of 'a hierarchically organised non-competitive collectivism in which state and society were one.'<sup>115</sup> Thus the PRI broke society down into three different sectors: labour, agriculture and popular – all of which were represented within official forms tied to the state.<sup>116</sup> This type of corporate approach, also known as clientelism, 'claimed a comprehensiveness that, theoretically at least, placed it above contestation.'<sup>117</sup>

The 'technocratic revolution' noted by Centeno can be traced back to the 1980s and this revolution began to produce contradictions in the clientelist model perfected by the PRI. During this period, the constitution of the political elite underwent a dramatic change: unlike in previous administrations, an unprecedented number of cabinet members began to emerge with academic and international postgraduate backgrounds in economics and administration. All three presidents during the final 18 years of PRI government, Miguel de La Madrid (1982-1988), Carlos Gotari de Salinas (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), studied economics and administration in the United States and all three had served in finance departments of the administrations previous to their own.<sup>118</sup> Under the influence of Chicago School economics and the related neoliberal theorists such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, this new group of rules, known popularly as *los técnicos*, set out to dismantle the Mexican state.<sup>119</sup>

When Miguel de La Madrid inherited the presidency in the midst of the peso crisis in 1982, he immediately reversed his predecessor's programme. In response to the crisis, the former President, López Portillo had nationalised the banks. Upon taking office, however, de La Madrid declared an end of his predecessor's 'financial populism' and announced a series of cuts to public expenditure and a plan of austerity: 'To rationalize,' he stated, 'is not to state-ize [...]the situation requires it. The austerity is obligatory.'<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Charles A. Hale, 'Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870-1930', in *The Cambridge History of Latin America. Vol. 4 Ca. 1870 to 1930*, ed. by Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.367-442, (p.397).

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Rudman, 'Review of *Mexico's Revolution Then and Now*', *Critique*, Volume 40, No. 2, (May 2012), 141-143.

<sup>117</sup> James D. Cockcroft, *Mexico's Revolution Then and Now*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010) p.51; Nicholas P. Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian*, p.128.

<sup>118</sup> Miguel Angel Centeno and Sylvia Maxfield, 'The Marriage of Finance and Order: Changes in the Mexican Political Elite', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (1992), 57-85.

<sup>119</sup> Nicholas P. Higgins, *Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian*, p.142.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Peter H. Smith, 'Mexico since 1946: Dynamics of an Authoritarian Regime', in *Mexico since Independence*, ed. by Leslie Bethell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.321-396, (pp.383-4).



One can immediately see here that the transformation of Mexican governmentality into a form of 'rationalizing' scientific expertise headed by *los técnicos* fits in precisely with Badiou's comments on the contemporary conjuncture from *Saint Paul* and in particular his denunciation of contemporary politics as a form of 'management.'<sup>121</sup> Rather than understand politics as a practice of subjects who attempt to organize the masses in relation to a principled idea or truth, which in Badiou's case would be communism, what takes place instead is a process of political disembodiment whereby responsibility is seemingly subtracted from the subject, in this case the government, who becomes the mere vehicle of "objective" or obligatory procedures which follow not a truth, but rather, the dominant ideology of the given state of the situation. Thus what determines governmental politics in neoliberal Mexico is not values or ethical truths drawn from an event, but rather 'the requirements of the situation'. In other words, technical management replaces conviction and principle. There is apparently no subjective choice or agency, rather 'austerity' or any other political decision for that matter is, in effect, 'obligatory.' Thus politics becomes determined by a technical expertise which, in Marxist terms, constitutes a reification of social relations and human practice.

In this context it is insightful to note a comment about the new Mexican political class in Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the New World Order*:

In 1991 a top adviser to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari described at length to me all the changes the Salinas government was making. When he finished, I remarked: "That's most impressive. It seems to me that basically you want to change Mexico from a Latin American country into a North American country." He looked at me with surprise and exclaimed: "Exactly! That's precisely what we are trying to do, but of course we could never say so publicly".<sup>122</sup>

Mexico's entry then to the 'new world order' of US led neoliberal capitalism thus signals a fundamental deracination of national politics and history. It is as if the Weberian rationalization thesis regarding the gradual erosion of substantive values by a means-end rationality has been amplified to an unprecedented level to the extent that the PRI, in its own words, quite literally attempts to "de-Mexicanise" Mexico. This is an important point because, as I will show, Bolaño's narration of the femicides in the 1990s seems to draw

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<sup>121</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.12.

<sup>122</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the New World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p.51.

upon images of nationalist mythology and messianic revolutionary discourses vis-à-vis the relationship between the USA and Mexico.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the PRI continued its cuts on public expenditure and celebrated the new enterprise culture fostered by the neoliberal technocrats. One of the major consequences of this new approach to market de-regulation was that large social sectors, hitherto managed by the corporatism of the PRI, such as labour and agriculture, were increasingly exposed to logic of capital. As the technocrats claimed, this exposure was not so much the responsibility of the new reforms, but rather that 'the reality of the global economic system forced Mexico to abandon its protectionist isolation and accept the limits of its role as a supplier of cheap labor and as a mendicant in the world financial market.'<sup>123</sup>

Along the northern border, the state's abandonment of a politics of 'protectionist isolation' and its acceptance of a new role as a supplier of 'cheap labour' for the global market was marked by an increase in the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and *maquiladoras*. This increase was enabled by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by Canada, the USA and Mexico in 1993 and inaugurated on 1 January 1994. Under NAFTA the 'force' of 'the global economic system' saw trade tariffs relaxed, especially along the northern border, and also the reversal of many of the hard fought victories of the radical forces of the Mexican Revolution, notably the abolition of Article 27 of the Constitution which enshrined inalienable land rights, known as the *ejido* system, for the peasantry. The *ejido* system of Article 27 had been long associated with the agrarian communism of revolutionary *cuadillos* Pancho Villa, Flores Magon and Emiliano Zapata. On 1 January 1994, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas resurrected the spirit of 1910 denouncing NAFTA as a 'death sentence' for the Mexican peasantry.

### **Neoliberal modernization, gender and the return of nationalist mythology at the US-Mexican frontier**

The inauguration of NAFTA was, to some extent, a death sentence for many female workers in the northern city of Ciudad Juárez. 'The news was horrible,' observes Morini in the first reference to 'the killings' in 2666, 'the dead numbered well over one hundred' (p.43).

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<sup>123</sup> Miguel Angel Centeno, *Democracy Within Reason: Technocratic Revolution in Mexico*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) p.198.

However, for the political class, NAFTA, and in particular the industrial productivity of cities such as Ciudad Juárez symbolised Mexico's entrance into the first world of economic modernization. The process of economic modernization thus produced a series of contradictory developments in Ciudad Juárez which require further explanation. On the one hand, the new market reforms symbolised by the *maquiladora* economy had an ostensibly progressive impact in gender-work relations. As Maria Socorro Tabuenca observes, the new process of industrialization was viewed as a 'saviour' for hitherto economically excluded groups such as women.<sup>124</sup> Before industrialization, female occupations in Ciudad Juárez were limited to the traditional role of mothers in the domestic sphere, or in the service sector, as formal (as secretaries, waitresses, domestics) and informal labour (as sex workers in the brothel-cabaret economy). The latter formed part of the 'Black Legend' of Ciudad Juárez; a social-cultural construction of the border city as a site of easy penetration from the US – cultural, economic and linguistic – that circulates in both Mexico and the US: 'from Mexico City's point of view, the northern border is imagined as perhaps the most "unredeemable" of all the province's representations'; similarly from the US, the border signifies everything associated with barbarism: 'sexuality, vice, nature, and people of color' and also violence.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, as Socorro Tabuenca has noted repeatedly, the city continues to be marked by a clearly limited zone of tolerance for this type of informal economy through which 'decent people', and especially 'decent' women, do not pass.<sup>126</sup> Thus when the '*chilango*' from Mexico City, Sergio González, first visits Santa Teresa in 2666, he is invited by the police to attend a nightclub, something that is completely alien to his normal cultural habitus in the nation's city: 'Sergio González couldn't remember having been in a club since he was seventeen years old' (p.377). Upon buying 'drinks for lots of girls' he is told by the policeman Zamudio that the women in the club are sexually available. 'At some point, Zamudio took him aside and said they could sleep with the girls. Zamudio's face was distorted by the strobe lights and he looked like a madman. González shrugged.' For the metropolitan visitor to a bar in Santa Teresa, the almost insane

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<sup>124</sup> Maria Socorro Tabuenca, 'Ciudad Juárez, Femicide and the State' in *Meanings of Violence in Contemporary Latin America*, ed. by. Gabriela Polit Dueñas and Maria Helena Rueda, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.115-148, (p.115).

<sup>125</sup> Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade and La Frontera*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), p.96.

<sup>126</sup> Ricardo Aguilar and Maria Socorro Tabuenca, *Lo que el viento a Juárez. Testimonios de una ciudad que se obstina*, (Torreón Coahuila/ Las Cruces N.M.: Laguna, Ediciones Nimbus, 2000), p.64.

logic of Zamudio's vision of sexual availability ('he looked like a madman') is normal to the point of almost unremarkable ('González shrugged'), such patriarchal doxa does not even warrant precise temporal distinction ('at some point') in the narration of the night itself.

With the development of the *maquiladora*, however, a new space for female employment and female social identity emerged. While certain female *maquiladora* workers, especially single mothers, were characterised as women of dubious reputation, the economic transformations associated with this new pattern of female employment had some progressive social consequences. Female identity began to shift, at least to a certain degree, from the traditional roles of wife, mother and daughter, to being the household breadwinner. With this new degree of economic autonomy, transformations in social relations began: more women attained powers as consumers, began to attend further education classes and enjoyed a social life that was no longer so heavily circumscribed by male family members.<sup>127</sup> As the head of Santa Teresa's Department of Sex Crimes states in 2666:

It wasn't all bad, where women were concerned....Do you know which Mexican city has the lowest female unemployment rate?...That's right, Santa Teresa, said the head of the Department of Sex Crimes. Here almost all the women have work. Badly paid and exploitative work, with ridiculous hours and no union protections, but work, after all which is a blessing for so many women from Oaxaca or Zacatecas...of course there's unemployment, female and male; it's just that the rate of female unemployment is much lower than in the rest of the county. So in fact you might say, speaking broadly, that all the women here have work (pp.568-9).

If the employment rate of women bespeaks an apparently progressive development, then on the other hand, the 'badly paid and exploitative' nature of this work highlights the contradictory logic of the neoliberal reforms. In *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, Melissa Wright examines the relationship between the *maquiladora* industry and the femicides in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>128</sup> Her central argument is that the female factory worker 'generates widespread prosperity through her own destruction.'<sup>129</sup> Wright's dialectical focus on the generation of 'prosperity' via 'destruction' – both socio-economic and, as in the femicides, biological – stems from her observation that the typical *maquila*

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p.64

<sup>128</sup> Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p.2.

worker has a productive lifespan of no more than five years. There are two related reasons for this: firstly, the worker is offered limited or no training, she is permanently unskilled and thus her productive value is thus seen to diminish over time; and secondly, a regular turnover in the labour is seen as essential for production, especially since the dexterity of the worker is viewed by the employers as diminishing over time. While the jobs in the *maquiladora* are part of a new high-tech industrial production line, they are not the classic Fordist jobs for life. Under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism, assembly labour at the US-Mexican border is characterised by post-fordist flexible accumulation. As Harvey explains, post-fordism emerged in the 1970s as a response to the declining rate of profit within the world market.<sup>130</sup> In order to counteract such problem, post-fordist production was geared towards highly mechanised productivity and an accelerated turn-over time of consumable commodities. In the *maquiladoras* of northern Mexico, this model of labour organization is also characterised by an accelerated turnover of a highly exploited workforce who work on short term contracts with few political rights or protections. As Sergio González Rodríguez puts it:

Such transnational industry has subjected female labor, and male too, to a new type of slavery or brutal exploitation, daily working hours of 16 to 18 hours, without a contract, medical insurance, pension plan, compensation, retirement, accident insurance, violating the Federal Law of Labor and the Constitution, submitting laborers to being fired if pregnant and to a permanent sexual harassment.<sup>131</sup>

Under such conditions, the worker becomes, in Wright's terms, 'disposable': 'the Mexican woman personifies waste-in-the-making, as the material of her body gains shape through discourses that explain how she is untrainable, unskilled, and always a temporary worker.'<sup>132</sup> Bolaño highlights such practices in *2666*. The sense of *maquila* workers as disposable human waste is depicted in the most literal sense. Most of the bodies are discovered, as in reality, on waste dumps or in drainage ditches. Much like the theological references to the physiology of the blessed discussed earlier, the discarded *maquiladora* worker becomes an excremental part of the economic miracle of Mexican industrial progress. In addition to the killings, the inhumane quality of labour at the border is also

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<sup>130</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, pp.142-145.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at its Limits: Crime, Terror and the Latin American Cultural Text*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), p.161.

<sup>132</sup> Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, p.73.

expressed in references to the loss of any sense of routine and structure. As a conversation between a policeman and young women reveals, shifts at the *maquiladora* 'followed no set pattern and obeyed production schedules beyond the workers' comprehension (p.469). The reified ('obeying production schedules') and inhuman ('beyond the workers' comprehension') power of the *maquila* economy means that even the identity and history of the employees is no longer a subject of much concern: 'At EastWest his [a missing worker's] file had been lost, which wasn't unusual at the maquiladoras, since workers were constantly coming and going' (p.414).

For the subaltern theorist Ileana Rodríguez, such developments highlight the way in which neoliberal economics have transformed social relations to the point at which the state form in Mexico itself enters an intractable crisis or limit point.<sup>133</sup> Rodríguez's thesis is that '*los maquilas maquilan lo social*: that is, maquilas produce the social.'<sup>134</sup> The Mexican state's attempt to attract high-tech, foreign and essentially footloose capital to the border zones by reducing taxes and tariffs under the neoliberal reforms outlined above has led, in Rodríguez's eyes, to a fundamental weakening of civil society and the public sphere. While the *maquilas* themselves represent high tech developments within capitalism, the economic investment by foreign firms has not been matched by attendant spending on social infrastructure, urban development and institutions such as the local police. The vast majority of women are abducted in public spaces on the way to work in the maquilas that are located outside the city; these areas are unpatrolled, poorly lit and unsafe, and when crimes do take place, the police regularly fail to investigate.<sup>135</sup> As Rodríguez explains, outside the maquila industry that dominates the city's economy there is little formal employment, apart from the criminal economies of local gangs and large drug cartels. Indeed, the state itself, in both local forms such as the police and even at a federal level is increasingly bound up with crime itself. Rodríguez quotes the journalist Diana Washington:

There is the possibility that the Mexican authorities in charge of these cases will not follow them up. Why? Maybe because they cannot, they do not want to, or because they are forbidden by higher authorities [...] The group that operates in Ciudad Juárez consists of various men. Collectively, they represent millions of dollars, own

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<sup>133</sup> Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at its Limits*.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p.167.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.162, pp.167-169.

great enterprises, and have connections with organized crime and with important politicians that are near the president.<sup>136</sup>

The alliance of the state and organized crime under the aegis of the 'great enterprises' of capital is an observation that is shared by the Mexican Institute of Studies of Organized Criminality: 'fundamentally, crime is organized from the State, protected by the State, defended by the State against victims' demands – society – to bring a close the aggressions of delinquent groups. In fact, Mexican 'mafias' inhabit the very heart of the state.'<sup>137</sup> 'Based on this evidence,' concludes Rodríguez, 'we ought to conclude that the state of law does not exist in Juárez.'<sup>138</sup> Her argument is that the crimes and violence in Juárez are a uniquely contemporary event, they are the product of the new social relations produced by neoliberal capitalism. 'The outcome of this labor process,' she explains, 'creates a reverse of the common good for the well-being of capital.'<sup>139</sup> In Marxist terms, her argument suggests that the neoliberal reforms represented by the maquila industry have subsumed the relative autonomy of the state. With the state and attendant concepts of law and order thus subordinated to the power of capital, her work seems to support Badiou's thesis that the state cannot be the space around which new mobilisations for radical politics take place.

Rodríguez's analysis of the femicides is a powerful contribution to the growing literature on the developments in Mexico. Her argument that the crimes bespeak an almost uniquely modern development is, however, problematic for it seems to operate mechanistically, reducing the crimes to a strict reflection of the new economic base in a corresponding superstructure. Indeed, despite her attempt to highlight the problems with the neoliberal transformations of Mexico, her assumption that the violence is uniquely modern in its almost singular determination by the economic base uncannily mirrors, albeit in an inverted way, the official governmental celebrations of NAFTA and the *maquiladora* industry as evidence of Mexico's new-fangled modernity. In contrast, I want to demonstrate how the crimes also bespeak a more overdetermined and less direct relationship between base and superstructure. In other words, the problem is not simply

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<sup>136</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, p.168.

<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Sergio González, *Huesos en el desierto*, pp.66-67.

<sup>138</sup> Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at its Limits*, p.162.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p.167.

Rodríguez's reliance on the base-superstructure model; this is indeed a necessary starting point for any Marxist analysis. However, it is only that: a starting point. What needs to be explored in more detail is the precise way that changes in the base *articulate* with, rather than mechanically determine, ideologies and practices in the superstructure that have a different history than the new economic base.

On closer inspection, it would appear that the disposability of workers and especially women, is also determined by an articulation of new economic practices with older, patriarchal discourse of gender relations. Rodríguez and other theorists are correct to note that the growth of female employment in the *maquiladoras* has entailed a partial reversal of male economic dominance in places such as Ciudad Juárez. However, cultural responses to the feminization of employment still articulate the economic with traditional or older ideological discourses of patriarchy or, in this specific case, machismo. According to this discourse, the virtuous Mexican female is configured as a dutiful and domestic mother or wife. Her domain is that of the home rather than the world of work. If the private sphere is thus the preserve of such a woman, then the prominent role of females in the public sphere of maquiladora employment bespeaks a form of unacceptable licentiousness. As various sociological studies have shown, the working atmosphere within the *maquila* plants is highly 'sexualized' with managers refusing to hire mothers or pregnant women and instead encouraging young female workers 'to dress fashionably, to participate in beauty contests, and go dancing in the clubs.'<sup>140</sup> Indeed, as Melisa Wright notes, an association between female employment and prostitution was frequently made by *maquila* managers when interviewed about working life in their factories: 'the message that you cannot tell the difference between a prostitute and a female *maquiladora* worker was common.'<sup>141</sup> For Wright, it is this dual discourse of economic and sexual availability, an articulation of new economic practices with traditional ideologies of patriarchy, that produces the women as disposable, and it is this that highlights the regressive nature of neoliberal economic reform:

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<sup>140</sup> Jessica Livingston, 'Murder in Juárez: Gender, Sexual Violence and the Global Assembly Line', *Frontiers*, 25.1, (2004), 59-76, (p.68).

<sup>141</sup> Melissa Wright, 'Maquiladora Mestizas and a Feminist Border Politics: Revisiting Anzaldúa', *Hypatia* 13.3 (1998), 114-131 (p.114).



At the heart of these seemingly disparate story lines is the crafting of the Mexican woman as a figure whose value can be extracted from her, whether it be in the form of her virtue, her organs, or her efficiency on the production floor. And once 'they,' her murders or her supervisors, 'get what they want from' her, she is discarded.<sup>142</sup>

The repetition of this sexualised view of disposable female labour is continued in 2666, when various characters, including the police, refer to the *maquila* workers as 'whores' who 'deserved to be fucked as many times as anyone wanted to fuck them.' (p.460, p.490). Indeed, the extent to which this type of machista discourse pervades comprehension of the femicides and the gendered economics of labour at the border is made even clearer later in the text when González discusses the killings with a 'whore' he has just slept with in Mexico City:

as he was talking the whore yawned, not because she wasn't interested in what he was saying but because she was tired, which irritated Sergio and made him say, in exasperation, that in Santa Teresa they were killing whores, so why not show a little professional solidarity, to which the whore replied that he was wrong, in the story as he had told it the women dying were factory workers, not whores. Workers, workers, she said. And then Sergio apologized, and as if a lightbulb had gone on over his head, he glimpsed an aspect of the situation that until now he'd overlooked (p.466).

The revelatory moment of the 'lightbulb' igniting 'over his head' vis-à-vis the crimes in Santa Teresa points, in part, to the apocalyptic style of the text. As I note in Chapters One and Two, apocalypse literally signifies 'revelation' and in a more precise cultural sense it is a genre characterised by a dualism that demarcates the present as a fallen time ('women dying'), and the revelation of the promise of a new, redeemed world. Despite the enlightened 'glimpse of the situation' that had hitherto been overlooked in González's conception of the Santa Teresa, the promissory discourse of another, messianic future is absent here. As such it plays out what Žižek and Gunjević call the 'inversion of apocalypse'; that is to say, that under the conditions of late neoliberal capitalism, there appears to be little if any hope of redemption or viable political hope. If this scene thus refuses a promissory political discourse, then it is also significant that the association between working women and prostitution ('whores') is made by Sergio González himself. To recall, the journalist González is the figure around whom revelation is played out at both a textual and inter-textual level. What his erstwhile unquestioned association between prostitution

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<sup>142</sup> Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, p.87.

and the femicides highlights then, is the extent to which intransigent *machista* discourses still determine comprehension of the femicides and female maquiladora labour, even when these are issues are approached by leftist figures such as González. Indeed, a repetition of this discourse is seemingly played out at the level of diegesis. Here the casual rather than ironic or stylistic use of the derogatory term ‘whore’ rather than ‘prostitute’ or ‘sex worker’ is drawn upon by the narrative voice itself.

What seems to be taking place in this association of promiscuity with female employment in foreign owned factories is a re-articulation of certain sexualised discourses around the issue of Mexican national identity. A recent short story about the changing economic landscape of Mexico’s northern industrial border by Carlos Fuentes is entitled, *Malintzin of the maquilas*.<sup>143</sup> The story focuses on a young female employee at a *maquiladora* and her failing personal relationship with a man who is resident in the United States. The title thus relates her situation to the anti-Antigone legend of Malintzin or *La Malinche*, an indigenous women given to the conquistador Hernan Cortés by a Tabascan tribe in the early days of the conquest. *La Malinche* became the mistress of Cortés, the mother of one Cortés’ children and also his translator. To a certain – and inarguably anachronistic – extent she embodies some elements of Wright’s thesis on disposability: ‘discarded’ by Cortes she later became a mistress to one of his subordinates. In the pre-Independence period she was viewed as a religious icon, both by the indigenous whom attributed her with amazing powers and by the Spanish who saw her as an exemplary convert.<sup>144</sup> Yet by the time of the struggle independence in the early nineteenth century, when the issue of national identity appeared, *La Malinche* became a symbol of the humiliation, her rape and then traitorous relationship with Cortés was seen as a key element in *conquista* oppression.<sup>145</sup> In his 1950 essay on Mexican national identity, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz, one of Bolaño’s literary *bête noirs* from his semi-autobiographical novel *The Savage Detectives*, famously argued that the Mexican male and the attendant culture of machismo was founded upon a violent rejection of his shameful mother:

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<sup>143</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *The Crystal Frontier: A Novel in Nine Stories*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), pp.114-144.

<sup>144</sup> Jean Franco *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p.131.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p.131.

[La Malinche] has become a figure that represents those Indian women who were fascinated, raped, or seduced by the Spaniards, and, just as the child cannot forgive the mother who leaves him to go in search of the father, the Mexican people cannot forgive the treason of La Malinche. She incarnates the open, the raped, in opposition to our stoic, impassive and closed Indians.<sup>146</sup>

Paz's argument is that the origins of contemporary forms of Mexican patriarchy, what is known as machismo, are located in the discourses and history of the conquest. While spanning a vast historical period, Paz's diagnosis of this 'Mexican disease,' the attempt by the sons of Malintzin to reject the feminine who had been raped (*chingada*) but had also betrayed her people, is legible in the contemporary vernacular of Mexico Spanish. The Malintzin myth is drawn upon in perhaps the most common of vulgarities, '*Chingada Madre*,' which – following the myth derived from Malintzin's own biographical details – literally means the woman or mother ("*Madre*") who is doubly "fucked": exploited in terms of work ("fucked over"), and also "fucked" sexually (raped).

In critical theory, Paz's theory has also been taken up by Jean Franco in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*.<sup>147</sup> Deploying a Foucauldian style genealogy she observes the way in which echoes of the *Malinche* myth have played a role in establishing 'the fact that national identity was essentially masculine identity.'<sup>148</sup> Franco's work covers a vast number of literary and cultural texts; her fundamental argument is that women's experiences in Mexico have been marginalised both culturally and politically. The immense historical reach of her work deals with issues that go beyond the focus on this thesis. However, in terms of the association of sexuality with issues of nationalism, an association that is legible in Fuentes' story, *Malintzin and the Maquilas*, and also in the *machista* discourses displayed in 2666, Franco's work on the gendered determinants of Mexican politics enables us to identify two further points of interest. First, she points out that the symbol of Mexico's war of independence from Spain (1810-20) and the patriarchal ideal of Mexican womanhood – the indigenous Virgin of Guadalupe – is, to a certain degree, a 'positive' machista re-writing of the *La Malinche* narrative.<sup>149</sup> The famous *Grito de Dolores*, "*¡Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe y mueran los gachupines!*" ("Long live the Virgin of

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<sup>146</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, trans. by Lysander Kemp, (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p.86.

<sup>147</sup> Jean Franco *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, p.xxi.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, p.xviii.

Guadalupe and death to the settlers!"), proclaimed by the priest Miguel Hidalgo invoked 'la Virgin' to announce the commencement of the war for independence. Her image was emblazoned on the banners carried by Hidalgo's troops and the first president of the newly independent Mexico, José Miguel Ramón Adauto Fernández y Félix, renamed himself, Guadalupe Victoria ('Guadalupe Victory'). The Virgin was symbolically resurrected in the Revolution a century later, when her image was carried on the flags of the radical forces of Villa and Zapata. The traditional iconography of the Virgin depicts a holy women 'crushing the [biblical] serpent and in possession of the heavens from which she protects her chosen people' – the Mexican nation.<sup>150</sup> The image thus demarcates the political dualism of a post-Edenic fall (the serpent) and the promise of a redeemed future (heaven for the chosen people).

Secondly, cultural and political discourses of resistance to a later invader of Mexican territory, the USA, which annexed over a third of Mexico in 1848, also play out the relationship between sex, gender and politics as analysed by Franco. The most illuminating case here is the representation of the invasion of US territory in 1916 by the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. In 1913, Ciudad Juárez was taken by troops loyal to the left-wing revolutionary leader, Pancho Villa. Heralded as a messianic 'avenger of the dispossessed,' Villa's victory in Ciudad Juárez enabled him to assume the governorship of the state of Chihuahua and implement a series of leftist reforms against the propertied elite.<sup>151</sup> As Max Parra has observed, Villa was a popular character in the sensationalist tales and *corridos* published in the new tabloid press that emerged following the revolution.<sup>152</sup> These mass-marketed cultural practices thus formed part of what Carlos Monsiváis called 'a literature of pre-consumerism' in the post-revolutionary period.<sup>153</sup> In such tales, Villa's revolutionary machismo signified lower class strength, the struggle against oppression and a virile Mexican nationalism which was highlighted by his invasion of the US and attack on the city of Columbus in 1916. As Parra notes, popular representations of Villa's violence

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p.xviii.

<sup>151</sup> Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, (Stanford: University Press, 1998); Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Pancho Villa: Una Biografía Narrativa*, (Mexico: Planeta, 2006).

<sup>152</sup> Max Parra, *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2005) pp.98-99.

<sup>153</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, 'Notas sobre la cultura Mexicana en el siglo XX', *Historia general de México*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Vol. 2, (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1981), 1375-1548, (p.1455).

and revolutionary nationalism were couched in explicitly *sexual* terms.<sup>154</sup> For example, in Rafael F. Muñoz's classic novel, *Vámonos con Pancho Villa!*, the capture of Columbus is explicitly depicted as the rape of a feminized American territory by lion-like Villista troops. On their approach to the border, the narrator states that 'like a woman who bends forward out of her window, the city of Columbus offered herself; she seemed to come to them, loose and seductive.'<sup>155</sup> . Muñoz's novel consists of stories originally published in popular news prints during the 1930s and his focus on sex and violence follows many of the sensationalist mass marketing trends of the early consumer culture. Indeed, the configuration of Columbus and US territory in sexual terms is heightened in the depiction of the attack:

When they crossed that imaginary line [the Mexican-US border] they experienced a sense of sexual satisfaction [...] blood completed the illusion of a violent hymeneal entry.<sup>156</sup>

Long emasculated by the military, territorial and economic power of its northern neighbour, the long-standing trope of Mexican nationality *qua* masculine virility is symbolically re-stated in this scene by the 'rape' of US territory. Villa's left-wing revolutionary machismo thus exacts vengeance for the poor Mexicans whose land was annexed by the United States in 1848 and are subsequently treated as 'beasts of burden at the service of capitalism.'<sup>157</sup>

When read via Jean Franco's examination of gender and politics, one can see that the depictions of contemporary 'beasts of burden at the service of [multinational] capitalism' at the US-Mexican border are *overdetermined* by an articulation of the new economic practices of neoliberalism with sexualised discourses tied to older traditions of Mexican nationalism. The configuration of female employees of US owned *maquiladoras* as 'whores,' a reference that is played out in Bolaño's novel and present in the discourses and practices around the *maquila* industry analysed by Melissa Wright, indicates that the violence is a more complex and contradictory phenomenon than Rodríguez suggests. Rodríguez is correct to focus on the way that the neoliberal transformation of

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<sup>154</sup> Max Parra, *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution*, pp.105-119.

<sup>155</sup> Rafael F. Muñoz, *Vámonos con Pancho Villa!*, 9th edn. (Mexico City: Espasa Calpe Mexicana, 1989), p.127.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p.142.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p.131.

contemporary Mexican society has produced the conditions that can make such violence a structural part of everyday life. However, the way that this violence also articulates and resurrects older discourses tied to Mexican nationalism means that her argument is unable to attend to the complex overdetermination of the structure of violence in the border area. The political temporality of the sexualised violence and attendant discourses around female employment are at odds with the linear economic chronology that underpins Rodríguez's argument. The repetition of the myth of *La Malinche* in relation to the working women of the *maquiladoras* and the sexual violence that accompanies the femicides outlines a disjunction between the libidinal economy of the maquila industry and the designation of this industry as an example of neoliberal modernity whether this example is read in a positive way, as in official celebrations of female employment and productivity, or negatively, in the revelations of the abject consequences of such economic transformation by Rodríguez. In terms of Badiou's arguments, the recrudescence of nationalism as a determinant element in the present conjuncture also suggests that his attempt to enact a break with such traditions in a new post-national world of communist resistance requires an element of redress. The sense of temporal contraction, whereby older discourses of sexualised nationalism continue to determine the reality of life under the conditions of multinational capital, means that critical theory and Marxism must still attend to the persistence of national as much as globalised relations if such practices are to attain any type of analytical power in the present conjuncture. I now want to return in more detail to the question of literature and the way in which the crime form of 2666 enables us to re-think some of Badiou's theopolitical theory.

**'I should like to have been a homicide detective much better than being a writer':**

**mediation, violence and the police procedural<sup>158</sup>**

As a variety of materialist scholars have noted, the 'text of violence' has become a 'major trope in Latin American literary and cultural criticism in recent years.'<sup>159</sup> This is arguably the product of shocking headlines about the atrocious and often unfathomable violence of the drug war and femicides in Mexico, along with the explosion of counter revolutionary

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<sup>158</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *The Last Interview*, p.122.

<sup>159</sup> See Herman Herlinghaus, *Violence without Guilt: Ethical Narratives from Global South*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at its Limits*; Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, trans. by Gabriela Jauregui, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2012).

violence in Colombia. In her reading of *2666*, Franco links this violence to the collapse of any grand narrative able to 'sustain the carefully engineered plot'.<sup>160</sup> Instead,

the fabula is sustained through chains of *petits récits*, records of casual encounters thanks to which information that may be trivial or, occasionally, momentous is passed on as anecdote, shouldering out History with a capital H.<sup>161</sup>

Franco's focus on the series of '*petits récits*' as the constitutive elements of a type of *verité* 'text of violence' which precludes meaning making in any significant or overarching sense (the end of 'History with a capital H') is underpinned by a notion of violence as an obliterating, 'necropolitical' and essentially ahistorical force.<sup>162</sup> This way of thinking about violence is also manifest in McCann's assertion that Bolaño's representation of the femicides in 'The Part About the Crimes', 'offers no generic framework that can make sense of the violence.'<sup>163</sup> He characterises this violence as Sadean, suggesting that since the levels of violence are so 'overwhelm[ing]' then it is only logical that the 'apocalyptic [tradition] is always overwhelming the possibility of adventure'.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, he argues that this apocalyptic force is so powerful as to dissolve the 'insistently literary voice' and 'heroic qualities of the detective' that characterised Bolaño's earlier dealing with the murders of young women following the 1973 Pinochet coup in *Estrella distante*.<sup>165</sup> In a similar manner, Tram Nguyen argues that 'Bolaño's severe literalism traverses both fiction and non-fiction' to the point where 'the real becomes a barely understandable phenomenon'.<sup>166</sup>

The postulation that the violence of the femicides is somehow beyond cognition ('barely understandable') and beyond conventional narration (dissolving the 'literary voice' and agency) is arguably in keeping with the 'apocalyptic tradition' endorsed by Bolaño. Attempts to emphasise the extremity, force and overwhelming nature of this violence arguably express the combination of horror and impotence that people experience in the face of the proliferation of dead, raped and mutilated bodies. However, the ahistorical conception of violence that underpins these critical readings runs the risk of endorsing a

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<sup>160</sup> Jean Franco, 'Questions for Bolaño', p.211.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Andrew McCann, 'Discrepant Cosmopolitanism and the Contemporary Novel: Reading the Inhuman in Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*', p.138.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Tram Nguyen, 'Travelling Sovereignty: Counter-Crossing Bolaño with Derrida', pp.35-36.

broader tendency to present Latin America and especially the Mexico-US border as a site of geographic exceptionalism characterised by an essential or natural violence and ungovernability. Moreover the disarticulated, essentialised model of violence that I have identified in Franco, McCann and Nguyen also forecloses the possibility of developing a critical and conceptual apparatus through which to envisage change. The infernal spaces of this kind of cultural imaginary are intrinsically ahistorical and therefore preclude the notion of any individual or collective agency; they re-inscribe the culture of despair and powerlessness that they purportedly critique. The analyses of *2666* by Franco, McCann and Nguyen also fail to attend to the crucial issue of mediation and particularly the significance of Bolaño's engagement with the conventions of the police procedural. As I argue in what follows, it is only via a close critical analysis of the interplay of form and content that we can begin to reveal the systemic underpinnings of this culture of violence and thus the possibility of envisaging a different future.

In *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, Stephen Knight examines the historical emergence and formal characteristics of the police procedural novel.<sup>167</sup> Drawing upon Ed McBain's 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct series that began in 1956 and constitutes one of the first major examples of this sub-genre, Knight explains that the emergence of the police procedural demarcated a new development in crime fiction. What was distinct about the sub-genre was the location of the detective figure within an institutional framework: the police. Earlier detective heroes were conventionally presented as romantic individuals, operating outside official institutions, either in the form of the amateur detectives of the British Golden Age tradition or the tougher, 'private dicks' of Hammett and Chandler's 'hard boiled' tradition of American noir.

Drawing upon the work of Raymond Williams, Knight explains that the US police procedural emerged historically in the new 'structure of feeling' that followed the Second World War.<sup>168</sup> In contrast to the cynicism towards government and institutions that had seen the lonely outsider of American noir flourish during the Prohibition era and then the Great Depression, the experience of war led to a 'widespread acceptance of bureaucratic organisation, and communicated a notion that security could come from organised,

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<sup>167</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, pp.168-9.



technically skilled collective effort.<sup>169</sup> Knight's argument is that the ultimate success of the state-run US war effort led to a shift in popular cultural attitudes towards institutions and that this was in part reflected in the new articulation of justice with an agent of the state in the emergent police procedural form.

The actant switch from the private enterprise of a lonely hero walking down Chandler's 'mean streets' to the collective work of state employees is a key characteristic of Ed McBain's fiction. In the 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct series, the detective protagonists come from the 'graft loaded squad room' of the local police station, a place that is full of men 'work[ing] in their short sleeves,' sweating and searching through 'file cabinets' which 'stood at strict attention.'<sup>170</sup> The personification of objects of bureaucratic administration ('filing cabinets standing at attention' ) is significant because it suggests that effective investigative work ('graft') is to be found in technical expertise, a routine of 'strict' procedure, which bespeaks, in Knight's terms, an 'objective' approach to crime.<sup>171</sup> As such this type of mechanical approach differs markedly from the romantic individualism and anti-institutional sentiment of the earlier hard-boiled detective heroes. Arguably the most striking expression of this type of objective approach to investigative work is located in the series of documentary additions that McBain brings to the crime genre. His first novel, *Cop Hater* (1956) is notable for the reprinting, often in typescript facsimile, of a number of documents: a pistol license application, a ballistic report, a prisoner's record card, an autopsy report, a definition of Penal Law, Section 402 (Burglary), a hair growth chart, a blood group analysis.<sup>172</sup>

In his analysis of McBain's novels, Knight explains that despite the novelty of the objective mode, the most 'striking feature is their irrelevance to the plot.'<sup>173</sup> What he means here is that the actual solution to the crime presented does not often emerge from the actual work of police detection. In contrast, the solution often emerges from a chance encounter while the reason for the crime itself is invariably tied to a type of moral failing or betrayal, often in relation to sexual relations, whereby the villain's sexual licentiousness is contrasted to the honest work and pure erotic love that a detective has for their own partner. For

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p.169.

<sup>170</sup> Ed McBain, *Cop Hater*, (London: Orion, 2003), p.62, p.69.

<sup>171</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p.174.

<sup>172</sup> Ed McBain, *Cop Hater*, p.33, p.42, p.43, p.64, pp.107-8, p.133, p.134.

<sup>173</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p.175.

example, in *Cop Hater*, the villain is not caught via the objective modes of investigation listed above. The identification of the killer takes place in a contingent manner when a doctor is able to identify the criminal, wounded after a shoot-out with the police, from reading about the crimes in a newspaper article. The identification thus does not take place through methodological police procedure, as Knight notes 'effectively there is no detection at all.'<sup>174</sup>

In terms of the ultimate moralistic orientation of the plot, the crime invariably relates to a rift in a personal relationship. For example in *Cop Hater*, it is the murderous wife of a police officer and her lover who attempt to suggest that an anti-police fanatic is on the loose. In contrast, the police themselves embody virtues of self-control and discipline; their reward for the apprehension of a criminal is often the erotic possession of a beautiful but virtuous woman. For Knight, the texts are thus intrinsically sexist, the women support the 'masculine narcissism of the detective's world as victims, villains, witnesses and police comforts.'<sup>175</sup> Interestingly, the loyal, yet highly sexed women who marry the police heroes are given masculine names: Teddy, the literally "beautiful deaf and dumb" lover of detective Steve Carella in *Cop Hater*, and Gus, who marries the officer Kling in *The Mugger*.<sup>176</sup>

For Knight the fundamental contradiction between the prevalence of an objective mode and the ultimately subjective moralism and contingent processes attached to the crime and its eventual revelation bespeak an ideology of liberal humanism that attempts to fight off or disavow the overarching structural forces and inhuman alienation of capitalist modernity. The objective style, with its personifications of various bureaucratic instruments such as filing cabinets, suggests a type of world dominated by objective forces where humans have little agency. This plays out Marx's argument about commodity fetishism in that objects behave like humans and are seen to be embodied by a mystical force or agency of their own. Humans in contrast, behave like objects; they respond to external stimuli and are devoid of the expected moral values.<sup>177</sup> This is what takes place in the sexual infidelities that generate the crimes. However, the persistence of moral virtues

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p.183.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p.186.

<sup>176</sup> Ed McBain, *The Mugger*, (London: Orion, 2003).

<sup>177</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p.176, p.188; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*, pp.163-177.

amongst the police, and the eventual apprehension of the criminal means that the foregrounding of this reality is kept at bay. Knight interprets this in the manner of Pierre Macherey:

The gap between objective and subjective styles, between police method and casual resolutions of the central mystery reveals what the novel cannot speak, but must say: that the objectified consciousness of the modern world is deeply hostile to the bourgeois ideal of individual consciousness.<sup>178</sup>

The gaps or contradictions of the novel thus play out the liberal, 'bourgeois' illusion that such structural forces can ultimately be controlled by subjective agency emboldened by moral virtues.

Although McBain's work began in the late 1950s, the contradictions of the police procedural recall Badiou's identification of the key contradictions of late capitalism. To recall, Badiou notes that the high-on imperial extension (his reference in *Saint Paul* is of course, the Roman Empire in the first century AD) of free market capitalism into almost all areas of social life is also accompanied by an ideology of conservative moralism towards the poor and a demand for a strong disciplinary state. While officially removed from economic organisation, Badiou observes that the state increasingly acts as a type of police force against the threat of popular movements among the masses. What is more interesting, however, and what I want to explore in more detail below, is that when approached in the terms offered above, one can begin to identify the ways in which Bolaño's use of the police procedural form signifies a critical type of ideological-cultural engagement with the historical raw material that constitutes the content for 2666: Mexican neoliberal modernity, and in particular the maquiladora industry and femicides of Ciudad Juárez.

### **Historical change and utopian persistence in 2666**

2666 unsettles conventional expectations by drawing the reader into a form of exploration that transcends the usual police procedural formula. As I discuss above, the novel begins with the enigmatic case of the Penitent. In the course of this investigation, the lead inspector, Juan de Dios Martinez, plays out the characteristic erotic formula of the early police procedural in his relationship with the director of the asylum. In something like Ed

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<sup>178</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p.190.

McBain's novels, the investigation is lent a hand, so to speak, by this type of erotic relationship. The centrality of the erotic in the revelatory nature of the crime is notable in the relationship between such 'older' libidinal impulses and the inclusion within the text of new documents of science: the forensic reports. What is interesting is that despite the focus on science, such developments prove ultimately to be ruses, for the solution to the crime is usually found not so much in this modern disenchanted world, but rather in questions of personal morality which almost invariably relate back to the erotic escapades of the police. Yet, in *2666* the normal structures of the genre are wholly reversed or at least fragmented. The enigmatic Penitent is not, it turns out, the key criminal in Santa Teresa: 'the priest-killer called the Penitent [...] had vanished as mysteriously as he'd appeared' (p.464). By extension, the normal erotic link between a given officer and the case is wholly broken; the narration of the relationship between de Dios Martinez and the doctor Elvira Campos recedes from the text without any apparent resolution or heightening of dramatic tension. Unlike the marriages that consecrate the resolutions of McBain's novels, Dios Martinez and Elvira Campos are badly matched. As de Dios Martinez realises 'the doctor treated him like a patient' (p.472). And if the crimes against women are the key focus of this section, then we are quickly made to understand that the vast majority of the police are either ignorant or uninterested or complicit. The local police and judiciales undertake cursory investigations, the various *lotes* and waste grounds at the peripheries of the city where the dead bodies are dumped are visited, but almost invariably the cases remain unsolved. One reason why this type of institutional failure takes place, in Jean Franco words, is arguably 'the shrinkage of state functions [as] a consequence of neoliberal policies', or, following Ileana Rodríguez, the decline of the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis the overriding imperatives of economic logic.<sup>179</sup> Thus in *2666*, the reader is witness to a meeting between the heads of police, the mayor of Santa Teresa and the leader of the chamber of commerce (pp.470-1). If the police are hampered by 'the magnitude of the job and their own lack of manpower' (p.464), then it is notable that the aim of the head of police and the political and economic elites is not so much to aid the investigation but rather to minimise the damage to the city's reputation and by extension its economy: 'The important thing is not to stir up shit, said the mayor' (p.470). And similarly, for the

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<sup>179</sup> Jean Franco, 'Questions for Bolaño', p.214; Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at its Limits*.

representative of the maquila industry, the aim is to proceed 'discreetly [...] without sending anyone into a panic, said the man from the chamber of commerce' (p.471).

In terms of the conventions of literary form, the interesting point here is not only that the police do not exhibit the virtues of discipline, hard work and moral integrity that traditionally characterise the characters in the police procedural; rather the subsumption of the police work by an overarching economic imperative is something that is not uncovered via an investigatory procedure that occurs through the heightening of dramatic tension of the plot. It is not as if the lower ranks of police themselves are ignorant of this type of structure, thus giving rise to space for investigation and a type aesthetic realism that would involve finding out previously unknown facts about the city: 'Juan de Dios Martinez wasn't invited to the meeting. He knew it was being held' (p.471). This information is simply presented in the normal detached style by the narrator, unmediated as such by the drama of a police investigation, and thus it begins to acquire the status of an almost sociological or empirical fact. There is little sense of historical transformation, or opening up of a deeper knowledge. The novel thus replicates what appears to be a static reality. For critics such as Franco and Nguyen, it is the unremarkable facticity of this invariant structure of death and indifference that renders Santa Teresa and by extension, Ciudad Juárez, a 'necropolis', a space completely abandoned by law and inhabited by the exceptional rule of a sovereign 'despot'.<sup>180</sup> This is, of course, the empirical truth that such a reality suggests. However, in the eyes of Badiou, empirical reality is, of course, not exactly a truth. For Badiou, truth emerges not from the realm of the given situation determined by empiricism, but rather from an interpretative process that follows an eventual or contingent emergence of certain inexistent elements which are not usually counted or valued in the dominant ideological mediations of reality.

The novel does reveal a more intermediate reality linked to the crimes – the power of big business, drug lords, with ties to the police and the US consulate. However, once again, this revelation does not follow the tradition of the genre. The importance of this grouping is neither brought to light by one of the few earnest or straight cops such as de Dios Martinez, nor does it emerge via the mediation of the narration of a police investigation which builds

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<sup>180</sup> Jean Franco, 'Questions for Bolaño' p.211; Tram Nguyen, 'Travelling Sovereignty: Counter-Crossing Bolaño with Derrida', p.34.

towards a dramatic crescendo and resolution. Rather this intermediate reality emerges from the work of a private investigator. However, it is crucial to note that his investigations are not narrated directly by the text. Only the results are presented after the fact; this investigation thus takes place outside the text, so to speak. In this, the structure of narration mirrors the absence of any direct narration of the killings in real time or how they came about, what is given instead are the results: the hundreds of corpses of the dead women and the nexus between the police, the narco-industry and the US consulate and the *maquila* industry. Indeed, much like the parallel with deaths of the women, the latter information only comes to light when the private eye has died. After this death, the person who has paid for his services, a former leftist member of the Mexican political class, Azucena Esquivel de la Plata, recounts the results of the investigation to the journalist Sergio González.

The reference to González of course marks the operation of a certain reality principle within the novel; for while the real-life investigations of González constitute the most proximate representations of the underlying reality of truth of the crimes, there is officially no resolution to the femicides, or, perhaps more accurately, in the individualised epistemology of law and also the crime genre, there is no means to express a type of structural guilt. What I mean here is that the repetitive nature of such ‘crimes’ against working class women bespeaks a more structural cause. Indeed, the identification of a new, intensified structure of violence that emerges historically in the era of late capitalism is a focus for many contemporary re-workings of Marx. Thus we find Badiou identifying ‘superfluous’ people, Mike Davis’ discussing the production of ‘surplus humanity’ and Jameson re-reading *Capital* and re-working the concept of the reserve army of the unemployed as a central and numerically enhanced feature under globalization.<sup>181</sup> What these concepts refer to is the human effect of structural changes in capital, in particular the erosion of national markets and state institutions by free market economic reforms, alongside the rise of the footloose multinational capital which relocates production to new and more profitable locations, leaving, in Badiou’s words, ‘vast numbers of people as completely superfluous’, with

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<sup>181</sup> Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, (London: Verso, 2006), p.174; Alain Badiou and Jean-Claude Milner, *Controversies: A dialogue on the politics and philosophy of our times*, trans. by Susan Spitzer, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p.129; Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Commentary on Volume One*, (London: Verso, 2011), p.149.

neither socio-economic security nor political protection.<sup>182</sup> Each of these theorists thus tries to address and examine changes in the capitalist world market in a manner that follows the political event of Marx: his revelation that capitalist surplus value is predicated upon the exploitation of the working class. Under the conditions of global capitalism, the production of surplus value now entails the production of 'surplus humanity.'

This new or heightened structure of exploitation and violence that includes elements of the criminal is, I would argue, encoded at the very level of form, or, more precisely, in the break with form in 2666. The marked absence of an enigmatic criminal or 'serial killer' (p.470) whose perversity is revealed and resolved at the end of the text means that it is not so much a given individual that requires investigation, but rather a whole social formation. Indeed, this is arguably the reason for the huge sprawling form of the novel itself. The five different sections, each characterised by a distinct literary form – the campus novel, the psychological drama, the pulp-fiction, the police procedural, and the picaresque meets Bildungsroman of the final chapter – each undertake a narrative and geopolitical movement that terminates in Santa Teresa. The violence in this city, its embodiment of the new processes and transformations of life under late capitalism, is thus opened up to a series of attempts at representation and investigation. Yet at the same time, the recourse to so many different forms and so many incongruous *petits récits* within each section emphasises the difficulty, or perhaps even the inability of such forms adequately to represent these new dynamics. Bolaño of course cites the mass cultural adventure story, of which the crime genre is undoubtedly his own preferred *modus operandi* and the apocalyptic tradition as the only means to comprehend the 'abyss' of Mexico today. I have already demonstrated how the inverted nature of the apocalyptic genre bespeak the key gendered dimension of the femicidal 'abyss'. The formal breaks in the police procedural also seem to register the key economic transformations that provide the structural grounds for the violence at the US-Mexican border. However, before I proceed to highlight how a utopian element works against the grain of Bolaño's authorial ideology, it is also worth noting how the new raw material of neoliberal economics and the almost ubiquitous

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<sup>182</sup> Alain Badiou and Jean-Claude Milner, *Controversies*, p.129.

imperatives of business and the money economy leads to an exhaustion of the melodramatic form of the police procedural.

As I note above, the prevailing motive for crime in the early police procedural form invariably related to issues of personal morality and untamed passions of sexual impropriety. Such acts were bound up with notions of transgression, a loss of social respectability and a sense of social scandal that the act of murder meant to keep at bay. As Jameson has observed, what is interesting today is that the melodramatic materials for such a plot 'have become increasingly irrelevant.'<sup>183</sup> This is because, as Badiou notes in *Saint Paul*, the vast multiplication of identitarian and communitarian logics are increasingly incorporated within the logic of the market. Cultural identities and lifestyles become the material for commercial investment. One effect of this is the flattening out of motivation to the financial: what Badiou calls the power of 'monetary homogeneity' seems to become the almost dominant source of action.<sup>184</sup> For the political and economic class in *2666* the importance of 'business' is more crucial than operations of law and justice (p.471).

It is for this reason, (the flattening out of motivation to the merely monetary), that Jameson argues that the 'melodramatic plot, the staple of mass culture, becomes increasingly unsustainable.'<sup>185</sup> This is because the omnipresence of greed or business 'has none of the passionate or obsessive qualities of older social drives and of that older literature which drew upon them as its source.' The older raw materials of personal passions or, scandal and transgression that played such a prominent role in the early detective genre are increasingly unsustainable. It is here then that one can locate the reason for the nigh-on ubiquity of the emotionally detached, or flat objective style of narration in 'The Part About the Crimes' in *2666*. For Knight, the origins of this stylistic innovation are to be found in the prevalence of commodity relations. However, the alienating effect of such an objective force is always offset by a different type of personal morality or even erotic passion on the part of the police and also the criminal. What is interesting about *2666* then is that there is almost no space outside this type of objective logic. So, when Juan de Dios Martinez and

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<sup>183</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Realism and Utopia in *The Wire*', *Criticism*, Vol. 52, Nos.3 & 4, (Summer & Fall 2010), 359–372 (pp.366-7).

<sup>184</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.10.

<sup>185</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Realism and Utopia in *The Wire*', pp.367-8.



Elvira Campos embark on an affair, the narrative tone does not depart from the flat, repetitive style used to narrate of the corpses:

A few days before Sergio González came to Santa Teresa, Juan de Dios Martinez and Elvira Campos went to bed together. This isn't anything serious, the director warned him, I don't want you to get the wrong idea about where things are going. Juan de Dios Martinez promised that she would set the limits and he would simply abide by her decisions. The director found the first sexual encounter satisfactory [...] Their meeting always followed the same pattern [...] Fifteen days later they would see each other again and everything would be just as it had been the time before. Of course, there wasn't always a party at a house nearby and sometimes the director couldn't or didn't want to drink, but the dim light was always the same, the shower was always repeated, the sunsets and the mountains never changed, the stars were the same stars (pp.383-4).

It is significant to note here that the sexual relationship follows the rationality of an economic transaction. The meetings take place every 'fifteen days' which is the normal time period for salary payments of workers in Mexico, what is known as the *quincena*. Thus what seems to be taking place here then is the replacement of nature and the erotic passions by the disenchanted logic of economic and financial rationality. Not even the traditional metaphoric references for romance 'the sunset and the mountains,' 'the stars' register any 'change'. The key point here then is that it is in the ruptures or even exhaustion of the police procedural form that one can identify the way in which the novel represents the historical changes tied to the development of neoliberalism. In terms of Marxist cultural critique, this is important because rather than represent the violence as a generalised, almost ahistorical state of necropolitics, an analysis of the transformations of form enables us to demarcate the key socio-economic determinations of the violence.

It is in these disturbances of form and plot, that one can also see the appearance of a type of utopian configuration. Unlike the other police, who are relatively uninterested in actual detection, the section contains one figure who offers a representation of work and productivity that is unmotivated by the force of finance or erotic personal ambitions. This is the young policeman known as Olegario 'Lalo' Cura Expósito. Lalo Cura is interesting because he attempts to solve the cases but lacks the resources and institutional support of those above him. Lacking such resources he resorts to reading old books on detection 'books no one read that seemed destined to be rat food, on top of shelves of forgotten reports and files' (p.437). There is something fascinating about this in that he does not

seem bound by the routines of shift work; coming home from work he does not rest, but rather 'read[s] the book in the dim light of single bulb at night in the tenement or by the first rays of sunlight that filtered in the open women' (p.438). This sense of utopian enjoyment in the practice of labour that is non-alienated thus continues in his official hours of work. Here, rather than follow orders from his corrupt superiors, he decides to embark on a proper investigation of the crimes:

Three days after the discovery of Luisa Cardona's body, the body of another woman was found in the same Podestá ravine. The patrolman Santiago Ordóñez and Olegario Cura found the body. What were Ordóñez and Cura doing there? Taking a look around, as Ordóñez admitted. Later he said they were there because Cura had insisted on going. The area they were assigned to that day stretched from Colonia El Cerezal to Colonia Las Cumbres, but Lalo Cura had wanted to see the place where they'd found Luisa Cardona's body [...] For a while, according to Ordóñez, Lalo Cura did strange things, like measuring the ground and height of the walls, looking up toward the top of the ravine and calculating the arc that Luisa Cardona's body must have traced as it fell [...] Ordóñez was getting bored [...] A little while later, with Lalo out of sight, he heard a whistle and headed for his partner. When he reached him he saw the woman's body lying at his feet. She was dressed in something that looked like a blouse, torn on one side, and she was naked from the waist down. According to Ordóñez, the expression on Lalo Cura's face was very odd, not a look of surprise but of happiness. What did he mean by happiness? Was he laughing? Smiling? they asked. He wasn't smiling, said Ordóñez, he looked serious, like he was concentrating (pp.525-6).

Lalo's 'strangeness,' his focus and dedication to the procedures of investigation that leave his partner 'bored,' presents an image of work satisfaction, of non-alienated labour: the 'serious' manner of his endeavour is something that provides 'happiness.' Symbolic gratification is not attached to the plot itself but to the framework (police work) without which there would be no story in the first place. The radicalism of Lalo's actions, the 'odd' way in which he differs from Ordóñez in actually doing his job, extends to his relationship to the rest of the force:

How could Llanos rape her, one of [the cops] asked, if he was her husband? The others laughed, but Lalo Cura took the question seriously. He raped her because he forced her, because he made her do something she didn't want to, he said. Otherwise it wouldn't be rape. One of the young cops asked if he planned to go to law school. Do you want to be a lawyer man? No, said Lalo Cura. The others looked at him like he was some kind of idiot (p.438).

The apparent 'idiocy' of Lalo inheres in his indifference to the machismo of his contemporaries and his dedication to the job. Yet his refusal to play along with 'jokes about

women' and his investigations leads to the other corrupt cops to give him a 'shit kicking' (p.554). The significance of Lalo's difference is registered here at the level of narrative form. For as the 'shit kicking' takes place, the convention of the detached third person narrative voice begins to fracture and traces of multiple first person points of view, relatively unmediated by the narrator, begin to break through. And, for the most part these are focalised through Lalo himself:

Talk to me about your family history, said the bastards. Explain your family tree, the assholes said. Self-sucking pieces of shit. Lalo Cura didn't get angry. Faggot sons of bitches. Tell me about your coat of arms. That's enough now. The kid's going to blow. Stay calm. Respect the uniform. Don't show you're scared or back down, don't let them think they're getting to you (p.554).

Under the conditions of late capitalism, when 'everything that circulates falls under the unity of the count' of monetary logic, acting in relation to one's object rather than a financial motive, in this case the act of simply doing one's job as a vocation, as a calling, as the German *Beruf* signifies, becomes a radical gesture that necessitates coercive measures (the shit kicking) on the part of interested or corrupt parties.<sup>186</sup> It is significant, however, that the radicalism or utopianism of Lalo is also encoded in a way that relates to a key theopolitical determinant that is legible in both content and form. The 'shit kicking' punishment and the demand to 'explain your family tree' leads to type of hallucinatory genealogy of Lalo's family history (Lalo is an orphan) which takes place via 'voices talking to him about the first Expósito' from 1865 (p.554).

Lalo's paternity is imprecise, he is revealed to be the son of either one of two revolutionaries from Mexico City who met his mother in the northern border town of Villaviciosa in 1976: 'Each night they made love to her, in the car or on the warm desert sand, until one morning she came to meet them and they were gone' (p.558). This is an intertextual reference to *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*) and its semi-autobiographical narration of Bolaño's own participation in revolutionary politics and avant-garde poetry under the character name of Arturo Belano.<sup>187</sup> In *Los detectives salvajes*, Belano and his friend Ulises Lima travel to Villaviciosa in 1976 in search of a missing hero from the Mexican Revolution. Their aim is to resurrect the revolutionary legacy and

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<sup>186</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.10.

<sup>187</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *Los detectives salvajes* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1998).

redeem the unfinished struggle for radical social change. In terms of my earlier discussion of Mexican revolutionary nationalism and its articulation with patriarchal discourses, it is interesting to note here that the sought after hero from the Mexican Revolution in *Los detectives salvajes* is feminized. Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima are searching for a woman named Caesarea Tinajero. The conclusion of *The Savage Detectives* is also significant because it follows a type of passion narrative.<sup>188</sup> Caesarea dies in a suicidal but ethical gesture, saving a prostitute from abuse at the hands of a pimp and policeman. This recalls the biblical scene at Golgotha (Luke 23.33-43). Caesarea dies along with the two 'thieves', the pimp and the policeman, with the latter begging, like the penitent thief, for mercy. The narrative of revolutionary struggle in *Los detectives salvajes* thus seems to configure a type of messianic and feminist politics that is vastly different to the violent and patriarchal re-articulations of Mexican nationalism that are legible in discourses and practises associated with the femicides.

This is made even clearer in the case of the novel's extended subversion of the sexualised discourses of Mexican nationalism. The prostitute who is defended by the revolutionaries is named as Lupe, the abbreviated name for the Apocalyptic and sexually 'pure' mother of Mexico, la Virgen de Guadalupe. The articulation of revolutionary socialism, messianic discourses and feminist politics here thus recalls the discussion of gender and Pauline politics in Chapter Two. To recall, Saint Paul's foundational statement of equality in the Letter to the Galatians (3.28) precipitates a series of gender displacements within the patriarchal traditions of Judaism.<sup>189</sup> Paul proceeds to describe himself and the nascent Jesus movement in feminised terms, often focusing on women such as Mary and Sarah who beget children without a male (Galatians 4.4; 4.21-31). A similar sense of gender displacement is arguably taking place in the feminized coding of messianic nationalism in *The Savage Detectives* and its offspring in *2666*. Here Lalo's role as a police figure who takes the 'crimes against women' seriously, 'hunting' down clues, is given a heightened sense of theopolitical determination in the way that it is also pre-figured in the discussion of his paternity. Until the two revolutionaries arrive in Villaviciosa, all the listed forbears of Lalo, stretching back to 1865, are the product of rape. The relationship between Lalo's departed

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid, p.603-5.

<sup>189</sup> Brigitte Kahl, 'No Longer Male: Masculinity Struggles Behind Galatians 3.28'.

mother and the revolutionaries is, in contrast, a consensual relationship. When understood in these terms, we can see that Lalo Cura's utopian configuration in 2666 has a distinctly radical and theopolitical lineage.

It is no surprise then that in 2666 the intrusion of the narrative form of the genealogy and its commencement with a 'nameless orphan' in 1865 (p.554) plays out Otto Rank's account of the birth of the mythological or divine hero.<sup>190</sup> Rank, and later Freud in his account of Moses, explains the way in which mythological heroes are generally found or adopted, and how the separation from family often includes a type of symbolic journey towards the foundation of new culture in a new land. The account of Lalo's family history takes the form of a genealogical list that recalls that of Jesus in Matthew 1.1-17 and Luke 3.23-38, and moreover, Lalo's departure from Villaviciosa on his recruitment to the police force is marked by the killing of a coyote, the mythical creature of Aztec and Mayan indigenous folklore known as the *Nahuatl* (p.386). According to ethnographic accounts, the *Nahuatl* is a mythical figure who brought fire to humanity and defended the world against monsters.<sup>191</sup> Thus for Lévi Straus, the coyote represents a mediatory role between life and death.<sup>192</sup> His name, Olegario, is also loaded with theological symbolism, it is the name of 'the patron saint of hunters' (p.558).

The point here then is that the ideology of 2666 seems to indicate that justice, both criminal, socio-economic and sexual, seems to depend upon a specific type of leftist political determinant. In contrast to Bolaño's Thermidorean statements of authorial ideology then, the ideology of 2666, legible in the formal breaks and utopian coding of Lalo Cura, suggests that the politics of the armed struggle and the Latin American left do not necessarily end in the terroristic logic of the 'labor camps.'<sup>193</sup>

If Lalo Cura thus represents a utopian configuration within this bleak text, a configuration that has political and theological determinants, then it is significant that the investigation

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<sup>190</sup> Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology*, trans. by F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe, (New York: Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases Publishing Company, 1914); Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by Katherine Jones, (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

<sup>191</sup> Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*, (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 200–201; David H. Kelley, 'Quetzalcoatl and his Coyote Origins', *El México Antiguo* 8, (1955) 397–416.

<sup>192</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobson, (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 224.

<sup>193</sup> Roberto Bolaño, 'Caracas Address', p.35.

or hunt that he undertakes is articulated with the forces of the state: he is a police officer. This type of link to the state might bespeak a type of utopianism that is utterly stereotypical in that it is impractical and improbable. For as I outlined above, the neoliberal reforms of Mexico have contributed to a decisive weakening of state institutions which has in part led to their incorporation with the world of organized crime. However, I would argue against this type of approach and instead, suggest that there is an enlarged sense of utopianism at play in the text which has equivalent structural features. The configuration of Lalo as a utopian figure within the text is no mere idiosyncrasy for the articulation of a promissory notion of justice via the elements of left politics, emancipated sexual relations, and the state has a key parallel in the revelations given to the left-wing journalist Sergio González by the congresswoman, Azucena Esquivel Plata (p.583, p.604, p.618). Not only is she both tied to the old left, visiting Cuba, having relations with revolutionaries, and also a congresswoman and thus tied to the state – indeed, the political power that her position as a congresswoman entails is what enable her to make her enquiries into the murders – but she is also a figure whose ‘sex life is legendary all over Mexico’, most notably for her refusal to adhere to the patriarchal notions of purity and subordination to a male (pp.600-601).

Mexico is of course now governed by the old authoritarian PRI. As I discussed above, it is not part of the *marea rosada*. Yet the utopian configurations of 2666, in particular the relationship between the state and the old traditions of left, seem to break through against the hellish reality of the femicides and their relationship to the neoliberal reforms symbolised by the *maquiladora* industry. Indeed, this type of break through takes place right at the end of ‘The Part About the Crimes.’ Here the New Year appears in ‘streets that were completely dark, like black holes’ (p.633). At this point the darkness recalls the traditional (inverted) apocalyptic conclusions of Latin American Boom literature, such as the famous prophesised return to solitude that terminates García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or the destruction of the millenarian commune of Canudos in Vargas Llosa’s *The War at the End of the World*.<sup>194</sup> However, the darkness in 2666 is punctuated by laughter coming from the ‘poorest streets:’ ‘the laughter [...] was the only sign, the only

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<sup>194</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien Años de Soledad*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericanos, 1967); Mario Vargas Llosa, *La guerra del fin del mundo*, (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981).

beacon that kept residents and strangers from getting lost' (p.633). In this image of the laughter of the poor emerging as a type of 'beacon' the text thus recalls the famous revolutionary poems of the Sandinista minister and liberation theologian Ernesto Cardenal. As the Sandinista struggle and later victory takes place, the raw historical materials that gave rise to cultural production begin to change. In the collection *Vuelos de Victoria* ('Flights of Victory'), Cardenal repeatedly uses the image dawn light breaking through the darkness to narrate the revolutionary struggle and finally his own arrival in Managua on the eve of the Sandinista victory in July 1979.<sup>195</sup> The images of brightness in the poem *Luces* ('Lights'), or a divinely inspired sunrise over a peasant village chasing away the shadow of the vampire in *Amanecer* ('Dawn') thus highlight a point of historical transformation, the earlier political failures and sufferings under the Somoza dictatorship are now to be redeemed.<sup>196</sup> Thus by returning to a cultural tradition that emerged in the midst of series of historical struggles for Latin American socialism, the bleak world of Bolaño's 2666 still contains a sense of the redemptive possibility of historical and political change.

The promissory configuration of justice in the relationship between the traditions of the old left and its occupation of the state apparatuses seems to contradict Bolaño's statements of authorial ideology. The time frame of the killing of women narrated in 2666 is interesting because the novel ends in 1998. As such the time of the plot pre-dates the leftward continental shift of *la marea rosada*. Bolaño finished writing the novel in 2003, after the rise of Hugo Chavez, whose politics he denounced in his attacks on the purportedly corrupt judges of Romulo Gallegos Prize, and when the economic crises in Argentina and Ecuador were underway. Nonetheless, there is a sense in 2666 that the only potential source of social justice that can be imagined is in an articulation of the history of the Latin American left with the state. In other words, the images of revelation and utopian praxis and their encoding in religious terms, seems to pre-figure or at least configure the seismic political transformations of *la marea rosada*. This is significant because it returns us to the central issues at stake in this thesis. What the utopian and redemptive codes in 2666 indicate then is that rather than be considered an archive of defeat, the theopolitical mechanics that underpin Badiou's theory are still drawn upon in the wider cultural

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<sup>195</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *Vuelos de Victoria*, (Nicaragua: Editorial Nueva America, 1987).

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p.27, pp.21-22.

imaginary to imagine political resistance and historical change. Moreover, my reading of Bolaño also enables a partial re-working of Badiou's strategy, namely that his rejection of the state as a means to organise politics requires a degree of redress for it fails to take into account the way in which the state can be, and is harnessed to progressive political change in Latin America at this present time.



## CONCLUSION

### Laughter in the darkness

In a recent talk given at Manchester Metropolitan University (February 2015), Irish artist Brian Maguire opened a discussion of his endeavour to paint the portraits of some of the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez with a comment about laughter and its appearance in surprising and inauspicious places; the living rooms of bereaved families, slums, prisons and mental hospitals.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the solemnity of the audience of academics and artists assembled in a newly built, 'state of the art' lecture room in Manchester School of Art, Maguire remarked that it was laughter that characterised his conversations with the families of the murdered women. His remarks were arguably intended to shock, playing out a type of aesthetic defamiliarization, both in relation to the horrific context of the femicides and the rather grave mood of the audience assembled before him. ('I have encountered laughter in many places', he noted, 'but never in an academic institution'). However, in terms of the argument I develop here, Maguire's discussion of the laughter he encountered in Ciudad Juárez and his assertion of its significance, is a good place to start drawing together the political, cultural and theoretical strands that constitute my thesis.

Maguire is an appropriate figure with whom to conclude the thesis as his personal and professional history traverses the locations, and historical and political contexts that I explore. Born in County Wicklow in 1951, to a family from Fermanagh in the North, Maguire became a member of the Marxist Official IRA during 'the Troubles'.<sup>2</sup> During his talk he explained that his commitment to painting the women murdered in Juárez and his decision to donate these artworks to their families stemmed from his earlier involvement in the anti-colonial struggle for social justice in Ireland. In his eyes, the violence and oppression in both these spaces, whether articulated in sexual or colonial terms, was always determined in the last instance by class. However, what was arguably more important for Maguire was the type of subjective response that was produced by people actively engaged in the struggle for social and personal justice. While he recognised the debilitating effects

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Maguire, 'Painted Back to Life' talk given at Manchester Metropolitan University, 18 February 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Vulliamy, 'Painted back to life: Brian Maguire's portraits of the victims of Mexico's 'feminicidio'', *Guardian* 4 May 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/04/brian-maguire-portraits-victims-mexico-feminicidio-ciudad-juarez>> [accessed 15 August 2015].

of gross economic and social inequalities, and the systemic nature of the crimes and violence in the city, he viewed the continuing capacity of people to laugh as a signifier of both resistance and hope. There is in laughter, he suggested, the glimpse of something promissory, a sense of overcoming and the possibility of change.

Maguire's reference to the power of laughter in the darkest of places recalls the laughter described by Roberto Bolaño in the conclusion of 'The Part About the Crimes' ('the laughter [...] was the only sign, the only beacon that kept residents and strangers from getting lost' (2666, p.633). In both instances, laughter breaks through the darkness in order to signify hope (the 'beacon') and a means to orient oneself in a bleak reality. Significantly also, in Bolaño's words, laughter keeps both 'residents and strangers from getting lost'; it has a universal power. Laughter then tells us something about the importance of affect in relation to both subjective and collective responses to systemic violence. It is symbolically significant in its capacity to express both resistance, endurance and hope. To continue to laugh even in the face of appalling loss and brutality, is an expression of resilience and a refusal of the 'politics of despair'.<sup>3</sup>

In part the defence of Badiou's Pauline turn that I develop in this thesis is an endeavour to emphasise the significance of symbolic, affective and imaginative resources with regards to political agency. It is useful to return in this context to the comparison that Benedict Anderson makes between the mobilising powers of Marxism in relation to nationalism in the opening pages of *Imagined Communities*.<sup>4</sup> Here Anderson observes that ideas of the nation and national-belonging have had a far greater mobilising force upon human political action than discourses of secular progress such as Marxism and Liberalism. Commenting upon the growth of popular, let alone, official religiosity regarding the cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers from a nation's past, Anderson jokes that the existence of such a Tomb could hardly be envisioned for an unknown Marxist or Liberal:

The cultural significance of such monuments becomes even clearer if one tries to imagine, say, a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist or a cenotaph for fallen Liberals. Is a sense of absurdity avoidable? The reason is that neither Marxism nor Liberalism are

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<sup>3</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, new edn. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.45.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London: Verso, 1991).

much concerned with death and immortality. If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings.<sup>5</sup>

The above comment is significant because it conveys an important notion of political mobilisation and religiosity that relates closely to the concerns of this thesis. Anderson's focus in the above discussion, as the subtitle of his book states, is to reflect upon the 'Origin and Spread of Nationalism'. Historically speaking, he locates the 'origin' of this new nationalist sentiment at the end of the eighteenth century and links it to two key historical developments which emerge with the rise of secular sciences and modern print capitalism. The first key development relates to the supersession of religious scripts such as Latin by centralized, vernacular languages within nationalised, geographical boundaries. The second refers to the growth of a post-messianic conception of temporality. Here a horizontal, sociological time (the 'meanwhile') replaced the vertical or prefiguring time of religious promise that had dominated thought during the dynastic regimes of the middle ages. These changes created the grounds for a new national community characterized by a 'horizontal comradeship' whose most famous sociological symbol in Anderson's work is the new national print newspaper. The details and controversies of Anderson's thesis regarding nationalism's origins have been widely discussed and they are not of particular interest here.<sup>6</sup> However, what is important about Anderson's argument is that it also situates 'nationalist imagining' within a broader realm of 'cultural significance' that relates to longstanding metaphysical questions over the meaning of life and death. That is to say, the 'spread' or vitality of modern, political nationalism is not disassociated, in Anderson's analysis at least, from its ability to provide a resolution or transcendental promise that answers to an immemorial longing or void within the human regarding the apparent contingency of life.

Although Anderson's primary object is the rise of modern nationalism, what his comments on nationalism and the war dead seem to suggest is that popular mobilisations of political subjectivity in the modern era still rely, to a certain extent, upon an engagement with cultural concerns over meaning and faith that once found their outlet in the sphere of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>6</sup> See, Mike Davis, 'Marx's Lost Theory', *New Left Review*, 93 (May-June 2015), 45-66; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*.

religion. Rather than emancipate humanity from the prejudices of pre-scientific mysticism, then, the secular and rational bent of post-Enlightenment thought has, according to Anderson, 'brought with it its own modern darkness':

With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation.<sup>7</sup>

Anderson's point in the passage above is not that nationalism emerges as a consequence of the 'erosion of religious certainties' but rather that nationalism is able to mobilise people towards action in the world because the idea or myth of a nation's eternal status transforms the 'contingency' of existence into something promissory and meaningful. 'If nation-states,' as Anderson notes, 'are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical," the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future.'<sup>8</sup> What Anderson seems to be suggesting, then, – and here I will borrow a phrase from his political contemporary, Tom Nairn – is that the 'Janus face' of nationalism, that is to say, its ability to look both forward and backwards at the same time and thus offer a sense of eternal meaning against the flux and fragmentation of modern life, provides a sort of libidinal cathexis for cultural concerns regarding the meaning and significance of our contingent existence.<sup>9</sup> In short, Anderson's comments here seem to imply that nationalism offers a space of investment for some kind of wish or promise regarding a greater meaning to history. Like religion, then, nationalism seems, in this reading at least, to allow an individual a certain sense of transcendence that lifts them beyond the sufferings and apparent insignificance of their daily existence.

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* was first published in 1983 and then revised for re-publication in 1991. What is interesting about his argument regarding the peculiar alignment between modern political subjectivity and the intransigent cultural remnants of religious hope is that, historically speaking, *Imagined Communities* emerges out of the decisive social-political conjuncture of the late 1970s when questions of nationalism and

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp.11-2.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (London: NLB, 1977), pp.329-331.

ethnic-belonging seemed to triumph and over-ride political mobilisations tied to socialism. As I noted in my Introduction to this thesis, it is in this very period that Alain Badiou famously declared that 'Marxism is in crisis.'<sup>10</sup> In his original introduction from 1983 Anderson observes that an unseen yet 'fundamental transformation in the history of Marxism and Marxist movements is upon us.'<sup>11</sup> He is referring here, of course, to the sudden rise of ethnic and nationalist sentiment and rhetoric that circulated around the 'first large-scale conventional war' between the nominally Marxist regimes of Vietnam and Cambodia in 1978-9 and the subsequent assault upon Vietnam by China in February 1979.<sup>12</sup> Much like Badiou's comments about the need for an ideological struggle to reinvigorate ideas of equality, what Anderson is identifying here then is the way in which Marxist ideology – its vision of a better future that will grip the masses – is beset by a lack of utopian populism. In other words, class based narratives of fraternity and solidarity have seemingly been overtaken by ideologies of nationalism and national comradeship.

Making reference to an earlier outpouring of blood-soaked nationalism in August, 1914 and the related collapse of the Second Communist International, Tom Nairn has argued that the 'theory of nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure'.<sup>13</sup> Nairn's comments here, especially in light of the outbreak and mass slaughter of Europe's working classes during The Great War (1914-18) – against the reclamations of certain contemporary, yet at that precise time, politically isolated, advocates of international class solidarity such as Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxembourg – are powerful. Yet it must be conceded, perhaps like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, that this tendency towards 'historical failure' could only be identified when the time was too late, or when a distinctive historical change had taken place. Indeed, what Anderson rightly notes is that since the late 1970s something qualitatively different in relation to nationalism, political violence and Marxism had begun to take place. In contrast to the nationalist bloodletting between liberal capitalist states in 1914, the mobilisations of political violence articulated through discourses of nationalism and myths regarding ethnic-belonging in the late 1970s had also

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<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p.182.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, p.329.

begun to take place between and also within nominally socialist, rather than liberal capitalist, states.

By the time of its revision and republication in 1991, Anderson's earlier concerns in *Imagined Communities* regarding the fate and unity of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the eastern European socialist-bloc and the Republic of Yugoslavia were almost a *fait accompli*.<sup>14</sup> Political fragmentation along national lines, rapid economic deregulation and privatisation, violence and, finally, almost a decade of civil-war between different "ethnic" groups in the former Yugoslavia would soon signal the end of Europe's version of "really-existing socialism".

Significantly, it is at the midst of this socio-historical threshold that Anderson seems to suggest that one of the great failures of Marxism is not so much the national question, but its inability to engage with the cultural concerns of which nationalism, according to his reading, is in fact a symptom. 'The great weakness of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism,' he writes 'is that such questions [regarding the need for meaning and the promise of something greater than daily existence] are answered with impatient silence.'

Marxism, as is well known, does offer a grand theory of historical continuity. The 'class struggle' between 'oppressor and oppressed', as Marx and Engels' own retroactive analysis famously identified, has been a historical invariant since the time of slave revolts in antiquity.<sup>15</sup> What Anderson's comments and the historical decline of political Marxism since the 1970s seem to suggest, however, is that this narrative of struggle has not, and does not energise political mobilisation (at least in the present) to the same degree as the quasi-religious discourses of nationalism as a form of a-temporal belonging. The 'success', so to speak, of modern nationalism in mobilising people towards sacrifice in battle is, as the sacredness of Anderson's modern cenotaphs testifies, tied to its 'affinity with religious imaginings.'<sup>16</sup> What Anderson's observations seems to suggest, then, is that the resurrection of Marxism as a viable and popular political body or force requires the incorporation of a certain theological or non-secular, promissory verve within its tradition.

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<sup>14</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.5.

That is to say, faced with a historical-political horizon in which it has been superseded, the contemporary Marxist project needs to re-invigorate itself with a more literal notion of enthusiasm, which means, etymologically speaking, an *enthusia* or *en theos*, that is, to have God inside oneself. What starts to become clear here, then, is that, a mere narrative of secular progress or of struggle appears insufficient for successful political mobilisation today.

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The sustained critique of Badiou's work offered in this thesis sets out to defend his recourse to Saint Paul as a means to reinvigorate political Marxism. Far from an expression of the historical defeat of Marxism, I argue that the turn to Paul offers us a way to address problems in contemporary communist politics and certain *lacunae* in Badiou's own theory. In Chapter One, I argued that the use of Paul to understand Badiou's key concepts of event and subject offered a way in which to understand that his theory of subjectivity bespeaks a decisively active rather than passive orientation towards politics and history. This was used to contest the major arguments made against Badiou by Daniel Bensaïd, namely that his philosophy lacks historical and political viability. In the following chapter, I then proceeded to contest Badiou's own depiction of his work as atheistic. I identified a key redemptive structure in his definitions and history of the communist subjectivity. Rather than see this theopolitical kernel as a betrayal of Marxism, I then argued that when approached in a materialist manner, the texts of the early Church can be seen to play out forms of ideological subversion vis-à-vis practices of social exclusion and structural inequalities in the ancient world. In other words, I argued that the Pauline Christianity does not contradict the basic egalitarian aims of communism.

Chapters Three and Four shifted the terrain of my discussion from political philosophy and theology to literature in order further to elaborate the imaginative and affective pull of messianic discourse in contemporary culture and to explore the political and theoretical potential of establishing a dialogue between the work of Badiou and that of Eoin McNamee (Chapter Three) and Robert Bolaño (Chapter Four). Symptomatic readings of the work of both novelists demonstrated that even in literature marked by a sense of historical stasis (McNamee) or revolutionary disillusion (Bolaño), one can still witness the subversion and disruption of the manifest ideologies of the text via the revelation of images of justice and

messianic hope in relation to left wing politics. My discussion of the novels in relation to their specific social, political and cultural contexts was also used to develop and critique Badiou's political strategies. Thus in my reading of Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras*, I considered the ways in which the novel's complex depiction of Robert Nairac, a member of the British Military involved in the 'dirty war' against the IRA, opened up some important questions about Badiou's strategy for resurrecting the viability of communist militancy and particularly his endeavour to abandon the vanguard model of political intervention. My reading of Bolaño's *2666* in the particular context of *la marea rosada* and leftist politics in Latin America further developed my critique of Badiou's approach to the state and explored the limitations of the Eurocentrism that underpins his argument that the power of the state must be contested. In general, my readings of the novels have attempted to describe the imaginative pull of particular expressions of hope and potentiality and to emphasise the role of culture and messianic discourses in offering alternative possibilities to the apparently disenchanted world of late capitalism.

My argument set out to show that the radical and subversive force of messianic ideology in the early Jesus movement, was also evident in modern examples of radical political subjectivity such as the EZLN and, moreover, that messianic discourses play a key role in literary imaginings of political justice and historical change in the present. In terms of historical materialism, my argument seems to suggest that Marx's original conception of religion as an alienating and pacifying form of super-structural false-consciousness may indeed be short-sighted. Rather than see religion in *toto* as a form of mystification, then, my point is that an articulation of Marxist politics with promissory notions of faith can provide the means through which popular support for political action can successfully take place. In other words, my argument is that discourses relating to Pauline Christianity and messianic mythology can be embraced by Marxism in an attempt to engender popular support for political action. Rather than an archive of defeat, the recourse to Christianity offers a means to uncover the 'incarnational resources' necessary for the re-enchantment of egalitarian politics.<sup>17</sup> To conclude, what I have set out to demonstrate in this defence of

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<sup>17</sup> Boris Gunjević, 'The Mystagogy of Revolution', p.26.



Badiou's recourse to theology is that he needs, in sense, to be more Pauline and less atheistic, more promissory and less ontological, and more historical and less abstract.

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