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Pirate Capitalism, or the Primitive Accumulation of Capital Itself

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Abstract

Pirates are often described as existing on the margins of the world economy, emerging from the outskirts to disrupt otherwise free capitalist markets. With this narrative in mind, it is not surprising that the pirate remains a marginal figure within both the fictional stories and historical accounts of the emergence of capitalism. This article, however, asks: What do we learn about the capitalist world economy if we understand the pirate not as an outlaw but as a fellow capitalist? Weaving together stories of the golden age of piracy in the Atlantic world with contemporary piracy in the Gulf of Aden, I argue that pirate capitalism helps us to understand the capitalist world economy, not only demonstrating the violence and dispossession at the centre of capitalist accumulation but also making visible the fluid relationship between capital, sovereignty, violence, and freedom.

Keywords

piracy, primitive accumulation, capitalism

Le capitalisme pirate, ou l'accumulation primitive du capital lui-même

Résumé

On décrit souvent les pirates comme existant en marge de l'économie mondiale, surgissant de ses abords pour venir perturber des marchés capitalistes par ailleurs libres. Cette représentation une fois posée, il n'est pas surprenant que le pirate demeure un personnage marginal des récits fictionnels ou historiques sur l'émergence du capitalisme. Cet article pose cependant la question suivante : Qu'apprenons-nous de l'économie mondiale capitaliste si nous voyons le pirate non pas comme un hors-la-loi, mais comme un capitaliste lui aussi ? Entremêlant récits de l'âge d'or de la piraterie dans le monde atlantique et de la piraterie contemporaine dans le golfe d'Aden, je défends la thèse que le capitalisme pirate facilite la compréhension de l'économie mondiale

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capitaliste, non seulement en démontrant la violence et la dépossession qui se trouvent au cœur de l'accumulation capitaliste, mais aussi en révélant la relation fluide qui existe entre capital, souveraineté, violence et liberté.

Mots-clés

piraterie, accumulation primitive, capitalisme

El capitalismo pirata o la acumulación primitiva del capital

Resumen

A menudo se afirma que los piratas habitan en los márgenes de la economía mundial, desde donde aparecen para perturbar el libre mercado capitalista. Partiendo de este relato, no sorprende que el pirata aparezca aún como una figura marginal tanto en las narraciones de ficción, como en las explicaciones históricas sobre la emergencia del capitalismo. El presente artículo, sin embargo, se pregunta qué aporta a la comprensión de la economía mundial capitalista el hecho de no considerar al pirata como a alguien fuera de la ley, sino como un capitalista. A través de la relación entre las narraciones de la época dorada de la piratería en el Atlántico con la piratería contemporánea en el golfo de Adén, sostengo que el capitalismo pirata contribuye a la comprensión de la economía mundial capitalista, no solo al demostrar que la violencia y el desposeimiento se encuentran en el centro de la acumulación capitalista, sino también al hacer visibles las fluidas relaciones que existen entre el capital, la soberanía, la violencia y la libertad.

Palabras clave

piratería, acumulación primitiva, capitalismo

[W]e might say that imperialism is piracy transplanted from the seas to dry land, piracy reorganised, consolidated and adapted to the aim of plundering the natural and human resources of our peoples.

– Amilcar Cabral¹

If the world stops stealing our property and harming us...[w]e will stop the piracy and go back to our normal jobs.

– Sugule Ali²

Between 2005 and 2013 pirates made a dramatic reappearance upon the world stage, this time in the shipping lanes of the Gulf of Aden. This event garnered considerable media

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1. Amilcar Cabral, 'The Weapon of Theory: Presuppositions and Objectives of National Liberation in Relation to Social Structure', in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amilcar Cabral* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 127.
 2. Quoted in Alex Perry, 'Arrr! The Somali Pirates and Their Troublesome Treasure', *Time*, 3 October 2008.

and cultural attention, and one of the most dramatic episodes – the capture of the *Maersk Alabama* followed by the daring rescue of Captain Phillips – became widely memorialised within popular culture.³ Many stories told about piracy in the Gulf of Aden, however, reduce pirates to mere criminal threats: problems to be solved. Kraska and Wilson, for example, describe ‘Somali maritime gangs’ and focus on ‘millions of dollars in ransom payments’, the killing of mariners, and the general economic instability that results.⁴ As often happens, however, the picture becomes more complicated once pirates tell their own stories. Pirates, in contrast, tell of economic deprivation at the hands of toxic waste dumpers and predatory international fishing companies.⁵ Sugule Ali – a pirate who, in 2008, captured the Ukrainian ship *Faina* carrying military hardware heading to Kenya – summed up his calculation as: ‘[w]e only want money so we can protect ourselves from hunger’.⁶

It is not coincidental that both narratives – hero and villain – draw upon the now vast archive of pirate lore dating back to the ‘golden age of piracy’ in the Atlantic world (1650s through 1720s). For example, Kraska and Wilson write that the ‘boldness and international scope of the maritime piracy campaign’ in the Gulf of Aden ‘recalls the ‘golden age’ of Caribbean piracy’.⁷ Others write that, while ‘Somalia’s modern sea bandits may lack some of the “colour” of the “buried treasure, peg legs, and Jolly Roger”, they nonetheless have been “aided by the news media’s inexorable search for a good yarn”’.⁸ I would argue that these nods are not mere rhetorical flourish, but rather an acknowledgement of the important commonalities between modern pirates and those inhabiting the Atlantic world during the age of sail. If listened to, these multi-generational stories can reveal much about the emergence, transformation, and continuity of the capitalist world economy.

Like their ancestors in the Caribbean, pirates in the Gulf of Aden⁹ are commonly presented as ‘extra-economic’ exceptions to the otherwise seamless flow of goods and

3. The movie, *Captain Phillips* – starring Tom Hanks and grossing \$218 million at the box office – was one of many recent feature-length movies and documentaries focusing on piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Others include: *A Hijacking* (2012), *Stolen Seas* (2012), *The Somali Project* (2013), *Fishing Without Nets* (2014), and *The Pirates of Somalia* (2017).

4. James Kraska and Brian Wilson, ‘The Global Maritime Partnership and Somali Piracy’, *Defense and Security Analysis* 25, no. 3 (2009): 223.

5. For example, Jeffrey Gettleman, ‘Pirates Tell Their Side: They Want Only Money’, *The New York Times*, 1 October 2008, 6; Jay Bahadur, ‘I’m Not a Pirate, I’m the Saviour of the Sea’, *The Times*, 16 April 2009, T2.

6. Quoted in Gettleman, ‘Pirates Tell Their Side’.

7. Kraska and Wilson, ‘The Global Maritime Partnership’, 223.

8. Jay Bahadur, *The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 45.

9. I use the term *piracy in the Gulf of Aden* rather than *Somali piracy* to dislocate piracy from the particularities of politics on land and instead highlight piracy as a contestation over the circulation of capital – a struggle, in this instance, taking place primarily at sea. See Isaac Kamola, ‘Capitalism at Sea: Piracy and “State Failure” in the Gulf of Aden’, in *Globalization, Social Movements, and Peacebuilding*, eds. Jackie Smith and Ernesto Verdeja (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 138.

services within a world economy. Commonly described as existing on the margins of the capitalist world economy, piracy becomes represented as a political/security issue rather than an economic activity. As such, piracy in the Gulf of Aden is commonly misunderstood as simply the particular result of localised state failure, rather than ‘a symptom of larger, structural relations’ within the world economy.¹⁰ However, if treated as an opportunity for critical theory,¹¹ piracy opens the possibility of examining the evolving relationships of primitive accumulation undergirding the capitalist world economy.

Like David Harvey,¹² I use the term ‘primitive accumulation’ not merely to describe a historical moment demarcated by the enclosure movement in England, or the dispossession in the Atlantic World, but rather to explain an ongoing process whereby state violence is routinely used to police and reinforce the separation between producers and the means of production.¹³ Most descriptions of primitive accumulation, however, assume states and capital conspire more-or-less seamlessly to enclose those commons – land, labour, and natural resources – existing beyond capital. While pirate capitalism makes explicit the function violence plays in capitalist accumulation, it also demonstrates the role of sovereign powers in determining who is (and is not) deemed the ‘enemy of all mankind’. The pirate must be destroyed because s/he is the capitalist who dares engage in *the primitive accumulation of capital itself*.

In this way, the pirate engages in a kind of ‘border thinking’, existing at the ‘intense battlefield’ between ‘colonial modernities’ and the lived worlds of the subaltern.¹⁴ Existing on the violent border of capitalist accumulation, the vast spaces of maritime circulation, and sovereign power, the pirate is uniquely well positioned to provide an account of the modern/colonial capitalist economy. A liminal figure – simultaneously a ‘villain and hero’, both ‘revered and reviled’¹⁵ – the pirate continually faces the threat of extinction at the hands of overwhelming state-sponsored violence, yet often re-emerges across those temporal, spatial, material, and cultural histories constituting the world economy. As a staple of popular culture, existing as both charismatic hero and despised villain, pirates illuminate the conflicting capitals, sovereignties, and freedoms that

10. *Ibid.*, 136.

11. This is, of course, a reference to the classical distinction between ‘problem-solving’ and ‘critical’ theory. Robert Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); also see Kamola, ‘Capitalism at Sea’, 136–7.

12. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

13. Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), especially 26–41; Massimo de Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007), 14; Isaac Kamola and Eli Meyerhoff, ‘Creating Commons: Divided Governance, Participatory Management, and the Struggle against the Enclosure of the University’, *Polygraph* no. 21 (2009): 15–37.

14. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12.

15. Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 136.

constitute the world order.¹⁶ After all, this multi-century ‘popular love affair’ with pirates stems from the fact that pirates ‘transgress’ legal jurisdiction, living both ‘inside and outside’ the sovereignty of the nation-state.¹⁷ They exist instead as a ‘third category’ – neither citizens governed by national law nor states subject to international treaty. Living on the border of the nation-state and international law means that, since Cicero, pirates have been deemed a species worthy of categorical eradication – the ‘enemy of humankind’.¹⁸ The hyperbolic military retaliation that follows stems not from the fact that pirates actually threaten all humanity, but rather that their very existence exposes the legal, military, and economic necessity – yet practical impossibility – of extending state sovereignty over the commons of the high seas. Pirates, in other words, threaten the state’s ability to ‘govern beyond the geographical authority of government’.¹⁹

While pirates thrive within the public imaginary, they remain largely excluded from the stories we tell about the origins of capitalism. This is unfortunate because the mariner has always been a central source of knowledge about this vast, interconnected world. Markus Rediker argues that, during the ‘age of sail’, the sailor’s yarn was a primary form in which knowledge about the world circulated. In stories told below deck, sailors – the first industrial workers – co-created a body of primary knowledge about the far-flung world.²⁰ Gentleman scholars, including the political pamphleteer, Daniel Defoe, often went down to the docks – literally or figuratively – to hear the sailors tell their yarns, and incorporated their maritime knowledge into the philosophy, poetry, science, and literature of the day.²¹ I suggest that in order to understand the origins of the capitalist world economy we once again go down to the docks to listen to these pirate sailors – whether in the Atlantic world or the Gulf of Aden – to see what this maritime border knowledge tells us about capitalist accumulation.

To do so, this article takes seriously the fact that pirates are simultaneously participants within world markets and mainstays within the modern imaginary. This article, therefore, examines the pirate at both registers, acknowledging a close relationship between capitalist accumulation and the stories we tell about it. Therefore, to understand the relationship between the pirate, capitalism, and primitive accumulation we start in an

16. For an overview of pirate narratives within international politics, see Alexander Spencer, *Romantic Narratives in International Politics: Pirates, Rebels and Mercenaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), Chapter Two 13–44; Christian Bueger, ‘Practices, Pirates and Coast Guards: The Grand Narrative of Somali Piracy’, *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 10 (2013): 1811–1827.

17. Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, 136.

18. *Ibid.*, 137.

19. *Ibid.*, 139.

20. Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 9–29.

21. *Ibid.*, 22–6. Defoe was so well acquainted with pirate lore that he is commonly misidentified as authoring *A General History of the Pyrates*, the highly influential compendium of pirate lore that continues to define the pirate within the popular imagination. David Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life among the Pirates* (New York: Harvest Books, 1995), xix–xxi.

admittedly unlikely place: namely, a reading of *Robinson Crusoe*. Since the publication of Daniel Defoe's novel in 1719, Crusoe routinely stands in for the paradigmatic figure of *homo economicus*. Crusoe rationally mixes his labour with nature to meet his personal utility and, in doing so, transforms a barren island landscape into bountiful private property. While liberal economists have plucked Crusoe from his island to tell yarns about demand curves and marginal returns, the Atlantic world Crusoe actually inhabited was populated by pirates, privateers,²² slaves, slave traders, indentured servants, conscripts, soldiers, settlers, and displaced native populations. In fact, the vessel that deposits Crusoe upon his island is a slaving ship heading for the African coast – with Crusoe as its captain. Similarly, the vessel that delivers him from the island is a merchant ship commandeered by pirate mutineers.

After examining Defoe's fictional narrative, we turn to contemporary scholars examining the historical rise of the modern world economy. While these accounts pay greater critical attention to primitive accumulation, the pirate remains notably absent, thereby failing to represent primitive accumulation as a contested process. I conclude by leaving the age of sail to explore contemporary piracy in the Gulf of Aden, where violence and dispossession remain at the heart of capitalist accumulation as pirates continue to navigate the ever-evolving relationship between capital and sovereignty. While pirates of the Atlantic world replicated the violence of merchant and plantation capitalism, pirates in the Gulf of Aden have similarly responded to primitive accumulation by creating well-financed venture capital firms, with salaried employees, subcontractors, franchisees, and corporate governance structures. However, while pirates replicate the violent world around them, what still marks Edward Teach (aka Blackbeard) and Sugule Ali as the enemy of all mankind remains the simple fact that they dare engage in the primitive accumulation of capital itself.

Capitalism, Piracy, and Primitive Accumulation

For liberal political and economic thinkers, the image of hardworking men and women, mixing their labour with nature and pursuing their 'propensity to truck, barter, and exchange'²³ stands at great odds with the hedonist figure of the maritime bandit, living freely and accumulating wealth through violence and force. After a quick look at Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – that strange fable retold by classical economists – it becomes apparent that the rational, toiling protagonist of liberal economic thought (whom we might call 'Crusoe-on-the-island') is only possible by actively ignoring the omnipresent slaves, slavers, and pirates who actually traverse Defoe's novel, and the Atlantic world more generally.

22. A privateer is a private ship that, by receiving a letter of marque from the sovereign of one country, is empowered to attack ships flying the flag of another country. Drawing on the Old English word for 'border', letters of marque became a sort of portable border. Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, 141.

23. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books I-III* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 117.

Crusoe and the Stories Told by Liberal Economists

In *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) John Locke asked his reader to imagine ‘an island, separate from all possible commerce with the rest of the world’.²⁴ Locke – himself profiting from the slave trade²⁵ – surmised that the people on this island would lack the incentive to cultivate the land beyond what the family could consume and, as a consequence, vast tracts of land ‘would not be worth the inclosing’ and instead be ‘give[n] up again to the wild common of nature’.²⁶ Less than 30 years after Locke’s *Second Treatise* Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe*, widely regarded as the world’s first novel.²⁷ Originally presented as Crusoe’s autobiography, this book profoundly captured the modern imagination.²⁸ Despite Locke’s prediction otherwise, Crusoe – a man shipwrecked on a deserted Caribbean island – commits himself to cultivating the earth, even in the absence of ‘commerce with the rest of the world’.²⁹ The ever-rational Crusoe encloses nature through his own toil, reaping, storing, and savouring the goods he produces. He uses his limited paper and ink to studiously maintain ledgers of all the hours spent working, and the wealth he generates through such labours.³⁰

In the centuries since its publication, Crusoe has become a common set piece in classical liberal explanations of the capitalist world economy. Adam Smith and David Ricardo each ground their economic theories in Crusoe-like stories. Smith, for example,

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24. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 29.
 25. Locke not only possessed financial investments in the slave trade and Caribbean plantations, but his philosophical arguments about economic and political liberalism are profoundly shaped by his reading of the colonial Americas. James Farr, ‘So Vile and Miserable an Estate: The Problem of Slavery in Locke’s Political Thought’, *Political Theory* 14 (1986): 263–289; Wayne Glasser, ‘Three Approaches to Locke and the Slave Trade’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 2 (1990): 199–216; David Armitage, ‘John Locke, Carolina, and the *Two Treatises of Government*’, *Political Theory* 32, no. 5 (2004): 602–627; James Farr, ‘Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery’, *Political Theory* 36, no. 4 (2008): 495–522.
 26. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 29.
 27. Ian Watt argues that the invention of the novel required two conditions: first, ‘society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature’ and, secondly, ‘there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be interested in other ordinary people’. As such, *Robinson Crusoe* was ‘the first fictional narrative in which an ordinary person’s daily activities were the centre of continuous literary attention’. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 60, 74.
 28. The official title of the book is *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all Alone in an Un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River Oroonoke; Having been Cast on Shore by Shipwreck, Where-in All the Men Perished but Himself. WITH An Account how he has at last as strangely deliver’d by PYRATES*. The attribution of authorship for the first edition was ‘Written by Himself’.
 29. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 60–92.
 30. Ibid.

describes the division of labour as originating in that ‘early and rude state of society’ in which hunters exchange deerskins for beaver pelts. Smith surmises that individuals who endure ‘superior hardship’ and possess ‘superior skill’ will accumulate surplus stock, hire additional labourers, and thereby instigate the division of labour.³¹ By the late 1800s, the figure of Crusoe himself appears within the writing of liberal economists who crib his story ‘to illustrate the principles of supply and demand economic theory’, and the activity of a ‘rational economic individual’ who ‘allocat[es] his available resources to obtain maximum satisfaction’.³² In fact, Crusoe populates many of the ‘founding texts of neo-classical economics, including those written by Jennings, Bastiat, Gossen, Jevons, Menger, Wicksell, Wicksteed, Edgeworth, Clark and Marshal’, among others.³³ A century later, Crusoe still inhabited the pages of the neoclassical economists.³⁴ In *Capitalism and Freedom*, for example, Milton Friedman defines a ‘free private enterprise exchange economy’ as akin to ‘a collection of Robinson Crusoes’.³⁵

The similarity between Defoe’s novel and the yarns told by liberal political economists was not lost on Karl Marx, who wrote that the ‘solitary and isolated hunter or fisherman, who serves Adam Smith and Ricardo as a starting point, is one of the unimaginative fantasies of eighteenth-century romances *a la* Robinson Crusoe’.³⁶ In creating Crusoe, Defoe became one of the ‘prophets of the eighteenth century, on whose shoulders Adam Smith and Ricardo were still wholly standing’, providing a portrait of the rational and autonomous individual ‘not as something evolving’ but rather ‘posited by nature’.³⁷ In the first chapter of *Capital Vol 1.*, for example, Marx excoriates Ricardo who, being ‘fond of Robinson Crusoe stories’, fundamentally fails to understand that

31. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 150.

32. M.V. White, ‘Robinson Crusoe’, in *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, eds. John Eatwell, Murry Milgate, and Peter Newman (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 217.

33. Gillian J. Hewitson, ‘Robinson Crusoe: The Paradigmatic “Rational Economic Man”’, in *Robinson Crusoe’s Economic Man: A Construction and Deconstruction*, eds. Ulla Grapard and Gillian Hewitson (London and New York: 2011), 11; see also Michael V. White, ‘Reading and Rewriting: The Production of an Economic *Robinson Crusoe*’, in *Robinson Crusoe’s Economic Man: A Construction and Deconstruction*, eds. Ulla Grapard and Gillian Hewitson (London and New York: 2011), 16–19.

34. Beginning with W.S. Jevon’s *The Theory of Political Economy* (1871), the figure of Crusoe became a particularly useful tool for advancing a microeconomic analysis now at the core of libertarian and neoliberal economic theories. Marginalist approaches often start with the assumption of an ‘isolated individual’ who engages in a series of ‘supply and demand analyses’ to determine where to place his/her labour, time, resources, and abilities to maximise ‘satisfaction (utility)’. White, ‘Reading and Rewriting’, 17. As an example, see Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1962), 36–61.

35. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 13.

36. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 188.

37. *Ibid.*, 188.

human labour is never isolated.³⁸ While Crusoe's activity on the island is 'his own personal labour', the same is not true in any other circumstance. When we 'transport ourselves from Robinson's island' and head *anywhere* else – whether 'medieval Europe', industrial England, or a future comprised of an 'association of free men' – labour is always social and organised by the proportion that one contributes to the entire production process.³⁹

Marx also critiqued the Robinsonade stories told by liberal economists because they failed to appreciate that capitalist accumulation fundamentally depends upon violence. By the end of *Capital* Marx returns to refute Smith's mythical narrative of capitalism's emergence among skilful hunters, and traces instead the origin of capitalism to the 'original sin' of 'primitive accumulation'.⁴⁰ Capital's 'pre-history'⁴¹ actually involves the violent capture, enclosure, and enslavement of resources, nature, and peoples.

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of the continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterise the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.⁴²

The violence of primitive accumulation, rather than the skilful and thrifty workman, created the surplus capital needed to birth industrial society. As such, the capital that 'appears today in the United States without any birth-certificate, was yesterday, in England, the capitalised blood of children', and the 'veiled slavery' of European wage-labour was constructed upon the 'pedestal' of 'the unqualified slavery of the New World'.⁴³

Crusoe and an Atlantic World of Primitive Accumulation

While liberal economists fetishise an isolated Crusoe-on-the-island, both Crusoe and Defoe actually lived in worlds structured by primitive accumulation. At the level of the story, *Robinson Crusoe* is riddled through with 'conquest, slavery, robbery, murder and force'.⁴⁴ After all, Crusoe's stock is not skilfully collected from nature, as Smith would predict, but rather a vast quantity of supplies retrieved from a shipwreck (guns, swords, shot, powder, saws, a screw-jack, grinding stone, pipe, tobacco, ropes, canvas, clothes,

38. Karl Marx, *Capital, Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans Ben Fowkes (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 169.

39. *Ibid.*, 170–1.

40. *Ibid.*, 873.

41. Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*.

42. Marx, *Capital*, 915.

43. *Ibid.*, 920, 925.

44. Stephen Hymer, 'Robinson Crusoe and the Secret of Primitive Accumulation', in *Robinson Crusoe's Economic Man: A Construction and Deconstruction*, eds. Ulla Grapard and Gillian Hewitson (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 42.

paper, ink, three Bibles, nails, two dozen hatchets, iron and ironwork, two saws, rum, a hammock, bedding, chests, barrels, needles, thread, and so on).⁴⁵ And as the story demonstrates, this original stock was available to Crusoe because of a vast economy of violence.

Crusoe begins his maritime adventures on-board a slave ship headed for Guinea.⁴⁶ On his second voyage, off the coast of Africa, Barbary pirates seize the ship, enslaving Crusoe and the crew. After two years, Crusoe escapes with the help of a fellow slave, a Moorish boy named Xury. Upon finding a Portuguese slaving vessel, Crusoe sells: the boat they had escaped on; the leopard and lion skins shot and cured with Xury's assistance; and 'my boy *Xury*' himself – receiving '220 Pieces of Eight' and free passage to Brazil in exchange.⁴⁷ Once in Brazil, Crusoe uses the money to purchase a plantation as well as an unnamed '*Negro* slave, and an *European* [indentured] servant'.⁴⁸ After a few years, Crusoe's plantation begins to prosper, allowing him to spend his free time regaling his neighbours with stories about voyages to West Africa and 'how easy it was to purchase' not only 'gold dust, *Guinea* grains, elephant teeth, & c'. but also '*Negros*'.⁴⁹ However, British victory in the War of Spanish Succession, and the signing of the *Asiento*, meant that 'few *Negroes* were bought' in Brazil and those available were 'excessive[ly] dear'.⁵⁰ Crusoe's plantation-owning friends eventually convince him to organise an illegal, privately funded slaving expedition to West Africa. It was agreed that the plantation owners would 'fit out a ship to go to *Guinea*', and Crusoe would captain it. In exchange Crusoe would receive 'my equal share of the *Negroes* without providing any part of the stock'.⁵¹ It was this ship – paid for with the profits of primitive accumulation – that became his original stock upon Crusoe's otherwise unpopulated island.

Primitive accumulation continues once on the island as well. After discovering a footprint in the sand, Crusoe concludes that his own deliverance depends upon getting 'a savage into my possession': 'one, nay, two or three savages' and 'make them entirely slaves to me'.⁵² His desire to once again become a 'Master' is realised when freeing the 'comely handsome fellow' from 'cannibals'. Crusoe clothes Friday in European attire, teaches him first 'run and fetch' and later to cook and bake, and regularly appropriates his labour: 'I made my man *Friday* dig a little dock' and 'bid him go to the sea shore, and see if he could find' turtle eggs to eat.⁵³

This island economy is once again disrupted when an English ship anchors near the island, and a group of mutineers brings the ship's captain and two crewmembers onshore as bounded prisoners. Intuitively siding with the captain, Crusoe and Friday free the captives after securing concession that they 'will not pretend to any authority' while on the

45. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 40–7.

46. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

47. *Ibid.*, 28–9.

48. *Ibid.*, 31.

49. *Ibid.*, 32.

50. *Ibid.*, 33.

51. *Ibid.*, 33.

52. *Ibid.*, 157–8.

53. *Ibid.*, 162–81.

island.⁵⁴ As self-declared governor, Crusoe decides to hang the leader as a pirate, but spares the other mutineers – while stating that no one could ‘doubt I had authority’ to execute them all.⁵⁵ In deciding to maroon the pirates instead, Crusoe promises to send women and supplies in return for their promise to maintain his island possessions while away. As governor, Crusoe claims sovereignty to retain some pirates in profitable service, while deciding that others should be hung ‘at the yard-arm’.⁵⁶ Once again, ‘[I]aw makes criminals and criminals make settlers’.⁵⁷

Primitive accumulation is not only central to Crusoe’s world but also forms the very conjuncture that made the book possible. As the story goes, the British privateer William Dampier, having received a letter of marque, left England in 1703 to pursue Spanish galleons operating in the Pacific Ocean. As Dampier rounded Cape Horn, crewman Alexander Selkirk expressed fear that the vessel was no longer sea worthy. Stopping for supplies on the Juan Fernández islands off the Chilean coast, Selkirk requested he be left behind.⁵⁸ Four years later, Dampier returned as a pilot for Captain Woodes Rogers’ privateering expedition to discover Selkirk living alone in a hut surrounded by a herd of domesticated goats.⁵⁹ Selkirk then joined the crew of the *Duke* and the *Duchess*, with whom he traversed the west coast of South America, capturing vessels, attacking and ransoming a village, and selling pirated slaves.⁶⁰ After returning to England in 1711 Selkirk became an instant celebrity after Richard Steele chronicled his experiences in the tabloid *The Englishman*.⁶¹ Defoe read the account of Selkirk – and quite possibly met the mariner himself – shortly before penning the novel *Robinson Crusoe*, which bears considerable similarities to Selkirk’s experience.⁶²

Given the dissonance between the fantasy of an ever-rational Crusoe-on-the-island and the violent reality of the Atlantic world, the absence of piracy within the stories told by liberal economists is not entirely surprising. The notable exception is Peter Leeson, who argues that piracy in the Atlantic world actually follows the same logics of liberal economics: namely, pirates are ‘self-interested’, rational, and ‘respond to incentives’.⁶³

54. Ibid., 201.

55. Ibid., 216.

56. Ibid., 216.

57. Hymer, ‘Robinson Crusoe and the Secret’, 58.

58. This proved a prudent call as Dampier’s ship, the HMS *Roebuck*, sunk shortly thereafter. While the crew was saved, Dampier was eventually court-marshalled and relieved of his commission. Cording, *Under the Black Flag*, 84–5.

59. Colin Woodard, *The Republic of Pirates: Being the True and Surprising Story of the Caribbean Pirates and the Man Who Brought Them Down* (New York: Harvest Books, 2007), 75–7.

60. Ibid., 77–84.

61. John Richetti, ‘Introduction’, in *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001), xiv.

62. Harvey Swados, ‘Robinson Crusoe: The Man Alone’, *The Antioch Review* 18, no. 1 (1958): 25–40.

63. Peter T. Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5.

Rather than treating pirates as ‘flamboyant, bizarre, and downright shocking’, Leeson contends that pirates were actually ‘rationally responding to the *unusual* economic context they operated in – which generated *unusual* costs and benefits’.⁶⁴ Here, Leeson essentially plucks Crusoe from the island and places him on board a pirate ship. In doing so, Leeson shows little appreciation for the fact that violence and dispossession are far from ‘unusual’ within the capitalist world economy. Any comparison between pirates and capitalist, therefore, should not rest upon some notion of common rationality and self-interest, but rather upon the shared propensity to acquire wealth through violence.

Primitive Accumulation and Pirate Capitalism

Today numerous political economists, historians, and scholars of international politics have argued that primitive accumulation within the Atlantic world between the 17th through 19th centuries profoundly shaped the modern world economy. Eric Williams, for example, famously demonstrated that bonded slave labour – first white then black – created the capital upon which British banking, shipping, manufacturing, insurance companies, and therefore the entire industrial revolution were built.⁶⁵ Since then, other scholars have carefully shown that the rise of modern British and American industrial capitalism emerged from the plantation and chattel slavery.⁶⁶ Other scholars have debunked the ethnocentric claims that modern capitalism originated in Europe before radiating outwards to Africa, Asia, and the Americas. These historical accounts place a renewed importance on the Atlantic world as one of the many locations that made the modern capitalist economy possible.⁶⁷

Such arguments about the origins of modern capitalist world economy tend to place primitive accumulation front and centre, yet still have little to say about piracy. Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, for example, powerfully demonstrate that ‘capitalism could only emerge, take root and reproduce itself...through a violent, coercive, and often war-assisted process subjugating, dominating, and often annihilating many of those

64. *Ibid.*, 6; italics added.

65. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

66. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492–1800* (London and New York: Verso, 1997); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).

67. John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161–7; Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 30–4; Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, ‘What’s at Stake in the Transition Debate? Rethinking the Origins of Capitalism and the “Rise of the West”’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 42, no. 1 (2013): 98–102; Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 121–173.

social forces that stood in its way – processes that continue to this day’.⁶⁸ Within the Atlantic, European empires created a labour force comprised first of enslaved Amerindian populations and European expatriates, made landless after the enclosure of the commons.⁶⁹ In England, the ‘iron discipline’ of the state served as ‘one of the fundamental levers’ that ensured a ‘dispossessed class of peasants could be terrorised into a new work discipline based on the capitalist mode’.⁷⁰ However, within the Americas, the state’s power was much weaker, and therefore a greater ‘impulse for rebellion’ against the ‘strict and onerous work regimes’ was possible.⁷¹ Within this context, many English settlers and escaped slaves joined Native American societies, created their own communities within a vast ungoverned landscape, or fashioned ‘more itinerant communities in the shape of bands of pirates and buccaneers’.⁷²

Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, however, still present the pirate as a momentary escape from the unfolding synthesis of state-sponsored violence and capitalist accumulation. The pirate, however, not only represents a momentary flight from the state-sponsored primitive accumulation, but also the personification of violence as a possible political and economic response to such predation. While merchant and slave ships, plantations, colonial administrators, and imperial navies constructed ‘war capitalism’ within the Americas, Africa, and Asia,⁷³ some communities turned to violence to construct an alternative social formation: pirate capitalism. Pirate capitalism was a crudely egalitarian and autonomous social and economic order, existing as the second dimension of the ‘dialectic of terror’.⁷⁴ The pirate represented the antithesis to the formalised terror of the whip, shackles, and gallows used ‘to protect property, to punish those who resisted its law’ and ‘instil fear in sailors who might wish to become pirates’.⁷⁵ Pirate crews instead constructed themselves as communities of mutineers fleeing impressment, former slaves, Native Americans, and ‘almost without exception’ members of the ‘lowest social classes’.⁷⁶ As such, the pirate ship became a ‘new social order’ – a ‘rough, improvised, but effective egalitarianism’.⁷⁷ Upon joining, crew members signed a ‘compact’ agreeing to ship rules. All crew members participated in a ‘common council’ that – based on the principle of one pirate, one vote – elected the captain (who led the ship in battle) and the quartermaster (who distributed the chores, food, and treasure). The crew also meted out punishment, which could include executing a despotic captain.⁷⁸ Looted treasure was

68. Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule*, 12.

69. *Ibid.*, 146–15; also see, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 36–70.

70. Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule*, 153.

71. *Ibid.*, 153.

72. *Ibid.*, 153.

73. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 29–55.

74. Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 6.

75. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

76. *Ibid.*, 50.

77. *Ibid.*, 60–6; Leeson, *The Invisible Hook*, 23–44.

78. Leeson, *The Invisible Hook*, 23–44.

divided according to a share system in which all crew members received one share, while privileged positions (gunners, doctors, carpenters, etc.) earned 1.25–1.5 shares, and the captain and quartermaster received 1.5–2 shares.⁷⁹ Crews often created proto-social security systems in which contributions to a ‘common fund’ helped cover the needs of injured members.⁸⁰ These techniques of social self-organisation were spread widely throughout pirate culture, and reproduced themselves as crews split apart, joined and re-joined, and incorporated new members.⁸¹ Like capitalists of their time, pirates in the Atlantic world accumulated their wealth through violence and enclosure, but – rather than doing so for a master – pirates constituted themselves into a democratic ‘people without a nation’ with the aim of ‘escaping to something new’.⁸²

It should be noted, however, that pirate capitalism constantly navigated the border of ‘private’ and ‘public’ forms of violence, as enclaves of freedom often folded back into sovereign power. In this way, piracy was akin to ‘privateering, naval warfare, trade and diplomacy’, which all relied upon ‘the combination of private and public mobilizations of force, authority, manpower and resources’ at a historical moment when ‘war and violence at sea’ formed the ‘necessary components of wealth-creation, circulation and accumulation’.⁸³ In this milieu, pirates often found themselves recruited and deputised by imperial powers. State-sanctioned pirates – or, privateers – were often employed to project military and economic power across the ocean; they received substantial private investment and were granted the sovereign right to plunder ships flying the flag of another country. In doing so, they returned considerable profits for their landed investors.⁸⁴ Chartered by letters of marque, privateers enabled European powers to deploy privately funded ocean-going violence across the vast oceanic spaces over which they otherwise lacked sovereign authority. However, after the Spanish defeat in the War of Spanish Succession (1702–1715), the British crown increasingly used its now unrivalled naval power to crack down on both pirating and privateering in order to consolidate its imperial maritime sovereignty. Many of the most prominent Atlantic pirates emerged from this reserve army of unemployed privateers, now sailing for no sovereign, and recognising no flag. Edward Teach, for example, served as a privateer for the British during the War of Spanish Succession, before taking up piracy in the Caribbean and off the Carolina coast. In 1718, Teach left piracy to again serve as a privateer, this time in the favour of the Governor of South Carolina.⁸⁵ Like Governor Crusoe, the state determines which pirates to employ and which to execute, a power bound

79. Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 72.

80. *Ibid.*, 73.

81. *Ibid.*, 77–82.

82. *Ibid.*, 8, 59.

83. Alejandro Colás and Bryan Mabee, ‘The Flow and Ebb of Private Seaborne Violence in Global Politics: Lessons from the Atlantic World, 1689–1815’, in *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires: Private Violence in Historical Context*, eds. Alejandro Colás and Bryan Mabee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 85.

84. Donald A. Petrie, *The Prize Game: Lawful Looting on the High Seas in the Days of Fighting Sail* (New York: Berkley Books, 1999), 3.

85. P. Nick Kardulias and Emily Butcher, ‘Piracy in a Contested Periphery: Incorporation and the Emergence of the Modern World-System in the Colonial Atlantic Frontier’, *Journal of World-Systems Research* 22, no. 2 (2016): 549–50.

up in the creation of modern nation-states. For example, the United States constitution grants Congress the power to ‘define and punish Piracies’ and to ‘grant Letters of Marque’.⁸⁶

However, the solidification of industrial capitalism and rise of the modern nation-state necessitated the violent persecution of pirates. By the late 1720s European powers engaged in a ‘campaign of extermination’, seeking to redefine pirates as ‘monsters, beasts, and “the common enemies of mankind”’ within the popular imagery, while also exerting unparalleled militarily power to – quite literally – rip pirates limb-from-limb.⁸⁷ A century later, during its campaign against slavery, the British Empire redefined slave traders as pirates and, therefore, the ‘enemies of mankind’. As such, British jurists laid the groundwork for the concept of ‘crimes against humanity’, which became the basic framework of international law.⁸⁸

While the military, legal, and cultural assault on piracy successfully brought an end to the golden age, pirates had nonetheless ‘captured the good ship *Popular Imagination*’.⁸⁹ In the centuries since the British Empire exerted sovereign control over the high seas, pirates continued to emerge within those vast maritime – as well as terrestrial, cultural, and cyber – spaces over which states remained unable to police the distinction between ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ forms of dispossession. During the first decades of the 21st century, as the capitalist world economy once again undergoes a profound restructuring, the pirates that once roamed the Atlantic during the age of sail have been joined by a new lineage of pirates who dispossess oil wealth from multinationals working the Niger Delta⁹⁰ and pillage the shipping lanes in the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Singapore, and the South China Sea.⁹¹ Today, the Pirate Bay remains a major conduit for reallocating seized wealth, but instead of dealing in captured sugar, slaves, and rum, modern-day pirates use this cove to redistribute movies, music, and software. But no contemporary piracy has caught the public imagination more than those plying the Gulf of Aden.

Pirate Capitalism in the Gulf of Aden

Most yarns told by journalists, academics, and security experts describe pirates in the Gulf of Aden as a rag-tag group of profit-seeking criminals operating as an organised criminal organisation.⁹² However, as in the Atlantic world, pirates in the Gulf of Aden exist within a longer history of primitive accumulation, one marked by colonial rule, the

86. United States Constitution, Article I, Section 8; italics added.

87. Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, 170–6.

88. Jenny S. Martinez, *Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114–139.

89. Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, 175.

90. Martin N. Murphy, ‘Petro-Piracy: Oil and Troubled Waters’, *Orbis* 57, no. 3 (2013): 424–437.

91. Carolin Liss, ‘Piracy in Southeast Asia: Trends, Hot Spots and Responses’, in *Piracy in Southeast Asia: Trends, Hot Spots and Responses*, eds. Carolin Liss and Ted Biggs (London: Routledge, 2017).

92. For an insight into the conversations among security and anti-piracy experts, see Christian Bueger, ‘Experimenting with Global Governance: Learning Lessons in The Contact Group on Piracy’ in *Knowing Governance: The Epistemic Construction of Political Order*, eds.

Cold War, and the highly militarised global war on terror. They also operate not as exceptions to contemporary forms of capitalism, but rather – as with their Atlantic counterparts – extensions of its ever-evolving logic of accumulation. As such, pirates today closely resemble a start-up firm, with international financing, a highly professionalised workforce, and an army of subcontractors. However, the major difference between pirates in the Gulf of Aden and a pre-IPO start-up remains the fact that pirates have the audacity to engage in the primitive accumulation of capital itself.

The Long History of Primitive Accumulation in the Gulf of Aden

The expansion of European industrial capitalism during the 19th century required greatly expanded flows of raw materials and manufactured goods between metropole and colony, which necessitated the enclosure of the Gulf of Aden as a strategic artery of imperial control.⁹³ Starting in the 1880s, Italy began colonising southern Somalia, and by 1919 established a plantation economy that produced ‘cotton, sugar, bananas, oil and soap’ for the Italian market.⁹⁴ In 1960, British Somaliland and Italian Somalia were granted independence and, in a controversial referendum, joined together as the Republic of Somalia. The newly created Republic of Somalia inherited very weak institutions, an impoverished economic base, and a state *designed* to pose little threat to European control over this strategic waterway. Nine years after independence, Siyad Barre overthrew the fragile pro-Western democratic government and, siding with the Soviet Union, declared a policy of Scientific Socialism. After the Marxist revolution in Ethiopia, the US and the Soviet Union switched clients and the Americans poured massive military resources into Somalia to prop up the Barre government.⁹⁵ Lacking a significant export economy and heavily reliant upon imports, Somalia developed a massive trade deficit that, by 1980, required an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout.⁹⁶ Neighbouring Arab states, western countries, the IMF, and World Bank placed external pressure on Somalia to liberalise its fragile economy.⁹⁷ In this context, the Barre government used military force to seek access to the relative wealth in the north, provoking an armed opposition. Facing dwindling international support and an on-going civil war the government finally collapsed in 1991 resulting in decades of continued struggle between local warlords, the

Jan-Peter Voß and Richard Freeman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); ‘Experts in an Adventure with Pirates: A Story of Somali Piracy Expertise’, in *Assembling Exclusive Expertise: Conflict Resolution Knowledge in Practice*, eds. Anna Leander and Ole Waever (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

93. Kamola, ‘Capitalism at Sea’, 145–9.

94. I.M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali: Revised, Updated and Expanded* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

95. Abdi Ismail Samatar, Mark Lindberg and Basil Mahayni, ‘The Dialectics of Piracy in Somalia: The Rich Versus the Poor’, *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 8 (2010): 1383.

96. David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 125.

97. Abdi Samatar and A.I. Samatar, ‘The Material Roots of the Suspended African State: Arguments from Somalia’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (1987): 685.

Islamic Courts Union, Al-Qaeda linked Al-Shabaab, the internationally backed Federal Government, the US-sponsored Ethiopian army, and the autonomous regional governments of Somaliland and Puntland.

The absence of national sovereignty made the area ripe for foreigners to engage in the dispossession of Somalia's vast maritime wealth. Since 1991, an estimated 700 foreign vessels have plundered somewhere between \$150–\$450 million worth of marine life annually, including millions in tuna, shark, lobster and deep-water shrimp.⁹⁸ These unregulated trawlers – owned by European and Asian firms – have effectively destroyed the local fishing industry, creating one of the primary causes of piracy.⁹⁹

The absence of sovereignty over Somalia's coastline also made it a highly profitable place for companies to dispose of toxic waste. Swiss and Italian companies with alleged mafia assistance¹⁰⁰ brokered deals to dump waste at \$2.50 per ton, compared to the \$250 per ton needed to dispose of the same materials under European regulations.¹⁰¹ The waste included 'uranium radioactive waste, lead, cadmium, mercury, industrial, hospital, chemical, leather treatment and other toxic waste' dumped 'without regard to the health of the local population and any environmentally devastating impacts'.¹⁰² After the 2004 Asian Tsunami, containers began washing up on shore. One pirate, Farah Ismail Eid, tells

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98. Samatar et al., 'The Dialectics of Piracy in Somalia', 138; Ted Dagne, 'Somalia: Prospects for a Lasting Peace', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2009): 10; Jonathan Hari, 'You Are Being Lied to About the Pirates', *The Independent*, 5 January 2009. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-you-are-being-lied-to-about-pirates-1225817.html>. Last accessed 17 May 2018.
99. Dagne, 'Somalia', 106.
100. Barbara Carazzolo, Aberto Chiara and Luciano Scalettari, 'E La Nave Va', *Familia Cristiana* 13 (1998); Monica Massari and Paola Monzini, 'Dirty Business in Italy: A Cast-study of Illegal Trafficking in Hazardous Waste', *Global Crime* 6, nos. 3/4 (2004): 288, 302 n.8.
101. Voice of America, 'UN: Nuclear Waste Being Released on Somalia's Shores After Tsunami', 31 October 2009. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2005-02-23-voa23/309291.html>. Last accessed 14 March, 2018. It should be noted that the toxic dumping off the Somali coast is not epiphenomenal. There is a long history of First World countries dumping remnants of excess consumption in Africa, especially those countries that have weak national governments. For example, in 2006 a company sub-contracting from the company Trafigura dumped toxic waste off the coast of Abidjan, Ivory Coast, causing 3,000 people to become violently ill and killing ten. This corresponds with the recent trend of transporting used computers and electronics (i.e. e-waste) to African countries for disposal in largely unregulated dumping sites, often resulting in toxic metals and chemicals leaching into the soil. Such dumping – in Somalia, Ivory Coast and Nigeria – eerily resembles then World Bank Chief Economist Lawrence Summer's infamous memo arguing that many African countries are 'under-polluted' and could achieve economic gains by importing toxic waste. Jonathan Clayton, 'Big Profits from a Very Dirty Business Encourage Corruption and Broken Treaties', *The Times*, 18 July 2009, 7; George Monbiot, 'From Toxic Waste to Toxic Assets, the Same People Always Get Dumped On', *The Guardian*, 22 September 2009, 29; Patrick Bond, *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation* (New York: Zed Books, 2006), 8.
102. United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), 'After the Tsunami: Rapid Environmental Assessment', 2005, p. 134. Available at: <http://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/8372>.

the story of finding fish along the beach: 'We thought we were lucky. We collected the fish and stored them in refrigerators, then later we discovered they were like plastic'.¹⁰³

In response to such dispossession Somali fishermen organised themselves into self-appointed naval militias. Taking names such as the Central Somalia Coast Guard, the National Volunteer Coast Guard, and the Somali Marines, these groups sought to keep foreign fishing vessels out of coastal waters, ransoming hijacked trawlers as an informal taxation system. Sugule Ali confirms this, pointing out that the actual 'sea bandits' are 'those who illegally fish in our seas and dump waste in our seas and carry weapons in our seas. We are simply patrolling our seas'.¹⁰⁴ Eid similarly claimed: 'the title of pirates should be given to those who come to our waters illegally'.¹⁰⁵

By the mid-1990s foreign fleets found their own market solution – hiring 'local warlords' to provide 'armed guards and anti-aircraft guns fixtures' on fishing trawlers.¹⁰⁶ As a consequence, the *badaadinta badah* ('saviours of the sea') found policing coastal waters increasingly dangerous and began turning their attention towards the more valuable cargo passing through the region.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the 'resource pirates' who plundered Somalia's maritime wealth, gave rise to a navy of 'defensive pirates', eventually morphing into the more widely known 'ransom pirates'.¹⁰⁸

(Pirate) Capitalism

If one ignores the spectacle of AK-47s and RPGs, piracy in the Gulf of Aden closely resembles a nimble, post-Fordist start-up company, funded by venture capitalists and employing an army of subcontractors. Each individual joining a pirate crew (and possessing his own weapon) receives one 'Class A' share. Additional Class A shares are given to those bringing a skiff or heavy weapon (such as a RPG) or who board a boat first. Foreign or domestic investors outfit pirate crews with ships, weapons, global positioning systems, satellite phones, food, and fuel. Once captured, ships are held in harbour where guards, interpreters, and cooks receive 'Class B' shares for their services.¹⁰⁹ Local merchants provide these militiamen with 'food, drink, qaad, fresh clothes, cell phones,

Last accessed 14 March, 2018; also see, Awet T. Weldemichael, 'Maritime Corporate Terrorism and Its Consequences in the Western Indian Ocean: Illegal Fishing, Waste Dumping and Piracy in Twenty-First-Century Somalia', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 8, no. 2 (2012): 110–126; Peter Eichstaedt, *Pirate State: Inside Somalia's Terrorism at Sea* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), 37–44.

103. Quoted in Tristan McConnell, 'Foreigners Are the Real Pirate, Say Somali Brigand Who Lost out to Trawlers and Waste', *The Times*, 12 June 2009, p. 41.

104. Quoted in Gettleman, 'Pirates Tell Their Side'.

105. Quoted in McConnell, 'Foreigners Are the Real Pirate'.

106. Bahadur, *The Pirates of Somalia*, 16.

107. *Ibid.*, 13–19.

108. Samatar et al., 'The Dialectics of Piracy in Somalia', 1384–87.

109. Matt Bryden, Arnaud Laloum and Jörg Roofthoof, 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)' (New York: United Nations, 2010), 99.

[and] air time', supplying them on credit and often at a considerable mark-up.¹¹⁰ Those negotiating the ransom are often sub-contractors working on commission. Once delivered by money drop (often by a sub-contracted private security firm) or electronic transfer, the payment is divided up among the stakeholders: 'fixed costs' are paid to the local merchants; financiers receive their standard 30 percent; local elders receive 5–10 percent for 'anchoring rights'; Class B shares are paid out at a determined flat rate (approximately \$15,000 each); and the remaining profit is divided equally among all the Class A shareholders.¹¹¹ While it is tempting to imagine that multi-million dollar ransoms translate into considerable windfalls for everyone involved, as with corner boys on the world's drug markets, the long hours and high competition often means that most pirates receive the equivalent of a paltry hourly wage.¹¹²

The financing closely resembles venture capital markets. Domestically, local exchanges allowed Somalis to invest directly. For example, in Harardheere, a stalwart town of pirate support, investors could make investments in a 24-hour 'stock exchange'.¹¹³ Additional capitalisation comes from a vast network of foreign investors in Kenya, Dubai, Lebanon, Somalia and possibly Russia who stand to triple their initial investments.¹¹⁴ Piracy is also deeply integrated into the regional economy, having a 'trickle-down economic effect' as pirates spend their loot on basic commodities, luxury goods, and services.¹¹⁵ Revenues from piracy have fuelled 'a mini-construction boom along the coastline of the Puntland'¹¹⁶ and are transferred regionally through the informal banking system (*hawal*) where they enter the formal economy through the purchase of property and businesses.¹¹⁷ The revenue from piracy, it should be noted, exists as one portion of the trillions of dollars flowing through the world economy 'outside of legal channels'.¹¹⁸

Legal corporate entities also make considerable profits from piracy. Insurance companies, for example, increased their rates quite substantially on ships passing through the Gulf of Aden. In 2008, insurance companies¹¹⁹ added \$20,000 per voyage – up from

110. Ibid., 99.

111. Ibid., 99.

112. Bahadur, *The Pirates of Somalia*, 223–233.

113. Mohamed Ahmed, 'Somali Sea Gangs Lure Investors at Pirate Lair', *Reuters*, 1 December 2009.

114. Robert I. Rotberg, 'Combating Maritime Piracy: A Policy Brief with Recommendations for Action' (Cambridge: World Peace Foundation, 2010), 3; Jonathan Clayton and Flora Bagenal, 'Ruthless Economics of the High Seas and the Somali Dream of a Life in the West', *The Times*, 16 November 2010, p 13.

115. Eichstaedt, *Pirate State*, 36.

116. James Kraska and Brian Wilson, 'Maritime Piracy in East Africa', *Journal of International Affairs* 62, no. 2 (2009): 57.

117. Eichstaedt, *Pirate State*, 64–6.

118. Carolyn Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws: Crime, Money, and Power in the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2007), xvi.

119. For an overview of the politics of global maritime insurance see Luis Lobo-Guerrero, "'Pirates", Stewards, and the Securitization of Global Circulation', *International Political Sociology* 2 (2008): 219–235.

\$500 the year before – totalling a \$400 million increase.¹²⁰ Insurance companies also offered premium pirate-specific packages. For example, Benfield Corporate Risk sold \$10 million policies protecting holders against ‘kidnapping and extortion, lost ransom, and the cost incurred resolving the situation’.¹²¹ Private security firms sold equipment such as water cannons, sonic guns and electric perimeter fencing as well as providing on-board guards.¹²² Muse Professional Group and Al Qusoor – American and Yemeni private security firms – rented six security personnel to ships passing through the Gulf of Aden at a cost of roughly \$100,000 per transit.¹²³

Like their ancestors before them, pirates in the Gulf of Aden have come face-to-face with an overwhelming international naval force. In 2008, UN resolutions 1816 and 1838 gave foreign countries legal authority to enter Somalia’s territorial waters to fight piracy, opening the doors for naval ships from more than two dozen countries to fight pirates under the auspices of the United States’ Combined Task Force 151, the European Union’s NAVFOR/Operation Atalanta, and NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield. By 2013, piracy in the Gulf of Aden was largely eradicated. This military defeat, however, enabled foreign trawlers to resume illegally harvesting Somalia’s maritime wealth.¹²⁴ It also appears that the recent departure of international forces has encouraged pirates to return as well.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Eckstein and Schwarz argue that just as ‘the imperial slave ship’ exists at the heart of the ‘battle for modernity’, so too should the pirate ship stand in as ‘a foundational if ambivalent trope which both shapes and refracts negotiations of the modern’.¹²⁶ The ambivalent

120. United States Department of Transportation, ‘Economic Impact of Piracy in the Gulf of Aden on Global Trade’, U.S. Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration, 2010. Available at: https://www.marad.dot.gov/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Economic_Impact_of_Piracy_2010.pdf. Last accessed 16 March, 2018; ‘A Long War of the Waters’, *The Economist*, vol 394 (8664), 9 January 2010, p. 47–48.
121. Richard Miller, ‘Benfield Unveils Marine K & R: Policy’, *Business Insurance*, 21 November 2008. Available at: <http://www.businessinsurance.com/article/20081121/STORY/200014567?template=printart>. Last accessed 18 March 2018.
122. Carl Mortished, ‘Security Firms Spy New Jobs on High Seas’, *The Times*, 22 November 2008, p. 58.
123. Sasha Planting, ‘Ripe for the Picking’, *Financial Mail*, 28 August 2009. Available at: <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/3342de00-3565-4e98-9ce3-877c5788b78e/?context=1516831>. Last accessed 21 May 2018. Similarly, the former owner of Blackwater, Erik Prince, worked with the South African and UAE backed security firm (Saracen International) to create anti-pirate militias operating within Puntland. Spencer Ackerman, ‘Did Blackwater Founder Fund Somalia’s Pirate Fighters?’, *Wired*, 20 January 2011. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2011/01/did-blackwater-founder-fund-somalias-pirate-fighters>. Last accessed 17 May 2018.
124. Jessica Hatcher, ‘Illegal Overfishing and the Return of Somalia’s Pirates’, *Al Jazeera*, 6 October 2015. Available at: www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/10/illegal-overfishing-return-somalia-pirates-151006111159994.html. Last accessed 18 March 2018.
125. Jason Patinkin, ‘Somalia’s Pirates Are Back in Business’, *Foreign Policy*, 9 April 2017. Available at: www.foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/09/somalias-pirates-are-back-in-business. Last accessed 18 March 2018.
126. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, ‘Introduction: Towards a Postcolonial Critique of Modern Piracy’, in *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South*, eds. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 9–10.

relation between the pirate and modern capitalist economies originates from the fact that pirates inhabit a position that renders visible the violent accumulation central to capitalist production and circulation. In this way, pirate capitalism is not outside modern capitalist economies but rather mirrors and mimics it rather closely. The primary difference, however, remains the fact that pirates are deemed ‘enemies’ solely based on their audacity to engage in the enclosure of capital itself.

Let us return to the *MV Faina*, the Ukrainian ship flying the Belize flag of convenience captured by Sugule Ali and his colleagues. This incident fuelled a great uproar stemming from the concern that the cargo of 33 T-72 tanks, grenade launchers, antiaircraft weapons, and pallets of ammunition would find their way to terrorists. The United States dispatched a warship to prevent the weaponry from being unloaded. And, after a five month standoff, Ali and his partners received a \$3.2 million ransom payout, and the military hardware continued its voyage to the Kenyan port of Mombasa and eventually on to South Sudan.¹²⁷ While pirates made the headlines, little attention was paid to the fact that a shadowy Ukrainian company was making ‘underground arm shipments’ into a war zone in violation of international law.¹²⁸ One was deemed piracy; the other, business.

This liminal distinction between piracy and capitalism becomes even more telling as the economic and cultural figure of the pirate evolves to inhabit more than maritime spaces. The seamless intermodal connection between ‘movement by sea, rail, and truck’ increasingly conflates ‘ocean-space’ with the rest of the world economy.¹²⁹ As capitalist accumulation continues to evolve in ways that ‘capture’ and ‘cod[e]’ the ocean by breaking down the ‘land-sea binary’,¹³⁰ pirates similarly stake out an ever-amphibious presence within the world economy – operating on land, sea, and within cultural and cyberspace.

The increasingly ‘terraqueous territoriality’¹³¹ of the world economy is no less defined by primitive accumulation today, much of which still takes place within vast swaths of limited sovereignty. By no means should we be surprised, therefore, by the reoccurring figure of the pirate, both in shipping lanes, cyber space, on the radio, or in popular culture. We should be stunned, however, by the degree to which the Robinsonade fairy tales of *homo economicus* still pervades the constitutive fables of capitalist accumulation. The durability of these stories depends upon viewing the vast oceanic space of capitalism through the myopic lens of an isolated individual upon an unpopulated and fictional island. The willingness to posit Crusoe – and not the pirate – as the leading character in the story of capitalist accumulation demonstrates the violence that continues to define some (and not others) as villains living on the outskirts of the modern world economy.

127. Eichstaedt, *Pirate State*, 4.

128. Jeffrey Gettleman and Michael R. Gordon, ‘Pirates’ Catch Exposes Route of Arms in Sudan’, *The New York Times*, 9 December 2010, p. 11.

129. Philip E. Steinberg, *Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 165.

130. Liam Campling and Alejandro Colás, ‘Capitalism and the Sea: Sovereignty, Territory and Appropriation in the Global Ocean’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, first published online, 6 November 2017, pp. 2, 15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775817737319>.

131. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

When asked by Alexander the Great ‘what he had meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea’, the pirate responded: ‘What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth, I am called a robber, whilst thou who dost it with a great fleet art styled emperor’.¹³² More than two millennia later, Edward Teach and Sugule Ali might similarly respond: ‘What do you mean calling me a robber, while calling yourself a capitalist’.

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132. Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 174–5.