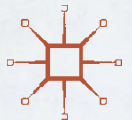




# KARL MARX AND THE POSTCOLONIAL AGE

★ RANABIR SAMADDAR ★



# Marx, Engels, and Marxisms

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Ranabir Samaddar

# Karl Marx and the Postcolonial Age

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four years ago, the debate that took place between Vivek Chibber and scholars of subaltern studies on the occasion of the publication of Chibber's *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* left me disappointed. Here was an opportunity to remove confusions and inadequate understandings, and clear up the ground for a deeper theorisation of the specifics of post-colonial condition under global capitalism, and discuss threadbare several related issues. But grandstanding prevailed at the cost of dialogue and clarity. Many found Chibber's conception of postcolonial theory narrow; and some pointed out that he had even refused to consider great anti-colonial thinkers like Mao or Fanon, Ho Chi Minh or Amílcar Cabral as vital elements in postcolonial thought. Chibber had approached his object—postcolonial thought—with set terms that never integrated Marxism with what can be regarded as a body of radical anti-colonial and postcolonial ideas. Equally, others found the defence by the subaltern studies scholars confined to refuting Chibber's criticism; they did not seem prepared to analyse what made postcolonial condition an integral part of global capitalism as well as a particular gradient in the globalisation of radical ideas, marked as it was with ambivalence towards global capitalism. For them, studying differences between the postcolonial condition and the Western condition was the main purpose of postcolonial thought.

In other words, polemics was unable to shed light on the specific reality sought to be represented by postcolonial thought: how Marxism could help unearth this reality, identify the fetish of difference, which nonetheless was rooted in this reality, and the significance of this particularity under global capitalism, especially in the neoliberal age. Both sides

steadfastly refused to engage in asking what constituted the meeting ground of neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial capitalism. It seemed as if both sides did not want to acknowledge the existence of anything by the name of postcolonial capitalism. Both sides refused to learn from Marx how to study a phenomenon, in this case capitalism in the postcolonial world. The quarrel was about the supposed purity or sanctity of a “thought”—how Marxist it was, or how different it was.

In writing this book, I wanted to move away from this mode of thinking.

Of course, the argument deserves merit, namely, that it is not enough to point out that capital and labour are not two banal universalisms with normative and epistemological presuppositions, inasmuch as it can be equally deservedly argued that it is not enough to point out the particularities—national, local, historical and of other kinds. The problem is when we move from the universal to the particular, from the universality of capital’s functioning to the particular zoning of its enactment. Chibber’s stance and the subaltern defence transformed the problem into a supposed antagonism between the champions of universalism and those of particularism. Marx would have been the last to approach the problem in this way. Marxism is not a seamless universalist epistemology or a gospel of universals. It is also not a sacred book of particulars.

This book was written in this polemical context. It is meant to analyse the problem of the relation between the global and the particular, universal and the specific, historical and the transcendental, and the abstract and the concrete. It intends to show that the emergence of what Marx called abstract labour is specific to capitalism, as the latter introduces a dynamics through which the dispersed, disparate labouring activities of producers are forced into a common phenomenon, called productive labour. Capital as a universal category thus involves the incorporation and absorption of particular mechanisms of production (labour) and distribution (market). Much of this book is devoted to explaining this dynamic and teasing out the political consequences of this formulation.

It also explains the dialectical relation between what Marx had called formal subsumption, that is where capital had subsumed the labour process as it found it, taken it over in the existing form, brought into being by other modes of production, and real subsumption where capital produces capital and the entire society functions towards producing relative surplus value made possible by a less personalised and less violent mode of value creation and extraction. Yet, as this book shows, both are needed for

capital's globalising role and mission, and they are complimentary to each other in this neoliberal age. The difference between the two processes indicates fissure as well as interrelation. The debate around the universalising role of capital and hence on the theme of "difference" is thus, beyond a point, sterile and purposeless. In fact, by harping on difference we only deny the global significance of the revolutionary ideas developed in the "South", by now securely ensconced in what we know as Marxism. This is the reason why Lenin and Mao are discussed in several places in this book, one that is devoted to the theme of Marx and the postcolonial question. The globalisation of the postcolonial predicament is the other site of what has been called the provincialisation of the West. Postcolonial theorists much in the manner of their opponent, Chibber, failed to probe this connection and offer compelling insights relating to the interface of neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial capitalism.

The neglect of Marx in understanding revolutionary dimensions of postcolonial condition and interrogating postcolonial politics is equally astounding. On one hand Marxist political theorists of the West have forgotten that in "most of the world" their political theorisation counts for very little, and except in the pages of famous Marxist and New Left journals these theorisations and philosophising do not relate to the broader world. On the other hand, postcolonial political theorists have damned Marx for being European and steadfastly refused to learn from Lenin or Mao or even Gramsci on how to understand Marx in taking revolutionary politics forward in conditions of "backward" capitalism and agrarian crisis. For them, Marx is outdated because class is dead, and it is time of the people—masses of petty producers, informal workers, urban dwellers, impoverished peasants and educated youth and the intelligentsia. In these flotsam and jetsam of life the State does not count; the government counts, but that, too, only through negotiations with the unorganised, rabble-roused masses. Hence, the discussions on class, people, populism, political subjecthood, power, autonomy, dual power and other related issues have become extraordinarily impoverished in postcolonial countries, at least in India. One cannot but be struck by the extreme scarcity of references to Marx's ideas in any random study of communist party and group literature on politics today. Once again, Marx is subject to a scissor-like operation and is taken out of the radical horizon of politics. This is the other reason for writing this book.

While writing I became aware of the immense value of the analyses, commentaries, debates and sentiments evident in the discussions among



communists worldwide in the 1950s to the 1970s: the postwar era thought to be outdated and no longer holding lessons for us. Likewise, we are often oblivious of the polemical and the dialogic context in which the classic works of Marx or Lenin or Mao were written. Any study of their formulations without reference to the debates, discussions and dialogues amidst which they took shape will lose half of its power. Marxism is nothing if it is not argumentative. Finally, the literature on the postcolonial condition also has been of great value. Even though in this book I have not concurred with it on several issues, these writings have been necessary to understand some of the dimensions of the postcolonial condition. This is the reason why I have written in the book that postcolonialism is like a commodity. We cannot bypass it; we cannot immerse ourselves in it. Being aware of the fetish of the postcolonial, we have to approach the problematic dialectically, and analyse it.

In writing this book I have incurred debts to quite a few colleagues and friends, who provided me with comments and suggestions on my ideas. My acknowledgements are to Etienne Balibar, Ritajyoti Bandopadhyay, Manuela Bojadzigev, Livio Boni, Andrew Brandel, Partha Chatterjee, Atig Ghosh, Giorgio Grappi, Mithilesh Kumar, Sandro Mezzadra, Iman Mitra, Prabhu Mohapatra, Brett Neilson, Immanuel Ness, Ned Rossiter and Samita Sen. Some of the draft chapters were presented for discussion in study classes, workshops and seminars at the Calcutta Research Group. Many participants enthusiastically commented on those presentations. My debt is to all of them including the organisers of those study meetings, in particular, Paula Banerjee, Samata Biswas and Anwesha Sengupta.

I am especially grateful to Terell Carver and Marcello Musto for the interest they took in my work. Their comments helped me in formulating some of the arguments.

Two final prefatory submissions: First, the postcolonial condition the book speaks of is a generic description, while there is huge and marked unevenness within the postcolonial world. Hence the title of the book speaks of the postcolonial age. Indian references have come easily in this book as the author is an Indian, but the idea has never been to suggest that the Indian condition prevails more or less in the same form in other postcolonial countries. The idea was to indicate the trajectory of postcolonial capitalism. Second, readers will notice that in this book I have used in some cases as reference more than one edition of a same book or article. Sometimes I chose one edition because the translated version there seemed better, sometimes only internet editions were available to me, and I could

only access the print edition much later or vice versa; in other cases I had to use whatever I could lay hold of. I wrote this book in the past two years while I was frequently travelling on work-related matters, and I could not carry with me all the necessary books and articles. I have standardised these references as far as possible, but inconsistencies may have remained. Readers may kindly forgive me for this.

Kolkata  
June 2017

Ranabir Samaddar

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# Introduction: The Postcolonial Condition as a Strategic Concept for Critiquing This World

## 1 THE BOOK PLAN

The Marx who will be found here is not the one whom we find in the overcrowded literature of campus Marxism. He will have some resemblance with the thinker found in some political journals in Europe and the United States, but only to a limited extent. This, of course, is understandable in view of the fact that the situation in Europe and North America is a particular one, different in many ways from what prevails in the greater part of the world. Hence there can be ground to say ‘their Marx’, ‘our Marx’. But this book does not intend to follow that line, however justified that line may be. Postcolonialism appears in this book as a strategic concept to understand the global condition today, and the Marx to be heard in the following pages at times loudly at times in echoes, is the Marx who is crucial for a strategic deployment of that concept. This Marx is not some esoteric thinker shining in individual glory, but a critical figure in a collective workshop of transformative and revolutionary ideas and practices in history, the symbol of a historical collective that emerged in this world in the last 150 years, who has always made sense to us through various mediations. Mediation means here the manifold resonance of the workshop of transformative history of life and society, the collective endeavour.

Beyond making the obvious observation, namely, that Marx is necessary to understand the postcolonial world, this book will also argue that without a rigorous understanding of the postcolonial world it will be impossible to return to Marx, rediscover his ideas. In short the relation between

an appreciation of the global salience of the postcolonial condition and grasping the transformative power of Marx's ideas is dialectical. We may recall Mao Tse Tung, who had famously said, "The target is the Chinese revolution, the arrow is Marxism-Leninism. We Chinese Communists have been seeking this arrow because we want to hit the target of the Chinese revolution and of the revolution in the East".<sup>1</sup> This book follows such a dialectical approach—the genre of political understanding that situates dialectics at its heart.

Towards the end of his life, while combating the errors of Trotsky, Lenin once said, "Politics is a concentrated expression of economics... my 'political' approach (is being) rebuked (by Trotsky and others) in a manner which is inconsistent and inadmissible for a Marxist. Politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism."<sup>2</sup> In this book, the argument for a strategic deployment of the concept of postcolonialism derives from a *political* understanding of the postcolonial condition. Politics is the basis for the return to political economy, to the ideas of Marx, to the question of social transformation. In the same spirit, the order of the chapters in this book follows the logic of a kind of political understanding, which calls for an integrated and over-determined approach. To give as an instance of the need of such an integrated and an over-determined approach: many readers of Marx are baffled by the way he concluded *Capital* (volume 1) with a discussion of primitive accumulation, and "spoiled" the economics of the book with history and political commentaries on conditions of accumulation. To them, the last pages are not perhaps integrated with the main content of the book, or remain a problem in the structure of the book. Therefore, in several celebrated analyses of *Capital* (by Karl Korsch, Roman Rosodolsky, Ernst Mendel and several others like Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar<sup>3</sup>) the treatment of the last pages appear as uncertain. Was the link between these pages and the entire book a logical link, or a historical link, or a structural link, or a simple descriptive extension of the book as it progressed towards its end? In the same way the pages in *Capital* on machinery and wages (parts V–VI) occupying the central sections of the book may also seem to hang uncertainly. In Etienne Balibar's words, "*Capital* is a theoretical machine", from which (to some) by implication then historical and real life is expunged. The focus is more on the *logic* of capital, also of the book *Capital*. However, is there some immanent logic in *Capital*? This book is based on the argument that there is no such immanent logic in *Capital* which, on the contrary, teaches us the dialectical

relation between logic and history. The unfolding of the logic in *Capital* is continuously negotiated and challenged by history, the history of living labour and time. The postcolonial condition forces us to read *Capital* in a new way, just as Lenin read Marx in a completely refreshing way. The postcolonial condition makes Marx once again relevant.

Chapter 2 address the question as to what is the postcolonial condition in terms of its predicament, that is to say a combination of contradictory circumstances—global and specific. This state of combination cannot be understood in terms of a theory of transition, it has to be understood as a state in its own right. The need for transformation of that condition demands that we analyse rigorously the paradoxes which define the postcolonial condition. The chapter takes up four sub-themes to explain the postcolonial predicament: (1) the post-colonial imprint on knowledge formation; (2) translation as part of producing the universal in the postcolonial age; (3) migrants as the subject of the postcolonial predicament; and (4) postcolonial labour as the mark of this situation. The chapter argues that these four issues are global in nature, and hence what we know as the postcolonial predicament is global, and not merely specific to certain ex-colonial countries.

Chapter 3 engages with the question of postcolonial accumulation through an interrogation of several phenomena featuring the neoliberal milieu today, such as the new dynamics of capital accumulation based on a combination of the most virtual forms and the primitive, new configurations of space in the forms of zones, corridors and walls, the extractive turn of economy and the emergence of transit labour as a critical form of labour which overturns our conventional idea of its composition. This chapter tries to suggest ways of: (1) analysing the dynamics of accumulation today; (2) conceptualising labour in the postcolonial condition; and (3) understanding the two phenomena—neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial capitalism—as two interrelated parts of the global capitalism of our time. The issue of reproduction of the postcolonial condition is important, and without studying the dynamics of circulation laid down by Marx in volumes II and III of *Capital*, we shall be at a loss to understand how the postcolonial condition is reproduced on a global scale as the fundamental characteristic of capitalism today. Production will be stripped of its fetish only when circulation can be conceptualised as part of what is understood as production, bound with the latter in dialectical unity.

From a discussion of accumulation, Chapters 4 and 5 move to a discussion of labour, *living labour*. Chapter 4 discusses in the framework of Marx's concept of living labour the postcolonial context of informal



conditions of work and migration. The chapter begins the discussion of postcolonial labour by reflecting on what Marx had termed *primitive accumulation*. The purpose in revisiting the question of primitive accumulation will be to reflect on the absolute relevance of Marx's formulations on conditions of life when it has been reduced to the minimum, so that capital can emerge. This indeed is the postcolonial situation where labour migrates from work to work, and the peasant becomes a semi-worker, becoming a full worker only to return to till his/her small parcel of land or work in others' fields when industrial, or semi-industrial, or semi-manufacturing, or even extractive, jobs become scarce. In this context it is important to note that footloose postcolonial labour is also a consequence of international investment chains in countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Colombia, Panama, Cambodia, Mexico, and so on, in garment production, iron ore mining, manufacturing of ancillary parts and instruments in industries such as automobile manufacture, electronics production, such as mobile telephony, leather products and toys. These are overwhelmingly export-oriented, with the production sites often being special zones. Wages are often low, the work force is markedly female, and the labour supervision rules strict and characterised by violence. Another aspect of the same scenario is the supremacy of logistical sites (like building financial corridors, special economic zones, upgrading ports for greater container-handling capacity, creating seamless multimodal transport hubs, building new towns, reprocessing e-waste, constructing highways, airports and logistical cities, etc.) which require and create footloose labour. In this circuit of commodity circulation, capital will continuously change form, and value-producing labour will be more and more distant from the final stage when the profit is realised from the capital invested, and revenue shared. The entire process requires money which, too, circulates alongside the circulation of commodities (as consumer and capital goods), determining the quantum of profit and revenue and its sharing. The postcolonial State is therefore eternally wavering between increasing money supply and restraining it, and as a sideshow of this monetary exercise between increasing interest rate and decreasing it. In the postcolonial world this is then the milieu of living labour, which precisely through its footloose life proves itself also as abstract—that abstract capacity, ready to be deployed for any productive activity.

Chapter 5 deepens the discussion on living labour through specific examination of the logistical expansion of postcolonial economy. For capital the desirable history of labour will be labour at work but not visible;

ready at hand but not always necessary; labour living but whenever required can soon be made dead. Shaping the postcolonial labour process in this model is the mission of global capital today. Everywhere, this seems to be successful—only to fail at the most unexpected hour. In this ghostly transformative exercise, money (increasingly in credit and digital mode) seems to be the most important tool. This chapter reminds us of the lesson Marx drew from the question of money in circulation—the supply chain of money: that it becomes a commodity like other commodities, appearing as forms of circulation of the same capital. Hence, even though money’s function is of one of capital, it appears as one of circulation, which either introduces the functions of productive capital or emanates from them. Money capital and not industrial capital is the spectral “other” of living labour in the postcolonial condition. The study of logistics has to take this as a central fact. Labour follows the commodity chain. In the process it also becomes a part of the commodity chain. The structure of one predicates the other.

In this way, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 try to suggest ways of: (1) analysing the dynamics of accumulation today; (2) conceptualising labour in postcolonial condition; and (3) understanding the two phenomena—neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial capitalism—as interrelated parts of global capitalism of our time.

Chapter 6, on the basis of the discussion in these three chapters, examines some of the contemporary theories of postcolonialism. Through an examination of relevant concepts such as abstract labour, concrete labour, need economy and informal conditions of work this chapter attempts to clarify the postcolonial problematic. It reinforces the arguments of this book, namely that without Marx we shall be at a loss to understand the problematic and will remain victim of various forms of the postcolonial fetish. Against this background, Chapter 6 picks up a few well known postcolonial works to show how some of them in their efforts to analyse the specifics of postcolonial condition have failed to understand Marx.

From this point the book through next three chapters (Chapters 7, 8 and 9) moves to politics. The discussion on transformative politics once again eschews any attempt to be comprehensive. Following the style of the previous chapters these chapters address select themes—this time themes of politics. The aim here is to reengage with certain themes in the writings of Marx, relevant to the task of understanding the postcolonial condition.

Chapter 7 discusses the problematic of dual power as a significant issue in the annals of revolutions. The politics, which constitutes the theory of

dual power and is able to make sense of this feature and build around it, is essentially a matter of organising this power, strengthening it, defending it and developing it as a feature of a particular situation—a point Marx and Engels had brought out in their writings on the revolutions of 1848, particularly in Germany. This can be called a “new practice of power”. We must understand that this insistence on a contextual reading of the problematic of dual power without relying on any philosophical truth poses a specific methodological problem, which relates to the way in which we read Lenin’s and Mao’s texts. In Lenin’s and Mao’s writings, dual power is not presented as a “doctrine”. They are dialogic compositions. Lenin’s *April Theses* is the best instance of that. We cannot forget that hundreds and thousands of militant activists died in armed struggles in postcolonial countries on the basis of an agenda of creating dual power or a “red political base”. Yet there was no pure “red” power that could be brought on this earth and could be sustained by a programme, unless this idea of dual power had emerged in that programme as a feature of the society at a particular juncture in the history of struggle. Perhaps then we can see in the history of dual power not only the presence of an irresistible idea, but also the demand that scientific analysis be given utmost importance with respect to great ideas that have animated the spirit of revolutions.

All these require that we study closely Marx’s use of notions like people, class, masses and in the present context, populism. Chapter 8 undertakes that task. In *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*<sup>4</sup> Etienne Balibar has pointed out that in Marx (particularly in *Capital*) the theory of historical materialism comes into conflict with the critical theory that Marx develops in his analysis of labour. Labour power is a property of the human body; but labour as a category becomes a social property under capitalism. Labour is the objective condition for the reproduction of capital, yet labour is the revolutionary subject. These two meanings of labour with which *Capital* resonates stand at the heart of the postcolonial condition, their engagement trapped in a deadlock—a site of truth still to be verified. Thus, exactly as in *Capital*, where these two senses of labour demonstrate an internal disparity which shows the promise of resolution only towards the end of the book (recall the sections on the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation), likewise under the postcolonial condition the promise of an emergence of a revolutionary form of subjectivity can never be shown as a natural attribute of a phenomenon, but always an attribute of a condition: a conjuncture of circumstances when class struggles transform into mass struggles, and thus a condition showing

promise but no guarantee. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 discuss this question from the angle of leadership, class, popular formations and the formation of power—in short, all that we mean by politics. In *Masses, Classes, Ideas* Etienne Balibar had also drawn our attention to the problematic of *people*. Why *people* have become the most important concept of politics in the postcolonial condition, how to understand the category of *people*, how to make sense of the overwhelming phenomenon called *populism*, how to analyse the over-determination of classes and masses in politics, and the way in which the theme of radical transformation of society depends on a resolution of these questions are the subject matter of these two chapters. The discussion on populism, a concept avoiding which means that no meaningful discussion on politics in the postcolonial condition can be held, takes place in this context.

Chapter 9 revisits, in this context, the theory of leadership and organisation with which the revolutionary writings of Marxism resonate. The discussion on the theory of leadership is linked to the issue of subject and plural subjectivities. This chapter therefore first discusses the domination of the theory of subject in Marxist academic writings. It revisits the issue of the subject as a product of idealist theorisation, and asks if we, as Marxists, cannot not allow ourselves to be trapped in endless discussions on the philosophical subject, then how can we theorise the political subject? In this context, the chapter brings in the relation between subject and leadership, and the emergence of the postcolonial political subject. The chapter recalls Marx, who emphasised that the proletariat, as a revolutionary subject, requires more than a common situation as wage-labourers vis-à-vis capitalists. He assigned the proletariat the key role in the coming of socialism not so much because of the misery it suffered as because of the place it occupied in the production process. That gave its leadership potentiality. He was also not unaware of the existence of various classes, groups, strata and subject positions in society, when he declared that the working class by emancipating the society emancipates itself. Its position as the subject of exploitation as well of leading the struggle for emancipation would be then a matter of past. In this double bind of subjectivity, any subject-centric thought can be only fragmentary. The history of the political subject in colonial and postcolonial history demonstrates this duality: its fragmentary nature and its universality, which implies the responsibility to lead.

But, of course, hovering over all these issues of economics and politics is the shadow of crisis—crisis as a concept, crisis as the reality of our time, the reality of all epochs of transformation. Time as an idea and as a reality

of our life plays a great role in our understanding of crisis. The last chapter—Chapter 10—seeks to find out from the writings of Marx and other revolutionaries various expositions on crisis—expositions made in times of crises. These writings are thus self-reflections of the times of crisis. Can there be a revolutionary philosophy of crisis, or to put it differently, is it possible at all to have a revolutionary philosophy not built around crisis, and the idea of crisis? For an answer, we must revisit the concept of crisis in the light of Marx and find out the stake that this concept has for our understanding of the postcolonial condition, the postcolonial age of capitalism, of postcolonial capitalism—without which a critique of neoliberal capitalism will remain incomplete.

In some sense this book argues, then, that some of the central concepts of *Capital* dealing with the contradictions of capitalism are resonant in the postcolonial context today. It is astonishing that back in 1867 Marx had ended the book's first volume with a critique of Wakefield and colonialism to point out that capitalist system does not end its ills and contradictions with colonial extension, but that on the contrary these contradictions are accentuated by colonialism.<sup>5</sup> The postcolonial condition is not an exception to capitalism or outside it, but is at the heart of capitalism today. Marx and the postcolonial condition is a global issue of study and practice today. Those who fight against neoliberal capitalism must situate a critique of postcolonial condition at its core. Without an awareness of the universal presence of the postcolonial condition the struggle against capitalism cannot proceed today.

## 2 A RETURN TO POLITICS

To think of the postcolonial condition through Marx, we have to learn from the way Marx thought of the whole question of inadequacy of thought in his time. We have to go to the fourth book of *Capital*, known as *Theories of Surplus Value*. There Marx exposes, criticises and comments on previous and contemporary economists to achieve a history of political economy in order to defeat the hegemony of bourgeois thought and in the process clarify his own ideas. Bourgeois thought is not simply a specific kind of thought, but one that is a part of the class relations in a bourgeois society. And as we know, the fourth volume of *Capital* was written before Marx wrote the other three volumes.

Thus, to know politics we must know its history, the history of postcolonial politics including anti-colonial politics. We must know specific breaks

in this history, conjunctures, dirt, bloody marks, struggles, contentions, deviations, deceptions, compromises, elations and ruptures, and understand thereby the specific form of power postcolonial politics has produced and the specific form of power that has given birth to postcolonial politics. We must see the specific form of the State that postcolonial politics is related to. One must soil one's hands in the labour of excavation in order to know the historical roots of this politics, the nature of our political practice. This is the theoretical knowledge we need for our practice and the clues to the required mode can be found through a diligent study of Marx.

The political in the postcolonial condition has a history to it. It is the modern history of capital, colonialism, independence, decolonisation, civil wars, neoliberal capitalism, democracy, struggles around land, socialist visions, communist movements, anti-colonial solidarity, women's movements, movements for social justice and environmental movements, and along with all these the history of famines, disasters and bloodbaths, as well as progress. There is no autonomy of politics and no fancy imagination of subjectivity here. Anti-colonial visionaries did not dream of such autonomy. Their practice meant muddling with determination through all these. Most of them, without knowing, made or anticipated Marxist critiques of state-centric politics and that is how they arrived at the "other" of bourgeois politics. It did not arrive through a critique of bourgeois political economy; but because politics was incomparably richer in the anti-colonial centuries, the critique of bourgeois politics came through a different route. The critique of capital arrived through other paths. We must study, therefore, the dynamics of the emergence of the political subject in the colonial and postcolonial condition.<sup>6</sup> We must study at the same time the history of the double effort of the anti-colonial visionaries: to build a State, yet not give to State what need not or must not be given. Therefore the idea or the spirit of the withering away of the State envisioned by Marx and Engels was built in the political thinking of the anti-colonial visionaries. They knew the value of an independent form of political power, known as national sovereignty, and national democracy, yet these were not products of a state-centric vision. Therefore, throughout the history of colonialism and postcolonial time, they wrestled with the domination of state power with counter-ideas of the power of society, communes, general strikes, cooperatives, autonomies of various forms, councils, peoples' assemblies and different forms of popular associations (sometimes known as *samaj*) and street associations and formations. The history of this counter-power

based on dialogic capacity will be perhaps never written. It will perhaps always exist as the other of the political power built around the State.<sup>7</sup>

Yet this history has to be imagined and anticipated in political practice. Clearly Marx and Engels saw in the disappearance of the State a contradictory process and not a time-lapse film of a vanishing subject. The State is necessary for reconstruction of society, yet it must not exist more than it is necessary for it to exist. In other words, as counter-power develops, the power of society—which is not classical political power but dialogic power—the State diminishes. If you like, this is the ultimate vision of dual power which was inserted in anti-colonial thinking through two long centuries' struggle for self-determination, autonomy, popular assemblies, mass councils and dignity as emancipation. The history of autonomies has been the framework for critical thinking in the colonial and postcolonial context. If the history of political power has been constructed around capital and colonial and neocolonial dominance, the history of counter-power is to be constructed or reconstructed around the history of autonomy. Such a kind of realisation explains the method of this anthology of expositions around the question of the relation between Marx and the postcolonial condition. The method is that of intertwining the productions of politics, autonomy and dialogue. Marx's writings on contemporary political events revolved around the central question of public power: What kind of public power the workers should strive for? Why should the workers struggle against the sort of public power the bourgeoisie has created, namely the State? As a form of public power why is the Commune unlike the bourgeois State? This is the question that again is at the heart of the notion of dual power, which later both Lenin and Mao raised. The critical political practices in the postcolonial condition have revolved around this issue, namely what kind of public power we want—that will be like a State, yet not a State: dialogic as well protective, enabling as well as suppressive of enemies, holding power yet decentralising and gradually diminishing by devolving both vertically and horizontally.

To understand the significance of Marx's teachings in this context, the old interpretive writings of the great Marxist intellectuals may not be of much use. In their place, we must dig into the concrete histories of politics, State, great directions and moments of great disjuncture in politics, popular assemblies and mobilisations, and the ideas that spurred them and were produced out of them. We must also see at the same time how the economy moved, how classes responded and how thinking along with these events proceeded on ways to reconceptualise politics. In the anti-colonial context

this was the logic of scientific discovery of the dynamics of struggles over political direction. We are, therefore, somewhat removed here from the Althusserian idea of scientific practice in Marxist philosophy<sup>8</sup> and far more removed from the equally attractive idea of the *Machiavellian moment* in modern history, where politics is conceived around centuries-long struggle for sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> Even though some have tried to view the birth of independent India and freedom from colonialism as “the righteous republic”,<sup>10</sup> the history of decolonisation, democracy and socialism in India cannot be interpreted in any way as a time when the new Indian republic confronted the problem of maintaining the stability of its ideals and institutions, and critical political thinking emerged as a response to a series of crises facing newly independent India seemingly on the cusp of destruction. The idea of the Machiavellian moment represents the synthesis of liberal ideology, bourgeois politics and republicanism in the form of popular sovereignty that would protect virtue. The Republic emerged in India not because a group of innovative, synthetic and cosmopolitan thinkers succeeded in braiding together two Indian knowledge traditions, one concerned with political and social questions, the other with religious questions and oriented toward transcendence, but because independence was achieved by anti-colonial struggles and critical thinking, and the Republic was an uneasy compromise between pressures from the popular masses and the power of the bourgeoisie and the landlord class backed by the colonial power. Yet it also true that Machiavelli cannot be reduced to a conception of politics around centuries-long struggle for sovereignty only, because it also inaugurates at the same time a line of political thinking and practice<sup>11</sup> that is not far from the one that anti-colonial politics evoked. After all we have to remember that in Marx’s historical and political writings, the “republic” appears to be split into the bourgeois republic and the political form in which public power takes on the shape.

### 3 A RETURN TO POLITICAL ECONOMY

But how can the analysis of postcolonial politics be freed from idealistic interpretations, esoteric talk of floating subjectivities, state-centric institutional discourses and vulgar empiricism? What is the way to ground such an analysis in a materialist framework? Marx is once again relevant to that search. In the postcolonial context, for instance in India, there is a resurgence of exercises in political economy challenging the crude economists busy peddling their theories of growth, satisfaction and productivity.



These exercises are significant as contributions to an understanding of postcolonial capitalism. They help us to understand the ongoing reorientation of postcolonial politics towards facilitating neoliberal growth and clearing the grounds for further accumulation. A return to political economy in understanding the postcolonial condition is now a noticeable phenomenon, and we must welcome this development. It will allow us to reengage with Marx in deeper ways than ever. There are four consequences of this development:

First, moving beyond a centre–periphery framework or making a simple distinction between the North and South we can now go deeper into an analysis of the postcolonial condition. This is not to suggest that there is no North or South in today’s world. But there may be South in the North and North in the South. A casual look at the lists of rich people in so-called countries of the South, and on the other hand a look into the growing immiseration and precariousness in the North will tell us of the intermingling of the North and the South. But more importantly, following the economic developments in the present epoch of globalisation marked by neoliberal capitalism we are now compelled to look closer and deeper into the economic realities in the postcolonial world, in particular the realities of development of capitalism there. The question is: does it show any difference with the historical experience of capitalism in the North (which is also the West),<sup>12</sup> and how shall we deploy Marx to understand this still-developing reality? Globalisation suggests interlinks between the North and the South and increasing differentiation within the societies in both the worlds. Globalisation also prompts us to find the causal dynamics in trade, money and power. Yet one has to go beyond the surface reality of trade, money and power, which suggests a trade-centric explanation, and carefully examine the production dynamics and the specific ways production and circulation have combined as mutually determining and defining entities. This will be the way to make sense of the developing capitalist relations in the South, which are bringing in changes in class relations. In short, the postcolonial condition is not the name of a condition of stagnation. It is a stereotype that numbs our critical understanding. The return to political economy takes place in this context.

Second, there is a renewed attention on the role of political processes as actors in developments in economy, and along with that a renewed attention on the institution of the State and all other elements that indicate class relations, such as the compradors, the corporate class, other forms of economy, modes of accumulation and the discourse of political economy,

which is itself a part of the said class relations. As a consequence, political, historical, social, even literary, writings today abound with commentaries on class relations. In short, the over-determination of politics and economy should not be difficult to understand.

Third, the return to political economy has ushered in a more holistic style of analysis, in which the peasants and workers—or the agrarian sector and the industrial sector—or the formal and the informal processes and organisations of production, are not seen any more as absolute opposites of each other, but as parts of a capitalist whole locked in a dialectical unity. Closer attention to the ways peasants are joining the working class in small-scale and informal mining and others sectors such as the construction industry exposes the myth of a continuing self-subsisting agriculture today. Recall Lenin, who, faced with the arguments of many that Russia was exceptional to the history of capitalism (reminding us of many post-colonial scholars of our time preaching the exceptionality of postcolonial condition), wrote *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899)—not to deny that there was a peasant question, but to establish that the peasant question was part of the problem of capitalism. In that book he brought forward Marxist analysis on the agrarian question by focusing on the role of peasant differentiation in the development of a home market, and he discussed issues of labour surplus, marketable surplus and investment surplus, and the role of merchant capital in the agrarian sector. Yet Lenin never argued that one had to wait for the full development of capitalism to begin the struggle for social transformation, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* is instructive of Lenin's analysis of the specificities of Russian capitalism due to the “simultaneous existence of the most advanced forms of industry and semi-mediaeval forms of agriculture”<sup>13</sup> and helps us to understand why, 20 years later, the Russian October Revolution succeeded, with land being one of three words that formed the slogan of the revolution (“Bread, Peace and Land”). The book also remains significant as a model to practise the concept of *simultaneity*. Simultaneity was the key to Lenin's idea of *chain*, and as a strategist he accentuated the concept of simultaneity, and following the idea of the chain, the key notion of the *link*. He was not a vulgar empiricist. Amidst observing all possible empirical details he theorised what was the link between all these facts, what was at stake in the co-presence of certain facts, and therefore the strategic road ahead.

Fourth, the return to political economy enables us to appreciate the actually existing range of labour forms—an overwhelming part of them

marked by what is known as “informal” conditions, that is, informal term of work, informal agreement, informal labour process, informal nature of the job performed, informal nature of relations between those who work, also between those who work and those who own capital, and at times even the informal nature of the supply chain including the front and back ends. Yet we have to note that the informal and formal conditions are woven into one another in the structure of the industry. Earlier, we used to divide the economy into formal and informal sectors on the assumption that in certain sectors labour would be highly formalised, while in others it will be to the contrary. Apart from the fact that there is an epistemological problem (concerning the question of “form”) involved in this division, today the extensive presence of informal labour conditions in economies—globally, nationally, in sectors—signals some major changes: (1) as if there is a law in the interest of capital ordaining the informal conditions of labour in almost all spheres of economy including the so-called formal; (2) these informal conditions are dominant in those productive sectors that can be described broadly as “extraction”; and, (3) labour deployed in the domain of extraction will be mostly in transit. It may be thus termed as “labour in transit”, “transit labour” or “migrant labour”; in other words, labour transiting from one site to another, one form to another, resulting in multiplication of the forms of labour.<sup>14</sup> These three features taken together clearly signal what we term the postcolonial condition.

One must also note that the four features noted above are interlinked. From opening up new areas for mining to building new towns, to recycling of waste including e-waste, to reprocessing the ultimate of biological resources, mother’s milk—extraction seems to be the hallmark of the expansion of the neoliberal economy. This forms the background to the return of primitive accumulation in our age. Yet this is not the age of primitive capitalism. On one hand, organised, large-scale, centralised production devours small- and medium-scale production; on the other hand, we can witness the extensive emergence of labour in decentralised and informal production processes, particularly in extractive sectors, contributing to primitive accumulation. Given this paradox, we need to investigate: what causes this return, this renewed attention to what is considered as “nature” as the site of renewal of capital? And what does it do to labour form and reproduction of labour power? Also, how does this return become a condition for neoliberal growth? The postcolonial condition seems to be the most appropriate site for such investigation, exactly as

England had appeared to Marx as the most appropriate site for studying capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century.

For a researcher from a postcolonial country this foundational understanding is important. The postcolonial setting of a flexible labour form that ranges from plough to pick is essential for the neoliberal transformation of the global economy where the most virtual forms of accumulation (sovereign debt, futures, forward trading, manipulation in commodity pricing in global market, quantitative easing, new forms of fiscal and policy restructuring, etc.) combine with the most primitive, whose characteristic element is the activity of extraction—the labour of extraction and extraction of labour.

In short, the return to political economy forces us to engage with Marx on one of the most complex theoretical lessons he offered for socialists and communists, namely the relation between what he termed “abstract labour” and “concrete labour”, and we can add “necessary labour” and “productive labour”. How shall we increase our understanding of labour in concrete, therefore in manifold form and in its immanent singularities, and at the same time renew our understanding of labour in abstract as the core of our life? Is this not the challenge that the postcolonial condition, which means always escaping standardisation of labour, poses for us? But contrary to the attitude of the pluralists, we are not arguing that this means individuation. It means, as distinct from individuation, labour as justice, “as fire”,<sup>15</sup> as that is what is exploited, and as that and nothing else needs emancipation. Therefore, not singularisation but immanent singularities... Yet we would be completely mistaken to think that Marx teaches us to make labour sovereign. No, all that Marx tells us is that labour is that which forms and shapes the thing, it is neither servile nor sovereign. It escapes power; it is the common, the ordinary that makes ever new, immanent plenitudes possible. Thus it is only the postcolonial condition that educates us on forms of labour, including caring labour and all other activities of social reproduction, which are directly productive of value for capital.

Forms of labour become productive or unproductive only in relation to the position they occupy within the process of value-formation in capitalism. Nothing is inherently productive or unproductive, that is to say productive or unproductive of surplus value. The postcolonial forms of labour and activities (caring or extracting) are essential to the making of value, and the reproduction of labour power would be impossible without these forms of labour. Or, small-scale and artisanal mining, idealised by a section

of sociologists as evidence of peasant resilience, becomes essential for global production of steel and the construction industry in capitalism, and thus becomes productive. In short, the varying and discrete forms of labour, such as caring labour or artisanal mining (which is mostly extractive), characteristic of postcolonial capitalism, suggest the emancipative possibility of labour under the postcolonial condition, indicated by Marx when he said that capital as the site of surplus labour was equally and at the same moment the positing and not-positing of necessary labour. As he said, “It exists only in so far as necessary labour both exists and does not exist.”<sup>16</sup> It is the postcolonial condition that suggests the possibility of labour returning to self.

#### 4 POSTCOLONIAL TIME

The postcolonial condition is also a statement on time. To some observers the postcolonial condition indicates arrested social and economic progress, or development trapped in a quagmire of politics and backwardness; to others it indicates nature; to still others a condition that carries traces of ancient communism, and all that an advanced capitalist society has long passed—a past that this world finds only in colonial and the postcolonial present. If Marx is classified as the signature of capitalism, postcolonial condition is the signature of anthropology, the anthropological condition of man. We can see in this projection a specific projection of the idea of time, also a specific politics of time. Any engagement with Marx in the postcolonial condition must reckon finally with the duplicity of time—for them one kind of time, for us a different time.

Walter Benjamin famously wrote of the homogeneous empty time of capitalism, yet capitalism in the postcolonial condition betokens heterogeneous time.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Benjamin can be read differently today: in his theses on the “concept of history”, known as “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), he introduced the concept of homogeneous empty time to indicate the phenomenon of historicism, particularly historicist positivism, which universalised and flattened the idea of progress, and expelled every inconsistency out of it. Benjamin opposed this kind of historical sense with a historical materialist sense, which allowed for breaks and moved for zero hours in history. In his words, “History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogeneous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now”,

Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. Materialist historiography differs from it as to method more clearly than from any other kind. Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock... A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognises the sign of a messianic cessation of happening, or put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it, in order to blast a specific era out of the lifework. As a result of this method the life-work is preserved in this work and at the same time cancelled; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history...<sup>18</sup>

And then, Benjamin had added that time in capitalism is homogeneous because it is not affected by particular events, and is imagined as one by all of its subjects. It is empty because any number of events can be put inside it (by logic, any number of discrepant events can be also taken out of it). “Homogeneous empty time” corresponds to a notion of history, where disparate events of disparate actors are understood as occurring simultaneously in time, and moving towards same direction. Yet the fact is that national and anti-colonial revolutions did not occur in empty or homogeneous time. The directions of anti-colonial revolutions and the postcolonial nation states were not same. As Benjamin noted, the transformations in history occur in moments of immediacy, blasting particular moments of the present and the past out of the linear sequence.

Yet, ironically, time is the plank on which the stereotype of the postcolonial condition builds and flounders. Consider: if it is considered that the postcolonial condition is a special one escaping the standard time and the standard timeline of capitalism, how then are we to account for *differential* functioning of capitalism and the differential operation of capital? On the other hand, if it is considered that forms of capitalism *simultaneously* exist, thereby making it possible for time to appear as homogeneous under capitalism, how are we to account for specific global–local relations? Perhaps we need a closer attention to anti-colonial revolutions as interruptions in bourgeois presentation of time. In short, the postcolonial condition not only indicates a certain imagination of space, it also indicates a certain notion of time. The idea of the postcolonial predicament being global rests on the mutual constitution of space and time. This then

is the central question in making time the most crucial aspect of studying the postcolonial condition. Or, to put it differently, time demonstrates a structure shaped by the apparatuses of capitalism.

We can now reformulate the central question as directly as possible: What is the “post” in postcolonial condition? What time does the “post” indicate? and what is the condition in which the time designated as the “post” congeals itself? Does it point at specific countries that have undergone the decolonisation process with all its contradictions and complexities? Does it mean the continuities of colonialism after colonialism left the scene? Does it mean a style or mode of analysis, and if so what are the marks of this style and mode? Or, does it mean global continuities of colonialism after colonialism was over as a historical phase? Perhaps, all these posers are relevant, and all their answers are necessary for understanding what the postcolonial condition is.

Yet, while finding answers to these questions we must not forget that these questions have a history to them. One has to only recall that in the four decades of decolonisation in the last century (1940s–1970s) the term “postcolonial” was rarely used. The widely used term was “ex-colonial”, which did not express any condition but more a fact that these countries had just come out of colonial rule and exploitation. The more important question was: what path should these nations now take? One section of communists held that, aligning with local bourgeoisie, the liberated people now should develop a “national democratic path”, while another section held that the path was to fight against the compradors, the imperialists or the neocolonialists, and on that basis develop “people’s democracy”,<sup>19</sup> which meant the political rule of a united front of workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie and all other patriotic sections of society. This could be developed, some belonging to the second group of opinions argued, through peasant revolutions leading to full national independence.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the discussion was over path, and not over a supposed condition of immobility, or any discourse of a special cultural condition. It was thus a political question concerning the conduct of the nations in the post-Second World War era, with several nations becoming nation states on attaining independence. The era of decolonisation as indicated earlier stretched up to the 1970s. Instead of getting resolved the nation question seemed to have flared up again. Communists talked of national revolution, national democracy, new democracy and the perspective of a new path for independent nations to escape dependence, backwardness, stagnation and neocolonial control, and take a steady route to self-reliance and development with international socialist help.

The dependency theorists talked of neocolonialism and core–periphery structure of the world to which these nations were bound.<sup>21</sup> The Western liberal and behavioural commentators strategised how these nations could be incorporated in the capitalist world. If Gunnar Myrdal spoke of *Asian Drama*, the communists replied with *Asian Dilemma*.<sup>22</sup> The concept of postcolonialism displaced this political context. Ex-colonial countries as a concept was out, we became postcolonial. The old political debates over life and death of peoples and nations under capitalism were expunged from the new discourse.<sup>23</sup> Postcolonialism became in time a theory (postcolonial theory) far removed from the moment of decolonisation marked by battles and wars involving millions of people searching for paths towards independence, freedom, democracy and a non-capitalist development. Over time, postcolonial theory became postcolonial studies, which required prestigious academic centres and institutional pastures of intellectual pursuit. The counter-revolution in politics was now complete with counter-revolution in the realm of idea.

As communist movements worldwide weakened, efforts towards achieving national independence experienced setbacks due to imperial interventions and counter-revolutions in ex-colonial countries, and as globalisation set in the wake of technological changes, restructuring of capitalism, and new modes of accumulation world over including countries of the South, nation appeared as a salient form with specific cultural attributes.<sup>24</sup>

Readers will now understand as to why this book is neither a contribution to postcolonial theory nor an exercise in postcolonial studies. It speaks of the postcolonial as a *condition, an age*—global, yet local in many ways—and as a *predicament*, an age that speaks of a condition with its contradictions, a site of new struggles, contradictory possibilities, and new transformations. The postcolonial condition tells us of time, and how time creates its own politics, which then proceeds to subvert the specificity of time itself. After all, is this not what Marx teaches us all along and Walter Benjamin had tried to indicate in his unique, mystic way?

## 5 THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION AS A STRATEGIC CONCEPT

We are thus using the concept of the postcolonial condition in a strategic sense, which denotes the history of a specific idea, its trajectory, various connotations around it, and the current moment in which the world finds itself. In order to appreciate the strategic possibilities of the concept and add rigour to the deployment of the concept let us first summarise some



of the fundamental features of this condition. The term “the postcolonial condition” denotes situations in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America which were once colonies or semi-colonies and are now independent. It also denotes the neocolonial control that imperial powers may have or had over all or some of them. Further, it points towards some of the specific ways in which global capitalism has developed in the last 200 years or more. It suggests also the hold of the colonial history and colonial structure of economy over the once-colonial powers, and indicates specific economic and power relations between the once-colonial powers and the postcolonial countries. It indicates specific fault lines (such as gender, caste, race, religion, etc.) around which postcolonial accumulation has proceeded. Besides all these, the phrase is a mark of the combination of the most advanced and primitive forms of accumulation. We can also say that due to all these reasons, labour in the postcolonial context assumes heterogeneity, and transit labour appears as a critical feature marking the boundaries of labour forms. This is because of the fact that the development of capitalism in the postcolonial context takes several new paths including forming special zones of accumulation, differently constructed corridors of supply and hubs of production that are meshed with circulation. In this context, politics in postcolonial countries is fundamentally about finding a non-capitalist path of development and is therefore continuously remaking the democratic theory. In other words, the postcolonial condition is a challenge to the organic link between democracy and capital, and calls for new definitions and practices of the popular as well as the nation, autonomy, sovereignty and dialogue.

Yet we must be particular about the way we use the notion of “condition”. Condition as a notion (combining the meanings of situation and bind or stipulation) has a long and tortured history with both phenomenological and epistemological underpinnings.<sup>25</sup> The usage of this notion can be both explanatory and transformative that is, radical, and revolutionary. Friedrich Engels’ famous book of 1845, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, was a study of a situation, yet it became immensely influential for its method in his lifetime and after. The deployment of the notion of class, analysis of capitalist urbanisation, report on public diseases (smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough), mortality and public health, commentary on the industrial revolution, and the implication that the condition of industrial workers could be changed only with a workers’ revolution, became one of the master compositions in revolutionary literature. Any attempt to understand this involves taking a

step back from the actual empirical evidence as that confronted Engels in 1840s and looking more at the methodology employed. Here is what Engels said on his own book 40 years later,

The state of things described in this book belongs to-day, in many respects, to the past... Though not expressly stated in our recognised treatises, it is still a law of modern Political Economy that the larger the scale on which capitalistic production is carried on, the less can it support the petty devices of swindling and pilfering which characterise its early stages...

The revival of trade, after the crisis of 1847, was the dawn of a new industrial epoch... The competition of manufacturer against manufacturer by means of petty thefts upon the workpeople did no longer pay. Trade had outgrown such low means of making money; they were not worthwhile practising for the manufacturing millionaire, and served merely to keep alive the competition of smaller traders, thankful to pick up a penny wherever they could... The largest manufacturers, formerly the leaders of the war against the working-class, were now the foremost to preach peace and harmony... Thus the development of production on the basis of the capitalistic system has of itself sufficed—at least in the leading industries, for in the more unimportant branches this is far from being the case—to do away with all those minor grievances which aggravated the workman's fate during its earlier stages... Accordingly, the most crying abuses described in this book have either disappeared or have been made less conspicuous. Drainage has been introduced or improved; wide avenues have been opened out athwart many of the worst "slums" I had to describe. "Little Ireland" has disappeared, and the "Seven Dials" are next on the list for sweeping away. But what of that? Whole districts which in 1844 I could describe as almost idyllic, have now, with the growth of the towns, fallen into the same state of dilapidation, discomfort, and misery. Only the pigs and the heaps of refuse are no longer tolerated... Police regulations have been plentiful as blackberries; but they can only hedge in the distress of the workers, they cannot remove it...

What I consider far more important... is the revival of the East End of London. That immense haunt of misery is no longer the stagnant pool it was six years ago. It has shaken off its torpid despair, has returned to life, and has become the home of what is called the "New Unionism;" that is to say, of the organisation of the great mass of "unskilled" workers. This organisation may to a great extent adopt the form of the old Unions of "skilled" workers, but it is essentially different in character. The old Unions preserve the traditions of the time when they were founded, and look upon the wages system as a once for all established, final fact, which they at best can modify in the interest of their members. The new Unions were founded at a time when the faith in the eternity of the wages system was severely shaken; their

founders and promoters were Socialists either consciously or by feeling; the masses, whose adhesion gave them strength, were rough, neglected, looked down upon by the working-class aristocracy... we see these new Unions taking now the lead of the working-class movement generally, and more and more taking in tow the rich and proud "old" Unions.

Undoubtedly, the East Enders committed colossal blunders; so have their predecessors, and so do the doctrinaire Socialists who pooh-poooh them... And for all the faults committed in past, present, and future, the revival of the East End of London remains one of the greatest and most fruitful facts of this *fin de siècle*, and glad and proud I am to have lived to see it.<sup>26</sup>

Narrating a condition is then the starting point of a critique, because the critique develops along the interstices of a condition, on its margins. Engels had two such in mind: the historically contingent nature of what he was describing and the revolutionary dynamics that a condition may have but is hiding. We are using the postcolonial condition in this double sense: its historically contingent nature and its transformative possibility. To appreciate both we need Marx. To the question, namely, since we all live inside those relations that make up the conditions, how can we get hold of this "insight into connectedness"? Marx's answer was that we needed to engage in a critique of political economy—the other, the hidden site of a condition. Critique was thus the weapon with which the condition was to be exposed and the reification of condition was to be torn asunder. "Once insight into the connectedness has been gained, all theoretical belief in the permanent necessity of existing conditions collapses before the practical collapse".<sup>27</sup>

Taking cue from Marx, critical postcolonial approach makes clearest its opposition to what passes as postcolonial studies when the latter deals with the issue of *identity*. Postcolonial studies revolve overwhelmingly around identity and identities (nation, culture, etc.). As against *identity*, critical postcolonial approach poses the question of the *subject*. It thinks that the absence of a singular subject is not a deficiency and that in order to cope with this deficiency it does not have to immerse in identities. Rather, the lack of a so-called singular subject may indicate a new quality in the programme of social transformation. Differential capitalism creates differences, and then puts these differences in a hierarchical order and valorises them. The task of critical postcolonial approach in such condition is then to create a concrete universal (a subject) out of the multiplicity. The subject is created only through what can be called *radical inclusion*, which means to include in the formation of the subject of resistance and transformation, yet retain the process of a continuous expansion of multiplicity. Dispersion and multiplicity are parts

of the postcolonial condition, which as mentioned earlier is marked by, on one hand, virtual and post-Fordist modes of accumulation and, on the other hand, by primitive modes of accumulation. And yet this dispersion and multiplicity does not destroy the formation of the political subject. By reinforcing the principle of autonomy (as against a state-centric attitude, governmentalism, etc.) it revives the idea of *commune*, the collective and the common, and recomposes the subject.

All these themes and issues will come back again and again in the course of this book. And each occasion of that return will signify the obligation of a postcolonial argument to struggle against the condition of its own existence, and therefore a struggle between a critical postcolonial approach (which is transformative) and postcolonial studies (which takes the postcolonial condition as given and immutable). Marx is essential for us to make this distinction and clarify the fundamental opposition between two strands of postcolonialism, because if postcolonial condition is the content, the form (of knowledge) it gives rise to is in constant struggle with the former, which results on one hand in the shedding of forms, and on the other a “transformation of the content”.<sup>28</sup> In other words, critical postcolonial approach may accept the frameworks and language of existing postcolonial condition, but it does so in order to pull at their threads and to focus critique on the accepted concepts. That is the point of heresy.

The accepted field of postcolonial studies built itself on diverse literary texts and audiovisual material composed in the nationalist milieu, and developed stereotypes of them. Some of these texts belong to the early genre and in time became canonical. The point is not to deny the relevance of these texts, but to examine their possible openness and find the feeble historical core now unrecognisable in a maze of legends. This will be one of the elements of a critical postcolonial approach, which has to base itself on how Marx dealt with concepts and their respective histories. Not only he read the concepts in a new way (for instance, labour, value, surplus, etc.), but in the process he transformed the given histories of those concepts. Marx did not simply play with Hegel’s concepts to have academic satisfaction or because of derision. He handled them in a strong sense, the action of a real drama, in which old concepts desperately played the role of something absent or nameless, in order to call onto stage something that would become present thereby. “The old concepts only produced their presence in their failures, in the dislocation between the characters and their roles.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the crisis of postcolonial theory is the crisis in the postcolonial condition—the crisis that is known as the post-colonial condition.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. Mao Tse Tung, "Reform our Study", May 1941, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung* III (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1960), p. 22.
2. V.I. Lenin, *Once Again on the Trade Unions*, 1921—<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/jan/25.htm> (accessed on 26 January 2016).
3. For instance, Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: New Left Books, 1970); significantly we find in *Reading Capital* the following remark that seems to recognise the problem yet appears unable to come to terms with it: "The analysis of Primitive Accumulation is part of the field of diachronic study, but not *in itself* part of the definition of the periods of transition (to capitalism). In fact, the analysis of primitive accumulation, of the *origin* of the capitalist mode of production, gives an element by element genealogy which passes through the transition period, but which in the same movement ascends to the heart of the previous mode of production. The outline definitions which can be borrowed from it must therefore be related to a different analysis which is not an analysis of the *origins* but one of the *beginnings* of the capitalist mode of production, and which in consequence does not proceed element by element, but from the point of view of the whole structure. In the study of *manufacture* we have a notable example of this analysis of the beginnings. The forms of transition are in fact necessarily modes of production in themselves."—<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1968/reading-capital/ch03.htm> (accessed on 28 January 2016); See also Roman Rosodolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital"* (London: Pluto Press, 1977). Rosodolsky views the section on primitive accumulation as a question of becoming—how the wage worker becomes a wage worker. He wrote, "Marx's examination of surplus capital showed us that, 'as soon as capital has become capital as such, it creates its own presuppositions, i.e. the possession of the real conditions of the creation of new values without exchange—by means of its own production process. These presuppositions, which originally appeared as conditions of its becoming ... now appear as results of its own realisation ... as posited by it—not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence! 'What follows from this, however, is that the conditions of the becoming of capital are distinct from the capitalist mode of production itself and must be explained outside of it. This is not only of importance in refuting the evasions of the apologists, which were mentioned in the previous chapter. 'What is much more important for us', says Marx, 'is that our method indicates the points where historical investigation must enter in, or where bourgeois economy as a merely historical form of the production process points beyond itself to earlier historical modes of production.'" (Chapter 20, p. 268); Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975) excludes any

discussion of primitive accumulation, though it discusses neocolonialism and unequal exchange. Even the glossary does not show awareness of it.

Karl Korsch gave a more nuanced observation in “Introduction to Capital” (1932), trans. T. M. Holmes, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/19xx/introduction-capital.htm> (accessed on 9 March 2016); Korsch wrote, “Finally he (Marx) addresses himself, with the same merciless and methodical realism to this ‘economically’ unsolved and still open-ended question. He too proposes not an economic, but an *historical answer*—although in the last analysis his solution is not a theoretical one at all, but rather a *practical* one that infers from past and present history a developmental tendency projecting into the future. It is only when we appreciate clearly the way in which Marx deals with the question of ‘primitive Accumulation’ that we can understand the proper relation of this final part to the foregoing parts of his book, and also the position within Part 8 of the penultimate chapter, which concludes the historical examination of the origin and development of the acculturation of capital with a treatment of the ‘Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation’. These considerations also make clear the compelling methodological reasons why ‘The So-Called Primitive Accumulation’ belongs at the end, and not at the beginning or in the middle of *Capital*. It was for these reasons that Marx positioned it there, and, for the same reasons, the reader too should save it up until the end.” (italics author’s).

4. London: Routledge, 1994.
5. On this David Harvey, *Reading Marx’s Capital, Volume 1, Class XII, Chapters 26–33* (lecture on 16 September 6 2008, audio)—<http://david-harvey.org/2008/09/capital-class-12/> (accessed on 26 January 2016); Harvey points out how by combining a critique of primitive accumulation with a critique of colonialism Marx squared up his engagements with Adam Smith (with the latter’s rhetoric of market as a natural institution) and Hegel (with Hegel’s rhetoric of rights) whose writings implied that capitalism could be peaceful. Marx had to reemphasise that state violence, in the form of regulations, laws, conquests and coercive measures, was not only evidence of the violence of capitalism and the production of the working class as a process, but was at the core of the process of accumulation itself.
6. Chapter 9 discusses this in detail; it also offers a theoretical–historical account of the question.
7. Some of what I am suggesting can be found in Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Demands of Liberty: Civil Society in France since the Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) and *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

8. On this, see Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), especially Chapter 3, “Science, Ideology, and Philosophy”, pp. 158–205; to be fair to Louis Althusser, he wrote that the very existence of historical materialism made it difficult for philosophy to exercise its traditional function of reconciling the category of the scientific with the status quo. Marxism, “causes a complete upset in philosophy: not only by forcing philosophy to revise its categories in order to bring them into line with the new science and its effects, but also, and above all, by giving philosophy the means, in terms of an understanding of its real relation to class struggle, of taking responsibility for and transforming its own practice”—*Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 174.
9. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).
10. Ananya Vajpei, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
11. On this, Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizio Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), in particular Chapter 2, “Virtue and Fortune: The Machiavellian Paradigm”, pp. 37–98.
12. The late Giovanni Arrighi was on the verge of grasping the issue at stake when he wrote *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century* (London: Verso, 2007) but he died soon after (2009). While Arrighi correctly located the shift of capitalism to newer territories in the South, his theoretical formulations were constrained because of his attachment to world system theory. *Adam Smith in Beijing* can be seen as a sequel to his *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of our Times* (London: Verso, 1994). It remains unclear in the works, particularly in *Adam Smith in Beijing*, what changes the trajectory of accumulation, precisely because he ignores the particularities of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation in the newer territories, in the postcolonial context in countries like India. Neoliberal capitalism broke the existing accumulation system and ushered in new dynamics by enhancing in specific ways the roles of extraction, finance, primitive accumulation, trade and a broad-scale restructuring of planks of production. *Adam Smith in Beijing* is very much a story of the decline of the United States. The main lesson of the book is not so much how capitalism advances in the South, but that the capacity to generate and attract excess capital is what sustains hegemons. In fact Arrighi argued in that book that the key to being a hegemon was to control finance and capital, not labour or technology. This was a continuation of his argument he developed also in *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (with Beverly Silver; University of Minnesota Press, 1999), which traced the rise

- and decline of Holland and then Britain as world economic centres and located the present position of the United States against those trajectories. —See also review of the book by Frank Dobbin, *American Journal of Sociology*, 115, 2009, pp. 293–95; Arrighi however noted before his death that while in Africa massive dispossession of peasantry hindered capitalist growth, in China capitalism produced development because people had not lost access to resources, and the State had not surrendered to the market. See on this, William I. Robinson, “Giovanni Arrighi: Systemic Cycles of Accumulation, Hegemonic Transitions, and the Rise of China”, *New Political Economy*, Volume 16 (2), 2011, pp. 267–280.
13. V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Collected Works*, Volume 3 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961), p. 394 n; on this see also, Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), Chapter 18, “From Populism to Marxism”, pp. 406–448. Significantly, the subtitle of Lenin’s book, often ignored, was, *The Process of the Home Market for Large-Scale Industry*.
  14. Samita Sen defines transit labour as, “...I would suggest that we see this at the intersection of two major conceptual grids characterising the understanding of labour in the present: first, transitional forms of labour, which are inextricably related to transitions in mode of production, involving change in forms of labour arrangements, shifts in, creation or closures of labour markets, and in types and structures of labour deployment; and, second, transitory labour, which may be considered in chronological/empirical frame to denote changing and shifting patterns of employment or, in a more particularised sense, may address questions of labour mobility, both physical and structural.”—Samita Sen, “Engaging with the Idea of Transit Labour” in Samita Sen, Byasdeb Dasgupta, Babu P. Remesh and Moulehsri Vyas, *Situating Transit Labour*, CRG research paper series *Policies and Practices*, 43, 2012, p. 4; Moulehsri Vyas pointed out three features of the concept—migration as a continuing phenomenon, sectoral profile of labour demand and supply and labour flexibility, and the inbuilt problem of the city and labour—see Moulehsri Vyas, “Transit Labour in Mumbai City” in *Situating Transit Labour*, p. 10.
  15. Marx described labour as the fire that gives form to a thing: “Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time”—*Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857–1858), trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 308; see also “Immanent Singularities: A Minor Compositions Interview with Bruno Gulli”, <http://www.minorcompositions.info/gulli.html> (accessed on 20 October 2015); Bruno Gulli, “The Labour of Fire: Time and Labour in the *Grundrisse*”, *Cultural Logic*, 2 (2), Spring 1999, <http://clogic.eserver.org/2-2/gulli.html#note30>



- (accessed on 5 February 2016); see also, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press. 2000).
16. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 401.
  17. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999, pp. 245–255), Theses XIV, pp. 252–253.
  18. “Theses 17”, *Ibid.*, p. 254.
  19. People’s democracy as a concept has been intimately linked with the question of the nation, national classes and the national popular. As a theoretical concept within the communist movement it developed after the Second World War. It allowed in theory for a multi-class, multi-party democracy as the pathway to socialism in the decolonised countries and countries liberated from Nazi rule. After the rise of fascism and Nazism, Popular Front governments were created in France and Spain and the Comintern under Bulgarian Communist leader Georgi Dimitrov advocated a broad multi-class united front. In this way the possibility of a multi-class democracy became part of communist movements in many countries. At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet leadership suggested to the leaders of Eastern European communist parties that they should advocate people’s democracy as the present goal. The Soviet leaders maintained that, the possibility of peaceful transition to people’s democracy and then to socialism was conditional on the global strength of socialism, and the strength of the USSR as a socialist superpower. Mao also argued for a similar idea of a cross-class democracy in *On New Democracy* (1940). In 1949 he spoke of people’s democratic dictatorship. However it was broadly agreed that in each particular country, people’s democracy had its own distinctive features, since the socialist transformation would happen under specific historical and national conditions. The issue of the united front, people’s democracy and the nation had been always linked in communist theory and practice (on many occasions violated too), contrary to what the postcolonial theorists of the nation would have us believe. See Mao Tse Tung, *On New Democracy, Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung*, Volume II (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, n.d.), [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_26.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm) (accessed on 1 January 2016).
  20. Apart from Mao’s writings on peasant revolutions in the period before the Second World War, which continued to guide communist movements in many ex-colonial countries, one of the illustrative instances of such analysis in the postcolonial context was the influential book, Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma (eds.), *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973); also see, on the critique by the Chinese communists of what was considered as national bourgeoisie but comprador in nature, “The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy”,

- Renmin Ribao* (*The People's Daily*), 6 May 1959, now available online, [http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/Nehru\\_Philosophy1.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/Nehru_Philosophy1.pdf) (accessed on 7 February 2016); and “More on Nehru’s Philosophy in the Light of the Sino-Indian Boundary Question”, issued by the Editorial Department, *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) October 27, 1962, now available online, [http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/More\\_on\\_Nehru](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/More_on_Nehru) (accessed on 7 February 2016).
21. To date, Andre Gunder Frank’s, “The Development of Underdevelopment,” in James D. Cockcroft, Andre Gunder Frank and Dale Johnson (eds.), *Dependence and Underdevelopment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972) remains a classic; for a short exposition of the school lay-readers can visit the essay by Vincent Ferraro, “Dependency Theory: An Introduction”, <http://www2.fiu.edu/~ereserve/010029521-1.pdf> (accessed on 3 January 2016).
  22. *Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (London: Allen Lane Penguin, 1968); R.A. Ulianovskii, *Asian Dilemma: A Soviet View and Myrdal's Concept* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973).
  23. Robert J.C. Young’s *Postcolonialism: An Historic Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) notes the historic evolution of the concept of postcolonialism, avoids relevant debates around anti-colonial revolutions and national independence in that discussion, and includes French thinkers like Foucault and Derrida in the formation of postcolonial theory.
  24. Benedict Anderson’s dramatic intervention (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983) arguing for the autonomy and salience of the nation made mark in this context.
  25. The notion of condition can be human-oriented or can be structural. The human condition is ordinarily assumed to be made of select characteristics, key events and situations that compose the essentials of human existence, such as birth, death, material and affective factors and conflicts. With philosophical neutrality Hannah Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* (1958, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); in it Arendt introduced the term *vita activa* (active life) by distinguishing it from *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life), which represented her understanding of Western society. According to her there were only three human activities: labour, work and action. They correspond to the three basic conditions under which humans live. Action corresponds to the political actions of anyone. Labour was one of the only three fundamental forms of activity that constituted the human condition. It was repetitive and included the activities necessary to mere living, such as the production of food and shelter as well as any material production, with nothing beyond that. The condition to which labour corresponded was sheer biological life. The third activity, “action”, was specifically political and could only take place in the public realm, that of

creating something lasting within the world. It called for speech (“logos”), needed to declare his or her unique existence in order for that action to be considered “human”. The notion (of *work*) as something rare as well reifying, distinct from ordinary *labour*, persisted in Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard argued, “The postmodern would be that, which in the modern puts forward the un-presentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms... it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable, which cannot be presented.” (p. 81). Condition thus always suggests something more than the condition from which the suggestion emanates. There is nothing postmodern in this, only the logic of reality that will produce its double. The postcolonial condition thus suggests another site—that of a possible dynamics suggested by this reality, to which we give the name “condition”.

26. Friedrich Engels, “Preface” (1892) to *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (reprint of March 1892 edition, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943), pp. v–xix; also—<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17306/17306-h/17306-h.htm> (accessed on 25 January 2016).
27. Marx to Kugelmann, 11 July 1868, Marx and Engels, *Letters on Capital* (London: New Park, 1983), p. 149.
28. Lenin, in “Elements of Dialectics” mentioned (point 15) “the struggle of content with form and conversely. The throwing off of the form, the transformation of the content...”—*Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, Book III, “Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion”, *V.I. Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), Volume 38, p. 222.
29. Louis Althusser, “From Capital to Marx’s Philosophy” in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 2009, pp. 13–75), p. 31.
30. In the usual postcolonial studies—even of Marxist persuasion—the notion of crisis is absent, partly because even Marxist postcolonial scholars focused on condition of production only and ignored the circulation process of capital, which is often the site where the antagonisms in economy flare up. On this see the discussion by David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 337.

## The Postcolonial Predicament

### 1 PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE, DECLINE OF THEORY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

In the introductory chapter we introduced the concept of *predicament* in order to have a grasp of the postcolonial condition which is marked by a series of contradictory features. We also sought to deploy the idea of the postcolonial condition as a strategic one in order to understand contemporary global capitalism. We tried to show how Marx and his ideas, the history of global Marxism and practices of the communist movements in the Third World are relevant in this enquiry, and at the same time, that ideas and analyses of what we call today the postcolonial condition, have been intrinsic to Marx's writings and communist movements. In this chapter we take the discussion of "predicament" further. We have to see how the deployment of the idea of predicament deepens our analysis of the postcolonial condition. It is an epistemic question, but immersed in historical narratives of a particular time. At the same time the issue of the postcolonial predicament reflects on the question of universalism, with which the historical narrative of capital is deeply implicated. To explain this we shall deal in this chapter with four themes as instances of the postcolonial predicament: (1) the postcolonial imprint on knowledge formation; (2) translation as part of producing the universal in the postcolonial age; (3) the migrant as the subject of postcolonial predicament; and (4) postcolonial labour as the mark of this situation.

We begin with the issue of knowledge-formation. In the last three centuries, almost synonymous with the age of colonialism, human knowledge has been based on what Mao Tse Tung termed three types of struggle: class struggle, the struggle for production and the struggle for innovation (in Mao's words, "scientific experiments").<sup>1</sup> Because of the historically predicated nature of these three sources, that is to say, the historically determined nature of class struggle, likewise the historical nature of struggle against nature, and for survival and production, the character of knowledge, particularly in the sciences, has been marked by a flow from peripheral sites to various metropolitan centres. Yet these peripheral sites are increasingly becoming critical because the flow of factual data provided by the peripheries is today a condition for the growth of fresh ideas and knowledge. Because most of the time the factual data is not initially intelligible to those unfamiliar with local contexts, the process of producing knowledge has to depend more and more on translators and interpreters. The communication needed for producing knowledge and ideas cannot, therefore, be transparent. Hence, the usual way has been to treat knowledge produced in the peripheries as raw or too particularistic and local to be understood by a non-specialist metropolitan readership. Input from the peripheries has to be "theorised" and generalised to become knowledge. Human sciences would stop growing if this centripetal flow were to be absent. Yet, in some sense this structure of the production of knowledge makes the claims for theory hollow and those for empiricism stronger, or at least makes the theoretical and the empirical appear in a new light. The incommensurability inherent in a body of data cannot always be made sensible in terms of a theoretical generality. At times the existence of a previously determined theoretical framework or idea becomes responsible for denying any possibility of a new generality. More and more, therefore, we shall see a different mapping of the knowledge world, let us say a world of different interacting constellations and autonomies in place of the core-periphery model.

As a result, theory, usually the preserve of metropolitan thinking, will be in decline. Interestingly Mao therefore spoke of correct ideas, and not theory.

Besides the decline of theory there is one more implication of the post-colonial situation, namely that several hitherto accepted distinctions are breaking down. Some are the prevalent distinctions between social science studies and area studies, between critical theory and empirical knowledge, and between the historical-geopolitical nature of the modern and the

premodern. With the weakening of these distinctions we can sense the emergence of a new global organisation of knowledge in which the post-colonial stake is high. This is because while old colonial structure depended on a core–periphery relationship, the new postcolonial structure turns the internal boundaries of this organisation of knowledge into a feature to be constantly and each time uniquely negotiated. We can locate two marks in this epistemic transition: first, knowledge is becoming more “objective” where “theory” as an attribute of the knowledgeable subject will be less and less required; second, a new type of transnational linkage in human sciences is developing where life questions will become more and more significant. These life questions generating from specific socio-economic locales will be perched on the great issue of “conduct of life”, until now derisively called “affect”. While the turn to empiricism and the ascendancy of affect may seem opposed to each other, they are dialectically united today in the emerging architecture of knowledge, which is based on questions of life.

Thus, formal economics finds itself naked in the face of experiences of life (say those of the 2008 crash); the fates of formal branches of humanities and social sciences are similar. Even many aspects of former socialist knowledge, which had modelled themselves on bourgeois-academic lines of inquiry, lost their critical edge in no time and found themselves dishonoured in the face of experiences of life exposed by the *annus mirabilis* of 1989. Several globally renowned thinkers of the West in the past century had detected the coming crisis, and thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault sought shelter by returning to the ancient Hellenic world—possibly to get clues to understand the contemporary crisis of knowledge and existence. Interestingly, in the empirical-data-producing peripheries this return had happened earlier, in the course of confrontation with colonialism, and this may mean that these peripheries are more prepared now, having already experienced the return to ancient knowledge and then made the subsequent transition to critical thinking appropriate to contemporary times.

One of the reasons behind this return to antiquity in the metropolitan world today is possibly due to an ahistorical notion of critique, produced from within the realm of theory, that de-links knowledge from social practices and makes critique an element in the self-referential cycle of ideas and discourses, be they philosophical, literary or scientific. This was the reason why Marx in 1844 broke with this idea of critique,<sup>2</sup> expounded the famous *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), in particular the eleventh thesis,<sup>3</sup> wrote the

critique of political economy, and grounded critique in modern empirical reality to show the inexhaustible nature of the reality that a formal discipline cannot subsume. On one hand, knowledge (rejuvenated by the empirical world) becomes distinct from theory that now appears rechristened as critique; on the other hand, knowledge progresses in a continuously developing frame of ideas and material practices and is perched on the borderlines of these two domains. The question of limits, plasticity and so on is linked to this borderline existence. Therefore, it is not enough to assimilate humanities with critique or criticism unless we know what we are critiquing and the limits we are reflecting thereby, the limits produced by the outside, the reality—which we have to invoke in order to produce a critique. Through all these then we have before us two worlds or styles of knowledge emerging: in one, the self-referential nature of producing knowledge is supreme; in the other the production of data is supreme, leaving no time for self-referential exercises in terms of genealogy of knowledge, perhaps to its own good. This is a postcolonial conundrum.

In this way one can see that in the production of knowledge and ideas, borders and boundary-making exercises are always in operation. Borders of different fields, different holding grounds such as geopolitical, historical and economic, and the recurrent boundary-making exercises form the reality on which we have to set today's question: where do correct ideas come from? We must ponder, what was the condition that led Mao and the Chinese Communist Party to raise the question?

But it also means problematising Mao's statement. The three different struggles from where ideas and knowledge spring have interlinkages and operate on historically conditioned terrains. Therefore, a game is on—between the data-producing periphery and theory-making centre, between defined social sciences and life questions of our time with issues of conduct of life, between logistical operations and flight paths, and between logic and experience. The postcolonial nature of the knowledge produced in this way is not there in the Third World only, boundary-making exercises and transgressions exist within the First World also. The presence of the three struggles Mao referred to marks the production of the knowing self today.

In short, we are asking: What are the struggles that provide the terrain of knowledge today? What are their links? What are their epistemic functions? Hitherto postcolonial theory pursued a normative "West versus the Rest" formulation, and thereby forgot to take into account the links, tensions, borders and borderlands of knowledge, and the struggles that create

them and in turn are conditioned by them. Also, the question of knowledge did not come up in postcolonial theory except in the form of cultural reflections of a particular kind, because postcolonial theory chose cultural criticism as the main plank. Theory took the place of knowledge, and in this way became a poor man's substitute for philosophy. The significant point here is that theory seemed to emanate from cultural criticism, another substitute for philosophy. Culture in this way was made implicitly critical, which by itself was paradoxical, because if criticism was an indispensable element of culture, then culture with all its criticism was untrue. The fact is that the complicity of cultural criticism with culture lies not only in the function of the cultural critic, but in the fact that cultural criticism is dictated by the relation between the critic and what s/he deals with. By making culture the object, the critic has objectified it, while culture by its very meaning is the "suspension of objectification".<sup>4</sup> Because the existence of cultural criticism depends on the economic system, it is involved in the fate of the system, and will thus bear the mark of the order.<sup>5</sup> The crisis in the production of knowledge thus characterises the postcolonial world also, because postcolonial critique had taken the dominant form of cultural criticism. Knowledge, ideology, theory—all three are implicated in this way in the formation of the postcolonial world.

## 2 TRANSLATION, EQUIVALENCE, AND THE MAKING OF THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

The recognition of the crisis in knowledge production is reflected also in the emphasis by a section of cultural theorists on translation. Translation has a crucial place in the knowledge industry today. Translation marks the processes of transfer of data, the transformation of empirical data into theory, the transfer of "theory" to the data producing areas, so that data can fit the theory, and serves the function of creating a theoretical world. At times translation, constituted into a self-sufficient world, kills the scientific nature of theoretical struggle and knowledge. In this over-emphasis on translation, knowledge suffers; the postcolonial process of knowledge production suffers most. The process of translation (including financing, marketing, publishing, determination of topics and themes, and the matter of translation, the language of translation and the language from which the matter will be translated) shows the ideological-political nature of the three phenomena that Mao said were the basis of knowledge and correct ideas. Translation becomes one more symbol of the reality of the network



like existence of capital today. Translation in short is the logistics of the knowledge production process, in which postcolonial knowledge formation occupies a designated place. At the same time, translation is an ideological process that erases the distinction between equivalence and difference, certainty and ambivalence, and creates what Walter Benjamin termed as “homogenous empty time”, within which global reproduction of bourgeois relations take place. Nowhere is this greater understood than in the postcolonial world.

One may rave and rant about the loss of originality. But first one should note the nature of the process. This is of course a material process, emanating from the overwhelming possession of our life and labour by information and computation. The postcolonial milieu is a specific geoeconomic and geopolitical milieu and therefore equally specific in its links with capital. These specifics influence the production of knowledge and anticipate certain social technical relations in the traffics of data, idea and fact. The movements of people, capital and information are now managed through certain logistical grids, by which we mean certain types of organisations, controls and rules. These produce protocols. They determine what is to be translated and made accessible for all, or for some.

It seems translation has become part of the global logistical industry of culture, which includes big publishing houses, institutions of culture industry, standards of internet publication, nature and protocols of governmental and non-governmental grants for translation, visits, conferences, exchange of data for joint research, and so on, besides of course the well-known networks of capital, finance, banking, funds and supervision. In all these, postcolonies are crucial. They cannot be thrown by the wayside, because they are needed by capital as they produce the data (even in life-centric sciences), they supply crucial labour (even in advanced laboratories), yet they, as postcolonial existences, cannot be allowed to have a proper say in the dynamics of knowledge and idea production. There is thus a constant struggle inherent in the mutually constitutive relation between the global informal (the South) and the global formal (the North).

It will be thus important to ask: What are the standards of translation? What are its protocols? Who determines it? What is the nature of the logistics of globalisation of knowledge and ideas, to which, at least to a part of which, we have given the name “translation”? Yet the stakes are high in this business of globalisation of knowledge, with a several-billion-dollar industry of university and inter-university collaboration, private funding of research in university, think tanks, development of software, travel, telephony and

digital connection, conferences, other modes of data exchange, organisation of field visits, think tanks, publication channels and the new knowledge centres. There is a great amount of cognitive labour involved in the logistics of globalisation of knowledge, so much so that the old model of wise men and women as solo warriors producing knowledge is dying out; even group efforts are becoming obsolete, networks and platforms are the new modes of knowledge and ideas—precisely because capital in knowledge industry works today in the mode of networks, constellations and platforms.<sup>6</sup> One only has to take note of the proliferation of foreign publishing houses in India, or the almost immeasurable amount of electronic copying of music, films, books and designs, and the reformatting of them for home purpose, to make sense of the amount of cognitive labour involved in this. The primary task of logistics in global knowledge industry is to manage and direct this cognitive labour.

If the foregoing is at least partly true, how high is the postcolonial stake in translation? At one level, the stake is high, yet one need not exaggerate its importance, which means it should be treated like any other communicative pursuit. Translation, while serving the need for exchange of ideas, often produces junk, literary waste consisting, for instance, of the leftovers from the preceding decades that, while promoting new styles of thinking, obliterated postcolonial conditions from the agenda of global thought even more than classic colonial thinking did. This is evidence of the fantastic power of the commodity form to detach or de-link ideas from the experiences of cognitive labour. Yet, as Marx so assiduously demonstrated, labour is inscribed in even the most abstract form of commodity. It is here where we can see new forms of cognitive labour engaged in translation, relevant software production, publication, diffusion—the cognitive labour that we can say represents the South in the knowledge industry in the North, the postcolonial within or amidst the conditions of the neoliberal life of the global rich.

Umberto Eco argued that translation—concrete translation practices and problems—was essentially a negotiation.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in understanding the dynamics of negotiation, if the question of power relations inscribed in the practice of translation is not analysed, it is pointless to speak of adequacy, equivalence, faithfulness or intention—the key issues of translation.

These and other immaterial practices produce forms of cognitive labour that provide, on one hand, what Althusser called the “apparatus”<sup>8</sup> shaping subjectivities, on the other hand, they, exactly like their opposite, that is dirt labour of the postcolonies doing essentials in the metropolitan world,

provide the bridge between the postcolonial and the rest of the world. Therefore, if we return to Mao's famous note with which this chapter began, we can see that the question of the apparatus, what Marx called the means of production, shapes the ways in which ideas will be produced. The postcolonial predicament is perched on that cusp of apparatus and subjectivity.

Marx spoke of how political economy had to have an economy of translation in order to become global. How could colonies co-exist with the advanced capitalist countries? How was the contradiction handled by the capitalist order? How could different orders under capitalism be compared and to what general effect? All these occupied his attention as he turned his thoughts to the issue of the "historical tendency of capitalist accumulation" and "the modern theory of colonisation".<sup>9</sup> He ended *Capital* (volume I) with these words:

However, we are not concerned here with the conditions of the colonies. The only thing that interests us is the secret discovered in the new world by the Political Economy of the old world, and proclaimed on the housetops: that the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of self-earned private property; in other words, the expropriation of the labourer.<sup>10</sup>

Important for this discussion will be: What happens to the colony now subject to the knowledge of political economy? The issue of postcolonial predicament emerges in this context. What is therefore to be noted is that translation works only in a particular way—as part of a broader dynamic of global production of knowledge. However, some of the ideas building on what is called "affect" or "sentiment" remain untranslatable. The postcolonial world often builds its response to metropolitan knowledge on this basis. Therefore, translation can work to the advantage of the peripheries only when translation becomes part of a broad range of dialogic practices, which mark the world of negotiation. In our time Michel Foucault became the American Foucault through translation in as much as Tagore became the mystic Oriental in Europe and Karl Marx became the academic Marx in the Anglo-American universities. This is because in this site called translation there is less scope for engagement with the world and the milieu in which these figures have emerged, there is only engagement with discourses. There are all kinds of translation programmes (perhaps the most

under-researched ones by translation theorists are the Foreign Language Publishing Houses in erstwhile socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, possibly the largest also), not only translation between languages but between mediums also. Therefore, there cannot be any general theory of translation, save the fact that it is part of the logistics of global production of knowledge.

At the same time, we must note that translation enables the postcolony to inhabit the same time and space that the metropolitan world inhabits. The co-habitation is via the translation of data and ideas, which provokes comparison. If comparisons were earlier more longitudinal, they are now more latitudinal. If earlier we were saying that Indian capitalism in the 1980s was as underdeveloped as say capitalism in mid-nineteenth century England, and that the latter developed in time comparison with the former, today we are asking, why has debt-ridden Greece suffered as say India also suffered in contemporary times? Thus, it is important to appreciate that comparison is a narrative gesture towards categorical exercise—understanding the present in terms of concepts and categories.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, by saying that we are using the postcolonial mode of inquiry, we are not suggesting similarities or differences between the European and the non-European world, for obviously in some ways they may be basically similar or basically different, depending on what the analyst wants to achieve. Thus, many have compared the Greek debt case with the Italian or Spanish in this decade, but comparison with India or China means our textbook learning about Greece may receive a jolt.<sup>12</sup>

The dilemma cannot be underestimated. It is not that metropolitan theory ignores facts. In fact, it is more and more attentive to facts in its effort to re-create reality. Therefore, one has to examine whether the method of re-creating reality is truly genealogical, that is to say, grey, meticulous and documentary? Is it based on details, those insignificant truths? Does it subvert and challenge the established modes and truths, if by truth we mean a system of ordered procedures for the production, operation, regulation and distribution of statements?<sup>13</sup> In other words, does this “re-creation of reality” challenge power? There is no doubt that it can, and when it is able to do so it has become an idea of the masses—a material reality. This is what Mao meant when he raised the question of the process of knowledge formation as one of continuous transfer of data and ideas from the masses to the vanguard and people of “knowledge” and then back to the masses.

### 3 THE SUBJECT OF THE POSTCOLONIAL PREDICAMENT: THE MIGRANT

As the foregoing pages show, postcolonial knowledge is not simply a matter of an otherness or alterity, but sometimes also the inverted form of a particular reality, and thus the paradoxical premise for the invention of a new enlarged form of universalism. Thus, universalism is always an invitation to understand the logic of this contradiction, to uncover how the contradiction works and how it shapes theory and practice. This is indeed the way Marx analysed money, which was not simply the alterform of a commodity, but, and precisely because of that, a new and universal form of commodity, which would now exclude many material objects from the market because the latter could not achieve the monetised form, or the degree of monetisation that money demands. While beginning his discussion on the commodity form, Marx wrote on this game between the particular and the universal, “The general value form, in which all the products of labour as presented as mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour, shows by its very structure that it is the social expression of the world of commodities. In this way it is made plain that within this world the general human character of labour forms its specific social character.”<sup>14</sup>

The postcolonial predicament lies in the tension in this dynamics of the universal. The universal has to be in a form that is specific, that is to say in the latter’s specific historical form and thus constituting its own negation. The universal suppresses distinctions and thereby reawakens them. One can say universalism in the bourgeois age forces the postcolonial to be both symmetric and asymmetric. It only shows that every act of the universal is located within a specific context that is producing the universal. It is in this sense that Marx described how the money form developing into the form of capital universalises a specific form and thereby obliterates all other specific forms of value. We are thus faced with the question: Is there a postcolonial subject? Can the postcolonial attain subjecthood? There cannot be a yes/no answer to this. Instead, we should perhaps remind ourselves that the subject can be only correlative with the ontological gap between the universal and the particular.<sup>15</sup> In plain language it means that the postcolonial is not a subject to itself, but only in relation to global capital. This explains the paradoxical nature of the postcolonial as a political subject, the specific nature of the phenomenon we know by the name postcolonial, and its procedural and organised nature. It can be thus neither conceived as an

existential place of a set of representations, nor apprehended as a transcendental system of constitution of objects of possible experience, which we can term as *postcolonial*. In 1762 in the *Social Contract* Rousseau achieved the metamorphosis of subject from being one of obedience into a new kind of subject, that of law, final arbitration of legal pronouncements and thus both active and passive. It meant politics, political personhood, republic, sovereignty and power.<sup>16</sup> In short, the subject will have will. For Rousseau, of course, the subject is mid-way between the passivity of the subject and the activity of the revolutionary subject. The subject has to be mediated not only via the citizen, but also by a new conception of sovereignty. The circularity is thus not only of subject and law, but also subject and sovereign achieved through the idea of general will. It means that the laws decided upon by subjects operate equally for all: “since each man gives himself to all, he gives himself to no one; and since there is no associate over whom he does not gain the same rights as others gain over him, each man recovers the equivalent of everything he loses, and in the bargain he acquires more power to preserve what he has”.<sup>17</sup> We all know how Marx realises a transformation of the problematic through his arguments of class struggle. In the same way, we can say that the struggle for national self-determination made the nation subject—subject of international law as well as subject of sovereignty.

Still later we shall see another round of transformation of the problematic taking place via the circularity between citizenship and migration, when borders appear as a crucial stake in determining subjecthood.<sup>18</sup> It does not mean that the migrant replaces the citizen as the subject, but that the post-colonial condition creates a situation where massive migration of peoples and population groups reorders the relation between the universal and the particular. The migrant becomes the universal, the citizen becomes the particular. Postcolonial subjectivity is determined through this tension.<sup>19</sup>

Crossing borders might be a banal routine for cosmopolitan elites, as capital proves more mobile than labour, yet reports everyday show that crossing borders continues to be a death-resisting and not infrequently death-embracing journey for refugees, other victims of forced migration and immigrants in search of life and security. In the context of the violence and immense sufferings that borders impose on people on the move, the world is witnessing now the production of a new culture, both innovative and postcolonial and postglobalisation.<sup>20</sup> The entanglements between various spaces the travellers pass through deserve close attention. People, who have chosen not to have a homeland, repeatedly make decisions to

cross borders, pass through them connecting the spaces they walk or sail through with new destinies that these spaces have never been associated with. Recent events in Europe demonstrate migration has emerged as the unconscious tool of history to end the last strongholds of the liberal empire in the modern age. Thus, in the aftermath of globalisation precisely when old historical divisions seemed to have been replaced with new seamless unity, migration from the postcolonial world to the heartland of the liberal empire has hurt the core of the liberal unification project. If the old European Concert vanished into history with its failure to define the respective boundaries and borders of the Great Powers and folded up after the Berlin Congress (1878) that divided Africa, the present European Union is facing the same problem of settling boundaries. To appreciate the postcolonial nature of migration and the challenge it poses for liberal constitutionalism we have to see how history works in unsettling the paradigm of border as the confine of citizenship. For instance, what is now happening in the Middle East is a rush back of a history that goes back to the understanding between the European great powers during the First World War to divide the colonies and govern the postwar colonial world. The postcolonial region of the Middle East is now obviously reshaping. An important causal factor for ISIS was the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003. The invasion intervened in the transformation of the region. Clearly, the refugee crisis cannot but cast the postcolonial shadow over Europe. It is clear that “a huge historical shift is now taking place, one that involves exactly the last one hundred years beginning in 1916 with Sykes-Picot. Great powers, states, client states, sub-states all have to be aware that a giant wave is rolling across the region... The people on the move do not control governments. They endure and persevere...”<sup>21</sup>

Added to the border anxiety is the threat of climate change induced migration. Thus, one of the bio-political spectres looming over the script of the age of the Anthropocene is the massive migration to the West from the supposedly climatically inhospitable regions of the South.<sup>22</sup> Millions, we are told, will want to escape the floods, earthquakes, droughts and famines to crowd the rich countries of Europe, Japan, North America and Australia. These are the climate refugees. They sail through the Mediterranean, pass through the snow fields, cross barbed wires and crawl into the bellies of ships, wagons and aircraft to reach the Promised Land. Those historically minded will remember that this was the spectre that haunted the rulers in colonial India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the El Nino famines struck the country, and became, in the memorable words

of Mike Davis, the late Victorian holocausts.<sup>23</sup> The managers of global governance are now worried: How will they stop migration? How are they to make these dangerous migrants resilient and stay put in the face of war and climate change? How can they find a way to make migration an appropriate adaptive strategy? How are they to stop travelling diseases from entering safe countries? These indeed are the concerns voiced by capitalist managers and bourgeois politicians.<sup>24</sup>

The predicament represented by the migrant is thus irrevocably postcolonial. First, today's migration flows are massive and mixed. Thus, the way in which the Refugee Convention of 1951 conceptualised forced migration as a single individual's decision to leave his/her country and seek shelter elsewhere is not the case today. Population flows are massive because all types of migrants—refugees, illegal immigrants, economic migrants, climate and environmental refugees, previously internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, trafficked men, women and children, escapees of war, violence and natural disaster—are mixed today in these population flows. Not only are flows of persons and groups mixed and complex, so are reasons to migrate.<sup>25</sup> This is the fundamental reason why the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) is becoming increasingly ineffective today, giving rise to the protracted nature of displacement. Added to this is the fact that the ideology of humanitarianism is now overwhelmed with humanitarian practices that must depend on market norms, increasing private–public partnership in protection strategies and policies such as camp management, sale of refugee products, health management, management of refugee economies and so on, and more importantly, celebrity endorsement, which we first witnessed prominently in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in the United States. Angelina Jolie began appearing endorsing refugee causes from then on. Finally, the international legal structure of protection is becoming weaker, while on the other hand regional protection pillars are not being strengthened. Even the fact that most of the care of the vulnerable is borne by societies across the world in informal ways is dismissed by models of global governance. Add to these another fact that war-induced population flows were not discussed at all in the 1951 Convention, which refers to war only in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War.

All in all, postcolonial subjecthood is essentially one of the most important political consequences of migration. The situation does not offer any solution. The bourgeoisie cannot solve the problem, it cannot bypass it. The figure of the migrant symbolises the classic postcolonial predicament.



It problematises even the way labour market issues are discussed. In Chapter 8 we will discuss how this transformation sets a further problematic of the relationships between class, people and nation.

In short there is no postcolonial identity as such. We can only speak of the postcolonial subject—a category made active through political history and that makes the postcolonial subject contingent on that history. The postcolonial subject does not exist outside the history of capital or capitalism. It does not represent any outside of capital; it does not speak of any non-capital. It rather makes us aware of the way in which the universal and the particular and the processes of inclusion and exclusion play themselves out.<sup>26</sup>

But the universalisation of capital also indicates a change in the dynamics of capital expansion whereby real subsumption under capitalism now takes on a deeper and wider nature. The link between accumulation under postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal management of economy proves to be the critical factor in the process of subsumption. The subsumption does not follow the classical routes only, such as worker as labour power, machine as fixed capital, money as circulating capital and so on, the entire society with various non-factory forms of labour is also subsumed. There is also a change in the dynamics of rent seeking activities. The subsumption thus involves not only a particular scale and mode of production, but also the incorporation of all that can be linked to market, such as the sheer capacity to care, communicate, feel, cook, help, teach, write, think and so on. In this sense labour is the classic fixed capital in postcolonial capitalism. Marx said, “From the standpoint of the direct production process it (productive power of labour) can be regarded as the production of *fixed capital*, this fixed capital being man himself.”<sup>27</sup> Capital no longer simply subsumes living labour, but the entire gamut of social relations that produces living labour and anchors living labour to market economy. This is where neoliberal governance of economy becomes crucial. By blurring the fundamental division between worker and capitalist or wages and capital, production is distributed all across the social space. Indian experiences of postcolonial capitalism show that structural reforms along neoliberal lines facilitate the real subsumption of society. Postcolonial capitalism also demonstrates that with real subsumption capital no longer has any outside, in other words, there is no relationship that cannot be transformed into a commodity. But the statement that capital has no outside also means that capital is being produced now outside of capital—an outside of capital that can exist as outside only by being subsumed under capital.

From this angle we now proceed to a discussion on another subject of postcolonial predicament, constituted by labour. Like the short discussion of the migrant as the marker of the postcolonial predicament, we shall again restrict ourselves here to a limited discussion of the theme of labour—to the extent we need to explain the nature of the postcolonial predicament. In subsequent chapters we shall discuss the issue of labour and the migrant more widely.

#### 4 THE SUBJECT OF THE POSTCOLONIAL PREDICAMENT: LABOUR

The predicament is reinforced by the particular nature of an overwhelming part of labour in the postcolonial milieu. A salient aspect of the postcolonial situation is the near permanent condition of primitive accumulation as the other of the most modern form of capital, which one may term as virtual capital. Studies show that, while more and more virtual capital in the form of offshore funds, venture businesses, hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, internet based investment and banking, forward trading based wealth and so on reach India and result in massive property booms, skyrocketing land prices, construction upsurge and a new surge in the prices of raw materials like iron ore, foodstuff and so on, at the same time an increasing number of people are pushed to precarious and unorganised work conditions, and as a consequence there is more de-peasantisation and an increase in unorganised labour.<sup>28</sup> The structural connection between the two forms of accumulation cannot be lost on us. Flexibilisation in the postcolonial milieu is appearing, not so much in the form of what is called in the West “post-Fordism”, which is based on micro-computerisation, flexible technologies and the domination of process industries, but much more in the shape of uncertain work profiles, uncertain conditions of reproduction of labour and flexible labour catering to the backward linkages of new capital which is based on various automated technologies and flows.<sup>29</sup> Despite governments, as in India, enacting law after law and taking measure after measure ostensibly to protect the unorganised workers and stabilise the informal condition of labour, these laws and measures fail.

To give the Indian instance, about 94 per cent of the 460 million workforce in India belongs to the unorganised sector: different forms of employment in small-scale industries, cottage industries, construction, small manufacturing units, similarly textile and garment units, horticulture, agriculture, rural occupations, forest-based work, fisheries, sweeping-cleaning,

loading–unloading, mining, the service sector, entertainment, temporary clerical workers, home workers, domestic servants, time-rated or piece-rated casuals, part-time workers, own-account workers and contractual workers. Low wages, always almost insufficient to meet minimum living needs, long work hours, hazardous work conditions, a high incidence of occupational hazard and illness and a lack of basic services such as drinking water and sanitation at the workplace mark the unorganised sector. Workers engaged in the unorganised sector do not have the benefit of many labour laws and statutory welfare measures such as maternity benefits, provident fund, gratuity and so on.<sup>30</sup> Most laws concerning unorganised labour do not touch self-employed labour. The Equal Remunerations Act (1976) and the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (1976) apply to all; however, Acts on minimum wages (1948),<sup>31</sup> child labour (1986), dangerous machines (1983), motor transport workers (1961), inter-state migrant workmen (1979) or manual scavengers (1993) touch only some sections of unorganised work. To take just one instance in this context, the Inter-state Migrant Workmen’s Act does not provide protection to migrant women “since they migrate on their own volition”.<sup>32</sup> There are still other laws, which can be extended, such as on beedi and cigar workers, or payment of wages (1936), construction workers (1996), maternity benefit (1961), contract labour (1970), workmen’s compensation (1923) and weekly holidays (1942). We can also include in the list of measures Acts applicable to all sections of unorganised work, such as those concerning equal remuneration and abolition of bonded labour. Some of these, such as the Minimum Wages Act, relate to agricultural work also. Besides there are others, such as the Plantation Labour Act (1951), which ensure certain basic facilities for plantation workers. There are also state laws, the best-known of these being the Shops and Establishments Act. Yet, if we consider factors taken into account in framing labour laws, such as physical conditions, duration and timing, remuneration, employment relations, conditions of disadvantaged workers and other elements, we shall see why these Acts remain inapplicable and only reinforce the precarious work conditions marked by rapacious exploitation, absence of work-place democracy, market stranglehold and the threat of extinction. Studies of Gurgaon and other new towns in India show again the co-existence of advanced capital and primitive forms of accumulation, both displaying flexible and uncertain processes of labour.<sup>33</sup> Add to these the various non-economic, primarily administrative modes (ranging from administered price rise to disinvestment plans and schemes of voluntary retirement) to create precarious work conditions.

The upshot of all these is the persistence of a labouring class with precarious life and labour conditions. Characteristic of a postcolony is the presence of such a labouring class, which is necessary for the most advanced form of capital. In one sense it is immaterial labour because it does not directly link up to the advanced forms of capital; on the other hand it is material because it constitutes the material basis on which the new capital can appropriately function. Its main characteristic is its mobility, its foot-loose nature, which the capital requires.

Thus, theories of transformations of labour and capitalism in Western Europe do not adequately help us understand postcolonial labour conditions and the dynamics of accumulation. A transit workforce circulating between urban workplaces and the countryside, various construction sites, moving through different labour regimes from sweatshop to factory, to self-owned production units, to circuits of menial labour characterises postcolonial capitalism. The simultaneous existences of advanced economy, cognitive labour, sweatshops, small manufacturing units, factories and footloose labour form the background of a remorseless financialisation combined with regimes of semi-forced labour. Not only “this points to a deep heterogeneity of subjective positions and experiences within the composition of contemporary living labour”,<sup>34</sup> at the same time this also indicates how postcolonial governments administer the situation. The welfare legislation for unorganised workers or getting food to people through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) are part of the appropriate governing conditions for capital accumulation. In fact, the entire range of tools of social governance is geared towards making postcolonial labour the key to capital accumulation today.<sup>35</sup> This is the essence of postcolonial capitalism today—a global phenomenon.

While we shall discuss in greater detail in latter chapters the problematic of postcolonial labour, presently we must ask: In what way does this condition constitute a predicament for the postcolony? The major answer is that this condition creates what Charles Tilly would have called “durable inequality” from which there seems to be no exit notwithstanding generation of greater wealth. Inequality becomes durable not because of lack of political democracy, but because of the way a social organisation works. Inequalities endure, Tilly believed, because that is the way an organisation maximises its efficiency and outcome. The roots of durable inequality may lie in links between enclaves and ghettos, networks, trust stocks and migrations. Generating inequality is a process. When we recall the way primitive work conditions are maintained as the other of the

modern forms of capital, we can see the relevance of Tilly's other idea, to which he gave the name "opportunity hoarding". Opportunity hoarding operates when members of a categorically bounded network acquire access to a resource that it considers valuable, renewable, supportive of the network and enhanced by the network's *modus operandi*, and thus subject to monopolistic control. "Opportunity hoarding" makes inequality durable.<sup>36</sup> Tilly said, "Large, significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to categorical differences such as black/white, male/female, citizen/foreigner, or Muslim/Jew rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities, or performances".<sup>37</sup> We can thus see how two elementary forms—*types of social relations* and *inequality-generating mechanisms*—produce durable conditions of inequality. This is certainly an organisational analysis of inequality, an "organizational view of inequality-generating mechanisms".<sup>38</sup> Yet, whatever we may think of an organisational analysis, at least it shows why modern development in a postcolony cannot remove major inequalities; on the other hand, the latter increases through the grid of development. The predicament increases because the market does not efface inequality, but accepts the frame of durable inequality to effect transaction and helps capital to realise the surplus. In other words, development does not provide an answer to enduring differences in power and wealth.

What is the way out? Postcolonialism still has no answer to the phenomenon of durable inequality. Perhaps a long period of experiences of development in Brazil, China, India or South Africa will show us the route to escape the predicament. Equal conditions will not automatically generate growth. Growth will carry inequality along with it, and at certain times exacerbate it. Politics will try to produce reforms, but the main agency of the reform, the State, is in a dilapidated state today. Autonomous social organisations will need a long time to learn to communicate together. On the other hand, global logistics that promises to a significant extent a way out of the predicament cannot be left to itself. Is logistical redesign that works to the advantage to the postcolony possible? When Lenin said Soviet plus electricity is equal to socialism, he was referring precisely to the logistical aspect of cutting the knot of underdevelopment. Do we have any roadmap to exit the postcolonial condition, which symbolises the bind of primitive work conditions and the reproduction of advanced forms of capital—a bind that leaves almost nothing as social surplus for the postcolony to develop?

This is the question posed by the famous problematic of transition. The postcolonial dilemma is around the issue of transition—transition from

semi-colonialism and neocolonial conditions to new democracy, retarded agriculture to agricultural reforms, land reforms and further on to cooperatives, foreign- and monopoly-led industrialisation to a balanced industrial growth, and the transition from rule by compradors and the corporate class to rule by a worker-peasant led democratic alliance. However, as the history of repeated failures of communist movements in the postcolonial world shows, this transition cannot be towards a predetermined socialism;<sup>39</sup> and the path does not lead to any precharted socialist path. The transition can only lead to its own future, to its own socialism. The situation can be understood only through what can be called negative dialectics.<sup>40</sup>

## 5 DIALECTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE POSTCOLONIAL PREDICAMENT

The specifics of the postcolonial condition and postcolonial transition, therefore, take us back to the issue of dialectics. Let us again recall Mao, who was careful in distinguishing between different forms of contradictions and their mutual transformation under particular conditions.<sup>41</sup> He drew inspiration from Lenin's study of Hegel to argue that the study of contradictions was the essence of dialectics.<sup>42</sup> This means we have to go back to three classic questions: (1) dialectics as a study of the process (of development, etc.); (2) dialectics as a study of antagonism; and (3) dialectics as a study of the process of subject-formation. Less as a science, but more as a mode of historico-political investigation, "dialectics indicates the untruth of an identity—the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived".<sup>43</sup> Therefore, as a mode dialectics helps connect the dynamics within economy and in the rest of the society. Any attempt to found a materialist theory, at least in the postcolonial context on the basis of an idea of realising some potency will fail because such a theoretical attempt to de-link capitalist crisis from materialist subjectivity, global crisis from movements for social transformation and economy from society will flounder.

The reality of contradiction is always greater than the science of it. The science was primarily developed in the West, while the reality of contradictions in the East in its fierceness surpasses its scientific analysis. This reality demands that the science of contradictions, known as dialectics, is not forsaken in preference to one or another variety of psychoanalysis or cultural studies, but that this science is developed further. In this sense, the postcolonial

predicament is immensely productive. We can also say that the determination of the contradiction is always a complex matter, in Althusser's famous words, the contradiction is always over-determined.<sup>44</sup> In other words, any conception of the postcolonial is based on a principle of identity that perpetually remains over-determined by the multiple figures of its other. This is the origin of the predicament, or to put it another way, by the equivocity of the world. The contradiction between the postcolonial condition and global capital is thus over-determined with many factors discussed in this chapter. Therefore, we are using the word predicament here, meaning thereby the openness of the situation. Thus, it is important to see the postcolony as the embodiment of *predicament* and not as one of failed dialectic in order to approach the question of transition. We shall see then that perhaps the angle of predicament gives us the advantage of looking at the global scenario of transformation in a new way.

Let us recall in this context, as indicated in the introductory chapter, that in the last century, between the 1950s to the 1970s, when the word "ex-colony" was used by anti-colonial Left movements all over Asia and Africa in place of today's "postcolony", there were fierce debates in the communist parties and among communists as to the path of transformation. Questions were asked: What is new democracy? What is national democracy? What is people's democracy? Perhaps this change of name from ex-colony to postcolony is a minor question. However, debates like these, more than the theoretical quarrels on meanings of transition, should be revisited, though today's questions have moved on from that time, which was still shadowed by decolonisation. The politics of the present time demand that we reframe the issues, more because the predicaments are global, and more than ever postcolonial experiences have global significance. This is why the task is not to provincialise Europe or the world of metropolitan capital, but to universalise the postcolonial predicament.

## NOTES

1. "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" (May 1963); The note formed a part of the "Draft Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on Certain Problems in Our Present Rural Work", which was drawn up under the direction of Mao Tse Tung, and was written by Mao Tse Tung himself. See—<http://www.marxists.org/reference/>

- [archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9\\_01.htm](http://archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_01.htm) (accessed on 1 August 2011).
2. “The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force”—Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O’Malley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), introduction, p. 5.
  3. Eleventh Thesis, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”—Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845); The most widely known version of the “Theses” is the one based on Engels’ edited version, published as an appendix to his *Ludwig Feuerbach* in 1888, where he gave it the title “Theses on Feuerbach”, *Marx Engels Selected Works*, Volume One, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), pp. 13–15.
  4. Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” in Theodor W. Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 147.
  5. Adorno further wrote, “Cultural criticism is however able to reproach culture so penetratingly for prostituting itself, for violating in its decline the pure autonomy of the mind, only because culture originates in the radical separation of mental and physical work”—*Ibid.*, p. 154.
  6. Ned Rossiter in his *Software, Infrastructure, Labour: A Media Theory of Nightmares* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017) has discussed the logistical mode of production and acquisition of knowledge in details. See particularly the sub-section, “Digital Humanities and the Problem of Method”, pp. 58–60 in Chapter 3, “Into the Cloud”, pp. 51–76. Rossiter discusses the “computational turn” involving “taxonomy and political economy of software applications and the cultures of code operative within institutional settings across the world” (p. 59). Rossiter’s analysis of the data economy brings out from a fresh angle its implications for postcolonial production of knowledge.
  7. Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003).
  8. Louis Althusser discusses this in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006), pp. 85–132.
  9. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I (1867), trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), Chapters 32–33, pp. 927–940.
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 940; Indeed, *Capital* from the first pages beginning with commodity and money to the last pages deals with the problematic of difference, translation and equivalence. This in one sense is at the core of the entire theme of Marx and the postcolonial age.



11. Marx wrote, “Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction.”—Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume I, p. 102.
12. Benedict Anderson commented, “The main thing is that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness and absences.” In “Frameworks of Comparison”, *London Review of Books*, Volume 38 (2), 21 January 2016 (pp. 15–18), p. 18.
13. This definition comes from Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in the *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 74.
14. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume I, p. 160.
15. Presently, we can compare this position with the analysis by Georg Luckacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971); Luckacs argued that market-based rationality takes on a scientific nature and is thus based on a separation of the objective and subjective sides of experience. However, this is only a prelude to the incorporation of all subjectivity into objectivity. By being completely incorporated into capitalism and thus its transformation into an object being complete, the worker becomes the subject of the revolutionary change, the subject of history. With the end of alienation, history ends, or the history of freedom, also history as freedom begins. However, the postcolonial condition tells us a more complex story. It recalls the fetishism, which Marx spoke of, hinging on money, law and several other instruments of measurement and equivalence, which make the incorporation of the potential subject (the human factor, social factor, the postcolonial or the political agency such as the nation) in the object-world of global capitalism possible. We shall discuss this question in detail in Chapter 9.
16. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The public person thus formed by the union of all other persons was once called the *city*, and is now known as the *republic* or the *body politic*. In its passive role it is called the *state*, when it plays an active role it is the *sovereign*; and when it is compared to others of its own kind, it is a *power*. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of a *people*, and call themselves individually *citizens*, in that they share in the sovereign power, and *subjects*, in that they put themselves under the laws of the state.”—*The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 61–62. He further asks, “What then is correctly to be called an act of sovereignty? It is not a covenant between a superior and an inferior, but a covenant of the body with each of its members” (p. 77).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
18. Etienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), Chapter 1 (pp. 1–10), “At the Borders of Europe”, p. 10; see also Nicholas De Genova, “The ‘Crisis’ of the European Border Regime: Towards A Marxist Theory of Borders”, *International Socialism: A Quarterly Review of Socialist Theory*, 150, 4 April 2016—<http://isj.org.uk/the-crisis-of-the-european-border-regime-towards-a-marxist-theory-of-borders/> (accessed on 20 June 2016).
19. Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 1999); Samaddar (ed.), *Refugees and the State: Practices of Care and Asylum in India, 1947–97* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003); Paula Banerjee, Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury and Atig Ghosh (eds.), *The State of Statelessness in South Asia* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2015); also, Sandro Mezzadra, “Borders, Migrations, Citizenship”, trans. Maribel Casas Cortas and Sebastian Cobarrubias (2004)—[www.observatorio.fadaiat.net/tiki-index.php?page=borders,+Migrations,+Citizenship](http://www.observatorio.fadaiat.net/tiki-index.php?page=borders,+Migrations,+Citizenship) (accessed on 12 June 2013); Mezzadra brought in the significant question of labour and labour market when he remarked in this article, “This tendency [conflicts over citizenship], exemplified most effectively (and usually dramatically) by migrants, plays an essential role in the material constitution of European citizenship as well as in the very functioning of the labour market within the various European countries. To such an extent, nowadays the border/confine can be considered one of the pillars around which citizenship and labour market is reorganized.” This point is developed further in Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
20. “Borders are there to be crossed”, *Jadaliyya*—<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23064/borders-are-there-to-be-crossed> (accessed on 2 November 2015).
21. Patrick Barnard, “Notes on Syria and the Great Refugee Crisis”, *Montreal Serai*, Volume 21 (9), March 2016—<http://montrealserai.com/2016/03/28/notes-on-syria-and-the-great-refugee-crisis/> (accessed on 5 April 2016).
22. Julian Reid, “Climate, Migration, and Sex: The Bio-politics of Climate Induced Migration”, *Critical Studies on Security*, Volume 2 (2), 2014, pp. 196–209.
23. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2002).
24. The recall of late nineteenth and early twentieth century experience narrated by Mike Davis is not accidental. Several studies reinforce the point of colonial patterns of migration being reproduced in postcolonial time.

- On this see some of the relevant writings—for studies of forced child migrations and women’s asylums see: Roy Parker: *Uprooted—The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada—1867 to 1917*, (University of British Columbia Press, 2008) and Mary Geyer, *Behind the Wall—The Women of the Destitute Asylum, Adelaide, 1852–1918* (Adelaide: Migration Museum, 1994); on coolie labour, see Rana Pratap Behal, Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism—Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) or the earlier classic work by Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast—Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); regarding famines see earlier cited, Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts and the Making of the Third World*.
25. Of the many recent reports on this, *International New York Times predicted*, “mass migration poised to rise”, and stay that way—report by Rod Nordland, 2 November 2015, p. 8.
  26. On the theme of postcolonial subjectivity, see two thought provoking essays in: Sandro Mezzadra, Julian Reid and Ranabir Samaddar (eds.), *The Biopolitics of Development: Reading Michel Foucault in the Postcolonial Present* (New Delhi and Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), Chapter 2; Judith Revel, “Foucault and His ‘Other’: Subjectivation and Displacement”, pp. 15–24, and Chapter 7; Julian Reid, “Interrogating the Neoliberal Biopolitics of the Sustainable Development–Resilience Nexus”, pp. 107–122; in the crowd of related writings, Etienne Balibar, “Citizen Subject?” in Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.), *Who Comes After the Subject?* (London: Routledge, 1991), Chapter 3, pp. 33–35; see also, Nina Power, “Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject”, *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Volume 2, no. 1–2, 2006, pp. 186–209.
  27. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857–1858), trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 643.
  28. Several studies in recent years form the basis of this formulation. See, Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination* (New Delhi and London: Routledge, 2013); Iman Mitra, Ranabir Samaddar and Samita Sen (eds.), *Accumulation in Postcolonial Capitalism* (New Delhi and Heidelberg: Springer, 2016); and Ranabir Samaddar, *Neoliberal Strategies of Governing India* (London: Routledge, 2016), Chapters 7–8.
  29. The tanneries of Tangra, Kolkata, represent a classic instance of such labour. The finished and value-added product of Bata or an Italian design company calls for the most primitive work conditions geared towards processing raw hide, and reinforced by the most brutal controls. Caste is important in such labour composition, determining who will be members

- of the precariat class. See, R. Samaddar and D. Dutta, “Knowing the Worker—The Tannery Majdur of Tangra” in Parthasarathi Banerjee and Yoshihiro Sato (eds.), *Skill and Technological Change—Society and International Perspective* (New Delhi: Har Anand, 1997), 276–309.
30. We shall come to the issue of composition of postcolonial labour in Chapters 4 and 5.
  31. The Supreme Court in the case of *Bandhua Mukti Morcha* (1984/SCC 389) held that even a piece rated worker is entitled to minimum wage. However, different minimum wages may be fixed for different employments and different classes of work in the same employment. Likewise, the minimum wage may vary according to hour, day, month or any other prescribed wage period.
  32. Findings of a study on Orissa migrant women workers; “Impact of Increasing Migration of Women in Orissa”, study conducted by Sansristi, and supported by the National Commission for Women, Bhubaneswar, 2007, p. 11.
  33. For few relevant studies, see C. Ramchandraiah, A. C. M. van Westen and Sheela Prasad (eds.), *High-Tech Urban Spaces—Asian and European Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008); also relevant are studies of the dwelling places of workers engaged in informal work regimes. For instance—“Basti Redevelopment in Calcutta”, a report, <http://cityrenewal.blogspot.in/2008/07/basti-redevelopment-in-calcutta.html> (accessed on 20 November 2015).
  34. Sandro Mezzadra, “Bringing Capital Back In: A Materialist Turn in Postcolonial Studies?”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12 (1: pp. 154–164), p. 162; Mezzadra drew his analysis on the basis of reports on workers’ mobility in China and the labour regimes there. Related to this, interested readers may see Beverly Silver and Lu Zhang, “China as an Emerging Epicenter of World Labor Unrest” in H. F. Hung (ed.), *China and the Transformation of Global Capitalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 174–187; Herman Rosenfeld, “The Roots and Contours of Worker Rebellion in a Changing China”, *The Bulletin*, Socialist Project, E-Bulletin No. 1244, 8 April 2016.
  35. Social governance has been of particular importance as a governing strategy and pacification device in conflict prone areas, for co-opting women in affairs of governance and for neutralising the rebellious protests of Dalits and indigenous people. Social governance is the template to combine neo-liberal and postcolonial modes of accumulation and appropriation.
  36. Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
  37. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

39. Such a predetermined path to socialism has always been heavily influenced by the concept of break, a complete rupture in the existing economy, which not only disallows any possible continuity of some of the old features of the economy, but ignores the possibility of what might be called an “invisible economy”. The philosopher who made the idea of break most famous, Michel Foucault, was also caught in this paradox. Thus, while in *The Order of Things* he focused on the discursive shifts in political economy, in his analysis of governmentality he presented a continuous and unified genealogy of the liberal account of economy. See on this, Ute Tellmann, “Foucault and the Invisible Economy”, *Foucault Studies*, 6, February 2009, pp. 5–24.
40. Theodor Adorno opened his book *Negative Dialectics* (trans. E. B. Ashton, London: Routledge, 1973) with these words, “*Negative Dialectics* is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation; the thought figure of a ‘negation of negation’ later became the succinct term. This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy. The unfoldment of the paradoxical title is one of its aims.”—p. xix; recall the formulation by Hegel: “The result of Dialectic is positive, because it has a definite content, or because its result is not empty and abstract nothing but the negation of certain specific propositions which are contained in the result—for the very reason that it is a resultant and not an immediate nothing.”—G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, (1830), trans. William Wallace, Section 82, p. 69, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/index.htm> (accessed on 18 June 2016).
41. All three essays of Mao need to be studied in this context: *On Practice: On the Relation between Knowledge and Practice, between Knowing and Doing*—[http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_16.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm) (accessed on 1 August 2015); *On Contradiction*—[http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_17.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm) (accessed on 1 August 2015); and *On the Correct handling of Contradictions among the People*—[http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_58.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm) (accessed on 1 August 2015).
42. V.I. Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, Lenin Collected Works (Moscow: Progress, 1976), Volume 38, pp. 85–241.
43. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 5.
44. Louis Althusser, “Surely, with a number of *realities*, which are precisely *realities* for Marx, whether superstructures, ideologies ‘national traditions’ or the customs and ‘spirit’ of a people, etc.... Surely, with *the overdetermination of any contradiction and of any constitutive element of a society, which*

*means*: (1) that a revolution in the *structure* does not *ipso facto* modify the existing superstructures and particularly the *ideologies* at one blow (as it would if the economic was the *sole determinant factor*), for they have sufficient of their own consistency to *survive beyond their immediate life context*, even to recreate, to ‘secrete’ substitute conditions of existence temporarily; (2) that the new society produced by the Revolution may itself *ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation of older elements* through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) ‘circumstances’. Such a reactivation would be totally inconceivable for a dialectic deprived of overdetermination...” (Italics Althusser’s)—“Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for An Investigation” in Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster—<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1962/overdetermination.htm> (accessed on 20 June 2016).

## Postcolonial Dynamics of Accumulation

### I THE “GROUND OUTSIDE”: BOUNDARIES OF ACCUMULATION

Having discussed to some extent in the previous two chapters the nature of the postcolonial age in appearance and reality, we shall now attempt to examine the postcolonial dynamics of accumulation. We shall use interchangeably the two phrases, postcolonial dynamics of accumulation and dynamics of postcolonial accumulation. They will mean the same here. We shall strive to situate the issue of accumulation in the perspective of imperialism, or what can be called its *other scene*, the postcolonial capitalist reality of today's world. It will also mean locating the boundaries of accumulation, which are set at least partly by the seemingly outside factors functioning as determinants of capitalist accumulation in today's context. Finally, this will also mean understanding the philosophical implications of a postcolonial critique of the contemporary dynamics of accumulation, given the fact that such critique can originate only from within—that is from within the postcolonial regime of accumulation. If so, what are the inside and the outside of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation?

The process of separation of labourers from the means of production so that they become free wage-labourers for the purposes of capitalist exploitation is not a natural development, but the result of violent confrontations. This process not only speaks of a past, (the process of initial transition from the precapitalist to the capitalist mode of production), it continues

to this day on a great scale in the postcolonial world. In developed capitalist countries, as in postcolonial capitalist countries, workers erect social and political barriers to the extension of the length of the working day, and therefore capital introduces machinery as a counter-element against the working class. Yet, while capital tries to reduce the number of workers, it also seeks to bring in new workers under its command as an exploitable human resource. The so-called human factor of production is thus always present, and capitalist accumulation must depend on the continuous separation of labourer from the means of production.

We can then say that primitive accumulation is the separation we have referred to whenever it occurs, and accumulation of capital proper includes, besides this separation, expansion through the mode of economy. Primitive accumulation may be taken as a historical companion, symbolising the separation happening continuously, of proper accumulation when the latter is the order of the capitalist economy. At yet another level, we can say that accumulation is transition (transiting the borders of production and circulation), while primitive accumulation is the specific mark of this transition, reminding us that the transition from say feudalism to capitalism did not happen as a natural process. We cannot take transition for granted, merely because history happened that way. The “extra-economic” factors are always present in the economic and only in this way can an adequate understanding of capitalism become possible.<sup>1</sup> It is not without reason that war as the extermination of several old relations has been always the occasion for discussion on accumulation. Think of the two world wars and the colonial and neocolonial wars continuing up to our time of neoliberal restructuring of global economy. Massive postcolonial experiences only reinforce this point.

A postcolonial critique of the accumulation process is built on a fundamental understanding that capitalism demands that all geographical limits to capital accumulation have to be overcome in different ways, which leads to the characteristic penchant for space. At the same time, while production entails geographical concentration of money, means of production (thus proximity to means of production including natural resources), labour power and consumer markets (all these for higher profits and lower costs), the circulation of capital requires circumventing various boundaries—of space, institutions, forms, financial regimes, labour processes, economic segments and so on, thus requiring the construction of different zones and corridors. Capital accumulation begins in this contradictory mode—whenever and wherever some money is deployed to make more money by



exploiting wage labour—with the important proviso that this will require specific conditions to make money in this way and in a sustainable manner. This makes borders perhaps the most important institution for capital to circumvent—national political borders, natural boundaries, borders of markets, boundaries of production and circulation, boundaries of cities, borders of norms and violence, borders of different labour forms and labour regimes, borders of appropriation and expropriation and, most importantly, the border between necessary labour and surplus labour, and thus necessary work hours and surplus work hours. We can see how a postcolonial critique of the capitalist accumulation process requires treating border as method.<sup>2</sup> But it also means that capital has to perpetually circumvent the dividing line between its own prehistory and the history of its own present.<sup>3</sup> Postcolonial capitalism in this way always demonstrates the relevance of the “ground outside” in the process of accumulation.

Marx, in the second and third volumes of *Capital*, showed how markets become crucial for accumulation. Thus, global and local capitalist as well as non-capitalist enterprises are interconnected today through global (that is, where exchange happens between entities across national boundaries) and local (that is, where exchange happens between intra-national entities) markets. This is the materialisation of a value chain. Neoliberal capitalism through the supply chains (consisting of various modes such as outsourcing, subcontracting and off-shoring) gives rise to new circuits of global capital. Connected to these circuits are new practices and relationships that produce new subjectivities and a new hegemonic social reality that aims to foreclose the language of class precisely by retaining and underscoring the presence of the so-called informal, agricultural and household sectors. Yet Marx showed at the same time how capitalist crisis becomes one of accumulation through the reinforcement of the social in the productive process—thus the resistance of the worker (and the society) does not allow beyond a point the operation of the so-called remorseless laws of accumulation. The State becomes the crucial site where politics negotiates the inevitable binds that accumulation as a process continuously throws up. There is thus perhaps as Alex Callinicos pointed out an elective affinity between capitalism and passive revolution. The decentralised nature of the accumulation process, driven by competition among capitals, is compatible with a wide range of political forms, giving scope for individual states to restructure the process.<sup>4</sup>

We are thus faced with the task of examining the ground outside in any investigation of the dynamics of accumulation, more so in the postcolonial

context, since this context supposedly speaks of difference in relation to the development of classical capitalism. If in volume I of *Capital* Marx analysed the factory mode of production and the emergence of wage labour, and in volume II focused on the circulation and reciprocal flows of commodities (including money) constituting the capitalist market, and its periodic crises, in volume III, Marx took the final step of his investigation by way of explaining the capitalist economy in totality. For this he had to analyse how the entire society had to be decomposed and recomposed not only to give birth to the two basic categories of revenue—wage and profit—but also to ensure that specific sectors of the ruling class participate in the distribution of the total mass of surplus value. Thus, besides wage and industrial profit he investigated commercial and banking profit, interest and rent. Equally significantly, he had to distinguish the rate of profit from that of surplus value, and on the basis of that step, the tendency of equalisation of rate of profit from the amount of surplus value collectively produced by the wage labourers. Interestingly, therefore, in Chapter 5 of volume III of *Capital* Marx wrote of the “Economy in the Use of Constant Capital”.<sup>5</sup> Besides general considerations, what he included in this consideration of economy is significant. He discussed how savings were made on the conditions of work at worker’s expense, how waste recycling constituted an important part of production, economy through inventions, economy in the generation and transmission of power, economy in the time spent in the circulation of commodities and economy of buildings—the factories, plant sites and other production sites.<sup>6</sup> All these are living realities of the postcolonial economy.

Remarkable here is the notion of economy. Economy is thrift (at the expense of the worker), economy is utilisation of the refuse of production, economy is through invention and so on, but economy is also the society within which capital accumulation will take place, and which will offer capital the opportunities to accumulate. How shall we then understand *economy* as a factor of accumulation as well as the environment in which the accumulation of capital takes place? Nothing describes this better than these words of Marx:

Just as the capitalist mode of production promotes the development of the productive powers of social labour, on the one hand, so does it whip on to economy in the employment of constant capital on the other.

However, it is not only the alienation and indifference that arise between the labourer, the bearer of living labour, and the economical, i.e., rational

and thrifty, use of the material conditions of his labour. In line with its contradictory and antagonistic nature, the capitalist mode of production proceeds to count the prodigious dissipation of the labourer's life and health, and the lowering of his living conditions, as an economy in the use of constant capital and thereby as a means of raising the rate of profit.

Since the labourer passes the greater portion of his life in the process of production, the conditions of the production process are largely the conditions of his active living process, or his living conditions, and economy in these living conditions is a method of raising the rate of profit; ... the transformation of the labourer into a work horse, is a means of increasing capital, or speeding up the production of surplus-value. Such economy extends to overcrowding close and unsanitary premises with labourers, or, as capitalists put it, to space saving; to crowding dangerous machinery into close quarters without using safety devices; to neglecting safety rules in production processes pernicious to health, or, as in mining, bound up with danger, etc. Not to mention the absence of all provisions to render the production process human, agreeable, or at least bearable. From the capitalist point of view this would be quite a useless and senseless waste. The capitalist mode of production is generally, despite all its niggardliness, altogether too prodigal with its human material, just as, conversely, thanks to its method of distribution of products through commerce and manner of competition, it is very prodigal with its material means, and loses for society what it gains for the individual capitalist.<sup>7</sup>

All these we can say indicate how the ground outside is to be investigated in the course of our analysis of the postcolonial dynamics of accumulation. The double significance of economy is a point in instance. From this angle, we shall now proceed to some associated issues including that of rent in postcolonial accumulation.

## 2 SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ORGANIC COMPOSITION OF POSTCOLONIAL CAPITAL AND LABOUR

Since the dynamic of postcolonial accumulation is usually considered as belonging to the primitive mode and stage, the theoretical problem is how to account for its persistence as well as its combination with the advanced mode of accumulation equally evident in the postcolonial condition, such as India's. Hence the problem, how to account for the original? Let us follow the trail left by Marx to the extent possible. Typically, we can begin with this:

We have already seen earlier that, though  $s$ , the surplus-value, springs merely from a change in the value of the variable capital  $v$  and is, therefore, originally but an increment of variable capital, after the process of production is over it nevertheless also forms an increment of  $c + v$ , the expended total capital. The formula  $c + (v + s)$ , which indicates that  $s$  is produced through the conversion of a definite capital-value  $v$  advanced for labour-power into a fluctuating magnitude, i.e., of a constant magnitude into a variable one, may also be represented as  $(c + v) + s$ . Before production took place we had a capital of £500. After production is completed we have the capital of £500 plus a value increment of £100.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, “The costs of the product include all the elements of its value paid by the capitalist or for which he has thrown an equivalent into production. These costs must be made good to preserve the capital or reproduce it in its original magnitude.”<sup>9</sup> The original thus appears only in a reproduction, which has taken on an expanded form by including an outside. Marx again visits the question of the original, now to clear up the mystery once for all:

In the process of circulation the time of circulation comes to exert its influence alongside the working-time, thereby limiting the amount of surplus-value realisable within a given time span. Still other elements derived from circulation intrude decisively into the actual production process. The actual process of production and the process of circulation intertwine and intermingle continually, and thereby invariably adulterate their typical distinctive features. The production of surplus-value and of value in general, receives new definition in the process of circulation, as previously shown. Capital passes through the circuit of its metamorphoses. Finally, stepping beyond its inner organic life, so to say, it enters into relations with outer life, into relations in which it is not capital and labour which confront one another, but capital and capital in one case, and individuals, again simply as buyers and sellers, in the other. The time of circulation and working-time cross paths and thus both seem to determine the surplus-value. The original form in which capital and wage-labour confront one another is disguised through the intervention of relationships seemingly independent of it. Surplus-value itself does not appear as the product of the appropriation of labour-time, but as an excess of the selling price of commodities over their cost-price, the latter thus being easily represented as their actual value (*valeur intrinsèque*), while profit appears as an excess of the selling price of commodities over their immanent value.<sup>10</sup>

We may say, the problem still persists, because capital now appears as a relation to itself, the original “original” is lost, something else now masquerades as the original.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the original equation is to be constantly reworked on the givens of original rate of profit, original average profit, original variable capital, original capital, original constitution of capital, original composition of capital, original cost of machinery, original form of means of production, original value, conditions of original production, original difference between various branches of production, original forms of money trade, original transaction, original distribution, original method and, finally, money as the original form of commodity and commodity as the original form of capital. So,

Merchant’s capital is originally merely the intervening movement between extremes which it does not control, and between premises which it does not create. Just as money originates from the bare form of commodity-circulation,  $C—M—C$ , not only as a measure of value and a medium of circulation, but also as the absolute form of commodity, and hence of wealth, or hoard, so that its conservation and accumulation as money becomes an end in itself, so, too, does money, the hoard, as something that preserves and increases itself through mere alienation, originate from the bare form of the circulation of merchant’s capital,  $M—C—M'$ . The trading nations of ancient times existed like the gods of Epicurus in the intermediate worlds of the universe, or rather like the Jews in the pores of Polish society. The trade of the first independent flourishing merchant towns and trading nations rested as a pure carrying trade upon the barbarism of the producing nations, between whom they acted the middleman.<sup>12</sup>

Yet this will be incomplete without this caution from Marx:

The matter is different with interest-bearing capital, however, and it is precisely this difference which lends it its specific character. The owner of money who desires to enhance his money as interest-bearing capital, turns it over to a third person, throws it into circulation, turns it into a commodity as *capital*; not just capital for himself, but also for others. It is not capital merely for the man who gives it up, but is from the very first given to the third person as capital, as a value endowed with the use-value of creating surplus-value, of creating profit; a value which preserves itself in its movement and returns to its original owner, in this case the owner of money, after performing its function. Hence it leaves him only for a specified time, passes but temporarily out of the possession of its owner into the possession of a functioning capitalist, is therefore neither given up in payment nor sold, but

merely loaned, merely relinquished with the understanding that, first, it shall return to its point of departure after a definite time interval, and, second, that it shall return as realised capital—a capital having realised its use-value, its power of creating surplus-value.<sup>13</sup>

The externalisation of relations of capital takes place only in the form of interest bearing capital, because through the process of money producing more money ( $M-C-M'$  reduced to its two extremes,  $M-M'$ , in Marx's language, "the original starting-point of capital"), capital will now appear as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest—the source of its own increase. Capital will manufacture an original form, while the original source will be pushed to an unrecognisable past. Is the postcolonial condition, then, a double confirmation of the spectre of the original—first, that capital must keep on returning to its original, and second, what we see as original is not original, and therefore only a break in this mutation process can unshackle us from the obligatory return to the original and the thralldom of the mysterious shell in which a counterfeit original dominates our consciousness? If this is true, as analytically and empirically borne out today,<sup>14</sup> we have to retrace the intermediary steps indicating one more problem of return/metamorphosis in the wake of the agrarian impasse in postcolonial countries. To take up the Indian instance once again, the peasant mode of production is in deep crisis. With the breakdown of subsistence agriculture, entry of commercial firms in food grain cultivation, plantations, horticulture and orchards and the general expansion of the market, the agrarian condition will be linked more than ever to markets. Mortgage and distress sale of land and other rural assets, debt trap, farmers' suicides,<sup>15</sup> agrarian wage and remuneration level being sensitive to prices often reaching distress level coupled with floods and droughts<sup>16</sup>—all mark the postcolonial agrarian impasse. The crisis in peasant agriculture has led peasants to combine farming with work in artisanal and small scale mining, construction and other sectors, including work in self-employed petty business.<sup>17</sup> The bourgeoisie sees this agrarian crisis as an opportunity for restructuring the economy and the entry of capital in the countryside, at the same time it views the impasse as one of closure from which exit is possible only through compulsory acquisition of land, leading to expropriation of the peasant and further rural destitution. Connected with this is the spree to acquire land by State and private infrastructure projects and other business ventures of a logistical nature. While we shall investigate the logistical turn in economy in Chapter 5, presently we have to note that

this turn entails an attention to rent as an increasingly important factor in the postcolonial economy.

Widening of roads and construction of new roads, building of smart cities, flyovers, financial centres, airports, new business districts, logistical hubs, special economic zones, new ports and so on—all these require acquisition of new land. Cities take on a neoliberal character and the migrant becomes a critical figure for the neoliberal city. Land is required for processing of waste, building of knowledge hubs and entertainment districts. These are all parables of rent extraction, and symbolise the conjunction of infrastructure, software and migrant labour. Add to that the construction of several fast corridors, smart cities and special economic zones (SEZ) in various parts of a postcolonial country and we get a fair idea of the conjunction of rent and profit.

All these on one hand give rise to Third World mega urbanisation, but on the other hand resurrect the rent factor from oblivion in capitalist economy. Through rental earnings the bourgeois economy makes up the loss it incurs in industrial investment. Rent and interest become the new images of profit; indeed, they are at times intertwined. Yet the return of capital to rent does not signify a Hegelian onward journey of some original form—an unfolding. It is important to see what the revival of the rent question implies for postcolonial accumulation. If this is a recent phenomenon, we have ample indications of this in Marx's inquiry into the theme.<sup>18</sup> Let us remain close to the text of volume III of *Capital* to understand what happens when land becomes a critical component in the metamorphosis of capital.

As Marx said in discussion on ground rent, landed property presupposes some persons (in India it includes the State, the *eminent domain*) enjoying the monopoly of disposing of particular portions of the globe as exclusive spheres of their private will to the exclusion of all others. Once this is given it is a matter of developing the economic value of this monopoly, that is, valorising it, on the basis of capitalist production. Several things draw our attention here: first, as Marx repeatedly argues in volumes I and III of *Capital*, it involves expropriation of peasantry and peasant labour; thus, we can say that extraction of rent involves simultaneously appropriation and expropriation. Second, and more importantly, as Marx cautioned, nothing is settled with the legal power, because the use of this power depends on economic conditions; thus, extraction of ground rent is not precapitalist but a phenomenon intrinsic to capitalism and bourgeois rule as a whole. Third, the economic value of the monopoly is nothing if

not developed through its valorisation on the basis of capitalist mode. We can get some sense of a series of contradictions in such a scenario ignored by Western theorists of Marxism, for instance, monopoly of land versus small peasant holdings, rent seeking landowners versus the peasantry and rural labour, capitalist investors in land versus peasants, capitalist investors in land versus the State, State (eminent domain) versus the peasants and rural labour, and capitalist investors in land versus the rent seeking landowners. In capitalism, the only solution to this series of contradictions, as Marx suggests, is the rationalisation of agriculture through complete impoverishment of immediate producers. In this way, ground rent becomes *deus ex machina* of the history of postcolonial capitalist development.

Something more happens. The postcolonial bourgeoisie in search of extra profit becomes a hound. Marx said in explaining differential rent, “surplus-profit, if normal and not due to accidental occurrences in the circulation process, is always produced as a difference between the products of two equal quantities of capital and labour, and this surplus-profit is transformed into ground-rent when two equal quantities of capital and labour are employed on equal areas of land with unequal results. Moreover, it is by no means absolutely necessary for this surplus-profit to arise from the unequal results of equal quantities of invested capital. The various investments may also employ unequal quantities of capital. Indeed, this is generally the case. But equal proportions, for instance £100 of each, produce unequal results; that is, their rates of profit are different. This is the general prerequisite for the existence of surplus-profit in any sphere of capital investment. The second prerequisite is the transformation of this surplus-profit into the form of ground-rent (of rent in general as a form distinct from profit); it must be investigated in each case when, how, under what conditions this transformation takes place.”<sup>19</sup> As we know the mad rush for land by Indian capitalists is governed by this search for surplus profit no matter the social cost. Thus they may like to invest, for instance, in say Maharashtra rather than West Bengal.

Postcolonial accumulation proceeds on bourgeoisie’s surplus profit. Thus Marx’s exposition on the transformation of surplus profit into ground rent includes the following observation: “Differential rent has the peculiarity that landed property here merely intercepts the surplus-profit which would otherwise flow into the pocket of the farmer... Landed property is here merely the cause for transferring a portion of the commodity-price which arises without the property having anything to do with it...”<sup>20</sup> What happens then say to the rent of buildings and the price of land?



Again, they show that the question here relates to “excess”—excess of agricultural profit, the excess of surplus-value characteristic of a particular sphere of production; in other words, not the net product, but the excess of this net product over the net product of other branches of industry. Marx, therefore, pointed out that to be able to speak at all of a surplus over the average profit, this average profit itself must already be established as a standard and as a regulator of production in general as is the case under capitalist production.<sup>21</sup> We are thus faced with the question of economic mystification—rent appearing as profit, profit masquerading as rent, average profit hiding surplus profit, surplus profit hiding the extraction of rent—which is exacerbated by what Marx called the illusion of competition.

In short, the boundaries of postcolonial accumulation are at least partly influenced by the interrelated dynamics of capital and rent. Significant is the fact that while the boundaries of postcolonial accumulation are also influenced by the composition of labour in the postcolonial context, which points to the phenomenon of informal labour (thus, a forcible increase in surplus labour time through unregulated long working hours and increasingly dense physical labour), the composition of capital in the postcolonial context indicates at the same time the specific context of the formation of capital (which produces not only surplus value, but also at times surplus profit), in as much as we have seen that at times without much increase in constant capital, surplus profit is created through the dynamics of rent and interest. All these call for examining at greater length the interrelated dynamics of labour and capital and the mysteries of their respective organic compositions in the postcolonial context. Yet, with all the postcolonial complications, nothing fundamentally changes in the essentials of capitalism. Marx wrote:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers—a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity—which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social

structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis—the same from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc. from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

### 3 ACCUMULATION AS TRANSITION

Let us recall the references by Marx to parliamentary legislations in the course of his discussion of primitive accumulation. The early modern State facilitated and participated in dispossession of peasants and the creation of the modern wage workers. This brings us to the question of State in our time. In recent times the State has vanished from Marxist discussion in the West, society occupies the table. State has become almost neutral—the neutral field for various social forces; State can be made amenable to the ideals of radical democracy. State appears almost irrelevant to the fortunes of capitalism in the high noon of European Union formation, flexibilisation of production, neoliberalism and global financialisation. The miraculous year of 1989 restored bourgeois power on a global scale, and by a twist of irony removed the State from the gaze precisely when it was anointing the return of the bourgeoisie to State power on a global scale.

On the other hand, the theme of State in a postcolonial study of accumulation is not accidental. Also, it is not strange that under Western capitalism theoretical critiques of the capitalist accumulation process almost did away with the State, as if capitalism unfolded in the long twentieth century without the State machinery and the imperialist order. Politics was once more taken out of political economy. In globally positioned views the State thus always appears as a minor factor, while in local revolutionary views the State appears always as a crucial factor facilitating globalisation and capitalism.<sup>23</sup> The State facilitates restructuring of the capitalist order. It is an agency of, as well as organic to, the working of capital. It is the site of passive revolution. Most importantly because of all these, the theme of State allows us a sustained engagement with the issue of transition and thus with the specific form of postcolonial capitalism.

As indicated, a salient aspect of the postcolonial situation is the near permanent condition of primitive accumulation as the other of the most modern form of capital, which one may term virtual capital.<sup>24</sup> The way the

postcolonial economy has been restructured along neoliberal lines indicates from a different angle the close relation between accumulation and transition. Crucial to this process is the production of migrant labour—labour transiting many borders and forms. Developmental and conflict-induced migration (known as forced migration) within the country and to other countries takes place under primitive and precarious conditions, and female labour forms a substantial chunk of this scenario. As more and more virtual capital, in the form of offshore funds, venture business, hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, internet based investment and banking, forward trading based wealth and so on, reach the postcolonial shores and result in massive property booms, skyrocketing land and food prices, construction upsurge and a new surge in the prices of raw materials like iron ore,<sup>25</sup> the more people are pushed towards accepting precarious and unorganised work conditions, and, as a consequence, there is more de-peasantisation and an increase in unorganised labour. In this context money has evolved into virtual forms such as finance, credit and promise, and it is in the virtual form that it will now link the two ends of accumulation.

Primitive accumulation will be spurred by construction boom, land grab, urban expansion and rampant mining and other kinds of virulent extraction of underground and surface resources, while virtual accumulation will be spurred by trading in money and finance as commodities in an unbridled manner. This situation constitutes a predicament for the post-colony. On one hand the postcolony must depend on the State to come out of this scissors attack taking place in the form of a combined appearance of primitive accumulation and virtual accumulation. On the other hand, the State is in bad shape today and postcolonial countries do not yet have any other substantive form of national autonomy. Therefore, it must carefully work its way through the problematic of State and the political economy.

The heterogeneity of labour produced out of the specifics of the accumulation process forces us to grapple with the dialectical significance of transition. The postcolonial dilemma is around the issue of transition—transition from semi-colonialism and neocolonial conditions to new democracy; from retarded agriculture to agricultural reforms, land reforms and further on to cooperatives; from foreign- and corporate-led industrialisation to a balanced industrial growth; and from rule of compradors and a corporate class to that of a national popular alliance. However, as Mao Tse Tung, on the basis of the experiences of socialist construction in the Soviet Union, argued,<sup>26</sup> this transition is not towards a predetermined

socialism; it does not lead to any precharted socialist path; the transition will be based on a resolution of the contradictions that make postcolonial capitalism.

Yet one thing is sure: in this transition the most crucial question will be how the State negotiates the double reality of accumulation with their intrinsic interrelation: primitive and virtual. The recent economic history of countries like China, India, Brazil, Korea and South Africa proves the role of the State in this global restructuring that is still continuing. In other words, transition has a close relation with the dynamics of capital—specifics, processes and institutional forms of political economy, such as the State.

Following Marx we can say that analysis of accumulation process also enables us to make a transition from the abstract to the concrete, a mysterious interiority to the visible order of determinations, a transition from Marx's theory to the analysable reality of postcolonial capitalism.

#### 4 ACCUMULATION AND THE REORDERING OF SPACE

The experiences of India, South Africa, Brazil, Chile and several other countries demonstrate how postcolonial capitalism through this combination of the low and the high forms of accumulation reorders the spaces of accumulation. Reordering of spaces becomes crucial in phenomena such as the return of the land question, resurgence of prices of commodities lined to land, mines, water, air and so on, and the reinforcement of the extractive nature of capital (extraction of biological power, nature, sub-soil resources or cognitive abilities of human beings). It results in new practices of zoning and creating corridors as circulating modes through which accumulation will take place. There are thus continuities as well as discontinuities and new features in the working of the logic of the reordering of space. These continuities and discontinuities show how old forms or configurations of space are remoulded under the conditions of postcolonial capitalism.

There are great stakes in this game of zoning and spacing. These stakes concern the bio-political organisation of postcolonial societies (for instance, in India there are coastal regulation zones to save the coast and some say also to save the fishermen, disaster zones and flood prone zones wherefrom human beings are removed to save them and to put in place protection measures such as dykes, earthquake zones where new norms of construction of buildings are introduced, there are even suicide zones

which are often dry and drought prone areas and where farmers have committed suicide in large numbers to end the miseries of life and debt). All these compel new legislations, policies and regulations marking the particularities of respective zones and the protective measures for endangered life. These zones thus show how features of nature and of life are getting intermeshed more than ever; and the two separate registers—of nature (with all its vagaries) and life—are getting tied into a new form of existence. This existence is marked by new regulations for zoning and spacing. At its heart is the logic of economy, which aims to make postcolonial labour's life resilient so that it can produce value through all kinds of special strategies to extract the last ounce of productive power from labour.<sup>27</sup>

The practice of zoning has assumed heightened importance in the background of postcolonial developmental urges. Highways are to be constructed; mines are to be opened up tearing the secrecy of the forests; airports are to be built; new economic zones like the free trade zones are to be set up; agro-industries including fruit-processing units are to be established in special areas; likewise, power grids are to be set up, and marine product processing units are to dot the coastal regions, besides the ports commanding once again distinct zones.<sup>28</sup> The country looks like an ensemble of zones representing different logics—at times complimentary, but often overlapping and conflicting. These zones require corridors to function—corridors of information, freight or cargo, money, credit, oil, gas and so on, the medium being the cable, ship, intermodal train service, pipeline, van, truck, highway or, as in the present day, containers as the most long-haul cargo transport and finally financial corridors. These corridors can be in the form of certain forms of labour linking the zones, or certain forms of transmission of information and finance, or even certain forms of circulation and processing of commodities like roads, pipelines, optical fibres, information highways or special freight corridors. While analysts often concentrate on the social life of a commodity (which is indeed one of the entry points in understanding the emergence of zones, thus plantation zones, tea zones, life of tea as a commodity, etc.), the need now is to look into the life of labour in its transit forms to make sense of what makes a zone and what links one zone with another. Clearly we are looking here beyond the factory form and trying to understand the newer forms of assembly and chain. This is also the way to make sense of the biopolitical organisation of capital and its logistical form.

The logical question is: How will these emerging zones be spaced? The citizen-worker may be a minor figure to populate such a zone, and whole

populations may have to be trained to become the denizens of such an anomalous universe. Dispossessed peasants, construction workers from villages, tea shop owners and other street vendors from nearby districts, snooty IT workers—all become parts of a heterogeneous scenario of labour. They all will demand rights, some couched in the language of citizenship, some in bare life terms, and again some couched in gross economic terms of flexibility and money. These heterogeneous forms of labour will be evened out in the form of a commodity, and more importantly through what Marx called on one hand “socially determined labour”<sup>29</sup> and on the other hand “average rate of profit”.<sup>30</sup>

The zoning exercise will become increasingly precarious. Because while the governmental and administrative history of zoning may be a long one, the more capital becomes virtual the more the zoning exercise can be subject to the unpredictable nature of fluctuations of capital (primarily capital in the form of credit) and thus the zoning exercise may be self-defeating. It could be as precarious and self-defeating as has been the creation of a euro-zone.<sup>31</sup> Within capital there is this immanent contradiction—zoning and flow. Finance capital requires both governing strategies—zoning and flow—functioning at their utmost efficiency, and thus has an insoluble paradox and dilemma, namely, how to return to a balance of the two, how to sanctify and protect the corridor that links the zones and makes flows possible.<sup>32</sup> If we think of the special economic zones (SEZ) in India and other countries in the last two decades, we can see how the postcolonial experiences of reordering of spaces enrich the Marxist understanding of circuits of capital. The circuits of capital are always over determined.

The more significant point is: Given the way zoning quarters labour with regulating conditions (assuming that all other things remain the same in an SEZ and outside) and makes a mess of average rate of profit (assuming that rent becomes a crucial factor in determining the rate of profit), can we say that there will be no longer a normal state of affairs of the market to be distinguished from an abnormal state, in other words, crisis becomes the general state of production of value? Also, with the incessant pressure on necessary labour time (in SEZ and widely prevalent SEZ like conditions), can we say that the determination of the extent of deviation of market prices from values becomes an even more hazardous exercise, because with logistical developments these “abnormal” conditions break the close relation between socially necessary labour and the productive power of labour, thus allowing the first to change without corresponding changes of the second.

Against this background it is futile to argue endlessly about whether zoning is an exception as a strategy. One can note the infinite ways in which the reality of difference and repetition (let us recall Gilles Deleuze's famous book by this name) indicates the profound relations between different forms of space, namely zones, corridors and, last but not least, the circuits that internally not only join these regions, but make them, including the corridors that link them to parts of the same template. Of course, such a networking exercise cannot be a seamless one. Contradictions between spaces of accumulation and dispossession remain an indelible feature of the process of capital circulation.<sup>33</sup> The differences in the organisational forms of capital speak of varying relations between capital, citizenship, sovereignty and territory. They also speak of various spatial and social forms of organisation of capital. In this regard, we have to remember that cities as special zones of commerce and trade have not been exceptions in history. They call to our mind cities of the Hanseatic League in the middle and early modern ages in Europe.<sup>34</sup>

Zones also problematise the magnitude representing the socially necessary labour which will determine market value.<sup>35</sup> If we take into account the social impact of the special zones, for instance, in India in Gurgaon, Rajarhat, Chennai and other places we may say that the *socially necessary* labour is approaching labour of *average* productivity. But this poses a problem for postcolonial capitalism here. Socially necessary labour can be nearly the same as labour of higher productivity or lower productivity. In order to be close to average (meaning the most widespread level of) productivity, labour cannot remain zoned in a big way in any special manner. Thus, the dilemma: Will accumulation strategy under postcolonial conditions depend on zoning strategy or will it become general? The fluctuating fortunes of SEZs and the smart cities in countries like China, India or Mexico confirm this dilemma. One way postcolonial capitalism may resolve the dilemma is that when zones have served the purpose of being the catalytic agent to boost up the average rate of profit, they become like other normal places, which is to say that other normal places will become zone like sites.

This then is the dilemma when neoliberalism is grafted onto the body of postcolonial capitalism. As Indian experiences suggest, in this recomposed form, capitalism restructures the economy, of which reordering of space becomes one element. In the West, piecemeal social reform through the first half of the twentieth century was replaced after the Second World War by a more thoroughgoing reformism of the Keynesian welfare state,

which was based on a systematic application of fiscal policy both as a means of redistribution and as a macroeconomic regulation to remedy the deficiencies of the market. Yet within three decades the Keynesian model was considered a failure in view of a deceleration in the pace of global capitalist accumulation, escalating inflation and increasing difficulty of financing government budget deficits—all these leading to restrictive monetary policies and reduction of state expenditure plans.<sup>36</sup> The crisis of the Keynesian state was thus transformed into a positive virtue by neoliberals, who now reassert the curative power of the market.<sup>37</sup> The latest round in the proliferation of zoning as a strategy of accumulation and the reordering of space has been against this background. In this vein, we have to remember that in the last quarter of the twentieth century zones were created less for the production of ordinary commodities or particular commodities like means of production, but more for production of money as a commodity (typical of these spaces would be London, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Dubai, Doha, Singapore and Mumbai)—that is to say an environ where production and circulation of money as a commodity merge. Thus, we are not dealing with a situation where there is an over production of goods requiring new channels of circulation via public reform programmes, including fiscal reforms to widen the base of consumption (famously the New Deal and various other Keynesian programmes), but the consequences of the expansion of the credit system resulting in accumulation of money capital in increasingly abstract, surreal and virtual or fictitious forms. The basic principle of all such forms has been capitalisation of revenue based on future production of surplus value as well as capitalisation of various forms of credit, such as banking capital or stock transactions in public debt. In this way, the “real” and “financial” spheres, while remaining different, become virtually one. Capital in the form of goods and capital in the form of money, though different, become inseparable in the economy. The difficulties in realising profit in the industrial sector is sought to be allayed in the financial sector (besides in the form of rental revenues) through emphasis on profits from credit operations, which finally tell back on the economy itself. We are thus facing here the question of several competing circuits endangering the corridors of supply and circulation, impacting especially on zones. Even though one is the virtual and the other real, yet in a sense both are real; one is also working as the virtual to the other. Therefore, the collapse of the virtual creates new wastelands of capital in the wake of its departure. The postcolonial world represents the wasteland.



What will then determine the relationship between the zones and volatile capital flows and the sudden emergence of wastelands, breakdown of circuits due to conflicts, competition and war, and the neoliberal way of organising the economy, which is precisely the way of combining the virtual and primitive modes of accumulation? Such an inquiry requires two changes in our pattern of thinking. First, it means that we increasingly view the circuit as a chain (with its weak links). Second, it means viewing more than ever economic relationships as essentially social relationships on which productivity (in other words the productive power of the present economy and its accumulation capacity) depends. These relationships, variously mentioned in this chapter, are between agriculture and industry, industry and services, capital goods and consumer goods, profit and interest plus rent, the overall economy and the unorganised or informal or the “need” sector,<sup>38</sup> growth and infrastructure, economic infrastructure and social infrastructure (such as education and health and skill formation), state and its sub-regions, river basins and dry areas, valley and hill, capital region and distant regions, and finally zones of capital investment and zones of social investment. These relationships will be uneven and in the form of a circuit they will always pose the threat of breakdown. Conceived as a chain they will always suggest some weak links.

Before we proceed further let us review our arguments made so far on the theme of a postcolonial analytic of the accumulation process:

First, Marx’s method of analysing accumulation as reproduction is both historical and transhistorical, sticking to historical singularities as well as pursuing a logical argument in dissecting the category of capital. The social is as important as the economic in this dynamic, whose biggest mark is the presence of several internal boundaries as well as external ones.

Second, the notion of economy is crucial—with its manifold implications—which influence the reshaping of the internal and external boundaries of accumulation. This gives a clue to the relation between profit and interest, and particularly rent, a relation crucial to postcolonial accumulation.

Third, postcolonial capitalism is an essential gradient in any analysis of the dynamics of accumulation today.<sup>39</sup> The angle of postcolonial capitalism implies (1) a combination of the virtual and the most primitive forms of accumulation, (2) a return of the land and other

resources question to a central place in the political economy as the combined phenomena of extraction and rent will assume increasing significance in the expansion of capitalism, (3) a new but precarious strategy of zoning and creating corridors for reconfiguration of the spaces of capital, (4) the salience of transit labour (simplistically called migrant labour) and (5) the persisting significance of the State as the facilitator of the conditions of accumulation. For all these reasons, postcolonial capitalism will be the stake on which the life of capital as accumulation will depend.

Fourth, all these mean that in the postcolonial epoch accumulation will mean a reordering of space.

Fifth, in the postcolonial age war becomes crucial to accumulation and reordering of space. We have not discussed this point till now and this chapter will end with a brief discussion on war, accumulation and the postcolonial question.

## 5 WAR, ACCUMULATION AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

The accumulation debate raged for more than a century under the long shadows of colonialism, imperialism, production of super profit, competition and monopolies, reorganisation of space, different forms of capital and above all wars. In this context, one may take note of the Lenin–Rosa Luxemburg debate. During the war Rosa Luxemburg wrote the *Junius Pamphlet*, wherein she mentioned the mistakes of the German working-class movement, which had not been internationalist, and said that in the imperialist age national wars were no longer possible.<sup>40</sup> Lenin, while appreciating and admiring the internationalist character of the pamphlet, wrote,

The first of Junius's erroneous propositions is embodied in the fifth thesis of the *Internationale* group, "National wars are no longer possible in the epoch (era) of this unbridled imperialism. National interests serve only as an instrument of deception, in order to place the working masses at the service of their mortal enemy, imperialism." The beginning of the fifth thesis, which concludes with the above statement, discusses the nature of the *present* war as an imperialist war. It may be that this negation of national wars generally is either an oversight, or an accidental overstatement in emphasising the

perfectly correct idea that the *present* war is an imperialist war, not a national war. This is a mistake that must be examined, for various Social-Democrats, in view of the false assertions that the *present war* is a national war, have likewise mistakenly denied the possibility of *any* national war (italics author's)<sup>41</sup>

Lenin then went on to a discussion on the dialectical relation between national war and imperialist war. He critiqued Rosa's treatment of the chronology of the national wars, as if the national wars collectively formed the preceding stage of imperialist war, and now with the advent of the inter-imperialist war national wars had become impossible. Lenin's observation is significant because in Lenin's analysis of the dynamics of accumulation under imperialist condition, colonial plunders, and therefore national wars, become inevitable in as much as inter-imperialist wars are. The acute awareness of the contemporary situation led Lenin to mention the possibility of national wars even in an era of inter-imperialist wars.

The war brought to the revolutionary leaders of the European working-class movements a new awareness of the need for dialectical judgement. Like Lenin, Rosa also attempted to treat the national question dialectically, even though Lenin found her falling short of the exacting standards that he set for theoretical arguments. The Lenin–Rosa Luxemburg debate was not over political tactics only. It involved, as we know, broader questions involving their respective views on imperialism, national revolutionary wars and so on.

Moving on to other phases in the debate over the accumulation question, we can recall how the connection between war and accumulation became a thorny issue, just as the notion of crisis became integrally linked to the debate. This also raised the question of how we perceive the crisis? Was war a crisis? Were social welfare and recovery measures, planned in war time, such as the William Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services (1942) and the postwar European Recovery Plan (ERP) known as the Marshall Plan (1948) linked to the accumulation question? When the war in Iraq began many Marxists in the postcolonial world spoke of a crisis of the finance driven late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century capitalism, though Marxist writings in the Western capitalist countries were still playing with completely different issues, such as culture, citizenship, democracy and the European Union. War never figured in these writings.<sup>42</sup> We also know that in the several Marxist writings, otherwise instructive, war, security and the development of the capitalist economy

have been seen less as intertwined factors. The period of “long peace”<sup>43</sup> (post Second World War era stretching up to the 1990s) is also seen as the period of long accumulation. Yet this picture cannot explain the self-working of the accumulation process. Indeed, both civil and national wars during the long peace period cleared the ground for fresh accumulation in various parts of the world. A view from below, which also informs to a great measure the postcolonial argument, teaches us to take wars and conflicts seriously, as they clear the ground for accumulation, exactly as the post-Second World War Marshall Plan did more than 65 years ago.

To put all these briefly, then: the accumulation question which is at the centre of capitalism is never at the centre. The centre is always to one side. Capitalism is real, but is also the theatre of the world of politics, religion, morality, gender, race, caste, nation and, of course, economic theories—in short, myths and opiates make capitalism decentred because our own consciousness of the world is framed with illusion, and that is wherefrom the postcolonial critique of capitalism begins. Therefore, the complete demystification of the accumulation question is always deferred, always beyond, always advancing from illusion towards the real. Althusser had remarked that philosophical battles are parts of the perpetual war that the bourgeoisie has always wanted to put an end to. Yet no philosophy, least of all materialist philosophy, can exist without this theoretical relationship to force. They bear the marks of a generalised state of war. The truth of capitalism as an established fact does not arrive easily; it has to always graduate from truth as ordeal through various mystifying philosophical and legal practices that lie at the root of many modern institutions. War serves the function of breaking various norms, and interrupts the so-called natural process of capitalism that had achieved the status of truth as an established fact.

## NOTES

1. Marx included parliamentary acts, etc., in the extra-economic; thus, state budgetary instruments, public policies and other governing measures count in the way the social grounds are cleared for accumulation to take place. See, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 885–886. Unfortunately, not much advance has been made along the lead provided by Marx in investigating the role of the State as a clearing agency for the capitalist accumulation to begin in postcolonial democracies in particular. Postcolonial democratic theorists have emphasised the counterbalancing

role of parliamentary democracy in the dynamics of primitive accumulation. See, for instance, Partha Chatterjee, “Democracy and Economic Transformation in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43 (16), 19 April 2008, pp. 53–60; Chatterjee argued that with the recent changes in India there was a new dynamics that tied the operations of “political society” (comprising the peasantry, artisans and petty producers in the informal sector) with the hegemonic role of the bourgeoisie in “civil society”. This was necessitated by the requirement of reversing the effects of primitive accumulation of capital with governmental activities like anti-poverty programmes. The mechanisms of electoral democracy become the field for the political negotiation of demands for the transfer of resources, through fiscal and other means, from the accumulation economy to programmes aimed at providing the livelihood needs of the poor. This, Chatterjee argued, is a necessary political condition for the continued rapid growth of corporate capital. Suffice it to note for the present that Chatterjee does not consider the State to be an agency of primitive accumulation, but rather the negotiating site for the protection of the poor, the expropriated. On the other hand, in India, the continuation of the Land Acquisition Act, now with some changes (the new name being The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act, 2013) and first promulgated under colonial rule (1894), is a case in point that proves the active involvement of the State in the process of primitive accumulation resulting in expropriation of the people.

2. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); in a subsection on “The Primitive Accumulation of Modern Cartography” (pp. 30–43) Mezzadra and Neilson provide a compelling analysis of how the concept of primitive accumulation required for Marx an accompanying analysis of the expansion of the area for the operation of capital. Capital expanded by expanding the area of its operation—not only sector wise and in a societal sense, but also in a physical sense.
3. Marx significantly remarked, “So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, 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”—*Capital*, Volume I, pp. 874–875.
4. Alex Callinicos, “The Limits of Passive Revolution”, *Capital and Class*, 34 (3), pp. 491–507.
5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, *The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, ed. Friedrich Engels, 1894 (Moscow: Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1959; New York: International Publishers, n.d.), pp. 49–73.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
11. “...the relation of capital to profit, i.e., of capital to surplus-value that appears on the one hand as an excess over the cost-price of commodities realised in the process of circulation and, on the other, as a surplus more closely determined by its relation to the total capital, *the capital* appears as *a relation to itself*, a relation in which it, as the original sum of value, is distinguished from a new value which it generated. One is conscious that capital generates this new value by its movement in the processes of production and circulation. But the way in which this occurs is cloaked in mystery and appears to originate from hidden qualities inherent in capital itself. The further we follow the process of the self-expansion of capital, the more mysterious the relations of capital will become, and the less the secret of its internal organism will be revealed.”—Italics Marx’s, *Ibid.*, p. 31.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
14. On this I have written extensively elsewhere on the postcolonial ways of accumulation; see Ranabir Samaddar, *The Neo-liberal Strategies of Governing India* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), Chapters 5–8.
15. In recent time, some articles drew public attention. For instance, Jayati Ghosh, “Food Insecurity in South Asia”, *Asian Age*, 27 December 2005; Aruna Roy, “Minds and Intestines”, *Tehelka*, 10 December 2005; Nistula Hebbar’s four-part serial on wages, grains and the public distribution system, the title of the first part being, “Wages Fail to Come in Time”, *Business Standard*, 16–19 May 2005; National Human Rights Commission, “Extract from a Hearing on the Right to Food”, 2003; Colin Gonsalves, “The Spectre of Starving India”, <http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/colin.pdf> (accessed on 15 July 2017); on famine and near famine condition in Kalahandi, Orissa, see for instance the report, “Agony in Kalahandi” by Farzand Ahmed, *India Today*, 31 July 1985 - <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/orissa-drought-famine-force-women-in-kalahandi-to-abandon-and-sell-their-children/1/354353.html> (accessed on 20 August 2017); the famine continued for decades.
16. The similarity to the late-nineteenth-century colonial condition in the wake of global drought is striking. See, Utsa Patnaik, “The New Colonialism—Impact of Economic Reforms on Employment and Food Security in India” in Malini Bhattacharya (ed.), *Globalisation—Perspectives in Women’s Studies* (Delhi: Tulika Books, 2004); on the late-nineteenth-century situation,

- Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts—El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2002); also Jean Dreze, “Famine Prevention in India”, in Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (eds.), *The Political Economy of Hunger*, Volume II, *Famine Prevention* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
17. This is brought out vividly in Md. Zakaria Siddiqui and Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, “Livelihoods of Marginal Mining and Quarrying Households in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, L (26–27), 27 June 2015, pp. 27–32; for a more nuanced study on the same theme, where she argues for a combination of the insights from labour studies with peasant studies, see Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, “Extracting Peasants from the Fields: Rushing for a Livelihood?”, Working Paper 216, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, February 2014; see also, Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, Kim Alexander and Chansouk Insouvanh, “Informal Mining in Livelihood Diversification: Mineral Dependence and Rural Communities in Lao PDR”, *South East Asia Research*, 22 (1), pp. 103–122; on the significance of self-employed labour in India in the context of this discussion, *Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector* (Government of India, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, 2007).
  18. Significantly Thomas Picketty in his recent investigation of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014) has discussed many of the “original” factors (such as rent, income, public debt, inheritance) in the production of wealth.
  19. *Capital*, Volume III, p. 464.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 533.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 550.
  22. *Ibid.* p. 555.
  23. A book from which we have learnt so much is a case in point. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar’s *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970) almost omits the State from discussion. It does not include the role of the State in the discussion on the realisation of surplus value through profit, interest and rent, and for that matter the constitution of classes. See especially Part 3 of the book.
  24. Marx wrote of virtual capital in connection with money capital and in particular hoarding: “production of virtual additional capital in the present case... expresses nothing but a phenomenon of the process of production itself, production, in a particular form, of elements of productive capital. The large scale production of additional virtual money capital at numerous points of the periphery of circulation, is therefore nothing more than the result and expression of the many sided production of virtual additional

productive capital, whose genesis does not itself presuppose additional monetary expenditure of money on the part of the industrial capitalists... The successive transformation of this virtually additional productive capital into virtual money-capital (hoard) on the part of A, A', A'', etc. (department I), which is conditioned by the successive sale of their surplus product—i.e., by the repeated one-sided sale of commodities without a complementary purchase—results in repeated withdrawal of money from circulation and a corresponding hoard formation.”—*Capital*, Volume II, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 573; For Marx, virtuality also indicated potentiality; thus, the potential of hoarded money or money in circulation to be additionally productive. See also the editorial note of Frederick Engels in Chapter 2, “The term—latent—is borrowed from the idea of latent heat in physics, which has now been almost replaced by the theory of the transformation of energy. Marx therefore uses in the third part (a later version), another term, borrowed from the idea of potential energy, viz.:—potential—or analogous to the virtual velocities of D’Alembert,—virtual capital.”—p. 158 (n 1)

25. Consider the infamous case of the Bellary mines in India. The international boom for iron ore made India at the dawn of the new century the third-largest exporter of iron ore in the world, and one-third of the exports came from the Bellary area. The Bellary region alone exported 15 million tonnes of high quality iron ore worth \$67 million overseas, mainly to China. A boom in the Chinese construction industry took place in the wake of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. The international price of iron ore rose from \$17 per tonne in 2000–2001 to \$75 at its peak in 2005–2006. Around this time the demand from the Indian steel giants also grew. Thus, exports, which had been 75 per cent of total production, fell to 60 per cent, and the mined iron ore began to be supplied in greater volume to the Indian market. The giants of the industry—Arcelor Mittal, Posco, Tata Steel, Jindal—all wanted to build steel plants. In 2008, steel prices doubled, surpassing \$700 per ton. Bellary mining symbolised the surge in demand for iron ore and the accompanying shift to privatisation and the open market economy in India. Women and children were pushed into the informal labour market, especially in sectors like mining, where deregulation of laws was aimed at attracting direct and private investment. Meanwhile, agrarian stagnation forced the landless agricultural labourers and marginal peasantry to look for other means of wage earning. By 2005, the hectic scramble for iron ore led to uncontrollable social and ecological chaos in the Bellary–Hospet–Sandur district. Most of the mining operations were carried out by small, illegal mining companies which did not abide by any environmental or social regulations. The working and living conditions of the workers were highly exploitative, there was lack of even



basic facilities and the poor level of sanitation led to ill-health. Bellary recorded the highest incidence of HIV in Karnataka. Mining dust affected mine workers, who developed serious and chronic illnesses like tuberculosis, silicosis, cancer and other respiratory illnesses. Ill workers gave way to children and young people in this hazardous industry. Estimates put the number of daily wage labourers there around 60,000, half of them children under the age of 14 and around 20,000 of them women. The daily wage paid to men was around 110 rupees, to women around 75 rupees, children 50 rupees; on average a family earned about 180–200 rupees. The mining boom that began at the end of 2003 (when the price of iron ore rose from Rs 200 per metric tonne to Rs 2700 per metric tonne) made the Bellary Brothers the “mining czars” of the state. Figures and facts taken from [http://bellary0.hpage.co.in/reddy-bros\\_1024057.html](http://bellary0.hpage.co.in/reddy-bros_1024057.html) (accessed on 12 October 2015).

26. *On the Ten Major Relationships* (1956, [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_51.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_51.htm)) (accessed on 6 February 2015).
27. Resilience is linked to the thesis of sustainability of life under capitalism so that labour as part of nature can be reproduced for production of surplus value. We shall discuss this in Chapter 5.
28. Of particular significance here is the creation of new mining zones through expansion of the mining sector. Analysts have noted the impact of India’s new mining policy on the livelihood of the indigenous people; however, mining companies are elated at the prospect of an extractive gold-rush. On 30 June 2016, as news trickled in of the impending change in policy following cabinet approval of the National Mineral Exploration Policy, which would open up to 100 new mining blocks for exploration, Economic Times reported “Exploration Policy Lifts Mining Stocks up to 18 per cent”—<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/stocks/news/exploration-policy-lifts-mining-stocks-up-to-18/articleshow/52981803.cms> (accessed on 3 July 2016).
29. On this, the best help is Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, 1928 (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972); in particular, Chapter 16, “Socially Necessary Labour”; however, Illich overstates the case when he comments that the concept of *socially necessary* labour presupposes equilibrium between the given branch of production and other branches. Neoliberal zoning strategy for accumulation begins with dismantling such a presupposition.
30. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Chapter 9, “Formation of a General Rate of Profit (Average Rate of Profit) and Transformation of the Values of Commodities into Prices of Production”, pp. 254–272.
31. Heikki Patomaki, *The Great Eurozone Disaster: From Crisis to Global New Deal*, trans. James O’Connor (London: Zed Books, 2012).

32. On financial flows and global crisis, see Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (eds.), *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*, trans. Jason Francis McGimsey (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2010); in particular Chapter 3, Carlo Vercione, “The Crisis of Law of Value and the Becoming-Rent of Profit”, pp. 85–118. Carlo Vercione notes that “the passage from the crisis of internet market conventions to the crisis of the real-estate market conventions lies not only in the cyclic repetition of the logic of finance, but marks a fundamental turning point in the dynamic of cognitive capitalism” (p. 88). See also Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, “Extraction, Logistics, Finance: Global Crisis and the Politics of Operations”, *Radical Philosophy*, 178, March–April 2013, pp. 8–18; also, Sven Opitz and Ute Tellmann, ‘Global Territories: Zones of Economic and Legal Dis/connectivity’, *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, 13 (3), 2012, pp. 261–82.
33. On the simultaneity of the two processes, see the report on the new town in Gurgaon in India—“Gurgaon Grief: Now for the Next Shake-up in the Global Labour Market”—A Report in *The Indian Express*, 29 September 2011, p. 13. Another such zone at Rajarhat-New Town near Kolkata in India can be seen equally as a paradigmatic site for the operation of the principle of difference and repetition. On Rajarhat-New Town as a new zone of economy, Ishita Dey, R. Samaddar and Suhit Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination* (London and New Delhi: Routledge, 2013).
34. Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism—15th to 18th Century*, Volume III, trans. Sian Reynolds (London: William Collins, 1985), p. 103; also see James Westfall Thompson, *Economic and Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages, 1300–1530* (1931, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969).
35. Recall Marx, “On the one hand, market-value is to be viewed as the average value of commodities produced in a single sphere, and, on the other, as the individual value of the commodities produced under average conditions of their respective sphere and forming the bulk of the products of that sphere” —*Capital*, Volume III, p. 178; here “sphere” is the *zone*.
36. Heikki Patomaki, “On the Dialectics of Global Governance in the Twenty-first century: A Polanyian Double Movement?”, *Globalizations*, 11 (5), 2014, pp. 733–750; also Heikki Patomaki, *The Great Eurozone Disaster: From Crisis to Global New Deal*, Chapter 6, pp. 104–132.
37. This is the classic neoliberal strategy—turning a crisis into a virtue; see Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neo liberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013); this is true of the recent economic history of India where the crisis of debt, inflation, recession and general accumulation crisis of the preglobalisation era was turned from 1991 into a positive ground for neoliberal structural reforms.

38. Need economy is a concept used extensively by the late Indian economist Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality, and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (Delhi: Routledge, 2013); we shall return to his work in Chapter 6.
39. Not surprisingly, Lenin stressed the question of colonies and the birth of finance capital; Rosa Luxemburg, too, situated her analysis of accumulation in the context of imperialism.
40. *The Junius Pamphlet*—<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/ch01.htm#n3> (accessed on 10 February 2014).
41. V.I. Lenin, “The Junius Pamphlet”, 1916, Collected Works, 4th English edition, Volume 22 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, pp. 305–19), p. 308.
42. There were exceptions. Against the background of the Vietnam War, US Marxist writings focused on war and accumulation; see for instance, Simon Clarke, *Keynesianism, Monetarism, and the Crisis of the State* (Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1988), Chapters 10–11.
43. Phrase used by John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989); *The Long Peace* ignored the short wars of neocolonial aggression and conquest.

# Living Labour I: Reproduction of Life and Labour

## I LIVING LABOUR AND THE LABOUR OF LIVING

It is perhaps typical of our time when philosophers are trying to understand what life is that they forget the question of what labour is. This is not an accusation against our philosophers, for they are justified in saying that all that is being critically written today is concerned with the labour of living. Life of labour, more exactly life as labour, probably eludes the thinkers of today while they remain engrossed in understanding the labour of leading life. We therefore get questions like: What is life like under certain specific political conditions? What kind of power grows out of disciplining and protecting life, from control over life? What does life mean under different thought-conditions? To questions like: What do ethical practices signify in spending one's life? Is life not, we are asked, one of realising the nature of subjection to a regime of power, yet determining how to recover the activity of the subject? These questions, great as they are, ignore the other set of great questions about what life as labour means, how it is still the key to production of wealth, what is living labour, what is congealed labour, what is the life cycle of labour and, therefore, what does reproduction of life mean under specific conditions? Both these sets of questions animate us even as we recognise the tension between the two. Is there a way of connecting the two organically? In some sense the clue to understanding postcolonial labour may be found in an attempt to find an answer.<sup>1</sup>

The first set of ideas and questions (revolving around life) led European philosophers such as Michel Foucault to develop the idea of technologies of life, hence biopower, biopolitics. The second set of questions (revolving around labour) led Marx a century earlier to develop the theory of labour power, labour as power to produce value, labour as power to produce life, hence reproducing the power of labour. The theory of productive power thus had its antecedent in the theory of productive labour. There is no doubt that after centuries of struggle by labouring people to escape, defy and destroy conditions of servitude, the importance of linking the arguments of life with arguments of labour is significant more than ever. In one sense, the correct handling of the relation between the two rests on the historical task of emancipation of the labouring classes in postcolonial countries. And in that sense the postcolonial condition symbolises the link between these two aspects of life: power and labour.

Conceptually how can we link these two sets of questions? How can we bring back the issue of labour process in the inquiry of conditions of life as labour?

As an initial response to the question, we can begin by reflecting on the way a new type of power emerged in the wake of what Marx had termed primitive accumulation, the condition of dispossession, the condition of bare life, to which labour is reduced, and which provides the ground for capital to begin accumulation. In previous chapters, we discussed the notion of primitive accumulation and its salience under postcolonial capitalism. The purpose in revisiting the question in this chapter will be to examine the absolute relevance of Marx's formulations on conditions of life when it has been reduced to the minimum, when the labourer has been stripped of all assets save his/her own labour power so that s/he can produce capital, in order to show, let us say, the original conditions of the emergence of a distinct type of power over life. Recovery of this condition in our critical understanding will be the justification for working around this theme one more time.

As noted in the preceding chapter, in vast areas of the postcolonial world primitive and the most advanced forms of accumulation have combined in installing and deepening the capitalist mode of production. The needs of accumulation have made management of populations an imperative of our age. Marx noted also the emergence of relative surplus population as accumulation proceeded apace. He wrote,

We have seen that the development of the capitalist mode of production and of the productive power of labour—at once the cause and effect of accumulation—enables the capitalist, with the same outlay of variable capital, to set in action more labour by greater exploitation (extensive or intensive) of each individual labour power. We have further seen that the capitalist buys with the same capital a greater mass of labour power, as he progressively replaces skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children.

On the one hand, therefore, with the progress of accumulation, a larger variable capital sets more labour in action without enlisting more labourers; on the other, a variable capital of the same magnitude sets in action more labour with the same mass of labour power; and, finally, a greater number of inferior labour powers by displacement of higher.

The production of a relative surplus population, or the setting free of labourers, goes on therefore yet more rapidly than the technical revolution of the process of production that accompanies, and is accelerated by, the advance of accumulation; and more rapidly than the corresponding diminution of the variable part of capital as compared with the constant. If the means of production, as they increase in extent and effective power, become to a less extent means of employment of labourers, this state of things is again modified by the fact that in proportion as the productiveness of labour increases, capital increases its supply of labour more quickly than its demand for labourers. The overwork of the employed part of the working class swells the ranks of the reserve, whilst conversely the greater pressure that the latter by its competition exerts on the former, forces these to submit to overwork and to subjugation under the dictates of capital. The condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the overwork of the other part, and the converse, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalists, and accelerates at the same time the production of the industrial reserve army on a scale corresponding with the advance of social accumulation.<sup>2</sup>

Social governance emerged in this context of population management in a society that would have to reproduce labouring life as value producing power. As a technology of rule social governance would therefore ensure:

1. the management of labouring population;
2. turning non-productive into productive labour;
3. pacifying the restless, non-productive, idle labour;
4. managing labour market needs and uncertainties;

5. producing skills, which the capitalist production requires on an increasing scale, among the productive population; and
6. generally maintaining conditions of reproduction by regulating the atmosphere of social war.

This situation links more than ever the art of governing and managing people's lives with economy, though we must not ignore the vast amount of force—still required at various stages to set the process of accumulation—often clothed in developmental discourse. This force is employed by the State, private corporate bodies and all those who enjoy powers of impunity or immunity, in short sovereign power.

We are here faced with a problem—historical as well as in terms of logic. The problem is: if governmentality is defined as a ratio where coercion is reducing and a non-coercive form of power is gaining ascendancy, in other words the primitive form of accumulation is declining and a more and more advanced and virtual form of accumulation is correspondingly becoming dominant, what are we to make of the pattern of biopolitics of our age when population management shows marks of deployment of both brutal power and advanced governmental techniques? In other words, the return of primitive accumulation as a capitalist phenomenon in large parts of the non-Western world makes the naturally assumed relation between governmentality, biopower and modern economy based on advanced forms of accumulation a problem.

There are of course many ways to address this problematic, for instance as Michel Foucault did by way of focusing on the concepts of biopolitics and biopower along with a radical critique of sovereignty and law.<sup>3</sup> The crisis of sovereignty as “modality or organising schema” of power (recall *Society Must be Defended*<sup>4</sup>) was discussed by him from the point of view of the contradictions arising from the commoditisation and socialisation of labour power: while the technologies of discipline address the problem of the “fabrication” of individuals, of docile and useful bodies, through the “system of subjection” of a new political economy and political anatomy, biopolitics addresses through its “regulatory” devices the entire life of man-as-species, as it is represented in populations (“a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they may not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted”). The main problem at stake in Foucault's analysis was precisely the modality of the intertwining and articulation of disciplinary “individualising” and biopolitical “massifying” power devices. This reminds us of the way Marx analysed the factory form of production with a mass of labouring bodies as the subject.

This takes us directly to the theme of labour and labour power, and the starkness to which labour is reduced in a regime of primitive accumulation. In *The Birth of Bio-politics* Foucault connected government as a form of political rationality with the phenomenon called economy; and in analysing German postwar liberalism and the liberalism of the Chicago School, he not only gave us a sketch of neoliberal governmentality, but also enriched the concept of government by scribing in it the concept of biopolitics.<sup>5</sup> He said that neoliberalism makes the problem of the society the problem of economy. Neoliberal governmentality would make the market the linchpin of construction of the State, and the inequality of the society would be the equality of all. The market as the fundamental economic mechanism could function only under a series of conditions, which had to be guaranteed by legal measures. Pure competition, therefore, neither existed naturally nor could be completely attained, but provided the justified goal for incessant and active politics. Such politics would constantly balance a limited domain of liberty and a legitimate domain of government intervention. There was no naturalism in this economic-institutional unity called the government. The other implication of this new idea of government was a new emphasis on law, because only with a proper form of law and appropriate juridical institutions necessary for social interventions could the entrepreneurial form of activity become the very heart of society. Law no longer belonged to superstructure, but became an essential part of the economic-institutional base and an indispensable instrument for creating entrepreneurial forms within society. The social in this way becomes a form of the economic. Managing social domains becomes a matter of vital policy. Biopolitics comes to its own with the rise of neoliberal governmentality.

In the postcolonial condition, however, we have besides the factory form other forms—dispersed, informal and unorganised—with labouring subjects moving from one site to another. We need to study how this dispersed labouring population is managed under postcolonial capitalism. In this, we have still to learn from Marx how to make sense of this transitory state of labour, and the combination of a dispersed state of power and centralised state power—in other words, a new form of biopower.

As already pointed out, Marx foresaw the capitalist task of population management. In Sections 3–4 of Chapter 25 of *Capital* (Volume I) he discussed the phenomenon of relative surplus population and its different



forms. In Section 5 he discussed the nomad population, whom he described as a class of people whose origin is agricultural, but whose occupation is in great part industrial. They are the light infantry of capital, thrown by it, according to its needs, now to this point, now to that. When they are not on the march, they camp. These writings suggest the ways in which the formulation of biopower and biopolitics can profitably proceed, namely by identifying its foundational elements—primitive accumulation, laws of population, violence and government of market economy.

It is true that a forcible dissolution of the preceding phase of society is necessary for the modern forms of population management to emerge, and a modern form of biopower can emerge only in the wake of violence. But it is important to remember that violence is constantly required to reinforce such power. On one hand, the bourgeoisie needs violence to constantly extract every ounce of power of the labouring body (and therefore the violent conditions of production), and on the other hand it wants to perfect a form of social governance that will make reproduction of economy almost automatic, self-regulated, so that the conditions of reproduction are resilient enough to withstand periodic shocks and possibilities of break downs. Thus, appropriate modes of governing the society including the labouring bodies, transforming them into resilient subjects must be ensured. What is the appropriate way to ensure such a paradoxical combination? How is the bourgeoisie to combine the primitive and the virtual modes of accumulation, the postcolonial and the neoliberal, the global conditions for reproduction and the local forms which will make accumulation of capital possible? To put the matter bluntly, how to make labour disappear in the economic process so that production of wealth appears as a function of capital only? Is it not already on the horizon of possibility when postcolonial labour appears as dispersed, immaterial to higher forms of accumulation and growth, need-centric in place of being market-centric and amenable to complete deregulation? Labour's presence here is subject to the vagaries of time: the divergent, yet intersecting times of production and circulation. In the same way, the co-existence of the primitive form of accumulation and virtual accumulation by high financial modes is also an illustration of double time, or more accurately heterogeneous time, which compels living labour to become fragmented, differentiated and heterogeneous.

Marx's discussion on primitive accumulation in many ways, therefore, remains a classic text not only on the emergence of biopower, but also on the simultaneity of various circuits of capital (the co-ordination and

management of which requires governance—though as we know such governance periodically collapses). This is not only because the famous last part of *Capital* (Volume I) discusses the life of labour, more accurately the life of physical labour at a particular historical conjuncture—which he termed the epoch of primitive accumulation—as the crucial component of an emerging mode of power (the power of capital), but also because of several other things, which reflect on the problematic of time in capitalist production. Primary among them are the points he made, namely, how does labour as power emerge in history? How does the owner of this power become aware that from now on s/he cannot survive in this world without it? What is the historical moment when two modes of power confront each other—power of capital and power of labour? What are the complex circumstances under which labour as producer of value exhausts all other meanings and dimensions of life? Marx wanted to speak of capital, but here he was speaking of the process when labour is reduced to its bareness. The particular ways in which surplus value is realised as profit, average profit emerges as a crucial category in the functioning of capitalist economy and profit is distributed among revenue-consuming classes ensure that labour will have only a spectral presence in the formal accounts of production and circulation. Therefore, labour's presence is only spectral in volumes II and III of *Capital*, where Marx discussed different moments of circulation of capital. But what we get in this discussion when we reread it in light of the later two volumes of *Capital* is a theory of modern power.

In the composition of labour, therefore, we must attend to the specific transient forms inasmuch as in the composition of capital we must attend to the specific forms in which capital can produce profit. These two inquiries allow us to situate the entire discussion on biopolitics in the context of accumulation. We can venture a little more and suggest that nothing is more pertinent than a discussion of postcolonial capitalism in order to bring out fully the significance of biopolitics in our time, thus the simultaneity of both coercive and non-coercive forms of power, varying modes of population management and the way life appears as nothing but the site of labour in place of labour appearing as a site in life.

In short, then, biopower, the equivalent of the function of modern market in terms of social governance, can never be fully scientifically exercised. Recall Foucault's arguments in *The Birth of Bio-politics*, where he indicated the dilemma of modern governance, namely how to rule scientifically rather than arbitrarily, that is to govern least so that society is governed best or, in other words, govern best so that society has to be

governed least. This was a classic liberal dream, somewhat dimmed in the decades of the high noon of the welfare state, and now brought back to the centre stage of politics by neoliberalism, which argues that through governmental promotion of market mechanisms the poorest can enter the market, and through governance of the market the governance of society can be ensured.<sup>6</sup> Yet as we know from these decades of experience, bodies never became completely docile. Physicality was not erased from life. Breadlines did not vanish. Wars did not cease. The power over life became overwhelming through a mix of violence (national, class, social, gender, race, etc.) and economy, rational governance and arbitrariness, and of the ideological hold of a myth of honesty, frugality, reward of industriousness and dispossession of increasingly large numbers of people.

A dialectical understanding thus allows us to understand the interplay of the insecurity of labour with the way security has functioned as the major rationale of liberal rule and the subjection of population groups to liberal governmental order. Insecure labour (that is insecurity of labour) will be made not only secure for reproduction of capital (that is security of capital), but, to borrow a phrase from Julian Reid and others, biopolitically “resilient” amidst conditions of insecurity to face those conditions of insecurity.<sup>7</sup>

Labour cannot be secured without completely destroying it—that is to say by minimising it to a vanishing point in the production process—only one alternative remains, at least it seems so, namely that the biopolitical capacity of labour will be made ready to use through reduction of human labour to a condition of dependency on the State’s welfare functions. Labour is thus reduced to a pathological disposition of life. This, we shall suggest, is at the core of what can be termed as the global predicament of postcolonialism. The more we witness the return of primitive accumulation in this era of globalisation, the more we see the mode of social governance in operation. The history of the *labour of life* is thus coming back, but only in a particular way. This particular way depends on the *life of labour* and the mode of reproduction of that life.

## 2 THE RESILIENT LIFE OF POSTCOLONIAL LABOUR

In the light of Marx let us now turn to the issue of resilience, by which we mean sturdy conditions for sustainability of the conditions of labouring life under postcolonial conditions.

Sustainability anxiety first came to public attention at the end of the Second World War, when the euphoria of victory of liberal ideas over fascist values was mixed with a concern, namely, would the world be able to withstand another such event of mass slaughter and the hitherto unimaginable destruction of resources? The concern was acute because of the fact that two of the most devastating incidents in the war had been caused not by the fascist powers but by the liberal powers—the bombing of Dresden and the dropping of an atom bomb by the United States on the civilian population of two cities of Japan. The anxiety increased, and at times became exasperating, as for the next three decades Cold War and nuclear rivalry saw an immense arms build-up of weapons capable of destroying the earth several times over. Was the world sustainable amidst this war build-up, particularly among the great powers? In this way the sustainability argument became linked up with peace and conditions of reproduction of life, which would then ensure the reproduction of labour.

Along with this, there was also concern about what came to be known as “gigantism”—reckless adulation of grand size (big cars, big avenues, big houses, big conferences, big institutions, big dams, big projects, big technologies)—and the consequent deployment of huge amounts of resources towards achieving and maintaining this size (or scale). Sustainability was now linked with the wisdom to appreciate discriminating or appropriate use of scale (known more as appropriate technology), and the need for a network of various small constellations rather than big institutions. This anxiety led to refinement of governmental techniques to ensure sustainability and make vulnerable sections of the world’s population resilient. One of the modes of ensuring this was the propagation of the ideology and policies of developmentalism, as expressed among others in the UN Millennium Development Goals and African Development Goals. New techniques to stabilise “surplus population”, “surplus labour”, “human waste” and so on were introduced in this way. Ruling classes the world over started to think that through partial de-escalation of tension and risk, partial arms-control, conferences on demilitarisation and the emergence of flexible technologies as part of the new technological revolution, the sustainability anxiety had been partially met. Also, the hope was that societies would realise the value of discriminate judgement on the matter of size and scale in reproducing life and labour. Small, as the famous saying went, was beautiful. In a way, innovations in governmental strategies were made mainly to control and moderate destruction so that labouring lives in the vast postcolonial world of Asia, Africa and Latin America could be reproduced.

But the world was not in for better times. Precisely when the youth were being considered the worthiest of sustainability in the wake of youth revolts the world over in the 1960s and 1970s and because youth became the theme in movies, songs, lyrics and theatres, hundreds and thousands of youth were either sacrificed in Vietnam and other wars, or were rounded up in countries like India, Chile, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Argentina, Bolivia and Guatemala merely on the grounds that these people were young. Young, fearless bodies were a threat to the rulers. These bodies were tortured, maimed and disabled, so that youth power was not reproduced. So, if sustainability is basically reproduction, the world always has a discriminatory attitude. Sustaining is fine, but we always judge what is worth sustaining? What is the audit or the balance sheet? How much effort does a case deserve? This became the classic governmental dilemma: how much to destroy and how much to sustain, how to make the human race selectively or appropriately resilient so that it could be sustained. In this dilemma the rhetoric used was of a broader social concern—concern about sustaining society. In current discourses of sustainability, such as climate change and the consequent need to take corrective measures, of rising food consumption in Asian countries and shortages in the world food market or of mounting state subsidies in certain sectors of the economy making an economy unsustainable, we find the invocation of the social.

This invocation hides particular concerns. In the sustainability drive, economy became the area where the hide-and-seek game between particularity of interest and the invocation of the social would take place. We can also recall in this context the received nineteenth-century story of industrialisation. This story speaks only of the conquest of nature, industrial revolution and growth, but not of massive food crises in most of the world, beginning with the Irish Famine and the death of millions in countries such as Brazil, Egypt, India, Burma, Thailand and China. This was the age of the discovery of the market, whose “hidden hand” balanced and settled everything. Thus, the market, along with a Malthusian logic, which was at the core of the governmental ethos of that time, led the industrialising economies to think of the sustenance of their process of industrialisation—and this at the cost of the destruction of other economies, but more significantly the lives of millions and millions. Mike Davis shows through a historical study of the *El Niño* famines that climate change, droughts, famines and deaths in the nineteenth century were never unconnected events happening coincidentally along a wide arc across the globe; economics, ideology and governmental policy always

went together.<sup>8</sup> The truth of accumulation (the secret of extended reproduction) has, therefore, a recursive legacy. Today's concerns and the emerging discourse of sustainability have deep roots in this nineteenth century history. Indeed, the rise of political economy as a discipline was helped by its claim to the status of science in the face of which concerns of the victims carried no weight. It was an indirect admission of the fact that sustainability was more than ever a question of governance than one of taking any inherent scientific path. Political economy, besides being a science of wealth and production, was also a matter of governmentality.

Yet why this strong presence of what can be called the metaphysics of sustainability? Is it, as some thinkers assume, an inherent part of our present time? That answer may be partly true. But the main answer may be found in the way people have been taught to value life under modern governmental conditions (think of all the OECD reports and the Millennium Goals for the reproduction of life), when every aspect of post-colonial life has less to do with ethos (another name of ethics), but more to do with finding mechanisms of reproduction of life. Thus, from drug manufacturing companies to pesticide producing firms to junk food sellers to small arms producers—we are witness to a seemingly endless empire of commodification impacting on life's capacity to labour. In this milieu, sustenance is included as a strategy in the dynamics of rule, which thrives on turning endowment (air, water, language, culture and so on) into resource and resource extraction; hence we all hear of resource crunch, resource crisis, resource war and thus waste reprocessing.

Here we have to first note that while economics is still groping in terms of its own disciplinary framework to cope with the challenge of sustainability, legislation in large parts of the world, including many postcolonial countries, has started laying some of the ground work needed to make the issue of sustainability a primary one cutting across boundaries of disciplines and occupations. For instance, in India, there have been public discourses and movements on issues relating to natural resources exploitation, inequitable growth, regional imbalances, demographic pressures, community knowledge and harnessing technology—all leading to legal decisions in the form of court judgements and in some cases enactment of legislation. In India, for instance, there have been 32 enactments beginning from the Indian Forest Act (1927) to the Biodiversity Act (2002). Pollution has been, of course, the single big issue in recent time, and the resistance of the indigenous communities to reckless destruction of forests and grasslands have led to decisions regarding regulation over use of resources.

Also, it has been pointed out that legal centralisation cannot pave the way to sustainability, while legal pluralism can respond better to issues such as preservation of the commons. Likewise, we have seen major international conventions on the issue of sustainability (such as, Convention on Wetlands, 1971, Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, 1979, Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, 1985, or the Basel Convention on the Control of Trans-boundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, 1989). But while law is admittedly the major terrain on which the argument for sustainability is building up now, the jurisprudence on sustainability is now a battle ground of the enormous power of the commercial enterprises and common interest. Even what is common is being defined in capitalist language in the jurisprudence on sustainability. In this situation, the issue of sustainability is posited in terms of responsibility and thus in terms of ethics—that is to say, responsibility for the future, but not in the sense of future for all in the same way, but a hierarchical future, or more correctly saying hierarchical responsibility to ensure future for all. Labour must ensure the future of the globe, in the process if the labour dies, so be it.

In order to appreciate these new conditions of governmentality, we need historical sensitivity. Imperial history has been always about the extraction of resources (for instance, gold, timber and iron ore) for imperial riches. However, this imperial history marks its acutest form when imperial powers became colonial powers, and the loot of riches in the colonies took on a different logic. That logic continues still today. The *conditions of life* form the underlying discourse of production and reproduction of labour power; at the same time, they guarantee the *destruction of life*. Should it surprise us then that Marx's writings on primitive accumulation foreground destruction of life as the condition of birth of a new profit centric order?

In short, the radical negativity suggested by Marx points to the dilemma that capital as relation faces today. Accumulation as a continuous process requires a strategy of sustaining an expanding phenomenon (both internally and externally) that includes radical events of accumulation through violent estrangement of labourer from means of labour. It is this separation which constitutes and conjoins the two concepts, namely, capital and primitive accumulation, the latter then appearing as a historic process in the accumulation of the former. This act is the historical genesis of capital,

the historical process of the separation of labourer from means of labour. Only in this way labour of living becomes the basis of a continuous transformation of living labour to dead labour and then on to living labour, always calling for coercive methods to keep the process going.

The capitalist agenda of making postcolonial labour resilient has significance in even greater ways beyond invoking the always primitive condition of a part of socially necessary labour. This involves the reproduction of capital itself. In the volume II of *Capital* Marx presented the fruits of labour as capital in the space-time of circulation that capital must traverse before re-entering the process of production to reproduce itself, to accumulate. Capital as a specific commodity having its specific use value must now face its other aspect, capital as a specific commodity having its specific exchange value in which as use value it must be subsumed. This is the sovereign process of circulation to which capital must submit, and thus must face labour still not completely objectified, labour still not fully capitalised, the subjective existence of labour itself.<sup>9</sup> Living labour cannot be completely exhausted or subsumed. This inexhaustibility of the productive capacity of labour is only too familiar to capital, which acknowledges this trait of labour, and must also ensure that it remains so. Hence making labour reproductive and therefore resilient is a task of capital. We find in this relationship a kind of virtual materiality. Capital must construct ingenious and diverse apparatus to capture living labour, and yet the captured labour has already been presupposed by capital as its contradiction, and as its contradictory being.

The situation acquires further complication, when as in the circulation process, labour is involved without adding anything to the total value. “This labour—which is a necessary moment of the capitalist production process in totality, and also includes circulation, or is included by it—behaves somewhat like the ‘work of combustion’ involved in setting light to a material that is used to produce heat... The dimensions assumed by the conversion of commodities in the hands of capitalists can naturally not transform this labour, which does not create value, but only mediates a change in the form of value, into value-creating labour”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the task for capital becomes to keep the wage and services cost as low as possible—the sole aim being to “shorten the buying and selling time of many producers”, reduce the expenditure of useless energy or help set free the production time.<sup>11</sup> It does not require much imagination to see that this agenda of capital acquires even greater significance in the postcolonial condition known above all by a lack of infrastructure for the sale and



purchase of goods and capital. Hence the cry all over the capitalist world is how to make postcolonial labour resilient and appropriate so that this lack can be corrected? And hence the demand for making labour resilient goes hand in hand with the global agenda of infrastructure building in the postcolonial world. It is not accidental that what Saskia Sassen called the new labour demand in the wake of the rise of global cities marks the labour programme of capitalism in the postcolonial world.<sup>12</sup> She also noted the role of migration in capitalist management of labour in the wake of globalisation. Capitalist management of labour means, among other things, management of “migration as a global supply system” of labour.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 LABOUR’S SPECTRAL PRESENCE IN THE MARKET

David Harvey in *Limits to Capital* notes the unrelenting circuits that capital-as-commodity must run through, with the circuits having their own respective turnover time and often conflicting with each other.<sup>14</sup> For its own realisation and expansion, value must travel relentlessly through different forms predicated by their starting points (such as, money, fixed capital or commodity such as consumer goods or raw material) with their own particular motions and, importantly, with capital at times shrinking as part of it in money form is withdrawn from circulation so that it can be hoarded in order to be deployed again back into circulation to ensure more machineries and so on.<sup>15</sup> These simultaneous motions are essential for capital to circulate and thus accumulate—from the first moment of its appearance when it has to confront labour and buy its power to produce value. As money becomes the most useful form in which capital can circulate, even when industrial commodities are also circulating to produce value, labour recedes from the scene. At times without any further addition to the total surplus value produced, capital in a particular form may increase. Time and space (recall the earlier discussion on remaking of space through zones and corridors) both play significant roles in this marginalisation of labour. This is now witnessed in a tidal wave of bankruptcies and closures of monetary institutions, which threaten to submerge the global economy in a backlash against neoliberal market economics. In a sense, then, free-market neoliberal economics means complete freedom for the various circuits to run even when competing and conflicting with each other to a point of utter ruin.

The important point, however, is still the old classical one, namely that commodities are exchanged in the market not as equivalent use values,

rather they are bought and sold for money. In other words, the use value of commodities must fulfil the material condition for restarting production through a particular circuit. While potentially money can be hoarded or put into circulation, capitalists through competition are driven to constantly throw their capital back into the circuit, however damaging the results are for the system as a whole. The specific labour embodied in every commodity, called concrete labour, is marginalised by what can be called total labour, which each commodity represents as a portion of the total labour performed in society. This is what Marx famously called abstract labour.<sup>16</sup> In the process of exchange, only that amount of labour socially necessary to produce the commodity under average conditions (that is with average levels of skill, etc.) will be considered valuable. The quantity of socially necessary labour embodied in different commodities, rather than all the diverse types of concrete labour involved becomes the source of all commodities' exchange values. Socially necessary labour time creates a benchmark which capitalists now must equal and beat in course of the production process. With socially necessary labour becoming crucial in the circulation of commodity, the law of value asserts itself like a law of nature under capitalism.<sup>17</sup>

One may add that in this continuous metamorphosis not everything is transformed. The passage also creates waste. Thus, waste of money, conduct, material, organic elements, biological remains and so on becomes a permanent feature of capitalist circuits, and the capitalist circuit in one form or another must now begin to process waste also, because without that the logic of the circuit cannot proceed.<sup>18</sup> Waste appears as the "other" of value. Waste must now produce value, that is to say waste represents materiality's transmogrifications amidst the turmoil caused by global capitalism marked by uncertainties of the regulatory modes of circulation. Waste represents capital's attempt to salvage, recuperate and recycle the remains of production; the disposable must not carry the guarantee that it will become irretrievably waste. Postcolonial labour is the guarantee that nothing will be an irretrievable waste for the global commodity chain.<sup>19</sup>

Given the dynamics of postcolonial capitalism and Marx's observations on the circuits of capital, what is waste? Will there ever be in a capitalist system of value production anything that will not have value? Is the point of departure always going to be the assumption that waste is a by-product, residual, epiphenomenal and inconsequential for the understanding of value production and realisation? Are we to consider it in the mirror of order/disorder binary? Or, shall we consider Marx's insights deeply and consider waste as the product of a contradictory process of

value production and realisation, which now requires fresh categorisations and value regimes? Also, given the fact that without labour (non-standardised, hence “creative”), waste renewal is not possible, how do we situate labour in the value chain of a commodity which puts capital at the centre and pushes labour to the margins?

Not without reason, contemporary global capitalism, marked by increasing production of waste and recycling of waste, is characterised at the same time by extreme wealth concentration, a rapidly expanding and largely impoverished global labour force, and an ever expanding waste reprocessing economy.<sup>20</sup> This is the logic of global value chains to which everything useful must attach in order to be useful as an exchangeable product. Global value chains must produce global poverty chains. Thus, precisely when (2010–2015) the wealth of the world’s richest 62 people became more than the wealth of half of the world population, the wealth of the bottom half fell by approximately 38 per cent. In 2010 approximately 942 million working poor (almost one in three workers) of the world were found living on under US\$2 a day.<sup>21</sup> Since the 1980s increasing numbers of corporations have transnationalised and operate across borders. Components of commodities are produced and assembled across many countries amidst increasingly intense intra-supplier competition. The labour market, too, is affected by transnational value chains. In industries such as garment manufacturing, smart phone manufacturing, construction, mining, fishing and the range of logistical industries, wages have tended to go down below subsistence levels. The link between value chain and poverty chain is demonstrated in this way and the source of this organic link is to be found in the dynamics of capital circuits. It is strange that in mystical–philosophical writings on living labour, capital either vanishes or presents itself as static, without the contradictions of the various circuits which subject living labour to its vagaries—in other words labour as the subject of money, money as the supreme and, at the same time, the most uncertain form of capital.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the problem with the postcolonial theorists is that they do not critically view the movement of capital; the social condition of labour overwhelms their studies of postcolonial capitalism.

The first poses the question of labour time, the second poses the question of circulation time. Marx therefore wrote,

These form the two great sections of its movement, which appears as the totality of these two processes: on one side labour-time; on the other, circulation time. And the whole of the movement appears as unity of labour

time and circulation time, as unity of production and circulation. This unity itself is motion, process. Capital appears as this unity-in-process of production and circulation, a unity which can be regarded both as the totality of the process of its production, as well as the specific completion... of one movement returning into itself.<sup>23</sup>

It is not difficult to see why these insights of Marx still hold their relevance in the postcolonial situation, where labour appears only as a distant form—a miserable phenomenon—in the circulation of capital and the realisation of value. Therein is the irony: nowhere perhaps as in the postcolonial world does labour in its scattered forms appear so unbelievably marginal to the production of wealth and calculations of capital, and incidental to the vagaries of the trade cycle; at the same time nowhere perhaps as in the postcolonial world is labour so much punished at the hands of the fluctuating circuits of capital. The reason is to be found in the conflicts among the various circuits which capital must undergo—conflicts arising out of the deep heterogeneity of these circuits due to the intrusion of factors like hoarding, suppressed wage levels, dominance of money, other forms of credit, domination of the rent form in the realisation of profit, fault lines in the forms of caste, gender and other social forms of division of labour, and not least the near permanent agrarian crisis. In fact, in the circuit from the general exposition of capital's movements to the postcolonial realities, it will be wrong to view the process as one from general to the particular; it is at the same time the movement of the general also.

In the context of all that has been analysed in this chapter, we can now give some provisional answers to the question, namely, why is living labour, which is to say the presence of labour, always spectral in the apparent world of commodity flows and capital flows? Why is its presence mostly ethereal, shadowy and phantom like?

One obvious reason is that in the domain of the formal knowledge of economy, labour's historicity has no place, as Marx pointed out, economists have "a singular method of procedure. There are only two kinds of institutions for them, artificial and natural. The institutions of feudalism are artificial institutions; those of the bourgeoisie are natural institutions."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, in the domain of economy, ruled by economists who are characterised by their lack of historical sense, the history of crises, interruptions and labour's angry presence is always absent, or at best marginally present. This is truer in postcolonial economies where organised

and formalised wage labour is accompanied by various other discrete forms of labour, and the history of economy never includes for instance the history of strikes, for strikes and other similar actions are the only occasions when labour makes its presence felt.<sup>25</sup>

But more importantly we have referred to other factors related to the specific methods of capital accumulation in the postcolonial world, such as the primitive mode of accumulation, its extractive nature, infrastructure building, the importance of waste reprocessing in capital circulation and the presence of a host of revenue sharing intermediaries in the process of realisation of profit, which cannot be realised without the sharing of revenues and at the same time which must be kept apart to the extent (historically) possible from the revenue sharing processes and functions, and thus the dominant but problematic presence of rent and interest in the circuits of capital. Marx therefore cautioned in the closing pages of volume III of *Capital* that labour was not solely a process between man and nature (common to all social forms of development), but a trait of a particular social development process, where labour becomes the abstraction of several productive activities.<sup>26</sup> Labour is abstraction, and labour as abstraction is the way in which capitalism appropriates living labour. Labour in general is not only a category but it corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with relative ease transfer from one work to another, and where the specific kind of work is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Labour loses the craft character of the past and becomes labour in general. It is not only a category, but labour in reality, which is labour—pure, simple, abstract labour—“absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity but capable of all specificities”.<sup>27</sup>

Is this not the situation in the postcolonial condition where labour migrates from work to work, and the peasant becomes a semi-worker to become a full worker only to return to till his/her small parcel of land or work in others' fields when industrial, semi-industrial, semi-manufacturing or even extractive jobs (like small scale and artisanal mining or sand mining, or stone crushing) become scarce? Some researchers think that because of a decline in our interrogations of agrarian society that we could not realise the implications of the changes in the agrarian order, the metamorphosis of the peasant into a petty commodity producer and the flexibilisation of labour form.<sup>28</sup> While much of what they say about agrarian transformation is correct, they seem to be ignoring the fact that only with the rise of a city-centric economy and massive influx of migrant labour into, for instance, the cities and towns of India (with consequent studies

on urban transformation and migrant labour) could we get a sense of the said agrarian transformation and our understanding then refocused on what was happening to rural labour.<sup>29</sup> The unremunerative rural small-scale economy, the impact of neoliberal governance, massive migration and consequent multiplication of labour forms—all these were much in evidence in India, for instance, when the *Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector* came out in August 2007.<sup>30</sup> Migration brought back the focus on studying labour forms. In this context, it is important to note that footloose postcolonial labour is also a consequence of international investment chains in countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Colombia, Panama, Cambodia, Mexico and so on in garment production, iron ore mining, manufacturing of ancillary parts and instruments in industries such as automobile, electronic production such as mobile telephony, leather products, the toy industry and so on. These are overwhelmingly export oriented, with the production sites often being special zones. Wages are often low, the workforce is markedly female and the labour-supervision rules strict and marked with violence.<sup>31</sup>

Another aspect of the same scenario is the supreme logistical sites (like building financial corridors, special economic zones, upgrading ports for greater container handling capacity, creating seamless multi-modal transport hubs, building new towns, reprocessing e-waste, constructing highways, airports and logistical cities and so on), which require and create footloose labour—the latter forever remaining in the shadows of the logistical sites, but moving on from construction work to plumbing to driving transportation vehicles, to perhaps quarrying or reprocessing urban e-waste. Profit is never derived from these logistical activities directly. For instance, in a new town where land prices soar, the built environment will rake in money, financial hubs will be established, business process outsourcing companies (BPOs) will populate the town and new steel and glass buildings will appear, the immediate revenue will be in the form of rent and interest, whereas without labour the soil could not have been ready, bridges could not have been built, airports could not have been constructed, additional iron ore supply would have been impossible, steel and glass buildings could not have come up, and so on.<sup>32</sup> Yet, in this circuit of commodity circulation, capital will continuously change form, and value-producing labour will be more and more distant from the final stage when the profit will be realised from the capital invested, and revenue will be shared.<sup>33</sup> Or, think of the capital (which deployed labour) that went

into clearing the forest to open up an iron ore mine to produce steel to produce a crane to build a giant steel and glass house or a data centre in a new town so that a local version of the Silicon Valley would appear to produce programmes and facilitate information expansion and transmission. One will see in this case capital constantly moving between what Marx called Department I and Department II—between variable and fixed capital, or between fixed and fluid capital, consumer goods and capital goods, and money capital and industrial capital—pushing labour all the way through the process to obscurity. The entire process requires money which, too, circulates alongside commodities (as consumer goods and capital goods), determining the quantum of profit and revenue and its sharing.

Consideration of inflation is therefore important in an analysis of the circuits. Inflation and disturbances in the money circuit result in discontinuous renewal of capital, particularly fixed capital, and create disturbances in the trade cycle, while concentrating wealth in fewer hands and reducing the income of many—a story of infinite accumulation and perpetual divergence.<sup>34</sup> The postcolonial state, as in India, is therefore eternally wavering between increasing money supply and restraining it, and, as a side show of this monetary exercise, between increasing the interest rate and decreasing it. Inflation may eat into wages, salaries, savings (idle capital) and interest, while a decrease in the interest rate, though reducing production cost (which includes payment of interest) and encouraging more circulation of capital, may discourage savings and thus capital formation. It is a classic governmental dilemma: how much or how little, how to manage money supply so that capital and commodity flows in their inter-related trajectories may continue in an ideal way? Or, as neoliberal management of economy would suggest, how much shock has to be administered so that the engine of capital can restart? How can the crisis of flows be turned into an advantage for capital? Or how, with the same quantity of money, can the economy ensure more rapid monetary circulation, meaning that a greater volume of transactions is completed with the same quantity of money?<sup>35</sup> Or how can production of virtual additional capital be made possible within the production process itself, that is by making money the most precious commodity and thus short-circuiting the process of production of other commodities?<sup>36</sup> Labour's creation of value is an eternal victim to these vagaries.

In the postcolonial world, this then is living labour, which precisely through its footloose life proves itself also as abstract—that abstract capacity makes it “absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity but capable of all specificities”.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the traits of postcolonial labour are appearing at a rapid pace in developed industrialised countries as well. Sweatshops are not features of only postcolonial regions, they are also to be found in cities like New York and London. The logic of circuit operates remorselessly. With structural changes in several Western capitalist countries, the postcolonial mode of accumulation and features of postcolonial labour appear in the heartland of capital. The wasteland of capital is everywhere.<sup>38</sup> This, as I explained earlier, is the globalisation of the postcolonial predicament. Yet Marxist thinkers in the capitalist West and postcolonial thinkers in the East have rarely discussed why labour is increasingly becoming a remote figure in the economy.

Recall Marx’s famous words,

Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of commodities? Clearly from this form itself. The equality of all sorts of human labour is expressed objectively by their products all being equally values; the measure of the expenditure of labour power by the duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labour; and finally the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products...There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, has absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising there from. There it is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, as soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.”<sup>39</sup>



## NOTES

1. For, after all, life and labour still remain organically connected under the postcolonial condition, while elsewhere capitalism succeeded to a considerable extent in separating the two, where life denotes leisure, creativity and culture, and labour seems to signify routine, draining and obligatory aspects of life. The social world of labour has been disconnected from the productive world of labour, whereas in the postcolonial world the two worlds seem to connect to each other more and more. In some way a shoe-worker's son, Harry Braverman, anticipated this contradiction in *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 25th anniversary edition (1974, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998). Braverman noted the contradiction between "descriptions of scientific-technical revolution and increasing division of work into petty operations" (p. 3). Braverman set his findings in the context of contemporary euphoria over capitalism enabling greater leisure for the working people because of industrial advance. New technology had raised levels of skill and responsibility. New wealth and leisure meant increased well-being rather than increased misery, and industrialism was pluralistic and power was diffuse (pp. x–xi). But, importantly, Braverman did not argue that the average level of skill in society would decline as a result of further division of labour under capitalism but with new machines the gap between "the scientific and educated content of labour" and the average worker would increase; thus it was not a "question of averaging but polarising" between scientific knowledge and skill embodied in the new machines and the routine, fragmentary operations embodied in labour needed for the former. (pp. 294–295)
2. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), Chapter 25, section 3: "Progressive Production of a Relative Surplus Population or Industrial Reserve Army", p. 446.
3. See, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), Part V, "Right of Death and Power over Life", pp. 133–159. Foucault explained bio-power there in this way: "This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes... what occurred in the eighteenth century in some Western countries, an event bound up with the development of capitalism... was nothing less than the entry of life into history, that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques..."

- If one can apply the term bio-history to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life..." (pp. 141–142).
4. Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, Lectures at College de France, 1975–76, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 249.
  5. Michel Foucault, *Birth of Bio-politics*, Lectures at College de France, 1978–79, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008).
  6. Yet these decades were also of neocolonial wars and plunder. Precisely at this time when neoliberal thought was taking shape, Paul Sweezy and Paul A. Baran wrote *Monopoly Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), and Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff wrote, *The End of Prosperity* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).
  7. Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* (London: Polity Press, 2014); also David Chandler and Julian Reid, *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation, and Vulnerability* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).
  8. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts—El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2002).
  9. Thus in the famous “Three Figures of the Circuit” Marx presented the ghost of consumption in various sectors, which would mean consumption at one level but at another level investment as the circuit takes alternating figures, and the productive and consuming forms of economy come to a head-on clash—*Capital*, Volume II, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1992), Chapter 4, pp. 180–199.
  10. *Capital*, Volume II, p. 208.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
  12. Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labour and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labour Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Chapter 5, “The Rise of Global Cities and the New Labour Demand”, pp. 126–170.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
  14. David Harvey, *Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 1999); see Marx, as in n 9.
  15. Marx explained the conundrum of capital in this way: “In a constantly rotating orbit, every point is simultaneously a point of departure and a point of return. If we interrupt the rotation, then not every starting point is a point of return. Thus we have seen that not only does every particular circuit presuppose the others, but also that the repetition of the circuit in one form includes the motions which have to take place in the other forms of the circuit. Thus the entire difference presents itself as merely one of form, a merely subjective distinction that exists only for the observer.

In so far as each of these circuits is considered a particular form of the movement in which different individual industrial capitals are involved, this difference also exists throughout simply at the individual level. In reality however, each individual industrial capital is involved in all the three at the same time. These three circuits, the forms of reproduction of the three varieties of capital, are continuously executed alongside one another... The reproduction of the capital in each one of its forms and at each of its stages is just as continuous as the metamorphosis of these forms and their successive passage through the three stages. Here therefore the entire circuit is the real unity of its three forms.”—*Capital*, Volume II, p. 181.

16. In *Capital*, Volume II, Marx explains the entire concept, which cannot be understood without reference to the circuits of capital, particularly when discussing Adam Smith’s idea of total national labour—pp. 214, 453–454, and 460–461.
17. *Limits to Capital*, p. 141.
18. On this see the interesting discussion by Vinay Gidwani, *Capital Interrupted: Agrarian Development and Politics of Work in India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Chapter 1, “Waste”, pp. 1–31.
19. J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of the Thing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); see also Friends of the Earth Report, *The Policy Study Report on the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive* (2011)—<https://www.foe.co.uk/.../report-influence-eu-policies-environment-9392> (accessed on 13 March 2016); J. Gabrys, *Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2013); S. Graham and N. Thrift, “Out of order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24 (3), 2007, pp. 1–25; J. Lepawsky, “Composing Urban Orders from Rubbish Electronics: Cityness and the Site Multiple”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39 (2), 2014, pp. 185–199; and the significant essay on labour and waste, N. Rossiter, “Translating the Indifference of Communication: Electronic Waste, Migrant Labour and the Informational Sovereignty of Logistics in China”, *International Review of Information Ethics*, 11, 2009, pp. 35–44.
20. One report from Bangladesh states, “Sixty per cent of iron used in the construction business in Bangladesh comes from the ship-breaking industry, earning the state-capitalist apparatus annual revenue of US\$900 million. It employs 30,000 people directly and 250,000 people indirectly. Yet the labour laws in the sector are not applied to protect the workers from grievous injury. In the last decade 250 workers have died and more than 800 have been handicapped for life. Hulking steel remains of ships that took part in maritime trade across the earth’s ocean spaces in the last century undergo radical transformation, reverting from ship back to steel.

The process of breaking down the massive ocean liners uses a mixture of acetylene and muscular power. Within the rusting structural frames lie the secrets of steel reclaiming its form. Here is the inverse of the shipyards of northern maritime powers, where steel, through the power of capital infrastructure, was reshaped into objects that would produce the conditions for capital to reorganize itself. The long stretching beach and the bay provide the scenography as the labourers struggle to dismember rusting leviathans in the oily mud. The bosses of the ship-breaking yards of Chittagong have an appalling human rights record despite global media coverage and impose a notorious no-photography rule...—Nabil Ahmed, “Entangled Earth”, *Third Text*, 27 (1, pp. 44–53), January 2013, p. 50.

21. Figures taken from John Clarke, “Looking the Basic Income Gift Horse in the Mouth”, *The Bullet*, 1241, 1 April 2016—<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1241.php> (accessed on 20 July 2016).
22. See the discussion on the exceptionality of capital’s circuit as commodity in Roman Rosodolsky, *The Making of Marx’s “Capital”*, trans. Pete Burgess (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp. 142–143.
23. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, 1857–58, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 620; also *Capital*, Volume II, p. 357.
24. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, Volume 6 (Moscow: Progress, 1976), p. 176.
25. The classic instance is the case of the general strike in the Indian Railways in 1974, which laid bare various contradictions in the Indian economy dating back over the previous ten years (1965–74); yet, strangely, Indian economists never cared to delve into the interlinked dynamics of the general strike of 1974 and the crisis in the Indian economy. For an analysis, Ranabir Samaddar, *The Railway General Strike of 1974 and the Rank and File* (Delhi: Primus, 2016), Chapter II, pp. 25–49.
26. *Capital*, Volume III, “In so far as the labour process is a simple process between man and nature, its simple elements remain common to all social forms of development. But each particular historical form of this process further develops its material foundations and social forms”—p. 1023.
27. *Grundrisse*, p. 235; See also, Marcello Musto’s discussion on the double nature of labour, “History, Production, and Method in the 1857 ‘Introduction’” in Marcello Musto (ed.), *Karl Marx’s Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 3–32.
28. For instance, Alpa Shah and Barbara Harriss-White commented few years back, “with the rise of the critique of village studies, the problems of categorising ‘modes of production’, and the push for scholarship to move to urban studies and address the urgent problems of liberalisation, in-depth research and reflection on the agrarian economy declined”.—Alpa Shah and

- Barbara Harriss-White, “Resurrecting Scholarship on Agrarian Transformations”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, xlv1 (39, pp. 13–18), 24 September 2011, p. 13.
29. For instance, see the study by Mithilesh Kumar, “Governing Flood, Migration, and Conflict in North Bihar” in R. Samaddar (ed.), *Government of Peace: Social Governance, Security, and the Problematic of Peace* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 203–226; Manish K. Jha, “Disasters: Experiences of Development during the Embankment Years in Bihar” in R. Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen (eds.), *New Subjects and New Governance in India* (Milton Park and New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), Chapter 3, pp. 109–153; and Mithilesh Kumar, “Terra Firma of Sovereignty: Land Acquisition and the Making of Migrant Labour” in Amit Prakash, Ishita Dey and Mithilesh Kumar, *Cities, Rural Migrants and the Urban Poor—III*, CRG Research Paper Series, *Policies and Practices*, 74, March 2016, pp. 37–49.
  30. [http://nceuis.nic.in/condition\\_of\\_workers\\_sep\\_2007.pdf](http://nceuis.nic.in/condition_of_workers_sep_2007.pdf) (accessed on 12 October 2015).
  31. On this see the study by Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labour and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labour Flows* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) even after nearly 30 years it remains instructive. See in particular on the feminisation of migrant labour, pp. 107–114; what was called two decades back the “Toyota economy” in South East Asia was one reflection of the global investment and labour chain.
  32. See Chapter 3, n 30.
  33. Indeed, the role of logistical initiatives, such as infrastructure building, make the circuits of capital more and more complicated, leaving the capitalist class with only aggregate calculations to decide how much of the said infrastructure building programme finally becomes profitable (after deducting all other forms of revenue including payment of salaries and wages). Two economists have noted, “Many of the recent infrastructure initiatives in Eurasia seem to treat connectivity gaps as a problem with an easy solution. For example, the ostensible purpose of China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is to direct large amounts of new credit toward infrastructure projects, suggesting that the problem is a ‘financing gap’. Yet international credit has been cheap for the better part of a decade, and institutional investors would happily lend money toward long-term projects offering a reasonable and reliable rate of return. Rather than a lack of lenders, a more pressing problem in Eurasia is mobilizing the resources to repay them. Infrastructure is funded in one of two ways: through use of public revenues (i.e., taxes) or through user fees (e.g., tolls). If the estimated infrastructural needs outweigh the resources available, the result is a funding gap rather than a financing gap, and it is the

- former that remains the more binding constraint in Eurasia. Funding shortages are only one of the many impediments to increasing infrastructure investment in Eurasia... Initiatives such as the Global Infrastructure Facility run by the World Bank and the G20-supported Global Infrastructure Hub are trying to address some of these constraints... (Besides China's One Belt One Road project) Other initiatives, such as those proposed by Tokyo and New Delhi... are similarly driven by each capital's commercial and geostrategic interests."—Matthew P. Goodman and David A. Parker, "Eurasia's Infrastructure Rush: What, Why, So What?", *Global Economics Monthly*, 5 (1), January 2016, pp. 1–2; one can also note in this context the pervasive failure of postcolonial cities to build a durable infrastructural environment—in Gurgaon or Rajarhat in India, for example.
34. On this, see the analysis by Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
  35. *Capital*, Volume II, p. 417; also p. 427 when the circuit of capital is in the form of immediate production process, that is *P...P*.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 573.
  37. In the discussion on the origins and meaning of abstract labour, Marx explicitly brought in the issue of mobility of labour in capitalism from one kind of useful labour to another. "Moreover, we can see at a glance that, in our capitalist society, a given portion of human labour is supplied alternatively in the form of tailoring, and in the form of weaving, in accordance with changes in the direction of the demand for labour. This change in the form of labour may well not take place without friction but it must take place." —*Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 2, pp. 134. In the next chapter we shall take up this point in detail. However, it is important at this stage that we take note of the relationship between mobility of labour and the emergence of abstract labour.
  38. S. Sassen, *The Mobility of Labour and Capital* and in *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2014). Saskia Sassen turns her analytical focus on subaltern labour in the developed capitalist countries, and attempts to place the phenomenon of massive migration of labour from the postcolonial countries to the developed capitalist countries in terms of a structural shift in the economies of the latter.
  39. *Capital*, Volume I, pp. 164–165; Marx wrote again in *Capital* (Volume III), "From the customary viewpoint, these relations of distribution appear to be natural relations, relations arising from the nature of all social production, from the laws of human production pure and simple"—Chapter 51, p. 1017.

## Living Labour II: Logistics, Migration, and Labour

### I MIGRATION AND CHANGING FORMS OF LABOUR

One of the great achievements of Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson in *Border as Method* is that they are able to place the issue of migration and border as one of the central questions in Marx's studies on labour. For the postcolonial problematic this is significant.<sup>1</sup> For not only the postcolonial composition of labour shows the multiplicity and heterogeneity Mezzadra and Neilson speak of; as we demonstrated in Chapter 3, the neoliberal regime of capital and its modes of control are also creating something very specific to labour in the post-colony, which lends certain particular aspects to the logic of multiplicity. For instance, the movements of workers impelled by the supply side of the economy and the overall logistical reorientation of economy provide new shapes to labour's living existence and its organisation. In this chapter, therefore, we continue our investigation into the composition of postcolonial labour and undertake a particular inquiry into the logistical reorientation of economy that brings to fore the role of supply chains of commodities—and this includes labour as an important commodity—in this economic reorientation. We shall have to see what the two interlinked issues of migration and multiplication of labour mean for economy and, in particular, today's capitalism.

Marx noted the role of crisis in making us aware of the dynamics of the movement—the passage, the supply—of labour power from the body of the labourer via the instruments of production to the commodity finally being brought on this earth.<sup>2</sup> Today's massive logistical reorientation of

economy—reemphasising the dimension of supply chains of commodities including labour—is a product of such a crisis of the erstwhile industrial economy and has brought the labour question back to the centre of economic discussion. This crisis is overwhelming and has come from all sides: the land utilisation pattern has changed overwhelmingly; technological changes have brought sunset to some industries in contrast to the emergence of sunrise industries; process industries have gained strategic prominence; in recent years the production of primary goods like ores has acquired renewed importance; managing supply chains of finance, information and other commodities now call for distinctly different set of products related to transportation, logistical sites like carrier terminals and ports, cables, wiring and so on. Marx noted, “A new and international division of labour springs up, one suited to the requirements of the main industrial countries, and it converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a pre-eminently industrial field...”<sup>3</sup>

In the wake of globalisation, the shift in political discourse from politics to economics is one indication of the crisis and the restructuration referred to here. Supply of labour accompanying these changes also brings in changes in labour regimes. From body shopping of IT workers to strict vigil over workers who may escape the informal, small, and artisanal mines—we have a range of control modes that show the co-existence of freedom of workers to move from one work to another (involving change in workplace, country etc.) and modes of controlling and tying them to the work where they are needed. This duality requires varieties of wage system, contract procedures, labour laws, and differing degrees of freedom to unionise. Multiplicity is in the gene of capitalism, and postcolonial capitalism is the scene of its crisis. Recall Marx, who said,

The economic fiction we have been dealing with confuses the laws that regulate the general movement of wages or the ratio between the working class—*i.e.*, the total sum of labour power—and the total social capital, with the laws that distribute the working population over the different spheres of production. If, for example, owing to a favourable conjuncture, accumulation in a particular sphere of production becomes especially active, and profits in it, being greater than the average profits, attract additional capital, of course the demand for labour rises and wages rise as well. The higher wages draw a larger part of the working population into the more favoured sphere, until it is glutted with labour power, and wages at length fall again to their average level or below it, if the pressure is too great. Then, not only does the



immigration of labourers into the branch of industry in question cease; it gives place to their emigration. Here the political economist thinks he sees the why and wherefore of an absolute increase of workers accompanying an increase of wages, and of a diminution of wages accompanying an absolute increase of labourers. But he sees really only the local oscillation of the labour-market in a particular sphere of production—he sees only the phenomena accompanying the distribution of the working population into the different spheres of outlay of capital, according to its varying needs... . The relative surplus population is therefore the background which the law of demand and supply of labour does its work... The demand for labour is not identical with increase of capital, nor is supply of labour identical.<sup>4</sup>

There is then, as always, another scene—the other scene of supply. The logistical reorganisation of capitalism points to that other scene of reorganisation of supply. Consideration of supply of labour may lead “capital resort(ing) to legislation, whenever it seemed necessary, in order to enforce its proprietary rights over the free worker. For instance, down to 1815, the emigration of mechanics employed in machine making was forbidden in England, on pain of severe punishment. The reproduction of the working class implies at the same time the transmission and accumulation of skills from one generation to another. The capitalist regards the existence of such a skilled working as one of the conditions of production which belong to him, and in fact views it as the real existence of his variable capital. This becomes very clear as soon as a crisis threatens him with its loss”.<sup>5</sup> To understand the nature of postcolonial labour it is important to realise how much the trends of emigration and immigration in his time counted for Marx in his general analysis of population growth and decimation, and particular analysis of the composition of labour.<sup>6</sup>

The continuous redrawing and rearrangement of political boundaries within postcolonial countries and among these countries (including various types of border arrangements, border flexibilisation, trade facilitation, etc.) show the global space of modern capitalism being made possible by a series of new lines of enclosure, separation, and partition.<sup>7</sup> The entire debate on GST (Goods and Services Tax) in India is an instance of the new mercantilism that is on its way to become the ruling ideology of postcolonial capitalism.<sup>8</sup> For Ricardo, trade meant the theory of comparative advantages, while for Marx it meant not only borders, but also and crucially, the disjunction between political borders and what can be called the *frontiers of capital*, which signify capital’s expansionist drive as well as its need to organise space according to multiple hierarchical criteria.<sup>9</sup> Once again the

trade and currency wars in India resemble the spirit of new mercantilism, founded on logistical agreements and arrangements both within the country and internationally. The new mercantilism, while consolidating, strengthening, rationalising and unifying the supply system, cannot do away with the internal differentiation within the commodity market including the market of labour as commodity. In this sense there is a postcolonial backyard in every developed country.<sup>10</sup> But to develop the full implications of this argument we have to theorise the migrant along relatively less explored lines, which will show that the migrant is not a derivative figure in contrast to the stable citizen,<sup>11</sup> but that the migrant occupies a primary position in the capitalist production process, more so in the neoliberal time, when accumulation would not be at all possible without labour flexibility, that is, without migrant labour. In the capitalist economy all these will function also to exacerbate the fault line of race along which accumulation will proceed.<sup>12</sup> Besides race, migrant labour negotiates and institutes boundaries of similar other kinds, like gender, caste and region.<sup>13</sup> In short, living labour in the form of migrant labour indicates the particular ways in which labour will be turned into dead labour, that is, capital.

Migration in this way signifies the continuous redefinition of people through exclusion, language, religion, blood, caste, race, and land. Yet both people and migration will remain two vital elements of capitalism and mark the aporias of postcolonial politics. If the great institutions of bourgeois power—the State with its apparatus—emerged on the basis of a multiplicity of powers existing beforehand, power in postcolonial context also derives from a similar set of multiplicity of prior powers—dense, conflicting, entangled, localised and bound by domination over land and possession of arms. Faced with a myriad of clashing forces, labour has to constantly migrate as well as reinvent itself as “people”. It does not matter if this “people” is not the classical republican people here, but oscillating between identities of multitude, population and masses.

## 2 THE HISTORY OF NATION AND THE HISTORY OF MIGRANT LABOUR

It is important to remember that more than any other strand of history writing, labour historians have tried to recognise the political significance of labour migration in the golden dawn of industrial capitalism—the second half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. Since Stephen Castles’ co-authored work on immigration and the

formation of class structure in industrial Europe appeared,<sup>14</sup> some excellent studies have appeared on labour migration and they indicate how a different history of the nation form can be constructed. Such a history would tell us the histories of the trajectory of citizenship (including what Marshall termed as “social citizenship”) along with histories of inclusion and exclusion. Also we have to note, along with the writing of general labour history we have special studies on export of indentured labour and the growth of plantation economy, which again suggest a different way of writing the history of the nation-form in the last two centuries, where the extra-nationalist narrative of indentured labour constitutes a different universe. These studies show the permanent disjuncture between the history of the nation form and that of the differentially constituted labour form. This disjuncture can be understood only in the bio-political framework of power and life.

Marx’s immense observations on the Factory Acts in Great Britain and the growth and fluctuations of working population in England in his time, suggest a different way of understanding modern governance, where a study of the nation is not at the centre of our political understanding. In its place we have the still largely unwritten history of governing a mobile, unruly world of population flows occupying a much more critical place of significance. These observations give us a sense of the hidden histories of conflicts, desperate survivals and new networks growing as well as old networks being transplanted across great expanse and zones. Studies of hunger in the nineteenth century, of itinerant movements of labouring poor, transportations of coolies, spread of famines, shipping of children, adult girls, trafficking in sex, labour, and human organs, and welfare legislations to cope with this great infamy tell us how actually we have arrived at our own time of subject formation under the conditions of capitalism driven by migrant labour. This is certainly different from the tradition of nation-centred histories.

Let us take the case of transportation of indentured coolie labour, or that of the children. We know something of the transportation of the coolie labour; but we know very little of the ways children were sent across seas and deserts as labour force, for instance of the exportation of hundreds of boys and girls from England to Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century—to work in Canada, to be beaten, sexually abused, slave laboured—all to build up Canada and to rid England of its destitute children.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, girls, boys and single women would be transported in the decades of the

first half of the twentieth century to stark Edwardian institutions in Australia, where (for instance in Adelaide today, in the building that is now the Migration Museum) charity institutions and city councils would cause to be written on the wall “You who have no place else on earth enter this home—never to look back to the outside world that rejected you, but to take this as home”.<sup>16</sup>

Hunger marches began in the latter half of the nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth century—in both new and old worlds, colonial and colonised countries—in search of food and jobs. It is important to see the exportation of coolie labour as part of this broader history, much of which is still concealed. Recent investigations suggest the broader connection we have to pursue to understand today’s labour migration.<sup>17</sup> Climate change is adding to the massive migrations that were already taking place in and from colonial countries.<sup>18</sup> Again, we get here a different picture of the making of our time, marked by famines and massive population movements induced by dry weather, floods, hunger and the forcible removal of large peasant communities from the emerging global food market. To all these we can add the histories of formation of large armies to fight wars in distant lands on the basis of recruitment of massive number of men of various nations on earth. This history is repeating in country after country, and at global level. These two issues have come closer as marks of modern post-colonial societies: mixed-up, messy population flows, provoking desperate governmental methods, and rapid innovations in humanitarian methods, functions, institutions and principles. The humanitarian response has grown in range as governments discover why people move: not only violence, threat of violence, torture and discrimination (by now banal causes), but also due to natural disasters, man-made famines and floods, climate change, the development agenda, resource crises, environmental catastrophes and the like. It is in this complex context that basic migration control systems have been put in place, such as recording foreigners, developing labour market management tools to use immigrant labour for a capitalist market and for control of domestic labour, and finally developing a detailed surveillance system. As a clinical task, classical humanitarianism wanted to change the soul of the “abnormal”, therefore there were educationists, pedagogues, missionaries, administrators and thinkers working on the issue of how to reform “abnormal” societies, which were mostly colonial societies. Modern humanitarianism has to combine the old techniques with new ones of care, protection, information gathering, interference, intervention and invention of a skewed theory of sovereignty, a one-sided theory of responsibility,

and the gigantic humanitarian machines which resemble the transnational corporations (TNCs). In practical terms this means today managing societies which produce the obdurate refugees and migrants to stop them leaving their native shores, to keep them within national territorial confines, and eventually to manage societies in “an enlightened way”. Relief organisations proliferated in the second half of the twentieth century. Destitute asylums resembling prison houses were set up in different lands by charitable institutions to welcome survivors, particularly girls and elderly female survivors. One common feature appeared in all these institutions, possibly for the first time: treating the migrant as the source of insecurity. The victim of forced migration was now an active body, whose soul no longer needed to be saved because the destitute, wretched body would inevitably sooner or later die, but because this was now an unruly body it required management and control.

Let us also note one more paradoxical aspect of our time first noticed in this period. If the production of the migrant as the labouring subject has thus its dark and illegal side, often representing what we have come to call the primitive mode of accumulation, yet there is also the fact that governments around this time started to pass laws and take steps towards making the immigrant a natural part of society, because by and large the reorganisation of a labour market must happen within a free juridical space, and that is when various provisions for naturalisation, domicile rights, citizenship laws, and so on began to be made, and when the relation between blood and territory was sought to be defined or clarified. It was hoped that such naturalisation would help in the multiplication of labour and at the same time retain the heterogeneity of the global space of capital without which global domination of capital was impossible.

If the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the time when basic migration controls were put in place, today the control of migrant labour is not only the concern of governments. Employers, recruitment agents, labour brokers in sending and receiving countries, lawyers, courts, training institutes, moneylenders and other credit agencies, bureaucrats, municipal authorities, smugglers and a wide variety of intermediaries seek to gain from the transnational flow of workers. Networks have grown. As then, now too, workers have developed different means of coping with these control mechanisms, even if the coping is only partial most of the time, and, if possible, evading them. But their vulnerability remains overwhelming. Possibly, today’s situation is better, with labour rights in place in many cases. But the fact remains that globalisation means globalisation

of recruitment of migrant labour, even though the situation is not what it was 150 years ago, particularly with regard to migration of skilled labour. In many cases, however, the situation obtaining today reminds us of the time this chapter refers to: the exploitation inherent in global supply chains (today, think of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand), creation of new economic space virtually out of nothing (for instance, Macao), Filipino nightclub hostesses and girls in Hong Kong, or the Nepali labour there, women migrant workers in Taiwan, and the massive cities of Asia marked by migrant workers and trafficked labour (including sex workers).<sup>19</sup> All in all, in the context of today's labour's supply chains, it will be good to have a sense of history of empires, particularly colonial empires, their boundary-making exercises, and the bodies that repeatedly hurled themselves on these borders and boundaries, and made migration one of the most acute biopolitical aspects of the time. Conversely we can say that it was in that age that control of mobile bodies began constituting one of the most critical aspects of biopower.

The nationalist history we read is therefore one but in a mythical way, because this myth hides at the same times other turbulent processes of population-formation and development of control techniques. This is perhaps another instance of Theodor Adorno's "negative dialectics"—a case when the more we try to think of the nation form, all the while distancing ourselves from the material process of labour, the more we are hurled back to the violent and contentious history of the form of labour.<sup>20</sup>

### 3 INFRASTRUCTURE, SUPPLY CHAINS, AND LOGISTICAL NIGHTMARES

Yet, postcolonial capitalism, buttressed by neoliberal capitalism and given a new life by the latter, is not what colonial capitalism was. Even though, as indicated in the previous section remarkable similarities strike us, such as between the plantation sector in those days and today's industries requiring coolie labour, or the construction of railways then and today's roadways building, or the recruitment modes of labour 150 years ago and some labour recruitments modes now, the differences in the state of logistical orientation of the economy are monumental. The development of Third World cities like Nairobi, Mumbai, or Bangkok, a vast arrangement of waste-reprocessing organised in a global chain, infrastructures of supply, new supply modes like container traffic, intermodal transportation, expansion of banks and other sites of financial and informational logistics, special

economic zones, various ways of financing infrastructural programmes including creating artificial monetary crises,<sup>21</sup> and a host of other developments mark postcolonial evolution of logistics and logistical labour. While in the next chapter we propose to examine the implications of these developments in the context of extant postcolonial theories, we have to first examine the logistical aspect of postcolonial capitalism more closely.

Like Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's study making us aware of the role of migration in today's capitalism, in the context of the reorientation of postcolonial economy towards becoming an infrastructural site for global supply of commodities, we have to take note of another remarkable work, *Software, Infrastructure, Labor*, by Ned Rossiter.<sup>22</sup> Rossiter makes incisive historical comparison in the development of logistics and the logistical state, and analyses "imperial infrastructures".<sup>23</sup> Imperial infrastructures focus on facilitating supply or more correctly, circulation—of information, data, money, soldiers, labour, and other commodities. Logistics makes the infrastructural sites the dual ground of production and circulation. Thus, the development of shipbuilding, railways, container traffic, roadways, airport cities, pipelines, cable-laying, and last but not least information and financial processing zones like data centres, not only indicates a logistical reorientation of the economy, it also marks a new type of politics that is imperial and vested with the "natural" power of producing new territories. In this way the imperial model is replicated in the postcolonial site. Within the postcolony the logic of imperial infrastructure begins operating. To borrow words from Ned Rossiter, the "space annihilating properties of telegraphy... freeing communications from the constraints of geography"<sup>24</sup> reinforce the imperial character of logistical infrastructure.

Yet, it does not mean that the empire as a form of rule is de-territorialised; simply the principal mode of creating new territories of control, extraction, exploitation and domination changes. The operation of the territoriality of power is remorseless. Postcolonial countries as sites of new division of labour are not the post-Fordist subjects (in as much as they were not the classical Fordist subjects)—the pure sites of designer, cognitive, immaterial labour. Rural migrant labour, waste-reprocessing worker, container truck driver, the crane operator in the shipyard, the construction labourer—these figures complete the other side of the software systems that link and run a port's cargo-handling capacity, toll plazas on the highways, the working of the data centres, the diffusion of mobile telephony and the rest of the infrastructural sites of logistics. We must understand the theoretical implications. Indeed, the logic of infrastructure has two implications.

First, it emphasises the urban turn in the capitalist policy universe. Cities were always with us. But with infrastructural growth the world of cities has now produced the urban. Policies in tandem have become mobile, and development strategies have followed suit. Policy mobility has created its own new territoriality; it has created simultaneously new geographies of the urban.<sup>25</sup>

Second, it enhances multiplicity of labour. Infrastructure is produced out of elements, categories, standards, protocols and operations (think of the construction of a flyover or setting up a bank). Thus, while infrastructure is a unified product of multiple elements, it not only requires this multiplicity to come into this world, it releases in turn multiple agents, like a particular form of labour, a particular set of users, a particular form of profit and a particular form of power, with each of these causing exclusion of other forms, sets, protocols and standards. Therefore, at one level, infrastructure sets the terms in which everyone must operate and to which everyone must subordinate the self, it also creates the possibility of what Rossiter calls “logistical nightmare confronting labour and life”.<sup>26</sup> The postcolonial in the history of bourgeois progress represents a disaster, a nightmare. Nothing, more than a breakdown of infrastructure, evokes that scenario. One incident in contemporary India, which can be characterised only as logistical nightmare, may be given as an instance.

The demonetisation crisis hit India in November 2016. On 8 November 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that in four hours’ time, 500 rupee and 1000 rupee notes, accounting for 86 per cent of the total currency of the country, would cease to be legal tender and needed to be redeemed for smaller notes. Government’s aim, he declared, was twofold: combating “black money”<sup>27</sup> and turning India into a cashless economy, where electronic payment would be the norm. People were asked to either exchange old notes for new, or deposit old notes in bank accounts. The government’s announcement resulted in people in urban areas standing in long queues in front of bank branches for hours, others covering long distances and standing in even longer queues in rural areas where one branch often serves thousands of villagers residing over several square miles. It soon became clear that not enough new notes were ready and they would not be ready for quite some time, so that banks began rationing cash withdrawals. Meanwhile exchange of new notes for old stopped altogether. ATMs stopped functioning, and were found to be ill-designed for new notes. The strain of standing in long queues for hours after covering long distances claimed nearly 100 lives. Yet, after such an ordeal, a person got a



meagre sum at the end of hours of queuing. The informal sector of the economy, which accounts for an estimated 47 per cent of the gross domestic product and more than 80 per cent of employment, and functions almost exclusively on cash transactions, was hit particularly hard. Recession set in immediately, with reports of a 50 per cent drop in sales in many places. The agricultural sector, employing nearly half the country's working population, was similarly hit hard; buyers of the harvested crops, being cash-strapped, became scarce; and peasants saddled with unsold crops were unable to buy inputs for the *rabi* (first quarter of the year crop) sowing. The poor were hardest hit, since neither their incomes nor their purchases were paid by cheque or credit card. Most did not have bank accounts.

Demonetisation had the hardest effect on tea garden labourers. The so called campaign against black money hit hardest the workers who had no money at all and lived below the poverty line.<sup>28</sup> As reports came in soon after the announcement of demonetisation, it was clear that it had added fuel to the fire and added to the set of issues the workers had already been fighting for. They were unable even to get minimum wages. The Darjeeling district in West Bengal in India has 68 tea gardens, of which 38 were able to pay only one week's wages to their workers after 8 November. The tea garden workers of the Alipurduar district, another tea-producing district in West Bengal, similarly suffered due to lack of money and food in their homes. Many were forced to eat tea leaves and flowers for mere survival. Some tea gardens were compelled to close down and end operations abruptly. Some owners of small tea gardens fled, after their managements were unable to pay their tea garden workers, leaving the labourers in the lurch. Thus, in North Bengal, where about 350,000 workers in tea gardens used to receive their wages in cash, with their daily wage being Rs. 132.50, and the mode of wage payment being weekly or fortnightly, thousands found themselves in one or two weeks without jobs. Likewise, in Assam tea estates, demonetisation and the state government's order to move over to bank transfer of wages by January was a serious disruption to their routine. The state government's decision to move over to bank transfer of wages for tea garden workers failed miserably as the banks claimed that they did not have enough cash to pay the labourers. In one district, Tinsukia, the workers protested and refused to accept payment in digitised mode.<sup>29</sup>

As far recovery of black money was concerned, it was found out in the ensuing days that the amount of cash-holding relative to the total GDP generated in the black economy was quite small. Likewise, the notion of the preponderance of fake currency notes in circulation as a justification

for demonetisation was also misleading, and people could not make anything of what the real situation was. Demonetisation opened up new “black activities” of converting old notes into new ones for a price, so that only a fraction of the demonetised notes of the “black economy” were disabled. As for the transition to a “cashless economy”, it was conveniently forgotten that most of the poor and working population were not considered credit-worthy by banks.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand the government at one stroke enriched the banks, which had been reeling under non-performing assets (NPAs), mostly in the form of unpaid loans made to the wealthiest.<sup>31</sup>

The first day of December, payday for tens of millions of Indians, was a day of utter chaos amid this pursuit of demonetisation. Banks throughout the country, including those in central business districts in big cities, displayed “No Cash” signboards within hours of the start of the day’s business. Branches of smaller banks did not receive any cash, while larger banks with currency chests got a quarter of their requirement. ATM facilities outside the banks, too, ran out of cash and displayed similar notices. Banks had to close their ATM shutters. Shops had onlookers, but no customers. New cars piled up outside showrooms as sales slumped. Jewellery showrooms were deserted. When ATMs did dispense cash, it was only Rs. 2000 notes. As a result, small trade in vegetables, fish and food in general practically ceased. Consumers spent less, which hurt small producers who, in turn, were forced to scale back their activities. Thus, supply chains at small, medium and even larger companies started breaking down. Lorries were stranded with no money for fuel, workers were unable to load goods, and distributors could not pay up. Wholesale markets in many cities were shut. The government put on a brave face and called the move a surgical strike to stamp out hoarders of unaccounted cash and to put an end to black money. It also said it would bring into circulation new 500-rupee notes and would replace 1,000-rupee notes with new 2,000-rupee notes. However, the central bank was unable to print new notes quickly enough.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha (Parliament), the former Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the economist who had designed India’s 1991 economic liberalisation, criticised the Modi administration for its “monumental mismanagement” of the demonetisation process and said that the liquidity squeeze would reduce India’s gross domestic product growth rate by 2 per cent, with agricultural production, small industries and the vast, cash-driven, informal sector, which employed millions of youth, hardest hit. By some estimates, the government would need time until May 2017 to replace the 23 billion bank notes it had sucked out of circulation.<sup>32</sup>

Restrictions on cash withdrawals from ATMs and bank accounts had to be imposed. By the end of December 2016, according to one report, only 50 per cent of the new currency needed to replace old high-denomination notes in the banking system would be available. By mid-December the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) could supply only Rs. 5 trillion worth of currency to the markets, and was preparing to supply more Rs. 500 notes. Government had to plan now to issue more Rs. 100 notes to augment the volume of Rs. 1.6 trillion of currency notes by another Rs. 800 billion. Yet the increase seemed to have little effect on the currency market as, by the RBI's admission, Rs. 12.44 trillion of defunct Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 notes had been deposited by 10 December.<sup>33</sup> Further, of about 200,000 ATMs only 120,000 machines were operational, as ATMs needed recalibration in terms of both hardware and software for supplying new Rs. 2000 and Rs. 500 rupee notes.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from informal workers, peasants and farmers with stakes in the country's Cooperative banks received the cruellest blow, as these institutions primarily dealing with people at the bottom of the pyramid nearly died so that the big banks could be saved. These cooperative banks were critical for rural India. Post demonetisation, cooperative banking gasped for breath due to a severe liquidity crisis, leaving many small cooperative banks with a few thousand rupees of funds. Yet these banks were particularly important for lower-income villagers who wanted small loans. According to data from the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), there were 32 state cooperative banks and 370 district central cooperative banks as of 31 March 2015. The number of primary agricultural credit societies (PACS)—the smaller institutions—as of 31 March 2014 (the latest data available), stood at 93,042. Yet, notwithstanding the significance of the statistical profile of cooperative banks, the RBI did not consider that the checks and balances at these banks were strong enough to counter efforts to push black money into the banking system. Also, these banks were not thought to be as tightly regulated as scheduled commercial banks. But, by choking off funds to cooperative banks significant damage to the health of cooperative banks was inflicted, with several such banks on the verge of closure. Yet, for instance, the non-performing assets of these banks are small compared to scheduled commercial banks. Also, in recent years, the primary agriculture credit societies (PACS) had had an impressive record of deposit-lending operations. Members of PACS as on 31 March 2014 aggregated Rs. 130.1 million, of which borrowing members, at Rs. 48.1 million constituted around 39 per cent.

On the deposit side, these banks mobilised Rs. 818.95 billion as on 31 March 2014, indicating a growth rate of 34 per cent over the previous year. The demonetisation drive, a severe cash crunch, put these banks under stress, and most of them stopped functioning, or functioned only gingerly.<sup>35</sup> One report said, “One important public sector bank in this state has a total of 975 ATMs across the country. Of these, 549 were serving up no denomination other than despair. Most of those non-functioning ATMs are in rural areas. A particularly cynical rationalisation of the impact is the claim that ‘rural areas function on credit. Cash means nothing.’ Really? It means everything.”<sup>36</sup>

In face of these developments and massive public protests against the government decision the government was pushed on to the back foot and introduced one small relief measure after another.

One may remark on the economic futility of such an exercise, but note that it was logistical thinking that led to such quagmire: how many ATM machines in India? how many branches? how many customers served by a branch? and what about differential density of coverage? how many notes of what currency? how many to be replaced by what new and old. but newly designed, denomination notes? over what period? whose money was being taken? who was being let free in terms of responsibility of NPAs (non performing assets)? and a hundred other questions like these were blithely disregarded thanks to what we may call a logistical mode of deciding how to curb black money, control the black economy, and make the Indian economy cashless.

As we have tried to indicate, this remorseless logistical mode of thinking had to have a sacrifice—and this was labour. To make the economy efficient, labour had to vanish. This is the pending task of capitalism, and it is the postcolonial site where the impossible task has to be achieved. This is at the root of these logistical nightmares. Such nightmares can be found in mega cities, particularly of the Third World, where circuits of labour, along with fibre optic cables, reshape the new territoriality of capital.<sup>37</sup> Yet when we re-read the details of the Indian currency crisis, the more appropriate enquiry would be, why are such logistical nightmares linked to increasing financialisation (as clearly the currency crisis was), and why cannot algorithmic extraction (in this case the fundamental calculation was how much money to extract from circulation, how much to put in, and in what form—all as a logical series) solve such problems?

Clearly our enquiry into the process of financialisation has to be in the sphere of circulation of capital, that is say in the sphere of exchange of goods and services, which produces a high level of abstraction.<sup>38</sup> Once

again, such a process needs the erasure of living labour. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the entire demonetisation exercise was attacked only on the ground of property rights and not destruction of labour.<sup>39</sup>

One reason for such a legal conundrum is of course that labour is now increasingly managed as financial capital<sup>40</sup>—thus wage bills, pension funds, the seasonal rise and ebb of labour requirements, the mode of what is known in the postcolonial world as financial inclusion of wage earners in the banking system, managing loan and mortgage business, welfare funds for migrant labour, managing expenditure on various schemes for labour, such as recreation, leave travel allowance, advance for different purchases and so on—all contribute to the financialisation of the life of labour. It is a process in which the State plays a big role.

#### 4 THE NEW TERRITORIALITY OF CAPITAL: DATA CENTRES IN THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

Data centres belong to the logistical world involving issues of infrastructure, software and computing labour. Driven by developments in information technologies, data centres carry forward the logistical argument of the management of the economy and polity to a new level, while remaining anchored in the overall logistical framework of politics, administration and economics. They represent governance in one of its fundamental aspects, namely management of data and information. Ironically, they have become important in the management of postcolonial economies and societies hitherto considered unmanageable and anarchic. Data centres emerged at a specific juncture in the history of computing, beginning with mainframes, moving on to personal computers and the client–server model, and then to distributed computing and software as a service. With the increase of data-transfer capacity, operational efficiency in classification, processing speed of structured and unstructured data, speed of data retrieval and the development of technologies like the cloud/ on-demand, we may say that data centres in some sense have transcended the preceding phase of networks of semi-autonomous computing devices. These dimensions are important to remember when studying the development of data centres in some postcolonial countries, which are products of new software in information technology related fields.

Data centres are not virtual entities. They represent materiality in a specific way, which is necessary to understand the dynamics of postcolonial capitalism. A data centre is a material reality with physical existence, concrete

location and concrete infrastructure. As such, a data centre may be said to symbolise the combination of materiality and immateriality of information. In this context it will be important to enquire also as to how the institution of the data centre has come to symbolise at the same time the centralisation and decentralisation of data management and governance. In India, for instance, data centres started developing in the wake of the so-called Indian GDP revolution (7–9 per cent annual growth over several years), which has meant a massive expansion in the volume of data in the wake of the expansion of trade and finance, and a concomitant exponential growth of electronic services, owing to the expansion of the volume of trade, insurance and other financial services (and thus massive increases in trade-related data) and a new digital sphere of functioning of regulating bodies like the SEBI (Stock Exchange Board of India), RBI (Reserve Bank of India) and TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India). This expansion in turn requires robust practices of achieving data integrity, data safety, adoption of latest standards (such as ISO 27001: 2013 in information security management), management of comprehensive data sets and an accompanying ability to analyse information. Data centres often appear as symbols of the contemporary world of mass generation of personal data as part of everyday digital processes, and their convergence through global digital identities, such as those offered by Google and Facebook accounts. They denote development of greater integration of data architecture, the best example of which in India is the information generated through the Unique Identity Project to be integrated (and interchanged) with other stored data (such as financial data on bank accounts, recipients of subsidies, etc.). It means that task planning will be easier, impacting on time planning as well. It will also mean rapid expansion of data storing, processing, analysing, retrieving and transmitting, leading to economies of scale.<sup>41</sup>

But this also implies increasing amount of unstructured data being handled, because of greater processing capacity. This is today at the heart of the big data phenomenon, which curiously co-exists with sparse data syndrome. For instance, unavailability of granular and/or interoperable data, as well as context specificities of machine learning, may lead to lack of warning, for instance in a situation where there is a requirement for immediate distribution of food grain in the country in order to arrest a price rise or prevent hunger, or a requirement to have a flexible warehouse utilisation programme. These paradoxes are evident in the Indian scenario, as in other countries like South Africa, Brazil and Thailand.

Located in different parts of India, data centres provide services including dedicated server hosting and co-location services.<sup>42</sup> They are usually

spread across substantial chunks of land and have high-capacity servers. For reasons of cost-effectiveness, data centres are especially favourable for start-up industries in the country, though these centres serve also clients abroad, catering to their IT infrastructure needs such as data storage, data security and interconnection. Real estate business firms, media and video-streaming firms, IT and ITES companies and the bulk messaging industry are often the clients, though the manufacturing industry, too, needs data centres. These data centres represent technological advances in IT which ensure higher speed, greater power and capabilities with regard to data and IP communications, including storage, retrieval, and transmission.

The global template of the postcolonial location of data centres is obvious; high-speed global communications networks and services provide the muscles and sinews of data centres, which are crucial for transmission of critical data at nearly the speed of light to where it is needed anywhere in the world. They provide clients with fast, reliable IP communications and support clients with services that are crucial for effective and efficient storage and multi-media services on social media such as voice and mobile signalling, cloud, big data, etc. These service providers cope with rapidly changing market dynamics, flock towards emerging market growth opportunities and are in a perpetual hunt for end-users needing to communicate across multiple channels. In this way, digital evolution and the existing landscape of business mutually determine each other. Data centres also provide dedicated platforms that ensure privacy and security of the clients with synchronisation across data centres that ensure business continuity. Business firms can co-locate on their IT equipment and thus acquire cost-effective alternatives to building their own infrastructure. Co-location services provide regulated power, cooling and physical security for the server, storage and networking equipment, and allow enterprises connect to a network service provider of their choice, plus shared rack, dedicated rack, caged space, remote hands service, customer workspace and reporting services. Clearly data centres in India are a mark of a growing business environment in IT-related fields. Their lives are related to trade cycles. They mark the centralisation of the IT and ITES business and demonstrate the logistical dimension of IT infrastructure. They create their own logistical territories.<sup>43</sup>

Data centres also embody the risks, leakages and breaking points of the global communication apparatus, a hint of which we got in the brief discussion on the currency crisis. Concerns about fire hazard, piracy, business slowdown, imperfect installation and big data missing out certain crucial particularities drive data centres to develop disaster-recovery

planning and business-continuity planning—something which calls for greater coordination of several authorities.<sup>44</sup> Given the question of cost recovery in the uncertain times post-2008, management of risk implies consideration of quality, cost, base factors and systemic solidity. These measures also include ensuring information security, restrictions on software installation, security policy for supplier relationships, response to incidents impacting on information security and other steps required as new controls under ISO 27001: 2013. These measures suggest that risks have become part of normal planning. They also imply greater reliability of environment, which will demand greater public oversight.

Postcolonial experience thus should prompt us to inquire if data centres are markers of a new mode of governance. While in information management some of the old modes of governance continue, data centres indicate new modes. These new modes of governance are yet to fully develop, but we may find the rough outlines through new government initiatives in data management. On one hand it means more centralised handling of data, on the other hand it offers scope for decentralised or dispersed handling. It also means more data-centric management of public life. More importantly, data management in India does not belong to purely private domains of data service providers and IT giants. Data governance draws from experiences of the postcolonial Indian State in dealing with society, population groups, security needs, welfare needs and territorial management. We can refer to the huge volume of data generated, processed, interfaced and retrieved in India in the context of both specialised public data collection institutions like the Office of Registrar General of India that conducts the decennial Census and the National Sample Survey Organisation on one hand, and sectoral data collection initiatives undertaken by national agencies and programmes such as the RBI (Reserve Bank of India), various public sector banks, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the National Crime Records Bureau and the Rural Employment Guarantee scheme on the other, besides, of course, the Unique Identification Authority of India that offers verification of identity as a service to other government and private agencies. The NIC (National Informatics Centre) has set up National Data Centres in Delhi, Pune and Hyderabad, and 30 small data centres at various state capitals. It also operates the open government data platform.<sup>45</sup> Global companies have thought of setting up public data centres (for instance IBM in Chennai) to tap into government initiatives like Digital India and Smart Cities.<sup>46</sup>

Logistics in this way brings back the State–capital nexus. For example, public management of data is increasingly geared towards interface of



various kinds of data in what is called the public interest. In India, highly developed in terms of keeping records, and with a long colonial history of census keeping and census analysis as well as a sizeable banking industry, the data management infrastructure draws heavily from State history and State capability. On the other hand, the State capacity may change, or acquire new abilities or become dependent on private abilities in governing the informational world and shaping its own logistical ability. In this context, the regulatory regime of e-governance in the country, including data protection provisions, the Data Security Council of India and the Information Technology Act as a whole, acquires significance. This is further important in the background of a large number of BPOs (Business Processing Outsourcing) in India with access to large amount of data—commercial and personal.

In brief, one has to look into the nature of a mixed governance regime such as a public–private partnership (PPP) in data management.<sup>47</sup> Even though the model of PPP precedes the growth of data centres, the field of data management and the broad growth of IT infrastructure are inconceivable without PPPs, whose aspects may range from land allotment, tax rebates and collaboration in public data management to budgetary provisions, and allowing downright access to commercial interests—public and private. One may say with the experience of Aadhar (the Unique Identification Authority of India or UIDAI)<sup>48</sup> that the market of interlinked data management is taking shape through public–private partnership. Still questions remain as to (1) the unknowable nature of certain risks (breach, piracy, fire, etc.); (2) hazards of trade cycles and crises like that of 2008; (3) limits of the context for which the data is geared; (4) the contradiction between the openness of the source (let us remember that much of the vital technology is driven by free and open-source software communities) and the private nature of the holdings; (5) possibilities of abuse (such as corruption, as has happened in the US, or directing data to “other” purposes); (6) ignoring the human factor—like political design and ambition; and (7) finally, the question of labour in the entire gamut of data industry—from collection to end-use.

The history of the management of public data—such as census data in various countries (in India, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data also), public sector banking data or the data collected for key national schemes on rural employment and rural health mission—will show the inadequate extent to which it contributes to building of social infrastructure like schools, public warehouses for essential commodities like food grains or flood-control measures. Likewise, the study of the Unique Identification of India Authority as instance of public–private partnership in the generation

and management of data about transactions between individuals and various public and private entities show the shifting modes of public–private data management it imagines and engenders. In the context of IT locations, issues such as land-use patterns, security and surveillance, backup arrangements, interlocking arrangements between data centres, IT firms, business firms, banks, financial companies, and the public authorities—along with complementary issues of decentralisation and centralisation of data management—suggest the nature of the transformation of what can be called “data collection labour”. That is, the shift from *amins* (revenue officials, measuring, collecting, and certifying land related claims and documents) and census surveyors to the new forms of data-collection workers on the ground. Yet this also means the *amin*, the figure who was omnipresent in the history of data collection on the ground, has now transformed into a nameless and faceless collector or data entry operator, for innumerable data-based operations such as the UIDAI or the Census.

For capital this is the desirable history of labour—labour at work but not visible, ready at hand but not always necessary, labour living but, whenever required, soon dead. Shaping the postcolonial labour process in this model is the mission of global capital today.<sup>49</sup> Everywhere this seems to be successful, only to fail at the most unexpected hour. In this ghostly transformative exercise, money (increasingly in credit and digital mode) seems to be the most important tool. Let us not forget the lesson Marx drew on the question of money in circulation—the supply chain of money—that it becomes a commodity like other commodities, appearing as form of circulation of the same capital. Hence, even though money’s function is of one of capital, it appears as one of circulation, which either introduces the functions of productive capital or emanates from them. Money capital and not industrial capital is the spectral “other” of living labour in the postcolonial condition. Study of logistics must take this as a central fact.

Labour follows the commodity chain. In the process labour also becomes a part of the commodity chain. The structure of one predicates the other. If this has been true of the colonial and postcolonial history of South Africa, this is true of migration to the Gulf region in the Middle East today. In case of South Africa, this has been evident in the production of primary commodities like minerals. The mineral market and labour market have moved together.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, in the Gulf the specific requirements of pink-collar jobs have shaped migration flows there. The Gulf is the region where women labour in pink-collar jobs migrate in large

numbers from South Asia, and the Gulf economy has produced there a society which continuously calls for the reproduction of such labour. One can notice a specific type of labour-recruitment pattern or a regime of recruitment modes which produce women as labouring subjects. These patterns resemble many of the past patterns of labour recruitment.

In short, infrastructure and logistics of supply (of commodities, human beings, money, information, waste, etc.) do not make labour flows homogeneous, even, and standard, but heterogeneous.<sup>51</sup> Postcolonial capitalism is a confirmed evidence of this law of mobility. On the other hand, the logistical turn in postcolonial economy creates infrastructural nightmares.

## NOTES

1. Mezzadra and Neilson clarify at the outset, “Our emphasis on heterogeneity is also important for the analysis of what we call with Karl Marx the composition of contemporary living labor, which is more and more crisscrossed, divided, and multiplied by practices of mobility and the operation of borders... we also focus, to make a couple of examples, on the *hukou* system of household registration in contemporary China and the complex systems of bordering that internally divide the Indian labour market.”—Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), preface, p. x.
2. “The property, therefore, which labour-power in action, living labour, possesses of preserving value, at the same time that it adds it, is a gift of Nature which costs the worker nothing, but which is very advantageous to the capitalist inasmuch since it preserves the existing value of his capital. So long as trade is good, the capitalist is too absorbed in making profits to take notice of this gratuitous gift of labour. Violent interruptions of the labour-process, crises make him painfully aware of it.”—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 1867, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), Chapter 8, p. 315.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 579–580.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 792–793.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 719–720.
6. Duncan McDuie-Ra in *Borderland City in New India: Frontier to Gateway* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016) discusses the long history of successive labour migration regimes in the evolution of a frontier city. In the background of violence and insurgency, and periodic attacks on outsiders, McDuie-Ra writes, “With this in mind it may seem odd that there is such a strong ‘pull factor’ in the disturbed city... Yet people continue to arrive, guided by promises of work, stories of returnees who have

spent time there, the opportunities from border trade, and by the centrally funded infrastructure projects that require labour... It is also interesting to consider the flow of migrants into Imphal at the same time as locals leave the city for other parts of India and beyond... During my research with Northeast migrants living in Delhi respondents would often speak of the unequal exchange of intelligent and skilled indigenous people contributing to the economies of metropolitan India, a brain drain of significant proportions, to be replaced by unskilled labour... Imphal in this sense represents the classic dilemma of connectivity. There is no clean connection, un-spoilt by labour. As in Imphal, there will be street corners on main roads frequented by migrant day labourers, some with harnesses for construction sites, some with a few tools, their chronically insecure condition representing in many ways life at this end of the economy as perpetually insecure. In an era of connectivity that has transformed the borderland from a frontier to a corridor and recalibrated Imphal as the major urban centre through which goods and people flow between Southeast Asia and South Asia” (p. 113), the paradoxical phenomenon of connectivity and the desire for exclusion of labour will thus co-exist.

7. This also includes militarisation of borders, and the pronounced presence of armed groups in the border towns. Militarisation and the influx of labour go side by side. On this, studies of towns and settlements in Mexico on the US–Mexico border are insightful. See for instance, Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the US–Mexico Divide* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); and, Kurt Birson, “Mexico: Abuses against U.S. Bound Migrant Workers” NACLA, 23 September 2010—<https://nacla.org/news/mexico-abuses-against-us-bound-migrant-workers> (accessed on 16 December 2016).
8. Goods and Services Tax is a proposed system of indirect taxation in India, merging most of the existing taxes into single system of taxation. It will be a comprehensive indirect tax on manufacture, sale and consumption of goods and services throughout the country, replacing taxes levied by the union and state governments. Instead, it will be now levied and collected at each stage of sale or purchase of goods or services based on the input tax credit method. Taxable goods and services will not be distinguished from one another and will be taxed at a single rate in a supply chain till the goods or services reach the consumer. Administrative responsibility would generally rest with a single authority to levy tax on goods and services. Exports would be zero-rated and imports would be subject to the same taxes as domestic goods and services, adhering to the destination principle. It is claimed that amalgamating several Central and state taxes into a single tax would mitigate cascading or double taxation, facilitating a common national market. The Union government has assured states of compensation for any revenue losses incurred by them from the date of introduction of GST for a period of five years.

9. *Border as Method*, pp. 66–67.
10. For instance, one study on US workers shows that transit mobility fails to improve the employment status of low-income persons. See Thomas W. Sanchez, Qing Shen and Zhong-Ren Peng, “Transit Mobility, Jobs Access and Low-income Labour Participation in US Metropolitan Areas”, *Urban Studies*, Volume 41 (7), June 2004, pp. 1313–1331.
11. One of the ways to think through the problematic is to conceptualise what the labour historian Samita Sen calls, “organised informality”; see Samita Sen’s study, *Organised Informality: Autorickshaw Drivers in Kolkata* (Kolkata: Jadavpur University, School of Women’s Studies, 2016).
12. It is not altogether beside the point that in as much as migration invokes race and racism, it is also the other way round, in the sense that race has produced over centuries bounty hunters, escapees, vagrants and fleeing bondsmen.
13. Colonial history is replete with accounts of circulating labour. For instance, Ian J. Kerr, “On the Move: Circulating Labour in Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial India”, *International Review of Social History*, Volume 51, 2006 (pp. 85–109); Kerr wrote that in 1770 a British official in Madras observed groups composed of men, women, and children who formed “a kind of travelling community of their own under a species of Government peculiar to themselves, with laws and customs which they follow and observe wherever they go”. These itinerant, coveted groups of earth- and stone-workers circulated from worksite to worksite where they dug tanks (small reservoirs), ditches and wells, and built roads and fortifications. They lived close to their worksites in temporary huts which they threw up for the occasion, and always chose a spot distinct from any village, “wandering from one place to another as is most convenient”, p. 85.
14. Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1973).
15. Roy Parker, *Uprooted—The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada—1867 to 1917* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010); also see in this context, Robert Coles, *Uprooted Children—Early Life of Migrant Farm Workers* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970).
16. There is an astonishing collection of documents and writings published on the occasion of the Women’s Suffrage Centenary in South Australia (1894–1994) titled, *Behind the Wall—The Women of the Destitute Asylum, Adelaide, 1852–1918*, ed. Mary Geyer (Adelaide: Migration Museum 1994), which tell us a great deal about the destitute migrants’ lives behind the walls.
17. For instance, Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast—Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); Rana P. Behel and Marcel van der Linden, *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism—Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

18. Mike Davis on the late nineteenth-century famines and migration in China, India and Brazil in the context of the El Nino spells, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001); see the report by Furquan Ameen Siddiqui, “Escaping A River’s Wrath”, *Hindustan Times* (Kolkata edition) 16 September 2016, p. 7.
19. For a collection of such studies, Kevin Hewinson and Ken Young (eds.), *Transnational Migration and Work in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2006).
20. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).
21. Michal Rozworski, “How Not To Fund Infrastructure”, *The Bullet*, 1296, 25 August 2016—<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1296.php#continue> (accessed on 15 September 2016); Rozworski wrote, “Recycling is supposed to be a good thing, so when the federal Liberals (in Canada) quietly announced that ‘asset recycling’ would be part of their strategy for meeting their much-ballyhooed infrastructure promises, not many eyebrows were raised. They should have been. Asset recycling is an obscure code word for selling our public goods for private profit. It’s privatization by another name... there is no crisis that says you have to sell a bridge to fund a hospital or the other way around. Or, better put, we have manufactured crises. Decades of slow but crippling austerity, tax cuts and restructuring have led us here. We cannot afford transit and hospitals by choice and it is in our power to reverse things. Deficit spending can be part of a reversal in the short term; asset recycling cannot... However, getting funds for investment by selling other assets into a system that has created massive asset price inflation—seen in stock markets at record highs, a lack of sub-million dollar homes in Vancouver or smashed art auction records—seems questionable at best.”
22. Ned Rossiter, *Software, Infrastructure, Labor: A Media Theory of Logistical Nightmares* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
23. “Focusing on the combinatory force of logistics and infrastructure between the 1800 and 2000 communication system of the cable, I argue that the logistical operation of imperial infrastructures produces territory in ways that skew and structure the relation between States and empire... the territoriality of power manifests through communications infrastructure such as telegraphic cables and data centres to produce a new sovereign entity that I term the *logistical state*”. (italics author’s)—*Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 160; incidentally in colonial times telegraph poles were also the guide for the coolies escaping the tea gardens in the wilderness of India’s northeast. See the “Autobiography of a Tea Garden Coolie” (in Bengali *Cha Kulir Atmakabini* by Jogendranath Chattopadhyay) in *Passage to Bondage: Labour in the Assam Tea Plantations*, edited and compiled by Samita Sen, trans. Suhit Sen (pp. 131–214), p. 181.
25. See the study of Johannesburg in this context, Jennifer Robinson, “‘Arriving at’ the Urban Policies/the Urban: Traces of Elsewhere in

- Making City Futures” in Ola Soderstrom, Shalini Randeria, Didier Ruedin, Gianni D’Amato, and Francesco Panese, *Critical Mobilities* (Lausanne: EPEL Press and New York: Routledge, 2015), Chapter 1, pp. 1–20.
26. *Software, Infrastructure, Labour*, p. 193.
  27. Income illegally obtained or not declared for tax purposes, which, the government believed, went into financing terror and other illegal activities.
  28. Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, “As Tea Gardens Worry about Wages Post Note Ban, Centre Mandates Bank Accounts for Labourers”, *The Wire*, 25 November, 2016—<http://thewire.in/82668/demonetisation-tea-gardens/> (accessed on 18 December 2016).
  29. “Demonetisation Stirs the Lives of Tea Garden Workers, Forced to Eat Flowers and Leaves for Survival”, report by Neha Vashishth, *India Today*, 16 December 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/tea-garden-workers-suffer-food-darjeeling-demonetisation/1/836070.html> (accessed on 18 December 2016).
  30. One business paper admitted, “The importance of cash in India can be seen from the fact that the country has a much higher cash-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio than most major economies. Even in terms of cash–deposit ratio, India is much ahead of the US and Euro zone. While some of this could be due to hoarding of undisclosed income, India’s huge informal economy is also a major factor in the dominance of cash in day-to-day transactions. Low average balance in Jan Dhan Yojana accounts suggests that those dependent on the informal economy might not have been using bank facilities regularly and are most vulnerable to the transition costs.” At the same time the same newspaper showed that while India had a high cash–deposit ratio, access to banking was limited, and the cash–GDP ratio was not abnormally high. Bank notes and coins in circulation as percentage of GDP at the end of 2015 was for India 10.86, for the US it was 7.9, for Switzerland 11.76, and for Japan 20.66.—*Live Mint*, 15 November 2016—<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/kcDSOV9ds7ZX-wlZwoKNGiP/Three-charts-that-show-why-demonetization-is-painful.html> (accessed on 21 December 2016).
  31. Prabhat Patnaik, “India’s Demonetisation Quagmire and Its Victims”, *Al Jazeera*, 5 December 2016—<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/12/india-demonetisation-quagmire-victims-161204101742156.html> (accessed on 17 December 2016).
  32. Himendra Mohan Kumar, “India’s Demonetisation Creates India’s Payday Cash Crisis”, *The national Business*, 1 December 2016—<http://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/indias-demonetisation-creates-payday-cash-crisis> (accessed on 17 December 2016).
  33. “Govt. to Review Curbs on Cash Withdrawal after 30 December”, *The Statesman*, 16 December 2016, news report, p. 1.

34. Kritika Banerjee, “Midnight Queues, Violence, Banks to Refusing to Cooperate: 7 Points that Sum Up Currency Crisis”, *India Today*, 13 November 2016—<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/7-points-currency-crisis/1/809528.html> (accessed 15 December 2016).
35. Dinesh Unnikrishnan, “Demonetisation: After 12 Days Cooperative banks Still gasping for Breath”, *First Post*, 19 November 2016—<http://www.firstpost.com/business/demonetisation-narendra-modi-risks-too-much-by-triggering-a-crisis-for-cooperative-banks-3113630.html> (accessed on 15 December 2016).
36. P. Sainath, “The Cashless Economy of Chikalthana”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 51 (46), 12 November 2016, <http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/46/web-exclusives/cashless-economy-chikalthana.html> (accessed on 21 December 2016).
37. For such a study of logistical nightmare, Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar, and Suhit Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination* (London and New Delhi: Routledge, 2013).
38. On this the classic study is Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* (LA: Semiotext(e), 2010).
39. See the note by Alok Prasanna Kumar, “Demonetisation and Rule of Law”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 51 (50), 10 December 2016 (pp. 19–21), p. 21.
40. *Software, Infrastructure, Labor*, p. 128.
41. See Chapter 2, which discusses the data-centric position of the postcolonial world in the global map of knowledge production.
42. <https://cloudscene.com/market/india/all> (accessed on 12 October 2016).
43. Belapur in Navi Mumbai in India is typical of such a logistical territory, though the crucial thing here is that logistical operations create “trans-territorial” territoriality. Data centres of banks located in Belapur help banks to create their own operational territories. Belapur houses a cluster of data centres of various financial institutions. The story of the financial growth of the area, the profile of customers, land utilisation, and the nature of its workforce tells of the way the immediate and expanded territorialities of a data centre materialise. That can also tell us of the relation between data centres in India and those across the east and southeast Asian region.
44. The development of disaster-recovery programmes and Acts in various countries like India has to be seen in the perspective of the increased logistical strength of the State.
45. <https://data.gov.in/> (accessed on 13 October 2016).
46. <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/ibm-sets-up-public-data-centre-in-chennai/article7757332.ece> (accessed on 13 October 2016).
47. In the study of the new town in Rajarhat also this issue acquired importance. See, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination*,



- pp. 82–85, 195–196; on this it is important also to see the growth of government’s new towns policy.
48. For details see, <https://uidai.gov.in/> (accessed on 27 April 2017).
  49. One aspect of this transformation is that besides the conditional visibility of labour in the logistical milieu, labour’s individuality (product of visibility) is over as the infrastructural turn of capitalism overwhelms the society. In the logistical milieu, infrastructure is able to present labour as a necessary coordinate to the universal future made of mobility. The sacrifice of labour as individual to a projected digital future signals the transition of industrial capitalism to postcolonial capitalism, from the factory to the imperium of roads, airport cities, ports, containers, special freight corridors, Uber taxis, fast transmission cables, autorickshaws and trucks.
  50. In this respect reports on South Africa are instructive. For instance, “Since the mineral revolution of the late 19th century, migrant labour in South Africa referred not only to workers coming into South Africa from neighbouring countries, but also to a system of controlling African workers within South Africa. Migrant labour provided abundant cheap, at the same time occasioned enforcement of strict labour supervision in the form of racial segregation of land. Male migrants employed by white-owned businesses were prohibited from living permanently in cities and towns designated for whites only. Hundreds of thousands of African men lived in crowded single-sex hostels near their jobs and were not allowed to bring their wives and children, who were described as ‘superfluous appendages’. Thus, migrant workers were divided into labourers during most of the year and full human beings—spouses, parents, and community members—during their short Christmas and Easter holidays in the rural reserves. Migrant workers were initially almost all men, who needed to earn a wage to pay hut taxes. Later, women, too, became migrant workers, chiefly doing domestic work for white families. Millions of Africans within South Africa—workers and their family members—were affected by this system. As the economy became more reliant on industry, urban migration increased further. There was pressure for reform of the labour system to allow Africans to stay in urban areas where their work and accumulated skills were needed, although apartheid still afforded them no political rights outside the so-called Bantustans. Migrancy continues to be significant in South Africa to this day.”—<http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/multimedia.php?id=65-259-5> (accessed on 16 December 2017).
  51. According to the 2001 census, in the city of Mumbai, of the total population of 11.97 million, 5.18 million or 47.3 per cent was categorised as migrant population. Migrants from other parts of the state were concentrated in the cotton textile mills; workers from Andhra Pradesh were concentrated in the construction sector; migrants from Uttar Pradesh and

Bihar were mainly taxi and auto drivers; Muslims from Uttar Pradesh, previously engaged in garment-making and power looms, and some in the textile mills, are now engaged in labour-intensive activities; Marathi Muslims are now mostly involved in the leather industry, zari work and embroidery, bakeries, garment making and tailoring and jewellery making; amongst Dalits, Mahars are mostly engaged in contractual jobs and unskilled employment.

In 1998, the government initiated a drive of deporting “illegal immigrants” who had apparently come from Bangladesh. An unofficial estimate of the homeless population of the city is around 1.5 million persons. Following the “Vision Mumbai: Transforming Mumbai into a World-Class City”, a document prepared by a global consulting firm, McKinsey & Company in 2003, the state government initiated transforming Mumbai into an International Financial Centre with world class infrastructure, citizen-friendly services and business-friendly environment. The government embarked on slum redevelopment to free at least 60 per cent of the land occupied by slums. In 2004–05, more than 90,000 slum units were demolished. Since then, periodic demolition of the slums has been a regular phenomenon.—from the research report, *Cities, Migrants, and the Urban Poor: Issues of Violence and Social Justice*, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, 2016—[http://mcrg.ac.in/Rural\\_Migrants/Final\\_Research\\_Briefs.pdf](http://mcrg.ac.in/Rural_Migrants/Final_Research_Briefs.pdf) (accessed on 12 October 2016).

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# Theories of Postcolonial Economy

## 1 THE FETISH OF DIFFERENCE

The postcolonial reality produces a fetish much in the manner other realities produce their respective fetish or mythologies. In this case, the distinct point is the fetish of *difference*. This we may say is the counterpart of a fetish of *sameness*. Capitalism creates space to think about particularity from the point of abstraction. In other words, when we say that capital globalises but not universalises, we are only partly making a point, because we are fiddling with terms and avoiding the task of inquiring into the dialectical process that produces sameness and difference, and the relation operating between sameness and difference.<sup>1</sup> Yet this task is at the heart of a critical postcolonial understanding of capitalism, which has to combine the analytic and the historical treatments<sup>2</sup>—the only way to avoid historicism, which seems to be the platform on which much of the postcolonial theory of difference rests.

This will be the main argument of this chapter, which will examine some of the theories that make a fetish of difference, and in that background, revisit some of the fundamentals constituting the postcolonial reality of capitalism.

In *Postcolonial Economies*, Dipesh Chakrabarty asks, “Can Political Economy Be Postcolonial”? It was followed in the book by another interesting note on “Postcolonial Theory and Economics: Orthodox and Heterodox”.<sup>3</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty notes by way of reflecting on the question that “much of the postcolonial historiographical revolt was against

the primacy given to economics in radical historians' explanation of rebellions by subaltern classes. With Mao as our explanation we rejected what we saw as the 'economism' of the usual Marxist explanations and gave primacy to the political instead".<sup>4</sup> Aside from the possible counter-argument that bad political economy can be replaced only by good political economy, and primacy of politics is a different matter, the fact is that Mao and the Chinese Communist Party had a proper analysis of Chinese society and economy, a corresponding class analysis, and drew political strategy accordingly. This, as said already, does not prevent the primacy of politics. But when the Chinese Communist party later erred and ignored in the name of politics the fundamental issues of socialist economic reconstruction, China suffered. Likewise China cannot ignore today the global lessons of capitalism and the neoliberal agenda. Chakrabarty further notes that it was wrong to assume that economics of today is the "culmination of a process of historical becoming" and pleads for taking into account "factors external to the geography or any perceptible, immanent logic to the historical evolution" of Europe.<sup>5</sup> He cites the categories of land, labour or capital as understood in the European sense may not be having the same knowledge protocols elsewhere. He also said that analytical categories may have prejudice built in them, and this requires "raising and wherever possible, dealing with the problems of categorical translation as part of the narrative of transition to capitalism."<sup>6</sup>

Continuing in the same vein, Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin examines the impact of postcolonialism on the discipline of economics, which is "orthodox", and raises the possibility of "heterodox" economics as a consequence of the said impact. What does this mean? It means in Zein-Elabdin's words: "the possibility of a distinct postcolonial economic approach depends on transcending the superstructural conception of culture found throughout social science and humanities discourse, a conception still common... By superstructural I do not only mean the classical Marxian argument from 'base' to 'superstructure', but any generic form of theoretical separation of 'culture' and 'economy'... Theorising economic postcoloniality requires dropping this binary conception of the relationship between 'culture' and 'economy'... Instead, I will tentatively use the expression *culture-economy link* to describe that which gets lost in debates over economic/ cultural/or material/ symbolic ..."<sup>7</sup>

"Economic postcoloniality" according to this view must, therefore, be based on examination of "the culture-economy link"; it must move away from "theories of underdevelopment and dependency"; "understanding

postcoloniality on its own terms cannot be accomplished with *a priori* centring of capitalism”, and, “there is the matter of Marxism’s historicism and implication in the imperial project of European modernity...” as it “disallows the non-capitalist from entering the terrain except as the obverse of capitalist-modernity’s self-narrative”.<sup>8</sup> As against this, the heterodox theorists will take up the “task of deconstructing the power of economics”. How? “Decentring the ‘market’ on the one hand, and ‘capital’ on the other, as the two finite... ways of conceiving the past, present, and future” will be the way.<sup>9</sup>

With culture thus securely placed at the heart of economic relations, class relations and social struggles, not surprisingly such kind of postcolonial economics has no place for analysis of labour, because it has already screened capital out of consciousness.<sup>10</sup> This is the way the fetish of difference works. It does it by locating culture in place of labour. Such postcolonial understanding of economy wishes to avoid concrete analysis of labour processes, labour forms, labour conditions, neocolonial forms of control and neoliberal global linkages, which reinforce the exploitative social and economic relations within the postcolony. Culture is in this way rid of any problem involving the history of class relations. It is now their economics versus our culture. Even old-style peasant studies are also given leave in this new understanding, which will now revolve around the middle-class domination of culture and the elite-dominated world of the nation—because we must not forget that such foregrounding of culture cannot but take the nation as the template. Class relations will be expunged. In this sense, labour cannot have a national history. Of course we have Chinese labour history or Indian labour history, meaning thereby that these national histories of labour indicate other overlapping histories influencing labour history. Yet these cannot be nationalised histories of labour, because labour surpasses the nation form. It is the subject of capital. It is the embodiment of wage relation. It indicates transnational links of capital formation. Labour politics by nature is non-national or extra-national politics. It refuses to be colonised by nationalism.

We must not though think that postcolonial understanding is as naive as presented in the preceding paragraph. Certain strands of postcolonial understanding recalls labour—but again labour not as wage labour or even as peasant labour groaning under the yoke of usury, conditions of the grain market, semi feudal agrarian relations, a crisis of subsistence agriculture, forcible eviction from land and compelled to migrate from one place to another, but labour as immanent human activity characterised by certain

cultural traits, ready to be worshipped, extolled and eulogised in literature. The latent argument is that in proper capitalism labour is primarily wage labour; in the postcolony labour is human.

Postcolonial thinking on labour came out in clearest relief in Dipesh Chakrabarty's exposition of labour's history as being double—as he put it, History 1 and History 2.<sup>11</sup> For Chakrabarty “capital” (author's quotation marks) is a philosophical concept of Marx. He argued that for the post-colony what was crucial was the distinction that Marx made between “two kinds of histories: the histories posited by ‘capital’ and histories that do not belong to capital's ‘life process’... Marx's thoughts may be made to resist the idea that the logic of capital sublates differences into itself.”<sup>12</sup> This could be done, if one understands Chakrabarty's argument correctly, by critiquing the given relation between Marx's concept of abstract labour (the core of History 1) and concrete labour (the core of History 2), and by inference exchange value and use value. The shorthand solution will be identifying the West and capitalism proper with History 1, with its attendant emphasis on abstract labour and exchange value, and the postcolony with the histories of concrete labour with History 2, with its attendant emphasis on use value that does not belong to capital. Yet Chakrabarty also conceded that capital produces differences as part of its globalising nature; for him the crucial question is what remains beyond capital's tendency to sublate differences—differences of culture, accompanying rituals, attitudes to work, etc. What is, of course, not answered is how existing differences are absorbed in the surplus-value-producing dynamics, known as capital, and thus how the question of the difference between two histories is relegated in the process of the relentless conquest by capital, in short how differences are appropriated. As Marx said famously, capitalism advances by both expropriation and appropriation: small capital is expropriated, and the capitalist mode of appropriation produces capitalist private property. In his words,

One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the co-operative form of the labour process...

The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish

private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisition of the capitalist era: *i.e.*, on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production.<sup>13</sup>

Relevant for us here is Marx's treatment of appropriation. Capitalism is also a process of appropriation—the dialectical opposite to expropriation. Appropriation is the quality of abstraction. Thus Marx commented that to make

abstraction from the means of subsistence of the labourers during the process of production is to comprehend a phantom... When we speak of labour, or capacity for labour, we speak at the same time of the labourer and his means of subsistence, of labourer and wages. When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not speak of labour, any more than when we speak of capacity for digestion, we speak of digestion. The latter process requires something more than a good stomach. When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not abstract from the necessary means of subsistence. On the contrary, their value is expressed in its value. If his capacity for labour remains unsold, the labourer derives no benefit from it, but rather he will feel it to be a cruel nature-imposed necessity that this capacity has cost for its production a definite amount of the means of subsistence and that it will continue to do so for its reproduction. He will then agree with Sismondi: "that capacity for labour ... is nothing unless it is sold".<sup>14</sup>

In other words, abstract labour is the capacity of labour when utilised through capitalist means. It is abstract, yet concrete. It reflects concrete labour lending to abstraction (through increasing socialisation of labour, which appropriates individual labour). It indicates a process, and has nothing to do with the so-called life-world of labour, unless this life-world shows how labour is becoming abstract through the form of wage labour. Is this not what is happening to labour in postcolonial countries, where subsistence labour is giving way or has to be combined with various forms of wage labour? Where is self-subsisting labour today resisting socialisation? On the template of time wage labour is the machine of abstracting historical differences among labouring bodies by homogenising the diversity of social experience. It does so by subsuming labour under the highly abstract one-dimensional category of time. Abstract labour becomes increasingly homogenous over time notwithstanding social differences among workers. Production must be governed by capitalist laws of motion, and wage labour becomes its appropriate tool, precisely because socially

necessary labour becomes the machine for making wage labour the universal category of labour. Socially necessary labour subsumes social differences because a common measure of labour power has become possible.

It is important to delve into the question of abstract labour more deeply in order to understand the significance of the concept for postcolonial countries. For that, we have keep in perspective Marx's method of analysing the organic composition of a property or a phenomenon—thus organic composition of capital, organic composition of labour. We also have to bear in mind Marx's analysis of department I and II of capital, likewise his analysis of production and circulation of capital. Both abstract labour and concrete labour form labour in capitalism inasmuch as both use value and exchange value are required for commodity production.<sup>15</sup> If a particular form of labour or capital is of no use to capitalist production, the circulation of commodity stops. Thus we must not lose sight of Marx's method when trying to understand Marx's analysis of labour.

Unless we keep this in mind we shall not realise that abstract labour is not just physically equal labour or even labour socially equated via the exchange of products through money as a universal equivalent. It also means the existence of normal labour-averages applying to different tasks, which function as labour norms in any society (thus industry wise wage agreements, minimum wage, etc.); the gradation of many different labour efforts along one general, hierarchical dimension of worth, for the purpose of compensation; more importantly labour as commodity leading to its universal exchangeability through the mechanism of labour market; for this to be possible, general mobility of labour from one job or worksite to another; and, finally, the ability of the same workers to do various kinds of jobs. In short, labour as "absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity but capable of all specificities". It is this spectral materiality that makes the emergence of working class possible, which is to say, the abstract labour of the workers as a whole creates everything. In other words, with the amount of socially necessary labour time corresponding to the value of goods created, abstract labour becomes crucial for the realisation of the total surplus value created.<sup>16</sup>

Does the economy of postcolonial capitalism not create *socially necessary* labour time? Indeed with all the characteristics mentioned above, labour time is increasingly socially determined—perhaps now more in the postcolony. The socially necessary aspect of labour tells us of the conditions of labour under postcolonial capitalism. To understand what socially necessary means we have get back to the difference Marx made between



abstract and concrete labour. To recapitulate, while Marx says that concrete labour informs us of activities with the goal of producing some use value, the kernel of Marx's critique is related to the fact that concrete labour may be important for the creation of value, but this must be a social use-value; in other words, under capitalism necessary labour has to be exchangeable qua commodities, so that the use value is realised. In other words, labour that conveys value must be carried out in a manner that is *socially* defined. The implications are manifold. We have no longer any notion of *human* labour irrespective of time, place and history, but labour conditioned by historical forces. With social determination of necessary labour, wages fluctuate according to all manner of things, according to struggles between labourers and capitalists, and value tied to labour time now fluctuates with them. For the capitalist expropriation of surplus value, there must be now mediating devices, primarily money and other financial instruments; otherwise there would be no possibility of wages, markets or accumulation. Indeed, the insights of Marx are now clearer more than ever with the interface of neoliberalism and postcolonial dynamics of accumulation. It is important therefore that we treat the abstraction under capitalism dialectically—as abstracts of realities as well as historically possible or enabled abstractions.

There is one more aspect to abstract labour that is relevant to our discussion. Besides leading us to the issue of socially necessary labour, abstract labour also points to the way society under capitalism defines what is productive labour and unproductive labour. Productive labour, which under capitalism has to mean productive of value and surplus value, will also increasingly incorporate the “unproductive”. We can see here the relevance of this question for the postcolonial economy, where the distinction is often submerged. Labour is abstracted in the social process in a manner in which the productive will be always defined and redefined and will therefore incorporate both Chakrabarty's History 1 and History 2. Let us see how this works.

Crucial in this is the process of cooperation. At this stage we have to read a clarification that is important for our discussion:

With the progressive accentuation of the co-operative character of the labour-process, there necessarily occurs a progressive extension of the concept of productive labour, and the concept of the bearer of that labour, the productive worker. In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him

to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform one of its subordinate functions. The definition of productive labourer given above... remains correct for the collective labourer, considered as a whole. But it no longer holds good for each member taken individually.<sup>17</sup>

This means that with spread of division of labour a single person's labour is almost always inadequate to produce use value. Cooperation does the trick of producing this social labour. The factory form is only one such form of cooperation. Manufacture begins the form. Wage labour institutes the form.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as production becomes increasingly decentralised with technological changes, cooperation also becomes more and more social, in other words assuming various forms. Marx thus stresses the fundamental property of productive labour that is labour transformed into capital. Labour under capitalism becomes social and acquires the possibility being transformed from an individual category to a category called "socially necessary".

Yet it also means something more, important again for this discussion. If unproductive labour is that which cannot be exchanged with capital, but directly with revenue (wages, profits, interest or rent), it means also that productive labour symbolises exchange of labour with capital, whereby "labour is directly *materialized*, is transformed *directly* into capital, after it has been *formally* incorporated in capital through the first transaction" (secured by money), which indicates again a specific form of labour, which expresses the form and manner in which labour power figures in the capitalist production process. The distinction from other kinds of labour is thus of great importance, since this distinction expresses precisely the distinction between what constitutes individual labour and labour socialised in the capitalist form of production. All in all then, there is hardly any room for misunderstanding the notion of abstract labour, which has to be grasped in its dialectical richness.

What is specific then to the postcolonial condition? The specific is in the way the individual forms or the discrete forms of labour are transformed into productive labour—social, capable of producing a surplus, linking the decentralised forms and locations and contributing to capital's growth. Because this form of labour may be situated with other strong forms, Marxists earlier used to call this condition "semi-feudal". Today with globalisation, neoliberalism and postcolonial dynamics of accumulation, the concepts of abstract labour, socially necessary labour, useful labour, productive labour, cooperation of labour, division of labour and collective labour must be grasped and deployed in their interlinked significations.

Therefore much of the postcolonial theorists' attempt to establish difference as the fundamental organising principle of postcolonial life and economy is misdirected. Chakrabarty's *History 2*, to be truthful, if present in India is present elsewhere too, even in Europe, though we must again take note of the fact that modern neoliberal capitalism proceeds precisely by valorising the labour of the piano player (use-value-producing labour, concrete labour, even though that, too, is consumed by the music industry) and impoverishing the piano-maker.<sup>19</sup> If we recall that theorists of late capitalism use the phrase "creative labour" to circumvent the difference between abstract labour and concrete labour or between surplus-value-producing labour and use-value-producing labour, then we can note a strange convergence between these theories of late capitalism and postcolonialism. Both groups of theorists deny the crucial place in global capitalism of the myriad forms in which wage labour operate and the intense interface between the organised/informal mode of production and the organised/formal mode of production in India and elsewhere in the postcolonial world. In fact by claiming that "Globalisation does not mean that *History 1*, the universal and necessary logic of capital so essential to Marx's critique, has been realized. What interrupts and defers capital's self-realisation are the various *History 2s* that always modify *History 1* and thus acts as our grounds for claiming historical difference",<sup>20</sup> we underestimate the crucial place of concepts like abstract labour or socially necessary labour time in an analysis of postcolonial labour. *History 2* in no way tells us of the labour in rat-hole mines on the hills of Meghalaya, the dusty bowls of Bellary in Karnataka, or sand mining or quarry labour across river beds of India. The difference lies elsewhere, namely the ways in which global capitalism requires the principle of division of labour to function across territories, making and remaking territories with global production and supply chains requiring new labour forms.

Sure enough, not all work is colonised by capitalism. Differences remain. The differences are between the metropolitan capitalist countries and regions on one hand and peripheries on the other, between nations, and within nations, between classes, gender, caste and other fault-lines along which postcolonial capitalism organises itself. Also, not all affective histories are made part of the history of capital. A lot goes in the interface between the two sides of the divides—in the realms of politics, law, arts, literature and various aspects of human relations, all that constitute the life worlds in the postcolony, called affective histories. Yet commodity production subsumes extant social relations in terms of producing a wage market.

The question is: Do these affective histories in any way reduce the shackles of wage labour, even minimise immiseration, exploitation, and other conditions of the sub-human, barely subsistence form of a vast majority of the workers and peasants in the postcolonial world? On the other hand, it will be important to study the dynamics involved in the increasing *convergence* (in place of *difference*) of neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial capitalism. Long ago the anti-colonial Marxist thinkers had tried to think of this phenomenon in terms of a postcolonial comprador class representing the convergence. But that is another story. Meanwhile the world has changed a lot.

## 2 FETISH OF THE INFORMAL

Postcolonial fetish, whose world is built mainly of difference, finds expression in another form. It is the idea of setting the informal in absolute opposition to the formal. In the process this gives rise to a series of binaries clouding our analysis of the links between the respective organisations of production and circulation under neoliberal capitalism. To be sure once again, without some basis in reality, the fetish of the informal would not have materialised. The symptoms catalogued by postcolonial theorists are to be found in real-life production system of capitalism—all that we narrated and analysed in the preceding chapters. These, referring to few, are namely the ancillarised production regime, lengthening of the supply chains, the extractive nature of neoliberal capitalism, waste recovery, emphasis on logistics and infrastructure, and consequently the ever finer tuning of the commodity market, an interminable agrarian crisis and primitive accumulation. These factors are producing so-called informal conditions of work. Yet postcolonial theorists do not analyse these dimensions of postcolonial capitalism or to be precise the grounds where postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal capitalism meet. Rather, they see in these not the reality of global political economy, but a strategy of exercising hegemony of capital. Simply put, the informal does not have any role to play in capital's reproduction. It is a problem of management of what can be called surplus population, surplus to the needs of capital. It is thus a problem of democracy. Again the idea is that classical democracy did not handle such a problem of surplus, or that democracy earlier never had to think of making the "surplus" productive. This is the second fetish—the fetish of democracy, something unique about its population management, its capacity to manage the "surplus". It is the second fetish clouding our understanding of postcolonial economy.

Partha Chatterjee built his theory of democracy as a surplus-managing system around the notion of the informal—an informal having very little to do with reproduction of capital, or shall we say, of capitalism. He saw it as a political task of democracy to manage the informal (peasantry, artisans and petty producers in the informal sector)—a requirement for the bourgeois order to reverse the effects of primitive accumulation of capital with activities like anti-poverty programmes. This, according to him, is a necessary political condition for the continued rapid growth of corporate capital.<sup>21</sup> There have been challenges to this argument,<sup>22</sup> into which we do not propose to go here. For us, the crucial task is to address the question, is there any absolute surplus? Is the informal a surplus to the formal mode of capitalist production? In order to address this question we have to visit the late economist Kalyan Sanyal's arguments of need economy, where he enunciated the thesis that the informal caters to the world of needs, while the formal caters to the world of production of surplus value. In theorising in such a manner Sanyal admitted that he was formulating a two-sector economy<sup>23</sup> much in the way a trade economist does. Let us visit Sanyal's arguments.

Sanyal argued that the production of poorer classes subsisting in informal economy in late twentieth and early twenty first century capitalism by no means signalled a return to the traits of capitalism from the nineteenth and the greater part of the twentieth century. Managing the poorer classes (which are being produced through dispersal of production, outsourcing and consequent informalisation of production) was "radically new in its form of governance and modalities of power".<sup>24</sup> By pitching the argument sociologically, Sanyal ignored the specific continuities (and discontinuities) of various phases of capitalism, and the fact that many of the features of the economy he was describing had been present also in earlier ages or forms of wage labour—one being the non-standardised form of contract. Sanyal continued that the section of population redundant for capitalist production—the "surplus humanity"—was not what Marx had termed as the "reserve army of labour". This is because now the "job gap" would never go away; unemployment in capitalist production was no more a "temporary problem". Sanyal ignored the well-known fact that in the history of capitalism the job gap had never gone away, the reserve army was always at hand even when supposedly full employment reigned, and the debates around full employment had only shown capitalism's permanent anxiety over inflation, the presence of liquidity in economy and the eternal mismatch between what capitalism considers "economic production" and structural unemployment in the economy. Also, Sanyal ignored the history of wars

unleashed by capitalism to make use of the reserve army of labour and the fact that the first major social security programme, pioneered in the capitalist age, was a product of war.<sup>25</sup> Indeed the features of the informal economy Sanyal enumerated, such as, ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership and small scale of operation, labour-intensive technology, unregulated markets and informal acquisition of skills<sup>26</sup>—all have contributed to the employment of labour in capitalist production. Enough evidence is there to suggest that in the postcolonial economy the informal is only a specific way of addressing the old capitalist concern of using labour for production. Sanyal's argument was therefore misplaced. He wrote,

The informal sector is not pre-capital; it is non-capital, and therefore a historicist concept of petty commodity production cannot provide its theoretical foundation. It must be conceptualized as an economic space constituting an outside of capital and at the same time as a space without any historical mooring.

I conceptualise it as a need economy. I see it as an ensemble of economic activities undertaken for the purpose of meeting needs, as distinct from activities driven by an impersonal force of systemic accumulation. It is a system of petty commodity production, but—and it is an important “but”—not the one that precedes capital in the historicist narrative transition. It is an effect of capital, its inescapable outcome—a non-capitalist economic space that is integral to postcolonial capitalist formation.<sup>27</sup>

Yet Sanyal had to admit that the “need based production must conform to the logic of the market, of commodity production, and must be viable in terms of market calculations, that is revenue must cover costs, and the money with which the circuit starts must be replenished along with a residual for consumption”.<sup>28</sup> If the need economy conforms to the logic of the market, which would presumably mean that some actors in the market would crash out, and it is not an insulated world of exchanges, then how do the two—the non-capitalist phenomenon of need economy and the logic of the market—combine? Can the circle be squared? Sanyal's answer is that “the two spaces are locked in a hierarchy: one is subordinate to the other”.<sup>29</sup>

But, this answer does not solve the riddle. Financing the need economy has less to do with global management of poverty than with credit capital. It sheds light on new financing strategies, employment-generating mechanisms, new forms of credit, varieties of hire purchase and advances and the

informalisation of some aspects of the accumulation process itself. Thus, the putting-out system, the self-employed sub-contractor system, forms of informally engaging wage labour, and many other features described by us in this and preceding chapters point out a range of circuits, initially analysed by Marx. Sanyal's analysis of circuit is incomplete because it does not show how labour as commodity features in the circuit of need economy, which apparently would begin logically with labour as the commodity being advanced in the market. What happens, then, to labour when other need items in commodity form take over? We have shown how living labour in the postcolonial economy recedes from the surplus-realising cycle. It will be there but it must not be visible. It will be the vanishing mediator.

Just as the problematic in Chakrabarty's formulation was around the question of abstract labour, here the main problematic is around the idea of need dragging in two more concepts—surplus and accumulation (including primitive accumulation). In order to examine Sanyal's deployment of the idea of need we have to watch carefully how he arrives at it. Formally, in most of the preceding pages in the book, he is dealing with the discourse of development, developmental economy and the developmental state. He is engaged with charting the history of developmental discourse, demonstrating how this discourse is part of a hegemonic strategy of the bourgeoisie—a bourgeoisie that knows all along that it is unable to provide the dispossessed with labour employment in the organised sector (the accumulation economy), and therefore it has to invent modern governmental methods (such as micro-financing, etc.) to enable the denizens of the need economy to subsist under capitalism. In this way, the impact of primitive accumulation on the social stability is offset, and this is the essence of a complex strategy of hegemony. Here there is no question of a transition to higher stage of capitalism, industrial development, growth of the industrial proletariat and so on, but a permanent condition of so to say “underdevelopment”, with the State, on the basis of a part of the revenues from the accumulation economy, helping the need economy to exist. This is non-capital, produced by capital but remaining outside the capitalist dynamics of accumulation, existing like waste as the inevitable product of industrial capitalism. Yet, all the while Sanyal was drawing his version of the big picture of what was earlier called as “development of underdevelopment”<sup>30</sup> he was taking other theoretical steps also. We must examine those steps.

First, while Sanyal gave a crucial place to the issue of primitive accumulation, he kept this as given; otherwise this would have led to him to other interlocked inquiries. Therefore he did not enquire: what is its history, for instance in a country like India? or, why does the Indian bourgeoisie resort to modes of primitive accumulation? As we know in the first two decades of decolonisation of India, with emphasis on planning and industrialisation, massive displacements and dispossession took place. Yet with the State drive for industrialisation, strengthening of the big bourgeoisie, and expansion of public sector (railways and banking being two important industries), the number of workers grew, while from the third decade of independence the State started paying attention to the stability of the peasant economy so that agrarian crises and peasant revolts would not jeopardise national stability and the drive for industrialisation.<sup>31</sup> It was in this way that the peasant economy was formally subsumed into the capitalist economy of India. Today, with spiralling commodity markets in land and minerals such as iron ore, uranium, and sand, plus a spurt in financial investment, rental growth, care services, infrastructural growth and waste recycling, we find dispossession of peasant labour proceeding at a furious pace. We need to examine the kind of labour market being produced as consequence. We cannot simply say labour, dispossessed as a consequence of primitive accumulation, now inhabits the need economy, without examining if this is actually happening, and the ways in which the disparate forms of labour are contributing to accumulation and circulation process. For Sanyal, circulation does not enter the capitalist economy. Therefore labour engaged in circulation of commodities remains unexamined.

Second, in Sanyal's analysis the concept of surplus labour is strategic. Therefore we should examine the concept of surplus (mainly surplus labour, and associated with other forms of surplus, such as surplus population, surplus humanity, surplus time, surplus stock, surplus money, surplus credit, surplus land etc.), because in calculations of profit the surplus is waste; surplus is idle, surplus is non-productive unless it will be ready at hand to be redeployed in production. Any analysis of capitalism, or for that matter wealth, wrestles with the notion of surplus. This is where we need to be objective to the utmost degree, understandable as the concern may be as to how to situate the notion of surplus in postcolonial reality. Sanyal's analysis also labours under the shadow of surplus. He is anxious as to how to situate the *surplus*, which now appears to him as *superfluous*.



In this context let us pause and recall how Marx negotiated the problem of surplus, and then we can return to Sanyal:

- (1) Marx said that the difference between labour, considered on the one hand as producing utilities (in Sanyal's word needs), and on the other hand as creating value, is a difference that resolves itself into a distinction between two aspects of the process of production. The process of production may be considered as the unity of the labour-process and the process of creating value, that is the production of commodities; it may be considered as the unity of the labour-process and the process of producing surplus-value—the capitalist process of production. Therefore, in the creation of surplus-value it does not in the least matter whether the labour appropriated by the capitalist is simple unskilled labour of average quality or more complicated skilled labour. On the other hand, in every process of creating value, the reduction of skilled labour to average social labour, perhaps one day of skilled to six days of unskilled labour, is unavoidable.<sup>32</sup> In this analysis by Marx the crucial issue is how this labour, regardless of its quality, produces surplus. Therefore the fact that labour in a need economy is simple (recall Sanyal's enumeration of the characteristics of the need economy) does not alter the fact that through the capitalist process of production and circulation a certain amount of surplus labour is realised in the economy in terms of profit.
- (2) Marx cautions us that capital did not invent surplus labour. Wherever a part of society possessed a monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, had to add to the working-time necessary for his/her own maintenance extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production. What is crucial is that in capitalism the surplus is hidden in the essential. Indeed, thus one can argue that in postcolonial capitalism surplus labour is socially realised in an even more enigmatic form, where apparently the labour producing the surplus is even more naturalised as existing in the form of "need enclosure", and where the products of the labour of this surplus humanity is realised through long circulation channels in a different way, beyond the contractual and standardised wage form.

- (3) In elaborating the idea of a relative surplus population under a capitalist production system, Marx says, “it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces indeed in direct relation with its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant working population, *i.e.*, a population which is superfluous to capital’s average requirements for its own valorisation and is therefore a surplus population.”<sup>33</sup> Now these famous words:

Owing to the magnitude of already functioning social capital, and the degree of its increase, owing to the extension of the scale of production, and the great mass of the workers set in motion, owing to the development of the productivity of their labour, and the greater breadth and richness of the stream springing from all the sources of wealth, there is also an extension of the scale on which greater attraction of workers by capital is accompanied by their greater repulsion; an increase takes place in the rapidity of the change in the organic composition of capital and in its technical form, and an increasing number of spheres of production become involved in this change, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes alternately. The working population therefore produces both the accumulation of capital and the means by which it is itself made relatively superfluous; and it does this to an extent, which is always increasing. This is a law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production...<sup>34</sup>

In short, the ideas of want, need, necessity, subsistence, surplus—all having their basis in reality—also create a fetish in the form of a binary of accumulation and need, and prevent us from analysing what postcolonial accumulation is.<sup>35</sup>

- (4) Finally, for Marx, one of the aspects of the issue of surplus and its utilisation is linked to the dynamics of fixed capital. When will surplus become “surplus capital”? that is, waste? To understand at least one aspect of it, we have to get a sense of the perspective in which fixed capital is discussed. Surplus capital is idle capital. But idle capital can be both fixed and circulating capital, which are different from the notions of constant capital and variable capital. Thus the crucial issue is: how is the capitalist to realise that the fixed capital is producing value? How is the capitalist to ensure that, like circulating capital, fixed capital—symbolised by the use of machines—also produces value? How is its use going to be instrumental in extracting surplus? If it cannot, clearly the machine

represents surplus capital—or, surplus product. This is where we come to the question of turnover of machines as capital, because the quantity of labour may remain the same while the volume of surplus value may fluctuate because of the fluctuation in turnover. At this point the worker comes to the scene. Marx shows, with repair and maintenance the worker now operates *on* the machine (or, say, an e-waste worker recharges a battery, recycles a transistor or a cell phone) making a decisive impact on the turnover of the machine as capital. We have here the intersection of fixed capital and circulating capital. Thus, Marx adds, “The elements of fluid capital are just as permanently fixed in the production process—if this is to be continuous—as are elements of fixed capital.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, we have to judge the labour of the repair mechanic of a scooter, car, bicycle, transistor or television set, or of one engaged in e-waste recycling, as precisely the one who is effecting the turnover time of capital represented by the machine, scooter, car or whatever, because these, exactly like the classic machine or railway tracks, influence the capacity to produce a surplus. Marx made this clearer and we have to listen to him attentively,

The fixed capital also requires positive outlays of labour if it is to be kept in good condition. The machinery must be cleaned from time to time. This involves additional labour without which it becomes unfit for use, of merely warding off the noxious influences of the elements, which are inseparable from the process of production; hence it is a question of keeping the machinery literally in working order. The normal life span of fixed capital is naturally reckoned on the assumption that the conditions under which it can function normally during that time are fulfilled, just as it is assumed, if the average life of a man is taken as thirty years, that he washes himself. What is involved here is not the replacement of the labour contained in the machine, but the additional labour that is constantly necessary for it to be used. This is not a matter of labour performed by the machine, but of labour performed on the machine; here it is not an agent of production but rather raw material. The capital spent on this labour is part of the fluid capital, even though it does not properly enter into the actual labour-process to which the product owes its origin. This labour must be constantly performed in the course of production, and so its value must be constantly replaced by the value of the product. The capital spent on it belongs to that part of the fluid capital that has to cover the general overheads, and is distributed over the value of the product according to an average annual calculation.<sup>37</sup>

In these extremely dense lines Marx lays bare the provisional nature of the temporalities of two types of capital, their mutually transforming nature, and tells us exactly in what way labour involved in the life span of a machine (a productive commodity or any other productive commodity) produces the surplus, so that the mutually constituting relation between the productive and waste is laid bare.<sup>38</sup> Because, let us read him again, “this is not a matter of labour performed *by* the machine, but of labour performed *on* the machine; here it is not an agent of production but rather raw material.”<sup>39</sup> We can then say that the possibility of a machine turning non-productive and becoming surplus (thus waste capital) is contingent upon labour performed on it, and this possibility is thus both dependent on the so-called life of the machine and beyond the so-called life of the machine. We can then also say that with waste-reprocessing capital seems to be continuously recovering from the prospect of exhausting—though, and this is an important proviso, with increased deployment of labour and less deployment of machine, capital will become less productive in the process of labour performing on the machine.<sup>40</sup>

Third, Sanyal removed circulation from an analysis of labour. This silence on circulation (of commodities, labour, finance, money, information and other services) costs his analysis dearly. While it allows him to posit need economy as a separate enclave, yet the fact is that the features of the need economy are directly related to circulation processes of the economy. There is no way one can conceptualise need without utility, exchange, market and capital. Indeed, what Sanyal indicated as need economy is the site where profits are realised, revenues shared and labour rendered invisible. It is here where the three circuits of capital, expounded by Marx, demonstrate themselves in their most interrelated, complicated, and conflictive form. For this, we must go back to Marx as to how we should treat the determination of needs. Needs are socially determined, hence they are shaped by the capitalist mode of production. Sanyal recognises this, though indirectly. Marx analysed how production produces consumption; first, by furnishing the latter with material; second, by determining the manner of consumption; third, by creating in consumers a want for its products as objects of consumption. It thus produces the object, the manner and the desire for consumption. He wrote, “The production of relative surplus-value, based on the growth of productive forces, requires the creation of new consumption; at the heart of circulation, the sphere of consumption must therefore grow in line with the

sphere of production. Consequently: (1) existing consumption is quantitatively expanded, (2) increased needs are created in propagating needs to a wider sphere, (3). new needs are created, new use-values are discovered and produced.”<sup>41</sup> Marx thus always placed in view the two contradictory aspects of the historical reality of capitalism he was analysing—in this case the development of human’s needs and the way capitalism shapes these needs and determines their evolution. What is more important is the underlying significance of exchange or circulation in the analysis of needs. Marx was specific on this:

Production is simultaneously consumption as well... The act of production itself is... in all its phases also an act of consumption... Consumption is simultaneously also production just as in nature the production of a plant involves the consumption of elemental forces and chemical materials... Nevertheless... the direct unity, in which production is concurrent with consumption and consumption with production, does not affect their simultaneous duality.

Production is thus at the same time consumption, and consumption is at the same time production. Each is simultaneously its opposite...<sup>42</sup>

There is a final comment on the silence on circulation. If Sanyal had analysed the role of migrant labour and what we have called forms of transit labour in postcolonial economies, he would have seen that the role of labour as a commodity in circulation is nothing but a symbol of the linkages between various aspects of capital accumulation. Having written already in detail on this issue of migrant labour, we shall not repeat the matter here, save giving two related observations.

First observation: While postcolonial theorists targeted for criticism an adherence to the evolutionary schemes dominating social science theory in the postcolonial era, it is a fact that increasing labour migration from the countryside to large and middle-sized cities was key to the transformation, at least in South Asia between 1901 and 1961.<sup>43</sup> Migration was crucial to labour regimes particularly in mining and the plantations, and in many respects to the intermediary regime prevailing in the industrial scene as a whole in much of the postcolonial world. The systematic neglect of the factor of migration in discussions of postcolonial capitalism continues, while migration remains as crucial as it ever was to the breakup of the communities of artisans, peasants and other groups. As a consequence, there is also neglect of the massive stratum of agricultural labourers—belonging to lower castes—who in a situation of new bondage become

subject to labour contractors and other intermediaries, and move from one work site to another. If labour is mobilised by the wage system, rural labour is today in new bondage.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the idealist binary between unfree and free labour crumbles in face of the realities of the ways in which structural obligations amounting to semi-bondage and contractual obligations of wage mix with each other. Marx indicated this mix of coercion and freedom on several occasions. In other words, a capitalist mode of production by no means precludes failure of industry to absorb the vast numbers of the agrarian unemployed as well as the surplus population as a whole. Migration thus also explains a characteristic of the organised labour force, namely the high percentage of workers who have to report daily for work. As Jan Breman observed, to defend against unpredictable desertion, the factories and plants in the subcontinent had a long tradition of setting up a reserve pool of labour on which they could draw whenever necessary to meet their strongly fluctuating requirements. Today, even technologically advanced plants such as the Maruti factory, and other units related to the automobile industry, maintain stocks of casual workers. We can thus say that urban industry has suffered from lack of labour and managed to negotiate the problem of the lack. In other words, the urban migrant army is the key to many of the puzzles of the postcolonial economy.

The second observation: the informal sector of the economy is featured by industrial work to an extent that it may no longer be accurate to think of a clear-cut divide, such as industrial as the formal and the cottage and the artisanal as the informal. One of the astute observers of the postcolonial industrial scenario, Jan Breman, while noting that the greater part of the urban population, both long-established and newcomers, are excluded from organised industrial employment and survive by practising trades such as hawkers, shoe-cleaners, repairers, tailors, small traders, bearers, porters, drink vendors, barbers, garbage collectors, beggars, whores and pimps, pickpockets, other small-time crooks, working in rice and other cereal mills, printing establishments, bangle factories, power looms, diamond cutting workshops, masonry and, last but not least, servicing households, added the fact that some of these are prominent examples of small-scale industry accounting for a very large share of total turnover in their respective fields. It will be important to note that the postcolonial state's own industrialisation policy encourages the establishment of small industries in the form of industrial estates—away from principal cities—whose workers come partly from surrounding villages, where the labour regime is similar to that of average informal sector practices in the urban

milieu, and which includes enterprises that process agrarian produce, such as sugarcane.

In short, migration and the blurring of the boundary between the formal and the informal are the two issues which show how the postcolonial theorists while pointing to an important feature of the postcolonial economy miss its complexity. And in this case, by theorising the idea of a need economy non-dialectically, Sanyal killed the idea of transition from a seemingly permanent postcolonial order. In this theorisation, the main purpose was to make a distinction between accumulation economy and need economy—an exercise that failed to recognise the fundamental point Marx had made long back in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) that creating needs and satisfying them was part of the dynamics of accumulation. In other words what Sanyal was describing as “need economy”, was part of “accumulation economy”.

Listen to what Marx said, “Industry speculates on the refinement of needs, it speculates however just as much on their *crudeness*, but on their artificially produced crudeness, whose true enjoyment, therefore, is *self-stupefaction*—this *illusory* satisfaction of need this civilisation contained within the crude barbarism of need.” The quarrel over need and accumulation in one sense, then, is “only the quarrel between that political economy which has achieved clarity about the nature of wealth, and that political economy which is still afflicted with romantic, anti-industrial memories. Neither side, however, knows how to reduce the subject of the controversy to its simple terms; neither therefore can make short work of the other.”<sup>45</sup> In this way postcolonial theorists fought against an unknown and undefined enemy called historicism, but to what effect and with what cost? With some remarks on this question we shall conclude this chapter.

### 3 A QUESTION OF METHOD

In making difference the cardinal principle of understanding the postcolonial condition, we learnt what was not Western in the non-Western world, but did we make any advance in knowing the dynamics of accumulation in postcolonial capitalism or, broadly, the postcolonial situation? Perhaps not much, because with difference as the epistemological principle we lost a dialectical sense required to investigate postcolonial reality. We understood neither the nature of postcolonial capital, nor that of postcolonial labour. This is not to say, to repeat, that there are no specifics of postcolonial capitalism. Or, that these theorisations did not give us insights to

build upon. But much of these remain misdirected. Victim to the fetish of the postcolonial, the critical sense to make sense of the contemporary was lost to an extent where the postcolonial condition almost appeared as eternal and immutable, while the bourgeoisie kept on introducing changes one after another in postcolonial society. Our tilting at the windmills of transition was complemented by real transitions in society and economy. If one transition came in the wake of decolonisation, the other moment of transition came when postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal capitalism combined to make this a globally defining one. The old ways of debating on transition was rendered meaningless.

Of course for millions trapped in poverty, low income, unemployment, ill health, the lack of state protection, financial loot and destruction of resources, the call to revolutionary transformation of society remains as valid as ever. Transition to a higher form of society marked with justice, more production, industrialisation, universal work opportunities and a more caring and socially secure life will always be a call to which people will take to heart. No amount of academic debate will convince people that the postcolonial condition is heaven on earth, which they must not seek to escape. We do not have to name and damn a “higher” or for that matter a “lower” stage,<sup>46</sup> or canonise transition inasmuch as we have to recognise that in revolutionary transformation of society there will be also the question of transition. The emergence of a theory comes through a tortuous route.

An absence of dialectical sense will be a grave loss for those struggling against capital today. The world over, the anti-capitalist movement is seeking what we can call roughly autonomous pathways toward a new society. Yet this must not make us forget that in his discussion in 1880s on alternate pathways for Russia, Marx avoided any kind of illusory politics, while noting the particularities of a non-industrialised country like Russia with different historical and social conditions than those in the West. He also stressed the revolutionary potential of indigenous forms, but not unconditionally. At the same time he talked of communist revolution in Russia and elsewhere, and not a mere democratic one, and in his eyes a revolutionary outbreak in Russia could serve as a spark for a wider global revolution against capital. His emphasis on multi-linearity was coupled with his argument that if a new unity of the archaic and the modern was at all possible, it had to take advantage of the highest achievements of capitalist modernity. “Precisely because it is contemporaneous with capitalist production, the rural commune may appropriate for itself all the



positive achievements and this without undergoing its frightful vicissitudes.... Should the Russian admirers of the capitalist system deny that such a development is theoretically possible, then I would ask them the following question: Would Russia have to undergo a long Western-style incubation of mechanical industry before it could make use of machinery, steamships, railways, etc.? Let them also explain how the Russians managed to introduce, in the twinkling of an eye, that whole machinery of exchange (banks, credit companies, etc.), which was the work of centuries in the West."<sup>47</sup>

Marx in this reply was fighting against the stranglehold of contextualism over revolutionary politics. Also what historical account should count as context is also a subject of contention. There is also a more significant flaw in contextualism in that it assumes that the existing historical work, which defines as context, does not already have a particular set of assumptions built in it. Thus, one assumes that to be contextual is to be objective. There is a potential problem of circularity in it, which calls for more rigour—in terms of logic as well as empirical evidence—to break the tyranny of contextualism. Thus, one can say that the idea of the need economy was less a matter of logic but more a matter of drawing from the history of the idea of the informal sector that Sanyal mapped so admirably. Or, Chatterjee could write the account of the political society because he could ignore the salient factor of migrant labour and take urban politics as he found it as the given benchmark. Or Chakrabarty could tell us of History 1 and History 2 because, for him, labour had appeared as the labour of the pianist and not of the piano-maker. In all these cases, history is suspended in the name of combating historicism. The history of labour is lost in the narrative of a postcolonial difference.

On the other hand, most neoliberal institutional developments, such as the new city or the logistical city, bridge the two divisions of economy—formal or informal, likewise production and circulation. Indeed, the logistical city creates an economy that develops a complex circuit combining all the elements in it. The migrant worker stands as the key figure in this new scenario. Amidst these loud signs of a new scenario, how could the organising principle of difference substitute for that of complexity, and come to be accepted so widely among postcolonial scholars?

We must also recognise here a deeper problem, a matter of method, but to be precise a deeper problem to which the question of method must lead us, which we cannot avoid, and must keep on engaging with, without ever solving it. The paradox is inherent in the idea of postcolonialism or the history of the thought known by this name.

It is not that the postcolonial scholars we have discussed, and others following the same mode of analysis, wanted to present a “coherent” system, quite the contrary. But we can see how in their works one kind of teleology (difference) was played off against the other (historicism). We may also say that they pursued the principle of difference as against the principle of dialectics, with the result that at the end they found themselves cornered by their own criticism of evolutionism of any form of consciousness—be it what they had described as “postcolonial” or if you like “the subaltern”. If this was the problem with Chakrabarty or Chatterjee, with Sanyal the problem became the following: the more his empiricist proclamations—on informal labour, micro-credit, governmental policies as stabilising measures for the victims of primitive accumulation as example of bourgeois hegemony, etc.—were mounted one after another, the more this idea of “informal” or the “need economy” appeared as fundamentally autonomous, with its own pre-existing logic, and consonant with an overall structure called postcolonialism. Did not this new structure of thought that banked on the trinity of context, experience and differentiation become another adventure in idealism? Did not the postcolonial become another name for an absolute, meaning in this case that as long as the West remained the non-West would remain, thus finally extinguishing the possibility of an agency of the non-West altogether? How can one not ask this question of how idealism in the structure of postcolonial thought has been produced?

All we are saying here is that the postcolonial critique of Marxist historicism produced a mirror image of the question it had set out to combat. The problem was that it missed the specific dialectical component, necessary as internal to the theory and equally necessarily implicated in its history.

To conclude: This chapter has tried to show that while postcolonial theories are not going to give us any concrete study of the forms of postcolonial labour and its organic composition, or for that matter of capital formation, postcolonial analysis will be with us as a valuable double edged conceptual exercise. The most certain indication of this dual nature of postcolonial theorisation is the way this theorisation has evolved. If, thirty years ago, it was marked by phenomenological exercises with an emphasis on the subject of the postcolonial condition, it has now reached a stage of structural analysis, where the postcolonial is not an attribute of the subject, but a structure of economy and existence. Yet, the desperate attempt to remain outside capitalism or to locate a subject outside capital continues.<sup>48</sup>

In many ways the attention paid to the postcolonial condition reminds us of what Marx said about commodity. We cannot bypass it, yet we must get to the bottom of it to make sense of it—in this case, of postcolonial capitalism. This double nature of postcolonial understanding has significance for politics. The labour movement and other popular movements of resistance against postcolonial capitalism will always have politics of class which will have to be a politics of working people suffering under capitalism in various ways. As one kind of imagery of labour is replaced by another, one can ask how long can a specific form of class reproduce itself? If, today, certain State policies seem to influence the formation of an informal working population as a sufficient stable development to warrant the name of a separate need economy outside the capitalist order, or as non-capital within the capitalist regime, we must recognise that this stability is contingent on the State's financial ability to stabilise such a population through governmental means. The ongoing crisis in the global neoliberal economy gravely reduces this ability, with the result that this section of the poor population will increasingly resemble an integral part of the proletarian formation, exactly as was the case 100–150 years ago, before the advent of the modern welfare state.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES

1. Readers will recall that in the second chapter, we tried to show how translation is an important part of this operation.
2. Vivek Chibber misses this point in his *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013).
3. These are first two chapters of Jane Pollard, Cheryl McEwan, and Alex Hughes (eds.), *Postcolonial Economies* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), pp. 23–35 and 37–61 respectively.
4. *Postcolonial Economies*, p. 24.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
7. “Postcolonial Theory and Economics: Orthodox and Heterodox” in *Postcolonial Economies*, p. 39; see also Zein-Elabdin, “Economics, Postcolonial Theory and the Problem of Culture: Institutional Analysis and Hybridity”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Volume 33 (6), 2009, pp. 1153–1167.
8. *Postcolonial Economies*, p. 53.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
10. As a consequence *Postcolonial Economies* has very, very meagre reference to labour, no reference to peasantry, no use for concepts such as dependency,

- neocolonialism, unorganised and informal labour, and a starkly inadequate understanding of neoliberalism in reshaping the postcolonial condition.
11. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chapter 2, “The Two Histories of Capital” (pp. 47–71), and Chapter 3, “Translating Life-Worlds into Labour and History” (pp. 72–96).
  12. *Provincialising Europe*, p. 50.
  13. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, 1867, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, n.d.), p. 542; I have used this translation of the quoted passage, as it is better known, also reads better; however as readers will note, in this book I have used mostly the Penguin edition, translated by Ben Fowkes and edited by Ernest Mandel.
  14. *Ibid* (Moscow edition), p. 122.
  15. On this see the discussion by I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, 1928 (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972), [https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/value/Chapter 14](https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/value/Chapter%2014), “Abstract Labour”, n. 20—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/value/ch14.htm> (accessed on 12 August 2016); See also Rubin, “Abstract Labour and Value in Marx’s System”, 1927, trans. Kathleen Gilbert, *Capital and Class*, 5, Summer 1978, pp. 107–139.
  16. See on socially necessary labour time, Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), Chapter 1. The crucial reasoning here is that: (1) it is an abstract labour time, not raw or direct labour hours; (2) socially necessary in the sense that it is socially determined, and not any particular labour performed in an exotic style, and (3) it is abstract labour time because different kinds of labour can be reduced to a uniform and homogeneous simple labour, which is abstract labour time of a uniform quality, whose only difference, therefore, is quantity. We do not know if the postcolonial economy does not create such a picture, or what else does. See on this also *Grundrisse* (1857–58), trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 171–172.
  17. *Ibid.*, pp. 643–644.
  18. “Only labour which produces capital is productive labour”... thus productive labour, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage-labour which, exchanged against the variable part of capital reproduces not only this part of capital (or the value of its own labour-power), but in addition produces surplus value for the capitalist.”—Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, trans. G.A. Bonner and Emile Burns (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1951), p. 152.
  19. *Provincialising Europe*, p. 68; Chakrabarty illustrates the point of “affective narratives of human belonging” (p. 71) as distinct from the narratives

- of labour as the bearer of “the universal history of capital” (p. 66) by discussing the instance of piano-maker and player provided by Marx in *Grundrisse* (p. 305).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
  21. Partha Chatterjee, “Democracy and Economic Transformation India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 43 (6), 19 April 2008, pp. 53–62; see also in this context, Partha Chatterjee, “Are Indian Cities Becoming Bourgeois At Last?” in Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), Chapter 7, pp. 131–48.
  22. For instance, Amita Baviskar and Nandini Sundar, “Democracy versus Economic Transformation?”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 43 (46), 15 November 2008, pp. 87–89; Dipankar Basu and Debarshi Das, “Political Economy of Contemporary India: Some Comments on Partha Chatterjee’s Theoretical Framework”, *Sanhati*, 23 October 2008—<http://sanhati.com/excerpted/1045/> (accessed on 14 September 2016).
  23. *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, p. 251.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
  25. This programme, “Social Insurance and Allied Services”, known popularly as the William Beveridge Report, was presented to the British Parliament in November 1942; for the full text of the Report—<http://www.sochealth.co.uk/national-health-service/public-health-and-wellbeing/beveridge-report/> (accessed on 11 September 2016); for his views, William Beveridge, *Full Employment in a Free Society* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1944).
  26. *Rethinking Capitalist Development*, pp. 200–201.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
  30. See, Paul A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957); and by Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967); *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution—Essays on the Development of Underdevelopment and Immediate Enemy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); also, *On Capitalist Underdevelopment* (Mumbai: Oxford University Press, 1975).
  31. This is a well-documented history. Interested readers may see, Wolf Ladejinsky, *Agrarian Reforms as Unfinished Business: The Selected Papers of Wolf Ladejinsky*, ed. Louis J. Walinsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Francine R. Frankel, *India’s Political Economy: The Gradual Revolution, 1947–1975* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); also *India’s Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs*, 1971 (reprint, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). On bank nationalisation in India in the same period, Suhit K. Sen, “The Politics of

- Bank Nationalisation in India” in Iman Kumar Mitra, Ranabir Samaddar, and Samita Sen, *Accumulation in Post-Colonial Capitalism* (Singapore: Springer, 2017), Chapter 7, pp. 125–145. Reservation for the small-scale sector was first introduced in 1967, and gradually the number of reserved items was increased. Besides bank nationalisation and reforms in setting agricultural prices, during the same period Clause 5B in the Industrial Disputes Act was introduced in 1976 making difficult for larger firms to close down. During this era coal mines were nationalised. Finally in 1985 the Sick Industrial Companies Act came and the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) was set up. Attempts to stabilise the small holdings are to be seen against this background.
32. *Capital*, Volume 1 (Penguin edition), p. 306.
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 782.
  34. *Ibid.*, pp. 783–784.
  35. Connected to this, see for instance the study on urban waste recycling by Debrati Bagchi and Iman Mitra, “Life, Labour, Recycling: A Study of Waste Management Practices in Contemporary Kolkata” in *Accumulation in Post-Colonial Capitalism*, op. Cit., Chapter 7, pp. 149–164.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
  37. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
  38. On the issue of repair, waste, and the enigmatic role of fixed capital, see the study by Ritajyoti Bandopadhyay and Ranabir Samaddar, “Caste and the Frontiers of Postcolonial Accumulation” in Iman Kumar Mitra, Ranabir Samaddar, and Samita Sen (eds.), *Accumulation in Post-Colonial Capitalism* (Singapore: Springer, 2016), Chapter 9, pp. 189–214.
  39. Italics mine.
  40. “Caste and the Frontiers of Postcolonial Accumulation” (n. 39) shows that in the decades of the 1950s to 1970s in the industrial city of Howrah in India, skilled workers in lathe machine factories spent crucial time in repairing old machines, and owners of these small and medium-sized engineering units preferred to spend money on labour working to repair the machines rather than buying new machines. While we can understand how this becomes a permanent feature of a waste-reprocessing economy, and with the skill of the worker not being transferred to a machine the rate of surplus value procured may be less than otherwise, there is no way that we can describe this as need economy. Small repair shops with abundant skilled labour form one of the major features of the informal economy.
  41. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 312.
  42. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya, Appendix 1, “Production, Consumption, Distribution, and Exchange” (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959)—<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/pol-econ/appx1.htm> (accessed on 20 September 2016).

43. Jan Breman calculated that the urban share in the total population rose from 4 to 18 per cent—"Industrial Labour in Postcolonial India I: Industrialising the Economy and Formalising the Labour". *International Review of Social History*, 44, 1999 (pp. 249–300), p. 253; also available at <https://socialhistory.org/sites/default/files/docs/publications/clarawp03.pdf> (accessed on 1 July 2016).
44. On the complexity and the interlinked duality of the theme of the origins of informal labour, we can draw on a series of writings: Jan Breman, *Labour Migration and Rural Transformation in Colonial Asia*, Comparative Asian Studies, August 1991; Breman, *Beyond Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Daniel Thorner and Alice Thorner, *Land and Labour in India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965); Daniel Thorner, *The Shaping of Modern India* (Bombay: Sameeksha Trust, 2005); Tom Brass, "Some Observations on Unfree Labour, Capitalist Restructuring, and Deproletarianisation I", *International International Review of Social History*, 39 (2), 1994, pp. 255–275; Also, Robert Higgs, *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), particularly on black labour migration, Chapter 4 (pp. 62–94); Utsa Patnaik and Sam Moyo, *The Agrarian Question in the Neoliberal Era: Primitive Accumulation and the Peasantry* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011).
45. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm> (accessed on 2 February 2017), Third Manuscript, Chapter 3, "Human Requirements and Division of Labour under the Rule of Private Property"—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm> (accessed on 2 February 2017).
46. It will be important to situate in this perspective the ethnological writings by Marx in old age. Marx avoided the question of higher or lower stage of society in these notebooks. See, Lawrence Krader (ed.), *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Co, 1974).
47. Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich, "The 'First' Draft", February–March 1881—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/zasulich/draft-1.htm> (accessed on 1 September 2016)—Source: Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road, Marx and the "Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
48. Thus, if Dipesh Chakrabarty's intervention mentioned in this chapter tells us of a subjective cast, Partha Chatterjee's works on the city occupy the middle ground. The traces of the subjective fury are still there, while the analysis takes on a more objective turn, ready to admit the larger, global forces of capitalism at work. This is because Chatterjee's late writings are

based on the idea of a structural transformation of the postcolonial societies, particularly of India, and their consequences. With Kalyan Sanyal the journey seems to have reached a point, where the local is perched on the global, and the subjective presence of the postcolonial is out. We have a more objective orientation to the idea of the postcolonial.

49. Interesting view from the beast's belly, Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani and Davide Furceri, "Neoliberalism: Oversold?" *Finance and Development*, International Monetary Fund, Volume 53 (2), June 2016, pp. 38–41.



## The Problematic of Dual Power

### I THE TOPOGRAPHY OF DUAL POWER

In some sense we are back to the question of duality, simultaneity and the paradox of the co-existence of contrasting realities in the postcolonial configuration, and the inexorable demand for dialectics in studying the postcolonial problematic of social transformation. Dialectical understanding of politics and society is at the heart of the postcolonial formulation of the theory of dual power. To be sure, this is not an esoteric theoretical exercise, but one that requires study of vital practices of power, the actual situation of which is far more complex than anything that can be theorised at the present moment of history. It will involve studying, among other things, the dynamics of the construction of dual power inherent in the already existing bourgeois State-making projects, institutions and structures, in a society characterised by different class bases. It is a condition that throws up issues of alliances, united front and other tactical issues. In other words, the practice of building dual power essentially means connecting new political structures in society with people's institutions and sites of new consciousness. A dialectical and historical materialist point of view can help us to make sense of new structures, institutions and organisations of power, and that can be the only possible perspective of studying the emergence of dual power.

Power is a relational concept as it connects institutions and structures. Liberal ideology treats power as a property of an institution or the ability of an actor to achieve his/her goal by overcoming the resistance of others.

However, to Marxists power emerges as a property of a social group. The ability to exercise power within a given set of institutions is contingent on the varying access of different social groups within those institutions and their associated structures to resources. So in a capitalist system, where power connects the social structure/s and institutions, different classes have different resources and therefore different capacities to exercise their domination. Power generates from relations and class power generates from class relations.

Yet it is important to remember that structure or structural analysis does not mean disappearance of agency, but rather points to the direction of how the protracted co-existence of two structures creates what we call *dual power*—a situation that may exist up to the time of revolution.

We should remember that current mainstream theory of liberal legalism thrives on what can be termed as “new institutionalism”, which focuses on stabilising the institutions of liberal democracy. Thus, we often hear terms like good governance, flexibility, improved participation, fostering of experimentation and deliberation, achieving a complex multi-level system, characterised at the same time by bottom-up approaches and soft law alongside hard law (these soft laws being law-like processes and opportunity structures, etc.<sup>1</sup>). These institutional features of modern liberal democracy show in an oblique way the recognition by the bourgeoisie of the reality of dual power. Some of these institutional features are manifest in the borderline existence of institutions of self-help, charity, mutual aid cooperatives and reform. Some of these exhibit features of parallel power, but as (and when) they increasingly refuse to move beyond legal structures, they only reinforce the capitalist system. Dual power is thus not a story of purity. Lenin had pointed out that in a situation of dual power there was an element of compromise also.<sup>2</sup> Their main function was thus not to change consciousness, but build new structures, from which emerged related institutions, new relations of power and consequently new consciousness. This is perhaps what Gramsci theorised as a “war of position”.<sup>3</sup>

War of position is of course connected with issues of building popular hegemony and moving towards a situation of dual power. One can also visualise the situation as one of acquiring “combat ability”. Mao was clear on this question, which not only meant emphasis on the decisive role of the subjective factor in making revolution, but a structural analysis of how the State can be engaged in a war of position. The ruling class rarely crumbles under gradual overwhelming pressure from various autonomous groups. Revolutionary strategy has various components; and dual power is

both a structural feature of a State with which revolutionary forces are engaged in a war and, at the same time a product of a hegemonic strategy which has little to do with a theory of revolution based on an anarchist conception of autonomy.

If the postcolonial problematic is built around the issue of limits to the hegemony of capital and the variety of ways in which the popular resistance to capitalism, imperialism and neoliberalism develop, dual power has remained one of the most significant features in the politics of anti-colonial revolution and postcolonial democracy. Ways of resistance by oppressed races, castes, nationalities and popular solidarities of workers, semi-workers and peasants ultimately tell us of the dynamics of dual power. Indeed, the truth is that almost all revolutionary experiences suggest the possibility and reality of dual power. Think of what Marx and Engels wrote of the features of 1848 revolutions in Europe. Almost everywhere, as opposed to the old State, the rightist-moderate centre and the party of order, the revolution developed parallel power. In *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* Engels described how the Frankfurt Assembly functioned as the parallel power and collapsed due to its own vacillation. Lenin drew specifically from Engels. We must re-read Lenin and Mao on the issue of dual power, keeping in mind the general theoretical and the specific dimensions of the question. The question is how to recognise the actually evolving dynamic, conserve and enhance its possibilities? How to bear on politics the fact that the worker is the symbol of dual power in a bourgeois society and the existence of the nation is the symbol of dual power in an imperialist order?

## 2 LENIN AND MAO ON DUAL POWER

Let us see how Lenin viewed the phenomenon of dual power. This is what he said in one of the several explanations he offered on dual power:

The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*... This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance...

What is this dual power? Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of *bourgeoisie*, *another government* has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

What is the class composition of this other government? It consists of the proletariat and the peasants (in soldiers' uniforms). What is the political

nature of this government? It is a revolutionary dictatorship, i.e., a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and *not on a law* enacted by a centralised State power. It is an entirely different kind of power from the one that generally exists in the parliamentary bourgeois-democratic republics of the usual type still prevailing in the advanced countries of Europe and America. This circumstance often overlooked, often not given enough thought, yet it is the crux of the matter. *This power is of the same type* as the Paris Commune of 1871. The fundamental characteristics of this type are: (1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas direct “seizure”, to use a current expression; (2) the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people; order in the State under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants *themselves*, by the armed people *themselves*; (3) officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control; they not only become elected officials, but are also *subject to recall* at the people’s first demand; they are reduced to the position of simple agents; from a privileged group holding “*jobs*” remunerated on a high, bourgeois scale, they become workers of a special “arm of the service”, whose remuneration *does not exceed* the ordinary pay of a competent worker...

Plekhanovs..., the Kautskys... refuse to recognise the obvious truth that in as much as these Soviets exist, *in as much as* they are a power, we have in Russia a state of the type of the Paris Commune.

I have emphasised the words “in as much as”, for it is only an incipient power...

To become a power the class-conscious workers must win the majority to their side. *As long as no* violence is used against the people there is no other road to power. We are not Blanquists, we do not stand for the seizure of power by a minority. We are Marxists; we stand for proletarian class struggle against petty-bourgeois intoxication, against chauvinism-defencism, phrasemongering and dependence on the bourgeoisie...

This is the actual, the *class* alignment of forces that determines our tasks.<sup>4</sup>

We may summarise the main aspects of his analysis:

First, Lenin viewed the situation of dual power as one of contingency, the product of a developing, or one may say of a precariously balanced, situation, “alongside the Provisional Government, the government of *bourgeoisie, another government* (italics Lenin’s) has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is

growing—the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.” This power is “weak and incipient”, but since the “basic question of every revolution is that of state power, unless this question is understood, there can be no intelligent participation in the revolution, not to speak of guidance of the revolution.”

Second, the important question is the class composition of this other government, its proletarian and semi-proletarian nature. One of the fundamental characteristics of this type is that the source of power is not a law discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas.

Third, for the parallel power “to become a power, the class-conscious workers must win the majority to their side.” Lenin reminds, “We are not Blanquists; we do not stand for the seizure of power by a minority. We are Marxists; we stand for proletarian class struggle against petty-bourgeois intoxication, against chauvinism-defencism, phrase-mongering and dependence on the bourgeoisie”. Hence, the potency of power will depend on the judgment of the question: will the form of dual power exacerbate class antagonism and clarify proletarian tasks? The “war of position” is thus not an alternative to insurrection or the final struggle or if we like to the “war of manoeuvre”. It has less to do with any supposed resilience of civil society to proletarian assaults. In Lenin’s words, it is an entirely different kind of power, from the one that generally exists in the parliamentary bourgeois-democratic republics of the usual type still prevailing in the advanced countries of Europe and America. This is the classic postcolonial response anticipated by Lenin to the quandary posed by European history of republican revolutions.

The history of the immediate months before the Soviet Revolution is well known to all communists. Though modern academic Marxism considers this history to be old fashioned, mythical and schoolbookish, it will be important to see even if briefly how this idea of dual power developed in Leninist revolutionary practice. Lenin wrote in *April Theses*, “The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that it represents a transition from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organization of the proletariat, placed power into the hands of the bourgeoisie—to the second stage, which must place power into the hands of the proletariat and the poor strata of the peasantry....” And further, “As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticizing and explaining errors and at the same time advocate the necessity of transferring the entire power of state to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies,

so that the masses may by experience overcome their mistakes.... Our immediate task is not to 'introduce' socialism, but only to bring social production and distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies."<sup>5</sup> From February Revolution and formation of the Soviets, to April crisis, revolution in the Army, the July days, to Bolshevik seizure of power, the constituent assembly, first Bolshevik decrees and the building of soviets—dual power remained a feature of Russia and guided Lenin's thoughts. The *April Theses* was significant, not merely because it outlined the profile of dual power, but laid down (1) why the scenario of dual power had to be considered with revolutionary determination; (2) and equally importantly, why dual power not only suggested co-existence of two forms of power, but also a dynamic situation, which suggested the possibility of transition from the previous, old type to a new type of power. In Lenin's words, The Russian Revolution was passing from its first to its second stage. The former, owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, had placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The next stage had to place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the State.

Fourth, dual power is thus a struggle and competition for legitimacy. It is a key to a consideration in a developing situation of revolutionary tactics towards establishing self-organised and interlinked counter-institutions. Revisionists have sometimes referred to this feature as tactics of hegemony to differentiate it from the Leninist idea of dual power. Thus cooperative federations, communities for local justice built on horizontal principles, libertarian municipal practices, workers' cooperatives, workers' councils, autonomous institutions—all these are considered as symbols of a Gramscian strategy of establishing hegemony, *counter-power* and not *dual power*. Verbal quibbles aside, in this way it is forgotten that dual power is a strategy, rather than an ideology, and its goal is the conquest of State power, its seizure and destruction, and replacement with a new type of power, which is not a mirror image of the power of the State that is sought to be crushed. To think of dual power as an imaginary of the decentralised, autonomous and horizontal is to mistake certain features of the new form of power with the objective of the struggle itself, namely the overthrow of the bourgeois order. There is no doubt that the postcolonial situation provides us with ample experiences of hegemonic practice, and a strategy of war combined into situations of dual power. Lenin was clear why dual power called for analysis in terms of goal and nature of the emerging, other form of power, and he said that this was like the Paris Commune—weak,

incipient and yet indicative of the new realities and features of the emerging power. Likewise, features of autonomy, horizontal nature, local roots, equality, flexibility, etc. are all marks of the new form of power engaged in a war with existing power. And, these features do not make sense unless they are seen in the frame of war against the bourgeoisie, where one form of power is out to vanquish the other. That dual power could not be conceptualised without thinking of the dynamics in the frame of war was made clear by Mao. He pointed out features of the situation in China where dual power could exist: indirect imperialist rule, economic backwardness, localised agricultural economy, leadership of the Communist Party and contradictions among the cliques of the ruling classes. In his words, "If only we realize that splits and wars will never cease within the White regime in China, we shall have no doubts about the emergence, survival and daily growth of Red political power."<sup>6</sup> The experience of dual power also tells us not only of fragility of Western-style liberal democracy in postcolonial situation, but also why the exercise of bourgeois hegemony in a postcolonial context remains extremely difficult.<sup>7</sup>

*Finally*, dual power means dual time. Lenin's reference to transition from one type of power to another indicated the simultaneity of two times: transiting from the time of bourgeois rule to that of rule by the soviets. Dual power thus brings out the problem in the currently held distinction between synchrony and diachrony, whereby the historical time is taken as homogeneous and contemporaneous with itself: thus the synchronic is considered as the contemporary itself, and thus by implication the diachrony a mere deviation. But, dual power rejects any linear idea of transition, which is nothing but an ideological conception of historical time.

As both Lenin and Mao showed, the concrete analysis of each national situation is a requirement for identifying the local features of dual power. There is no general theory of dual power apart from the recognition that the situation of duality is one of contradiction, precariousness, fluidity and non-correspondence among its internal components, yet all these may lead to insurrection, upsurge and massive churning for social transformation.<sup>8</sup> Mao said,

The long-term survival inside a country of one or more small areas under Red political power completely encircled by a White regime is a phenomenon that has never occurred anywhere else in the world. There are special reasons for this unusual phenomenon. It can exist and develop only under certain conditions.

First, it cannot occur in any imperialist country or in any colony under direct imperialist rule, but can only occur in China which is economically backward, and which is semi-colonial and under indirect imperialist rule. For this unusual phenomenon can occur only in conjunction with another unusual phenomenon, namely, war within the White regime. It is a feature of semi-colonial China that, since the first year of the Republic [1912] the various cliques of old and new warlords have waged incessant wars against one another, supported by imperialism from abroad and by the comprador and landlord classes at home. Such a phenomenon is to be found in none of the imperialist countries or for that matter in any colony under direct imperialist rule, but only in a country like China which is under indirect imperialist rule. Two things account for its occurrence, namely, a localized agricultural economy (not a unified capitalist economy) and the imperialist policy of marking off spheres of influence in order to divide and exploit. The prolonged splits and wars within the White regime provide a condition for the emergence and persistence of one or more small Red areas under the leadership of the Communist Party amidst the encirclement of the White regime. The independent regime carved out on the borders of Hunan and Kiangsi Provinces is one of many such small areas. In difficult or critical times some comrades often have doubts about the survival of Red political power and become pessimistic. The reason is that they have not found the correct explanation for its emergence and survival. If only we realize that splits and wars will never cease within the White regime in China, we shall have no doubts about the emergence, survival and daily growth of Red political power.<sup>9</sup>

Consider in the background of all these the enormous experiences of situations of dual power and the inability of revolutionary forces in the vast postcolonial lands of Asia, Africa and Latin America, where dual power existed, to sustain it even with the sacrifices of thousands of lives. In Malay, Indonesia, India, Burma, Iran and many more countries the communist movements created red political power but could not sustain it, and red political power was submerged in nationwide counter-revolutionary bloodbaths. The emergence of red political power and the inability to sustain it have both been features of the postcolonial history of revolutions. Is it surprising, then, that postcolonial history of sustained resistance and failures gives us insight to this dynamics of power?

In this perspective the politics of dual power owes little to a philosophical theory of power. It is a specific kind of political practice; dual power is a fact that moulds revolutionary political practice. Stripped of sociology, *power* in the history of dual power acquires a revolutionary-practical nature.



Postcolonial history also shows that dual power is manifest not only in terms of institutions, areas or territory, but in terms of classes and ideas also. One such idea is that of autonomy in which the notion of dual power is reflected.

In the next section we propose to continue the discussion on dual power in the context of the issue of workers' autonomy in India. The history of class compromises in labour movements lends urgency to a discussion on the issue of workers' autonomy.

### 3 AUTONOMY OF WORKERS' STRUGGLES AND THE ISSUE OF DUAL POWER

There is no doubt that in the phenomenon of dual power we find the notion of autonomy—perhaps relative, now incipient now clear. Wherever workers have sought to buttress their organised existence as an independent power parallel to the State and the captains of industry, they have tried to reduce their dependence on the bourgeoisie and become autonomous. Yet, retaining this autonomy in struggle, continuing the fight, maintaining class solidarity, defeating the machinations of the State and developing a holistic perspective of the struggle has not been easy. Almost, wherever unions managed to become autonomous of the control of a party, either they had to become practically syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist, or succumb to a mirage of power, which practically meant discarding the principle of general interest of the working people. So, how does the autonomy of workers' struggle reflect on the issue of dual power?

Below we present a brief narrative of workers' struggle in the automobile industry near Delhi in India to show the dilemma and the problems.

Though workers' autonomous struggles in the last decade (2002–2014) in the automobile industry in Gurgaon-Manesar area near the Indian capital, New Delhi, had caught the attention of political activists and labour organisers in the country and abroad, Left political parties could not come out with a full analysis of the dynamics of the struggle and the lessons for working-class organisers. It will be useful to note at the outset that workers' struggles around the globe by the first decade of this present century were entering a new phase of militancy.<sup>10</sup> New forms of struggle emerged as automobile production globalised and there was increasing casualisation of work. Old distinctions between formal and informal organisations of work and formal and informal workers became untenable in many cases. There were also attempts to come up with new methods of

organising workers in contemporary conditions where the organised sector was supposedly being increasingly fragmented, lean production or just-in-time production was becoming the norm of production method and shop floors becoming increasingly redundant as a site of production and mobilisation. Even where the shop floor was important, as in the automobile industry, the worker was now a mere appendage of the machine and had to tune him/herself to the rhythm of the robot. The Gurgaon-Manesar unrest happened in a so-called organised branch of industry—the automobile sector where production was happening on high-tech shop floors with machinery at the cutting edge of technology and increasing productivity at a level hitherto unseen, but marked and permeated with the most rudimentary work condition found at the household level.<sup>11</sup>

Often automobile parts had many tiers to pass through before they ended up at the Maruti or Hero Honda main factory. For example, rubber hoses for carburettors arrived in the form of rubber blocks in Mujesar, a village in Faridabad surrounded by industry. Inside the huts of the village, people worked on 1970s lathes of German origin, turning metal or working on antique power presses. Maruti's supply-chain started there.<sup>12</sup> Gurgaon-Manesar transformed the entire area into a social factory—not metaphorically but in reality, thus turning the battle at Maruti as one for the command and occupation of the society there.

In a substantial sense, industrialisation at Gurgaon-Manesar represented the new type of industrialisation and circulation of finance characteristic of this age of globalisation. In most of the factories there, formation of unions was prohibited for a long time. In the plants producing automobile parts production standards had been set in tune with the production needs of car-producing plants in the United States and elsewhere. If work stopped at Gurgaon-Manesar or took place at a lower speed, it hampered wages, salaries and livelihood level of employees in the US, and, more importantly, the global profit margin in the industry. While there were several important issues arising from this phenomenon, such as challenges for the working-class movement in uniting the workers segmented and marked by the vagaries and irregular frequencies across the supply chain, the location and site for working-class struggle when the shop floor condition deteriorated or became precarious, or the methods or approach of political organisers, the most important question was finding the way to preserve the workers' power that had emerged in course of the struggles against the new production method and regime in the automobile industry in the Gurgaon-Manesar area.

In the Gurgaon-Manesar area, the Maruti car plant, a state-run company with Suzuki Motor Company of Japan at the helm, not only saw a transfer of ownership, but perhaps the first experiment with just-in-time production or what was called then the Toyota system of production.<sup>13</sup> In such a system a worker was told how many times s/he could go the toilet and for many seconds or minutes. How much time would a worker standing in front of the belt require to drink water? How much could s/he talk with the fellow worker standing next in assembly line? This demanded a new kind of workforce pliable to a particular regime of production, and yet this new workforce was crucial in raising the banner of revolt in the two manufacturing units—one at Gurgaon and another at Manesar, the site of militant struggle of 2012–13. The first wave of struggle at Maruti came about in 2000–2001 during a period of transition as older workers were trying to come to grips with the new management and new production system. This period also saw an unprecedented rise in productivity at the factory. This first struggle began in 2000 on the question of incentive wages, when the management unilaterally changed the method of calculation from a basis of savings of labour costs to one on the basis of productivity per direct worker.<sup>14</sup> Also, it was from around that time that the workforce at Maruti became increasingly casualised, with contract workers and apprentices being recruited in large numbers.

The particular production regime put in place in this period was marked by intensification of social control of workers. Apart from the usual management steps, such as, disallowing union formation, suspending workers at will, handing over rebellious workers to the police and restricting physical movement of a worker in the plant, social control was buttressed from the outside. The rural gentry all around, the upper-caste kulaks and the wise elders of the nearby settlements—all supported the company bosses. Some of the members of the local gentry became contractors for Maruti and other plants in that area, for instance in the supply of building material. Some became a canteen supplier; some began to supply other material to the plant. On the other hand, as more and more temporary hands were engaged in Maruti the workers became casual, contract-bound in special ways earlier indicated, and bereft of any social security entitlement. These workers were mostly *Dalits*. They were kept invisible from the public profile of the company and the business, so that later the bosses could say that only a minority of the Maruti workers were troublemakers, that claims of large scale worker dissatisfaction was a lie and that the repeated lock-outs at Maruti were aimed at protecting the majority loyal workers.

All these gradually helped the State and local government to frame its response: quick apprehension of the troublemakers, quick trial and quick exemplary punishment. Meanwhile in 2002, Suzuki increased its share to 54.2 per cent. In 2006, the Manesar unit of Maruti was established. The grip of management on the workers tightened. There were regular reports of daily abuse of the rights and dignity of the workers, mostly on ground of caste and the impossible working condition of the lean production system. In 2011 a new wave of struggle at Maruti brought it to the forefront of working-class struggle in India and attracted global attention. The discontent over working conditions and the abusive attitude of the management had reached a breaking point. On 3 June 2011 the workers at Manesar plant submitted an application to register their independent union Maruti Suzuki Employee Union (MSEU).<sup>15</sup> The next day a workers' sit-in at the Manesar factory began. The primary demands of the workers were the right to unionise and making all contractual and temporary workers permanent. On 6 June, the services of 11 workers were terminated. On 17 June the labour department intervened and the workers were reinstated and a verbal assurance was given that their union would be registered. During this entire period the workers occupied the factory. They had learnt their lesson from the earlier struggle that it was unwise to get out of the factory as it allowed the management to declare a lockout. What followed was constant threats and abuse by the management as well as dismissals and suspensions. This went on until August when suddenly on 28–29 August 2011 a large contingent of police entered the plant and management sealed the gate. When the workers arrived the management declared that they could enter only after signing an undertaking of good conduct. The workers refused to do so. Harassment and arrest of union leaders followed. On 30 September the workers agreed to sign the good conduct undertaking. However, only permanent workers were allowed to enter, while 1100 contract workers were denied entry. They were told to take their dues and leave. From 7 October, permanent and contract workers occupied the factory and on 13 October the High Court passed an order that the workers should vacate the factory.

In the meantime the management laid siege to the factory cutting the water supply and closing the canteen. In a dramatic turn of events, still largely inexplicable, the strike ended in November as some leaders of the strike took compensation from the management and left the company. In any case the management promised that the union would be registered by 31 December 2011. But the promise was not kept. The Maruti Suzuki

Workers Union (MSWU) was finally registered on 31 January 2012. What followed was more of what had already gone by. From April the union became active in presenting a charter of demands to reduce work pressure, the extreme demands of the work schedule on the workers, the end of the incentive scheme and so on, battling against suspensions of union leaders and mobilising the workers for stiff resistance as talks between management and the union broke down in the following months. Inevitably, the management resorted to intimidation, violence and threats by bringing in toughs from outside.<sup>16</sup> There were more suspensions of workers, and further violence broke out, resulting in the death of a manager in July 2012. Who killed the manager remains a mystery. Workers demanded an impartial probe into the incident. In any case, the violence and the death of the manager allowed the State to crack down on workers with ferocity. Thus came to an end of the year-long struggle of the Maruti workers.

In this entire period the struggle remained autonomous in the sense that the direct intervention of trade unions of the left and other parties was negligible. However, as the struggle came under heavy State repression, several trade unions came to the support of the workers. This period is more interesting as it revealed a completely new face of trade union movement in India and new methods of negotiations between the workers and the unions. There were several unions and workers' organisations ranging from various shades of what is called far-left to ones who were more like non-governmental organisations and labour solidarity associations than unions.

After the July incident, 546 permanent workers were terminated along with about 1800 temporary workers, and 147 permanent workers were arrested on charges of murder. To meet the consequences of the crack-down of July 2012, the union reorganised itself through a provisional committee and a new movement began from 7 November 2012. MSWU demanded that the arrested leaders be released, dismissed workers reinstated, the temporary workers made permanent, and an impartial probe on the incident of 18 July be instigated. The struggle this time, however, was perceptibly different in terms of tactics and strategy. The forms of resistance shifted from factory occupation, and became more mobile. Considerable debate followed between the various unions and MSWU to shift the site of struggle to the capital (Delhi) rather than clinging on to the peripheral site of Gurgaon-Manesar. This suggestion was not taken up. In any case by this time the issue of the Maruti struggle was not a local one

only, but a national, even a global, issue. The MSWU now sought help of some central trade unions. On one occasion the workers sought help from the notorious *khap panchayat*.<sup>17</sup> If this tendency of the workers might be taken as a sign of autonomy, the experience of Maruti showed that such alliances were never symmetrical in their power relations. In this case the power was firmly in the hands of reactionary local gentry. After the police repression of 19 May 2013, the local gentry withdrew its support. With this came the end of this phase of the struggle. All that was left for MSWU was to seek suggestions from various organisations who had stood by it in the struggle. The union also tried to align with central trade unions of the parliamentary left as well as organisations belonging to the radical Left. However with heavy State repression the struggle died.<sup>18</sup>

There is, of course, a strong line of argument that the desire to autonomously build up a workers' movement in Maruti originated from the specifically precarious situation of work there. More than three decades earlier the Suzukis had started their journey with Maruti with a 26 per cent stake; now they controlled 52 per cent of the stock. While the main company is located in Japan, the main share of its exports was to Europe and Africa. The US was one of the company's biggest investment centres, while South Africa was soon going to host one of their large assembly plants. The increase in production and sale had been possible due to just-in-time production process, which in turn had required the collaboration of three categories of workers—permanent labour, contract labour and apprentices. In 2012, of the total Maruti workers 1100 were contract labour, 400 apprentice labour and only 950 were permanent labour. The number of contract labour fluctuated from time to time. The categorisation of workers into three groups—permanent, casual and apprentice—had helped the Maruti plant at Manesar to increase its annual production capacity from 250,000 to 350,000. This was the background to the labour regime in the Maruti plants.<sup>19</sup>

The important question is: How should a Marxist conceptualise dual power in the context of workers' sustained protests against the new and flexible work regime? In Italy a section of the theoreticians of workers' movement in the 1970s had argued that in contrast to the centralised decisions and authority structures of modern institutions, autonomous social movements involved people directly in decisions affecting their everyday lives. In this way, democracy would expand and help individuals break free of the political structures and behaviour patterns imposed by capital from the outside. Such an understanding involved a call in a revolutionary perspective for the independence of movements from

political parties. It sought to create a practical political alternative to both capitalist democracy and what they defined as authoritarian socialism.<sup>20</sup> Here, too, the question is: does the principle of autonomy help us to investigate the dynamics of dual power, without which no revolution proceeds? Given the experience narrated above, it will be important to look dialectically into the issue of autonomy in the workers' movement in the context of the strategy and tactics of proletarian politics.

To arrive at that discussion we have to ask as a beginning: Who organises the workers at sites that have not been previously organised or where it has been at a minimum? Here, the history of the Left movement in India becomes important. The changing circumstances had forced the radical Left, which emerged after the movement of the late 1960s, to look anew at their programme, strategy and tactics. Contrary to the belief that the radical Left was in terminal decline or at best only active in distant forests, a great ideological and political churning went on within this circle. As a matter of fact, the intensity of polemic was similar to the 1960s if not actually even more intense. This was because of the questions raised by the working-class struggle and the methods of organising it and making it more militant and sustainable involved also issues of party, union and new, potential, forms of association that could be developed through working-class struggle. Those were no longer ossified concepts. With the rise of contractualisation and casualisation of work the workers became more mobile, but this made them more receptive to a kind of politics that revolved around the issue of *power* and not simply *wages*.<sup>21</sup> After all, concepts like mobile war and positional warfare did not escape the political lexicon of the postcolonial radical Left, as in India.

The experiences of the Maruti workers recounted here, along with other references to workers' struggles in India and other postcolonial countries, suggest that in order to understand the dynamics of dual power in the time of globalisation and neoliberal economy the problematic of workers' "autonomy" has to be rigorously investigated.

#### 4 NEW QUESTIONS AROUND DUAL POWER

So, then, the first question is around the principle of autonomy. Autonomy is inbuilt as a feature of dual power, and hence its dialectical incorporation in a relational frame is necessary. In other words the issue is not one of choice between one form and another—say, party form or the union form, union form or an autonomous organisational form, the form of a political movement or the self-organisational movement of the

workers, and finally political upsurge or social movement. Dual power is not a creation of communists. It is a feature of the State and the society in a time of crisis. Inasmuch as we cannot make the dual power artificially autonomous, we cannot kill its autonomy either, without which it would not have come into existence as challenge to bourgeois power.

Every uprising of the workers has shown strong marks of autonomy, a swell of consciousness at the ground level and a large element of spontaneity. Yet almost to the same measure, every uprising of the workers has shown marks of strategic leadership, strong organisation, wide social networks and a strong transformational urge. The great railway strike in India in 1974 was one of the clearest instances of the presence of “autonomy” of the movement. But the formation of the great autonomous institution, the NCCRS (National Coordination Committee of Railwaymen’s Struggle), was a political decision and an agreed decision of the political parties leading the struggle. NCCRS was backed by the tremendous upsurge of railway workers.<sup>22</sup> Likewise in the Kanoria Jute Mill in the last decade of the twentieth century the celebrated movement for factory self-management after occupation of the factory was led by an autonomous group, yet with a particular politics, and with support and solidarity of different Left mobilisations.<sup>23</sup> This was also the case with the Dalli-Rajhara movement of the miners led by the late Shankar Guha Neogy, once again marked by strong organisation, a keen sense of tactics and strategy and active involvement of the rank and file. This history is therefore dialectical. Strongly poised between the two, workers in India are now learning to strategically and tactically use the concept of autonomy.

It is remarkable, how the idea of autonomy is once again witnessing a revival in India and elsewhere in the postcolonial world in the wake of factories turning into sweatshops, the most virtual form of accumulation combining with the most primitive, the wage question linking up with the issue of work condition, and labour process getting enmeshed with the issue of casualisation of labour. The old trade union movement failed to appreciate the consequences of the changes in labour regime ushered in by neoliberal modes of accumulation, and hence neglected to revise its strategy. The answer however is not in making autonomy the holy principle of the life of labour, but appreciating the phenomenon dialectically, that is to say in the a relational frame of dual power. This means bringing back the great question of organisation, strategy and tactics towards transformation of the balance of forces. The question of organisation is crucial, as workers have to increase their challenges to adverse work conditions, as in India



where wages and salaries as a proportion of gross national income has steadily gone down over the last thirty years. This indicates the precarious condition in which labour is increasingly placed. In this situation, while the workers' movement grows with its own dynamics, the State has come down violently on strikes and the entire movement, basic trade union rights are trampled upon and every governmental step is taken to ensure that a strike does not become the symbol of a politics of the workplace and beyond.

As components of war, strategy and tactics are as crucial as imperatives of autonomy. Autonomy is a concept, while strategy and tactics are principles of waging class war, in fact of all wars. They indicate relational judgement, evaluation of balance of forces, command, stewardship, mobilisation, deployment of forces, logistical planning, measurement of time and so on. Once workers have gone beyond the boundaries of workplace trade unionism, which they know and understand naturally, they often become reliant on national institutions like political parties and national trade unions. Since the parties and unions have very little idea of working outside the national institutional sphere, workers have to grope for a way out of the institutional confines. This is the time when they cry out "treachery"! They say leaders have sold out. Yet they cannot find the exit route. This is where the experiences we have cited are indicative of new thinking and new modes of organisation, howsoever faulty and hesitant the initial steps may appear to us.

The situation calls for dialectical thinking on autonomy and organisation. While in many fields observers speak of de-unionisation—a decline in union membership and several other associated features—workers in several other fields are founding unions, associations, solidarity forums and militant groups, and are fighting battles that involve political choice at every step. The slogan of autonomy is therefore the appearance of a different reality, which we have tried to indicate in this chapter. It is like the question of wages, which may become under particular circumstances what Marx called the "form of appearance" of the "true state of affairs". Marx had written in the context of a discussion on wages, "The forms of appearance are reproduced directly and spontaneously, as current and usual modes of thought; the essential relation must first be discovered by science. Classical political economy stumbles approximately onto the true state of affairs, but without consciously formulating it. It is unable to do this as long as it stays within its bourgeois skin."<sup>24</sup> The "true state of affairs" cannot be known through invocation of any principle, but concrete

investigation, on which Lenin, Mao and Gramsci put emphasis in their investigations into situations of dual power.

The second question relates to workers' power built around the historical weapon of the general strike. In Russia, as we know, workers' power gradually built up on general strikes, and developed into soviets of workers, semi-workers and soldiers' deputies. Lenin had noted the process through which the general will of the workers developed, justifying the name, *general strike*; precisely because of the fact that a general strike would become what he called in relation to the party—"a tribune of the people"<sup>25</sup>—in this case the general strike became the meeting site of various workers' organisations (based on craft, position, area, political loyalty, etc.), various voices against oppression, and various styles and forms of organisation. On the St. Petersburg Strike of 1905, Lenin made his outlook clearer. He wrote,

... The movement owes its rapid expansion to two circumstances: first, the moment was propitious for an economic struggle (the government was in pressing need of the fulfillment of the orders placed by the War Ministry and the Admiralty); secondly, the constitutional movement among the social strata was expanding. Having begun the strike in defence of some dismissed comrades, the workers took the further step of presenting broad economic demands. They demanded an eight-hour day, a minimum wage (one rouble for men and seventy kopeks for women), the abolition of compulsory overtime work (and double pay for overtime), improvement of sanitary conditions and medical aid, etc. The strike began to develop into a general strike... things did not stop at economic demands. The movement has begun to assume a political character. ... Freedom or death, declare the workers. Moscow and Libau are sending workers' delegates to St. Petersburg... The political protest of the leading oppressed class and its revolutionary energy break through all obstacles, both external, in the form of police bans, and internal, in the form of the ideological immaturity and backwardness of some of the leaders... this mobilisation, of course, is not to be classed with demonstrations of minor importance in this or that municipal council, but with mass movements, like the Rostov demonstration and the strikes of 1903 in the South. The mobilisation of the revolutionary forces of the proletariat in this new and higher form is bringing us with gigantic strides nearer to the moment when the proletariat will even more decisively and more consciously join battle with the autocracy.<sup>26</sup>

Recall the words of Engels who had expressed scepticism at the idea of a sudden victorious insurrection by workers in face of the development of

the coercive power of the bourgeois State, and suggested the strategy of developing alternative power of the workers till the moment of final reckoning arrives. From then on the general strike became a part of a strategy of dual power than that of an insurrection. Following Engels, Rosa Luxemburg also had cautioned against a cavalier attitude towards using the general strike as an ultimate weapon, which expressed in fact a strategy of syndicalism than a politics that focused on the State as the repository of power of the bourgeoisie.<sup>27</sup> Engels had written,

The conditions of the struggle had essentially changed. Rebellion in the old style, the street fight with barricades, which up to 1848 gave everywhere the final decision, was to a considerable extent obsolete. Let us have no illusions about it: a real victory of an insurrection over the military in street fighting, a victory as between two armies, is one of the rarest exceptions. But the insurgents, also, counted on it just as rarely. For them it was solely a question of making the troops yield to moral influences, which, in a fight between the armies of two warring countries do not come into play at all, or do so to a much less degree. If they succeed in this, then the troops fail to act, or the commanding officers lose their heads, and the insurrection wins. If they do not succeed in this, then, even where the military are in the minority, the superiority of better equipment and training, of unified leadership, of the planned employment of the military forces and of discipline makes itself felt... In addition, the military have, on their side, the disposal of artillery and fully equipped corps of skilled engineers, resources of war which, in nearly every case, the insurgents entirely lack. No wonder, then, that even the barricade struggles conducted with the greatest heroism—Paris, June 1848; Vienna, October 1848; Dresden, May 1849—ended with the defeat of the insurrection, so soon as the leaders of the attack, unhampered by political considerations, acted from the purely military standpoint, and their soldiers remained reliable.<sup>28</sup>

Innumerable controversies have raged through decades over Engels' famous introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggle in France* (1895) in which he made this remark. Lenin, accused in 1917 of Blanquism, even by many of his own party comrades, dealt in his writings at great length with the distinctions between Blanquism and the Marxist conception of 'insurrection as an art' based upon the preparation, guidance and active participation of a broad mass movement. Lenin wrote,

Strikes... teach the workers to unite; they show them that they can struggle against the capitalists only when they are united; strikes teach the workers to

think of the struggle of the whole working class against the whole class of factory owners and against the arbitrary, police government. This is the reason that socialists call strikes 'a school of war', a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people, of all who labour, from the yoke of government officials and from the yoke of capital. 'A school of war' is, however, not war itself. When strikes are widespread among the workers, some of the workers (including some socialists) begin to believe that the working class can confine itself to strikes, strike funds, or strike associations alone; that by strikes alone the working class can achieve a considerable improvement in its conditions or even its emancipation...some think that the working class has only to organise a general strike throughout the whole country for the workers to get everything they want from the capitalists and the government... *It is a mistaken idea.* Strikes are *one* of the ways in which the working class struggles for its emancipation, but they are not the only way...<sup>29</sup>

Today, with the strike, including the general strike, becoming a routine tool of the workers, it has ceased to be a symbol of dual power. In other words, it is often a mode of action without emancipative potential. This is a particular situation to be found in probably all other cases where the tradition of general strike has been transformed into new unionism. Increasingly, workers involved in a critical strike are left alone in their movement, reminding us of what happened to the miners in Great Britain in 1926, and nearly half a century later to the railway workers in India in 1974. With the advent of new unionism, the difference is that while in the former there was a politics of upsurge, insurrection and direct democracy, with varying degree of consciousness, in the latter, there is a politics of negotiation, file pushing, extracting bits of concession, practicality, smart and cool leadership characterised by a desire to be a part of the reconstruction of the nation, the economy and the society, in short the features of a stakeholder. Massive changes in methods, machines and labour practices have made new general strikes difficult. Dispute-resolution procedures have been simplified. Agreements are more and more locally concluded. As a result violence or direct action in industries has become localised. The big labour federation leaders can congratulate themselves for ushering in the great and largely peaceful revolution in the industry. The new unionism is the bourgeois version of dual power, and has become an important element in the neoconservative transformation of democracies. The power of the unions has been incorporated in the power of the State.

We may say then that dual power has a liminal presence in the map of class war. To understand the role of a collective in a situation of extreme tension, tussle and flux, we must know how to situate the events that make the emergence of dual power possible (hence, learn from the analyses by Lenin and Mao). There is no doubt that these contradictory possibilities will be always there in situations of dual power. Therein we can find the permanent relevance of the events that produce the duality.

But an analysis on the basis of a description of a situation must presuppose some amount of theorisation, though we earlier argued that dual power is not a conceptual principle but a matter of proletarian strategy. Once again we have to read the writings of Marx and Engels on 1848, particularly *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany*. If as we have tried to suggest that events produce dual power (again let us recall Lenin and Mao's mode of analysis), how do we think of a politics that can anticipate event that is to say draw lessons from it, and thus conserve these lessons for the advance of the revolutionary struggle? If dual power must at some point transform into a general advance, how will proletarian leadership sense that moment which is to say determine that moment? Otherwise as we indicated dual power will become routine, diminish and finally evaporate as *power*. How to make haste slowly (*festina lente*)?

In this sense the realism of dual power in a strange dialectical twist must embrace an imaginary that will help the duality to sustain. Postcolonial experiences suggest how anti-colonialism acted as the bedrock of such duality. In certain other experiences democracy as a spirit has provided the same template. Peasant struggles, which today by themselves may be unable to become such an anchor, have strengthened such template. Federalism or dispersal of power has been a similar booster from late feudal time. A specific historical pattern of dispersal of power has been at times the foundation on which dual power has survived.

In the Indian historical context as in many other postcolonial contexts, it will be important to remember that except in the last two hundred years of colonial history the State was never the centralised entity with which we are familiar today. There were always regional kingdoms, cumulative indigenous changes at local levels reflecting a wide variety of commercialisation, formation of social groups and political transformations, and different rates of expansion, in cases slow and piecemeal penetration, of organised State power in the country. Imperial power in precolonial time often depended on subsidiary alliances. Social groups in many places became classic peasant classes. In times of the decline of the sovereign

power, the confederal nature of politics would be clearer. So, if conquest was essential for an imperial power to form and take definite shape, State power became a combination of imperial administration and rule on one hand, alliances and grant of autonomy on the other. Local kingdoms evolved in a variety of ways, many evolved from the warrior orders, and there was almost always some flux and emptiness waiting to be filled up by some soon to emerge local powers.<sup>30</sup> In most colonial lands local power survived based on the rich produce of the valleys and the plains. Only lightly touched by the “mainstream of imperial and royal political culture”, there were petty kingdoms based on community solidarities of the pastoral, hunting, slash and burn occupations and skill. These and many other petty kingdoms continued to exist for a long time with their own political organisation. In many cases as now people groaned under the burden of taxes imposed by revenue authorities at multiple levels. Yet, agriculture remained on the whole stable, trade routes remained open and trade flourished, and about 15 per cent of the people in the country at the higher side of the estimate (lower side 10 per cent) were town-dwellers, as in India.<sup>31</sup>

Of course there is a strong line of thinking that what we describe as the modern State, in the Indian case the modern postcolonial State, has changed all this. The State has become centralising, the relative autonomy of the regional kingdoms and the subahs is gone forever, the petty kingdoms of the indigenous people have been done away with, the taxation system has been streamlined, and with a huge bureaucratic–industrial–financial–economic–military organisation the State is now in a new modern form, with welfare and economic functions as important as military and punitive functions. The justice and legal system backed by a basic law governing all conceivable relations in the country has become another characteristic of this modern State. With independence have come democracy, votes, political parties, press and “a democratic public”, that have changed the face of the State altogether. Therefore, the argument goes that the modern imperial-republican-centralising state basing itself on the politics of democracy and covering the entire country has no similarity with the earlier confederal nature of political power. This is the sovereign State, the form of power is popular sovereignty, and the nation of India is the site of this power; and hence the question, how much of a vision of dual power or red political power is realistic?

Yet, the counter-question can be: is not this “modern” State system and the form of State power described here in bare essentials also facing a crisis, and is not the post-colonial situation today exhibiting symptoms

of the reappearance of the earlier patterns of power, best described as a combination or a co-existence of the centralised and capillary forms?

Let us in this context observe briefly how power is in a decentralised state also in India in the midst of relentless centralisation. Reacting to the British Cabinet Mission Plan (1946), which was a confederal scheme, the Indian National Congress had wanted a federal scheme with greater powers for the centre, including residuary powers. The Constituent Assembly of united India had already been elected under the Cabinet Mission Plan in 1946 by the electoral college of the provincial legislatures under the 1935 India Act, with the provision in place for the nomination by princely rulers of their representation in the Constituent Assembly in due course. In the early post-Independence decades India functioned as a highly centralised polity. However, with the decline of the Congress Party, which had functioned as the lever of centralisation, by the late 1960s, the political dynamics started to become more competitive. Regionalisation today characterises the shifting of powers from New Delhi to the state governments. What is happening is thus, one expert notes, neither federalisation proper nor decentralisation proper but regionalisation. State-building or state-capacity-building at the provincial level has become very important today because the capacity of the Union government to help the poorer and backward states has declined, and national and multinational capital is making a beeline for investment only in advanced states, so backward states are languishing without any capital investment, either national or multinational or foreign direct investment.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, agrarian crisis, which affects the states directly, has deepened. In this overall situation, populism has increased its stake in the power of the states in face of centralisation and neoliberal policies of the Indian State. In addition, progressive, militant politics has survived on the basis of one or other kind of social and political support against all odds. It constitutes one may say the power outside—outside the formal institutional structure of power.

In short, dual power does not make its appearance in the world in the way Minerva appeared to the society of gods and men. Dual power exists as a critical history in the annals of revolutions only in so far as it has occupied a problematic position, and, to use Louis Althusser's commentary on philosophy, "it occupies this position in so far as it has secured its place in the thick of an already occupied world. It therefore only exists in so far as this conflict makes it something distinct, and this distinctive character can only be won and imposed in an indirect way, by a detour involving ceaseless study of other, existing positions."<sup>33</sup> The politics, which constitutes the theory of dual power and is able to make sense of this feature and build

around it, is essentially a matter of organising this power, strengthening it, defending it and developing it as a feature of a particular situation. This can be called a “new practice of power”.

## NOTES

1. On these see the detailed discussions in Ranabir Samaddar, *Neoliberal Strategies of Governing India* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).
2. V.I. Lenin, “The Dual Power”, April 1917, *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), volume 24, pp. 38–41—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm> (accessed on 26 November 2016).
3. To be truthful, Gramsci’s ideas on “war of position” do not easily lend themselves to a straightforward formulation. Surely, the “war” is more than a metaphor in the formulation of the idea of “war of position”, that is to say the proletarian strategy to build forces gradually and incrementally, against the concentrated might of the State. However, the related ideas of hegemony and civil society also play crucial roles in this understanding. On this, Gramsci seemed to suggest two things: (1) In modern liberal democracies, direct confrontation may not necessarily threaten the dominant structure as long as its credibility and authority is firmly held up by civil society. In this condition a “war of position” within civil society will entail resistance to domination with culture, in place of pure military strength, making a “war of position” the process which would gradually build up the strength of the social foundations of a new State by creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within existing society; (2) To the extent dual power is an issue of war of position, the power has to be mapped concretely, nationally—exactly in the same way that in war a theory of how to conduct warfare is useless without specific investigations into the terrain, logistics, positions of the troops, their deployment pattern and so on. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1996), p. 238. Indeed, Gramsci seemed to be unaware of Lenin’s writings on dual power, when he commented that Lenin did not have time “to expand his formula” and “the fundamental task” of reconnaissance of the terrain “was a national one” (p. 238). On this see also the discussions by Comrade Azaad, “Clarifications of the terms on Dual Power”, 2013—<https://ri-ir.org/2013/11/08/clarification-of-the-terms-on-dual-power/> (accessed on 24 November 2016); also Amil, “Towards the War of Position: Gramsci in Continuity and Rupture with Marxism-Leninism,” *Uprising: Journal of Revolutionary Initiative* 4, September 2013, pp. 19–31.



4. V.I. Lenin, “The Dual Power, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm> (accessed on 27 November 2016).
5. V.I. Lenin, “April Theses: The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution, April 17, 1917”, *Pravda*, 20 April 1917—<http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/april-crisis/april-crisis-texts/april-Theses/> (accessed on 27 November 2016).
6. Mao Tse Tung, “Why is it that Red Political Power can exist in China?” 1928, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung*, Volume One, [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_3.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_3.htm) (accessed on 28 November 2016).
7. Even though, like the guerrilla movements and zones in many postcolonial countries, massive trade unions have acted as pillars of parallel power in bourgeois democracies; likewise, the armed presence of anti-fascists was also a dual power in immediate postwar Europe. However, class compromises and dependence on the State for exercise of this armed power and power of organised labour reduced the contradictory nature of the duality and made them complementary. We require a deeper study of the way in which armed power in Western Europe evaporated in the process of European reconstruction, and the theory of dual power was consigned to waste.
8. While leading peasant struggles in South China, Mao wrote in 1928, “The significance of the armed independent regime of workers and peasants in the Hunan–Kiangsi border area, with Ningkang as its centre, is definitely not confined to the few counties in the border area; this regime will play an immense role in the process of the seizure of political power in Hunan, Hupeh and Kiangsi through the insurrection of the workers and peasants in these three provinces. The following are tasks of great importance for the Party in the border area in connection with the insurrections unfolding in Hunan, Hupeh and Kiangsi: Extend the influence of the agrarian revolution and of the people’s political power in the border area to the lower reaches of the rivers in Hunan and Kiangsi and as far as Hupeh; constantly expand the Red Army and enhance its quality through struggle so that it can fulfill its mission in the coming general insurrection of the three provinces; enlarge the local armed forces in the counties, that is, the Red Guards and the workers’ and peasants’ insurrection detachments, and enhance their quality so that they are able to fight the landlords’ levies and small armed units now and safeguard the political power of the border area in the future; gradually reduce the extent to which local work is dependent on the assistance of the Red Army personnel, so that the border area will have its own personnel to take charge of the work and even provide personnel for the Red Army and the expanded territory of the independent regime.”—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_3.htm#s4](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_3.htm#s4) (accessed on 28 November 2016).

9. “Why is it that Red Political Power can exist in China?” (accessed on 28 November 2016).
10. Immanuel Ness, *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of the Global Working Class* (London: Pluto Press, 2016). Based on focused studies of workers’ activism in China, India and South Africa and a global comparative analysis, Ness destroys the ill-founded belief in the decline of the working-class movements and shows how, in the context of massive migration, new production techniques, changes in patterns of unionisation and new issues of labour security, working-class movements are being reconstituted on a global scale, and “Southern insurgency” is the flag of that reconstituted militancy of the working class. See particularly Tables 2.5–2.9 (pp. 40–50).
11. The workers’ blog *Gurgaon Workers News* noted that the supply chain of Maruti started in Mujesar, a village in Faridabad.—<http://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no3/#fn1> (accessed on 5 October 2014); this section draws heavily on the study by Mithilesh Kumar and Ranabir Samaddar of the Maruti struggle, “Autonomy in India: Tactical and Strategic Considerations on the New Wave of Workers’ Struggles”, *Viewpoint*, January 2017—<https://viewpointmag.com/2017/01/23/autonomy-in-india-tactical-and-strategic-considerations-on-the-new-wave-of-workers-struggles/> (accessed on 3 February 2017). I am grateful to Mithilesh Kumar for his inputs.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Hard Drive: Working Conditions and Workers’ Struggles at Maruti*, A Report by People’s Union for Democratic Rights, New Delhi, July 2001.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Driving Force: Labour Struggles and Violation of Rights in Maruti Suzuki India Limited*, A PUDR Report, New Delhi, May 2013.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Khap panchayat* is the local association dominated by upper-caste landowners ruling over few villages. They act as quasi-judicial bodies that pronounce harsh punishments on the deviants based on customs and traditions, often bordering on regressive measures. They are notoriously anti-women.
18. The curtains came down on 10 March 2017 when a local court convicted 31 workers while acquitting 117 others of the charge of murdering the manager at Maruti-Suzuki’s Manesar plant five years ago. On the legal dimensions of the violations of Maruti workers’ rights, see “Merchants of Menace—Repressing Workers in India’s New Industrial Belt, Violations of Workers’ and Trade Union Rights at Maruti Suzuki India Ltd”—Report of the International Commission for Labour Rights, New York, n.d.
19. *Driving Force*; This entire account of struggle by Maruti workers draws from Mithilesh Kumar and R. Samaddar, “Autonomy in India: Tactical and Strategic Considerations on the New Wave of Workers’ Struggles”, *Viewpoint*, January 2017—<https://viewpointmag.com/2017/01/23/autonomy-in-india-tactical-and-strategic-considerations-on-the-new-wave-of-workers-struggles/>

- [wave-of-workers-struggles/](#) (accessed on 21 April 2017); on some aspects of workers' struggle at the Maruti plants, see also G. Sampath, "Before and After Manesar", 2012, [www.ecologise.in](http://www.ecologise.in) and republished in *Frontier*, 49 (39), 2–8 April 2017.
20. This is of course an extremely simple version of a large corpus of writings. For details, see, Patrick Cuninghame, "Autonomism as a Global Social Movement", *Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, 13, 2010, pp. 451–464; Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980); and Georgy Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday and Life* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006).
  21. Several experiences besides the Maruti workers' struggle bring home the question of power as the immanent one in proletarian politics in postcolonial India. We can mention two here: The first and the most pronounced experience is of the great railway strike of 1974. Since there are two detailed accounts on workers' power as evinced in the general strike of 1974, we did not repeat the discussion here. However, readers are advised to read Stephen Sherlock, *The Indian Railway Strike of 1974: A Study of Power and Organised Labour* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2001), and Ranabir Samaddar, *The Crisis of 1974: The Railway Strike and the Rank and File* (New Delhi: Primus, 2016); The second instance is of the experience of the iron ore miners in Dalli-Rajhara in Chattisgarh in the 1980s and 90s in organising militant movements along with building alternative institutions of life; on this Punyabrata Gun and Sankar Sanyal (eds.), *Sangharsh O Nirman: Sankat Guha Neogy O Bharater Sramik Andolaner Anya Dhara* (in Bengali—*Struggle and Rebuilding of Life: Sankar Guha Neogy and a Different Trend in the Indian Working Class Movement*, (Kolkata: Anustup, 2015). This account is remarkable for its documentation of what it calls the "third strand" of workers' movement in India (pp. 76–88)—the first being the constitutional, reformist trade unionism fostered by the parliamentary Left, the second the radical-extremist struggles led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), and the third being called as the plan of "struggle and reconstruction" (*sangharsh o nirman*), which included workers' movement for alternative economic policy, drawing and fighting for plans alternative to the State's policy for mechanisation and automation in Bhilai steel plant (pp. 207–230), programmes for workers' health and literacy, besides continuous work on developing political consciousness of the workers and linking up with other centres of struggle (p. 47).
  22. For details of the general strike by the workers of the Indian Railways in 1974, see Stephen Sherlock, *The Indian Railway Strike of 1974: A Study of Power and Organised Labour* and Ranabir Samaddar, *The Crisis of 1974: Railway Strike and the Rank and File*.
  23. On the Kanoria Jute Mill struggle, Prafulla Chakrabarty, [Tin Lekhayee Kanoria Jute Miller Sramik Andolan](#) (Kolkata: Kolkata Prakashan, 2014); Kushal

- Debnath, “West Bengal: The Neo-Liberal Offensive in Industry and the Workers’ Resistance”—<http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv9n1/westbengal1.htm> (accessed on 16 October 2014); for a brief history of the autonomous workers’ movements in India with specific reference to West Bengal, <http://sanhati.com/articles/347/> (accessed on 4 December 2016).
24. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1 (1867), trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 682.
  25. Lenin distinguished a trade-union secretary from a tribune of the people; the people’s tribune is the leader who responds to all instances and forms of oppression. Lenin wrote that a revolutionary must be a “tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of people it affects.”—*What is to be Done, Selected Works*, Volume 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp. 154–6.
  26. ‘The St. Petersburg Strike’, *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 8 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), pp. 91–93.
  27. In 1902, when the Belgian workers under the leadership of the Belgian Labour Party launched yet another general strike after resorting to repeated large-scale strike actions, with at least four mass strikes in 1886, 1887, 1891 and 1893, Rosa Luxemburg criticised the Belgian Labour Party for tactical incompetence. She said a general strike forged in advance within the fetters of legality is like a war demonstration with cannons dumped into a river within the very sight of the enemy... “Of course, even during the revolution, mass strikes do not exactly fall from heaven.”—Rosa Luxemburg., *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, 1906, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/massstrike/ch04.htm> (accessed 20 January, 2016).
  28. Frederick Engels, ‘Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France*, 1895—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/intro.htm> (accessed 21 January 2016).
  29. ‘On Strikes’, *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 4 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), pp. 310–11.
  30. On the discrete and the plural nature of sovereignty in India before the colonial time, see Margaret Frenz, *From Contact to Conquest—Transition to British Rule in Malabar, 1790—1805* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 5, “Concept of Rule in Malabar”, pp. 141–169.
  31. C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 36.
  32. On the emergence of regions as parallel centres of power, Mahendra Prasad Singh, “Indian Federalism: Myth and Reality”—*The Frontier*, Volume 49 (20), 20–26 November, 2016—<http://www.frontierweekly.com/articles/vol-49/49-20/49-20-Indian%20Federalism.html#sthash.qVYOGFrC.dpuf> (accessed on 4 December 2016).
  33. I am here drawing from Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 165–66.

## The Problematic of People

### 1 HOW TO STUDY PEOPLE AND CLASSES IN THE HISTORY OF STRUGGLES AND REVOLUTIONS

As a consequence of all the factors discussed in this book, postcolonial politics wrestles with the problem of the *people*. The economy does not know how to tackle the presence of people and shape them into a productive agency. Politics does not know how to turn people into responsible voters and make them enlightened citizens. Marxists do not know how to make sense of people in the framework of an identifiable and definable class.

At the same time, the postcolonial condition is considered as marked by lack of adequate industrialisation, hence lack of a numerically strong working class, by inadequate modern class formations and un-clarified class struggles. And, with exceptions, Marxists have not paid sufficient attention to Marx's historical writings on politics and political struggles, particularly his writings on France—as if these writings belong to European history and are not relevant to the history of the class and national struggles of postcolonial people. This attitude is evident in, India, for instance, where postcolonial theorists of “passive revolution” while discussing economic reforms, and the neoliberal transformation of the country, have been remarkably silent on the class struggles in the two decades of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup> These struggles had actually begun in the 1940s, when class and national struggles meshed with each other, resulting in tremendous

radicalisation of the content of the anti-colonial revolution. The questions of class and people and, by inference, class and nation, had raised their heads then, possibly for the first time in an emphatic manner. Indian Marxists avoided the theoretical issue at stake in their discussions on the 1940s, generally emphasising one or the other, and refused to learn from Mao, who, in the context of Chinese revolution, treated the relationship dialectically. And now, parliamentarianism has submerged most of the Indian Marxists and the Left who refuse to analyse what had happened in the 1960s and 1970s, marked by unprecedented class struggles. I think even a cursory reading of the relevant material would attune us to the problem of the interrelations between classes and the people that infused the revolutionary history of those thirteen years (1965–1977). The problem still haunts us and is laid bare only when political struggles become acute, and rival classes tear at each other in a situation when people have become an active political category. The writings of Karl Marx appear remarkably relevant to such situations, particularly one characterised by a sense of *lack*—lack of industrialisation, investment, growth, class formations, democracy and so on. Where did the struggles come from? How were they conducted? What were the political consequences? How did they demonstrate the dynamics of the relations among classes, people and the nation? These abiding questions lead us back to Marx, who also faced those questions and had to address the issue of *lack*.

There is every reason to read together Marx's three books on contemporary French history.<sup>2</sup> Of the three, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is possibly one of the most discussed works of Marx. One has to read it again and again to learn how Marx wrote contemporary history which would stand the test of time. Sifting through available material Marx demonstrated how to read the roles of various sections of society and the role of what is known as *people*, in social and political struggles and thereby understand the dynamics of class struggle. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is a tract on a counter-revolution, but the aim of which is to cull out from this counter-revolution lessons in revolutionary politics. In this magisterial account *classes* appear as always the *other* site of formal politics. The work is an exercise in dialectical understanding. By comparison, Marx's other two tracts on revolutions happening at the time he was writing, are relatively direct and programmatic on the basis of a theory of class struggle. Yet these other two works, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* and *Civil War in France* are not just books on contemporary history. They are also some of the finest pieces ever written on proletarian politics, outlining

in historical terms some of the essential aspects of what has now come to be known as revolutionary socialism or communism. *The Civil War in France* particularly, became popular, after it was written, in the next two decades in workers' circles. On the other hand *Class Struggles in France* is essential reading in order to understand the method and techniques of class analysis in a living situation. Lenin, who of all twentieth-century revolutionaries had possibly the sharpest programmatic eyes, not without reason allotted the highest importance to these two books. His *State and Revolution* was inspired heavily by what Marx wrote in *The Civil War in France*.

*Class Struggles in France* deals with the defeat of the workers in the 1848 June revolution, and the exclusion from power also of the petty bourgeoisie. Marx also linked the fate of the French working class to a European social revolution. There was an international dimension to the idea of Revolution from the beginning. This is clear also in *The Civil War in France*. Marx connected upsurge with war, nation with social emancipation, national with the international, class with people, and democracy with revolution, precisely because these connections exist and yet most of the time are not obvious and apparent. Class divisions are not always clear till clarified by social struggles, political conflicts and upheavals. In the case of postcolonial societies, this is truer, hence the greater significance of these writings for postcolonial transformation. Marx ended the first section of *Class Struggles in France* with these words,

The Paris proletariat *was forced* into the June insurrection by the bourgeoisie. This sufficed to mark its doom. Its immediate, avowed needs did not drive it to engage in a fight for the forcible overthrow of the bourgeoisie, nor was it equal to this task... By making its burial place the birthplace of the *bourgeois republic*, the proletariat compelled the latter to come out forthwith in its pure form as the state whose admitted object it is to perpetuate the rule of capital, the slavery of labour. Having constantly before its eyes the scarred, irreconcilable, invincible enemy—invincible because its existence is the condition of its own life—bourgeois rule, freed from all fetters, was bound to turn immediately into *bourgeois terrorism*. With the proletariat removed for the time being from the stage and bourgeois dictatorship recognized officially, the middle strata of bourgeois society, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasant class, had to adhere more and more closely to the proletariat as their position became more unbearable and their antagonism to the bourgeoisie more acute...

Finally, the defeat of June divulged to the despotic powers of Europe the secret that France must maintain peace abroad at any price in order to be

able to wage civil war at home. Thus the peoples who had begun the fight for their national independence were abandoned to the superior power of Russia, Austria, and Prussia, but at the same time the fate of these national revolutions was made subject to the fate of the proletarian revolution, and they were robbed of their apparent autonomy, their independence of the great social revolution. The Hungarian shall not be free, nor the Pole, nor the Italian, as long as the worker remains a slave!<sup>3</sup>

Marx went on to show the significance of the *republic* as a bourgeois form of rule. We have to read Marx in these and other passages closely and carefully in order to see how he analyses the classes and their political conduct in the template of struggle marked by the interplay of the two categories, *class* and *people*. There also remained the category of the nation. When the French Republic attacked Rome, Marx noted its implication in terms of committing aggression on other peoples and nations.

Marx's analysis echoes heavily in the postcolonial context of democracy, constitutionalism, formal democracy, wars upon other peoples and the progress of capital through the change of forms of bourgeois rule. Here, as in Marx's France, the perennial problematic seems in one sense to be: Revolution of the people, but struggles of a class or classes; hence also, the question: a class revolution or a people's revolution? Marx addressed the twin problematic of political struggles in this way. Economic crisis affects most of the society; power is concentrated in the hands of the financial oligarchy; workers are still not fully developed for the struggles they have launched; the workers moreover will be soon jettisoned by the republican bourgeoisie; and above all democracy may soon invade other peoples and nations, destroy their freedoms, and create a condition when emancipation of the working class may be possible only with national freedom.

The crisis is a revolutionary crisis, because it has affected all sections of society, particularly various sub-strata composing the *people*, and at the same time propelling the working class to move on. It is thus never a simple question of workers wresting power from the bourgeoisie, but one of various classes, their sub-strata, and the crisis affecting all—but not all in the same way, but differentially—that is in different ways and to different degrees. In one word, a revolution is launched when the revolution is not fully prepared. Workers show class spirit, but the people may not be ready, while the workers' revolution will not be victorious till it appears as a people's revolution.<sup>4</sup> The class therefore will not have the most singular life even when or particularly when it is living, a pure



identity to itself. Its inside will always be immersed in the phantasmagoria of the *people*.

As we move on to *The Civil War in France*, we find the problematic posed in an even sharper manner. These two books handle in a dialectical way the historical question of relations among classes and groups, and the relationships among various population groups—forged, challenged and re-forged through class struggles. By dialectical method we mean three things—(a) locating contradiction at the heart of a relationship; (b) looking at the process of unity of opposites; and finally (c) grasping the meaning of negation—the principle of negation operating by various means such as displacement, mediation, interpellation, resolution, transference, extinction, transformation, transcendence and so on. To locate the problem of revolution in an analysis of the question of the people, therefore, we must see how Marx in these writings continuously moved from the terrain of class to that of the people, and returned. In this way he analysed the composition of a class or the people at a given point of time, as concretely determined and a concrete determinant. He was, therefore, always alluding to the organic composition of class from the point of society, economy and politics—all that make a people. In the same way he was analysing the organic composition of people from the point of class, and thus from the point of production relations. This was how he related class and people to state, government, organs of power, modes of power, army, police, militia and other institutions of governance and rule.

## 2 CITIZENS, PEOPLE AND THE POLITICAL MOMENT

To understand the theoretical significance of what Marx did in these two books let us take a short detour. Ever since the rise of the “people” as a category in late middle ages and early modern time, which in the West is referred to as the “Machiavellian moment”, there is this idea of an organic connection between the emergence of the people as a collective political actor, the ideal of republicanism, and revolution that will make the people “citizens”. The classic work expounding this idea is of course *The Machiavellian Moment*, a work of intellectual history, which posits a connection between republican thought in early sixteenth century Florence, the English Civil War and the American Revolution.<sup>5</sup> The Machiavellian moment is the moment when a new republic first confronts the problem of maintaining the stability of its ideals and institutions. Machiavellian thought was a response to a series of crises facing early sixteenth-century Florence

in which a seemingly virtuous state was on the cusp of destruction. In response, Machiavelli sought to revive classical republican ideals. The republican story tells us, thus, that all the revolutions from early modern times have faced similar such moments and offered related sets of answers. The Machiavellian moment has come to represent the so-called republican synthesis, which holds that revolution gives birth to a state marked by a fear of corruption and a desire to promote classical virtue.

Now, like all myths, the republican myth has some truth in it. The republican moment brought into the political world a cluster of concepts associated with the notion of the people and the popular; concepts such as: sovereignty, legality and governmental power. Yet in tracts on actual political struggles and manifestos we find little discussion on the significance of these as problems of popular politics. Popular politics had to encounter and surmount these problems in order to develop into a constituent power that would not reproduce the power it sought to replace. No longer could anybody discuss “people” or various problems afflicting popular politics without relating the concept to sovereign power, legality and governmental power. It also meant discussing (1) supremacy of authority or rule as exercised by a sovereign or sovereign state; (2) rank, authority, or power; (3) complete independence and self-government; and finally (4) a territory existing as an independent state. The idea of *people* thus made us confront the issues of the right and power to command, decide, rule or judge—in other words, authority, command, control, domination, dominion, jurisdiction, mastery, might, prerogative, sway, autonomy, freedom, independence, liberty and self-government. Yet, the interesting point is that while with the emergence of the *people* these questions became important for politics, the struggles were actually led by classes and conducted among classes. Revolutions, therefore, had two registers: on one hand, *classes* as actors forced these questions to the fore; on the other, these questions could be posed only in the frame of the *people*.

An important question therefore emerged within a revolution and faced being overwhelmed by the republican myth: first, do people make an undifferentiated category? Then, with economy becoming increasingly the most crucial component of life from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, two other questions became even more important: first, do all sections of people have the same stake in revolution—does the revolution mean the same for all? And, second, if the Machiavellian moment is one of anarchy and a void, does this not mean that a revolution is connected to what came to be known during the Westphalian century as

“interstate” or “the international”. So, the question that Marx faced and set out to historically investigate and resolve was: What is the meaning of a revolution with respect to people and with respect to the world?<sup>6</sup>

We know now through these books how he conceptually treated the two terms “people” and “class” as alter-realities in discussing the revolution. We can also see how he demonstrated that the conditions of the republican constitution were all material.<sup>7</sup> If we can sum up these conditions as a crisis, we can say after Marx, rupture became a law of development.<sup>8</sup> But then it was also a rupture of the bond between *class* and the *people*. It meant, further, a process of dislocation of power from the abstract terrain of general will (representing the union of class and the people) to the concrete terrain of law and wealth, legally defined in the form of property (whence the unity would break). It meant that the advance of constituent power was now reflected in society through the manifestation of the divisions on which the society was founded. But as social space started dominating political space, the right of the permanent exercise of the role of masses to constitute politics became a nightmare at the moment of the constitution of the republic. Masses had to dissolve into *people*, a legal category. Labour (as the core of class) could not be allowed in any way to define historical subjectivity, law (as the core of the people) had to become the historical subject. Yet we must not make the mistake that in these three historical writings Marx constructed the solution to such closure in terms of *society versus the state* or *constituent power versus constituted power* or *social versus the political* or even *class versus the people*. The reason is that Marx wanted to avoid the line of *civil mediation* as the solution. For him the line was always constructing a revolutionary resolution, and thus the ever-present possibility of practical criticism.

What we begin to perceive here is the absolute role of crisis as the singular moment of production and constitution of the people. It is crisis that forces labour, the producing machine, into constituting itself into a subject. Without crisis, as Marx would say, insofar as capital is a relation, and specifically a relation to living labour capacity, the worker’s consumption reproduces the relation. But the dialectical process is opened up not by God but by the contradictions of material life.<sup>9</sup>

But we must also see in this connection Marx analysing another process of mediation and interpellation, namely, the idea of the nation working as an interceding factor in the relation between the people and the world, the *interstate*, the *international*. Thus *The Civil War in France* is also a commentary on the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war, Prussian occupation

of France, capitulation of France and the setting up of the reactionary government of Thiers. The contradiction then was, as Marx pointed out, people may become the political actor, but classes, with their respective stakes, remained. The rights of man invoked in the revolution would now become thorns in the flesh of a society. There is thus also a reversal of sort—from general will to classes and class divisions.<sup>10</sup> The republic manipulates the rights because it becomes a form of bourgeois class rule, and thus increasingly takes an imperial form. Nation can become an empire-like formation. Thus republican France attacks Italy, and Prussia moves from a strictly defensive war to occupation and then cedes power to the French bourgeoisie and not to the Commune. Marx therefore repeatedly remarked in *The Civil War in France* that the French Empire was not like its predecessors, the Legitimate Monarchy, the Constitutional Monarchy and the Parliamentary Republic. It was both its most complete and its ultimate political form. It was the State power of modern class rule. While Michel Foucault has described in detail the ways in which governmental thinking evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries amidst the permanent reality of war—both international and civil—and thus compelled the three realities to be bound together in their respective destinies, namely security, territory and population,<sup>11</sup> what remains absent in his analysis is the mutability of forms of rule. For that we return to Marx.

One of the complaints against Marx has been that he focused on the State and neglected government; hence he discussed classes and people and not classes and populations—the products of modern governments and politics. It is a misdirected complaint. Apart from the fact that *Capital* itself is a demonstration of how a certain rationality (the rationale of capital) produces categories of population, such as the worker, the merchant capitalist, etc., *The Civil War in France* actually deals with governments at work: the government of Versailles, the government of Paris Commune, the conduct of other cities, Assembly of the Rurals, government of the counterfeit Empire and so on, their differences, and their respective class roots, connotations and significance. In the same spirit Lenin cautioned against ascribing omnipotence to the category *people*, and wrote early in his political life the famous tract, *What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* (1894).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, by discussing population categories one is able to point out the frequently vacuous nature of the category *people*. Michel Foucault showed that precisely when the Machiavellian moment was gathering strength there was something else at work, the vivisection of that category, its

exhaustion, the emergence of its counter-figure: that of population tied to government, inasmuch people were tied to the State; likewise, population tied to policy and people tied to sovereignty; population tied to government and people tied to democracy. But Foucault left out the question of how these two levels worked in historical dynamics, and in leaving this question out he was possibly guided by the idea that revolution was past as a chapter of modern history, and now the time was for governments and populations. Hence, he had no space for classes in his analysis. All were creatures of an ever-mutating policy game. We must realise, then, the contradictory significance of the people/population binary and read Marx's treatment of the problem.

To combat the liberal myth of the people, critical thinking in recent years has emphasised another concept, *multitude*. Friedrich Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* had noted the emptiness of the concept, *people*, and had remarked (in "The Great Towns"),

The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy?... And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honor another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space... The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme. Hence it comes, too, that the social war, the war of each against all, is here openly declared....<sup>13</sup>

*The Civil War in France* gives us a further disaggregating view of Paris, narrating at the same time how Paris presented to the society in face of reaction and war, a *general will*.

### 3 THE MULTITUDE

The present currency of the word *multitude* is said to have drawn inspiration from Spinoza who used the term in the sense of common man and had said, "The multitude of Jews and gentiles, to whom the prophets and

apostles preached and for whom they wrote in ancient times, understood the language of the prophets and apostles. This knowledge of the language enabled them to grasp what the prophets meant... What about the general mass of people today?... This grasp is what the multitude trusts, not the testimony of interpreters. And in respect of the other things—the ones that are not needed for salvation—the general mass of people are in the same boat as the learned.”<sup>14</sup> Besides Spinoza, the other authors of the concept are Machiavelli and Hobbes. With Hobbes we get the idea of the two opposite concepts of *people* and *multitude*—the former reflecting the phenomena of stability, organicity, responsibility and compactness, the latter reflecting anarchy, disaggregated state, unruliness and danger posed by a crowd. “Multitude” in this argument remained the “other” of people, as population remained the “other” in the above-mentioned train of thought. Paolo Virno in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, however, does not mention the uses by Marx of this term.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to see how the concept of multitude can be used in a class context, unless we also bring up for discussion the idea of people and the class/people question as the route through which we get back to this early modern idea, which probably signified something like lower orders or lower depths. Paolo Virno does this in the context of Hobbes, but this remains inadequate because while he dissects the notion of people, his treatment of class as an element of the relationship (class/people) remains inadequate.

In *The Civil War in France* Marx refers to multitude in a dialectical way. Marx wrote in the “Third Address” (Chapter 4, “The Paris Workers’ Revolution and Thiers’s Reactionary Massacres”), “Thiers opened the civil war by sending Vinoy, at the head of a *multitude* of *sergents-de-ville*, and some regiments of the line, upon a nocturnal expedition against Montmartre, there to seize, by surprise the artillery of the National Guard. It is well known how this attempt broke down before the resistance of the National Guard and the fraternization of the line with the people” (italics mine).<sup>16</sup> And then in the same “Third Address” (Chapter 5, “The Paris Commune”), “However, after their one heroic exploit of June, the bourgeois republicans had, from the front, to fall back to the rear of the ‘Party of Order’—a combination formed by all the rival fractions and factions of the appropriating classes. The proper form of their joint-stock government was the Parliamentary republic, with Louis Bonaparte for its president. Thiers was a regime of avowed class terrorism and deliberate insult towards the vile *multitude*.” And then again in the same address, “The Paris of M. Thiers was not the real Paris of the vile *multitude*, but a phantom Paris,

the Paris of the francs-fileurs, the Paris of the Boulevards, male and female—the rich, the capitalist, the gilded, the idle Paris...”<sup>17</sup> (italics mine). Multitude does not replace class here; it does not replace people nor does it replace population. In its plural composition it is subject to bourgeois power precisely because it is plural and speaks of the lower depths of society, vile to the bourgeoisie and a factor in revolution.

How much can we then conflate the two terms—class and people—in this concept, *multitude*? Or, three terms to be precise—class, people and population—in the concept? In Marx, who was aware of the potency of the usage, we do not find any attempt to conflate the three concepts; we only find their interrelations described historically, contingently, predicated on several conjunctures. It is as if the relations are one of a situation of conjuncture; as if one is always conjuring up into existence the presence of the other in such contentious situation. We can also say that in one we have the real presence of the other, which is to say, the other where we have the real presence of the one, the opposition of the effective to the ineffective, again which will be to say a historical temporality made of different presents contemporary to themselves yet not identical to each other. The organic is thus operative through the conjunctural rather than disappearing into it. Thus, class and people remain tied to each other, not by tending to merge with one or the other but by becoming conjunctural elements of a situation.<sup>18</sup> In this co-presence of class and people there is a dangerous radicalisation of events. It is a situation, where the presence of class will always bring back the people, and the presence of people will always conjure up the spectre of class. In this displacement caused by and resulting in the invocation of the double, the other, we also witness the contradiction between the two temporalities—of the people and the class (general time and the accelerated time)—resulting in an anachronistic situation known as *conflict, the time of crisis*. Anachrony to Marx was striking difference. Thus the important question put to us will be: Can the language of class be translated into one of people? How will revolution resolve the spectral presence of the other (class *vis a vis* people or vice versa). And is this not at the heart of the postcolonial problematic of social transformation, and thus the great problematic of transcendence, in which the revolution-inducing strains are at once displaced and fulfilled? The problematic of transcendence is thus constitutively tied to the Marxist question of antithesis—the moment of radical rupture that the situation attempts to repress, yet that bursts through the existing order.

Let us proceed further with one more related question: Does the concept *multitude* herald the end of the *nation*—another translating terrain in the two way passage of class, people (the other terrain being the inter-state or the international), in as much the concept of *population* seems to herald the death of the nation? Let us see how Lenin and Gramsci—two of the major twentieth century revolutionaries—grappled with the question. Lenin for instance in “Theses on the National Question”, written in June 1913, stood in defence of the national question, argued that the question was still relevant, that it was at the heart of the democratic issue, but differentiated the national question from the fundamentalist stand of cultural autonomy of every group or section, and said that proletarian politics was not against national self-determination; and the proletarian manifesto grounds itself in the dialectical relation between the nation, the international and the class.<sup>19</sup>

Antonio Gramsci also invoked the national question. Though he did not speak of the colonial question, the *national* in Gramsci had within it the Southern question (dimensions of geography, underdevelopment, peasantry, etc.). Faced with the same contradiction, Gramsci, spoke of the “national-popular”,<sup>20</sup> at times people-nation, mainly to argue that national-popular is the agenda (also the product) of socialist hegemony, mainly cultural, and without establishing hegemony the proletariat would not achieve revolution and revolutionary transformation of society. In the 1920s and 1930s, and with the rise of fascism and the failure of the Western European working-class movements to prevent it, Gramsci began to ask: why was the working class not necessarily revolutionary, why did it surrender, or at least yield, to fascism? He argued that class struggle must always involve ideas and ideologies, ideas that would make the revolution or prevent it; hence he argued that politics had to be more “dialectical” than “deterministic”; and for this reason a revolutionary theory that recognised the autonomy, independence and importance of culture and ideology was of critical importance. Hegemony was needed to bring the backward sections of the proletariat, other classes such as the peasantry, the petty producing masses and the petty bourgeoisie in general. Hegemony represented a “historic bloc”.<sup>21</sup> We have been witness to three historical consequences of such a strategy to deal with the contradictory relations between class, people and the nation. First, the pursuit of hegemony has proved to be riding a tiger; it has led to many compromises without any specific revolutionary political objective. Second, it has subjected the politics of revolution to a politics of cultural gradualism. And finally when this national-popular was achieved in the form of *people-nation*, the bourgeoisie was found to be back on the



centre stage of politics. Of course one can argue that notwithstanding these historical deficiencies, the Gramscian idea of hegemony at least helped socialist defence against fascism, because above all it reminded those pursuing the politics of class the salience of two inter-related realities—*people and the nation*.

In *The Civil War in France* Marx again and again invoked the nation. Thus in the chapter “The Prussian Occupation of France”, he wrote, “Let the sections of the International Working Men’s Association in every country stir the working classes to action. If they forsake their duty, if they remain passive, the present tremendous war will be but the harbinger of still deadlier international feuds, and lead in every nation to a renewed triumph over the workman by the lords of the sword, of the soil, and of capital.”<sup>22</sup> And then, in the chapter “The Paris Commune”, he wrote, “The unity of the *nation* was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organized by Communal Constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence.”<sup>23</sup>

In this age of scepticism of the idea of revolution and revolutions that happen but often end in defeat, where do we stand on this? As a tentative reply, two more issues remain to be referred to before we end this discussion: recent hopes on the idea of the *multitude* in the light of the political lessons of the two works by Marx; and the specifics of the postcolonial reconstitution of interrelations.

Is *multitude* a dissolution of classes or an expression of a multi-class composition? Does it indicate something that Mao termed the united front? A multi-class, multi-group embodiment, which is crucial to every revolution that the proletariat wages? Does revolution achieve the conflation of the three—class, people and population? The answer is “perhaps so”, because at that hour of revolution the multitude achieves an organic character, which transforms it into a people. But clearly we cannot overlook the federal character and the dialogic composition of this re-composed people, which Marx speaks of repeatedly in *The Civil War in France*, namely the strategy of the Commune to dialogue with others. Not only that, as Engels later pointed out on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Paris Commune, Blanquists behaved in the most transparent and merciful way in the conduct of the Commune, while the Proudhonists went on to reorganise large-scale industry with an autonomous workers’ association.<sup>24</sup> We must then think along the line of a recomposition of the

organism, indicated by Marx in *Capital*, where besides presenting the picture of labour working as part of a collective bodily organism running like a machine, he also spoke of the individual being divided up by capitalist operation, and questioned the presumed unity of the body. He suggested a way to an alternative conception of the body in which any unity that the body may possess is never fixed.<sup>25</sup>

However, we shall lose this dialectical attitude if we efface the difference between two concepts—class and people—and merge them in the concept of multitude. Hardt and Negri think that the multitude is being regenerated out of the twin decompositions of class and identity politics and emerges out of the new, twenty-first century conditions of global capitalism. “Multitude is a class concept” not restricted to waged workers but extending to the “potentially infinite number of classes that comprise contemporary society based not only on economic differences but also on those of race, ethnicity, geography, gender, sexuality, and other factors.”<sup>26</sup> In short, the multitude is comprised “of all those who work under the rule of capital thus potentially as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital”.<sup>27</sup> The multitude “refuses the organic unity of the body” and is fundamentally different from past Marxist notions of a unified class in that “the multitude cannot be reduced to a unity and does not submit to the rule of one”.<sup>28</sup> We have thus suggestions of some alternative body architecture—of corals and other more complex bodily metaphors of roots and rhizomes, the last invoked by Deleuze and Guattari. Hardt and Negri wrote in 2004, “One of the most surprising elements of the events in Seattle in November 1999 and in each of the major such events since then is that groups we had previously assumed to have different and even contradictory interests managed to act in common—environmentalists with trade unionists, anarchists with church groups, gays and lesbians with those protesting the prison–industrial complex. The groups are not unified under any single authority but rather relate to each other in a network structure”.<sup>29</sup> In *A Grammar of the Multitude* Paolo Virno wrote that the post-Fordist economy does away—almost—with the state, old classes and people, and concluded in this way:

The concept of multitude was meant to demonstrate that a theory of class need not choose between unity and plurality. A multitude is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, beginning from this unobjectionable intention, the contemporary theory of the multitude has moved quite a bit from Marx. At least one reason for the over-theorisation of the idea of the multitude is the unrealistic notion of these Western authors of a general post-Fordist global economy, which has supposedly done away with industrial capital, manufacturing, primitive accumulation and so on. However global capitalism is incomparably broader and more complicated than what appears in the West. In China, India and several other countries we see all the aspects of global economy present, and entire societies with their non-capitalist sectors subjected to capitalist laws in unforeseen ways. Governments, too, are developing new techniques for governing societies. The global situation perched on a combination of neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial capitalism presents us with the need for reflecting once again on the relations between people, population and multitude; and at the same time owing to the postcolonial nature of present capitalism we cannot forget the ever-present realities of *class* and *nation* acting as the translating medium of these notions. Indeed, the great anti-colonial revolutions did not bring the nation to an end, but reconstituted it. These great popular revolutions have not given birth to unified, organic, undifferentiated peoplehood, but to a multiple, variegated multitude whose composites are not just population groups subjected eternally to governmental policies and operations of capital, but unique singularities acting often in unison through a dialogic mode. The reason is that class has not died out—not in the time of the anti-colonial revolutions, not even in these times postcolonial capitalism. This, then, is the reason why we must re-read the three tracts of Marx to learn how the reality of class operates in times of great change.

Anyone familiar with the postcolonial context will know the dominant presence of what we call “popular movement” in the contemporary history of social and political conflicts, the endless invocation of people and the popular, and the almost apologetic attitude of the communist leadership in such a situation when asked to explain what has happened to class in these conflicts. Marx’s historical writings are important because they tell us how to read and analyse the dual issues of class and people in situations when the living ghost of one imposes itself on another—ideologically, fantastically, automatically; so much so that the effect is deeply destabilising. This is what happened in the militant movements in India in the 1960s and 1970s—the two decades referred to earlier. One has constantly subverted the other, till the ontological and the critical have merged to bring

about a transformation in political consciousness. Marx not only did not deny ontology, and thus the presence of different phenomena (class, people, nation ...) in order to develop critique, but took them into account, as shown in his historical analyses (including his analysis in all three volumes of *Capital*) in order to develop critique. In the postcolonial condition we need this dialectical unity. "People" is more of an ideological representation, yet, as Marx argued as early as *The German Ideology*, these representations, in this case people, arising from the empirical world of classes develops into an entity that is not only conceived, but confronts the classes as something objective. The challenge of critique is therefore double: critique has to work not only on the margins, but on the phenomenon itself. That is how Marx developed his critique of capitalism, by working on capital.

Mao Tse Tung, the theoretician of people's democracy, was clear on this question. The basis for him always remained the analysis of classes in Chinese society, the class composition of peasantry in China, and a similar analysis of the Chinese bourgeoisie.<sup>31</sup> On this analysis he built the notion of the united front, and when he expounded the theory of new democracy or people's democracy he had secured it with class content.<sup>32</sup> Following Marx, in this case also, analysis and theorisation was a product of class struggles, class conflicts and great revolutionary upsurges. In other words, the union of class and people happens in the midst of a revolutionary struggle and mass upsurge, when people emerge as a radical category propelling the struggle forward.<sup>33</sup> The united front of classes achieves a critical dialogic formation. The experience of popular fronts in Europe has to be studied in this light. One must also investigate why in so many West European countries popular fronts did not culminate in socialist revolutions, and how class lost out to the *popular, the people*.

In other words, we are confronted with one difficult question: How can the proletariat become the *universal class*, which will not only mean that the proletariat is able to speak for the society, known as the *people*, but also displace itself so that it can represent the society, and thereby become universal? Hence the following poser remains always crucial: Who are the people? What do we mean when we say popular?

As we move towards concluding this discussion, we must recall the well-known term *populism* that has embodied in a perverse way this unity. We shall now turn to a discussion on that.

## 4 POPULISM

The history of engagement of Marxism with populism is long and tortuous. There have been no people without an ideology of the people (often representing the worldview of the petty bourgeoisie and the associated unorganised sections of society), and this we can term as populism. The economic content is often meagre, and when not hollow it tries to deliver welfare to the people without seriously disturbing property relations. Yet while its economic possibilities are limited, its political possibilities have been quite noticeable. Populism has various forms, agrarian populism being one of the widely prevailing forms.<sup>34</sup> Agrarian populism has ranged from a belief in the salience of the old commune system in land, as in pre-revolutionary Russia, to limited land redistribution as the way to escape an agrarian crisis, as in West Bengal in India, to demanding from the state subsidies and higher procurement and remunerative prices for crops and various other limited sops to the peasantry. Populism has had cultural expressions besides ideological attributes, such as faith in strong leadership, distrust of all mediating institutions between the ruler and the ruled, a plebiscitary mode of conducting politics and a spiritual rediscovery of the nation. In the process *people*, representing the lower orders of society, becomes the elect idea, because it is able to submerge class differences between the workers, other petty producers and the middle classes, and is able to produce a society out of a given or defined people.

Proletarian history shows that the working class evolves;<sup>35</sup> the working class is not a solid, homogenous crust of material preserved in a museum. Many of the formal features of capitalism such as formal free wage agreements may not be enough to understand neoliberal capitalism, which is marked by an enormously heterogeneous/complex composition, and one of the effective routes to understand the heterogeneity is to see how gender, caste, race, age, territory, occupational holds and skill act as fault-lines in the said composition. These fault-lines point to not only the borders and boundaries of capital/labour, but also how migration of labour acts as the *deus ex machina* of modern capitalism to cross those borders.

Neoliberal capitalism has made obsolete many of the past discussions on continuation of peasant societies, stages of growth, the iceberg formation of economic structure, the centre-periphery model, unremunerative productive activities, subsistence activities, commodification versus colonisation, forced labour versus free labour in the small and unorganised sites of production and so on, precisely because neoliberal capitalism thrives by challenging these distinctions and by incorporating into itself all that was

known as the informal, the colonised, the South, the gendered, the non-productive and so on.<sup>36</sup> These debates indicate the ground on which discussions on populism have been conducted in postcolonial capitalism. With the march of neoliberalism, what Marx would have called *the different moments of primitive accumulation* now distribute themselves more or less in an analysable order: practising internal colonialism based on core-periphery relations, national debt, various modes of taxation, financialisation of the economy, primarily of land and other extractive commodities, the rise of new forms of credit capital, flexibilisation of labour, the comingling of organised and unorganised forms and structures of production, variegated supply chains, the zoning of production activities, corridors of supply, various forms of protectionist wall combined with a world trade regime, and violence. In this milieu of extreme dispossession the world is witnessing populism whose social basis is the lower order of society. In other words, populism can be right wing, but it can also be of the poorer classes. It is important not to suspend the class criterion and not to ignore the social basis of the populist response to the crisis. In many ways we shall see a remarkable similarity between populisms of the nineteenth century and those of our time. Is it not then strange that populism is often treated with sweeping observations (such as populism is fascism and Nazism, or, charitably, it is nihilism) without making concrete historical investigations?

In the postcolonial context already marked by the neoliberal turn of capitalism it is all the more important to notice and analyse the all-round institutional crisis of liberal democracy in order to have a dialectical understanding of lower-order populism. In a situation marked by the collapse of all welfare functions of the state, populism at times signifies the intense craving of the poor masses for public protection and public power—a kind of displaced site of social justice.

We can recall Teodor Shanin's *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (1983).<sup>37</sup> While discussing Russian populism<sup>38</sup> Shanin was careful not to present the case as one of backward country versus a developed capitalist economy. He did not counterpose the supposed model of Marx's *Capital* (Volume I) with later writings of Marx, but showed how the writings of Russian populist revolutionaries contemporary to Marx (mainly Nikolai Chernyshevskii) and later on of Lenin resembled Marx's own thoughts developing in the last ten years of his life on the question of the "Russian road". Shanin noted that Marx liked the populist idea of Russian labouring classes waging war against the State that represented to the greatest degree

in Russia the capitalist order of exploitation, and that the labouring classes consisted of “peasants, part time workers, and wage workers”. The persistence of agrarian populism neither suggests the resilience of the peasant mode of production, nor its demise in the wake of capitalism. Whether peasant society exists, whether peasant labour is actually multifarious labour (that is combining other forms of labour, such as artisanal mining) is relevant, but more relevant is the central question under capitalism, namely what happens to labour, in this case peasant labour?

In India the discussion of the peasant mode of production in academic debates around the question of mode of production happened in the wake of the peasant struggles in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>39</sup> And, as happens with academic debates, while peasant struggles in the old form slowly gave way to other forms of struggles, academic debates hovered over dead or dying issues. In part, our obsession with the transition question was responsible for it, and our Marx was kept confined to issues of two transitions: from feudalism to capitalism, and from the division of labour under artisanal production to factory-based organisation of labour.<sup>40</sup> That they could co-exist and that a new capitalist reality could incorporate artisanal arrangements into a global economy was something we have taken some time to fathom. We are now in a time which is not only the time of capitalism, but also marked by what can be called a *production complex* consisting of artisanal, manufacturing, large-scale factory organisation, and technologically automated production chains. Populism has reemerged in this new condition, where it has become at times the immediate defence of the poorer classes against the debilitating effects of globalisation. Thus, in countries of Latin America, Africa and in several countries of Asia, including India, populist politics has resurfaced. The situation forces us to note its class basis.

In India we saw right-wing populism in Indira Gandhi’s time;<sup>41</sup> recently we have witnessed in West Bengal another story of populism whose social basis is the poorer sections of society.

In the period 1965–75 there were widespread agrarian unrest and workers’ strikes, culminating in the 1974 general strike of railwaymen; there were food riots, student revolts, the Bangladesh War, massive civil disobedience and economic crisis.<sup>42</sup> The decade of crisis was marked by two simultaneous developments: worker and peasant militancy and authoritarian rule, which adopted populist measures to neutralise the popular upsurge, and finally imposed a National Emergency (1975–77).

In West Bengal there was a similar social crisis in 2001–2011. Food production, poverty reduction and public distribution of essential commodities

suffered. The situation was aggravated by forcible acquisition of peasants' land for the benefit of monopoly bourgeoisie and agrarian unrest in various parts of the region.<sup>43</sup> This time, the decade of crisis (on a lower scale) resulted in lower-class populism.

It is important, therefore, to understand the specific historical context and the specific mode of populist politics in order to make out the ways in which class and people relate to each other. From that angle, we may say with some exaggeration, populism is the mediating ground of two different phenomena: class and people.

We can now see specific relevance of the postcolonial experience to the problematic of populism. We still have to analyse the enormous experiences of populist politics with which the postcolonial countries have resisted the bourgeoisie and a very authoritarian institutionalist straitjacket of democracy. In the time of neoliberal globalisation if democracy is the path of passive revolution and capitalist development, populism remains one of the principal weapons in the hands of the lower classes to defend their existence when threatened by ruthless corporate interests. Populism evokes the links between the classes and masses, between petty producers and workers. It accepts all the prerequisite of the bourgeois democracy as eternal forms but wants to eliminate this bourgeois order as the basis and the consequence. With destabilisation of the market economy in the last ten years or so, populism has come to represent the derelict state of the public monuments of bourgeois politics before they have completely crumbled. In some way then, populism represents an unstable historic bloc in the time of neoliberal crisis. It is a response to crisis. Since precarious life is the general postcolonial condition, populism retains an abiding reference to it. In the absence or weak presence of a communist movement, populism is the weapon of the weak. Populism enables people to articulate their demands against indebtedness, precariousness and governmental austerity measures; it raises the discourse of rights to a new contentious level, and heightens the awareness that in time of crisis people feel the need of a government which can protect them, to some extent at least, and in doing that government can disregard the bourgeois institutional and conservative discourse of responsibility, and make a case for defending a society under attack. If the social movements in Europe aim to conjure up a form of politics on the basis of social assemblies and assemblages, populist movements in the postcolonial world aim to conjure up a society on the basis of populist politics—a society fractured into classes, groups, fractions or strata, where caste, ethnicity, gender and many other identities



are to be reassembled on the foundations of some popular perceptions of claims and justice. It has a healthy disrespect for the institutionalist–authoritarian version of democracy. To that end it can become personality-centric, assimilative, coalitional, tactical and issue-oriented.<sup>44</sup>

We have to note that those who have voiced this warning against the supposed omnipresence of populism are mostly the parties and persons in power. In the neoliberal discourse populism is a pejorative word. It is to be denounced because it is a form of politics that combines demagoguery, charismatic leadership, rhetoric and lower culture.

While the neoliberal denouncement is based on false reading of a particular form of politics, it is true that populism will, like society, be seen as composed of two separate entities—the people and the corrupt, anti-people elite. In this sense it aims to replace the old bipartisan politics (right/social democratic and left) with a new one (rich, urban rulers/people). Thus, the larger political agenda, such as an alternative vision of economy or politics, is not the concern of populist politics. Populism is thus neither inherently the true content of democracy nor its negation. All that we can say is that to a great extent it is opposed to liberal democracy. It can be illiberal, but in many other cases it can be pluralist. It is thus neither to the right nor to the left; or can be both. Perhaps it is more on the left in the European South and more to the right in the European North. In Eastern Europe, agrarian populism had a remarkable history. Racist and anti-immigrant parties later embraced populist politics and language.

Here is the relevance of the postcolonial experiences of populism. Its relation with democracy, particularly with parliamentary democracy, is much more complex and contentious. Even though it abides by the rules of democratic governance, it is cynical about these rules, almost bordering on a healthy disrespect. At heart it knows that democracy has an essential populist side to it (precisely what Aristotle had taught us). Thus, under populist politics in postcolonial countries allusions to people have proliferated dramatically, if newspapers are to be believed, though, to be historically faithful, democracy was always in some respects a business of putting the *demos* on stage. Filthy talks characteristic of daily life, its coarseness and masculinity, threats, words of coaxing and cajoling, beating into submission coupled with spontaneous dialogism—all that we associate with the daily life of the lower depths make their marks in populist politics.

As in several postcolonial countries, the language of politics changes with the entry of lower classes into mass parliamentary politics. Stakes in

politics become high for them. Civility can wait. Inasmuch as the earlier civility of language had no reference or equivalence to the administrative methods of law and order, today the barbarity of language has little relation to the amount of actual administrative coercion. Whatever doomsday prophets tell, life in the postcolonial world is not necessarily nasty, brutish and short, though the postcolonial world's share of global violence cannot be denied. Cities, small towns and villages are not burning in the postcolonial world, where the coarse language of populist world signifies something else. Power is now exercised in a different way, at different scale, and at different speed. This is where the *demos* comes into play. Previously power was exercised in the name of birth, lineage, education, status, caste, patrimony and so on. Now, with parliamentary democracy and regular votes, power must be exercised finally in the name of the *demos*.

Yet populism is a double-edged sword. This is what Ernesto Laclau forgot when he wanted to identify a reason, *popular reason*.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary Gramsci spoke of *common sense* and Mao spoke of *from the masses to the masses*. If the idea of common sense indicates embedded, incoherent and spontaneous beliefs and assumptions, the latter concept admits that there are ideas and sensitivities below, which require deliberation and judgement through collective and critical procedure to become elements of revolutionary politics. Ideas of people cannot be ignored, they cannot be deified. They must be the raw material of communist political work, the essence of what Mao repeatedly called, *mass line*.

Hence, the crucial thing is that the nature of populism has to be understood in the specific historical context in which it emerges, and aims to combine the contradictory pulls of the time. For the problem of populism is precisely that it embraces a range of diverse and often contradictory political beliefs; reciprocally, movements as varied as fascism and Peronism, or leaders as distinct as Margaret Thatcher and Hugo Chávez. It does not mean of course that populism thereby becomes hopelessly vague or imprecise. The distinctiveness of populism is that it gathers together disparate ideological positions or political demands, and stresses their equivalence in terms of a shared antagonism to a given instance of political power or authority. In other words, populism is distinct due to its form rather than its content: It tends to divide (and so simplify) the social field into two distinct camps, championing the camp of the 'people'.<sup>46</sup> Populism is not destined by some law of nature to be fascism, which the conscientious, responsible, and theological Leftists tend to believe, though populism may slide into the latter. There will be grounds to fight populism in defence of the rights of the lower classes of people in particular, when a populist government

becomes xenophobic, subservient to big, autocratic and corporate interests. To the same extent, if and when a populist government helps the people with populist measures, howsoever small these measures may be, the Left, who claim to be leaders of the people, must support them. Populism becomes at times a thorn in the body of neoliberal governmentality. We have to remember that “neoliberal governmentality consists of the fact that it construes neo-liberalism not just as ideological rhetoric, as a political-economic reality... but above all as a political project that endeavours to create a social reality that it suggests already exists.... We can decipher a neo-liberal governmentality in which not only the individual body, but also collective bodies and institutions (public administrations, universities, etc), corporations and states have to be ‘lean’, ‘fit’, ‘flexible’, ‘reasonable’, and ‘autonomous’.... It highlights the intimate relationship between ‘ideological’ and ‘political-economic’ agencies.... This enables us to shed sharper light on the effects neo-liberal governmentality has in terms of (self-)regulation and domination.”<sup>47</sup> Populism upsets neoliberal calculations by always producing two rival jurisdictions through its play of the double game: the jurisdiction of the poor, the immigrant and insistent urge for some indefinable justice, and that of the citizen, formal democratic institutions and law.

We need a more discerning view. In the age of postcolonial globalisation, liberal democracy may come and go. Populism as a distinct form of politics marked by the presence of the lower classes will remain. That will be the biggest challenge for the Left in coming years in shaping anti-capitalist strategy. If the account of populism offered in the preceding pages is even remotely correct, then clearly the challenge of populism will not be resolved by any sudden new discovery of how things really are, or by ideological postures. It will be decided, if history allows us the leisure to decide such issues, only by a slow and painful choice between alternative self-images of the Left.<sup>48</sup>

The challenge of populism is conceptually at a deeper level also. By suggesting in one and single form the politics of class as well as politics of people (rights, claims, an urge for an indefinable justice and a just government) populism indicates a deeper feature of modern emancipative politics—the continuous coming together of the two trajectories of liberty and equality.<sup>49</sup> Yet, as is clear from experiences of populism the world over, they never come together; class struggle and the poor people’s urge for justice never completely merge. It is not so much a conceptual paradox as it is produced by history and actual life—derived from specific historical conditions and with determinate, real-world consequences. Such a politics is always discrete and incomplete. It always calls for a dialectical negotiation.

The need for such a dialectical negotiation is all the greater today given the fact that radical postcolonial thinkers engaged with Antonio Gramsci in the hope that his analyses of Italy would have a close historical bearing on the postcolonial world. They had interpreted Gramsci in a way that accorded the primacy of context over all other analytic considerations. A dialectical negotiation will enable us to rediscover a method of analysis that exceeds the tyranny of context. Concepts such as class, people, population, mass, multitude and populism coexist in non-conflated (and therefore non-identical) yet interlocked relationships in a situation that we name as conjuncture. It means that the existence of one always conjures up the presence of the others in a contentious manner. It implies that to treat these relationships as non-causal is always a matter of revolutionary analysis, a political–categorical act. It is a moment of pulling apart those diversely situated conjunctural elements in order to decide which aspect of which contingent configuration is to be emphasised in political analysis. Thus, defining populism is mostly a categorising moment, and hence the destiny of populism remains open. Perhaps, because of its inherent elasticity and ability to move around or through diverse ideological and political ecologies, populism remains conceptually unruly.

Why it is that parliamentary Marxism could never scientifically analyse populism, even though at times it itself practised populist policies? Why it is that it could never dialectically engage with the simultaneous existence of class and the masses, or class and the people? Two answers: first, parliamentary Marxists sacrificed dialectic long ago. For them dialectics meant in a narrow sense some kind of method, that need not form the essence of reasoning. They forgot Hegel’s teaching, developed by Marx through his entire life-work: namely that dialectics was not only a matter of method, an artifice of investigation, it had simultaneously three aspects—an abstract aspect, a dialectical aspect or “negatively rational” aspect and, finally, “a positively rational” aspect. The second answer is more of a political statement, namely the political that the parliamentary left has brought into this world has a bourgeois history. That history proves insurmountable for them, as proved by the failure of the Syriza in Greece. They cannot leap over this history. The autonomy of politics they have practised has been only for the newspapers. They cannot arrive at a different political without having traversed the full course of the journey they undertook long ago. Probably, that moment has arrived globally, which is why populism is having a revival.

## NOTES

1. For instance, Asok Sen, “The Frontiers of the Prison Notebooks”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 (5), 30 January 1988, pp. PE 31–PE 36; Sudipta Kaviraj, “A Critique of the Passive Revolution,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXXIII, no. 45–47, 1988; pp. 2429–2444; The exception to this passive understanding among the Indian Marxists was perhaps Ajit Roy, who frontally brought in the question of classes and class conflicts while discussing the independence of 1947; see, “‘Revolution by Consent’: Indian Case Study” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 17 (46–47), 13–20 November 1982, pp. 1876–1874.
2. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (1850)—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/> (accessed on 21 March 2016); Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851–52) in Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works (MECW), Volume 11 (New York: International Publishers, 1979)—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf> (accessed on 21 March 2016); Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (1870–1871)—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/> (accessed on 21 March 2016).
3. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ch01.htm> (accessed on 1 June 2016).
4. Here Marx also repeatedly invokes the disparity of the past and the present, dead and living, unprepared present and a revolutionary future, stymied condition and the process of the blocked condition being suddenly opened up by a knife. It is a phantasmagoria. Therefore, “And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.” The class is thus always facing the spectral presence of the people appearing as past, images of the society in which the working class is living, and trying as one “who has learnt a new language to translate it back to his mother tongue.”—*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels Collected Works* (MECW), Volume 11, pp. 103–105; Class struggle will be thus always caught in two modalities, two temporalities—the relation between class and the people being one of the crucial registers of these two modalities and two temporalities.
5. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

6. Marx's concern with the nation and the international in view of the class struggles he was studying was clear from his *Secret Diplomatic History of the Nineteenth Century* (also known as *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the 19th Century*), 1856–57 (Rome: Editora Griffio, n.d.).
7. This is also true with regard to the moment of republican constitution of India (1946–50).
8. Chapter 10 discusses this point in detail.
9. Marx wrote, “Hence the highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with depreciation of capital, degradation of the labourer, and a most straitened exhaustion of his vital powers...”—*Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, 1857–58, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 676–677.
10. Etienne Balibar has written, “This is in the end the aporia, or in any case the difficulty, of the politics of the rights of man: the risky putting into the balance of the power that makes and unmakes constitutional orders through the invention of new rights, or the extension of rights, at the limits of democracy.” in E. Balibar in *Masses, Classes, and Ideas*, trans. Trans. James Swenson, Chapter 9, “What is a Politics of the Rights of Man?” (London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 205–226), p. 224.
11. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory Population*, Lectures at the College de France, 1977–1978, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
12. V.I. Lenin, *What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* (1894) in Lenin Collected Works, Volume I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), pp. 129–332.
13. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, authorised English edition 1887 (London: Panther edition, 1969), Chapter 2, “The Great Towns” (pp. 57–93), pp. 57–58.
14. Benedict (or Baruch) Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, 1669, Chapter 7, p. 71—<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1669.pdf> (accessed on 2 January 2016).
15. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude for an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e). 2004).
16. [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_France.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_Civil_War_in_France.pdf) (accessed on 3 June 2015).
17. *Ibid.*
18. Antonio Gramsci wrote, “A common error in historico-political analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural. This leads to presenting causes as immediately

- operative which in fact only operate indirectly, or to asserting that the immediate causes are the only effective ones. In the first case there is an excess of ‘economism’ or doctrinaire pedantry, in the second an excess of ‘ideologism’. In the first case there is an overestimation of mechanical causes, in the second exaggeration of the voluntarist and individual element.”—*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. & trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Elecbook, 1999), p. 401; one has to note further that the conjunctural appears and accelerates in the time of a crisis.—p. 400; Marx had written of such a situation—France in 1848.
19. V.I. Lenin, “Theses on the National Question” (1913) in *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), pp. 243–251.
  20. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 299.
  21. “the moment of hegemony and consent as a necessary form of the concrete historical bloc”, *Ibid.*, p. 209.
  22. *The Civil War in France*, “The Second Address”—[https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_France.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_Civil_War_in_France.pdf) (accessed on 2 June 2016).
  23. *Ibid.*
  24. *The Civil War in France*, Introduction by Frederick Engels, 1891—[https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_France.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_Civil_War_in_France.pdf) (accessed on 2 June 2016).
  25. In the midst of his discussion on the division of labour, Marx alluded to “the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which presents man as a mere fragment of his own body”—Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), Chapter 14, “The Division of labour and Manufacturer”, pp. 481–82.
  26. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 103.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 162, also p. 330.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
  30. *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Chapter 6—<https://libcom.org/library/6-ten-theses-multitude-post-fordist-capitalism-day-four> (accessed on 6 June 2016).
  31. Mao Tse Tung, “Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society”, March 1926, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung*, Volume 1—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_1.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_1.htm) (accessed on 3 June 2016); Apart from the fact that Mao placed the question of classes in the framework of determining friends and foes of revolution, therefore never proposing any non-class theme of *people*, one has note the way he used the word “people”. He used the word 15 times, never in

- the sense of people as a composite category. He used it mostly in the sense of “persons”, and in the sense of people belonging to certain class. Indeed, it will be a worthwhile effort to see how the concept of people evolved over the years in Mao’s writings.
32. Mao Tse Tung, “On Policy”, 25 December 1940, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung*, Volume 2 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967), pp. 441–49.
  33. Mao Tse Tung, “The Question of Independence and Initiative within the United Front”, 5 November 1938, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung*, Volume 2—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_11.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_11.htm) (accessed on 3 June 2015).
  34. Colonial history in the twentieth century witnessed many forms of agrarian populism, often in militant form. With the rise of the kulak economy and commercialisation of agriculture, agrarian populism came to be dominated by rich peasants and owner farmers driven by issues of remunerative prices of cash crops, abolition of land ceilings, greater supply of inputs at cheap rates and so on. See, D.N. Dhangare, *Populism and Power: Farmers’ Movement in Western India, 1980–2014* (London: Routledge, 2016). Industrial populism has often taken the form of a belief and strategy of building workers’ cooperatives to own factories and workshops, and trying to make them market-viable. Yet in times of recession and attacks on workers by capitalists this has been one of the main defences of workers. This shows once again the double nature of lower-class populism and populist strategies based on the aspirations of the lower classes.
  35. For a reflection on the evolution of the working class on a global scale, Ingo Schmidt, “The Downward March of Labour Halted? The Crisis of Neo-liberal Capitalism and the Remaking of Working Classes”, *Working USA: The Journal of Labour and Society*, 17 (1), March 2014, pp. 1–22; also available at [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1743-4580](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1743-4580) (accessed on 5 September 2015).
  36. The new situation in case of labour is brought out clearly in the global overview by Christien Van Den Anker and Ilse Van Liempt (eds.), *Human Rights and Migration: Trafficking for Forced Labour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); see also Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (eds.), *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); also, Samita Sen, “Engaging with the Idea of Transit Labour”, in Samita Sen, Byasdeb Dasgupta, Babu P. Remesh, and Moulehsri Vyas, *Situating Transit Labour*, CRG research paper series *Policies and Practices*, 43, 2012.
  37. Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the “Peripheries of Capitalism”* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); for a critique of Shanin, Jim Heartfield, “The Late Marx, Lenin, and the Russian Road” (n.d.)—<http://www.marxmail.org/archives/july98/shanin.htm>



- (accessed on 25 May 2016); on this see also, Kevin B. Anderson, “Marx’s Late Writings on Russia Re-examined”, *Theory/Practice: News and Letters*, November 2007; also on the thesis of peasant economy, Aleksandr Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).
38. Lenin’s response to populism is discussed in Chapter 10.
  39. On this, Usta Patnaik (ed.), *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The Mode of Production Debate in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); see also in this connection, Utsa Patnaik and Sam Moyo, *The Agrarian Question in the Neoliberal Era: Primitive Accumulation and the Peasantry* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011).
  40. Peter Custers, “Rethinking Marxism: The Manufacturing Phase in Europe”, *Frontier Autumn Number*, 48 (14–17), October 11–November 7, 2015—<http://frontierweekly.com/articles/vol-48/48-14-17/48-14-17-Rethinking%20Marxism.html> (accessed on 18 October 2015).
  41. On right-wing populism in Europe, G.M. Tamas, “The Mystery of Populism Finally Unveiled”, *Open Democracy*, 24 February 2017—<https://www.opendemocracy.net/wfd/can-europe-make-it/g-m-tam-s/mystery-of-populism-finally-unveiled> (accessed on 2 May 2017).
  42. On the crisis in the 1970s, R. Samaddar, *The Crisis of 1974 and the Rank and File in the Indian Railway Strike* (Delhi: Primus, forthcoming).
  43. On the contentious politics of the time and popular protests, Ranabir Samaddar, “Prescribed, Tolerated, and Forbidden Forms of Claim Making” in Pradip Kumar Bose and Samir Kumar Das (eds.), *Social Justice and Enlightenment: West Bengal*, Volume 1 (pp. 153–179) of *State of Justice in India: Issues of Social Justice*, ed. Ranabir Samaddar (New Delhi: Sage, 2009).
  44. On this my reading of populist movements and politics in the postcolonial world veers away from Ernesto Laclau’s reading in *On Populist Reason* (2005) as well as his and Chantal Mouffe’s thesis on radical democracy, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985). See Dan Hancox, “Why Ernesto Laclau is the Intellectual Figurehead for Syriza and Podemos”, 9 February 2015—<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/09/ernesto-laclau-intellectual-figurehead-syriza-podemos> (accessed on 1 July 2015).
  45. Therefore Ernesto Laclau in *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005) could never analyse the “people” as a material category or even state analytically what he thought of the term “people” except that it was a linguistic product (hence away from the shadowy notion of *class*, a term absent from the book); see particularly Chapter 4, “The ‘People’ and the Discursive Production of Emptiness”, pp. 68–128. Class struggle appears only eight times in the book. He wrote, “So we can say that progress in understanding populism requires as a *sine qua non*, rescuing it from a marginal position within the discourse of the social sciences—the latter having

confined it to the realm of the non-thinkable, to being the simple opposite of political forms dignified with the status of a full rationality.” (p. 19) Populism is thus to Laclau a question of reason/unreason to be debated by social sciences; it has nothing or less to do with class and people, class/people, and their relation.

46. Review of Ernesto Laclau’s *On Populist Reason* by Jon Beasley-Murray, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 2006, 5 (pp. 362–367), p. 363.
47. Thomas Lemke, “Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique”, Paper presented at the *Rethinking Marxism Conference*, University of Amherst (MA), September 21–24, 2000—<http://www.thomaslemkeweb.de/publikationen/Foucault,%20Governmentality,%20and%20Critique%20IV-2.pdf> (accessed on 11 June 2016).
48. I am alluding to the lines with which the late Richard Rorty ended *Consequences of Pragmatism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1982)—<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/index.htm> (accessed on 17 March 2016).
49. Etienne Balibar has made famous the concept, “equaliberty”. See his, *Equaliberty: Political Essays* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

## The Fragmented Subject and a Theory of Leadership

### 1 SUBJECT AS A PRODUCT OF IDEALIST THEORISATION

Hegel, even after Georg Lukacs's famous intervention (*History and Class Consciousness*), has never been widely studied in circles of communist politics (leaving out, of course, the theorists), and activists in their study circles regarded him as a remote, though surely relevant, precursor of Marx, though less significant than Marx's followers. Lukacs elevated Hegel to a dominant position in the formative elements of Marx's thought. The influence of this reassessment of Hegel was to be deep and lasting on at least one theoretical issue: the notion of the proletariat as the "identical subject-object of history",<sup>1</sup> whose class consciousness thereby overcame the problem of estrangement and the social relativity of knowledge. This additionally implied that the reappropriation by the proletariat of human objectivity, whose other name was alienation, would signal a return to an unsullied subjectivity, that is to say the attainment by the working class of true consciousness. The sudden appearance of Hegel in writings of communist leaders like Lenin and Mao therefore appeared to many communist activists as striking, because none of them, in the overwhelming bulk of their studies, had bothered themselves with theories of subjectivity, though raising the consciousness of the people—the workers and peasants, and building an appropriate party for that task—was one of their lifelong preoccupations.

Hence, in the Marxist revolutionary movement, it was never a question of denying the subject; the academic debates over the subject appeared to them mostly tilting at windmills; and to communists it was always a matter of not getting trapped in subjective theories of the subject—a useless philosophical bloodbath over what materialism meant in human history. For communists, by virtue of their very practice of politics, were dealing with subjects, subjecthood, subjectivities and subjection. It was thus always a question of acknowledging the multiplicity of subjects and producing the generality of revolution and social transformation out of this multiplicity. Lukacs' theorisation of the “subject–object” was of course faithful to Hegel's exposition on the double nature of human consciousness, which saw in it always the duality of human being.<sup>2</sup> But to be fair to Lukacs, in drawing inspiration from Hegel, he was nonetheless torn between a theory of the subject (for whom the history unfolds) and the process of revolutionary activism and its dialectics, and he said in a passage, where the fateful phrase “identical subject–object of history” occurs,

Reification is, then, the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by *constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development* (italics author's). But it must be emphasised that (1) the structure can be disrupted only if the immanent contradictions of the process are made conscious. Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the *proletariat become the identical subject–object of history whose praxis will change reality* (italics author's)... (2) Inseparable from this is the fact that the relation to totality does not need to become explicit, the plenitude of the totality does not need to be consciously integrated into the motives and objects of action. What is crucial is that there should be an aspiration towards totality, that action should serve the purpose, described above, in the totality of the process...<sup>3</sup>

What was still a contradictory pull in Lukacs became soon a matter of philosophical game to Marxist academics, who became involved in structure/subject game. To these academic Marxist philosophers, situated comfortably at a distance from the agenda of preparing the “subject” for revolution, the subject became a matter of hermeneutics and had little

resemblance with the actual subjects of capitalism. Of course there was a philosophical compulsion in returning to the subject of the *subject*. It was to examine in the process of subject-formation the “historical a prioris”—with what Michel Foucault called “genealogy” in order to chronicle the ways in which successive power configurations had governed bodies and populations, created forms of subjectivity, and had woven themselves inextricably into systems of knowledge. Such a genealogical involvement in exploration of subjectivity soon meant historical constructions of individuality, which to use Foucault’s words once again meant “techniques of the self” or the “hermeneutics of the subject.” Yet the question remained: if examination of discourses gave us insights to the formation of the subject, what remained of histories of societies that challenged the very claim that discourse governed by rules formed the subject? Conscious of the problem, the inquirers of the subject turned to building critique of truth, which they argued was the hidden secret of Western thought.

So questions arose like: Did language present truth? Or, was it a linguistic event that produced concrete effects of truth, which would imply that a linguistic event presented itself explicitly as an expression of power? But if it was an expression of power, it further meant that truth had a juridical function, of settling a dispute. Therefore its oracular role of making itself manifest in human affairs was not to be the case. One would have to be morally or legally required to submit to it. Aware that they were being caught in this way in the game of subjectivity, philosophers then started saying that *truth lay not so much in the struggle’s outcome as in the struggle*. Clearly oscillating between Kant and Hegel, occasionally straying into Greek thought, or an exceptional figure like Spinoza, our academic philosophers had not progressed much beyond Marx.<sup>4</sup>

One of the problems that this subjective turn faced is that it did not seem to have sufficiently recognised the political implications of fact that subject-formation was a matter of mediation of a field of experiences of materiality—and mediations made possible through specific modes, apparatuses and transmission procedures. The history of this mediation, with its changing trajectories and composition, goes well beyond power and discursive formations, and involves material formations with kinetic dimensions. It means that rather than focusing on the hermeneutics of the subject, we should focus on the dialectic of the subject/object, in particular how through the internal contradiction of this dynamic the universal subject is produced. This, then, is a political question. It becomes also one of contingency—the production of a universal out of specific existences.

Marx's inquiry into subject-formation was never (even in his early writings) purely philosophical, but political, hence specific and contingency-centric. The functioning of politics in Marx—in his historical as well as political economic investigations—meant moulding the subject in terms of governing, overturning and revolution. Politics in Marx was subjected always to a crisis of identity, which we can say is precisely the other dimension of the autonomy of the political. There is always an awareness of the crisis of political rationality in Marx's writings on politics and the working class, or the politics of the working class.

As we showed in the preceding chapter examining at length Marx's historical writings on class struggles in France, the unveiling of the autonomous forms of political domination signals new levels of class struggle that sought for themselves new institutional politics. In other words, class movements mature through a crisis of rationality of the very autonomy of the political of the bourgeoisie. The subject, thus we can see, is not merely being mediated through larger forces; subjecthood is attained through involvement in struggles of politics. To know this politics is a weapon, an instrument for making its presence felt in this world. Subjecthood is not a battle of ideas. It is not a case of convincing intellectuals. There is only one path towards the recovery of politics—as activity and as thought. It is the path of an awareness of the specific nature of its origin as a generality from specific, local existences and the deployment of this generality towards the transformation of the specifics. This politics is thus autonomous, yet contingent. The idea that politics proceeds autonomously is a bourgeois utopian story marketed assiduously so that the economy can function separately, unchallenged, with the subject having market in its grain and satisfied with protocols of bourgeois politics.

That the subject-centric game could be turned on its head was proved by neoliberalism, especially when it combined with postcolonial capitalism. Neoliberalism has attempted to make a subject of every human being, a creature who is ready to exchange everything for everything. This was thus no longer the place of the autonomy of politics. Classical liberalism had focused on exchange, and had thus naturalised the market as a system with its own specific rationality, arguing its superiority as an efficient distributor of goods and services. The market became a space of autonomy that had to be carved out of the State through the unconditional right of private property. The autonomy of market was transferred later to what was thought of as the autonomy of politics. Classical liberalism in this way made exchange among subjects the general matrix of society. However,

neoliberalism does not take the market to be a natural social ground of exchange. The market has to be built out of an anarchic society; the social actor has to be transformed into a market-enabled actor through induction into an ethos of competition. To exchange, one has to compete with one's resource. Thus, every conceivable resource—body to brain—is capital. Exchange is thus not “natural”, it has to be boosted up by competition, which necessitates a constant intervention on the part of the State in the conditions of the market. Neoliberalism thus calls for a competitive subject—atomised, individualised and specific. So, every social institution playing a role in subject-formation, from marriage to, say, help to needy students, is to be understood according to a cost–benefit calculus. Roles can be transformed. Salary or wages can become the revenue earned on an initial investment in developing skills or abilities. The worker is thus a capitalist—an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself.<sup>5</sup>

In Marx the subject was linked to labour. Academics delinked the subject from labour; the subject was no longer the labouring subject. The neoliberal discourse pounced on this separation. It made the subject the agent of competition and exchange, and thus a willing participant of a set of political techniques by which the subject would be tied to labour. This would be a set of techniques through which people's bodies and time would become labour time and labour power so that capital would be able to produce profit. The opposition between the capitalist and the worker was now abolished not by a transformation of the mode of production but by a mode of subjection, a new production of subjectivity.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 IF NOT THE PHILOSOPHICAL SUBJECT, THEN WHAT?

Before we venture to engage with this all-important question, it is necessary to realise its significance in the postcolonial context. If we recall the trajectory of the now extinct Subaltern Studies series, we shall remember how a group of postcolonial theorists (consisting of eminent historians and social scientists) armed with a manifesto of rebellious narratives of agrarian history and peasant consciousness became bogged down in less than a decade in inquiries of subject-formation, slid from history to anthropology, social history and cultural criticism, and finally gave up their investigations into rebellious and revolutionary subject-formation and consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Their explorations of concrete characters bearing on post-colonial identity lost their purpose because of their incapacity or unwillingness to abstract the lessons of the histories of peasant rebellions and

peasant nationalisms. On the other hand Marx had theorised the problematic of abstraction, and in the *Grundrisse* had recognised that abstraction could play a valuable role in the cognitive process, though, as before, he remained sceptical of useless philosophical rumination that passed as abstraction. The subject was an abstract category, and as such was a product of a process of universalisation. Fragments were not subjects unless they had attained subjecthood—an unmistakable commonality of subjection to capital and forms of domination and power. Thus, Marx had theorised abstract labour to understand concrete labour without ever confusing the two. Thus again, the circumstance whereby subjects separated from the means of production are produced from precisely the condition that will allow the capitalist to find property-less workers capable of performing abstract labour (the necessary requirement for the exchange between capital and living labour) is never investigated by the economists, even though this condition forms the history of the origins of capital and wage labour.<sup>8</sup> The historical is therefore never natural and abstraction tells us the mystery of why it happens the way it happens. Marx was even more specific in linking forms of understanding with forms of being:

The bourgeois economists who regard capital as an eternal and *natural* (not historical) form of production then attempt... to legitimize it again by formulating the conditions of its becoming as the conditions of its contemporary realization; i.e. presenting the moments in which the capitalist still appropriates as not-capitalist—because he is still becoming—as the very conditions in which he appropriates *as capitalist*.<sup>9</sup> (Italics Marx's)

The subject, therefore, was not immutable, the postcolonial was not unchangeable, and the peasant was also subject to change. Marx differed from the classical economists; in his view, “capital did not begin the world from the beginning, but rather encountered production and products already present, before it subjugated them beneath its process.”<sup>10</sup> For while the “worker reproduces one thing—namely himself, as living labour capacity... this, his reproduction, is itself a condition for capital, therefore the worker's consumption also appears as the reproduction not of capital directly, but of the relations under which alone it is capital. Living labour capacity belongs just as much among capital's conditions of existence as do raw material and instrument. Thus it reproduces itself doubly, in its own form, [and] in the worker's consumption, but only to the extent that it reproduces him as living labour capacity.”<sup>11</sup>



The reason why we are emphasising the two elements—generality and abstraction—in the production of the subject is that both generality and abstraction are virtues of the moment of production and not when the subject is already in existence, when the subject is already passing into banality. The moment of production is significant in the process of existence because production congeals an organic totality that rests on a number of contradictions between the inner moments; also because, production is the “predominant moment”, the “real point of departure”,<sup>12</sup> from which “the process always returns to begin anew”.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a definite production determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these different moments. Here again, as Marcello Musto points out, Marx’s insights had both theoretical and political significance.<sup>14</sup> The subject could not be reformed contrary to the wish of the reformists. For instance, a change in the form of money would leave unaltered the relations of production and the other social relations determined by them; the central question would remain the overcoming of wage labour, and first and foremost that concerned production.

If abstraction is necessary, what happens to the concrete? The concrete is a differentiated unity of plural determinations and relations. The concrete is necessary to expose the mystification practised by economists with regard to the concept of production in general. Production in general is an abstraction, which does not exist at any concrete stage of reality. However, since all epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics, Marx recognises that production in general is a rational abstraction insofar as it really brings out and fixes the common element. The question then remains from the outset: how to reproduce reality through thought? Evasion of the specificity of capitalist production therefore has both theoretical and political consequences. On the one hand, it impedes understanding of the concrete historical levels of production; on the other hand, in defining present conditions as unchanged and unchangeable, it presents capitalist production as production in general and bourgeois social relations as natural human relations.

The only proper method thus may be formulated in the following way, namely, that abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought. It was this that Marx described as the scientifically correct method. He was convinced that the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is the only way in which thought appropriates the concrete. The concrete even though it is the concentration of many determinations appears in thought as a process of concentration, as a result

and not a point of departure. For Marx, we have always to bear in mind that the concrete is the point of departure—for observation, analysis and theorisation. In this dialectical game between the abstract and the concrete and the emergence of the general, the role of philosophy is limited. Perhaps this may be called anti-philosophy. The fragment can neither be philosophised, nor made absolute through the argument of the concrete.<sup>15</sup> The subject is the result of abstraction—a process of abstraction. To try to theorise it in disparate concrete existences is a failed exercise. This is what happened after the subjective turn in postcolonial studies.

The nature of the subject is always fragmented, even at the hands of great philosophers. After all, as Alan Badiou says, “The conditions of philosophy that is the truth, to which it bears witness, are always contemporary to it.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore that which is being philosophised as the subject is already in concrete separate existences. The more we theorise it the more we immerse ourselves in fragments—fragments of a supposed whole, which is actually a process of abstraction. Anti-philosophy situates “the philosophical desire in its entirety in the register of the erroneous and the harmful.”<sup>17</sup> This is what Marx wanted to do with the philosophy of the subject, and this is what we have to do with regard to this. There is thus a “remainder” in the anti-philosophy of the subject which builds on concrete disparate existences and concrete relations only to expose their incompleteness by way of this act of exposure. In other words, the subject must be made to disappear as its being, and thus it can present itself to us at its vanishing point. The subject can be thus only a “motif of a thought”.<sup>18</sup>

Of course this does not mean that the thought of a postcolonial subject should be over. To the extent such a subject exists, its inquiry can be only in political representations. Only the political representation is the possible reading of such a subject. Engels’ famous tract *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1882),<sup>19</sup> contrary to conventional thinking, did not present an oppositional model between the two. It did not oppose reality to thinking, from within the society to from outside the society, or a historical view to a philosophical view. The scientific view showed how thinking could approximate reality, how on the basis of a mode called “critique”, thinking from within society could be the basis of thinking from outside, and how historical thinking could be used to appreciate the positive science of nature. Scientific socialism signified cognition of proletarian realities (including the preconditions of proletarian emancipation besides human will) through a dialectical model inasmuch as science meant laws of formal cognition. Above all, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* signified that the subject could be the

subject of emancipation only in a particular condition—the historically unique reshaping of living labour and use value. Thus, the subject acquires subjecthood only under certain conditions, which must mould the former to extant conditions, which include conditions of change.

### 3 SUBJECT AND LEADERSHIP

Subjects are thus fragments and in disparate existence, practising politics that will make them subjects. They will emerge in generality, and subjecthood (an abstraction) will become a reality, a material opposition to capitalism. Their subjection to capitalism will make them subjects of struggle and emancipation. Who can help effect this abstraction, this transformation to a general attribute? Leadership is the name of this historical operation. By leading the fragmented sections of the society to a general understanding of capitalism the working class becomes the leader. Lenin wrote,

We have seen that the conduct of the broadest political agitation and, consequently, of all sided political exposures is an absolutely necessary and a paramount task of our activity, if this activity is to be truly Social-Democratic. However, we arrived at this conclusion solely on the grounds of the pressing needs of the working class for political knowledge and political training. But such a presentation of the question is too narrow, for it ignores the general democratic tasks of Social-Democracy, in particular of present-day Russian Social-Democracy. In order to explain the point more concretely we shall approach the subject from an aspect that is “nearest” to the Economist, namely, from the practical aspect. “Everyone agrees” that it is necessary to develop the political consciousness of the working class. The question is: how that is to be done and what is required to do it. The economic struggle merely “impels” the workers to realise the government’s attitude towards the working class. Consequently, however much we may try to “lend the economic, struggle itself a political character”, we shall never be able to develop the political consciousness of the workers (to the level of Social-Democratic political consciousness) by keeping within the framework of the economic struggle, for that framework is too narrow... the basic error that all the Economists commit, namely, their conviction that it is possible to develop the class political consciousness of the workers from within, so to speak, from their economic struggle, i.e., by making this struggle the exclusive (or, at least, the main) starting-point, by making it the exclusive (or, at least, the main) basis. Such a view is radically wrong...

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the

sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the inter-relations between all classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be... "To go among the workers." To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population; they must dispatch units of their army in all directions.<sup>20</sup>

The working class is the revolutionary subject, because it leads the entire society; communists lead the working class because they encourage the workers to fan out among all sections of the oppressed people; the party leads the communists because it trains them not to be sectarian (in Lenin's words "economists"), but to be embracive. Thus, Lenin wrote,

It cannot be too strongly maintained that this is still not Social-Democracy, that the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the *tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to *generalise* all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.<sup>21</sup> (Italics mine)

This means spreading class struggle among other sections of population, mainly the semi-proletarian sections, peasantry in particular,<sup>22</sup> and winning the nation to the side of the proletariat. Thus,

In our time only a party that will organise really nation-wide exposures can become the vanguard of the revolutionary forces. The word "nation-wide" has a very profound meaning. The overwhelming majority of the non-working-class expositors (be it remembered that in order to become the vanguard, we must attract other classes) are sober politicians and level-headed men of affairs. They know perfectly well how dangerous it is to "complain" even against a minor official, let alone against the "omnipotent" Russian Government. And they will come to us with their complaints only when they see that these complaints can really have effect, and that we represent a political force. In order to become such a force in the eyes of outsiders, much persistent and stubborn work is required to raise our own

consciousness, initiative, and energy. To accomplish this it is not enough to attach a “vanguard” label to rearguard theory and practice. But if we have to undertake the organisation of a really nationwide exposure of the government, in what way will then the class character of our movement be expressed?—The overzealous advocate of “close organic contact with the proletarian struggle” will ask us, as indeed he does. The reply is manifold: we Social-Democrats will organise these nationwide exposures; all questions raised by the agitation will be explained in a consistently Social-Democratic spirit, without any concessions to deliberate or un-deliberate distortions of Marxism; the all-round political agitation will be conducted by a party which unites into one inseparable whole the assault on the government in the name of the entire people, the revolutionary training of the proletariat, and the safeguarding of its political independence, the guidance of the economic struggle of the working class, and the utilisation of all its spontaneous conflicts with its exploiters which rouse and bring into our camp increasing numbers of the proletariat.<sup>23</sup>

From this flows the politics of organisation. Without the task of leadership, there is no organisation howsoever self-managed that particular organisation might be. In Chapter 7 we showed how the principle of autonomy loses its principal goal if this principle refuses to comply with the necessity of leadership. Organisation is the clue to a collective subject-formation. However before coming to the point of collective subject-formation, we must spend few more lines on the question of the subject forming the axis between a class (for instance, workers) and the society or the nation.

In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels had already drawn attention to the leading role of the workers. Indeed *The Manifesto* is replete with such references and exhortations. The section “Proletarians and Communists” begins in this way:

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries,

they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement...<sup>24</sup>

Before co-authoring *The Communist Manifesto* Engels had made their point about working men being the universal class more clearly by asking first, “In what way do proletarians differ from serfs?” and then answering:

The serf possesses and uses an instrument of production, a piece of land, in exchange for which he gives up a part of his product or part of the services of his labour. The proletarian works with the instruments of production of another, for the account of this other, in exchange for a part of the product. The serf gives up, the proletarian receives. The serf has an assured existence, the proletarian has not. The serf is outside competition, the proletarian is in it. The serf liberates himself in one of three ways: either he runs away to the city and there becomes a handicraftsman; or, instead of products and services, he gives money to his lord and thereby becomes a free tenant; or he overthrows his feudal lord and himself becomes a property owner. In short, by one route or another, he gets into the owning class and enters into competition. The proletarian liberates himself by abolishing competition, private property, and all class differences.<sup>25</sup>

The claim to a universal role is thus not spiritual, or is not on the basis of defining what is universal, but is on the basis of what is specifically necessary now. Perhaps universality has to be invoked from the past to be periodically renewed. All universalities are therefore not the same. There are possibilities of shifts and strategic choices in the claims to universality. The notion of universality is thus open to contests, and has nothing pure or impure in the nature of it, as postcolonial theorists would like us to believe. They have ignored the antinomies of universality. They need to think deeply about Lenin’s writings that place (in Balibar’s word, “recast”<sup>26</sup>) the

proletariat as the universal class which assumes the agency to lead the society against exploitation and towards liberation.

Responsibility to lead comes from universality. Wage labour and its place in production make the wage labourer (in varied forms) responsible for leading other oppressed classes and segments of society. As Marx commented in his discussions on theories of surplus value, wage labour (notwithstanding its many intermediary forms) becomes the universal form of labour, because “the limit to property is the limit of personal labour” and a “man cannot accumulate more things than he can use.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore it is not an immutable subject called the proletariat that appears from the sky to salvage the society. It is the wage–capital relation, the dynamics of accumulation of capital and the specific form of labour which is known as wage labour that makes the proletariat the universal class, shouldering the responsibility to awaken other oppressed classes. No heavenly subjectivity, to repeat, makes this possible and imparts universality to the worker, but its form of labour, its relation to capital and the nature of exploitation make the generality of labour and the abolition of wage labour along with other forms of degrading labour a universal possibility.

Yet the organisational form of this universality of the subject required political elucidation, part of which was provided by Lenin and the greater part of which waited for Mao, who provided the concept of the united front. If, as we have seen, Lenin elucidated how the workers needed to go out to the masses, Mao in the national context of China clarified how communists could unify the nation against imperialist, comprador and feudal exploitation only through the politics and the organisational form of the united front. In a largely forgotten note, Mao explained the strategy in this way:

All political parties and groups in the united front must help each other and make mutual concessions for the sake of long-term cooperation, but such help and concessions should be positive, not negative. We must consolidate and expand our own Party and army, and at the same time should assist friendly parties and armies to consolidate and expand... “To fall back the better to leap forward”—that is Leninism. To regard concessions as something purely negative is contrary to Marxism-Leninism. There are indeed instances of purely negative concessions—the Second International’s doctrine of collaboration between labour and capital... capitulationism must be strenuously opposed. When we make concessions, fall back, turn to the defensive or halt our advance in our relations with either allies or enemies, we should always see these actions as part of our whole revolutionary policy, as an indispensable link in the general revolutionary line, as one turn in a zigzag course. In a word, they are positive...

To sustain a long war by long-term co-operation or, in other words, to subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle against Japan—such is the fundamental principle of the united front. Subject to this principle, the independent character of the parties and classes and their independence and initiative within the united front should be preserved, and their essential rights should not be sacrificed to co-operation and unity, but on the contrary must be firmly upheld within certain limits. Only thus can co-operation be promoted, indeed only thus can there be any co-operation at all. Otherwise co-operation will turn into amalgamation and the united front will inevitably be sacrificed... Thus there is identity in the united front between unity and independence and between the national struggle and the class struggle... Our policy is one of independence and initiative within the united front, a policy both of unity and of independence.<sup>28</sup>

This is the subject position of the leadership: make alliance, forge unity, help others and build common cause, but do not sacrifice your independence. Leadership represents generality, because it cherishes the principle of united front while retaining firmness and independence. “All Communists must realize that only through resistance to the very end can there be unity to the very end, and vice versa. Therefore, Communists must set an example in both resistance and unity.”<sup>29</sup> But why is this needed? Why must the proletarian party maintain unity and independence?

Although the Chinese revolution in this first stage (with its many sub-stages) is a new type of bourgeois-democratic revolution and is not yet itself a proletarian-socialist revolution in its social character, it has long become a part of the proletarian-socialist world revolution and is now even a very important part and a great ally of this world revolution... Before the May 4th Movement of 1919 (which occurred after the first imperialist world war of 1914 the Russian October Revolution of 1917), the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie (through their intellectuals) were the political leaders of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The Chinese proletariat had not yet appeared on the political scene as an awakened and independent class force, but participated in the revolution only as a follower of the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie. Such was the case with the proletariat at the time of the Revolution of 1911. After the May 4th Movement, the political leader of China’s bourgeois-democratic revolution was no longer the bourgeoisie but the proletariat, although the national bourgeoisie continued to take part in the revolution. The Chinese proletariat rapidly became an awakened and independent political force as a result of its maturing and of the influence of the Russian Revolution. It was the Chinese Communist Party that put forward the slogan “Down with imperialism”



and the thoroughgoing programme for the whole bourgeois-democratic revolution, and it was the Chinese Communist Party alone that carried out the Agrarian Revolution.<sup>30</sup>

The nation, international revolution, imperialism, anti-landlordism and agrarian revolution, proletarian party and many other elements of the situation impel the subject to become the universal subject of emancipation. This universal role is not out of a tactical necessity. Thus, even after Chinese liberation, Mao was insistent on unity. He said,

With this great aim in mind, in the international sphere we must firmly unite with the Soviet Union, the People's Democracies and the forces of peace and democracy everywhere and there should not be the slightest hesitation or wavering on this question. At home, we must unite all the nationalities, democratic classes, democratic parties, people's organizations and patriotic democrats and consolidate the great, prestigious revolutionary united front already in existence. Whoever contributes to the consolidation of this revolutionary united front is doing right, and we welcome him; whoever harms this consolidation is doing wrong, and we oppose him. To consolidate the revolutionary united front, we must use the method of criticism and self-criticism. The main criterion in the application of this method is our present fundamental law—the Common Programme. We have carried out criticism and self-criticism at this session, basing ourselves on the Common Programme. This is an excellent method, which impels every one of us to uphold truth and rectify error, and it is the only correct method for all revolutionary people to educate and remould themselves in a people's state. The people's democratic dictatorship uses two methods. Towards the enemy, it uses the method of dictatorship, that is, for as long a period of time as is necessary it does not permit them to take part in political activity and compels them to obey the law of the People's Government, to engage in labour and, through such labour, be transformed into new men. Towards the people, on the contrary, it uses the method of democracy and not of compulsion, that is, it must necessarily let them take part in political activity and does not compel them to do this or that but uses the method of democracy to educate and persuade. Such education is self-education for the people, and its basic method is criticism and self-criticism. I hope that this method will be used by all the nationalities, democratic classes, democratic parties, people's organizations and patriotic democrats in the country.<sup>31</sup>

We must note that in these lines universality and concreteness emerge as a relational issue. Even when discussing war, Mao was careful to stress

the question of relations among the specifics, such as giving proper consideration to~: the relation between the enemy and the revolutionary forces; the relation between various campaigns or between various operational stages; those parts which have a bearing on (and are decisive for) the situation as a whole; the special features contained in the general situation; and the relation between the front and the rear.<sup>32</sup> We may, perhaps, now understand how and why subject-centric variations on the dual question of universal role and specific existence are generated, each time in a given historical circumstance and for historical-practical reasons. Formally these variations will maintain the principle of the subject, but they will give completely new contents, either to the notion of the subject, or to the definition of what is a “universal”, or to both. If the variations were absent, that is if this unity of opposites were to prove unsustainable, we would soon have been confronted with the dreaded thought of a permanent and ossified universal. Indeed, are not both—universality and specificity—true of the history of each specific revolutionary social transformation? To appreciate this dialectical history, it is important to realise that all subject-centric discussions that ignore the process of transformation of an existence into subjecthood build on the very binary they want to oppose, namely the subject/object divide and, along with that, the universal/specific division. It does not mean that they are the same; it only means that Marxism treats them dialectically, and if we recall Marx’s historical writings discussed in Chapter 8, histories of revolution have done well without such theories of the subject.

To get a sense of the postcolonial resonance of such a formulation, we must take stock of at least some of the features of the emergence of the political subject in colonial and postcolonial milieu, the conditions of its emergence, and the theoretical implications of this emergence, particularly the implications for postcolonial history.

#### 4 THE EMERGENCE OF THE POSTCOLONIAL POLITICAL SUBJECT

To date, philosophy has speculated on self, reason and existence. If we follow Marx we have to ask: Does politics obey its rules and findings? Does the political subject display other features—features that remain beyond our speculative texts? These questions arise as politics throws up an unexpected array of actions and repertoires of experiences, and we are compelled to

look back at the history of subjugation, independence, and the quest for justice only to find the political subject repeatedly emerging as the constitutive force of postcolonial life. There are two grounds for raising the question.

First, societies under colonial and postcolonial conditions had different speculative and inquiring traditions, largely banished today to what can be called the popular sphere of thinking, or the “extra-colonial” sphere of thinking. These traditions did not have the “normal” connection that they could have been expected to have with the new political thinking under colonial conditions because in the colonies speculative traditions had not much to offer on the materiality of the political life except by way of advice to princes.

Second, the extremely contentious colonial and postcolonial politics skipped many centuries of transitions to arrive straight away at the problematic of the political subject. The route was not through centuries-long speculation on the self, but through a dramatic arrival at the great question of the political subject. As ruthless colonial rule moved the colonised societies to a resistance culture the normal questions to be asked would be, Who are you to rule? What are our roles then? Who is the ruler and who is the subject? In short, the issue of political self emerged directly under specific colonial and postcolonial conditions, cutting many philosophical knots of past centuries. Political necessities led to new thinking, political subjecthood became a practical question of society. What in Western political history required centuries of thinking to emerge as a question, was asked on the streets in the East: What does it mean to demand freedom and act in the name of freedom? What does it mean to act politically? The consequent reflections throw light on the specific situations in which the subject emerges and proceeds towards reconstituting the political society.

In short, in the great tradition of Marx, Lenin and Mao can we reframe the notion of the political subject in a materialist manner? Can we rid the notion of political subjectivity of metaphysical traces, and discuss the theory of the political subject based on rigorous discussions on the conditions of its emergence, without any unnecessary digression into a theory of the self?

In order to understand the process of hundreds and thousands of people emerging as the collective subject authoring politics, we need to glance around for those contentious situations and positions from which the political subject emerges—the *subject* who was *subjected* to colonial politics, but who refused to be mere object of politics and rule, and wanted to

become *subject*. Subjection and subjectivation, the word that indicates the practices of subject-formation, are thus two interlinked processes. It is necessary to mark out those variegated situations of contention. Politics seen in this light is a discourse of actions.

As situation, therefore, each of these contentious actions is a concatenation of circumstances. For instance, a guerrilla leader has to dialogue on a desirable and possible political future because s/he wants peace now;<sup>33</sup> or the political subject learns to dialogue and court death in order to cope with situations of deadlock, as happened in the national freedom struggles in India; or itinerant preachers try to grasp the phenomenon of colonialism and alien culture and attempt to make sense of patriotism which would take into account both religion and language, and would thus form a community of believers based on diversity of beliefs to create a political-spiritual nation free from colonial rule;<sup>34</sup> or we can think of the early militant political activists who debated on the morality of violent actions against colonial rule that would mean killing members of the alien ruling class. Therefore, the questions debated were: What is action? What is death? What is good for the country? What is the ethics of the collective? What indeed is ethical existence under alien rule? What is obligation? The replies of the early militant nationalists to these questions, some of them classic political queries, are all clarifying exercises; they indicate the process of reflection through which the political subject emerges under specific conditions. They also show the ways in which the political subject attains a leading position in society. The political subject exceeds the standards set by the regime for permissible violence, displays determination in the pursuit of a goal; hence its unruliness, its so-called fanaticism.

Fanaticism is the readiness to go to war discontinuing the prevailing mode of politics. It is the voice of the underground. Alberto Toscano shows how it breaks the myth that politics is the product of enlightenment.<sup>35</sup> It is unruly because it is still beyond the given formula of the time on the war/politics copula. Political subject exceeds rules of politics.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the unruly subjects in colonies not only repeatedly exceeded the overwhelming legal realities, against which and in the midst of which the colonial subject had to work, but demonstrated by their life experience that the emergence of the subject was fundamentally a matter of non-correspondence with the dominant reality of law, power and rule—a non-correspondence that helped it to assume leadership in contentious time. Political thinking under colonial and postcolonial conditions in this way arrived at its most important gradient, namely, evolving a theory of action:

action for mutiny, sedition, protest, revolt, revolution and challenging the monism of sovereignty with alternative ideas of shared sovereignty.

In short, the inquiry is about the subject claiming and gaining political agency, and thereby leading others. This is therefore not an issue of “self-consciousness” of the oppressed, though that may be a necessary and certainly a hazardous task. In Western political philosophy, attempts to recover such self-consciousness (again we can recall Georg Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness*) are not rare. The hazards of such a task in extricating itself from traces of the master’s hold (Lukacs in a tract on Hegel calls him the Master waiting at a distance for everyone for the final reckoning<sup>37</sup>) are simply enormous. The crux of this inquiry is, How does such agency arise? What are the contentious conditions of politics, which allow the emergence of the political subject? What are the conditions that generate the autonomy of politics or conversely destroy this autonomy? What are the conditions that enable a subject to lead, to become the vanguard of the society? This is not a question of identity of the self, but identity of actions. In short, through all its manifestations the figure of the political subject conveys three senses: a collective sense, a sense of resistance to power, particularly to the legal resolution of issues of power, and a sense of being a supplement; in other words the figure is not absorbed or exhausted by, while being marked by, political regimes, control systems, power structures, legal codifications and present political establishments. The theme of knowledge of politics becomes crucial in understanding how agency in politics is claimed.

We can now summarise the issue of the emergence of the political subject in the following way: First, there is a critical function involved in getting ready to do politics—to “unlearn” the present state of knowledge (academic, sentimental, theological, spiritual, economic and so on) and preparing to do politics by learning new things about society and its power relations. Second, following from the first, knowledge therefore has a function of struggle. Third, the practice of politics in this way is conceived as an ongoing war. Thus, training and learning to do politics become important as human activity. Political pedagogy becomes crucial. Fourth, the political subject does not emerge from the existing techniques of power, particularly legal techniques, but from resistance against those techniques of power. Fifth, as in any subject-formation, a set of practices becomes significant in the formation of the political subject. And finally, these practices are essentially collective, that is to say relational (contentious on one hand, dialogic on the other), and because of this, the emergence of the political subject is possible only in a collective form.

## 5 COLLECTIVE SUBJECT AND LEADERSHIP

Many bourgeois theories of subjectivity have understood in recent times the acuteness of the problem. Thus, John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*<sup>38</sup> tries to lend a social determination to being through appeals to equality and common good. For him, the proposition of the difference principle is a mechanism for the development of social equality and, the principle of justice has the power to constitute the social being with real determinations, with preference for the least advantaged members of society constituting the social. For that, society has to have fair equality of opportunity through institutional management of the task of attaching the difference principle with the equality principle. Yet, the constitution of the social being stops at that point. Also, as we know, the difference principle was subsequently subordinated to the principles of liberty and of the priority of right and (market) opportunity. This shows how bourgeois society today has lost the capacity of even minimal social reform. Hence its intellectual problem: Does it go back to the idea of transcendence and the idea of a transcendental subject, or attempt once more to find out a theory the socially constructed subject, where of course it would have to negotiate the problems of idealism, particularly the idealism inherent in Kantian moral framework? Given this dilemma, militant intellectuals must grasp the central “contradiction between a subject defined by the freedom of rational thought and a subject grounded in determinations by material reality”.<sup>39</sup> Therefore the thesis of the collective political subject emerges from contentious circumstances and owes nothing necessarily to historical inevitabilities. But this would mean taking politics as real thought. We shall thus come up repeatedly with situations of void—in India for instance the Mutiny of 1857 and the years around 1857, the year(s) of the first Bengal Partition and the terrorist-revolutionary campaigns (that is the first two decades of the twentieth century), or the year of Independence and Partition, 1947.<sup>40</sup>

In speaking of the subject this chapter does not speak of intersubjectivity, or an intersubjective situation, as the game of cultural studies would like us to frame the question of subject and subjectivity. Intersubjectivity, at least the way it is perceived, removes the issue of challenge, encounter, contradiction and conflict. In such an understanding it is all a matter of interface. From this sociological revisionism we clearly take a step apart. Instances of encounters and texts on class leadership mentioned here are not evidences and documents of intersubjectivity. They are commentaries of *deep voids*, of situations where the political subject appears as the

constituent force destroying the claims of dominant norms. That is how the subject comes to exercise leadership, and that is what Lenin indicated by his notion of vanguard. The politics of leadership forces us to confront the question: How will the subject cope with the void, and take on a constitutive programme? How can the political subject constitute itself as if in a double bind—determined yet determining, inventing? How can the productive capacity of the subject, that is to say its constitutive capacity, be reaffirmed again and again, acts that by themselves are declaratory of a promise? Politics in this way appears as the constituent power of the subject. This is the virtue of leading the society by reconstituting it.

Clearly, conceptualising the political subject as a collective subject in the framework of an ongoing war against the State and the ruling order implies a specific model of politics that not only draws from the insight that war is politics by other means, it also expands the possibilities of “means” (that is, at times, violent means); by that token it also expands the possibilities of politics. By making the series of interchangeability of power, politics and war interminable, it makes politics action-oriented, complementary, and always moving away from the State, making new leadership role possible. Such displacement opens up the unity of theory and history—the two masters of politics—as a problematic to the advantage of politics. Politics was a matter of theory in the sense of totality, typical of a Platonic enterprise, which must accompany a theory of life, good life, just life, and become a part of it. Then it became a matter of history, whereby it must fall into a pattern, must look to precedents, and must fulfil a historical mission only to be explained by philosophy. But anti-colonial politics, and various politics of liberation, while adhering formally to these masters, resisted their pressures, and conceptualised situations as singular ones. Therefore, each act singular in possibility, each practice to be carefully meditated before acting upon, each possibility, was to be new in history, whose antecedent may not be found in the scriptures.

For these reasons the hermeneutics of the political subject not only cannot be state-centric—it cannot be self-centric also. Any standard history of political philosophy will tell us how the connection between self and the State was established and has become inseparable today, so much so that it is inconceivable to even think of their disconnection. Here in the colonies and ex-colonies how the self, State and politics claimed their respective autonomous spheres (with the consequence that politics became mostly popular politics) is of course another history, which remains to be worked out in a complete manner, but whose fragments have been narrated elsewhere.<sup>41</sup>

Ours is a time marked by the real subsumption of society under capital and the realisation of a generalised rule of capital, destroying subjectivities indiscriminately. Yet this is also the time when the resultant encounters provide opportunities for subjectivities to reconstitute themselves. The reconstituted subjectivities are undergoing a process of transformation within the crises and encounters. In this critical and reflective space, always new as this space emerges, the reconstitution of the subject takes place.

We can recall that Marx emphasised that the proletariat, as a revolutionary subject, requires more than a common situation as wage-labourers vis-à-vis capitalists. He assigned the proletariat the key role in the coming of socialism not so much because of the misery it suffered as because of the place it occupied in the production process. That gave its leadership potentiality. He was also not unaware of the existence of various classes, groups, strata and subject positions in society,<sup>42</sup> and that is precisely why he declared that the working class by emancipating the society emancipates itself. Its position as the subject of exploitation as well of leading the struggle for emancipation will be then a matter of the past. In this double bind of subjectivity, any subject-centric thought thus can be only fragmentary. In his works on political economy and history, he highlighted the specific process of the constitution of the subjectivity in the age of capital, and therefore the specific technologies or practices shaping this process of constitution. But this was not all. Not content with introducing the theme of the constitution of subjectivity, he went on to explore the theme of the liberation of subjectivity, in other words the theme of revolutionary subjectivity. This was at the heart of historical materialism, which has always seen subjectivity as something to be grasped in terms of the social-political processes of the production of subjects. The subject is thus both a product and productive, constituted and constitutive, participant as well as a critical one. This is the theory of the unruly subject that can be never expropriated by capital, as the accounts of colonial and postcolonial encounters in this chapter show.

In order to have a better understanding of how the anti-colonial heritage works in our time, we shall have to read other accounts of subject-formation in various colonies in the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. We shall realise how imperial conditions could not deter the political subject from making its mark; on the other hand we shall also see that the last two centuries are perfect illustrations of how political subjectivity exceeded the given institutional forms of State, law and the nation. This double understanding assumes greater importance in this neoliberal time



when a large section of the middle classes in postcolonial countries has been bought over to its side by neoliberal ideology and financial techniques, and the earlier bond between the middle classes, the peasantry and the workers is now broken. Postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal capitalism are now densely woven into each other. The task of leading society is more than ever incumbent on the postcolonial political subject. And the trajectory from the fragmented to the collective is more than ever complicated and challenging.

Yet this is how the historical quarrels among the Marxists over vanguardism will be resolved. For if the vanguard is of the society and revolution, and if a social class, a party or a group has to acquire or acquires the subjective power to lead the society, we cannot but ask, is the vanguard not an exception among the oppressed classes and masses, who are oppressed but still have not risen up in defiance? Yet if the vanguard is an exception to this passivity, we must ask, what is this exception? Or to say it differently what different rule does this exception express? Recall Althusser who wrote,

Let us return to Lenin and thence to Marx. If it is true, as Leninist practice and reflection prove, that the revolutionary situation in Russia was precisely a result of the *intense overdetermination* of the basic class contradiction, we should perhaps ask what is *exceptional* about this ‘exceptional *situation*’, and whether, like all exceptions, this one does not clarify its rule—is not, unbeknown to the rule, *the rule itself*. For, after all, *are we not always in exceptional situations?* The failure of the 1849 Revolution in Germany was an exception, the failure in Paris in 1871 was an exception, the German Social-Democratic failure at the beginning of the twentieth century pending the chauvinist betrayal of 1914 was an exception... exceptions, *but with respect to what?* To nothing but the ‘dialectical’ schema, which in its very simplicity seems to have retained a memory (or rediscovered the style) of the Hegelian model and its faith in the resolving ‘power’ of the abstract contradiction as such: in particular, the “beautiful” contradiction between Capital and Labour. I do not deny that the “*simplicity*” of this *purified* schema has answered to certain subjective necessities of the mobilisation of the masses; after all, we know perfectly well that the utopian forms of socialism *also* played a historical part, and played it well because they took the masses at the word of their consciousness, because if they are to be led forward, even (and above all) this is how they must be taken. One day it will be necessary to *do what Marx and Engels did* for utopian socialism, but this time for those still schematic-utopian forms of mass consciousness influenced by *Marxism*

(even the consciousness of certain of its theoreticians) in the first stage of its history: *a true historical study of the conditions and forms of that consciousness*. In fact we find that all the important historical and political articles written by Marx and Engels during this period give us precisely the material for a preliminary reflection on these so-called “exceptions”. They draw from them the basic notion that *the Capital–Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised*. It is specified by the forms of the *superstructure* (the State, the dominant ideology, religion, politically organised movements, and so on); specified by *the internal and external historical situation* which determines it on the one hand as a function of the *national past* (completed or “relapsed” bourgeois revolution, feudal exploitation eliminated wholly, partially or not at all, local “customs” specific national *traditions*, even the “etiquette” of political struggles and behaviour, etc.), and on the other as functions of the existing *world context* (what dominates it—competition of capitalist nations, or “imperialist internationalism”, or competition within imperialism, etc.), many of these phenomena deriving from the “law of uneven development” in the Leninist sense.<sup>43</sup> (Althusser’s italics)

In other words, the vanguard—an exception—gestures towards leadership, which represents the historical bloc of the masses and the vanguard in times of change. This historical bloc is situation driven, has its own contradiction, and plays a crucial part in every revolution. The relation between the vanguard and the masses is not at all an illusion. The activity of the masses/classes is represented in the activity of the vanguard. This relation is not thus ideological but material. They are real relations asserting themselves as part of politics of the society, and this politics can emerge only from the relations among the oppressed, through them and between them. To the philosopher, politics appears from outside, as “ideology” or “ideology-driven”, and a matter of representation.<sup>44</sup> But as we have sought to emphasise in this chapter through discussion on various fragments of worldwide revolutionary experiences, the relations between the vanguard and the masses is an objective phenomenon, a product of definite social conditions and conjunctions.<sup>45</sup>

Today we are witnessing a historic reversal of the political project, a new historical conjuncture, and a new moment which the Right, rather than the Left, is able to dominate, because the Left has forgotten the necessity to lead, how to lead, and how to form the historical bloc between the masses and the vanguard, enamoured as it is with the ideology of representation. As if representation can do away with the historical necessity to lead.

The criticism of vanguardism unintentionally has led to a blind alley, and the present moment looks like one of total crisis for the Left, when all the reference points have been shot to pieces. The political universe which the Left had come to inhabit has collapsed.

## NOTES

1. Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1922), trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: The Merlin Press, 1971), p. 197.
2. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), trans. J.B. Baillie, Section B, “Self-Consciousness”, para 179–183—<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/phb.htm> (accessed on 20 December 2016).
3. *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 197–198.
4. In some sense, Michel Foucault’s intellectual life with its specific discontinuities and ruptures represented the possibilities and limits of this history of inquiry into the dynamics of subject-formation. See on this, Michael C. Behrent, “The Genealogy of Genealogy: Foucault’s 1970–71 Course on *The Will to Know*”, *Foucault Studies*, 13, May 2012, pp. 157–178.
5. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 226.
6. On this, Jason Read, “A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity”, *Foucault Studies*, 6, February 2009, pp. 25–36.
7. The best summary on this is, “A Brief History of Subalternity”, introduction by David Ludden to his *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalisation of South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2001), pp. 1–39.
8. Marcello Musto, “History, Production and Method in the 1857 ‘Introduction’” in Marcello Musto (ed.), *Karl Marx’s Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 3–32), p. 9.
9. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, 1857–58, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 392; also available at Marxist Internet Archive—<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/index.html>.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

14. “History, Production and Method in the 1857 ‘Introduction’”, pp. 14–15.
15. Partha Chatterjee’s *Nation and Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) is tantalisingly perched on this dilemma.
16. Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2011), p. 67.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
19. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, English edition, 1892, in *Marx Engels Selected Works*, Volume 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), pp. 95–151.
20. V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (1902), The Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>, pp. 47–48.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
22. Lenin wrote specifically, “We urged the necessity of carrying the class struggle into the rural districts in connection with the fortieth anniversary of the emancipation of the peasantry... In connection with the new law we attacked the feudal landlords and the government which serves them... and we welcomed the illegal Zemstvo congress. We urged the Zemstvo to pass over from abject petitions... to struggle... We exposed the “senseless dreams” and the “lying hypocrisy” of the cunning liberals... while pointing to the violent fury with which the government-gaoler persecuted “peaceful writers, aged professors, scientists, and well-known liberal Zemstvo members” (*What is to be Done?*, p. 58).
23. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
24. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848, (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 234.
25. Friedrich Engels, *The Principles of Communism* (1847), section 8—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf> (accessed on 26 December 2016).
26. Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1995), p. 111.
27. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, 1858–1862, trans. G.A. Bonner and Emile Burns (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1951), p. 28.
28. Mao Tse Tung, “The Question of Independence and Initiative within the United Front” (1938), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Volume 2—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_11.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_11.htm) (accessed on 28 December 2016).
29. Mao Tse Tung, “Unity to the Very End” (1940), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Volume 2—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_36.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_36.htm) (accessed on 28 December 2016).

30. Mao Tse Tung, *On New Democracy* (1940), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Volume 2—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_26.htm#p5](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm#p5) (accessed on 28 December 2016).
31. “Be a True Revolutionary” (1950), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Volume 5—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_08.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_08.htm) (accessed on 27 December 2016).
32. “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War” (1936), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Volume 1—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_12.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm) (accessed on 27 December 2016).
33. Naga rebel leader T. Muivah’s interview to Kapan Thapar on the BBC TV *Hard Talk* programme; the interview is discussed in details in “A Rebel’s Vision” in Ranabir Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject*, (New Delhi and London: Sage Publications, 2010), Chapter 6, pp. 162–186.
34. “The Impossibility of Settled Rule” in *Emergence of the Political Subject*, Chapter 2, pp. 39–78.
35. Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010).
36. In this context we have to study rigorously the narrative of what is known as “counter-Enlightenment”. See for instance an account of the debate on counter-Enlightenment, Robert E. Norton, “The Myth of Counter-Enlightenment”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68 (4), October 2007, pp. 635–658; historians have also recorded the collective violence, oaths of solidarity, swearing, use of harsh language, ardent appeals, forceful interventions and the display of an energy produced out of the “combustible mix of indignation, ritual humiliation, and the threat to the blood”—phenomena noted, for instance, by William Beik, “The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution”, *Past and Present*, 197, November 2007, pp. 75–110. Beik notes the moral indignation of the people, “their desire to punish the authorities for the latter’s abuse of power”, “the emergence of factional politics” out of this hyper energy, and a clear decision among the people, “excluded from decision making (now) shifting their loyalty to the rioters”. Beik notes what we may call the moral contagion.
37. Georg Lukacs, *Hegel’s False and His Genuine Ontology*, trans. D. Fernbach (New York: Merlin Press, 1978).
38. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1971).
39. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus—A Critique of the State Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 248.
40. On this thought of void producing the subject, or correctly speaking, subject-position, see the essays of Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, Trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), particularly Chapters 1 and 2.

41. R. Samaddar, *The Materiality of Politics*, 2 vols (London: Anthem Press, 2007); R. Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject* (New Delhi and London: Sage Publications, 2010).
42. *Class Struggles in France, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *Capital* (Volume 3) remain the best instances of that.
43. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, Part III, “Contradiction and Overdetermination” (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1969)—<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1962/overdetermination.htm> (accessed on 29 December 2016).
44. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson in their article, “The Materiality of Communism: Politics beyond Representation and the State”, are aware of the paradox when they write in a critique of the idea of politics as representation, “Nevertheless we are convinced that the criticism of political representation is a key feature of a communist politics—to put it even more sharply, we are convinced that, there is no communist politics without a criticism of political representation. There is no contradiction here with the unease we have just declared. When Marx and Engels famously wrote, with a reference to the statutes of the First International, that “the liberation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself” they clearly set the stage for a communist politics conceived of as a radical criticism of representation. At the same time, we believe that because Marx and Engels were not naive, they were also acutely aware of the difficulty and even of the paradoxical nature of the task they were outlining. The “liberation of the working class” is presented here as the result and the effect of the process through which the working class constitutes itself as a political subject”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Volume 113 (4), Fall 2014 (pp. 778–790), p. 784.
45. E.J. Hobsbawm wrote in *The Revolutionaries*, “Here again, what forces people towards conscious revolutionism is not the ambition of their objective, but the apparent failure of all alternative ways of attaining it, the closing of all doors against them... Becoming a revolutionary implies not only a measure of despair, but also some hope. The typical alternation of passivity and activism among some notoriously oppressed classes or peoples is thus explained.” (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 248; see also in connection to this various reflections on revolutionary activism in the sixties of the last century; for instance, Ernest Tate, *Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s and 1960s: A Memoir*, Volume One, *Canada, 1955–1965* (London: IMG Publications, 2014).

## Rebuilding the Theory of Crisis as a Postcolonial Task

### I THE WORKING CLASS PERSPECTIVE ON CRISIS

To discuss transformation of the postcolonial society, perhaps we need to think in terms of strategy and not theory. And, the first requirement of such thinking will be that we must not consider the postcolonial condition as one of disaster. Marx did not think in terms of disaster or catastrophe, but in terms of crisis.

One of the fundamental reasons was of course he never saw any setback or destruction as the end of the world, as a catastrophic end. Crisis meant it was or had been brought about by a conjunction of circumstances upsetting the prevailing schema of things; crisis also indicated an opening, an opportunity to claw back, fight back, recover lost ground, push ahead, judge a situation in its dynamics, and not as an end of the dynamics.

The second reason was that crisis meant among other things something organic to the situation experiencing a crisis—the economy, politics, society, whatever—and while this crisis could be short-term, due to an external cause or released by an external element, which worked as a catalyst, crisis denoted an organic asymmetry, a disorder, which the proletariat could take advantage of, but also which, if overcome by capitalism, could push the workers temporarily again on to the back foot.

If the first reason was political, the second was structural. The first becomes sharper in Leninist formulation of Marx's notion of crisis. That Marx and Engels saw a crisis in the frame of a conjunction of circumstance, or a clash of situations and classes, was evident in the way they wrote their

reports on the revolutions in Germany and France.<sup>1</sup> It now acquires a tone of immediacy and urgency in Lenin's writings in 1904–1905 and again during the First World War, particularly in 1917, on contemporary crises in Russia, the proletarian response, the formation of Duma in 1906, the emergence of the Soviet as an organ of Deputies of workers and soldiers, his analysis of war and imperialism and the roles of erstwhile Marxist leaders who had betrayed the ranks of revolutionaries, and the *April Theses*. And then there is his famous tract, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*,<sup>2</sup> in which Lenin analysed the different blocs of the contemporary situation, such as the approaching famine, government inactivity, the role of banks and syndicates, need for control measures, regulation of consumption, possibilities of financial collapse and so on, and asked, if all these amounted to an impending catastrophe in war-torn Russia, could the working class sit back and watch? We have repeatedly referred to these writings of Lenin in course of this book.

This is the first reason why we do not think in terms of disaster, but crisis, a conjunction of circumstances—an opening and perhaps a failed opening for the working class. Now, the second reason—structural. The second reason becomes quite apparent and fundamental to an understanding of Marx if one closely reads his writings on economy. Crisis is not only due to a new set of unsettling circumstances, but the reproduction of a disorder organic to the economy.<sup>3</sup> Hence, as Engels indicated, resistance will begin again from the beginning... because capitalism is unable to organise production and distribution in a rational way. Even in its own terms it fails, so it is prone to recurrent economic crises. Marx moved away from the physiocrats and showed that the falling rate of industrial profit had to be sought in industry itself and not in agriculture. Technical change, far from arresting the falling rate of profit, could be the basis of the fall. Technical change saved labour, and when all the capitalists saved labour there was a change in the organic composition of capital, namely dead labour rises in comparison to living labour, the ultimate source of all value. The rate of profit then must fall. Real wages may rise in absolute terms but may fall in relative terms so that there is an increase in rate of exploitation.<sup>4</sup> Yet this denotes no more than the most abstract form of the crisis, as Marx noted of the bourgeois economy, “without content, without a compelling motivating factor”.<sup>5</sup> He said that in the bourgeois economy sale and purchase may always fall apart and this represented a potential crisis. Yet, as he noted, the possibility of a crisis turning into an actual crisis was not contained in the form of the crisis itself; it only implied that “the *framework* for a crisis exists.”<sup>6</sup> (Marx's italics)



If this seems to be reason why we have to search for organic factors in a crisis, there is a further reason to this. The crisis appears as a crisis only at a particular moment, even though it may be in the coming, because economic thought is an ideology. It clouds the coming of the crisis. In *Theories of Surplus Value* Marx spoke of vulgar economists, who never went beyond appearances of things to the real lives of these things, and who through their ideologies espoused policies and doctrines that aimed at making this essentially unstable system appear stable. Thus, prices never tell us of the source of value in labour, profits do not tell us always of exploitation, and the hidden magnitudes of economy are not subjective realities. To explain prices we need to go beyond the veil of appearance and examine values. Again the appearance may be local, but the context may be global (think of the sub-prime crisis in the United States and the global financial crisis). Profits may seem to arise in circulation, yet this is globally impossible, for one commodity owner can thereby secure profit separately, but all capital owners cannot take that route simultaneously. Capital may be destroyed through commercial convulsions, improvements in production, import of cheap necessities and instruments, and outflow or emigration of capital.<sup>7</sup> Bourgeois economists not able to discard Marx completely have tried repeatedly to reformulate his analysis, for instance with the concept of creative destruction, or sharp bust cycle leading to recession, etc.<sup>8</sup> Thus, to bourgeois economists the degree of *tuning* necessary for intervention in otherwise perfect market mechanisms becomes crucial. In time, as interventions became increasingly global, the theory of imperialism became an extension of the theory of crisis. In the age of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg insisted, crisis meant the possibility of a breakdown.

In short, in understanding a crisis we are on the cusp of several times: long term/short term; the time of coming/the time of appearance; local time/global time; the time of economy/the time of the immediate that is to say political response; the time of reproduction of crisis/the time of recovery; and thus finally, the suddenness of the crisis/the preparedness of the combatants.

It also means we are on the cusp of several causes. Crisis is not usually a mono-causal one. Mono-causal explanations of crises generally centre on the idea of disproportionality, and thus anarchy of production as the key cause, or the idea of under-consumption, lack of purchasing power of the consumers as the cause. But let us keep in mind Marx's own dictum according to which *all* basic contradictions of the capitalist mode of production come into play in the process leading to a capitalist crisis, though one or the

other cause may become relatively more important on one or the other occasion. Likewise, a crisis of overproduction is both a crisis of overproduction of commodities and a crisis of overproduction of capital. Likewise it is equally possible that a crisis may exhibit in the sphere of production or in the sphere of circulation, because the main thing is that the crisis is an interruption of the process of accumulation—enlarged reproduction, which, as has been pointed out in this book following Marx, is a dialectical unity of production and circulation. Similarly, the business cycle is intimately linked with a credit cycle, and thus while an expansion of credit can enable the capitalist system to sell temporarily more goods than what the sum of real incomes and past savings could buy, at some time debt must be paid. Hence there is always the possibility of a credit or banking crisis, adding fuel to other factors leading to a crisis. It is like a mass of explosives waiting to catch fire. This is essentially what Marx argued—the interplay of objective and subjective factors.<sup>9</sup> Not only economic crisis and growing centralisation of capital, but also the growth of exploitation of the workers and their indignation at being rendered surplus, leading to revolt, will cause the crisis of capitalism and its fall.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the relation of the crisis to the militancy of the rank-and-file is direct. The entire discussion of the crisis suggests at least one truth, namely, the self-fulfilling nature of a prophecy. In other words, the crisis is somehow an explanation of itself; an inquiry into what causes a crisis always suggests that an element is working towards fulfilling the conditions of crisis; and that a general explanation is never enough. The general explanation only provides a framework, while a specific factor must be sought—that is, the catalyst of the time.

Even though this is a very rough sketch of the critical ideas on crisis,<sup>11</sup> this will be perhaps enough to see the relevance of the postcolonial condition to crisis. The relation between the crisis and the postcolonial condition is deep but intriguing. Marx wrote in 1857 in introduction to *Grundrisse*,

Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc.<sup>12</sup>

In a way then we can say that the crises in the developed capitalist societies tell us of the various distortions in the postcolonial capitalist order—the “historically vanished” or “partly the still unconquered remnants”. But we can make use of this historical sensibility in another way also. We can say that by studying the history of communist movements in Russia and China and elsewhere in the so-called backward capitalist countries, we can understand better the history of crisis under capitalism, and specifically how crises are to be faced and coped with.<sup>13</sup> If a study of a crisis is inseparable from a study of its resolution, that is from a study of the problematic of transition, then does not the problematic relation between capitalism and postcolonial condition tell us of the way in which we can read the question of crisis in the history of postcolonialism itself?

There are several ways to understand this query:

First, the postcolonial condition itself manifests a crisis of capitalism. It poses temporal and situational barriers that capitalism cannot overcome. Postcolonialism is thus not the past, but the incessant present and the future of a capitalism that is beset with limits.

Second, the crisis capitalism faces can be overcome by a politics of resistance to crisis that characterised the communist movements in less developed capitalist countries (Russia, China or Cuba, for instance), and only this type of resistance unmasks the crisis.

Third, the crisis capitalism faces has been laced and partly overcome in the past by wars of global consequences, which include most importantly consequences for colonial and ex-colonial countries.<sup>14</sup> This means that historically important events like decolonisation and anti-colonial revolutions are resolutions of global capitalist crises as well.

Fourth, and this is most important, as postcolonial capitalism develops, as this book has argued, it develops capitalism, so leading the father by the tailcoat. At the same time it unmasks capitalist crisis in capitalism’s new dimensions, and suggests new ways to combat it.

In any case, without studying the postcolonial condition we cannot come to grips with the problematic of crisis in a political sense. A theory of crisis today must wrestle with the transition question as capitalism becomes more and more global and value chains lose all meanings if torn from the global context. The rent crisis in postcolonial capitalism and the interest crisis in middle-income capitalist countries like Greece show different aspects of crisis under capitalism.<sup>15</sup> Profit, interest and rent, the three phenomena of distribution, become simultaneously the three phenomena of production, three necessary constituent parts of the process of production, and thus the three locations of crisis. In the postcolonial milieu, like rent in India or interest in

many other countries, their position straddles both production and distribution, and is the fertile ground for breeding crisis. Marx pointed out,

The division of profit into profit of enterprise and interest (not to speak of the intervention of commercial profit and money-dealing profit, which are founded in the circulation sphere and seem to derive entirely from this, (and not from the production process itself at all) completes the autonomisation of the form of surplus-value, the ossification of its form as against its substance, its essence...

Capital-profit (or better still capital-interest), land-ground rent, labour-wages, this economic trinity as the connection between the component of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity... It is equally natural, therefore, that vulgar economy, which is nothing more than a didactic and more or less doctrinaire translation of the everyday notions of the actual agents of production, giving them a certain comprehensible arrangement, finds the natural basis of its fatuous self-importance established beyond all doubt precisely in this trinity, in which the entire inner connection is obliterated. This formula also corresponds to the self-interests of the dominant classes, since it preaches the natural necessity and perpetual justification of their sources of revenue and erects them into to a dogma.

In presenting the reification of the relations of production and the autonomy they acquire vis-vis the agents of production, we shall not go into the form and manner in which these connections appear to them as overwhelming natural laws, governing them irrespective of their will, in the form that the world-market and its conjunctures, the movements of market-prices, the cycles of industry and trade, and the alternations of prosperity and crisis prevails on them as blind necessity.<sup>16</sup>

Hence the question: Is not the global financial crisis in a fundamental sense a postcolonial crisis as well, a postcolonial crisis that often manifests in rent crisis and interest crisis?<sup>17</sup> To attempt to engage with this question means to distance ourselves from the traditional view of crisis as linked with classical business cycles. The classical epoch of industrial capitalism ended with the First World War, but this is still the period cited by all defenders of capitalism when they refer to the regenerative powers of the “business cycle” and the periodic crises that engender it. For Marx, capitalist crises were not only crises of overproduction: not only too many commodities than could profitably be sold, but also too much capital to be profitably invested in industry or advanced as loans, and thus also the disjunction of the three elements of distribution—profit, interest and rent—consequently violently destabilising production. Eventually, as the crisis deepens, masses of workers are thrown out of employment, peasants crash out of the market,

wages are forced back downwards towards or below subsistence level, and a new recovery period seems distant. Thus, concentration of capital along with its expansion, and technological advance, cannot prevent under-consumption, meaning under-consumption of capital. Hence, wages for few may remain high, but that does not mean that the means of production will increase. The postcolonial condition exhibits the perennial under-consumption of capital, hence it becomes the sign of capitalist crisis, not cyclical but permanent. In this sense, “overproduction” of the means of production demonstrates the necessary contradictions of a system that has the potential to produce real abundance, yet under which that very potential causes a breakdown every time it builds up. All these could have been avoided if capitalism had no monopoly form, but in its imperialist stage free competition is no longer free but straitjacketed in monopoly. Industry is dominated by a few giant companies in developed capitalist countries powerful enough to keep out smaller, weaker competitors from other countries. This is how concentration and centralisation proceed. This how countries like Brazil, Argentina, Greece, became victims of a policy of debt expansion, the other aspect of which is a range of austerity measures. From this aspect, Lenin’s arguments on the links between monopoly, banks, imperialism and domination of weaker nations as signposts of capitalist crisis and its epoch of decay can be seen to be profound.<sup>18</sup>

The long-term fall in the rate of profit arising from the concentration of capital is not the same thing as short-term profit fluctuations dependent on the business cycle. Unlike short-term business cycles, the long-term fall is carried out by a series of self-destructive measures or trends. As the post-2008 global crisis showed, overproduction of capital (including credit) forced many capitalists to devalue their capital as new and cheaper production and circulation techniques (through innovations in digital infrastructure) were introduced, leading to fictitious capitalisation. Hence, in such situations, the postcolonial condition indicates not the secular tendency of surplus to rise, but stagnate. For all these reasons, the world crisis emerging in the wake of 2008 is not simply another cyclical downturn. It represents the reemergence of the conditions of a severe crisis long suppressed by the post-Second World War boom. It looks already like a new Great Depression: government bailouts, insurance schemes, guarantees of unrecoverable bank loans and the revival of national instruments of recovery. Without a recovery of postcolonial economies on a broad scale it is difficult to see how capitalism can cope with this round of crisis. Achieving greater circulation in the global economy—a process in which some postcolonial economies will play important roles—may be one such expansionary step. Yet such operational

expansion can be of only short-term value if it cannot address the crucial question of surplus capital—particularly in credit form.<sup>19</sup>

Escape or survival routes like these merely illustrate the fact that the contradictions and crisis-tendencies of accumulation remain latent irrespective of whether a crisis blows up in the form of a general crisis, or passes away without resulting in a general crisis affecting all sectors of the economy and all aspects of politics. The tendency of over-accumulation of capital is permanently manifested in the class struggle over the production of surplus value, and the competitive struggle over its realisation, as capitalists seek to overcome the social and natural barriers to accumulation inherent in the social form of capitalist production. They do so mainly through credit expansion, as “(T)he entire credit system, and the over-trading, over-speculation, etc. connected with it, rests on the necessity of expanding and leaping over the barrier to circulation and the sphere of exchange.”<sup>20</sup> Historically, credit expansion has led to indebtedness, hence the struggle everywhere is against debt and crisis. Yet the experiences of postcolonial countries suggest at least some lessons of how the institution of the national State, national planning, a strong banking system, including a strong central bank, a strong saving rate and a protected and protectionist national economy, which includes food sufficiency, have acted collectively as a barrier against global capitalism and the worst ravages of global credit expansion. Indeed, social struggles have increasingly been pitched against debt and insecurity rather than falling wage per se.

To understand this situation, the irredeemable global nature of crisis, and therefore the global nature of postcolonial capitalism, we have to again go back to Marx’s understanding. As we know, present-day neoliberalism has mounted offensive against all concessions that working people the world over secured from the capitalist ruling class in the post-War era. It claims that these concessions are restrictions on business and must be removed so that the rate of economic growth can be accelerated. Of course the extreme manifestations of neoliberalism began with the dismantling of the planned economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe by the anti-communist forces that rose to power in those countries in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet it is precisely the restored “free capitalist relations”—that is, capital itself—that now appear as the new barrier to the development of production and of human society. It is no longer a commercial crisis that is proving to be the obstacle to capitalism, but as Engels wrote in *Anti-Duhring*,

the ever-increasing perfectibility of modern machinery is, by the anarchy of social production, turned into a compulsory law that forces the individual industrial capitalist always to improve his machinery, always to increase its productive force. The bare possibility of extending the field of production is transformed for him into a similarly compulsory law. The enormous expansive force of modern industry, compared with which that of gases is mere child's play, appears to us now as a necessity for expansion, both qualitative and quantitative, that laughs at all resistance. Such resistance is offered by consumption, by sales, by the markets for the products of modern industry. But the capacity for extension, extensive and intensive, of the markets is primarily governed by quite different laws that work much less energetically. The extension of the markets cannot keep pace with the extension of production. The collision becomes inevitable, and as this cannot produce any real solution so long as it does not break in pieces the capitalist mode of production, the collisions become periodic. Capitalist production has begotten another 'vicious circle'.<sup>21</sup>

Here, Engels sees crises as collisions between “the quite different laws” of the private appropriation of wealth and the socialised nature of production; the growing anarchy of production versus the increasingly planned nature of production within the capitalist enterprise, and later the giant transnational capitalist corporations; and the growing antagonism between the capitalist ruling class and the working class—leading necessarily to a situation where the growth of the market cannot keep up with the growth of production, including production of capital.

The market is thus important in a discussion on crisis. The postcolonial condition presents a scenario of a restricted market and a barrier to free trade. On the other hand it also presents a clamour for a strong State able to initiate steps for industrialisation and take financial measures in order to hold in check the more destructive consequences of globalisation—in short, a more vigorous interaction between the market and the State. The Keynesian phase of the developed Western capitalist economy had envisaged such interaction. And, now with the development of market forces in China, India and several other developing countries, the market has come back to the centre of attention, displacing capital per se, so that State finances have become important as a factor in a crisis situation. The result has been that, as time has passed, crises are increasingly involving the finances of the State itself. This is the main reason why today, compared to the early crises in the days of Marx or even to those taking place as late as the 1920s, the modern cyclical crises of capitalism are political crises as well.

The involvement of the State in a crisis was always the case. But more than ever it is clear—in the wake of the crisis of 2008, the debt crisis of Greece, the European currency crisis, the crisis of the European Union and Brexit, moves by China to expand its credit operations for logistical enterprises, and the trend towards new protectionism evinced in several capitalist countries to save the State from the crisis—that all crises are now political.

## 2 LENIN, CRISIS, AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION

The crisis of capitalism is thus continuous, as well as of a specific element inside the capitalist form. A dynamic view of the crisis enables a link between all the five forms of crisis, namely: (1) the crisis of economy (primarily a crisis of accumulation); (2) the crisis of the system (primarily the political-economic system); (3) the crisis of authority (primarily a crisis of government); (4) the crisis of hegemony (primarily a crisis of the State); and (5) the organic crisis (primarily a crisis of classes). By organic crisis, we mean organic to both the bourgeoisie and the working class. Grasping the links between these various forms is the clue to understanding the crisis.

No one understood the essential political nature of any discussion of crisis as thoroughly as Lenin. The postcolonial engagement with crisis begins from there. In the 1880s Russian intellectuals had debated Russia's future in terms of the desirability or undesirability of capitalist development in the wake of the experiences of Western Europe. It was the Russian populists, activists of "land and freedom" who made the first translation of *Capital* from German possible. They criticised liberal political economy. And the idea of *Capital* encouraged them to think of a Russian state whose duty would be to combat Russian capitalism and encourage a non-capitalist path of development. Such a state could not follow the Western parliamentary system, which had proven to be an obedient tool of the propertied classes. Since all these involved the question if capitalism was inevitable along with its crises, and if the cyclical crisis of capitalism could be bypassed on the basis of the Russian commune, the concern was: Could the existing system of the commune be preserved? Or, to put the concern a little differently, with all the social upheavals against Tsarist autocracy, feudalism, the unsettling nature of emerging capitalism and the Russian tradition of the commune, was Russia riper for the great Revolution than the economically developed bourgeois Western countries? While following *Capital*, Marxists had argued that the bourgeoisie was just as necessary a precondition of the socialist revolution as the proletariat itself, and the evolution of every economic foundation was like a process of natural history, objective and independent



of human will, it did not mean that Russia had to desist from revolutionary programmes. So, the all-important question echoing among Russian revolutionaries and Marxists arose: *What is to be done?* Were they to wait for Westernisation, full development of capitalism, ignore the crisis of social formation brought about by the vagaries of capitalist markets, famines and industrial unrest? Besides *What is to be done?* another question arose: *What should we expect from Revolution?* There was a shift from what was desirable to what was necessary.<sup>22</sup>

A further shift came with an emphasis on programmes rather than on doctrines. Till the time doctrines held sway, the emphasis was on the progressiveness of capitalist industrialisation and the dissolution of the Russian commune. Endless scientific discussions could continue. This was what was called “legal Marxism” in the 1890s, which Gramsci described as a blend of bourgeois political economy with appropriately simplified Marxism.<sup>23</sup> But Lenin was tougher. He said,

Struve’s *Critical Notes* appeared in 1894, and during the past twenty years Russian Social-Democrats have become thoroughly familiar with this habit of the enlightened Russian bourgeois of advancing their ideas and advocating their desires under the cloak of a “Marxism” *purged* of revolutionary content. Struvism is not merely a Russian, but, as recent events clearly prove, an international striving on the part of the bourgeois theoreticians to kill Marxism with “kindness”, to crush it in their embraces, kill it with a feigned acceptance of “all” the “truly scientific” aspects and elements of Marxism *except* its “agitational”, “demagogic”, “Blanquist-utopian” aspect. In other words, they take from Marxism all that is acceptable to the liberal bourgeoisie, including the struggle for reforms, the class struggle (without the proletarian dictatorship), the “general” recognition of “socialist ideals” and the substitution of a “new order” for capitalism; they cast aside “only” the living soul of Marxism, “only” its revolutionary content.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of the fierce controversy and debates between Russian Marxists and Populists, young Lenin had taken a new route. He cut himself off from the Populist “Friends of the People”, also from Struve with *The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr. Struve’s Book*. He wrote, significantly,

The only question that might here arise is: who indicates such undoubtedly desirable measures with greater accuracy and ability—the Narodniks or publicists like Skvortsov who has so much to say in favour of technical progress and to whom Mr. Struve is so extremely well disposed? It seems to me that

from the Marxist viewpoint there can be no doubt that Narodism is absolutely to be preferred *in this respect*. The measures proposed by the Messrs. Skvortsov relate to the interests of the entire class of small producers, the petty bourgeoisie, in the same measure as the programme of *Moskovskiiye Vedomosti* relates to those of the big bourgeoisie. They are designed not for all, but only for certain of the elect, who are vouchsafed the attention of the authorities. They are, lastly, abominably crude because they presume police interference in the economy of the peasants. Taken all in all, these measures provide no serious guarantees and chances of the “productive progress of peasant economy.”

The Narodniks *in this respect* understand and represent the interests of the small producers far more correctly, and the Marxists, while rejecting all the reactionary features of their programme, must not only accept the general democratic points, but carry them through more exactly, deeply and further<sup>25</sup>

With *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Lenin’s argument was well-formed. For Lenin, capitalism was not the social system of the future, to flourish after the overthrow of Russia’s autocracy, but the social system of Russia’s present, supporting all reactionary dimensions of the country, and definitely established by the time Populists were debating. Populists were to be critiqued not because they were anti-bourgeoisie, but, rather, too soft on the bourgeoisie. So, the question was: *What was to be done?* With the impending social upheaval, class conflicts, peasant unrest and workers’ uprisings in different cities of Russia, a crisis was definitely coming. Would the revolutionaries wait for the will of the people? Would they watch and measure and see if the forces of socialism were adequately thrown up by capitalism to take charge of the Revolution? Would they wait for industries, railways and banking to expand? Would they wait for peasant dissolution or dissolution of peasant communes? Lenin responded to the query set for Russia by Chernyshevskii (1863),<sup>26</sup> by recalling this old call of the revolutionaries, and repeating it: *What is to be done?* Chernyshevskii’s novel written in jail had inspired Lenin, who was dissatisfied with both Tolstoy’s and Dostoyevsky’s responses, to ask: What must then we do? We all know his answer. That was at the same time his response to the crisis.

For almost twenty years since the late 1870s Russian Marxists had debated what to do with capitalism, if capitalism had arrived in Russia, etc., reminding us of the debates Western Marxist academics held almost a century later in the 1970s and 1980s as to what were the real reasons behind a crisis. Lenin had cut his way through the debate, showed how much capitalism had progressed in Russia, analysed the specific features of Russian crisis in the background of a global crisis that had erupted in war,

and for twenty years pressed on with the poser *What is to be done?*, until the question and the crisis both were resolved in a revolution.<sup>27</sup>

Is there a lesson in this? There are many. Here at least one answer can be advanced: crisis exposes the weakest point in the link, the point where the proletariat must strike; more often not it is in the weaker industrialised countries that the crisis demonstrates itself in its utmost severity; and crisis poses the political question in its most immediacy, in its most concreteness. Thus the crisis may involve particular questions of strategy involving State, party, nation, organisation, central slogan, unity, economic policy, etc. There is no fixed grammar of handling it. The main issue is the necessity of an immediate response, forging a strategy. This was Lenin's answer to the furious debates in Russian revolutionary circles.

Yet the history of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* tells us the histories of other crises as well, and that is no less important for our discussion. As we know, Lenin was responding not only to a Russian crisis, but a crisis within revolutionary ranks also, an organisational crisis, a crisis in traditional workers' organisations, and a crisis in the routine Leftist notion of how to do politics. His response compounded the crisis among the revolutionaries, who split as a consequence. Indeed, on the eve of the October (November) Revolution Lenin was compelled to offer his resignation from the Bolshevik Party if his sense of immediacy and urgency was not reciprocated. He argued that peasant unrest was fast spreading, soldiers were not ready to listen to the government and were showing disobedience, in key cities the soviets of deputies were on the side of the Revolution, and the international perspective had never been more favourable. In his words, "In the face of such facts, can one remain a conscientious champion of the proletariat and yet deny that a crisis has matured, that the revolution is passing through an extremely critical moment, that the government's victory over the peasant revolt would now sound the death knell of the revolution, would be the final triumph of the Kornilov revolt..." And then he said:

It is obvious that if in a peasant country, after seven months of a democratic republic, matters could come to a peasant revolt it irrefutably proves that the revolution is suffering nation-wide collapse, that it is experiencing a crisis of unprecedented severity, and that the forces of counter-revolution have gone the *limit*.

That is obvious. In the face of such a fact as a peasant revolt all other political symptoms, even were they to contradict the fact that a nation-wide crisis is maturing, would have no significance whatsoever...

What, then, is to be done? We must *aussprechen was ist*, “state the facts”, admit the truth that there is a tendency, or an opinion, in our Central Committee and among the leaders of our Party which favours *waiting* for the Congress of Soviets, and is *opposed* to taking power immediately, is *opposed* to an immediate insurrection. That tendency, or opinion, must be *overcome*.<sup>28</sup> (Lenin’s italics)

After Lenin, crisis could no longer be discussed in pure economic terms. Political response henceforth would become a part of the history of a crisis. Perhaps this had something to do with Lenin’s study of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* in the war years and his appreciation of human subjectivity, already strong, becoming even stronger.<sup>29</sup> This appreciation of human subjectivity contributed to his analysis of the imperialist situation, revolutionary defeatism, national liberation and the State. In this way he connected crisis with revolution, objective phenomenon with subjective resistance, and analysed crisis with the weapon of immediacy and urgency. No crisis guarantees the conditions of its own resolution. So, intervention of a revolutionary party became for Lenin a decisive factor in a critical situation: “It is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, ‘falls’, if it is not toppled over.”<sup>30</sup> Lenin called for an intervention by a resolute subject. Hence his famous formulation of a revolutionary crisis: the ruling class cannot rule in the old way, the ruled cannot tolerate rule in the old way. For the rest, let us listen to his words,

To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the “upper classes”, a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for “the lower classes not to want” to live in the old way; it is also necessary that “the upper classes should be unable” to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown

more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in “peace time”, but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis *and by the “upper classes” themselves* into independent historical action.<sup>31</sup>(Italics Lenin’s)

In this time of restlessness released by global capitalism in postcolonial countries, we find a reflection of Lenin’s insistence on an activist response to the crisis.

### 3 THE CRISIS OF THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION

As mentioned above, decolonisation in itself was a resolution of the global crisis that had appeared in the form of war. Over vast stretches of the earth decolonisation brought in the postcolonial condition, which was at the same time a new expression of the limits of global capitalism. Wars continued. The Vietnam War was not the last imperialist war in the post-Second World War period. With wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in this new century, the global capitalist crisis once again demonstrated its close affinity with war. Yet the postcolonial condition did not mean a static, homogeneous undifferentiated condition in absolute distinction to developed capitalism. As this book has tried to argue, the postcolonial condition has to be seen in its dynamics as part of global capitalism, in its updated manifestation in the neoliberal era, so much so that any study of capitalism and its crises cannot be analysed without reference to postcolonial capitalism.

The postcolonial condition exhibits today a great variety of situations in the economy and politics, yet there is something of a general condition, which we can name as postcolonial capitalism that has emerged, whose features are parts of global capitalism. We have tried to illustrate at least some of them in this book. To find what the postcolonial condition is, what these features are, one does not have to go to the remotest parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America; one will increasingly find them in Europe, in North America, in the interstices of global capitalism operating everywhere. In this situation, obviously, new issues have emerged. These new issues, like informal conditions of work, the domination of logistics and the extractive mode of production in postcolonial development, the destruction of agriculture, indebtedness, massive expansion of cities, displacement, migration, primitive accumulation, the instability of the conventional parliamentary form of politics, populism as the mainstay of politics, subjection

to global trade rules, the reemergence of the national question, the demand for autonomy at every level of life, the demand for a State that would protect the lives of the people, and federalisation of power show that the post-colonial condition itself is a component of a bigger crisis affecting the global bourgeois order. Yet it is not that these questions were never considered in course of the consideration of classical questions of politics by Marx and those who followed him. In analysing contemporary crisis they are as relevant as ever. Some of them are listed here:

- (1) While the crisis seems episodic, coming in short bursts, it is also a long-run phenomenon—in Marx's words crisis is the mode in which capitalism functions. Neoliberalism has stretched this reality further. It treats crisis as an occasion to restructure and press home capitalism's domination. This is evident in the condition of postcolonial capitalism. Hence, revolutionary activity does not depend on the maturing of a crisis. The work continues much as Mao said: it is a protracted war, but crisis increases the tempo, brings the hour of collision nearer. The strategy of dual power in postcolonial countries is as alive as ever.
- (2) The salience of primitive accumulation on the basis of destruction of agriculture is one of the most significant aspects of the postcolonial condition, forced upon these countries by global capitalism. In India, for instance, the increasing incidence of farmers committing suicide is the most telling illustration of this. The roots of the crisis are deep, with a long history of dispossession and extractive accumulation. The ongoing crisis in Indian agriculture is in the nature of a struggle between peasant producers and the exploiters bent upon extracting from peasants maximum surplus through the mechanism of the market, and at times outright violence. The land question, and in general access to resources like forests, water and so on, has become an intrinsic part of the class struggle in several countries including India. In India, it was during the 1960s that state interventions to transform the production processes in Indian agriculture began in earnest. This was also a period of acute food scarcity; food riots became endemic, with dependence on imports for most essential food items becoming acute. This was also the time when armed peasant struggles broke out in different parts of the country. The first phase of this movement was drowned in blood. Today, millions of farmers are pitted against the highly organised corporate sector, which controls

the market. Accumulation at the cost of the primary sector has become a principal source of wealth in the country, which is equated with the national growth rate. Dalits and indigenous people have been transformed into mere cheap labour. Rural indebtedness is on the rise, and we can thus see in these forms the return of the nineteenth-century mode of extraction of surplus—so called primitive accumulation.<sup>32</sup> Millions of dispossessed from the villages are now migrants into ever-expanding urban agglomerates as in India, indeed, all over the postcolonial world. The agrarian crisis in its present form is a result of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by a neoliberal world order on to scores of postcolonial countries, aiming to reform the State and the economy. On the other hand, popular struggles in myriad forms continue to defeat or obstruct the structural adjustment agenda and policies. Once again, Marx's interest in agriculture, his expositions on rent and his correspondence with Russian populists will be a major reference point in understanding the nature of crisis in capitalism, not to speak of Mao's enormous amount of writings on Chinese peasantry.

- (3) In the face of neocolonial domination and a neoliberalising globalisation, the issue of the nation has not died. As the Greek debt crisis demonstrated, at the final moment of challenge to neoliberal domination over people's lives the national question will resurface. However with the reemergence of the national question, issues of national identity have also surfaced, as have issues of other identities. They are marks of not only an unsettled global liberal politics; they also challenge conventional national politics, even what Antonio Gramsci had called the *national popular*. The need for autonomy and thorough democratisation calls for their insertion in the class politics of the Left, while the Left has to battle ideologies of xenophobia, divisions within oppressed classes, and attacks on minorities. The old legacy of international unity seen repeatedly in anti-colonial struggles (the Organisation of African Unity, the Tri-Continental Solidarity Movement, Afro-Asian Unity) seems to resurface during anti-globalisation mobilisations, and they survive below the surface of official global politics. Once again, as indicated earlier, the migrant more than the national citizen stands as a key figure in such new politics. In the long tradition of the International it was clear how Marx, Lenin and others wanted the national question to be addressed within an internationalist framework.

- (4) The postcolonial condition represents global crisis because it represents challenge and contest over five monopolies: the monopoly of technology, monopoly of control over global finances, monopoly of access to natural resources, the monopoly over international communication modes and the media, and the monopoly of the military means of mass destruction. On the other hand the postcolonial countries cannot produce a sturdy challenge because most of these countries have huge state-sector deficits and chronic deficits in their current account balances, high imports, and in the long run capital imports, and are marked by rapid urbanisation combined with an insufficient local production of food, excessive expenditures on local bureaucracies, changes in income distribution to the benefit of the local elites, insufficient growth of and structural imbalances in the industrial sector—all these features producing reliance on foreign assistance, with globalisation only accentuating them.
- (5) Crisis is in the ranks of the fighters also. Postcolonial experiences of development have demonstrated that the existing accumulation mode is insufficient and with new modes of accumulation being made possible under postcolonial capitalism (one instance being infrastructure building) existing political modes of resistance are proving inadequate. Plural subjectivity of resistance, and hence the question of the formation of the people, a popular platform and a united front are real issues of today. Thus, rights of the unorganised workers, workers in extractive industries and waste-reprocessing operations, peasants thrown off the land, small traders and other sections of the petty producing classes now occupy the attention of communist movements in postcolonial countries. This strategy primarily invokes the politics of justice;<sup>33</sup> it also invokes the issue of autonomy, which becomes crucial as the hour of crisis strikes. Without autonomy of the Soviets the Leninist programme could not have succeeded. Without factory councils the Italian workers' movements could not have proceeded. Without autonomy of the nationalities, the Russian empire could not have been liquidated, and the Soviet Union could not have been born. These principles formed the backbone of the revolutionary programme of combating the crisis. The violation of these principles became the cause of new crisis.

In the context of all these, in the postcolonial countries old modes of party building, parliamentarianism, old style trade unionism, old style



peasant associations, and other platform-building activities are proving inadequate. In the vacuum left by the inadequacy of the old style of work, Left wing populism is gaining ground across vast stretches of the postcolonial world, particularly in Latin America. At the present juncture, populism expresses most acutely the political crisis of the postcolonial condition. Too often, commentators have written obituaries of the postcolonial State (this is a Failed State, etc.) and too inadequately we have studied the crisis and the reconstruction of the postcolonial State over the decades. Economic crisis and State failure have been compounded by the existence in almost all ex-colonial countries of a comprador class, which has facilitated foreign intervention and suppressed the politics of subordinated classes and the yearnings for democracy and autonomy. Yet, as the Nigerian experience in Africa or the Indian experience in Asia has shown, the struggle over the State has not ended. As one observer of the recent history of Nigeria has noted, "The recent history of popular resistance to the crisis policies of the Nigerian state, for instance, suggests that it is a running battle, with the victories by no means only on the side of the state and ruling class."<sup>34</sup> One may say that the postcolonial State is the best evidence of the crisis, the crisis has gripped the State, and the revolutionary task of destroying the old State and building a new one is more pressing than ever. This struggle encapsulates the history of colonialism, ideas of independence, freedom and liberation, the different attempts to democratise the postcolonial State, make it responsive to the needs of the subordinated classes, and free the country from neocolonial domination and its compradors. It is a crisis of that history too, for it brings forth the challenge of reinventing the anti-colonial.<sup>35</sup>

To go back to the history of Lenin's writings for over 20 years on crisis is to revisit the history of self-introspection of a revolutionary strand of thinking within the anti-colonial body of thought.

In one form or another, all these five questions reflecting on crisis of the postcolonial condition have been discussed and debated within revolutionary circles for more than a century. On the basis of those insights, rebuilding a theory of crisis becomes a significant postcolonial task. Such a task will eschew economism, make politics part of a theory of crisis, and discuss other issues of nation, globalisation, autonomy, changing class-people relations and, most importantly, organisation, as parts of a theory of crisis. The postcolonial condition impels such a discussion. Rebuilding the theory of crisis is a postcolonial task.

The postcolonial condition above all brings to our attention the global crisis of liberalism. The earlier alliance between nationalism and liberalism

was long over, even in continental Europe; and liberalism in postcolonial countries considered as peripheral countries never had much chance. The perpetuated class divisions between peasantry and land-owning nobility, workers and mill owners, the comprador class and the nation, did not prove hospitable to liberal ideas. Nationalism, socialism, ethnic ideologies and finally populism have grown in the decolonised world, but not liberalism. The historical core of liberal ideology was absent and in that milieu its global crisis has become too-soon apparent in ex-colonial countries. In the early years of the decolonised world liberal ideas were tailored for domestic purposes, which meant a strong State, secularism, the role of the State, some amount of social justice and equity, enlightened values, again some quantum of social reforms and human rights, developmental administration and peaceful borders. The middle class, produced mostly by an educated stratum of society and bureaucratisation, required a growing State in the decolonised world, and they became bearers of liberal values within this postcolonial context. Neoliberalism has changed the situation. With half of the middle classes yearning for less State and more business, the nationalist ideology itself has undergone a transformation. This section of the middle classes does not need this home-grown liberalism any longer. On the other hand, the working poor does not know what use this ideology of liberalism will be in the context of massive attacks on labouring people by forces of trade, commerce, industry, banks and global forces of capital. The shock-waves of the decimation of liberal ideology are being felt across vast stretches of three continents. In this vacuum everywhere the search is on: how to refashion politics to cope with new challenges?

#### 4 THE HISTORICAL IMMANENCE OF CRISIS

At one level the challenge translates into one of articulation: How will the revolutionaries pull together multiple subjects, by which we mean distinct social forces opposed to capitalism which is backed by neoliberal globalisation and neocolonialism, into a lasting unity? How will multiplicity generate generality, without which no social revolution takes place? After all, as Sandro Mezzadra points out, “The most illustrative historical example of this process probably remains the October Revolution: recall how its success depended on articulating the diverse interests of various sectors of the working class, different layers of the peasantry, and the soldiers, a unity captured in the slogan ‘Peace, Bread, Land’.”<sup>36</sup> But this also means that this articulation cannot come without understanding the existing structures

of power, specifically, (and this and the previous three chapters tried to show) the unstable structure of “dual power”, and working for a strategy of transcending the dual power to a victorious counter-power, which symbolises another space of politics and society. The peculiarity of a crisis situation is that each and every phenomenon in politics in the time of crisis is marked by this duality. Recall, as in Russia, the army was an organ of the Tsarist State, yet the soldiers were the mainstay of the revolution. Peasants had remained initially under the yoke of Tsar’s rule yet their unrest was crucial for the Revolution. Russia was at war, yet Russia yearned for peace. In Latin America, every part of the State has been challenged by a counter-force over the last twenty years of unrest in that continent, even though the strategy of dual power seems to have failed in the absence of a determined strategy to crush neoliberal aggression. There is no pure social space unaffected by crisis that lies outside the State, nation and existing forms of politics. It is these spaces that are marked both by crisis and duality, and at crucial moments these spaces become the sites of contention.

This is perhaps at the heart of communism as its motto of struggle, and not unnaturally the idea of transition plays a crucial role in this. Marx’s ideas as much as his successors’, therefore, wrestle so much with issues of crisis and transition. Transition makes class struggle possible. Transition is the space, in Etienne Balibar’s words “political place par excellence”,<sup>37</sup> where crisis and its resolution play themselves out. Transition is the large shadow looming over dual power. There is no site on earth today where the spectre of dual power and transition appears as pronounced as in the postcolonial condition. This is because in the postcolonial condition crisis is never purely economic, it always becomes political.

This is what Lenin taught. Just as Marx observed minutely and rigorously the functioning of the capitalist economy to bring out the reality of crisis and its components, Lenin observed equally closely for twenty years how the Tsarist state functioned, how its government worked, how people responded to each and every act of injustice, how bureaucracy controlled power, how the mainstream liberal opposition behaved, how the structure of power functioned and faced a counter-power over time—in short the functioning of politics and government as the class organ of rule. Even after the Revolution his observations on the critical state of affairs did not end. He did not deny that in post-revolutionary Russia crisis had not ended, and transition was not a one-stroke affair. With the post-revolution Russian economy floundering over famine, food shortage, farming crisis, etc., he came out with new responses, the most famous of which was the

New Economic Policy.<sup>38</sup> In studying the dynamics of socialist governance, or what can be called socialist governmentality, as a key mode of coping with crisis, there is no better instance than his “Better Fewer but Better” (1923).<sup>39</sup> Postcolonial governance holds similarly enormous treasure of lessons for the analysis of the rule of global capital and neoliberal management of the economy and forms of politics similarly marked by dual power and resistance. It is in that possibility of transition that the deeper meaning of crisis in today’s world lies.

It should be clear by now that the postcolonial condition is marked by an immanence of crisis—the postcolonial condition at times conceptualised as peripheral condition, at times that of the less industrialised countries, peasant countries, backward countries, etc. There is something immanent in that condition that invokes the idea and the reality of crisis. In this concluding chapter we have merely tried to use Gramsci’s method of using the idea of immanence historically as distinct from speculatively.<sup>40</sup> For Gramsci, immanence meant being within history and mediated by praxis. We can infer two implications of immanence here:

First, to the extent socialism grows out of particular form/s of capitalism, socialist construction continues to suffer from those deformities and their long-term consequences. Crisis is this immanent in this condition. Following Lenin, Mao had insisted on studying the difficulties of building socialism in the Soviet Union, defects in China’s own experiences, the consequences of a long-term domination of a communist party over society, and the results of incorrect handling of contradictions in course of socialist construction. In other words, the crisis of capitalism would continue under socialism, and hence the need for constant watch, reform and revising of socialist strategy. This was also the message of Lenin’s notes and writings in the last years of his life. Crisis under socialism was thus historically immanent.

Second, the situations that go into the making of the postcolonial condition are not self-explanatory in terms of their postcolonial ingredients. Each such situation is explained or acquires its significance only in relation to the rest. Thus something like peripheral situation acquires meaning only in relation to industrial backwardness or global capitalist dynamics. So is the case with an agrarian crisis. Most importantly the nation acquires immanence only through these historical situations of retarded agriculture, backwardness, global capitalist domination, an informal mode of production and all the other factors we described in this book. The nation is always the object of all the expectations of the labouring people. In order for the working masses to develop, to live with dignity, to attain

self-respect, to have a society of justice and equality, to labour with recognition the nation must fulfil its promise. And yet, with all these conditions the postcolonial nation appears too weak to fulfil the expectations. Since each of the situations defining the postcolonial condition can lead to a crisis, revolution in the post-colony must face crisis permanently. It is the crisis of the nation form.

## NOTES

1. See Karl Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, 1850, *Selected Works*, Volume 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969)—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/> and Frederick Engels, *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Germany*, Chapter 19, “The Close of the Insurrection”, 23 October 1852—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch19.htm> (accessed on 21 December 2016).
2. V.I. Lenin, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It* (September 10–14, 1917), *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), Volume 25, pp. 323–369.
3. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, 1858–62 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, n.d.), Chapter 17, “Ricardo’s Theory of Accumulation and a Critique of It (The Very Nature of capital Leads to Crises)”,—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch17.htm> (accessed on 29 January 2017); contemporary economists still repeat the old idea of Malthus, exposed by Marx in *Theories of Surplus Value*, of the so-called positive role of the unlimited growth of consumption as a means to fight economic crises. Unproductive consumption brought forth possibilities of war, such as increased armaments orders and wasted capital, and in the final reckoning it led to war itself. It could not, however, avert the economic crises of overproduction. Related to this, see also Chapter 20 (section 3 (b), “An Inquiry into Those Principles...” [The Lack of Understanding of the Contradictions of the capitalist Mode of Production Which Cause Crises])—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch20.htm> (accessed on 26 February 2017).
4. Marx wrote, “a falling rate profit (may correspond) to a rising or falling rate of surplus value, and a constant rate of profit to a rising or falling rate of surplus value. And we have seen in that a rising, falling, or a rate of profit that remains the same can also correspond to a rising or falling rate of surplus-value... The rate of profit is thus determined by two major factors—the rate of surplus-value and the value-composition of capital. The effects of these two factors may be briefly summed up as follows, and we are able now to express the composition in percentages, since it is immaterial

here in which of the two portions of the capital the change originates. The rates of profit of two different capitals, or of one and the same capital in two successive different conditions, are equal: (1) given the same percentage composition and the same rate of surplus-value; (2) given unequal percentage compositions and unequal rates of surplus-value, if the (mathematical) product of the rate of surplus-value and the percentages of the variable part of capital ( $s'$  and  $v$ ) is the same in each case, i.e., if the mass of surplus-value reckoned as a percentage of the total capital ( $s = s'v$ ); in other words, when the factors  $s'$  and  $v$  stand in inverse proportion to one another in the two cases. They are unequal: (1) given the same percentage composition, if the rates of surplus-value are unequal, in which case they stand in the same ratio as these rates of surplus-value; (2) given the same rate of surplus-value and different percentage composition, in which case they stand in the same ratio as the variable portions of the capitals; (3) given different rates of surplus-value and different percentage compositions, in which case they stand in the same proportion as the products  $s'v$ , i.e., as the masses of surplus-value reckoned as a percentage of total capital.”—*Capital*, Volume 3, *The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, ed. Friedrich Engels, (1894), trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1991), Chapter 3, pp. 161–162. In other words, crisis thus remains organic to economy more because of the uncertainties in the parallel trajectories of the rate of surplus value and rate of profit, with the mutating organic composition of capital ever unsettling any possibility of fit.

5. ‘The Crisis as the Manifestation of All the Contradictions of Bourgeois Economy’, in Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Chapter 17, Section 10, ‘Ricardo’s Theory of Accumulation and a Critique of it. (The Very Nature of Capital Leads to Crises)’, *Theories of Surplus Value*—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch17.htm> (accessed 26 December 2016).
6. *Ibid.*
7. Roman Rosdolsky thought that Marx’s argument of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall was “in every respect the most important law of modern political economy... despite its simplicity, it has never before been grasped and even less consciously articulated... It is from the historical standpoint the most important law.”—*The Making of Marx’s Capital*, (1968), trans. Pete Burgess (London: Pluto Press, 1977), p. 381. This is because, as Marx said, the real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself (*Capital*, Volume 3, Chapter 15), and thus the law was linked to the entire range of questions concerning the mode of production, development of productive forces, existence of various social classes, etc.
8. Joseph A. Schumpeter popularised the idea of creative destruction, a phrase that Marx did not use, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* 1942 (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 82–83, 139.

9. On this see David Kennedy, “A Clarification of Marx’s Theory of Crisis”—<https://libcom.org/library/clarification-marxs-theory-crisis-david-kennedy> (accessed on 6 January 2017).
10. This is also indicated in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, 1857–58, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), “Crises. Dissolution of the Mode of Production and Form of Society based upon Exchange Value”, p. 201.
11. On post war debates among the academic Marxists in the West on Marx’s ideas on crisis and the relative validity of various explanations, such as, under-consumption, falling rate of profit, realisation crisis, over-accumulation with respect to labour power, competition and the anarchy of the market, production and consumption disproportionality, market competition and monopoly profit, finally credit and regulation of accumulation, see Simon Clarke, “The Marxist Theory of Overaccumulation and Crisis”, *Science and Society*, Volume 54 (4), Winter 1990–91, pp. 442–467, and for the following debate, Judith Orr, “Making a Comeback: The Marxist Theory of Crisis”, *International Socialism*, 79, Summer 1998. This chapter does not go into these debates as they are not relevant for a postcolonial framing of the question.
12. *Grundrisse*, p. 46.
13. The Japanese Marxist Samezo Kuruma wrote as early as 1929, “As long as political economy retains its bourgeois perspective, however, it will be incapable of moving forward to thoroughly understand the problem of crisis. We can in fact see that the outbreak of crisis, in the proper sense of the term, was a turning point in terms of political economy ceasing to exist as a science. Crisis, in its particular sense, is the collective explosion of all of the contradictions of capitalist production, and as such the outbreak of crisis, from two directions, necessarily brought bourgeois political economy as a science to an end. First, by actually thrusting upon political economy a new problem that was unanswerable from the bourgeois perspective—i.e. a problem that could only be answered by elucidating the contradictions of capitalist production—crisis exposed in the clearest manner possible the fundamental defect of bourgeois political economy: the class-based limitations of its cognition. Second, the appearance of crisis threw out on the streets immense numbers of waged workers, who had been gathered from every direction during the preceding period of prosperity, thereby revealing the anti-social figure of capitalist production in the most vivid manner and stimulating the class consciousness of the proletariat, so that the elucidation of the internal connections of capitalist production, which had been a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie, became a weapon to be wielded by the proletariat.”—“An Introduction to the Study of Crisis”, *Journal of the Ohara Institute for Social Research*, Volume 6 (1), September 1929—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kuruma/crisis-intro.htm> (accessed on 25 January 2017).

14. Samezo Kuruma noted many years ago that all through his expositions on crisis Marx had analysed the global entanglement of crisis. For instance he remarked that Marx had written, “The commercial crises of the nineteenth century, and in particular the great crises of 1825 and 1836 [were] big storms on the world market, in which the antagonism of all elements in the bourgeois process of production exploded.” (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*); then “The world trade crises must be regarded as the real concentration and forcible adjustment of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy.” (*Theories of Surplus Value*); and then “In world market crises, all the contradictions of bourgeois production erupt collectively; in particular crises (particular in their content and in extent) the eruptions are only sporadically, isolated and one-sided.” (*Theories of Surplus Value*)—Samezo Kuruma, “An Overview of Marx’s Theory of Crisis”, *Journal of the Ohara Institute for Social Research*, August 1936—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kuruma/crisis-overview.htm>(accessed on 25 January 2017).
15. Marx wrote, “It is quite simply the *private ownership* of land, mines, water, etc. by certain people, which enables them to snatch, intercept and seize the *excess surplus-value over and above profit* (average profit, the rate of profit determined by the general rate of profit) contained in the commodities of these particular spheres of production, these particular fields of capital investment, and so to prevent it from entering into the general process by which the general rate of profit is formed. Moreover, some of this surplus-value is actually collected in every industrial enterprise, since rent for the land used (by factory buildings, workhouses etc.) figures in every instance, for even where the land is available free, no factories are built, except in the more or less populated areas with good means of communication.”—*Theories of Surplus Value*, Chapter 8, Section 3 (c)—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch08.htm#s3c> (accessed on 25 January 2017); he also pointed out there, “Interest and rent, which anticipate surplus-value, presuppose that the general character of reproduction will remain the same. And this is the case as long as the capitalist mode of production continues. Secondly, it is presupposed moreover that the specific relations of this mode of production remain the same during a certain period, and this is in fact also more or less the case. Thus the result of production crystallizes into a permanent and therefore prerequisite condition of production, that is, it becomes a permanent attribute of the material conditions of production. It is crises that put an end to this apparent independence of the various elements of which the production process continually consists and which it continually reproduces.”—*Ibid.*
16. *Capital*, Volume 3, pp. 969–970.
17. For a detailed discussion on this, R. Samaddar, *A Postcolonial Enquiry into Europe’s Debt and Migration Crisis* (Singapore: Springer, 2016).



18. See in particular the famous section, “The Banks and their New Roles” in V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* in *Lenin Selected Works*, Volume 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), pp. 210–225—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch02.htm> (accessed on 29 January 2017). He wrote further, “It is characteristic of capitalism in general that the ownership of capital is separated from the application of capital to production, that money capital is separated from industrial or productive capital, and that the rentier who lives entirely on income obtained from money capital is separated from the entrepreneur and from all who are directly concerned in the management of capital. Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which this separation reaches vast proportions. The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy...”—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch03.htm> (accessed on 29 January 2017).

Thus, after the financial meltdown in 2008, when the US banks were in trouble, they had Henry Paulson write a three-page piece of legislation within days granting them \$750 billion. When Congress rejected this outrageous giveaway, after a struggle among the banks, a small number of them emerged stronger than before the crisis. Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase—all of whom had got government coverage—made billions of profits, seven times higher in 2009 than a year previously. Meanwhile, home foreclosures went up; more workers lived in their cars and were pushed into homeless shelters.—[http://www.workers.org/2009/us/banks\\_1029/](http://www.workers.org/2009/us/banks_1029/) (accessed on 17 January 2017).

19. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 3, p. 967; Marx wrote, “...the actual production process, as the unity of the immediate production process and the process of circulation, produces new configurations, in which the threads of the inner connection get more and more lost, the relations of production relations becoming independent of one another and the components of value ossifying into independent forms.”
20. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 416.
21. Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dubring: Herr Eugen Dubring's Revolution in Science*, 1878—p. 196 [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Engels\\_Anti\\_Duhring.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Engels_Anti_Duhring.pdf) (accessed on 31 January 2017).
22. One of the most lucid and informative expositions on this is Andrzej Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), Section 3 (4), “Populism and Marxism”, pp. 132–194; See also on the engagement of Marxism with Populism, Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism* (London: Routledge

- and Kegan Paul, 1983). According to Walicki, Shanin's representation of the populists was inadequate, and did not do full justice to the full range of Populist writings. See "Preface" to *The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists*, p. xii.
23. Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957), pp. 153–61.
  24. V.I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, 1915, *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, Volume 21: pp. 205–259), Section 3, p. 226.
  25. V.I. Lenin, *The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr. Struve's Book*, 1984–95, *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, Volume 1: pp. 333–508), pp. 507–508.
  26. One of the detailed discussions on Chernyshevskii's novel and its history in Russian political-revolutionary thought is Andrew M. Drozd, *Chernyshevskii's What is to be Done? A Reevaluation* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001).
  27. As the war clouds gathered over Europe, Lenin began focusing on crisis; see, "The Meaning of the Crisis", 1911, *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 17 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), pp. 168–172. In 1914 he wrote, "The European war is a tremendous historical crisis, the beginning of a new epoch. Like any crisis, the war has aggravated deep-seated antagonisms and brought them to the surface, tearing asunder all veils of hypocrisy, rejecting all conventions and deflating all corrupt or rotting authorities. (This, incidentally, is the salutary and progressive effect of all crises, which only the dull-witted adherents of 'peaceful evolution' fail to realise.)"—"Dead Chauvinism and Living Socialism—How the International Can be Restored", *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, pp. 94–101), p. 98; among Lenin's other war year writings on crisis, "The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis", 1915, *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), Volume 21, pp. 378–382; "Three Crises", July 1917, *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), Volume 25, pp. 171–175; and "The Crisis Has Matured", October 1917, *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), Volume 22, pp. 74–85.
  28. V.I. Lenin, "The Crisis Has Matured"—<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/20.htm> (accessed on 21 January 2017).
  29. On this see the discussion, Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), particularly Chapter 1, "The Crisis of World Marxism in 1914 and Lenin's Plunge into Hegel", pp. 3–27.
  30. V.I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, 1915, *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 28 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, pp. 205–259), p. 214.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
32. This is an important point. Agrarian crisis was almost forgotten by the crisis theorists of the West. Or the entire question was subsumed under anti-quarian interest in Marx turning in his late years to Russia, or Lenin pointing out the importance of the peasant question in 1911–12, or the idea of a “peasant mode of production”. Only few theorists from postcolonial countries, dubbed as “Maoist theorists”, such as Amit Bhaduri or Samir Amin, kept on pointing out the significance of agrarian crisis in the broader crisis of capitalism. Among the new crop of writings, see T.J. Jacob, “Farmers’ Issues: Class Struggles under Neocolonial Relations of Production”, *Frontier*, Volume 49 (28), 15–21 January 2017—<http://www.frontierweekly.com/articles/vol-49/49-28/49-28-Class%20Struggle.html#sthash.QdDQAdWh.dpuf> (accessed on 30 January 2017); see also P. Lawrence, (ed.), 1986, *World Recession and the Food Crisis in Africa* (London: James Currey, 1986), and D. Nabudere, *The Political Economy of Imperialism*, (London: Zed Press, 1978).
33. On the role of the idea of justice, Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra and Ranabir Samaddar (eds.) *The Borders of Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).
34. Bjorn Beckman, “The Postcolonial State: Crisis and Reconstruction”, *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin, Sussex*, Volume 19 (4: pp. 26–34), p. 32; R. Sandbrook, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
35. In this regard, the history of South Africa seems to be decisive; see, Susan Booysen, *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011); Anthony Butler, *The Idea of the ANC* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013); and Jonathan Ball, Arianna Lissoni, Jon Soske, Natasha Erlank, Noor Nieftagodien and Omar Badsha (eds.), *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012).
36. Interview given to Francesco Raparelli, “Reinventing Communist Politics”, Rome Conference on Communism (18–22 January 2017), *Viewpoint Magazine*, 18 January 2017—<https://viewpointmag.com/2017/01/18/reinventing-communist-politics/> (accessed on 30 January 2017).
37. Interview given to Chiara Giorgi, “The Communist Desire to Change the World—And Ourselves”, Rome Conference on Communism (18–22 January 2017) *Viewpoint Magazine*, 18 January 2017—<https://viewpointmag.com/2017/01/18/the-communist-desire-to-change-the-world-and-ourselves/> (accessed on 30 January 2017).
38. For instance, “The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments”, *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 60–79.

39. *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 487–502; read also in this context Mao’s writings in the post-revolution China such as *On the Ten Major Relationships* (1956), where Mao introduced the problem in this way: “there are some problems in our work that need discussion. Particularly worthy of attention is the fact that in the Soviet Union certain defects and errors that occurred in the course of their building socialism have lately come to light. Do you want to follow the detours they have made? It was by drawing lessons from their experience that we were able to avoid certain detours in the past, and there is all the more reason for us to do so now.”—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_51.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_51.htm) (accessed on 31 January 2015); see also equally important from the theoretical point of view, and *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People* (1957)—[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_58.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm) (accessed on 31 January 2017).
40. “It is affirmed that the philosophy of praxis was born on the terrain of the highest development of culture... this culture being represented by classical German philosophy, English classical economics and French political literature and practice. These three cultural movements are at the origin of the philosophy of praxis. But in what sense is this affirmation to be understood? That each of these movements has contributed respectively to the elaboration of the philosophy, economics, and the politics of the philosophy of praxis? Or that the philosophy of praxis has synthesised the three movements... that in the new synthesis, whichever “moment” one is examining, the theoretical, the economic, or the political, one will find each of the three movements present as a preparatory ‘moment’? This is what seems to me to be the case... that the unitary “moment” of synthesis is to be identified in the new concept of immanence, which has been translated from the speculative form, as put forward by classical German philosophy, into a historicist form with the aid of French politics and English classical economics.”—Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (London: Elecbook, 1999), pp. 739–740.

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