Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations

Matthieu de Nanteuil
Anders Fjeld *Editors*

# Marx and Europe

## Beyond Stereotypes, Below Utopias

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Editors

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# About the Editors

**Anders Fjeld** is doctor in political philosophy and researcher and lecturer at Kulturakademiet in Paris. He is the author of *Jacques Rancière: Pratiquer l'égalité* (Michalon éditions, 2018) and, with Matthieu de Nanteuil, *Le monde selon Adam Smith: Essai sur l'imaginaire en économie* (PUF, 2022), and has edited several anthologies, among them *Jacques Rancière* (with Étienne Tassin, Katz Editores, 2017) and *Movimientos sociales y subjetivaciones políticas* (with Étienne Tassin and Laura Quintana, Ediciones Uniandes, 2016). He is an editor of contemporary philosophy at the Norwegian publishing house H//O//F, and has translated several books from French, such as Françoise Vergès, *Avkoloniseringsfeminisme* (2022), Vinciane Despret, *Tenke som en rotte* (2022) and Ludivine Bantigny, *Revolusjon* (2024).

**Matthieu de Nanteuil** is professor in sociology at UCLouvain, member of the Institute for the Analysis of Change in Contemporary and Historical Societies (IACCHOS) and currently Dean of the Louvain School of Management. He has published a variety of works. Among others: *Justice in the Workplace: Overcoming Ethical Dilemmas* (Edward Elgard Publishing, 2021); *Le monde selon Adam Smith: Essai sur l'imaginaire en économie* (PUF, 2022) with Anders Fjeld; *Introduction à la sociologie économique: Analyse critique des organisations et des marchés* (De Boeck, 2022), with Thierry Amougou; *Face à la violence. Tome 1: Représentations* (Le Bord de l'Eau, 2024). He has also designed a method based on deliberative workshops in organizational settings, allowing participants to overcome value conflicts and ethical dilemmas in the workplace, by relying on collective intelligence practices – entitled Ethical Dilemmas in Contemporary Organizations (EDICO).

# Chapter 1
# Introduction


**Anders Fjeld and Matthieu de Nanteuil**

In *Contribution to the critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* written in 1843, Marx considers the revolutionary potential of the European working class. He claims that past "revolutions" only represented partial progress, because they were scattered around Europe and controlled by the interests of dominant social groups rather than combining and thus contributing to the emancipation of humanity as such. The French political revolution, the British industrial revolution and the German intellectual revolution needed to merge and co-develop for the proletariat to emancipate humanity from its capitalist shackles and bourgeois life world. Of course, this strategic and geopolitical reading of the European space would evolve in Marx' later works. Just weeks after Marx and Engels combatively wrote about the communist "spectre" that was "haunting Europe" in the *Manifesto*, the vast uprisings of 1848 would soon experience a heavy counter-revolutionary backlash with significant impact on Marx' life and thought.

But in whichever way the analysis of the revolutionary potential of the European proletariat would evolve, through Marx' ensuing exile in London, the founding of the International Workers Association (IWA) in 1864, the immense work leading up to the publication of the first volume of *Capital* in 1867, the experiences of the Paris Commune in 1871, the ensuing conflicts within the IWA in particular with the Russian anarchist Bakunin, it is beyond any doubt that Marx' emancipatory politics always was and remained internationalist. Yet, in which way? Is it a heavy-handed tearing-down of all borders and frontiers in the name of a united humanity, or rather a federative call sensitive to traditions and cultural diversity? Does it open up the intellectual space for a reimagining of what borders and frontiers mean? Do implicit and problematic frontiers persist in Marx' internationalism between Europe and the

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rest of the world, between the struggles of the European proletariat and emancipatory movements elsewhere, between European industrial capitalism and other types of societies, even under the banner of a world revolution?

Whether its immediate anchorage in a cross-European proletariat is linked to deeper eurocentrist tendencies of Marx' thought or not – and to which extent, relative also to the evolution of his analyses from the 1840's to the 1870's –, is an ongoing debate of great importance to the discussions of this book. One would have to add, however, that the colonial question is not a mere extra-European question in Marx' texts, as testified by his substantial critique of the British domination of Ireland. Eurocentrist or not, Marx' hopes of uniting what he thought of as an inherently revolutionary and solidaric cross-European proletariat – those who have nothing to lose but their shackles – have remained a largely unfulfilled horizon, undermined by colonial ambitions, deep divisions and devastating wars that marred the continent from Marx' death in 1883 to the Second World War, to be followed by 30 years of bloody decolonization in the midst of the Cold War, that significantly diminished the European global hegemony.

These lines are written at a time when the war in Ukraine is shaping up to be a long war, marked by all the avatars of mass violence. Once again, though this time in a post-Cold War scenario, the European space is split along the diffuse geopolitical lines of East and West, with the "return" of an imperial logic at the heart of what was once the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), founded when the October Revolution of 1917 dedicated the future of the Russian people to the invention of the political and socio-economic realities intended to inaugurate a world united by Communism. Admittedly, this "return" calls for many comments: it has been prepared for a long time and first materialized during the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia has no monopoly on it (it would be difficult to consider that the United States has not developed imperialist logics during and after the Cold War). The fact remains that this war, waged by what was once the tentacular and orthodox centre of global communism, has a particular resonance: after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the spectres of both pre-Bolshevik tsarism and of Stalinist authoritarianism seem to haunt the "Russian World" that Vladimir Putin dreams of – which is, in relation to Marx' nineteenth century analyses, yet another burial of Marxism and its hopes for an international class struggle spanning the borders and interests of Nation-States and peoples. As if the burial of Marx – or the political fate of Marxism – was a kind of marker of European history in the 20th and 21st centuries.

However, the words and writings of those who seek reference points for collective emancipation never cease to disrupt the existing cartographies. In this book, we seek to explore two questions in particular that have crossed the field of social sciences for several decades and that seem to give Marx' work particular strength. These questions have less to do with a "singularity", whose actuality should be regularly tested, than with the "scene" where it was born – Europe. These two questions are the following:

1. *On the one hand, the debates and controversies surrounding the construction of the European Union (EU) and, more broadly, the trajectory of European societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century*. We will not mention here the

numerous legal or institutional difficulties that mark the situation of the EU. These are obviously important, but will not be discussed in depth in this book. Instead, the political, cultural and ideological matrices surrounding the recent development of Europe will be examined. Born of a dual impulse (the need to make peace between yesterday's enemies and the desire to build a continent-wide social market economy), the EU has gradually been dominated by the demands of liberal monetary and budgetary policies and the absence of a supranational social agenda capable of making the eradication of poverty, the fight against inequality or the improvement of the situation of workers its fundamental priority. Above all, it seems that the dynamics of European integration have failed to take account of the transformations in capitalism itself: the "metamorphoses of the social question", to use the title of Robert Castel's seminal book (Castel 1995), have been accompanied by equally profound metamorphoses in the very structure of capitalism, generating both a diversification of its forms of existence and an increasingly marked absence of credible alternatives to its unshared domination – what Étienne Balibar here calls "absolute capitalism" (Balibar 2017). In the face of this, European integration has sought more to consolidate the market economy model, supplemented by geostrategic concerns to compete with the other "centres" of the global economy (the United States, China, the BRICs, etc.), than to irrigate or substantially renew its social model, even if this means generating numerous negative externalities, as well as tightening up its legislation in the face of the knock-on consequences of an economic system that is gradually getting out of hand. Admittedly, the European Green Deal outlines a path for new regulation. But the Greek crisis, the rejection of migrants and the acceleration of climate change under the impact of economic activity driven by the quest for indefinite growth appear to be emblematic figures of the profound limits of current European integration. The questions remain: should this situation lead to the rejection of the European construction as such? Does the latter not have undeniable achievements? Complementarily, does the desire to fall back on the national level not entail a risk of deepening competition between national economies and political areas? Is it not, more broadly, the capacity to house social and ecological criticism *within* the European project itself that is lacking? Yet, why did this perspective never really emerge in the course of the European construction? How is it that, after all the years during which Marxian thought played a structuring role in the European political field, it has progressively been pushed aside? More than three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, is Marx not missing in the European construction, to institute economic practices that serve human beings and the planet – and not the other way round – but also to prevent the abuses of the rule of law that are the direct result of the degradation caused by capitalism without an alternative? In other words, can we not consider that Marx is *not European enough*, in the sense that his thought has not been sufficiently assimilated by or integrated in the European construction?[1] The legacy of European

[1] There have of course been critical Marxist perspectives on the European construction in the past, particularly regarding the ideological "vagueness" that marked its genesis. The question of whether

Marxism, and its reinterpretation as Leninist and Stalinist, makes simple "recycling" unimaginable. But in the absence of radical social and ecological roots, is the European construction not condemned to float without a rudder? Is this not a founding paradox for the EU?

2. *On the other hand, the fundamental contribution of post-colonial and decolonial studies, which question the forms and foundations of social critique*. Because its main authors are said to be European, social critique is often said to be stamped with the seal of the colonial spirit. More subtly, many colonialist presuppositions would taint it forever. The questions are real. On a global scale, the main authors of reference are Western – Latin American, African or Asian authors being much less read, worked on and discussed. Because they come from the periphery, non-Western categories of thought have difficulty finding their way into the numerous scientific discussions. Finally, Westerners' attachment to "reason" and the "universal" is often experienced as a means, if not of imposing particular categories (rights, norms, etc.), at least of silencing the social relations that underlie them and of serving dominant interests, thus perpetuating a neo-colonial order *after* decolonization. Is there a eurocentrist tendency in Marx' writings, as one of the fundamental sources of critical thought, related in some way to the belief that the proletarian revolution by which all political movements are to be measured and that should shape the future of world politics could only happen in Europe? Could Marx have been *too European* in his writings, patronizing non-European peoples and believing that they must first and foremost leave the "state of feudalism" or the "Asian mode of production" before engaging in a genuine revolution (Said 2003)? In other words, was Marx too unconcerned by the colonial realities – the "elsewheres" – that fuelled European capitalism and helped form the European proletariat? But then, how are we to understand the echo of Marx' work on the peoples of the world, especially in the very process of decolonization? This last question leads not to simply revisiting the theme of exploitation, although this remains important: it invites some of these critical positions to interact more with Marx' global analysis. Instead of focusing exclusively on discriminated groups, this analysis sought to grasp the essential role of political economy in the trajectory of modern societies, to draw on the contradictions that plague them, to subvert existing frontiers – particularly national frontiers – in search of a common humanity, and to observe, in a phenomenological manner, the social condition of the men, women and children of his time. In this vein, is there not a great deal of work to be done to deepen the dialogue with Marx and, in particular, with the complexity of his thought, rather than seeking to "liquidate" or "replace" an often caricatured Marx?

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the European Union has been influenced by Marxian thought has also been addressed. See in particular: Peter Cocks, "Towards a Marxist Theory of European Integration" (1980); John Laughland, "European Union. A Marxist Utopia?" (2009).

Marx thus seems to have been rejected on all sides "in the name of Europe". A double exclusion, in a way, that does not fail to surprise. What if we had to reverse our perspectives? What if this double rejection was also an opportunity to take stock of the irreplaceable role of this thought in the very places where it is rejected, whether it is a question of the construction of Europe or of the critique of the forms of domination that accompany contemporary neo-colonialism? Question that calls for others, such as: what did Marx lack to take measure of a plural world and of emancipation strategies that would escape a single analytical scheme? Conversely, do we not lack a certain relationship to Marx to take up today's challenges and invent responses to the state of degradation of the world? Do not anti-racist, feminist and ecological critiques need to clarify their relationship to certain key questions bequeathed by Marx's analyses of capitalism, especially his double ambition to overcome the trap of "bourgeois universalism" but also to emancipate humanity as such?

To address these challenges, this book brings together authors from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and political orientations. Their aim is not to propose a new version of Marx' work, still less what would be a "good use of Marx in the contemporary world". On the contrary, their common goal is to explore Marxian thought and its legacy from a diversity of perspectives, which are not necessarily convergent. Divided into three parts ("Part I – Marx: *Not* European *Enough*? Marxian Perspectives on the European Construction", "Part II – Marx: *Too* European? Postcolonial Perspectives on Marxian Thought", "Part III – Marx and Europe, a Dialectic Relationship"), their contributions take a fresh look at contemporary reality by drawing on the resources of Marxian thought, while maintaining a critical distance and pointing out the limits of Marx' work, therefore often going – or looking – beyond Marx.

Opening the first part, and addressing the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, Albena Azmanova questions the fact that any alternative – any positive utopia or alternative model of social existence – to the dominant socioeconomic model today seems to be fundamentally lacking. Understood as a situation of "anxious disorientation", Azmanova examines the enabling conditions for progressive radicalism, in particular in relation to social and ecological justice in Europe. Suggesting that the model of "class struggle"centred on the industrial proletariat has become counter-productive for social transformation, Azmanova defends the idea that multifaceted discontent with the new social conditions of an intensely competitive capitalism could better enable its overcoming, in forms that remain largely open to this day.

Analysing the post-World War foundations of the European Union and following in detail the history of this construction until today, Jean-Christophe Defraigne focuses, in the next two chapters, on class domination, the absence of the European working class, and the conflicts between the elite classes of different European nations as well as with the American bourgeoisie. The major advances of the institutionalization of the European Union and the Eurozone corresponding to the regression of worker movements, Defraigne argues that it has ended up favouring reactionary and extreme-rightist "solutions" to crisis scenarios, aligned with a rampant euro-scepticism symbolized by Brexit, that prevents the creation of a

supra-national European State with the capacity of resolving at least some of its internal contradictions.

From a Marxist perspective, Cécile Barbier retraces the historical construction of the European Union (EU) as an economic and financial free-market space, focused on how the ideas of the German ordoliberal tradition have been influential in shaping fundamental central institutions such as the Central Bank and the Eurozone. Particularly attentive to how the ordoliberal authors were initially inspired by Marxist capitalist critique with their idea of "social market economy", as well as to how the recurring economic and political crisis of the European construction have led to the progressive radicalization of ordoliberal orthodoxy and of predatory finance, Barbier defends a critical return to Marxian perspectives and to the struggle for the commons.

This first part ends with Remy-Hendrick's contribution, in which the author interrogates the continuities and tensions between Islam and Marxism in Europe through an ethnographic study of Nasser and his double affiliation: member of a Belgian Marxist Party on the one hand, religious Muslim on the other. Considering Islam and Marxism as identity markers, as discursive traditions and as subjectivations of the subaltern status of the European Muslim, Remy-Hendrick proposes that a series of traditional oppositions – Materialism and Idealism, religious faith and political activism, Muslim and European – should rather be understood as spaces of negotiation allowing for new political actors to emerge.

Opening the second part, Raul Fornet-Betancourt questions a series of borders related to the idea of going beyond *both* Marx and Europe: beyond European capitalism and its ideology of historical progress, beyond the timid consideration of colonialism in the eurocentrist tendencies of Marxism, beyond the supposed universality inherited from Christian Europe. As part of a deliberately humanist interpretation of Marx, Fornet-Betancourt considers this "call" to *go beyond* both as a European and a non-European task, and explores the contributions of the Latin-American theology of liberation to the Marxist heritage.

Underlining the constant reconfiguration of the senses of and connections between Marx and Europe, in particular as incarnations of the idea of universality, Alfredo Gomez-Muller explores the fluid, decentred and decolonial perspective of the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui. He studies how Mariátegui valorised myth over "scientific socialism", reconsidered the human dimension of the "spiritual", and elaborated "Inca communism" against the eurocentrist idea of "primitive communism". Gomez-Muller thereby suggests that Mariatégui already, half a century before the emergence of post-colonial studies, started decolonizing Marxism, both from within and without.

Studying the mining sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Anuarite Bashizi, Cécile Giraud and Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka adopt a Marxian and ecopolitical analytical framework in order to consider the interconnexions between ecological deterioration and primary resources, post-colonial politics and international financial institutions, class struggle and the international division of labour. In emphasizing how systematic race relations structure the exploitation of the racialized work force as well as the access to natural resources, and underlining the heritage of

colonialism in the form of "global coloniality", the authors argue that a decolonial approach to political ecology and to Marxist capitalist analysis is necessary in order to apprehend the realities of exploitation in Africa.

In the next chapter, Matthieu de Nanteuil examines in detail Marx' analysis of Ireland. He shows how the Irish case enabled Marx to develop, and even experiment with, a dual critique of capitalism and colonialism. While Marx' analysis of Irish class relations is not entirely convincing, his description of a society emptied of its own forces under the impact of colonialism – literally "depopulated" – is visionary. In this respect, Marx develops a narrative that links economic critique to the symbolic sphere. There is, however, a major flaw in this approach. By attempting to show that colonialism was simply the extension of capitalism beyond national borders, and by equating colonial practices with the domination of one mode of production over another, Marx completely overlooks a dimension that is essential to understanding colonial brutality in Ireland: the religious dimension, which consisted of subjecting a Catholic population (the Irish) to Protestant tutelage (the English). This flaw is the reason why Marx largely underestimated the cultural component of colonialism, as well as the diversity of cultural traditions as a means of resistance to colonization. This limitation should not, however, lead us to believe that Marx ignored or despised non-European societies. On the contrary, his attention to detail, visible in many places in his analysis of the Irish case, testifies to a rare sensitivity to geographical and cultural differences. But as a man of the Enlightenment, Marx was always looking for a "general principle" that would enable him to analyse colonialism in the age of the Industrial Revolution, without seeing that this concern for the "general" was at the same time an obstacle to the full recognition of non-European singularities.

Continuing with the question of eurocentrism in Marx' writings, Anders Fjeld focuses on a fundamental ambivalence in Marxist emancipatory politics: on the one hand, this politics is *universal*, addressed to humanity as such, and inherently internationalist in scope; on the other hand, this politics is *conditioned* by the West-European modernization and industrialization that lies at the heart of bourgeois capitalism and of revolutionary class struggle. Fjeld returns to Marx' texts during the 1850s on British colonialism in India to identify an early "eurocentrist period" in Marx' thought, but also suggests, along with newer scholarly study of Marx' later writings, that eurocentrism became more and more problematic for Marx himself, especially in relation to Ireland and Russia. Fjeld outlines the challenges that this poses for Marxist thought in relation to emancipatory politics and capitalist analysis.

The third part focuses on the dialectical relationship between Marx and Europe, and more specifically, on the reflections of the French philosopher Étienne Balibar, who has devoted an essential part of his intellectual life to both "Marx" and "Europe". Revisiting Balibar's critical work on the European Union, Teresa Pullano suggests that there is a double and conflictual perspective at the heart of his writing: for Balibar, Europe is "both a philosophical node and a political terrain for theoretical reflection". Attentive to the forms of violence traversing the European continent, that has already been "provincialized", Pullano emphasizes the actuality of Balibar's thought, in particular in relation to neo-racism and post-colonialism. Pullano

explores how this actuality and originality of Balibar's thought is further deepened by the constant and mutually beneficial interrogation between Marx and Europe, sustaining the possibility, according to Balibar, of a democratic and socially responsible refoundation of the European Union.

This analysis is also the reason why the last text of this book was proposed to Étienne Balibar himself. Addressing the dramatic situation of migrants and refugees in the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-British space, the philosopher mobilizes and questions the Marxist theoretical legacy, in particular the "law of population" and the "general law of capitalist accumulation". Introducing the notion of "absolute capitalism" – the idea that there is no longer any existing alternative economic system to capitalism –, Balibar focuses on the violence inherent to new regimes of mobility and immobility in migration and migratory politics, focusing on borders, exploitation and the segmentation of the labour-force. Contrary to traditional Marxist analysis, absolute capitalism, according to Balibar, is not characterized by stability and self-regulation, but by financial and political instability which, due to a severely limited capacity for control and restraint of violence, opens up for extreme violence.

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With these contributions in mind, the combination of these two terms ("Marx" and "Europe") is not intended to link supposedly homogeneous realities, still less to give voice only to experts of one or the other: it is rather intended to provoke discussion, to nourish interdisciplinary exchanges, to create debate.

For the coordinators of the book, this initiative is also part of a more general reflection on other possible trajectories for the critique of political economy that, in particular, underline the importance of a *cultural perspective*, with all the consequences that flow from this on the imaginary and symbolic levels.[2] In fact, "Europe" has always been a strategic site for Marx, both a *place of confrontation* (through his attempt of differentiating national strategies, but also Europe and the rest of the world, in order to invent an internationalist way out of capitalism) and a *place of anchorage* (for instance in his circulation in Europe, attempting to escape censorship and repression, and of inscribing his political thought in the European space).[3] It is this cultural complexity, articulated with a constant concern for the materiality of modern societies, that we seek to explore.

In a period of huge geopolitical troubles and deep socio-economic inequalities, it is time to move away from *stereotypes* about Marx and his thought, even though

[2] A cultural perspective on political economy is nothing new – Max Weber is one of its founders, with his cultural critique of capitalism. Such a perspective has been renewed or reinvented by post-colonial and subaltern studies. See in particular Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). The editors of this book have initiated a complementary perspective, by revisiting the cultural background of some of the "founding fathers" of political economy. See Anders Fjeld and Matthieu de Nanteuil *Le monde selon Adam Smith. Essai sur l'imaginaire en économie* (2022).

[3] In Europe, Marx was also a "passerby", in the sense that Achille Mbembe gives to this term (Mbembe 2019).

Europe has been one of the main scenes where Marxism has itself contributed to shaping its own caricatures. There is, however, a condition for such an operation, if it is to have any meaning today: not only ensure that a reassessment of Marxist thought is henceforth worldwide in scope – a thought of the "Whole-World", in the words of Édouard Glissant –, capable of assuming the irreducible cultural diversity of humanity beyond any European "specificity" or "privilege" (Glissant 2020),[4] but also avoid – this time, in the footsteps of Marx himself – that the construction of Europe becomes *a mere utopia*, substituting itself for what was, in the past, "Progress", "Peace" or "Revolution". Europe is not, and probably should not be, a utopia. It is above all a cultural invention set on a material soil, struggling with its own contradictions (of which the colonial question is one of the fundamental scenes) and the contradictions of the world (of which the ecological question is now extremely urgent).[5]

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[4] Indian sociologists have played a major role in the "relativization of Europe" and the promotion of subaltern studies. See in particular Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography* (1985); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2007).

[5] In this book we will distinguish between the terms "Marxist" and "Marxian". The former refers to a doctrine, a theory or an identity that emphasizes the historical trajectory of Marxism and the way it has concretely taken shape, be it the practice of power, a field of research or political identities. The second refers to a work, or even a doctrine, subject to a series of contradictory interpretations, whose social-historical consequences remain open.

# Part I
# Marx: *Not* European *Enough*? Marxian Perspectives on the European Construction

# Chapter 2
# The Road to the European Social Green Deal: Class Struggle or Counter-Hegemony

**Albena Azmanova**

**Abstract** Addressing the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, Albena Azmanova proceeds from the fact that any alternative – any positive utopia or alternative models of social existence – to this dominant socioeconomic model today seems to be fundamentally lacking. Within this condition of "anxious disorientation", Azmanova seeks the enabling conditions for progressive radicalism, in particular in relation to social and ecological justice in Europe. She contends that the model of "class struggle" centred on the industrial proletariat has become counter-productive for social transformation, and suggests that multifaceted discontent with the new social conditions of an intensely competitive capitalism could better enable its overcoming, in forms that remain largely open to this day.

**Keywords** Green Deal · Class struggle · Capitalism · Working class · Europe · Ecology · Justice

"Truth will sooner come out from error than from confusion."[1] Francis Bacon's famous pronouncement was meant to inform the progress of science. Whatever the merits of this wisdom for its intended field, its validity is now being tested for progressive social transformation. The puzzling difficulties the affluent and scientifically proficient European societies experienced in containing the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020–2021 have been a potent catalyst for radical social transformation. They have deepened the crisis of the dominant socio-economic model – that of neoliberal capitalism. This model, with its excessive stress on profit, depletion of essential public services such a healthcare, production networks spanning the globe, and commercial logic of 'just on time delivery' proved to have made these societies extremely fragile and their governing mechanisms inept for coping with the challenge. The acute crisis of the neoliberal hegemony, however, has not engendered an

[1] Francis Bacon, 1620. *Novum Organum*, book ii, aph. 20.

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alternative. In the interlude between crisis and the conspicuously absent transformation, the sense of confusion is palpable. Corroborating Bacon's dictum, no distinct 'truths' seem to be emerging for the needed overhaul of our governance know-how and models of political economy.

European societies first entered this state of anxious disorientation at the close of the twentieth century when, despite the stable economic growth and low unemployment in most countries, 'fringe' parties and movements began to mobilize, triggering the anti-establishment upheaval that pundits have named 'populism'. These movements signaled a spreading distress by voicing concerns with physical insecurity, cultural estrangement, political disorder and economic instability – the four elements of a new 'order and security' agenda of public demands (Azmanova 2004). The anxiety was further inflamed by the 2008 financial collapse and the decade-long recession that ensued, followed by the economic and medical crisis that beset the world in early 2020.

This state of exasperation has been aggravated by the lack of positive utopias offering plausible alternative models of social existence. In late capitalism, Jürgen Habermas observed, one particular utopia has come to an end, namely, the socialist utopia centered on the emancipation of labor from alien control.[2] The collapse, in 1989–1990, of the Soviet-style dictatorships in East and Central Europe – regimes that had claimed to have implemented the socialist ideal – deprived the Socialist and Communist creeds of their capacity to steer discontent into a constructive pursuit of a better future. With very few exceptions, the social imaginary driving most of the anti-establishment insurrections is marked not by the solidaristic spirit that typically animates utopias (this has been true even when these utopias directed their longings to an idealized past) but rather by resentment without direction, targeted at designated enemies of the moment – ruling elites, immigrants, cultural minorities. This 'exhaustion of utopian energies' (Habermas) has helped transform the crisis of neoliberal capitalism into what I have described as a meta-crisis (or "crisis of the crisis"): society experiences itself in perpetual crisis – a state of anxiety and animosity. The low inflammation of civil strife consumes society's creative energies, leaving it unable to end the crisis or exit the rejected societal model.[3]

Yet the great exigencies of our time – from the deepened impoverishment of the poor to the impending climate catastrophe, have spawned a novel policy commitment to two familiar goals – social equity and ecological sustainability. The twin goals of social and environmental justice seem to be delineating an emancipatory trajectory amidst the metacrisis of neoliberalism. The political leadership of the European Union proclaimed a commitment to Social Europe which led to the inauguration of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2016. A drive for a Green

[2] Habermas 1991, pp. 48–70, at 50, 52–53). Jacques Derrida has used the term 'crisis of crisis' to describe a situation when, even as the word "crisis" has deserted our vocabulary, the idea that the present world is in crisis persists (in Derrida 2002, p. 71).

[3] Azmanova 2020b. See also Azmanova 2020a.

transition (the European Green Deal) became the flagship policy of the new European Commission in 2019.[4] This indicates the emergence of a broad societal consensus for an epochal paradigm shift, akin to the shifts that enabled the post-WWII welfare state and that of neoliberal capitalism in the late twentieth century. The double commitment to social and green Europe is, indeed, a challenge to the stress on competitiveness that is *raison d'être* of neoliberal capitalism. The strong commitment to these goals, both by political elites and broader publics, is far from sufficient for the paradigm shift to become reality. This is the case because even though the two elements of this policy shift enjoy a broad public support, they are nevertheless in tension. Thus, a Eurobarometer survey conducted in late 2020 established that environmental responsibility and climate action are seen as a top priority by 27% of EU citizens, yet jobs are the overwhelming priority for most (at 46%).[5] This means that climate action would face an opposition if it is perceived to threaten employment. Moreover, businesses are increasingly vocal in their concerns that higher environmental and social standards would hurt their bottom-line and impair their competitiveness, and are actively demanding to have input in EU policy-making in order to block policy that harms their interests.[6]

Acting simultaneously and promptly on both goals – healing society and healing the environment, is not a matter of somehow balancing, or reconciling these goals, that is, of diminishing pollution and improving social rights. This is the case because in the current socio-economic model, with the shrinking of the welfare state, personal wellbeing has become deeply dependent on holding a job, and job-creation is, in turn, implicated in polluting practices. Thus, a transition to a social and 'green' Europe would necessitate a profound alteration of the way European societies manage their economies and polities. What would it take for the proclaimed commitment to a greener and more social Europe to actuate a genuine societal transformation? In other words, what are the enabling conditions for progressive radicalism in our era? Can such a radical policy shift be undertaken without the energies of an empowering Utopia?

The European Left's positioning within this emerging paradigm shift, I will argue in what follows, is preventing it from assuming a leadership role. Animated by

[4]The European Green Deal is a policy roadmap aiming at the elimination of emissions of greenhouse gasses in the EU by 2050; it sets out guidelines for EU member-states for comprehensive reforms to their economies, ranging from investment in non-carbon fuels, to farming and transport, together with a pledge to make the transition socially equitable. See "The European Green Deal", Communication from the Commission, Brussels, 11.12.2019: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1576150542719&uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN

[5]Special Eurobarometer 509, "Social Issues", Kantar Belgium and DG COMM; Brussels, March 2021: https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Special-Eurobarometer-509-Social-Issues.pdf

[6]For instance, Germany's industry association BDI called on the EU to "focus all policy areas on competitiveness" and introduce customary "industrial mainstreaming" to "environmental, climate and consumer policy discussions at an early stage" (reported in POLITICO Brussels Playbook 1 March 2021).

concerns with rising inequality and the widening rift between the 'winners' and 'losers' of neoliberal globalisation, progressive politics on the Left is taking the familiar 'class struggle' formula of left mobilisation. I will review this diagnosis of our predicament and the solutions it issues in order to expose its poor fit to the present historical juncture. I will then chart an alternative recasting of both the analysis of the social question and the prognosis for emancipation within a formula of a broad anti-capitalist mobilisation which negates the 'class struggle' pattern of conflict. Both my critique of the 'class struggle' modality of intellectual and political militancy and the articulation of an alternative will deploy Marxian conceptual schemata, which I adumbrate in the next section.

## Marx and the Social Critique of Domination

Sidestepping the copious debate on the interpretation and intellectual heritage of Karl Marx' work, I have proposed to recast his critique of capitalism as an institutionalised social order (or system of social relations) into an account of domination along three trajectories (Azmanova 2018, 2020a, b).

The first trajectory is that of *systemic domination* – that is, the subjugation of all members of society to the system-constitutive dynamic of commodity-production and capital accumulation. I refer to this core dynamic of capitalism as 'the competitive production of profit". Although Marx offers no systematic analysis of competition, in his treatment of capital accumulation competition is "the inner nature of capital, its essential character" (Marx 1857, Notebook 4). Being the general form of economic interaction among actors, competition is thus capitalism's coordinating mechanism and acts as a "coercive law" through which the logic of capital accumulation is imposed on individuals and the whole society (Ibid.; 1867, ch. 10 and 12; 1885; 1894, ch. 10 and 50).

Within the realm of systemic domination, social injustice occurs in the form of harm beyond the unequal distribution of social advantage and disadvantage. The object of critique in analyses of systemic forms of injustice is therefore not the way power resources (wealth, political office, respect) are distributed, but what counts as a resource and how this resource is valued as a desired good. Within a capitalist society, this valorisation of practices is sourced from the *profit motive* – not so much the realization of profit through market exchange, but the motivation of human activities and interactions on the basis of their likelihood to generate profit.

Marx introduced this trajectory of domination in his analyses of alienation (the multifaceted estrangement of people from their humanity, their "species-essence"). Although he focused predominantly on the effect of alienation on wage labor, there is no reason to claim that the impact of the competitive production of profit is not suffered by all members of a society of commodity producers, irrespectively of their class status. The alienation thesis therefore can be taken to apply to all participants in

this process: the profit motive permeates all spheres of human existence, resulting in a broad spectrum of suffered injustice. Thus, labor commodification (treating a person's capacity to work as a good produced for market exchange) and alienation afflict all who are engaged in the process of competitive profit production, while the destruction of the environment is a harm suffered by the whole of humanity, be it in different degrees.

Policies of *equality* (such as rising wages) and *inclusion* (worker involvement in the management of companies) would not suffice to counter the harms of systemic domination. Emancipation from systemic domination would necessitate not redistribution, but the eradication of the operative logic of the system – in the case of capitalism, the competitive production of profit. In the current historical junction, the inventory of socially induced suffering that is incurred by the competitive production of profit spans the intensified productivist pressures that prevent a fulfilling or even healthy work-life balance, the increased health hazards as companies prioritize profit over safety, and the destruction of our natural environment.

The second trajectory of critique of domination we find in Marx's analysis of capitalism (what I have named *structural domination*) concerns the effect of the main structuring institutions through which the operative logic of the system is enacted. These are the institutions of the private property and management of the means of production, as well as the market as a mechanism of economic governance (i.e., a mechanism for the allocation of productive inputs and social surplus and not as a price mechanism via meeting supply and demand, which is not peculiar to capitalism).[7] Within the original Marxian analysis of capitalism, exploitation is the key structural injustice in this social system. The structure of the private property of the means of production, together with the nominally free labor contract, is what allows the exploitation of labor: it gives the owners the power to extract surplus value from their workers. The particular social harm incurred by the market as a structure of commodity exchange is the commodification of labor and nature, i.e., treating human beings' creative capacities as well as our natural environment as goods "produced" exclusively for market exchange. Raising the living standards of the working class (returning to workers, in the form of higher wages or other benefits, a bigger share of the value they produce) would not terminate exploitation. Only eliminating class differentiation by way of abolishing the private property of the means of production would do so.

Finally, the third form of domination – what I label *relational domination* concerns forms of suffering whose source is the unequal distribution of power, that is, the power actors have in relation to (or relative to) others. The unequal distribution of material or ideational resources (e.g., wealth, knowledge, recognition)

[7] Nancy Fraser has offered a useful articulation (drawing on Marx) of the "distributive" and "allocative" functions of markets. Under many social formations, markets are a basic tool for distribution of goods for personal consumption. The *differentia specifica* of capitalist markets is that they are also used for the allocation of societal resources (inputs into production) as well as for the allocation of society's surplus (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 24–28). In this sense, I speak of markets as a primary mechanism of economic governance under capitalism.

might produce power asymmetries.[8] Typical forms of injustice on the plane of relational domination are inequalities and exclusion. To remedy them, it suffices to equalize the distribution of power by, say, policies of wealth redistribution and political and cultural inclusion and recognition.

Marx has been adamant about the futility of what he dismissed as a bourgeois obsession with equality:

> An enforced *increase of wages* (disregarding all other difficulties, including the fact that it would only be by force, too, that such an increase, being an anomaly, could be maintained) would therefore be nothing but better *payment for the slave*, and would not win either for the worker or for labor their human status and dignity. Indeed, even the equality of wages, as demanded by Proudhon, only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labor into the relationship of all men to labor. Society would then be conceived as an abstract capitalist. (Marx 1844)

Radical social transformation, therefore, should be thought not in distributive terms (as a matter of fighting what I called here relational domination), but in terms of countering and eradicating the constitutive dynamic of capitalism (the competitive production of profit) and the supporting institutions through which this dynamic is enacted. Transformative radicalism acts on the planes of systemic and structural domination.

In further elaborating a device for conceptualizing a path for progressive social change in contemporary European societies, I adopt and adapt three additional distinctive features of Marxian social analysis.

First, Marx saw his intellectual endeavor as being strongly *historicist* in nature. He famously refused to identify himself as a Marxist, that is, a thinker subscribing to a method of socioeconomic analysis based on abstract laws derived from his historical account of nineteenth-century European capitalism (Engels, "Letter to Edward Bernstein," 1882; Engels, "Letter to Conrad Schmidt," 1890). In the spirit of this aversion to formulaic accounts, the critique I will offer of contemporary democratic capitalism is meant to take into account the peculiarities of our current historical juncture.

The second feature of Marxian analysis I take up is the preference for critique of domination over the design of utopian blueprints for an emancipated society. Indeed, Marx has offered no detailed account of a postcapitalist society. In his writing, far from being an elaborate social model, communism is the realization of democracy as spontaneous self-organization of the people (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875; *German Ideology*, 1845). For Marx, "communism is not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things." (Marx, *German Ideology,* 1845). Thus, the emancipatory interest driving critique is sourced not from an ideal of a just society (a utopian telos) but from the ambition of reducing

[8] I do not claim that every inequality of resources generates domination; I am suggesting that there are forms of domination that can be traced back to power asymmetries resulting from unequal distribution of resources: the rich may not dominate and the dominators may not be rich.

domination by eliminating its sources. Thus, for Marx, eliminating the private property of the means of production is not a programmatic element in the blueprint of communism as the singularly just society. It is, rather, a way of removing one of the main sources of injustice that industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century systematically engendered – worker exploitation. Putting an end to the private property of the means of production (but not of private/personal property altogether) is a way of achieving emancipation from specific sources of domination, not securing absolute freedom. Such a negativistic conception of emancipation from oppression, one aspiring to diminish suffering rather than to obtain the just society – what Amy Allen (2015) has aptly named "emancipation without utopia" – is particularly appropriate for our contemporary context marked, as it is, by the exhaustion of utopian energies.

Third, in the absence of guiding utopias, the critical enterprise does not aspire to spell out the *features* of a just social order, but instead the *conditions* enabling such an order and the *processes* for attaining it. It seeks to discern what Horkheimer discussed as "the enabling conditions for successful realization" (*Gelingen von Vollzügen*) of a valued form of life. This is the role that the collectivization of the means of production plays in Marx: socialization of labor, thus achieved, would in turn enable the transformation of specialized and alienated labor into creative and individuated practice. Once the productivist pressures of the profit motive are eliminated, the space opens for creative, fulfilling work that also satisfies needs.

I next turn to the resurgence of radical critique of capitalism in the course of the recent crisis of neoliberal capitalism marked by ambitions to merge environmental and social justice into a novel formula of progressive politics.

## *Green-and-Participatory Socialism as a Neoliberal Ruse*

Bridging environmental and social justice is a promising avenue for the emergence of a radical alternative to neoliberal capitalism. Such efforts, however, encounter a triple difficulty.

First, social and environmental justice cannot be easily reconciled by pledging allegiance to both. The struggles for ecological and social justice have not only taken place on separate battlefields, they have been in permanent conflict with each other. Advocates for a grand Green transition have always had a little 'red' problem. In the famous words of one Yellow Vest protester: "The elites talk about the end of the world; we talk about the end of the month" (Rérolle 2018). There are solid reasons for the advocates of social and ecological justice to be political 'frenemies'. The political economy of capitalism has made livelihoods strongly dependent on employment in polluting industries, and consumers' purchasing power in the context of neoliberal globalisation has become dependent on cheap imports whose competitive prices are secured via polluting practices. This has engendered a powerful capital-labour alliance that has been opposing environmental policy ever since ecological concerns gained public attention in the 1970s. Reassurances that the

Green transition would create *in the future* more jobs than it will eliminate are not compelling when livelihoods are at stake *now*. We cannot expect working people to be impassioned about a Green transition when their economic survival – here and now – is threatened by such a transition.

The second weakness of the Green democratic transformation platform is its narrow understanding of social justice in terms of fighting inequalities. Since pundits and academics drew public attention to the spectacular growth of inequalities in the West, social justice has been approached as a matter of fighting inequality via wealth redistribution. Thus, in a formula of 'participatory socialism' that is gaining popularity, the eminent French economist Thomas Piketty has articulated two pillars of progressive social reform towards a post-capitalist future. The first pillar is a dramatic redistribution from rich to poor, sourced from income and wealth taxation. A wealth tax is to provide the funds for a capital endowment inheritance for all – 120.000 euro each is to receive at age 25. The second pillar is increased worker involvement in the management of companies, for instance, by giving employees half of the seats on the board of large companies (Piketty 2019).[9]

Although proposals for a dramatic redistribution of wealth and power from rich to poor, from capital to labor, are now being advocated as a form of radical opposition to neoliberal capitalism, the departure from neoliberal convention is only apparent. Thinking in terms of inequality engages a logic of comparison between individuals and presents the idea of social justice in individualistic terms – as a matter of personal circumstances, of private wealth. Such a focus on individual circumstances is a trademark of the neoliberal mentality. Thus, even as we engage in the worthy struggle against inequality and exclusion, we in fact remain captive of the neoliberal imaginary, which views society as composed of individuals solely responsible for their lives. This eliminates the notion of collective wellbeing that has always been fundamental for Socialism as it espoused a *solidaristic* economy without emphasizing neither equality nor prosperity. Equality-within-prosperity is not a socialist ideal; solidarity in wellbeing is. It might be worth remembering that Marx did not advocate economic equality in his vision of a just social order. Marx's formula of distributive justice under communism mandates not equal distribution of existing resources but rather allocating them according to the dictum "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" (Marx 1875, 27). A privately-wealthy society, even if not too unequal, can still be publicly poor as long as essential public services are missing or deficient of funds. In his critique of the celebrated egalitarian affluence achieved under the post-war Welfare state in western democracies, John Kenneth Galbraith (1958) observed that these privately wealthy societies, even if fairly equal, were publicly poor as essential public services were being starved of funds. We might also do well to recall that totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe created societies that were egalitarian but certainly not solidaristic as the combination

[9] For Tomas Piketty's discussion of this project in the context of Europe, see his interview for *Social Europe* (podcast 16 Dec. 2020): https://www.socialeurope.eu/podcast

between discretionary political power and poorly governed economy created an atmosphere of mutual mistrust and competition for scarce resources.

Pledges to oppose neoliberalism by fighting inequality now invoke the policy formula of growth-and-redistribution that had ensured the (relative) equality in prosperity of the post-WWII welfare state. However, this prosperity – obtained via intensified production and consumption – proved deleterious for the environment. The return to the post-war welfare state, to Social Europe of the inclusive prosperity of the 1960s should be undesirable, even if it might be obtainable.

A third core element of popular proposals for a radical left alternative to neoliberal capitalism is the democratization of the control over productive capital – either via the socialization of the means of production or through significant involvement of workers in the management of companies. This is the second pillar of Thomas Piketty's proposal of 'participatory socialism" which is representative of political and intellectual ambitions on the Left.

Indeed, such proposals are in line with Marxist orthodoxy. Marx and most of his contemporaries saw emancipation primarily as a matter of liberation of labor from exploitation. This has been the predominant position of the Left in the course of the twentieth century. This objective has been pursued along two paths. The Social Democratic solution ran along the trajectory of fighting relational domination. The animating idea is that wealth redistribution from capital to labour would diminish exploitation. Similarly, the increase of worker representation on company boards – as advocated by eminent public figures such as US senator Elisabeth Warren as well as in programmatic documents of the European Left – would diminish the power asymmetry between labor and capital.

If a Social democratic alternative to the neoliberal consensus emerges along the trajectory of relational domination (fighting inequality and exclusion), the more radical path preferred by the Socialist left is along the path of structural domination – the expropriation of the means of production and the socialization of the economic process. However, even as these proposals go a long way in countering relational and structural domination, they do not diminish systemic domination – they do not necessarily abate the competitive production of profit and its attendant alienation, as the experience of "real socialism" in Eastern Europe and elsewhere has made clear.

One could take this argument further and note that against its purported emancipatory ambitions, such proposals in fact strengthen neoliberal capitalism. In conditions of globalised capitalism through market integration, even state-owned companies or companies owned by the workers they employ, would behave like capitalist actors in the pursuit of profit. Involving workers in the companies' management would only increase workers' vested interest in the capacity of their company to pursue profit – with all the familiar negative impact on human beings and nature: from self-exploitation, poor work-life balance, mental health disorders, and extractive economic practices that destroy the ecosystem. Thus, the solutions to relational and structural injustice that proposals like Piketty's 'participatory socialism' advance would inadvertently deepen systemic domination as it will enhance the logic of competitive pursuit of profit that is constitutive of capitalism. Such modes of critique are trapped in what I have called the paradox of emancipation: as we seek

inclusion and equality within one model of well-being, we further validate that model, together with all the injustices it might contain beyond inequality and exclusion (Azmanova 2020a, b). If we redistribute wealth in an egalitarian manner, this will neither help us have better public services nor will it do much to safeguard the natural environment – the two grave concerns of our time: the public commons and the ecosystem.

## Subverting Capitalism by Fighting Precarity

A radical alternative is, however, available. It is contained in some distinctive features of contemporary capitalism. We stand at a tipping point in history, when acute dissatisfaction with capitalism is rising, not on account of its poor economic performance or the unfair distribution of wealth, but rather its excellent economic performance, its intensity.

Towards the close of the twentieth century, the policy priority of enforcing competition, which had been a trademark of the neoliberal state, was replaced with the imperative of remaining competitive in the global economy. Thus, I have argued that since the early twenty-first century we inhabit yet another modality of capitalism – what I have called 'precarity capitalism'. One of the peculiar features of this new model of capitalism is that the state actively helps specific economic actors by enhancing the advantage they already have in the global economy, for the sake of ensuring national competitiveness. In this situation, the privileged position of select corporations which are sheltered from competition intensifies the competitive pressures on all the rest – people compete for fewer and fewer jobs, employment insecurity rises for all, funds for public services and public goods are slashed – all for the sake of remaining competitive in the global economy. The trouble is not only for the underclass of workers on insecure and poorly paid jobs – the 'precariat'. The insecurity has become massive – it afflicts highly educated employees in the legal profession, in Information Technology, and the medical service. Insecurity is forcing the labour-market insiders to work more than they would normally like to – but under the competitive pressures of globally integrated capitalism, they remain in the race out of uncertainty. On the other hand, this precludes access to the labour market for others – generating long-term unemployment as a source of precarity.

As the real income and the social clout of the working class has risen, exploitation (enabled by the private ownership and management of productive capital) is no longer the key engine of social injustice. Moreover, the proliferation of forms of property ownership and professional tenure have increased the complexity of the structural dimension of domination. Thus, the investment of pension funds in publicly traded equities means that workers, often unawares, assume the ownership, if not the control, of productive capital. At the same time, these new forms of ownership also decreases the relevance of structuring institutions in the allocation of social advantage and disadvantage: owning property no longer provides a shelter from risk. Instead, it is the competitive production of profit – the key dynamic of capitalism – that has become the decisive factor. At the root of discontent is not

simply the unfair distribution of wealth, but, importantly, the very process through which wealth is generated as well as the impact this has on individuals, communities, and nature.

The trouble with current-day capitalism is not just material inequality, but a massive economic and social uncertainty – precarity afflicts a growing multitude of groups beyond the poor and the excluded. The intensified competitive pressures of globally integrated capitalism have harmed not only the losers of globalisation – the 'the precariat'. Intensified global economic competition has also done tangible damage to the *winners* in the distribution of power – labor market insiders with good and well-paid jobs, owners and managers of capital – and is triggering their discontent.

This multifaceted discontent is shaping up into a powerful political force. A variety of interests across class divides, educational levels, and cultural identities are bringing together a multitude of strange bedfellows, united by an overarching grievance against the impact the competitive production of profit is having on their lives as well as on their social and natural environment. Mobilized in a mundane and inglorious anti-capitalist revolution, these forces could perform a social transformation still more radical than any proletarian class struggle could ever achieve.

This recasting of the diagnosis of the social question of our times – as a matter of precarity rather than inequality – articulates the possibility of reconciling social and environmental justice we so urgently need. If social justice is redefined away from material prosperity and in the direction of stabilising livelihoods, this solves the conflict between ecological justice and a vision of social justice predicated on a growth-and-redistribution dynamic. Only in this way is a Social and Green Europe thinkable.

A policy strategy for fighting precarity should be sought not so much in terms of active job creation or universal basic income – currently the two competing economic panaceas. On the one hand, depleted public budgets, especially after the pandemic-induced economic crisis, would necessitate spending on public services (building up the commons) to take priority over supplementing individual incomes. On the other hand, intensive technological innovation has decreased the time spent in productive employment that is necessary to effectively satisfy needs. The anthropologist David Graeber has noted that currently over half of societal work is pointless, while meaningless jobs are psychologically harmful.[10] An alternative to both job-creation and universal basic income is available, which I have discussed in terms of a 'right to minimum employment', to be obtained via job sharing in view of maximization of voluntary employment flexibility. We should all work, but all should work less, and accept lower revenues in exchange for secure income and increased leisure time. A wide-spectrum policy reform would enable such a transition towards less affluent, but more stable livelihoods: from a trans-European social security provision which is independent from the employment contract to an affordable housing provision, and building a trans-European public sector of industries and

[10]David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018.

services.[11] This will decrease the time we spend in gainful employment, while distributing access to jobs more fairly. Ultimately, this would amount to a revolution in the way we perceive and deliver social fairness – from the model of equality-in-prosperity which has proven so deleterious to the environment to a model of solidarity-in-wellbeing. No, we do not have the right to be middle class and affluent. But we have the right to live in dignity. Marx would approve.

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[11] For a more detailed account of specific policy reforms in this direction see Azmanova 2020a, and 2021.

# Chapter 3
# A Marxian Analysis of the European Construction I: Origins


**Jean-Christophe Defraigne**

**Abstract** Analysing the post-World War foundations of the European Union and following in detail the history of this construction until today, Jean-Christophe Defraigne focuses, in two chapters, on class domination, the absence of the European working class, and the conflicts between the elite classes of different European nations as well as with the American bourgeoisie. The major advances of the institutionalization of the European Union and the Eurozone corresponding to the regression of worker movements, Defraigne argues that it has ended up favouring reactionary and extreme-rightist "solutions" to crisis scenarios, aligned with a rampant euro-scepticism symbolized by Brexit, that prevents the creation of a supra-national European State with the capacity of resolving at least some of its internal contradictions.

**Keywords** Marxism · European Union · Political economy · Eurozone · Crisis · Brexit · Working class

The aim of this chapter is to present a Marxian analysis of the origins of European construction. By "European construction", we refer to the process of economic and institutional integration that began shortly after the Second World War and developed into the supranational institutions of the European Union (EU) we know today.

The arguments presented here will show that the European construction is a tool of class domination, but an incomplete one that is subject to numerous dysfunctions as a result of rivalries between the European national bourgeoisies and the evolution of the complex relations between these European bourgeoisies and their American rival and protector. The role of the working class in the broadest sense[1] was marginal in this construction, which was partly carried out against its will. This can be

[1] We will define it here as individuals who have to sell their labor or receive social assistance from the state in order to survive.

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explained by the political and social situation of the working class, whose organizations drifted away from revolutionary communist (and, to a lesser extent, anarchist) currents after the Second World War, and became increasingly passive politically and socially as the leaderships of their organizations no longer offered them the prospect of reformist struggles for economic and social gains – a phenomenon that accelerated from the 1980s onwards, as witnessed by the decline in militancy and major social movements.

The acceleration of European construction between 1979 (creation of the European Monetary System) and 2008 (global financial crisis) was marked by the creation of the single market, the introduction of the Euro and the enlargement of the European Economic Community to the Mediterranean and then of the EU to Central and Eastern Europe. It is taking place precisely during this period of decline in the labour movement and in the living conditions of the working class in developed countries. The conscious use of these mechanisms of economic integration by governments and multinational firms to weaken the position of the European working class will have the consequence of strengthening so-called sovereignist political currents and the far right, especially as even communist parties are becoming nationalist and are in retreat, threatening the neoliberal European construction project with the risk of splintering as illustrated by the Brexit.

This contribution will highlight how rivalries between Europe's national bourgeoisies, whose capacities for long-term vision are increasingly reduced by the financialization of the capitalist economy, are preventing the creation of a genuine European "supranational" state that would be capable of resolving some of these contradictions.

## 3.1 The Origins of European Integration: the Need to Adapt the Superstructure to the Development of the Productive Forces in the Era of Monopoly Capitalism

The technological developments brought about by the second industrial revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century played a decisive role in the genesis of European integration. Innovations in electrical machinery, chemistry, metallurgy, telecommunications and motor vehicles radically transformed the organization of capitalist firms, increasing their capital intensity (the organic composition of capital), product standardization and production volume (Chandler 1990; Landes 1975; Gordon 2014). This shift to large-scale standardized production, often referred to as Fordism, favours an acceleration of industrial concentration, leading to the period of oligopolistic capitalism known as "monopoly capitalism" (Mandel 1973). The oligopolies of the most technologically and financially advanced capitalist economies led to rising profit levels, which in turn encouraged the international expansion of their capital. This is the origin of economic imperialism, which accelerated

between the financial crisis of 1873 and the First World War (Béaud 1985; Hobson 1905).

Capital exports from the imperialist economies of Europe (England, France, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy) altered the economic and social prospects of less economically developed countries, particularly in the Mediterranean and Eastern European economic periphery (Berend 1996). Through the mechanism of financial loans and direct investment in the exploitation of raw materials, railroads, telecommunications and financial services, the firms of European imperialist economies, supported by the diplomacy of their respective states, gained increasing influence in the management of these economies, including regal competencies such as taxation and trade policy (Wallerstein 1974; Mandel 1973; Cain and Hopkins 1993). Faced with firms with considerable capital and better management and innovation capabilities, the bourgeoisies forming in these peripheral economies feel unable to compete with these firms in activities requiring advanced technical skills. They therefore confine themselves to serving local "niche" markets with lower added value, or to placing themselves at the service of imperialist firms by specializing in complementary activities. In this way, European comprador bourgeoisies develop with smaller accumulation capacities than those of the imperialist bourgeoisie, and remain politically weak. As Lenin emphasized in his analysis of the Russian case, and as Samir Amin has pointed out in the case of other Third World economies, these bourgeoisies are incapable of imposing a more liberal regime that would attack the privileges of local aristocracies, all the more so as the imperialist powers rely on these classes to better exploit the dominated economies of the European periphery (Tsarist, Ottoman, Austrian or Spanish aristocracy). This debility of the European bourgeoisie on the periphery blocked the economic development prospects of these countries, which remained dominated by a largely large-estate and under-mechanized agricultural sector. In the European regional division of labour, with a few exceptions such as Bohemia-Moravia and Catalonia, they import technology-intensive products and services and export raw materials and agricultural produce. Without being formally colonized, the European periphery is embarking on a path of dependence that will make it unable to catch up with the economic level and geopolitical influence of the European imperialist powers (Berend 1996).

Competition between imperialist powers for access to the rest of the world's markets and raw materials was at the root of the bloody conflict that tore Europe apart from 1914 to 1918, but this conflict did not resolve the rivalries between the German, French and English bourgeoisies. The inter-war period highlighted the industrial technological lead of American firms, which benefited from a vast, integrated national market with a greater number of consumers with the purchasing power to buy durable consumer goods (Defraigne 2004). Although the European imperialist powers have a similarly large population in their colonial empires, the colonized peoples being despoiled by the capitalist firms are plunged into poverty and have no such purchasing power. The size of the American market meant that Fordist production processes were more widespread, and productivity gains were partly reflected in wage gains (to alleviate the social struggles of the American

working class) which fueled mass consumption, enabling American firms to benefit from even greater economies of scale. This phenomenon further increases the differential between the American bourgeoisie and its European counterparts in terms of accumulation capacities and control of large multinational firms (Defraigne 2004; Chandler 1990; Panitch and Gindin 2013).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the political and business leaders of the major European imperialist powers were well aware of the competitive advantage that the size of the US domestic market gave their large firms. Leaders of European industry declared that they wanted to be inspired by American methods of organization, at a time when there was talk of "American commercial invasion" and "Americanization of the world" with the penetration of major brands by American multinationals (Wilkins 1970). The penetration of European markets by major US multinationals accelerated during the interwar period, leading to defensive reactions across Europe. As Schuker points out: "during the years 1927–1929, a great fear of the vitality of American capitalism had developed in France. By the end of the 1920s, the major industrialists of the *Comité des Forges* and *Comité des Houillères*, automobile manufacturers, the potash industry and film producers shared this fear of American competition and efficiency" (Schuker 2007). European firms formed European cartels in several sectors with strong economies of scale, such as steel and chemicals (Schröter 1997; Wurm 1977).

In the face of these threats, we are also seeing the emergence of tentative plans for European integration. We might cite Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergy's Pan-Europa of 1922, or the memorandum on the organization of a regime of European federal union drawn up in 1929 by the French President of the Council, Briand, within the framework of the League of Nations, which recommends: "the establishment of a common market to raise the level of human welfare to the maximum throughout the territories of the European community (...). With such a general orientation, the immediate pursuit of a rational organization of European production and trade could be practically undertaken, through the progressive liberation and methodical simplification of the circulation of goods, capital and people, subject only to the needs of national defense in each State" (Briand 1929). When Poincaré or Briand addressed their German counterparts, it was to advocate greater integration for a Europe they perceived as threatened by both the Soviet alternative economic and social model, which had gained support among a significant part of the European working class, and the economic superiority of the United States (Schuker 2007). Advocates of European integration clearly identify the problem of European fragmentation generated by the conflicting interests of segments within each national bourgeoisie in Europe who fear that foreign intra-european competition will take over if they lose the protective tools of their national state. Coudenhove-Kalergy writes: "For these industries, the fight to maintain customs barriers is a fight for their material existence. A pan-European customs union means their ruin. They will therefore fight Pan-Europe with all the means at their disposal. They will buy newspapers and put them at the service of this struggle; they will commission economists to write books and articles which must prove that free trade between European countries means the ruin of Europe" (Coudenhove-Kalergi 1927).

## 3.2 From the Crisis of the 1930s to the Nazi Project for European Integration

But these first steps towards European integration did not withstand the shock of the 1929 crisis, which plunged the imperialist powers into national protectionist logics, with each state apparatus supporting its national bourgeoisie. The return to agressive protectionist measures by the major European powers led to the abandonment of any plans for European integration (Defraigne 2004). The three industrial powers, Germany, Italy and Japan, which had insufficient outlets for the development of their productive forces due to the narrowness of their domestic markets and colonies, experienced a serious economic crisis that led to the nationalist and military radicalization of a fringe of their national bourgeoisie, particularly those linked to heavy industry. Part of the bourgeoisie supported the establishment of far-right dictatorial regimes, which envisaged military territorial expansion and the destruction of workers' movement organizations as a strategy for economic development (Tooze 2006; Bullock 1962; Guérin 1971; Defraigne 2004). Inter-imperialist rivalries led to a second, even more deadly global carnage.

From 1931 onwards, a large part of the German bourgeoisie, particularly in heavy industry (metallurgy, chemicals, automobiles, electrical products), supported nationalist governments whose aim was to protect it from foreign competition and particularly from takeovers by American firms (such as the industrial flagships Opel and AEG, taken over by the American giants GM and GE in 1929 and 1930), to develop a more aggressive trade policy and to impose austerity policies on German workers (Defraigne 2004; Tooze 2006; Goriely 1982). Since these policies were not enough to pull German capitalism out of crisis, this fringe of the bourgeoisie supported the creation of a coalition government between the right and the Nazis, who made no secret of their intention to destroy left-wing workers' organizations by imposing an extreme right-wing military regime (Bullock 1962; Frei 1994; Guérin 1971). The Nazi regime considerably raised the rate of surplus value of German capital in several ways. Firstly, it helped to drive down wages by forcing the unemployed to work on public works for below-market wages; by eliminating government-independent trade unions through state terrorism; and by imposing a pro-business labour code (Guérin 1971; Defraigne 2004). Secondly, it protected the German market from foreign competition and increased public orders, mainly in the military field. Thirdly, between 1938 and 1940, it pursued a policy of plunder against the Jewish population and the bourgeoisie in occupied territories such as Bohemia and Poland, which enabled military orders to continue (Tooze 2006; Defraigne 2004). This policy of plunder in Central Europe was facilitated by the attitude of a large part of the English and French bourgeoisie, who supported a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany, aimed at wiping out the USSR and the revolutionary upsurges threatening capitalism (June 1936 strikes in France, Spanish revolution) (Fontaine 1983). The policy of plundering continued between 1940 and 1944, when the populations of occupied territories were subjected to a very high degree of exploitation through rationing, forced labour (STO, slave labour, mainly Jewish,

Polish and Soviet) and compulsory financial transfers to cover the costs of military occupation (Defraigne 2004).

It is difficult to discern a coherent plan for European economic integration within the Nazi leadership. The short-term necessities imposed by military conquests and subsequent defeats, the limited economic capacities of the Nazi leadership and the chaotic nature of the Nazi administration explain this situation. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify more specific economic policies and projects aimed at securing a hegemonic position for the German bourgeoisie in Western Europe. Speer, Funk and Goering envisaged a customs union or free-trade zone with a clearing system based on German currency (Milward 1987; Einzig 1941; Durand 1990; Kolko 1994).

In this integrated space, the private property of Western European bourgeoisies is preserved, with a few transfers of assets from subsidiaries of French or Belgian multinationals to their German competitors (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). The financial transfers imposed by military means would limit the accumulation capacities of Western European bourgeoisies, which would then become comprador bourgeoisies, playing the role of subcontractors for German capitalism. Thanks to this European economic integration imposed by the military invasion, German firms would reach production levels that would enable them to benefit from economies of scale close to those of their American competitors (Defraigne 2004). This was not colonization, then, but a more favourable sharing of European markets for German business. The occupied countries retained a state apparatus that enjoyed most of the prerogatives required to serve the interests of the national bourgeoisie, most of whose members accepted a policy of collaboration to maintain their ownership and accumulation capacity as far as possible. Despite the impoverishment and rationing of the working class and part of the petty bourgeoisie, the big bourgeoisie from Western European occupied countries fared relatively well by participating in the Nazi war effort, which enabled it to obtain substantial profits, even higher for some firms than during the crisis of the 1930s (Defraigne 2004). This policy of Nazi collaboration with the Western European bourgeoisie is reminiscent in some respects of the British colonial system of indirect rule. It enabled the Nazis to save military forces for their great colonization project in the East, as the occupied states of Western Europe maintained the capitalist social order under the hegemony of the German bourgeoisie. The deportation of Jews, non-Europeans and resistance fighters was essentially carried out by the state apparatus of the occupied countries, rather than by German military forces.[2]

The situation was radically different in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, where the Nazi regime confiscated businesses on a massive scale (particularly among the Jewish population) or dismantled national industries, and proceeded to exterminate political and economic elites (Poland, Soviet Union) and ethnic

[2] As an example, we recall the words of SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich, architect of the Final Solution, about the key role played by René Bousquet, General Secretary of the Vichy Police, in the round-up of Jews in Paris. After the war, René Bousquet went on to work for the Banque d'Indochine et de Suez, retaining his Legion of Honor. Similar cases of collaboration by senior civil servants exist in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Italy.

minorities (Jews, gypsies). This was a veritable process of colonization, deindustrialization, de-urbanization and extermination of unprecedented violence, aimed at securing a *lebensraum* for Germanic settlements that would benefit from an indigenous slave labour force (Tooze 2006; Bullock 1993). Eastern Europe would be a reserve of raw materials and agricultural products, as well as an outlet for German industry, which would no longer have any local competitors after the programmed deindustrialization of the region.

The cost of this barbaric imperialist policy, which culminated in the military defeat of Nazi Germany, would amount to over 40 million dead, including seven million Germans. If the war was disastrous for the German population, the same cannot be said for the big industrial firms. The looting economy, subsidies and large-scale military orders from the state enabled German firms to benefit from constant modernization of their equipment and to adopt Fordist production methods, with economies of scale almost comparable to those of their American counterparts (Harrison 2000; Defraigne 2004). What is more, they benefited from forced labour by workers from occupied countries, and in some cases by deportees from extermination camps, notably for Krupp, BMW and IG Farben.[3] Despite the destruction wrought by the end of the war, the managerial and technological know-how of German firms gave them a serious lead over their European competitors, and explains the rapid recovery of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s (Harrison 2000; Overy 1994; Defraigne 2004).

## 3.3 From Post-war Deadlock to the American Push for European Integration 1945–1953

Contrary to what remains the most widespread vision of the myth of the European construction,[4] the more than 40 million deaths caused by imperialist barbarism during the Second World War did not lead to European reconciliation in 1945. The French and British governments' first reaction to Germany was not to cooperate

[3] From which come BASF, Bayer, Hoecht and Agfa.

[4] We can quote the edifying style of the EU explanatory brochure written by academic Pascal Fontaine to understand EU policies available on the official EU publications website: "It was not until the reflections of the resistance movements against totalitarianism, during the Second World War, that a new hope emerged: to overcome national antagonisms, to create the conditions for lasting peace. A handful of courageous statesmen, such as Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Winston Churchill, committed themselves between 1945 and 1950 to convincing their peoples to enter a new era: that of a structured organization of Western Europe based on common interests, guaranteed by treaties ensuring the equality of each state and respect for the law. Robert Schuman (French Foreign Minister) took up an idea of Jean Monnet's and, on May 9, 1950, proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Placing the coal and steel production of formerly enemy countries under a common authority, the High Authority, had great symbolic significance. The materials of war were transformed into instruments of reconciliation and peace."

in its reconstruction and reintegration into the European economy. Paris, and to a lesser extent London, aimed to obtain war reparations from Germany, notably by carrying out the notorious dismantling of German industries by Allied occupying forces as reparations, and to isolate it diplomatically (as with the 1947 Treaty of Dunkirk). The French bourgeoisie, particularly those involved in heavy industry, feared competition from German industry, which had benefited for 6 years from the plundering of neighbouring economies, enabling it to modernize more rapidly and slow down the development of its European competitors.[5] The Europe of 1945 remained fragmented, with protectionist and monetary barriers much higher than in the interwar period, as evidenced by the decline in intra-European trade, which was much lower in the late 1940s than before 1914 (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). Each national bourgeoisie feared competition from its rivals and sought state support to protect its interests. Some the wealthiest capitalists preferred to send part of their capital to the United States or Switzerland rather than invest in war-torn Europe, where the working class was combative, partly armed (via resistance organizations) and hostile to a bourgeoisie largely compromised by collaboration (Kolko 1994).

Certainly, European business leaders and governments were aware of the superiority of American Fordist mass production, and of the need to benefit from a large market in order to achieve the level economies of scale enjoyed by US firms. A few European federalist currents emerged at the end of the war, but the solution of supranational European integration was still a long way off. It was mainly defended by certain small states (Belgium, Netherlands) whose narrow domestic markets penalized their national bourgeoisie in a world characterized by very high trade barriers. The French government proposed the Fritalux (France-Italy-Benelux) customs union, which excluded Germany and which France could dominate (Lynch 1997; Djelic 1998). This project was rejected by the Benelux bourgeoisie, whose companies were highly dependent on the German economy. The British government pursued its imperial withdrawal and tried to disengage itself from a continental Europe it considered permanently weakened by war and at the risk of civil war (notably in Greece, Italy or Yugoslavia)[6] (Camps 1964; Milward 1992). As for the German bourgeoisie, it no longer had a state apparatus capable of protecting its interests, and was dependent on the occupying forces of foreign powers (Milward 1992; Buhrer 1995). As can be seen, the lack of consensus on the problem of European fragmentation between the European bourgeoisies and their respective states has led to the same deadlock on the European integration issue as in the interwar period.

[5] The Nazi government pursued a policy of economic plundering in Eastern Europe, imposing substantial financial contributions from the occupied territories, reaching up to 10% of GDP in 1943 and 1944 (Defraigne 2004).

[6] In 1951, Churchill summed up the UK's post-war diplomatic vision: "Our first object is the unity and consolidation of the British Commonwealth and what is left of the former British Empire. Our second, the 'fraternal association' of the English-speaking world; and the third, United Europe, to which we are separate, closely and specially related ally and friend" (quoted in May, 2013).

It was the impetus of a foreign imperialist power, the United States, that made it possible to overcome the rivalries between European bourgeoisies. US political leaders and business circles understood that European integration could strengthen the hegemonic position of the United States vis-à-vis the USSR, which had emerged victorious from the war, and give them faster access to European markets, the most important in the world after the US domestic market.

Firstly, the US government realized that it was necessary to rebuild the industrial base of Western Europe, including Germany, the continent's leading industrial power, in order to stabilize the German political situation and strengthen pro-American military capabilities to counter the USSR in the event of global conflict (Hogan 1989; Gillingham 2003).

Secondly, the US government considered that the risk of Communist subversion in Western Europe, particularly in France and Italy, also needed to be reduced. It developed an anti-Communist ideological offensive strategy on an exceptional scale. The Marshall Plan accelerated the reconstruction of European industries, not only through financial aid but also through the transfer of American technology and managerial know-how, which facilitated the widespread adoption of Fordist production methods (Lynch 1997; Wonoroff 1994, 503). The American administration in charge of the Marshall Plan predicted that the resulting productivity gains would translate in part into higher wages, enabling the American working class to acquire durable consumer goods and adopt the "American way of life", moving away from communist perspectives. In the words of Marshall Plan officials in their documents, the idea was "to promote the American assembly line against the Communist Party line" (Djelic 1998, 78).

Thirdly, this reconstruction plan had the advantage of providing outlets for the American industry, which was experiencing a serious crisis in 1946–1947 due to the end of the war economy. More than the stimulus policies of the New Deal, it was the military orders of the British (with Cash and Carry from 1939) and American governments (the Land-Lease of 1941) that pulled the American economy out of the depression, but the end of the war and of military orders led to a severe recession in 1946. European reconstruction required American machine-tools and other manufactured goods, and could provide a breath of fresh air to limit the crisis of overproduction in the United States in 1947 (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022).

The American officials who drew up the Marshall Plan were aware that the transition to Fordism and Germany's reintegration into Western Europe required the creation of a European common market, to avoid a geopolitical struggle between European powers to obtain sufficient outlets for their national industries to benefit from economies of scale. With their exceptional financial, political and military leverage, they forced France to sign an agreement with Germany (Gillingham 2003; Djelic 1998). To support the European project, the US government insisted that NATO declare itself in favour of European economic integration, and the CIA financed political organizations such as the European Movement (Denord and Schwartz 2009; Defraigne and Nouveau 2022).

It is in this context that we can understand Jean Monnet's role in the decisive step of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which set up the High

Authority, the first supranational European institution with binding powers on its member states. Monnet was probably the Frenchman with the best contacts in the United States (Djelic 1998). Having gained experience in international finance for states and private companies, he forged important links with American law firms and financial services, notably with John Foster and Allan Dulles, who would become Secretary of State under Eisenhower and Director of the CIA respectively (Bossuat 2014). During the war, he worked as a consultant for the Roosevelt administration. He also developed a close relationship with the influential John McCloy, who enabled Jean Monnet to act as liaison between Washington DC and "Free France" during the liberation of France (Joly 2007). McCloy presided over the World Bank until 1949, before becoming High Commissioner to the Allied High Commission in Germany until 1952, two key positions during the Marshall Plan period (Bird 1992). In other words, Monnet enjoyed the confidence of senior American officials. Contrary to certain stereotypes, Monnet came from the world of international finance, hostile to communism. He was an Atlanticist, convinced of the superiority of US fordist production methods.

In 1950, Monnet made the following observation: "Germany expanding; German export dumping; demand for protection for French industries; trade liberalization halted; pre-war cartels recreated; German expansion perhaps directed eastward, a prelude to political agreements; France back in the rut of limited, protected production" (Monnet 1976). To overcome this situation, in which Germany could move politically closer to the USSR and French producers would continue to operate on a protected domestic market that was too small to benefit from the most modern Fordist production techniques, Monnet negotiated financing for the construction of new, ultra-modern French production capacity with the Marshall Plan authorities. He convinced the American authorities, notably McCloy, to grant the French steel industry access to Ruhr coal resources (Lynch 1997; Joly 2007). In this way, Monnet and his minister Schuman succeeded in softening the protectionist reflexes of the *Maîtres des Forges* and imposing the ECSC. As for the German bourgeoisie, it understood that acceptance of the ECSC was a condition for recovering its state apparatus and gaining access to Western European markets (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). The success of the ECSC (increased production and lower prices) encouraged the creation of a Common Market extended to all goods with the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

As we can see, the first major stage in the construction of Europe, which tempered the rivalries between Europe's national bourgeoisies, was not a project of reconciliation and European emancipation initiated by a few pan-Europeanist elites. It is, in fact, an integral part of the US government's strategy in its global struggle against the USSR and communism, and in its quest for new foreign markets. US financial and geopolitical leverage is essential in explaining how these rivalries were overcome, enabling the creation of supranational European institutions in the 1950s.

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# Chapter 4
# A Marxian Analysis of the European Construction II: Contradictions


**Jean-Christophe Defraigne**

**Abstract** Analysing the post-World War foundations of the European Union and following in detail the history of this construction until today, Jean-Christophe Defraigne focuses, in two chapters, on class domination, the absence of the European working class, and the conflicts between the elite classes of different European nations as well as with the American bourgeoisie. The major advances of the institutionalization of the European Union and the Eurozone corresponding to the regression of worker movements, Defraigne argues that it has ended up favouring reactionary and extreme-rightist "solutions" to crisis scenarios, aligned with a rampant euro-scepticism symbolized by Brexit, that prevents the creation of a supra-national European State with the capacity of resolving at least some of its internal contradictions.

**Keywords** Marxism · European Union · Political economy · Eurozone · Crisis · Brexit · Working class

This chapter builds on the analysis of the previous chapter to highlight, from a Marxian angle, the contradictions of the European economic construction. It begins with the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community (EEC), and goes on to analyse six decades of deepening and enlargement of the EEC and the European Union (EU). The aim is to shed light on the obstacles, limits and impact of this process of economic integration, which has marked the history of Europe and is part of the transformations of globalized capitalism.

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## 4.1 1953–1973: The Return of Rivalries Between National Bourgeoisies and European Deadlock

As the political situation stabilized with the end of the Korean War, the death of Stalin and the retreat of the Stalinist parties in Western Europe, the threat of the overthrow of capitalism no longer seemed imminent. With the reconstruction of European national economies and the end of the Marshall Plan, Europe's national bourgeoisies resumed their protectionist attitudes. They used the privileged ties they maintained with their national state apparatus to defend themselves against their US and European competitors, notably by reducing the powers of supranational institutions they were not sure they could control in the face of lobbying from their European competitors (Defraigne 2004). Thus, the employers' associations of ECSC member states managed to resist the High Authority's attempts to rationalize production capacity, and Monnet, who was appointed to head the High Authority, was unable to make full use of the powers he had on paper (Lister 1960; Joly 2007), in particular the possibility of carrying out transnational mergers within the ECSC. The supranational institutions of the 1957 European Community no longer had such powers.

During the first 30 years of its existence, the Common Market was hampered by numerous barriers erected by member states to protect their national firms – a policy of "national champions" rather than "European champions". The national bourgeoisies are able to obtain subsidies to counter foreign competition, to erect technical barriers to trade, and to obtain virtually exclusive access to procurements from their national state. The Commission denounced such practices, which violated the "Community acquis" (the set of EU rules),[1] but failed to get member states to put a stop to them. As a result, the Common Market is unable to match the degree of integration of the US domestic market, which is detrimental to the competitiveness of European firms, and is even making certain new sectors such as IT and pharmaceuticals considerably lag behind. As for the European defence, the same fear of losing control of the foreign policy that protects their imperialist interests is preventing the French, German and British bourgeoisie from seriously considering the creation of a European army. It's hard to see the German bourgeoisie supporting French colonial wars, when its economic interests are virtually non-existent in the French colonies, given the preponderance of French imperialism.

[1] That is, all the supranational rules in force in the EEC and then the EU.

## 4.2 The Crisis of the 1970s, Capital's Offensive Against Workers and the Acceleration of European Integration 1973–2006

The capitalist system experienced a serious structural crisis in the early 1970s. Reconstruction and the generalization of Fordist production methods, the driving forces behind the postwar European growth, ran out of steam at the end of the 1960s, as new producers of manufactured goods emerged in East Asia. Full employment in the 1960s and the high level of militancy among the working class in imperialist countries led to upward pressure on wages, which rose faster than productivity gains in Europe. The development of state intervention in the economy, through the nationalization of ailing industrial sectors and the development of social security systems, increased the tax burden on capital and limited the scope for capitalist investment. The rate of surplus value fell rapidly from the end of the 1960s in the USA and the early 1970s in Europe (Duménil and Levy 2011; Mandel 1985).

To defend their accumulation capacities, the bourgeoisies embark on a series of manoeuvres aimed at raising the rate of profit (Kolko 1988; Mandel 1985). The first is to resort to increased automation and industrial relocation to Third World economies where exploitation can be intensified, first in East Asia (the Asian tigers) and then in the vicinity of imperialist countries (Mexico, Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean region, ASEAN and China). The second is to use the loopholes in the international monetary system, notably the Eurocurrency market, to set up a system of offshore financial centres, with the support of governments, which will enable the de facto development of greater freedom of capital movements and large-scale tax evasion via transfer pricing mechanisms (Helleiner 1995; Shaxson 2011). These new opportunities for tax evasion will permanently weaken the tax resources needed to finance social security, thereby weakening wage-earners and the small self-employed by reducing their access to or level of alternative income (unemployment benefits or pensions). The third is to structurally weaken workers' ability to fight (reducing the right to strike, using the civil code against the labour code, with bailiffs), and to deregulate or "flexibilize" the labour market to make workers more precarious (temporary work, bogus self-employment, fixed-term contracts, zero hour contracts, etc.). An ideological offensive – some call it neoliberal, even though it is basically a step backwards – is developing on a massive scale, via think-tanks, universities and the press, calling into question state taxation and social transfers, public enterprises and public services, trade unions, financial and labour market regulation, and all forms of intervention (Halimi 2004; Harvey 2005).

The working class actively defended itself during the last three decades of the twentieth century, as indicated by the frequency of strike days, but was dragged along by its organizations in a purely defensive and sectoral perspective, aiming to preserve their status quo in terms of living standards. This inability to play a decisive role in the face of the forces of capital, when it had succeeded in doing so at other times in its history, can be explained by the existence of social stabilizers (unemployment benefits, early retirement schemes) which plunge them into poverty but not

into misery comparable to the situation in the nineteenth century, or by technological change which catches them off-guard, or by employers' strategies of dividing workers according to their nationality or status (temporary work, fixed-term contracts versus permanent contracts).

However, in addition to these socio-economic factors, there was another determining factor of a political nature. This was the disappearance of strong organized revolutionary currents, in contrast to the situation that prevailed in the labour movement before the 1930s.

The reformist drift of social democratic organizations, trade unions, political parties and associations continued throughout the twentieth century, and they ended up supporting political leaders such as Mitterrand, Schmidt, Prodi, Renzi, Gonzales, Blair and Di Rupo. Not only do these politicians support the maintenance of capitalism, they also ended in cooperating with employers in their offensive against workers. Reformist left-wing organizations, which have abandoned the classical Marxist analysis of class and state for decades, are completely surprised by this offensive, which began in the 1970s, as the social and institutional framework in which they had been accustomed to operating since the end of the Second World War is gradually being dismantled: social security, regulation of the labour market, trade union rights and "social concertation", high taxation of high incomes and companies. As workers' living conditions worsened, these organizations suffered a loss of credibility, a haemorrhage of activists and a change in social composition, gradually losing their working-class identity.

The revolutionary communist parties and trade unions inspired by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 became appendages of Stalinist foreign policy during the purge waves of the 1930s and 1940s, imposed by the Stalinist bureaucracy via the Comintern (Broué 1997). Afterwards the communist party leadership became conservative, even reactionary, and suspicious of any workers' movement it could not control, a far cry from the origins of the revolutionary Marxist current. With the growing discredit of the repressive Stalinist society (especially after the revelations of Stalinist crimes at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union in 1956), these parties gradually lost their influence among the working class. Those of their bureaucratic leaders who chose to distance themselves from Moscow (like Berlinguer in the Italian CP) did not return to a revolutionary Marxist vision, but followed the path and evolution of reformist social democracy. Revolutionary currents (Trotskyists, Maoists until the Deng Xiao Ping turning point, or anarchists), other political currents or non-revolutionary syndicalists who advocated social struggles rather than electoral prospects were still very much in the minority, and did not have enough of a foothold to form mass parties capable of altering the balance of power in favour of the workers.

Thus, the acceleration of European integration between 1980 and 2000, with the creation of the European Single Market and the single currency, took place during a period of retreat for the workers' movement. The latter had no influence on this process, leaving the field free for capital's lobbyists to influence the evolution of the EEC-EU. In this context of employers' offensive and retreat of the working world, this integration is used by the European bourgeoisie as a tool to reinforce the

domination of capital. Of course, this offensive has a structural cause independent of the European integration process, and extends beyond the EEC/EU to all imperialist and Third World economies, the latter hit by the debt crisis and notorious structural adjustment plans during the 1980s–1990s (Kolko 1988; Panitch and Gindin 2013; Harvey 2005). Contrary to certain sovereigntist discourses that claim to be left-wing but have no desire to call into question the foundations of the capitalist economy, namely private ownership of the means of production and profit, it is not European integration that is the cause of this offensive against labour (it is indeed the re-establishment of the rate of profit necessary for the continuation of capitalist accumulation). Nor is it the only means of pursuing this offensive, as witnessed by the setbacks suffered by the American and Japanese working classes at the same time.

The crisis of the 1970s intensified international competition. There were also a few protectionist impulses, but nothing like the crisis of the 1930s, since no imperialist power thought of challenging the United States' position as leader of the capitalist camp, or of military expansion as a way out of the crisis, given American military superiority and the fear of a USSR still perceived as powerful (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). Faced with the Soviet threat, which was overestimated following the victory in North Vietnam and the USSR's geopolitical advances in Africa and the Middle East, and faced with the rise of a discourse emanating from Third World countries calling for a new world economic order, the imperialist countries chose not to confront each other too harshly on the trade front (Kolko 1988). However, the American government took advantage of its hegemonic position to impose unilateral measures that harmed the economic interests of the European and Japanese imperialist powers, such as the Trade Act of 1974 and the unilateral abandonment of the dollar's gold convertibility and fixed exchange rates between 1971 and 1973. We are reminded of a unilateralism that prefigures the "America First" of the Trump era with Treasury Secretary Connally's quip: "The dollar is our currency, but it's your problem" (Panitch and Gindin 2013). The EEC remains open to international trade, but is subject to Washington's unilateral policies. What is more, the meteoric transformation of Japan's economy has made it a major competitor, whose commercial expansion is as frightening to European chancelleries in the 1970s–1980s as China's has been in this last decade.

The transition to the electronic age and differentiated mass production (what some have called post-Fordism or Toyotism) calls for an increase in firm size that challenges the status quo of the Common Market fragmentation through national champion policies (Defraigne 2004; Boyer and Durand 1998; Piore and Sabel 1984). Against this backdrop of crisis and heightened competition, Europe's major corporations are seeking greater integration of the European market to eliminate their weaker European competitors, rationalize production capacities at the European level and facilitate the transition to post-Fordist production. Even non-EU multinationals operating within the Common Market, such as Volvo (Sweden), Nestlé, CIBA Geigy (Switzerland), IBM or United Technologies (USA), were in favour of removing national barriers within the Common Market. In the spring of 1983, with the support of the European Commissioner for Industry and the Internal Market,

Etienne Davignon, Volvo boss Pehr Gyllenhammar and Dutch Philips boss Wisse Dekker set up a lobbying group of major European firms in favour of greater EEC integration (Dinan 2005; Gillingham 2003). This led to the creation of the European Roundtable of Industrialists, which brought together some 20, then 40, large firms from member states and elsewhere operating within the EEC (Dinan 2005; Green Cowles 2007; Moravcsik 1998). This lobby had a decisive influence on the creation of the Single Market in 1993, and even drafted parts of President Jacques Delors' 1985 White Paper, the document that paved the way for the Single Market (Gillingham 2003; Defraigne 2004).

Some fractions of the national bourgeoisie still resisted, fearing that abandoning the protections afforded by their national state would expose them to devastating competition, but other fractions, which included most of the very largest firms, supported the ERT, battled and prevailed in favour of the creation of the Single Market (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022).

In parallel with the creation of the Single Market, a process of monetary integration began with the fixed exchange rate system introduced at Bretton Woods with the Werner Report (1970), and continued with the European Monetary System in 1979, culminating in the single currency in 1999. Monetary integration had several objectives: to ensure greater fluidity in the EU market by limiting exchange rate risks and fluctuations; to facilitate the integration of financial services; and to provide an alternative to the dollar, thereby strengthening the balance of power between European states and US monetary policy (James 2012; Marsh 2010).

While some authors credit Delors presidency with a social vision that saw the integration of markets and currency as a step towards a social, market-regulating Europe, this presupposes a degree of autonomy that European technocrats have never enjoyed (Gillingham 2003). The Single Market and the single currency were accompanied by severe market deregulation and considerable social regression in the 1990s and 2000s.

## 4.3 The Single Market as a Tool for Strengthening the Control of the Bourgeoisies of the Major European Imperialist Powers

The European Single Market generated a wave of mergers on a scale unprecedented in European history, enabling the emergence of large firms comparable in size to American firms in several sectors (Defraigne 2004). This dramatic industrial concentration took place at the expense of the national champions of smaller member states. Firms such as Société Générale de Belgique, Skoda (Czech Republic), Dacia (Romania) and Seat (Spain) were absorbed by the giants of the larger member states, such as Suez, VW and Renault. This process, which continued for three decades, strengthened the hold of the major groups of the largest European imperialist powers within the Single Market. It transformed certain small national

bourgeoisies into comprador rentiers. The smaller member states ended up with fewer and fewer world-class firms, while the share of French and German firms in the group of European firms belonging to the Global Fortune 500 grew.

The strengthening of competition policy was supported by ERT and the big firms, as it limited the ability of states to save their inefficient national firms and drives the privatization of public companies. These companies either went bankrupt or became absorbed by larger competitors. Under the pretext of creating European champions through transnational mergers, which will have better economies of scale and be able to offer services at lower prices, governments have carried out numerous privatizations of public companies in telecoms, electricity, water distribution, transport and financial services. The result is large companies that benefit from economies of scale, but which are essentially national, not European: they retain a strong national shareholding and national commercial law. Most small member states find themselves in a situation analogous to that of Third World countries, where foreign multinationals control the bulk of capital-intensive services, with a small proportion remaining in the hands of the national comprador bourgeoisie.

## 4.4 The Single Market and Its Enlargements as a Mechanism of Social and Fiscal Competition for the Benefit of Business

The European Single market of 1993, with its four major freedoms of movement (goods, services, capital and workers), enable companies to fully exploit competition between workers in different member states, and between governments, to generate a race to the bottom in social rules and corporate taxation. The position of Business Europe, the European employers' association, is to oppose European fiscal and social harmonization. Indeed, companies have the freedom of establishment between member states, which enables them to relocate to obtain the most advantageous social and tax legislation, and to more easily blackmail relocation to obtain lower wages or public subsidies (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022).

Enlargement towards Eastern Europe greatly accelerates this process. The Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CCEEs) are in a very fragile situation at the time of their accession negotiations. Many of them are heavily indebted and need access to external markets to repay their debts with exports. The European Commission estimates that 70% of their companies have obsolete technology incapable of coping with international competition (Berend 2009). Dependent on aid from international organizations controlled by the big imperialist powers (IMF, EBRD, European Commission), their governments accept transition programs that result in closures and privatizations of national champions taken over by EU multinationals. Unlike China's transition to capitalism, during which the state maintained a developmentalist policy to modernize its national champions, CCEE governments are following the Washington Consensus of the IMF, World Bank and EBRD and their neoliberal agenda.

The CCEE adopt the Irish "Celtic Tiger" model. To attract multinationals wishing to relocate their labour-intensive activities, CEE countries offer cheap labour with modest social contributions and very low corporate tax rates. Like Ireland, they use EU aid to modernize the infrastructures that multinationals will use. Public money is thus used to facilitate the creation of production zones to drive down the production costs of multinationals, mainly from the EU's most developed economies, which are already raking in billions in profits. EU aid to the CCEEs is actually quite limited, given the enormous technological and social cost of returning to the fold of Western capitalism. Whereas the Mediterranean countries had a GDP per capita averaging 50% of the EEC level when they joined, the figure drops to 25% for the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). Yet they receive half as much aid per capita for their accession (Boillot 2003; Michalski 2006). In reality, the CCEE have the characteristics of so-called emerging economies, but they remain underdeveloped. Labour costs are five to ten times lower than in Germany or France. Without sufficient financial aid from the EU to ensure real catch-up in the medium term, and without a sufficient tax base, social security coverage in the CCEE is being dramatically reduced, and mass unemployment is rising to twice the level of the EU of 15 old member states (Eurostat, 2021). With unemployment benefits insufficient to live decently, the working population of the CCEE has to sell off its labour force, either by working directly or indirectly (subcontracting) for local subsidiaries of multinationals, or by moving to the old member states to take any available job, mainly in construction, road transport, tourism, catering, home services and agriculture as seasonal workers (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022).

Millions of CCEE workers migrate to the old member states, driving down local wages in certain sectors. As workers from CCEE compete with those from the old member states, fear and even anger against EU rules is on the rise. This was symbolized by the "Polish plumber" controversy during the French referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. This labour race to the bottom was a key factor in the rise of euroscepticism, which led to the failure of the French, Irish and Dutch referendums, strengthened xenophobic far-right currents and pushed Great Britain towards Brexit.

Following the failure of the referendums, the openly neoliberal version of the EU labour and services market advocated by the European directive drafted by European Commissioner Bolkenstein (from the Dutch liberal right) is legally amended. The Bolkenstein directive advocated using the labour market laws of the country of origin of a worker providing a service in another member country. Thus, a Polish worker from a Polish firm providing cleaning services in France was not entitled to the benefits of the French labour code, but had to make do with Polish rules, which were much more favourable to employers. The amendment tabled by the parties of the European reformist left impose the principle of using the social legislation of the country of destination... but with an exception for posted workers providing a service of less than 1 month, in which case the legislation of the country of origin would apply. Whether these parties were naïve or duplicitous does not change the fact that millions of workers from the CCEE and Southern Europe are exploited on temporary

assignments of less than a month (but often de facto repeated) under the social legislation of the country of origin. In the 2010s, for example, Bulgarian workers took on assignments for firms in the meat-cutting sector in Germany at a wage of 3 to 4 euros, i.e. over 50% below the German minimum wage (Monty 2013).

These circumventions of the law, which offer cheap labour to capitalists in the north-western part of the EU, are legion, and member state governments consciously choose not to employ enough labour inspectors to systematically enforce the law. When, by a happy coincidence, a company is prosecuted, the procedures are very slow and the penalties negligible. For example, it took 9 years to convict the French company Bouygues, which had subcontracted 460 Romanian and Polish workers on its Flamanville sites, without paying social security contributions, granting paid leave or offering social protection. On appeal, the French giant was ordered to pay a fine of 29,950 euros, while the loss of earnings for the State amounted to between 10 and 12 million euros. As journalist Dan Israel of Médiapart points out: "a very precisely chosen amount: a fine of 30,000 euros would have prevented it (Bouygues) from gaining access to public contracts for several years, as the president of the Caen Court of Appeal himself had pointed out, highlighting the risks for the employment of construction workers" (author's translation, Israel 2021). In its Laval and Viking rulings, the European Court of Justice revealed the extent to which the European Treaties were designed to enable firms to compete with EU workers, thereby driving down wages and levels of social protection (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). This race to the bottom has been reflected in a steady fall in corporate taxes and a decline in the share of wages in EU GDP, two mechanisms that boost the profit rate of capitalists.

Another area where oligopolistic capitalism plays on differences in national legislation is competition. If capitalists wish to operate freely throughout the EU, they do not wish to be subject to centralized regulation at EU level. So, until the Banking Union was established in 2014, the national banking authorities of member states had no clear view of the activities carried out by their banks' subsidiaries located in other member states, where banking regulation may have been more lax. This phenomenon encouraged the creation of real estate and financial bubbles in certain member states, such as Ireland. In the telecoms and energy sectors, there is no real European market, but 27 national markets within which oligopolies operate, facing regulatory authorities of widely varying powers, rather than a centralized European authority. This allows firms operating in different member states to impose prices that are sometimes very different and bear no relation to actual production costs, as illustrated by the fact that prices for telecoms and electricity within the EU can vary by as much as double. In Belgium, for example, the Commission de Régulation de l'Électricité et du Gaz has publicly admitted its inability to obtain the cost structures of the French multinational Engie, which holds a dominant position in the Belgian energy market and charges much higher prices than in France (Belga 2011). Some multinationals, particularly in the services sector, find themselves in the comfortable position of oligopolistic rentiers facing small member states with weak, underfunded regulatory institutions, and have no interest in developing genuine European integration, which would nevertheless be more efficient in terms of production costs.

## 4.5 European Institutions Under the Control of Large Capitalist Firms

As the pace of European integration accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, the major multinational corporations strengthened their influence in Brussels, which became home to the largest number of lobbyists in the world, ahead of Washington DC. Specialized "public affairs" agencies developed the techniques used in the US to defend the interests of large corporations (Laurens 2015). The complexity of European institutions and policies is conducive to opaque decision-making. Industrial, health, environmental and social standards are decided behind closed doors. Although consumer associations, NGOs and trade unions may be included, the presence of big business is preponderant, and some proposed European directives include passages directly drafted by private firms. The so-called "revolving doors" mechanism between the European civil service and the private sector is encouraged, with opportunities for repeated career breaks to "facilitate" experience in the private sector. This obviously helps private interests to penetrate the European civil service. For example, a Commission official might work on car pollution standards, then go to work for a car company, only to return to work on these standards. Revolving doors can be seen at the highest level. The case of European Commission President Barroso, who went to work for Goldman Sachs Bank after his term of office, or that of Mario Draghi, who became ECB President after having been a director of Goldman Sachs Europe, are emblematic but by no means exceptional. Some members of the European Parliament belong to companies, while at the same time legislating in areas of interest to those companies. For example, the CEO of Tiscali, one of Europe's leading telecoms operators, was a member of the European Parliament, as was former Belgian Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene, who sat on the boards of Dexia bank and beer multinational Inbev (Defraigne and Nouveau 2022). Of course, these phenomena also exist at member state level, or in the US and Japan, but they are more exposed to criticism and public opinion than at the level of European institutions, which are more complex and less familiar to the general public. Numerous NGOs working on these issues, such as Corporate Europe Obervatory, note the near-total stranglehold of big business on the European decision-making process (CEO 2017).

## 4.6 Where Is Europe Headed?

Marxian analysis of the European construction provides essential keys to understanding the chaotic and incomplete nature of this construction, as it does not shy away from analyzing the links between national bourgeoisies and their state apparatus, and considers that the driving forces of societies are the development of productive forces and class struggle (Marx 1994). An analysis that takes these elements into account helps us to understand that, from the beginning of the

twentieth century, Western European economic integration was seen by European economic and political leaders as necessary to reach the level of competitiveness of US firms, by adopting Fordist production methods and benefiting from the economies of scale generated by the technological innovations of the second industrial revolution. But the rivalries of the national bourgeoisies held back the creation of supranational institutions to drive forward this integration, despite two bloody conflicts, as each national bourgeoisie feared it would not have the same control over them as it had over its traditional national state apparatus. Contrary to what prevails in certain superficial analyses by the media and certain European technocrats, it is not so much the populations, supposedly driven by strong nationalist sentiment, who have blocked European integration in order to preserve their political sovereignty, but rather the national bourgeoisies who have used their state apparatus to defend their interests.

These rivalries between national bourgeoisies did not prevent them from using the process of European integration as one tool among others to contribute to the wider general offensive of the bourgeoisies of imperialist countries against the workers, in order to raise a rate of profit so low in the early 1970s that it threatened the continuation of capitalist accumulation. European integration has been used to promote competition between workers and between states, especially since the enlargement to the East in the 2000s. The result has been a race to the bottom in social standards and corporate taxation. This social deterioration has encouraged the emergence of eurosceptic sovereignist movements, particularly on the far right. Where can a capitalist Europe go, weakened by rivalries between national bourgeoisies and gradually losing its legitimacy within a growing proportion of the population, other than towards more contradictions that push it towards reactionary or revolutionary outcomes?

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# Chapter 5
# Marx and Europe, or How to Overcome Predatory Finance?


**Cécile Barbier**

> *Modern bourgeois society, which has set in motion such powerful means of production and exchange, resembles a magician who no longer knows how to dominate the infernal powers he has conjured up.*
>
> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto*
>
> *The study of money, above all other fields in economics, is one in which complexity is used to disguise truth or to evade truth, not to reveal it.*
>
> John Kenneth Galbraith, *Money: Whence it came, where it went*

**Abstract** From a Marxist perspective, Cécile Barbier retraces the historical construction of the European Union as an economic and financial free-market space, focused on how the ideas of the German ordoliberal tradition have been influential in shaping fundamental central institutions such as the Central Bank and the Eurozone. Particularly attentive to how the ordoliberal authors were initially inspired by Marxist capitalist critique with their idea of "social market economy", as well as to how the recurring economic and political crisis of the European construction have led to the progressive radicalization of ordoliberal orthodoxy and of predatory finance, Barbier defends a critical return to Marxian perspectives and to the struggle for the commons.

**Keywords** Marxism · European Union · Finance · Eurozone · Ordoliberalism · Commons

In the Europe of the European Union (EU), the weakening of the critique of *capitalism* in the Marxist tradition, which studies the logic of capital as a mode of accumulation, has given way to an analysis of the *different forms of capitalism*, opening the way to a diversity of possibilities for its socio-economic

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transformations. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the publication of Michel Albert's book *Capitalism vs. Capitalism* marked not the end of history *à la* Fukuyama, but the end of the analysis of the opposition between capitalism and socialism, as well as its replacement by that of the only system considered viable: capitalism, based on two major models: the Anglo-Saxon and the Rhenish. The European Communities, forerunner of the European Union, provided the framework for the "new European capitalism", within which the two visions, one ultra-liberal, the other ordoliberal, were already clashing (Albert 1991, 138–142). According to a European Commissioner responsible for the internal market, the European Economic and Monetary Union is "one of the main political instruments for stabilizing Europe's enormous market economy. As such, it is a pure product of ordoliberal thinking" (Bolkestein 2000). In the globalized world of finance, could the European market economy have synthesized the contradictions already at work within it, when its architects were the most aggressive promoters of the liberalization of capital movements between its member states and between the latter and third countries?

The market economy has influenced the construction of Europe, an inspiration now enshrined in the primary law of the EU. The *highly competitive social* market economy is one of the EU's "objectives", which does not correspond to the "practice" of Rhenish capitalism to which Michel Albert had equated the social market economy.[1] In the German context, this variety of capitalism has been and remains the unifying element of the main components of the political class (Duillen and Guérot 2012).

This text explores Marx's shadow in the development of the German and European national narrative. The first part examines the notion of the social market economy. This remains an ambiguous notion, whose origins in the ordoliberal movement date back to the interwar period. The second looks back at the responses formulated in the twenty-first century, in the context of the eurozone's "sovereign debt crisis". In part, they draw their theoretical justification from ordoliberal foundations, while reinforcing their constitutional anchorage. To avoid the break-up of the eurozone, the role of the European Central Bank (ECB), the eurozone's only federal institution, was decisive in ensuring the irreversibility of the single currency "whatever the cost". This was achieved gradually through the so-called "non-conventional" actions of the ECB, which freed itself from the straitjacket of European primary law (the rules of the Treaties). The third part of this text shows how the shadow of ordoliberal orthodoxy still haunts eurozone economies, despite its foundations having been shaken.

[1] In 1999, Gerard Schröder's arrival at the Chancellery heralded a break with the past in terms of openness to financial markets, as analyzed by German historian Rudolf von Thadden in an article published by the French newspaper *Le Monde*: "Les Allemands sont plus ouverts à la globalisation que les Français" (December, 1999).

## 5.1 The World in Crisis, Europe's Crisis?

### *5.1.1 Crises and Their Interpretation: The Return of Karl Marx?*

Financial crises are part and parcel of the capitalist system, as historian Charles Kindleberger, author of a famous book on financial speculation, demonstrated in a study covering the period from the famous tulip bubble in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century to the stock market crisis of 1987, during which he counted 150 financial crises (Kindleberger 2005). There is no such thing as capitalism without a financial crisis: capital markets have always been subject to booms and busts, euphoria and panic.

The never-ending crisis shaking the financial world has brought Karl Marx's analyses back to the fore, not primarily by the exegetes of Marx and the thousand and one Marxisms, but by the mainstream economic and financial press such as *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Financial Times*, drawing on "capitalism's tendency to self-destruct", or more recently, the weekly that Marx himself read, The Economist (2018), calling on the world's leaders to read him. For them, it is not a question of drawing inspiration from his analyses of the financial and banking crises of the nineteenth century, but of taking note of the rise of the "precariat", the intensification of the "backlash against capitalism", most often in the form of "populist anger" rather than "proletarian solidarity". Back in 2008, commenting on the Treasury's decision to inject $250 million into the banks, Paul Krugman asserted that the time was not ripe for "socialism" or a return to Karl Marx, inviting us rather to rediscover the lessons of Roosevelt 75 years earlier in the New Deal (CNBC 2008; Leuchtenburg 1963).

75 years earlier on the European continent, Germany had entered uncharted territory by passing under the domination of National Socialism following the appointment of Adolf Hitler to the Chancellery on January 30, 1933 by Field Marshal Hindenburg, President of the Weimar Republic. To understand this crucial historical fact, we need to look back at the sequence of events that led to this outcome. Just as the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the "Marxist"-inspired group of German socialists, had not wanted to prevent the First World War by voting for war credits, it was not in favour of adopting monetary policies that would have solved the problem of mass unemployment in a Germany defeated in 1918 – it was hostile to the reparations of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and particularly hard hit by the consequences of the 1929 crash. The repression of the Spartakist revolution in 1919 had not prevented the rise of the German Communist Party (KPD), founded in response to the betrayal of the SPD, a social-democracy that was no longer revolutionary for the Spartakists led by Rosa Luxemburg. While the German free trade unions supported a program of massive public works financed by the direct creation of public money, SPD leaders such as Rudolf Hilferding opposed this solution, deeming it unrealistic and "un-Marxist" (Gates 1974). At the beginning of 1932, Chancellor Brüning had not followed the British government's advice to

devalue the German currency, as had been done in the UK on September 20, 1931, and had decided to continue the policy of deflation. It was against this backdrop that German ordoliberalism emerged, a trend of thought with many ramifications.

### 5.1.2 Using Marx to Build Ordoliberal Thinking

Karl Marx embodied the first radical critique of the "political economy" of the capitalist mode of production, whose devastating effects he observed during the Industrial Revolution in the UK in the nineteenth century. The notion of class struggle designates the antagonism between social representations whose interests are irreconcilable. According to Marx, class struggle is the driving force of history, itself the product of the evolution between relations of production and the forces of social reproduction that will lead to the transformation of capitalist societies into socialist ones. In Marx's time, "utopian socialists" such as Proudhon, Fourier, Owen and Saint-Simon attempted to answer the "social question" as it was posed in the nineteenth century, i.e. how to remedy the disastrous living conditions of the working class by proposing alternative development models for a society based on well-being, social solidarity, progress and so on. While he read them and ultimately rejected them (concerning Proudhon, see Marx 1847) or admired them (Saint-Simon),[2] Marx saw the capitalist mode of production as revolutionary in itself, capable of transforming society and constantly commodifying everything, with unexpected consequences that could be terrifying, as capital sought to "conquer the whole earth for its market" (Marx 1847, 464). Marx observed the debates on free trade against a backdrop of doubts about its continuation within the very guardians of the temple.[3] He himself had come out in favour of free trade, seeing it as the way to accelerate the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, ultimately leading to its demise.

Broadly speaking, the thinkers of ordoliberalism rejected the market economy of the nineteenth century, equating it with the laissez-faire liberalism of the Manchester School. Known for his critical analysis of the German historical school and its failure to explain the hyperinflation of 1923, the economist Walter Eucken was the main leader of the Freiburg School, the main current of German ordoliberalism, along with Franz Böhm, a jurist and economist. After the Second World War, Alfred

[2] In *Anti-Dühring*, Karl Marx's alter ego, Friedrich Engels, prophesied the demise of the state with Saint-Simon's words: "The government of men gives way to the administration of things". Engels acknowledged Marxism's debt to Saint-Simonism.

[3] "At the quarterly meeting of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce held this afternoon a lively discussion took place on the subject of free trade. A resolution was proposed which read: 'Having waited in vain for 40 years for other nations to follow England's example and adopt free trade, this Chamber feels that the time has come to revise this view'. The proposal was rejected by a majority of just one vote, with 21 in favor and 22 against. (Evening Standard, November 1, 1868)" (Marx 1973, 27).

Müller-Armack, Alexander Rüstow and Wilhelm Röpke were the main authors associated with the theme of the "social market economy". With the social market economy, these thinkers set out to answer the "social question" understood by Max Weber as the investigation of "the relationship between the modern wage-earning class and the existing social order" (Weber 1904).

The German ordoliberals forged an approach that outlined a new conceptual framework for rebuilding the market economy by defining new "rules of the game" and breathing new life into capitalism, even if they were reluctant to use the term. It is already a question of going beyond Marx, with whom they share certain analyses, in order to hijack his meaning. The ordoliberals drew their inspiration from observations of the glaring inequalities in the social condition of workers, not because of their exploitation and alienation, but because of their proletarianization. This must be combated in order to create a new work ethic and a new human ethic. To achieve this, it would be necessary to undertake "a deproletarization of society through the development of private savings and the widest possible distribution of national capital among all citizens", because "a wage-earner who is also a capitalist is no longer a proletarian" (François Bilger cited in Foucault 2004, 267). Article 20 of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz 1949) establishes the "postulate of the social state". The policies that can be implemented must conform to the market and competition. Hence the ordoliberal call for the creation of a private social insurance system. In the 1950s–1960s, however, the social market economy did not supplant traditional social policies (Abelshauer 1995).

Ordoliberalism served to support the grand narrative of the "miracle of the German economy" (Commun 2003). This is to forget the currency reform of 1948 under the Allied occupation forces, which created the Deutsch Mark and the establishment of the Bank deutscher Länder (BdL), as an independent Central Bank (of a then non-existent state, the Federal Republic of Germany and its government arrived in March 1949), a status that would be taken up after bitter discussion in 1957 in the law creating the Bundesbank (Bibow 2017). As head of the Bizone's economic administration, Ludwig Erhard's role in the price liberalization law is less contested, though questioned (Kindleberger and Taylor Ostrander 2013). Another nuance to this grand narrative of the "German economic miracle" is the leniency of the London Agreement of 1952/1953, which considerably lightened Germany's foreign debt burden, as economic historian Albrecht Ritschl recalled in 2011 in the midst of the Greek debt crisis (Ritschl 2011; see also 2012).

Thinkers of German ordo-liberalism had crossed paths with those of the Austrian School, a movement to which belonged the Austrian-born British economist Friedrich Hayek, president of the Mont Pèlerin Society founded in 1947. Two representatives of the German movement, Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rüstow, were also part of the School. After emigrating to the United States, Friedrich Hayek's Austrian movement joined the Chicago School, which rejected the laissez-faire critique of the ordo-liberals and opted for the legal disarmament of the State, including in the monetary sphere, in accordance with the precepts of Milton Friedman, the School's emblematic figure, a promoter of monetarism and an acerbic critic of State

interventionism and Keynesian economic policies. This cross-fertilization is reflected in the statutes of the ECB, whose mandate reflects the success of the monetarism espoused by the Bundesbank in the 1970s. Ordoliberals were also influenced by the Public Choice School of the Virginia School (Brennan and Buchanan 1985; Vanberg 1988) and the New Classical Macroeconomics of the Chicago School (Kydland and Prescott 1977), the two sides of "constitutional economics" as formulated by R. McKenzie and systematically developed by J.M. Buchanan (McKenzie 1984; Buchanan 1990). This led to a blending of ordoliberal and neo-classical interpretations by the German Constitutional Court in its 1993 ruling on the Maastricht Treaty, as well as in its numerous rulings on the ECB's monetary policy (Grégoire 2021).

## 5.2 The Question of Currency

### *5.2.1 When the Monetary Veil Is Ripped*

Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo and Jean-Baptiste Say are among the thinkers of political economy known as the "classical economists", a school of thought at the root of "economic science". Karl Marx is considered the main critic of the modernity of political economy, which led him to be categorized as the last of the "classical economists", and posthumously as one of the greatest economists, on par with Keynes. Keynes revolutionized economic thought by inventing macroeconomics, in which money and interest rates play an essential role, in contrast to classical and neo-classical theories, which postulate the neutrality of money and regard it as "a veil" having no impact on economic activity.[4]

For Eucken, monetary doctrine must be anchored in the "stability of money" and the division of orders, as well as in the economic constitution.[5] Monetary policy should be entrusted to a body isolated from politics and pressure groups, and managed by an autonomous Central Bank, a principle which the ordoliberals did not forge themselves (Werner 2006), but which the first-generation heirs of ordoliberalism would draw on to defend the Bundesbank's anti-inflation performance (Le Héron and Moutot 2008; Le Héron 2015). Bibow more than nuances this narrative by deconstructing the myths on which the Bundesbank elaborated its narrative of justifications for the dogma of its independence and the use of its success in fighting inflation to reinforce it (Bibow 2009, 2017).

[4] Jean Baptiste Say asserted in 1805 that: "The monetary veil merely masks the reality of exchanges. Products are exchanged for products, since they serve each other as outlets."

[5] Between 1945 and 1949, the struggle to enshrine ordoliberalism in the Basic Law was analyzed in terms of the "economic constitution" theory. According to this doctrine, "every constitution should respect the interdependencies between a system of free competition, public freedoms and the rule of law – more than that, it should be committed to protecting this precious balance against any 'political interference'" (Joerges 2006).

Economists adopt a discourse shrouded in mystery when it comes to discussing money creation. A recent publication by the Bank of England lifted the veil surrounding the mystery of money creation: money is created through debt (credit) (McLay et al. 2014). Put another way, it's credit (loans) that makes deposits, not the other way around. Banks do not lend pre-existing money from deposits entrusted to them, but create money in the form of deposits by issuing new loans. This scriptural money, created by means of writing – most often digital today – accounts for 97% of all money in circulation, with fiduciary money, i.e. coins and banknotes, accounting for just 3%. Banks lend according to the borrowing opportunities available to them. They do not, however, lend indefinitely. The assessment of the Bank of England's quantitative easing policy is also instructive, as it highlights the lack of transmission of monetary policy to the real economy. Since 2008, the actions of central banks have helped to boost stock market values and fuel new speculative bubbles. The ECB's various announcements of new, unconventional policies, for example, triggered euphoria in the financial markets, with European stock markets leaping to peaks comparable to those seen in 2007, before the bursting of the US real estate bubble.

Modern macroeconomics largely ignores the operations of the financial system and in particular the role of banks, which, according to Adair Turner, former Chairman of the UK's Financial Services Authority, is "at the very least curious" insofar as monetary policy operates through credit markets and the banking system (Turner 2017, 317). In a globalized, financialized world, the sheer number and complexity of financial products and the role of non-bank players in the shadow banking system are at the root of the global systemic crisis that began in 2007. The spectre of the shadow banking system continues to loom large over the real economy, as it could be the source of the next financial bubble bursting. In 2015, shadow banking accounted for $92,000 billion worldwide, or the equivalent of half the traditional banking system, while the amounts at stake for shadow banks involving systemic risk amounted to $34,000 billion, or almost half the world's GDP. These staggering figures bring us face to face with the "black hole of finance" (Barbier 2020). Some are proposing the regulation of a sector whose contours even the ECB admits it is unable to define (see also Lautenschläger 2018).

### *5.2.2 Sovereign Debt: A High-quality Financial Asset to Be Guaranteed by the European Central Banker*

To understand the financial system, Marx coined the notion of "fictitious capital", which makes it possible to seek accumulation within capital itself, i.e. in the future, by anticipating production that does not yet exist. Let us emphasize that fictitious capital is not credit. It is made up of securities, shares, bonds and debts, representing rights to potential profit, in the form of dividends or interest. The financial crisis of the twenty-first century began in 2007 in a globalized, highly financialized economy,

in which several decades of financial deregulation had led to a gigantic imbalance between the financial sphere and the real economy, as analysed in 2009 by French economist André Orléan (2009). In the United States, this is reflected in the toxic combination of over-indebtedness on the part of households with low creditworthiness and the securitization of subprime mortgages in the financial markets. As Saskia Sassen explains, securitization "makes it possible to use housing as an asset represented by a contract (the mortgage) and capable of being divided into slices, into smaller elements associated with other types of debt for sale in the circuit of high finance (. . .). It was necessary for the title secured by a property to be 'freed' from the burden of the property's real value, which was most often very modest" (Sassen 2016, 167–168).

Since the introduction of the single currency, the debts (so-called sovereign bonds, i.e. debt securities to which public and private investors can subscribe) of eurozone member states have been regarded as high-quality, risk-free assets. The rating agencies give them a rating (the famous triple A for countries with the highest-rated bonds). According to the concept of the Maastricht Treaty, unchanged in the Lisbon Treaty, the financial markets were to discipline States that deviated from the path laid out by the rules of budgetary discipline, by imposing high interest rates. What we are talking about here is the logic of a currency conceived without a sovereign based on the financing of States by financial markets. Public debt becomes a financial asset like any other. The plan is not to repay it, but to contain its progression. What counts is the deleveraging process that debt implies. As Maurizzio Lazzarato points out, "public debts have reached record levels in all countries practicing austerity, which means that creditors' rents have also reached record levels" (Lazzarato 2014, 7). Hence the need for the central banker to reassure creditors, seen as long-term investors in government bonds.

## 5.3 Beyond Marx and Ordoliberalism?

### *5.3.1 The Growing Role of the ECB: An Instrumentalization of the Ordoliberal Concept?*

The eruption of the global financial crisis confronted eurozone member states with the limits of the economic constitution, political prevarications in the dominant countries, and the ECB President's authoritative argument in May 2009 that the monetary institution does not envisage "qualitative easing" in the manner of the Anglo-Saxons (Trichet 2009). At the national level, the States parties to the budget treaty are obliged to incorporate a "debt brake" into their national constitutions or equivalent legislation, grafting into national legal orders a rule revived by the

German government in 2009.[6] This is the national anchoring of the principle of sound public finances, advocated by European bodies and treaties. By agreeing to tie their hands on budgetary matters, they are also committing future governments. From a constitutional point of view, the procedure is dubious. As a member of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, Oliver Wendell Holmes, put it in his famous Lochner Dissent: "A constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory… it is made for people with fundamentally different views".

Since the financial crisis, the ECB has increasingly distanced itself from its model, the Bundesbank, with ECB President Mario Draghi's assertion that the euro would be saved "whatever it takes" (a formula that precedes the Outright Monetary Transaction statement (OMT)) and the January 2015 launch of an "extended asset purchase program", presented as European-style "quantitative easing". Mario Draghi enunciated his famous "whatever it takes" on July 26, 2012, these eminently political words uttered in response to the exceptional nature of the euro crisis and to convince the financial markets of the euro's "irreversibility". Challenged before the German courts, the OMT, however virtual, contributes to the survival of the single currency.

At a press award ceremony, the ECB President, in a very habermassian way, calls for the creation of a "European public space", while warning that: "European citizens need a basic agreement that, in an economic and monetary union, certain economic models are not possible" (Draghi 2012). The ECB President's "seizure of authority" has left its mark on people's minds, and brought back into the academic debate the shadow of the German jurist, close to the neo-Nazis, Carl Schmitt (Wilkinson 2015; Streeck 2015). To counter these excesses, the reinforcement of the European Parliament's powers is repeated like an old antiphon (Habermas 2012). This overlooks the difficulty of imagining how the European Parliament could obtain more power and give European citizens the feeling of being truly represented at the European Union level, as well as the nature of the decisions that could be taken at this European level without colliding with the national level.

#### 5.3.1.1 Perspectives

The EU's primary legislation is the product of a long historical process, which demonstrates the importance of the role played by political and financial entrepreneurs. In this respect, monetary union is above all a class project as defined by Karl Marx. The ECB embodies the European institution, insulated from democratic control, ardent guardian of the teleological approach to the principles of the market

[6] Budgetary discipline was reinforced by the Six Pack and the Two Pack, but their principles could not be incorporated into the European treaties due to the refusal of the United Kingdom, followed by the Czech Republic. The result was an international treaty, the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG), or the Fiscal Treaty, considered by the ECB President as "a major political achievement, as it is the first step towards a fiscal union". In the same interview, Mario Draghi said that the European social model was dead (Thomson et al. 2012).

economy and their implementation in all components of the European economy. Marx could not have anticipated the role of this "independent" institution in the construction of a stateless Europe, even though he was more than sceptical of the role of the state, whose demise he prophesied.

The crisis of 2007–2008 is the product of globalisation and the hypertrophy of finance, the result of several decades of liberalization of capital movements. Following the outbreak of the banking crisis in the United States and its transformation into a global systemic crisis, the parenthesis of the need to regulate finance quickly closed. Little known to the general public until then, the role of central banks became the focus of attention beyond the financial markets. The apparent naivety of the question posed by the Queen of the United Kingdom during a visit to the London School of Economics in November 2008 about the financial crisis "Why didn't anyone see it coming?" is far from trivial. The simple answer is that, in neo-classical macroeconomic models, money is a "veil". The Great Financial Crisis has exhausted the theoretical basis for ignoring money in the financial system. It showed the depth of the interdependencies and connections, even incestuous links, between financial players, monetary authorities and the banking sector, and between the latter and shadow finance. It has also highlighted the fragility of the theoretical edifice underpinning the independence of central banks and their economic model (Giles 2017).

As the transition takes place between Mario Draghi and the new ECB President, Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from 2011 until October 31, 2019, and former Finance Minister under French President Sarkozy, the ECB has been in the business of negative interest rates since June 2014, and there is no indication that the situation will change in the short term. Before taking office, the former French Finance Minister expresses her approval of the continuation of the monetary policy pursued by the ECB under Mario Draghi. The ECB's final decisions under Mario Draghi's presidency, announced in September 2019, confirm the continuation of ultra-low and negative interest rates and asset purchases. This intervention provokes an unusual moment of rebellion from former European central bankers in a memo critical of ECB policies: "As former central bankers and European citizens, we are witnessing with growing concern the ECB's current crisis mode" (Arnold 2019). This is not the least of the paradoxes of a rebellion against the flouted principles of the Economic Constitution, which is supposed to isolate from democratic debate the actions of central bankers whose main interlocutors are the financial markets.

As in Karl Marx's time, money, credit and debt remain vital issues. Will the climate crisis change the course of history? Bank of England Governor Mark Carney warns the City's financial elite of the dangers of climate change for the stability of the financial system (Carney 2015). The aim of taking these risks into account at insurance company level was later taken up by the "Network for Greening the Financial System", set up in 2017 by eight central banks on the sidelines of the first One Planet Summit. On closer inspection, under the guise of promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the aim is to complete the conversion of the United Nations forum to the promotion of capitalist growth through the "greening of

finance" and thereby the deepening of the "Wall Street climate consensus", as Daniela Gabor puts it.

What would Karl Marx have learned from this, if not perhaps the imperative need for critical vigilance in order to alter the course of history and derail it from the socially harmful grip of finance? Beyond Marx, this would also require dethroning from its pedestal the Western "homo economicus", its cold rationality, falsely obsessed by the illusory mastery of finance that continues to inspire it. To achieve this, we need to start by dusting off the mainstream teaching of "economic science",[7] which is not a science at all, with a view to putting an end to its colonization of the field of other social sciences. Food for thought in the face of the "existential vertigo" provoked by the realization of the asymmetry of the recipients of monetary and financial measures by pondering the reflections underlying the Gilets jaunes mobilization in France and also beyond. The paradigm of the commons opens up alternative perspectives both on how to think differently about interactions between the various components of "what makes society" and to put an end to what comes under the heading of "everything to the market by the market". Did not Gandhi, that great and invaluable prophet of non-violence, assert from the depths of his wisdom that: "We must live simply so that others may simply live"?

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[7] For debates, see in France https://assoeconomiepolitique.org/manifeste-pour-une-economie-pluraliste/ and in Belgium http://rethinkingeconomics.be/index.php/ressources/.

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# Chapter 6
# Being a Marxist and a Muslim in Belgium: A Case Study

**Lionel Remy-Hendrick**

> *(. . .) A dramatic work shows the succession of the act's exteriors without any of the moments retaining any reality and, in the end, nothing happens.*
>
> Stéphane Mallarmé (1945, 296)

**Abstract** Lionel Remy-Hendrick interrogates the continuities and tensions between Islam and Marxism in Europe through an ethnographic study of Nasser and his double affiliation: member of a Belgian Marxist Party on the one hand, religious Muslim on the other. Considering Islam and Marxism as identity markers, as discursive traditions and as subjectivations of the subaltern status of the European Muslim, Remy-Hendrick proposes that a series of traditional oppositions – Materialism and Idealism, religious faith and political activism, Muslim and European – should be understood as spaces of negotiation allowing for new political actors to emerge.

**Keywords** Marxism · Islam · Faith · Activism · Europe · Ethnography · Subjectivation

This famous quotation from the poet Stéphane Mallarmé was borrowed by Roland Barthes (1966) in the no less famous eighth issue of the journal *Communications*, entitled "Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit". Far from being a sad admission of the emptiness of his object, this phrase is, on the contrary, testimony to an omnipresent meaning, since nothing "happens" in a narrative except: "(. . .) language alone, the adventure of language, whose coming never ceases to be celebrated" (Barthes 1966, 33). So, when it comes to "saying" the "Marx as he is practiced" in the narratives of militant commitment, language remains our sole and true object. Fortunately, and sometimes to the chagrin of linguists, the social sciences have not

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shied away from meticulously slicing narratives into many little vignettes, using tools of their own that we hope will correspond in some fashion with social reality. With the renewed popularity of "life stories", sociology and anthropology find themselves confronted with narratives of individuals about themselves, contents that are almost as rich in information as they are delicate to process. The rigorous protocol we need to impose on ourselves must therefore take into account the following questions: in what forms does meaning appear in an autobiographical narrative, and what methods can guarantee us the greatest possible extraction of it? If we hope to be up to the task, we do not need to answer these fundamental questions, which continue to make a career in our disciplines, but they do encourage us to present our object and the protocol of investigative techniques and analysis[1] that accompanies it correctly.

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The aim of this article is to present the case of Nasser, a Belgian Marxist activist, and through his story – as well as his graphic representation – to analyse a singular trajectory: that of a young man (aged 27) who is both active as a cadre in a Belgian Marxist party and a Muslim by faith. The combination of these two "identity markers" (Toboada-Leonetti 1990), far from being accidental, is the very object of the research and must therefore be explained. It became apparent that both within the ethnographic universe (a Belgian Marxist-Leninist party and its various offshoots) and outside it (e.g., my colleagues at university), this configuration is conceived at first sight either as an "unthinkable" ("impossible marriage", "clientelist will", "exit from Islam", "profound contradiction", "opium of the people", "dunya",[2] etc.) or as an "unthought" or "insufficiently thought". Here, a detour through the history of communist parties in the Middle East; there, a reading of the memoirs of a Lebanese Marxist intellectual and activist (Mahdi Amel); or the theoretical positioning of

[1] This research focuses on the main people involved, following a strict protocol. Firstly, long-term ethnography enables us to meet these activists and observe the diversity of profiles brought together under the two markers of "Islam" and "Marxism". Secondly, life stories are collected in the manner of Bertaux (2016), with an initial question, deliberately broad, constituting the framework of the entire narrative and engaging the individual surveyed in a narrative perspective: "Tell me how you became a Marxist activist?". Based on the transcribed document, we then code it in a spreadsheet according to a triple division: sequences (Sn), actors (An) and argument classes (Pn), in the manner of Demazières and Dubar (1997). The episodes, classified chronologically (Sn, sequences), and the characters (An, actors) identified in the narrative will constitute the material from which cognitive maps will be elaborated. Once the maps have been created, a second interview with the subject of these maps enables the graphic representation of the discursive representations thus constructed to be corrected, completed or refined. Finally, the part of the document coded under the heading "argument classes" or "propositions" (Pn), which includes beliefs, value judgments, representations of the world held to be true, etc., will constitute the main material for structural content analysis (Hiernaux 1977). In this article, however, we will stop short of the last stage, to focus on the description and analysis of the cognitive maps co-created by Nasser and myself.

[2] In Islamic sources, *dunya* refers to the world of earthly existence. In interpersonal terms, "too great" an interest in *dunya* can be reproached, because it is interpreted as a turning away from Allah.

certain Marxist intellectuals and figures (Engels, Lenin, Samir Amin, for example) vis-à-vis Protestantism; or the awareness of "common struggles" on various contemporary political issues; and, of course, the concrete reality of the presence of Muslims within the party. To put it more simply, a range of justifications and analyses as to reasonable union or necessary disunion, compatibility or incompatibility, emerge when these two markers come into co-presence: Islam and Marxism.

## 6.1 Nasser's Story: Describing His Path to Involvement

The cognitive map (or concept map) is a way of graphically representing the researcher's mental representations of the respondent's discursive representations (Cossette 2003). Less than a method for bringing out the meaning hidden by the scientist's inward focus, it intervenes here rather as a "(. . .) mediator through which actors allow themselves to express themselves on their own ways of constructing, thinking and justifying their identities in relation to others, questioning themselves on the consequences of their choices and actions" (Chaxel et al. 2014). The graph called "sequence map (Nasser)" (Fig. 6.1) is the result of coding sequences from S1 to S366, based on an interview conducted on April 14, 2019 (03h02m52s). The confirmatory interview was conducted on September 23, 2021, and modifications/

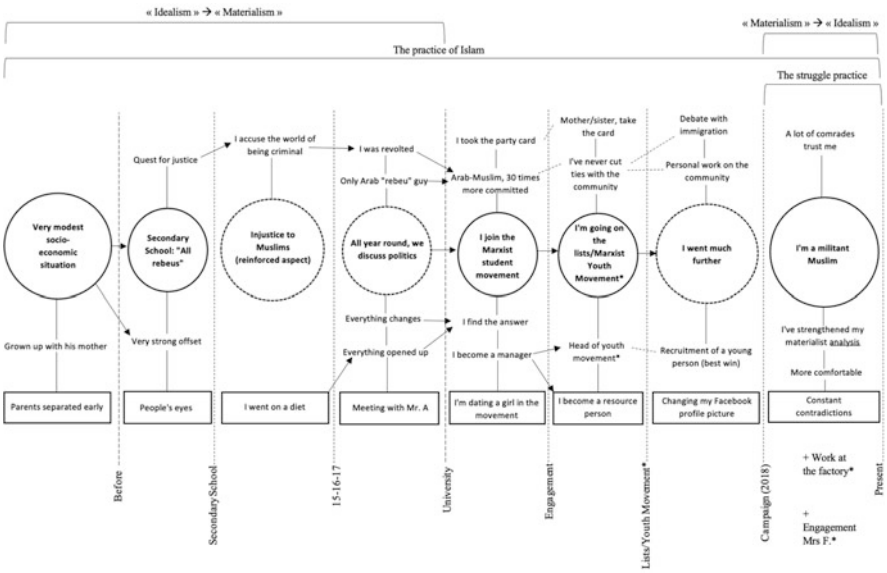


**Fig. 6.1** Sequence map (Sn)

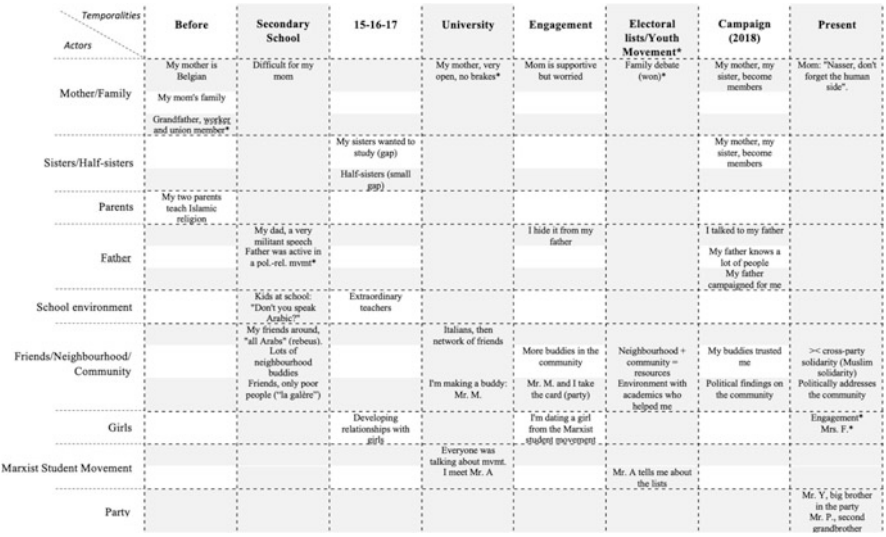


**Fig. 6.2** Actors map (An)

additions/cuts are noted with an asterisk (*) in the graph.[3] The "actant map (Nasser)" graph (Fig. 6.2) is the result of coding actors in the range A1 to A369 from the same interview; the notation of modifications is identical.

### *6.1.1 Phase 1: A "Belgian Muslim" (Segments 1–3)*

Nasser grew up in a working-class district of a large Walloon city, his family's "very modest" socio-economic situation reinforced by the early divorce of his parents. Around the age of 10–12, he experienced his own otherness through various confrontations with racist behaviour:

> In fact, if you like, the change, the passage, took place when on the bus, I saw that the old ladies looked at me differently when I grew up. When I was 5-6-7-8 years old, I was a super nice kid, cute etcetera, and I was a kid from Belgium I mean pretty much. Well. . . But in fact, people's opinions have changed.

[3] To keep the text as short as possible, we have included the graph legend here; arrows mean "which implies/which leads to", dashed lines mean "links up with" (without this implying that), solid circles indicate decisive situations for Nasser, that can be situated in time and space, dashed circles refer to situations that are just as decisive but more difficult to mark out insofar as they deal with feelings, perceptions, vignettes constitute events (punctual or not) leading to bifurcations in the narrative and accompanying the leap to another segment. The graph is divided into eight segments, running from "before" to "now", and shares this segmented structure with the actant map (see Fig. 6.2).

The traumatic experience of this distancing, of this change in outlook, led to what he describes as a form of "gap" (a term that would recur on numerous occasions, and which was also insurmountable for his sisters, who decided to stop their studies), fed by the homogeneity of the group of classmates at the start of secondary school (a school of positive discrimination, "all Arabs"). At the same time, coming from a "mixed couple" (Belgian mother, Islamic religion teacher; father of Algerian origin, Islamic religion teacher), he sees himself as "Schizophrenic. . . Dual identity, mixed race, I'm a schizophrenic of humanity".[4] In addition to this, on a linguistic level, it's true that the diglossia of Arabic among the younger generations (alternating dialectal languages and classical Arabic) remains a challenge (Maréchal and Remy 2017), this being all the more true for Nasser, speaking none of these languages, and forced to consider himself a "new concept", a "Belgian Muslim":

> (. . .) but it was very difficult because you're in a situation where the other kids in the school are going to tell you: yeah, but you don't actually speak Arabic, how come? Well yeah, well no, I wasn't educated in Arabic. Not at all. So there you go. I didn't need to speak Arabic and all that. But for them, it was what determined them, it was easier to be directly affiliated with that. For me, it was between the two and so on, even if a lot of kids are also in this schizophrenia because they're both Moroccan, Muslim, whatever, and born in Belgium and so on, completely in tune with the world around them, but they're still in a position that's not easy to manage.

Islam gradually becomes a central dimension of his identity. This has to do with the "profession" of his parents (reference is made above all to his mother's religious upbringing, which he describes as "values" oriented), but is also an element to which he can "affiliate" without feeling this "duality" (the fact of being a "youngster from miserable neighbourhoods", will constitute a second element). However, his adolescence is marked, on the one hand, by low self-confidence, due to overweight (further increasing the violence of "people's gaze") and, on the other, by the growth of a feeling of "revolt", the need "to be radical", a "quest for justice". The support of some "extraordinary teachers" encouraged him to delve deeper into these feelings and needs. Very quickly, his analysis focused on the injustices suffered by Muslims specifically: "(. . .) I was revolted by what was happening, I accused the world of being criminal". In his late teens, Nasser decided to go on a diet which proved successful. This had two important consequences: the development of his "relationships with girls" and an increase in his self-confidence just before entering university. Note that the diet represents a bifurcation from phase 1 (segments 1–3) to phase 2 (segments 4–6).

[4] A quote from the song "Alger pleure" by French rapper Médine (Don't Panik, 2012).

### 6.1.2 Phase 2: Political Discussion and Commitment (Segments 4–6)

Nasser takes his sense of rebellion to the university, to the faculty of social sciences. While his "quest for justice" does not change, his environment does: he is now the "only Arab dude", he rubs shoulders with people other than those "from misery", he makes friends with a whole "group of Italians" and meets Mr. M. (who today is also a young leader in the party). A movement of Marxist students was the talk of the lecture halls, and Mr. A., one of the young leaders at the time, approached Nasser and "discussed politics" with him for a whole year: "For the whole year, Mr. A. and I discussed politics and so on. And I had this attitude where, more and more, I rejected the economic model in which we lived, and I also rejected the Western model in which we lived, it was the two, together." Following a school trip, Nasser criticizes North American imperialism, publicly expressing his "revolt". Mr. A. witnessed Nasser's "very radical" (*sic*) character, with no consequences other than the beginning of a new friendship. This event took place in April, and in September of the same year (during J-1), Nasser and Mr. M. acquired their party cards together (linked to the aforementioned movement). This was a very positive period for Nasser: "everything changed", "everything opened up", "I found the answer", and so on. And while he embarked on his first love affair, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the Marxist student movement:

> You see me say, me, an Arab-Muslim etcetera, just because I'm rebellious and because I come from a class, I completely belong. At that point, in fact, everything falls into place, everything falls into a spiral where everything is logical, and so I'm going to get involved, but. . . 50 times more than other people!

Nasser brings a lot of his thoughts and readings home, and discusses them with his mom, who takes an interest, encourages him and worries. He soon joined the "bureau" (a group of students who organize and run the cell group) and became "respo" (*sic*, responsible, in charge). His father, whom Nasser describes as deploying a "very militant discourse", is active in both a religious and socio-political movement within Islam, and was not told from the outset of his son's involvement in the Marxist student movement: "I hid it from my father. At first, yeah, not because I was trying to hide it specifically, but because I thought yeah, but Dad, I know Dad, his vision etcetera. He was starting to get on my nerves with his reflections". Nasser keeps his "neighbourhood buddies" as well as his "buddies in the community" and realizes that they are all "resource people" through the prism of this new university sociability "that helped him". However, apart from the occasional discussion, the two circles remain hermetically sealed from each other.

Nasser's commitment was confirmed by a mission to manage the Marxist youth movement (itself also linked to the Marxist student movement and the party) as early as the following year. In the same year, a significant event took place: a family debate (on his mother's side) in which he managed to convince:

> We had a big discussion at the dinner table, in fact we had several discussions at the dinner table. And there was one where I won the whole debate, but really, I was really, I'd trained so hard, I was really. . . I hadn't trained for that one, but I was leading debates all over the place, all over the party, I was saying go guys, you've got to get involved na na na.

Mr. A. proposed to Nasser that he take part in the Belgian regional elections in 2014 by registering him on the lists, and he accepted. At the same time, Nasser realizes that he, in turn, has become one of the "resource persons" on whom the party relies.

### *6.1.3 Phase 3: From the 2018 Campaign to Today (Segment 7)*

Between 2014 and 2018 (Belgian communal and provincial elections), Nasser identifies nothing that completes his trajectory of commitment. Even his trip to Palestine (organized by the Marxist student movement) in 2015, which caused a stir and much debate, but also won him sympathy in the community – "(. . .) I got even more support when I went to Palestine than during the 2014 elections, you see?" – is, in his view, nothing more than the continuation of a commitment that was evolving "normally". On the other hand, he claims to have "gone a lot further" afterwards: the locks allowing the different social worlds he traversed to remain hermetically sealed from each other were opening, and this voluntarily, through social networks. Indeed, he decided to publish his campaign photo as a profile picture on his Facebook account. If the "reflection on the community", in this large Walloon city, its visibility and its commitment was not absent before, from now on he takes the decision to "address it politically". He led various debates in many places (including some mosques, which he had previously frequented only for Friday prayers) and convinced as much as he recruited. His father – informed about his engagement at last and convinced –, campaigns for him in his networks and "knows a lot of people". His success in the elections, less than his commitment, motivated his mother and one of his sisters to join the party, which Nasser describes as "the greatest gift". Nasser is now a militant (the highest level of commitment within the party) as well as an elected member of the party. However, throughout his story and again at its conclusion, he testifies to "constant contradictions" with an Islam he hopes to retain, and which constitutes an "idealistic point of view that will remain":

> Really, in a sense, I've increasingly, over the years and through my involvement with the party, refined and strengthened my materialist analysis. Now I think it goes further and further, on many aspects. And there comes a point when it comes down to a reality that is an idealistic view of my. . . From an idealistic point of view that will remain. . . What I tell people all the time is that I think I'll remain a Muslim for the rest of my life, I think that. . . I even hope so. I hope that. . . Ah but, I honestly think that, in the proselytizing that I could have etcetera, it could never be with comrades, never. I never talk about. . . well it happens that I talk about Islam, of course I do, because the analysis is very interesting for everyone, but I never proselytize.

This aspect, which he presents as a collection of "contradictions", appears in different, falsely identical ways: "I think it depends on the level of commitment", "there are still questions of values that will come up, at one time or another", "the fact of being a Muslim and to be engaged", "capitalism has greatly influenced Islam in a vision that was individual and not collective", and so on. We'll come back to this in Sect. 6.2.

### *6.1.4 Cross-cutting Analytical Commentary*

In sociology, as Lahire (2013) reminds us, the notion of socialization refers to a "shaping", partial or global, punctual or systematic, diffuse or explicit, consciously organized, of an individual destined to become "a social being adapted to a determined socio-historical universe" (Lahire 2013, 115). However, only a precise study can give substance to this "amorphous" concept (ibid.). The case study and description of Nasser's trajectory of engagement is remarkable in this respect. The actors map (cf. Fig. 6.2) reveals two strong horizontal elements: the figure of the mother in the family structure, and networks of friends in different parts of the social world (neighbourhood, community, university, politics). Nasser's relationship to Islam as practice and corpus is intensely linked to his maternal upbringing, to the transmission of "values" and "behaviours". On the other hand, without these two universes being opposed or even truly separate, the network of friends is one of evolving commitment, criticism, "the practice of struggle" and "materialist analysis". It would be absurd, however, to homogenize these two universes; that of primary socialization, i.e. family socialization, sees the emergence of the figure of the committed father, for example, and continues to act via the prism of advice (or guidance) throughout the trajectory, while secondary, multiple socialization is the site of a social identity in negotiation, sometimes in tension (Muslim, neighbourhood youth, "lone Arab", "communist", etc.).

On numerous occasions, Nasser refers to a "gap" for himself or for those close to him. Behind this term – the interpretation of which must absolutely be related to its contexts of enunciation – lie very diverse realities. To start with, it highlights a number of obvious social inequalities (Lahire 2019), such as the conflict between, on the one hand, the high degree of desirability and the high value placed on higher education and, on the other, the barriers to entering it (e.g. his sisters' hijab). This conflict is made all the more violent by the fact that Nasser describes the "positive discrimination" school environment as highly homogeneous ("all Arabs"), and the catalogue of schools accessible to him is restricted.[5] Furthermore, there is the gap that expresses an exceptionality within the social group, and that requires him to justify himself to those who refer to him as having an uncertain identity: on the one

[5] Nasser refers to his choice of school as his mother's decision not to "favour" him over his sisters, whose wearing of the hijab had greatly limited their enrollment opportunities.

hand, the fact that he "doesn't speak Arabic" (among young people in the school environment), and that his mixed race makes him a "new concept", a "Belgian Muslim", and on the other, the "people looking" and the various racist behaviours he has experienced, both systemically and occasionally, makes him "an Arab". Here, this gap becomes synonymous with "duality", or even "schizophrenia" (*sic*), and managing it requires the mobilization of many individual resources and the implementation of several strategies (humour and repartee, self-confidence, turning stigma around, etc.). At the same time, there's the gap that refers to the sudden nature of a new social position (often requiring an adjustment of manners, language skills, etc.): Nasser moves from a neighbourhood and a high school with a very homogenous socio-economic population (working class, small middle class) to the university, where he of course finds certain similar profiles (such as Mr. M.), but also young adults from the upper classes.[6] Finally, there's the gap in his relationship with the two "identity markers" (Toboada-Leonetti 1990) of "Islam" and "Marxism", which he presents as "idealism" for the former and "materialism" for the latter (cf. point 2).

Nasser's story sketches out a specific trajectory leading up to the commitment of a Marxist militant, and raises questions about the "career" within the group, which is a relatively old question in the field of sociology. Indeed, while the term "militant" has its origins in the religious world (e.g. the militia of Jesus Christ), as Fillieule and Pudal (2010) remind us, it was later secularized to designate very uniquely a form of militancy "inhabited by the imaginary of the militant worker, and even more so of the militant communist" (ibid., 163). This individual was undoubtedly one of the major interests of twentieth-century French intellectuals, and biographies of militants abound, while certain intellectuals – significant ones – sometimes committed themselves alongside them. While activism, as a field of research, has several decades of scholarly work to its credit, it has many blind spots; among them, so-called "left-wing" groups seem to have been investigated more than so-called "right-wing" groups (Sawicki and Siméant 2009), global causes have been favoured over local ones (ibid.) and partisan, trade union and professional organization activism has given way in large part to "moral activism", i.e. alterglobalism, humanitarianism, etc. (ibid.). So much so that: "The selective nature of the choice of research fields has thus contributed in its own way to fuelling the belief in the decline of certain forms of activism reputed to be 'traditional'" (ibid., 98). However, the electoral success of the latter, and especially that of the so-called "traditional" Marxist parties in Belgium, calls for their reconsideration by social scientists.

Since the 1980s, the sociology of militant commitment has undergone significant renewal, with militant sociabilities described as resulting from primary socialization and ideological control gradually being abandoned (ibid.), and the "rewards of militancy" (Gaxie 1977) and militant "careers" (Fillieule 2001) ushering in the era of the interactionist paradigm. Whether we are talking about the influence of social networks (in this case, Facebook), the absence of a form of determinism through

[6] "Only people 'of misery', I had no pals from the upper classes, my most well-off pal had a house in the Fifth and that was it".

socialization, or decisive bifurcations in the trajectory that seem to lie outside the spectrum of militant commitment (in this case, the diet), these maps confirm, if not reinforce, the appropriateness of such a renewal. However, the risks evoked by Sawicki and Siméant (2009) concerning biographical efforts, while very real, should not, in our view, distance us from such a tool. The biographical enterprise is only partly our own, and does not exempt us from noting the risks associated with anecdote, lack of contextualization, exceptionalism or the psychologism of some of our predecessors' investigations. Graphic representation and co-creation are our first safeguard, structural analysis our second. However, this risk-taking seems necessary here, for while the long-term nature of collective mobilizations requires "the existence of social experiences shared by groups of individuals with analogous, if not similar, properties" (Sawicki and Siméant 2009, 108), neither interactions nor the action-institution dialectic alone can answer the question of the negotiations or contradictions *destined to last* in an activist that remains active. For example, we might have expected, a priori, that an activist experiencing constant "contradictions" (cf. Fig. 6.1) – or identity tensions, to paraphrase the literature – would see his or her intensity of commitment drop in relation to an activist experiencing none, yet this is not the case here. That said, it is not impossible that this negotiation of the two markers ("Marxism" and "Islam") teaches us less about militancy than about Islam as a "discursive tradition" (Asad 1986) that makes it possible to bring "coherence" to certain social behaviours organized by the actors themselves (Fadil 2017).

## 6.2 "Idealism" and "Materialism": Back and Forth

In Marxist literature in particular, and in philosophy more generally, these two categories have a long history. On the one hand, idealism refers to "the anteriority of thought or of a spiritual principle over matter and being" (Labica and Bensussan 1985, 557); on the other, the materialist dialectic of history was formulated in a struggle against Hegel's objective idealism (and by building on the work of Feuerbach, only to later detach itself from it). However, the philosophical history of these notions, and even their strict definitions, need not worry us in the present case. Nasser, proposing a rereading of his trajectory a posteriori and constituting his identity in the process through his own narrative (Ricœur 1988), evokes "idealism" and "materialism" as two realities in a relation of mutual interrogation. Let us recall that idealism for him includes the idea of maternal inheritance, precocious socialization, "values" and behaviours, and ultimately, an "analysis". Materialism, on the other hand, is presented above all as an "analysis" that enables us to understand the social foundations of exploitation, and to pinpoint the location of contemporary power relations in order to act to overturn them. It is important to be careful not to summarize the way in which the concepts are articulated here, at the risk of falling

into a form of theoretical "catechism",[7] from one side or the other, and that does not exist in the testimony. We have to stay as close to the story as possible.

First of all, idealism poses questions to materialism (segments 1–4), strictly in the fourth segment and hypothetically in the first three segments. This is relatively clear in the interview, though implicit: Nasser, since his primary socialization, his nurturing of faith and his practice of Islam, considers that at the time and for him, it would not have been conceivable to construct or give credence to a critique of Islam (or of what he later calls idealism), outside of said Islam. However, it appears that this opposition is only ultimately that of a revealed truth versus a philosophical analysis of the historical process, or of the primacy of the social being over its conscience (Labica and Bensussan 1985). Indeed, the "quest for justice" and the need "to be radical" was expressed in his commitment to understand and denounce the "injustices suffered by Muslims" as early as secondary school. Analysis of contemporary geopolitical contexts and the history of colonization (among other things) were the driving forces behind his entry into the faculty of social sciences, and also what later led him to say that it was, among other things, his "religious sensitivity" that led to his commitment.

If the practice of Islam remains unconditional – "but me, I was pulling out the rug, even when we were on a school trip" – Nasser draws a connection between his "withdrawal" into himself and a period of intense faith, with the university constituting a tipping point where "everything changed", "everything opened up". Not that his faith or practice diminished, but his interest in geopolitical and historical issues – as well as minute-to-minute news – involving Muslims found new support in Marxist literature: "At that time, in Syria everything was also accelerating and I remember that these questions were always there, I wondered why, how, Palestine, Palestine was something that made me freak out. So there I was reading for example Marx and Lenin. . ." During this period and right up to the present day, idealism questions materialism in relation to idealistic aspects: for example, in the relationship with children and their education, the transmission of "left-wing values, solidarity" is not enough, and the transmission of "(. . .) good values like my mother did" remains important and constitutes a "contradiction" according to Nasser (in the field of political Marxism). This does not mean – Nasser denies – that "the human" (in his mother's words), in its verticality, should be considered first and foremost. Indeed, materialism questions idealism in return, in a double movement. First, Islam is seen as a content that can be oriented:

> Now, it's how you adapt Islam and how you analyse it, in fact capitalism has done a lot of harm, because capitalism has greatly influenced Islam in a vision that was individual and not collective. It's like the Catholic religion, you can attack it on certain points, but there are Catholic priests who, at the base, who came from the base and everything, there's the theory, what's it called? The theory in Latin America that links Marxism and Catholicism.

[7] As an anecdote, Gilbert Achcar (2018) reminds us that while they rigorously opposed reactionary uses of religion, Marx and Engels mocked Blanqui, Bakunin and their followers for an atheism erected as an "obligatory article of faith".

The strong "collective imprint" he sees in the sources, the critique of inequality and the question of wealth distribution, is contradicted by the concrete reality of his contemporaries' lives. His analysis of the influence of capitalism on Islam[8] leads him to see the negotiation between Marxism and Islam as being of the same order as that between Catholicism and Marxism in liberation theology. In a second movement, which is an immediate extension of the first, this makes him think of Islam in public debate as the miserable mask of political disengagement. Such a critical dimension seeks the emancipation of a community whose expression in political and media debate has been limited to nothing but its confession:

> But in the rest of the working class what's crazy is that when there are political subjects that emerge, they're social subjects, they're subjects of struggle etcetera, what comes out as a political subject when you're a working-class Muslim, it's first of all Islam, it's first of all culture etcetera, because you're enclosed in that and you're obliged to position yourself in relation to that.

It is evident then that Islam is not just about a private faith in tension, related to the transmission (or not) of inherited values, or a practice, it is also about the political existence of a community and its expression (or not) in the public arena; just like Marxism, which is not just an all-encompassing analytical effort and a philosophical position ("materialism"), but a critique, and also a practice – the "practice of struggle" – which commits its militants to sacrificing a considerable amount of time to it.[9] Nasser made the "practice of struggle" and the "practice of Islam" coexist, their reunion ultimately being no more than a "question of agenda".

## 6.3 Islam and Marxism, or European Discursive Traditions

In order to understand the binding together of Islam, Europe and Marxism, we must first establish three important elements: the first is historical, and concerns the territorialization of Christianity in Europe (constructed in parallel with the territorialization of Islam in the East); the second is methodological, and refers to the joint consideration of Islam and Marxism as (discursive) traditions; and the third element is empirical, as an invitation to conceive of the European Muslim from the point of view of his subaltern condition.

[8] When I first contacted him for an interview, he emailed me the preface written by Alain Gresh for the reissue of Maxime Rodinson's *Islam et Capitalisme* (2014).

[9] The higher the sacrifices made, the higher the cost of leaving the group. To see this, we need only consider the potential "rewards" of commitment, which are small or non-existent outside the group. To put it more simply, the fruits of one's Marxist militant investment – with the exception of the occasional magazine hiring a freelancer here and there – from internal recognition and valorization to being engaged as a parliamentary assistant after graduation, require that "room be made" to continue to enjoy them.

***Europe as Christian Territory*** Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a revelation of how Islam is exogenized through orientalist comparatism. Indeed, the space of Islam is referred to the East, and Christianity is territorialized in Europe, de facto denying both Eastern Christianity and Sephardic Judaism, as Asad (1986) rightly reminds us. If the construction of this reciprocal heterogeneity is extremely fruitful in understanding the success and posterity of such questionable works as Samuel P. Huntington's famous *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), Said has nonetheless received critical scrutiny. Indeed, as soon as his book came out – considered by many to be the founding work of postcolonial studies –, numerous debates erupted. Among them, that of Mahdi 'Amil, a Lebanese Marxist activist and intellectual, was undoubtedly among the most notable.[10] His reproach concerned that Marx was classified in the Orientalist camp due to his geographical position. The man in sandals of fire thus accuses Said of falling into the trap he claimed to denounce, and of remaining locked in a philosophical idealism[11] he does not seem to recognize. However, for Mahdi 'Amil and in Marxist literature more generally: "methodological idealism [is] – by definition – the matrix of essentialism in all its manifestations" (quoted in Achcar 2013, 74). Moreover, the ideal construction of a Christian Europe and the exogenization of Islam remain relevant and, above all, functional. The various works of Nadia Fadil (2017, 2019), following Talal Asad (1986), recall and demonstrate the durability and centrality of this construction in the governance systems of Western societies.

***Islam and Marxism as (Discursive) Traditions*** Talal Asad was the cause of a double earthquake in the world of anthropology: the first concerned anthropology and the colonial question (Asad 1973) which, in addition to criticism, invited reflection on the "conceptual conditions of anthropological discourse" in its dialectical relationship to the world (Landry 2016); the second was a specific deconstruction of definitions of Islam as an object of anthropological investigation and an invitation to consider Islam scientifically as a "discursive tradition" (Asad 2017). The latter concept seems original insofar as Asad is too often "lost in translation" (into French), even though it has long been part of the social science toolbox. It can be understood as: "discourse aimed at training practitioners as to the appropriate form and purpose of a given practice which, being instituted, has a history" (Asad 2017, 132). It refers to a past (moment of the practice's institution, aim and transmission) and a future (preservation, modification or abandonment of the practice) via a present (context of other practices, institutions, social conditions). Marxism is a sociological, philosophical, political, economic and scientific tradition. Indeed, since his reading of Imre Lakatos's epistemology (1994), British sociologist Michael Burawoy has made Marxism a "research program" whose progressive

[10] This is only half true when we consider the list of Marxist thinkers engaged in this debate, which includes Ajjaz Ahmad, Maxime Rodinson, Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, Samir Amin and others. According to Achcar (2013), Said found it more comfortable to debate with "bellicose pro-imperialists" like Bernard Lewis or Kanan Makiya.

[11] To find out more, from Maghreb Islam, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978) by Bryan Turner.

character he defends (1990). If this is accepted, the epistemological foundations of "Marxism as a science" also allow Marxism to be seen as an evolving tradition, degenerating in one branch and progressing in another. From a sociological point of view, and with the specific support of Nasser's narrative, we can also[12] raise the question of political Marxism as a "discursive tradition", without reducing it to an inventory and analysis of its uses, or taking up *ad litteram* the terms of the Asadian definition. Empirically, Marxist militancy in its partisan form is a place where struggle is a practice[13] (cf. Fig. 6.1), sustained by evolving cycles of training where a body of discourse inscribed in the tradition – at a time "t" – is subjected to evaluation, debate (think of the gradual penetration of Gramsci's work into Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy) and then sometimes to study and finally integration. Nasser's case is interesting insofar as "the practice of Islam" and "the practice of struggle" dialogue on the same plane, while the density of oppositional vocabulary (shift, opposition, duality, schizophrenia, etc.) meets the many symmetries of interest throughout his story, carving out a "political consciousness" that sometimes borrows from the Marxist (discursive) tradition, sometimes from the Muslim (discursive) tradition: quest for justice, radicalism, quest for meaning, need to understand, etc.

***The Subaltern Experience of the European Muslim*** The topicality of Antonio Gramsci's work in English is surely as strong as the author's visibility in French is weak – although this is gradually improving. The famous author of the *Prison Notebooks* developed several concepts that still have a career in the Marxist tradition and in militant circles. Among these, the concept of subalternity holds pride of place. While the idea of subaltern class immediately makes sense (in opposition to dominant, hegemonic class), Gramsci (1986) also theorized subalternity on the scale of the singular individual (due to social position or "cultural limits"), which leads Liguori (2016) to say that he potentially inspired Subaltern Studies, although they steered the concept in an entirely different direction. Cultural subalternity is, however, a complex construct, requiring a diachronic perspective, if only to integrate the colonial question. For lack of space, I shall concentrate on two processes. On the one hand, the exogenization of Islam, already mentioned, creates the illusion of radical otherness and feeds fears of a second fall of Rome.[14] On the other hand, the space thus freed up generated, as early as the labour agreements (1960s) in the case of Belgium and over the rest of the century, a succession of fairly explicit and symptomatic caricatural figures: after the "South European immigrant worker"

[12] In particular, we must stress the absurdity of considering Marxism solely as a "discursive tradition".

[13] To offer another example, let's take the practice of "democratic centralism": this is a practice with a long history, preserved by Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and abandoned by the Trotskyist faction, in a chronology that it is possible to date and that still structures today the relations between these groups, but also the relations of these same groups to the Marxist tradition in general and to political struggle in particular.

[14] Whose effectiveness in political communication was demonstrated during the last French presidential elections.

came the "Turkish unemployed", the "young Moroccan delinquent" and the "Muslim fundamentalist" (Manço and Kanmaz 2002, 62). More recently, with the multiplication and interchangeability of post-attack "-ism"[15] words (radicalism, fundamentalism, jihadism, etc.), we see the reinforcement of Islam seen as a religion generating political violence (Asad 2018), in contrast to a Europe portrayed as an innocent, besieged citadel.[16] At the same time, the Muslim individual is now a "suspect figure", where even strict observance of moral prescriptions becomes a sign of radicalization (with authorities inviting denunciations via call centres). In conclusion, when Pnina Werbner (2007) demonstrates that cosmopolitanism is an opportunity for Pakistani migrants to belong to something "more" than ethnic and religious localism, and that it does not mean the absence of belonging, it seems that through Nasser's story, Marxism does not mean the end of belonging to Islam either, but rather an opportunity to contribute to giving such a belonging a new political value.

* * * * *

In 1848, Marx and Engels famously wrote at the start of *The Communist Manifesto*: "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of communism" (Marx and Engels 1897, 292). While it's true that even 17 decades can't get the better of a spectre, here we see that what should be ethereal is devilishly tangible. Admittedly, these lines are not written from the communist society Marx describes, but men and women are still working on it. Through this "traditional militancy", we have seen that sociology and anthropology face many challenges in different fields. The intertwining of primary and secondary socialization, and their respective non-homogeneities, already noted in the literature, are confirmed. The search for bifurcations in trajectories of engagement clearly cannot be limited to socializations in militant spheres; indeed, we often note the crucial character of the mediation of "tutelary figures" (Sawicki and Siméant 2009, 104) or the decisive character of a punctual, external event, such as a diet. "Materialism" and "idealism" are not so much enemy brothers as identity markers requiring multifaceted "negotiation" and forging new, complex actor profiles. Finally, the exogenization of Islam, the territorialization of Christianity in Europe, systemic racism, the construction of the Muslim as a "suspect figure", etc., are all processes through which the subalternity of the European Muslim experience must be understood. What less can we ask for, if not "a homeland for he who has been humiliated" (Neruda 2010).

[15] For more information on this subject, cf. Haoues Seniguer (2016).

[16] Talal Asad (2018) argues that the "political metaphysics of secular states" is constituted by a political violence at the very heart of liberal doctrine.

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# Part II
# Marx: *Too* European? Postcolonial Perspectives on Marxian Thought

# Chapter 7
# Beyond Marx, Beyond Europe


**Raúl Fornet-Betancourt**

**Abstract** Raul Fornet-Betancourt questions a series of borders related to the idea of going beyond *both* Marx and Europe: beyond European capitalism and its ideology of historical progress, beyond the timid consideration of colonialism in the eurocentrist tendencies of Marxism, beyond the supposed universality inherited from Christian Europe. As part of a deliberately humanist interpretation of Marx, Fornet-Betancourt considers this "call" to go beyond both as a European and a non-European task, and explores, in relation to the second point, the contributions of the Latin-American theology of liberation to the Marxist heritage.

**Keywords** Marxism · Theology of liberation · Eurocentrism · Latin-America · Universality · Humanism · Postcolonialism

The title of this book, *Marx and Europe*, is undoubtedly an attractive and suggestive title. However, in my opinion, there is a certain redundancy in its formulation. For to say "Marx" is to mention a part of Europe, insofar as his name represents a work which, through the places, the languages and even the fundamental questions it deals with, shapes to an important extent the intellectual and social history of Europe from the nineteenth century to the present day. Marx is a part of Europe, and Europe – and certainly not only Western Europe – finds in Marx's work the basis of one of its most globally relevant historical projections of the last century. The name Europe being associated with a memory in which "Marx" is missing, would imply the absence of a weighty reference in the intellectual and social map capable of guiding us in recognising the possibilities of "Europe".

But whether or not the title *Marx and Europe* is redundant, what is of greater importance to my argument here is not the fact that Marx is European and, as such, part of Europe, but rather the fact that a European (or that part of Europe) is Marx. For, as I shall try to show in the following reflections, it is precisely this difference, which may here seem somewhat pedantic, that makes it clear that Europe is a space

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of thought and action that confronts the dialectic of a history, whose continuity is traced with the singular peculiarity of being configured at the same time as a thread in which discontinuities and/or ruptures are its form of continuity, because it is a history in whose real progress, and in order to preserve its achievements, there are always possibilities that call into question what has been achieved. In other words, it is a history torn between the conflicting tendencies of the "non plus ultra" and the "semper plus ultra", that is to say, split by the struggle between the forces of reaction and the forces of revolution.

Before going on, it seems to me necessary to add a few more words on the title of my text which, as I must also make clear, was proposed by the editors: "Beyond Marx, beyond Europe".

As we all know, the nouns "Marx" and "Europe" are indicative of extremely complex subjects due to the multiple facets they present and which make them, therefore, unmanageable topics within the framework of a small article. This is especially true when, as is the case here, the ambition is further enlarged as an attempt to reflect on the possible need to go "beyond" what the names "Marx" and "Europe" represent. It is therefore necessary to anticipate. And this is exactly what I am trying to do in my explanation of my understanding of the title of the book.

But why do I say that the task is thereby enlarged?

In my opinion, for the simple reason that any attempt to go "beyond" an author, a scientific theory, a philosophy or a cultural space, etc., requires, as its condition of possibility, to have gone to its outer limits, to its ultimate frontier. It is understanding the edges that really mark the terminal points of something, which makes it possible to know if and from where exactly it is necessary to try to go "beyond" it. But for this very reason we must also ask ourselves this question: aren't the ends or outer limits of the realities that we recognise, be it the work of an author, in this case "Marx", or of a cultural space, here "Europe", always boundaries that connect them with other realities that are already in themselves a "beyond" their limits?

I believe that this is indeed the case. What this implies is that these *confines*, just as border places affronting each other, are the places that also allow us to discover points of reference for discerning possible directions that may lead to an eventual going "beyond" what we know. Directions which, I might add, would offer the necessary support to ensure that the attempt to go "beyond" does not simply respond to a craving for novelty, to the echo of motives or to a desire for prominence that is bound to fall into the void, like the vain pretensions of those who imagine they can do everything new and anew, by *creatio ex nihilo*.

If attempts to go "beyond" require knowing where those we want to surpass have gone before us, such attempts also require, as their flip side, being able to at least glimpse the path we must undertake when we decide to go "beyond" them – because we feel that they lack something we need to better think and act in our own present. The experience of exploring the limits as *boundaries* serves precisely to glimpse these possible paths, seeking what we lack or miss, boundaries which are also, let us not forget, places where the "living" and the "dead" meet.

This experience of exploration is all the more important for the basic intention behind my reflections because in it the discernment of the direction to be taken by the

attempt to go "beyond" "Marx" or "Europe" also involves the question of becoming aware of the ideological background which may possibly condition our understanding of "going beyond", when we take it for granted that such an effort cannot mean anything else – as is also stated in the book's introductory text – than the attempt to "go further" in the sense of "moving forward", of marching onwards. I am referring concretely to how the horizon of modern progress has become the self-evident ideological backdrop for how we think and act.

And that is why I pose the question: Should we not disconnect the representation of the possibilities inherent in "going beyond", whether of an author or of a cultural space, from the ideology of progress, where "going beyond" implies "leaving behind" and expelling from the realm of the real and valuable whatever is not the "latest novelty"? Or asked another way: Might not the exploration of the *boundaries*, precisely in the sense of a dialogue between the "dead" who have not quite died and the "living" who have not quite come to life yet, make us understand that there are paths to go "beyond" which are not those of progress leading us away from Marx and Europe, but those that approach their edges, taking us into the tensions and contradictions that give these edges their own profile and thus make it possible to recognise them as frontiers with openings, no-man's-lands, which call for the shared work of communication by intensity.

I would like to emphasize that this questioning of the ideology of progress is not a rhetorical question. I raise it as a heuristic question of central importance for this book, because one of the reasons for the globalisation of capitalism as a form of rationality lies precisely in the fact that it has managed to colonise the human capacity for *imagination* (understood here in the Sartrean sense of the manifestation of freedom, and thus the capacity to imagine). The human capacity for imagination (understood here in the Sartrean sense of the manifestation of freedom and thus of the contestation of the *positive*) (Sartre 1966) with the massive expansion of an idea of progress that impels us to see everything as "going beyond" precisely in the aforementioned terms of a path of progress, the acceleration of which is hindered by the past. And I take this opportunity to note that, seen from this critical perspective, our historical situation is very different from the times when José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) said: "Capitalism has ceased to coincide with progress." (1964, 32) On the contrary, today capitalism dominates the representations of progress.

Before moving on, I would like to draw attention to another aspect that is also present in my understanding or reading of the title of this book and which consequently conditions my approach to the subject. It is the following: One does not need to be an expert in Marx or in the intellectual history of Europe to notice that when tasks such as going "beyond Marx" or "beyond Europe" are proposed, we are talking about history. I mean: we are talking about tasks that have nothing new in them because they are part of the history of Europe. I document my assertion with two examples from the late twentieth century.

First, with reference to Marx, the perspective outlined by Henri de Man (Hendrik de Mann, 1865–1953) in a work published in French in 1927 with the suggestive title *Au-delà de Marx* [Beyond Marx] (1927).

Secondly, with reference to Europe, the lecture by the German philosopher Theodor Lessing (1872–1933) at the Congress against colonial oppression and imperialism, held from 10 to 15 February 1927 in Brussels, in which he advocates a "going beyond" colonial Europe through policies of a "retracting colonisation" that would enable Europe to rediscover its soul through the teachings of the peoples it has despised (cf. Lessing 1987, 248 and onwards).

In what follows I will therefore try to argue in favour of "going beyond Marx" and "beyond Europe" with and from Marx, with and from Europe. And for this I will understand Marx precisely as a "European", but insisting on what I was saying, that what is relevant here is the fact that a "European" is Marx. I return, then, to the difference I mentioned at the outset and that I will explain in the second point that now follows. And this point will be followed by a third where, with a complementary intention, I will try to show that there is also a history of what we could call "going beyond Marx and Europe" from an experiential horizon outside the European universe. I turn to the second point.

## 7.1 "Beyond Marx, Beyond Europe": A Task That Is Still European

I said that I would start from Marx to try to explain why the task of "going beyond Marx and Europe" can be understood as a task that is posed from within European history and as part of that history. And I also said that Marx provides the starting point because what I focus on is that a European is Marx. What does this mean?

It means seeing Marx as part of the chain of ideas and projects by which Europe is being shaped or imagined. And what is even more, it means seeing him as a thinker whose work marks his own links in the chain of the European tradition. In this sense, Marx would also give Europe possibilities to change its course or, if one prefers, Europe would find in Marx perspectives to try to go beyond its own reality from the innermost part of its own history. Hence the relevance of the difference I established when I stated that what is significant is not that Marx is European but that a European can be Marx. Let me illustrate this idea with a brief general indication of the course of European history:

In this geographical space that we call Europe, there are common roots of identity or identification that have the peculiarity that they emphasise "destiny" more than "origin", that is, they insist more on the future projection towards an "ideal" than on the regressive fixation of the cradle (cf. Ritter 1977, 321 and onwards). We know that Europe traces the origin of its name to Greek mythology – Europa is the name of the Phoenician princess seduced and abducted by Zeus – but the connotation with which that name resonates for us today is not so much fed by the origin of the myth as by a history that has been burdening it with the weight of an ideal. In this historical process it seems to me particularly relevant, at least in the context of my argument, to emphasize the intellectual and political constellation that took shape in the early

modern age and, more specifically, with the Enlightenment, and which led to relaunching the name "Europe" by using it to replace the concept that, until then, expressed its unity as a cultural and social space, namely, the concept of *Christianity*. What is remarkable, and particularly important, in this process is that the name of *Christianity* is replaced by that of Europe, but without breaking with significant dimensions of the idea of Europe in *Christianity*. That is to say: Europe inherits and continues the Christian idea according to which the European peoples constitute a community of peoples who are certainly diverse in language and customs, but who are identified as such by the homogeneity of their relationship to the "ideal" to which they project themselves, or by the universal order to whose supremacy they are subordinated. Just as the idea of the universal church in the centuries of Christianity united the peoples of the local churches and their rites in the spirit of God, so modern Europe will have to unite its nations in the future projection towards an ideal of unified forms of life and coexistence. This tension explains what Ortega y Gasset has called the "dual way" of thinking and living that has characterised the peoples of Western Europe since their first configurations following the dissolution of the ancient world and which, in his opinion, has been a true constant in the history of Europe (cf. Ortega y Gasset 1983, 255 and onwards; Nolte 2003).

We would add that this tension of living and thinking between a concrete here and now, between the positivity of the facts and a "beyond", a future, regarded as the true horizon of realisation, is the tension that explains why in European history we can see this genealogy that leads, for example, from the *City of God* of Saint Augustine to the Marxist vision of the "classless society", passing through the vision of the order of the universal common good of the School of Salamanca. A genealogy that can be interpreted as messianic, utopian or critical, and which, according to the interpretation that is held, allows its roots to be traced back to traditions of very different origins, be they of a religious or secular nature. But what is decisive is to understand that it is a genealogy in which one can recognise a convergent impulse that makes its different historical manifestations recognisable as "members of a family", so to speak. For me this impulse can be summed up in the attitude of a man who is not satisfied with the facts, neither with those of his own being nor those of his circumstances, and who, because of this "feeling bad in his own skin", tends to "go out of himself", to "go beyond", which is to say: to seek ways of fulfilment and of overcoming the historical conditions of a given state of affairs or world.

I think it is this genealogy of what I have called family kinship that the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano (1904–1991) has sought to emphasise in highlighting this trait in the European mentality: "The effort of European man has been the tireless tension of tending towards a world, towards a city always on the horizon, unattainable… It is the constitutive idealism of the European which preceded idealism proper, in its German version, … and which is like the condition of his life… Idealism which is created and verified in that desire, that need to have a world in view, to live towards it, gravitating more towards possibility, taking it more into account than reality itself" (Zambrano 1988, 61–62).

I return to the point of interest here: Regardless of the interpretation of this genealogy, the important thing is that it shows that in the intellectual and social

history of Europe, internal perspectives of thought and action are generated which indicate possibilities, or rather, attempts to "go beyond". And, as is well known, one of these perspectives is the one summed up by "European humanism". It is also well known that the humanist movement is the manifestation in which the tension between "being" and "ought to be", the tension of the dual way of living and thinking between a real order and a higher order, of which Ortega y Gasset spoke, is perhaps most forcefully and clearly expressed in the history of Europe.[1] But the real reason why I highlight here the European humanist tradition is rather that it is this tradition that represents the intellectual heritage that makes it possible for a European to be "Marx" and, consequently, for his work to appear as the work of a thinker who, in the sense already mentioned, goes beyond Europe from within the very tradition of Europe, or, if you like, goes beyond Europe without ceasing to be part of Europe.

The above assertion implies that, to put it bluntly, I am opting here for a "humanist reading" of Marx. And I am aware that the justification of this option would entail both a differentiated analysis of the complex movement represented by European humanism,[2] and at the same time a study of the no less complex relations of Marx's work with humanism.[3] But it is obvious that, owing to the limits of space and time imposed by the treatment of a subject within the framework of an article, I am unable to undertake such a task here. It will have to suffice, to continue my argument, with a few brief indications on humanism in general as a link in the chain of the critical or utopian genealogy in the history of European thought, and in particular on Marx's humanism as part of that movement, but at the same time as an impulse to take it beyond its borders.

By referring to the concept of "Wärmestrom" (Bloch 1976, 1985), "warm current", coined by Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) to designate that way of thinking which, in contrast to the "cold stream" ("Kältestrom"), takes on the concerns and hopes of the human being, the very complex and plural European humanist tradition can be characterised in general as a specific manifestation of this "warm stream" of

[1] To reinforce my interpretation, I would also refer to Karl Mannheim's exploration of European humanism as a movement in which this dual way of living and thinking is concretized precisely in medieval and modern humanism as a dialectical process between the "local" and the "international" or "universal". He writes: "The fact that modern Culture was prepared by clerical training immediately aligned it with, from its very origin, a strong sense of internationalism. Clerical culture was in the first place the expression of an international order, and only in the second place a reflection of individual, local or national situations. The successor of this Christian humanism was secular humanism, which for its part began, for secular reasons, also as an inter-national movement. . . . Thus the march of the Western historical community is not. . . a gradual process from the provincial, localist culture to the national and international. On the contrary, it is structured according to a magnificent *arsis* of inter-national integration. . ." (Mannheim 1958, 78–79). It is also interesting to take into account the work of Jacques Le Goff, such as his book *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Age* (2003).

[2] For an exhaustive study see the well-documented work of Thomas Leinkauf, *Grundriss Philosophie des Humanismus und der Renaissance (1350–1600)* (2017).

[3] We will recall as an example the Louis Althusser's polemics against humanism.

thinking. For if there is one thing that is shared across the board by the different humanist models, it is precisely the concern to be attentive to the needs and expectations of human beings, to listen to the human heart in order to trace its horizon of hopes, and this with the desire to seek "remedy" from within the human being. Let us recall, by way of two examples which symbolise what is common to the diversity mentioned, St. Augustine's search for a response to the concerns of the human heart,[4] and Marx's attention to the "sigh of the burdened creature" (Marx 1962, 5; see the original in 1971, 378).

Closely related to this transversal concern of the models of European humanism, I would like to point out a second dimension that I believe they also share and which perhaps deserves to be considered as the basic condition that gives meaning to the first. I am referring to the faith in man's ability to humanise himself and to humanise his historical world, that is, to direct his being and the realities of the world in which he lives along paths leading to the realisation of goodness and justice. In a word: faith in the perfectibility of man and his world. This also means faith in the human capacity for rebellion against any order that closes the horizon to man's cherished hope in his humanity to come.

I will leave aside the question of whether or not this belief in human perfectibility is due to the influence of Christianity on European culture – belief which implies, at the same time and with equal weight, the inner transformation of man *and* the social transformation of his world, and which includes, as its strict consequence, the belief in man's capacity for rebellion both against "the old Adam" and against injustice in the historical world. This question seems more than legitimate in this context of European humanism, especially if one considers the fact that Christianity sets itself apart as a religion that unites the poles of the cultivation of the inner man and the task of transforming the world as inseparable moments of its salvific message (cf. Spranger 1928, 2 and onwards).

But, as stated, I will not dwell on this question. I mention it here only because it also belongs to the history of the cultural backdrop of Marx's humanism and, in particular, of the (messianic) hope he seems to nurture in a new order whose true priority is to save human life, starting with the redemption of the lives of those whom the "state of affairs of the world" condemns to live life as a mere means to survive in the anxiety of daily worry: the poor.[5] Let us say in passing that this hypothesis, of a real impact of this cultural backdrop on Marx' writings, has motivated several attempts to demonstrate the biblical and/or Christian traces in his work.[6] But I

[4] Exemplary here are the *Confessions* with the famous advice of "noli foras".

[5] One will recall Marx's well-known statement: "Life itself appears as a means of living" (Marx 1966, 67; for the German original see Marx 1968, 516).

[6] Examples of such attempts include José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx y la Biblia: crítica a la filosofía de la opresión* (1972); Enrique Dussel, *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx* (1993); and more recently: Franz Hinkelammert, "Der Vorrang des Menschen im Konflikt mit der Idolatrie: Religionskritik, profane Theologie und humanistische Praxis" (2016, 3–32); and Michael Ramminger and Franz Segbers (ed.), "*Alle Verhältnisse umzuwerfen . . . und die Mächtigen vom Thron zu stürzen*". *Das gemeinsame Erbe von Christen und Marx* (2018).

shall return to my argument, by attempting briefly to indicate how humanism in Marx can be understood as a new "frontier" in the movement of European humanism.

I have already mentioned that for Marx it is a question of not remaining deaf to the "sigh of the burdened creature". If we accept that this also heralds an existential and political project of humanisation, we can affirm that this idea sums up the core of a humanism that is understood above all as a response to the human need to find respite, to live life as "life commands", that is, to live it by living and not by dying. Hence from this listening to the "sigh of the exhausted creature", there follows for Marx a "categorical imperative" which, unlike the Kantian one, is not formal but vitally material, and which demands nothing less than: "...to cast aside all relations in which man is a humiliated, subjugated, abandoned and despicable being..." (Marx 1966, 10; for the German original see Marx 1968, 385).

This confirms what I said above about the hope for an order that subordinates all that is real, also the course of history, to the satisfaction of the needs of the burdened creature: the needs for recognition, social liberation and esteem in the community must be the focus of all human activity, be it personal, social, political or economic. It is a question of elevating the human being to the human life that corresponds to him or her as a human being. And that is why the world must be put on new foundations.

This imperative explains why Marx's humanism is projected as a humanism whose dynamic of development is ultimately guided by the hope of abolishing the conditions that block the blossoming of man's humanisation, thereby sentencing him to that increasingly vanishing life that is the life of the existence of the "burdened creature".

The connoisseur of Marx's work will know that there are many moments in his writings that concretely exemplify this projection of humanism. Two of these moments should be highlighted here, because they seem to me to be particularly significant for the purpose of my argument: the theory of alienation and the critique of fetishism.

In my opinion, both motifs highlight the fact that with Marx, European humanism redimensioned its frontiers, since his reflections on alienation and fetishism open up the theoretical and practical space of the critical humanist heritage to the awareness of the failure of humanity caused by the social conditions imposed by the thriving capitalist system – a system, it should not be forgotten, that Marx is already analysing as the driving force of what in our time will be called globalisation.[7] And if we bear in mind that in Marx's analysis alienation and fetishism and/or idolatry, precisely because they represent processes of destruction of the human substance of man, place before European humanist culture the mirror of a real failure of humanity, it is all the more understandable that with Marx European humanism is

[7] Recall, for example, Marx and Engels' far-sighted and prescient statements about the expansion of the civilization of the new world created by capitalism (cf. Marx and Engels 1961, in particular 73–77; for the German original see 1972, in particular 463–467).

confronted with internal contradictions whose resolution it cannot undertake without going beyond their respective limits, which is what Marx does.

In this sense, it must finally be emphasised that in the "Marxian" frontier of European humanism there is not only a shifting of boundaries from within, but also an "advance" or departure into a border region in "no man's land", since in Marx's reflections on alienation and fetishism, despite their undoubtedly European accent, which we do not dispute, it is not difficult to recognise an attempt to respond to a challenge that knows no boundaries of space or time: to listen to the profound cry of the human being embodied in the precarious life of the "burdened child" and to come to his or her aid.

But I do not want to end this section without taking a position on one of the questions raised by this book, namely the question how can we understand the echo of Marx's work in the peoples of the world, especially in the period of decolonisation? For it seems to me that precisely this "advance" of the "Marxian" frontier, towards the *simply human* dimension of opting for the redemption of the life of the "exhausted creature", offers a perspective for a well-founded answer to the question of the global impact of Marx's work. As a representative proof of this, we can cite the testimony of one of the most important and influential figures in the intellectual and social history of Latin America: the testimony of José Martí (1853–1895), who on the occasion of Marx's death, when writing what is perhaps the first "summary" of Marx's thought in Latin America, justified his recognition of Marx with this laudatory phrase, which needs no commentary: "Karl Marx is dead. Because he sided with the weak, he deserves honour" (Martí 1975, 388).[8]

## 7.2 "Beyond Marx, Beyond Europe": A Task That Is No Longer Only European

In this section I would like to draw on the dialogue of Latin American liberation theology with Marx in order to show on the basis of a representative case – and in line with the observation made at the end of the previous section – how this "advance" towards more *humanity* that Marx' works represents, and specifically his humanism related to vulnerable life, has found real echoes in other countries, strengthening movements of emancipation and *humanisation* which, both for of their cultural roots and their liberatory horizons, try to go "beyond Marx and beyond Europe", and this without falling into anti-European infantilism, which seems to be unfortunately fashionable.

The dialogue of Latin American liberation theology with Marx is a widely known topic, with an impact that, without exaggeration, can be described as worldwide, since it was the subject of strong and lengthy debates within and outside the Catholic

[8] For a presentation of Martí's vision of Karl Marx see: Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación del marxismo. Historia del marxismo en América Latina* (2001, in particular 28–34).

Church throughout the world. Suffice it here to recall the two Roman instructions on the Latin American theology of liberation and the splitting of the frontlines that prompted the reaction to them from Christian circles and social movements in general.[9]

It is not appropriate, however, to attempt to comment here on the dialogue between Latin American liberation theology and Marx, which, seen in this light, also represents a specific chapter in an even older and more complex process of dialogue, namely the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism in general. My reference to the dialogue between Latin American liberation theology and Marx in this section can do no more than highlight some dimensions of the attempts to "go beyond Marx and beyond Europe" in other historical experiences. What are these dimensions? In summary form, they are as follows:

- First, the attempt (and proposal!) to rethink the question of the subject of history from a broader horizon that resizes Marx's thesis of the "proletariat" as the revolutionary subject. This is an attempt to revisit, expand and strengthen Marx's thesis, above all in relation to the impulse of the *emancipatory ethos* at the heart of it, by showing how, in the realities and liberation struggles of the peoples of Latin America, the subject of history is a protagonist with diverse faces and that for this reason, rather than a single name such as "proletariat", it should be identified with plural names that indicate the diversity of the agents of history, such as the names of "the impoverished popular majorities", "the excluded" or the "crucified peoples"; names that Latin American liberation theology uses to designate groups of diverse collectives such as indigenous peoples, women, peasants, etc.[10]
- Secondly, the proposal to implement Marx's conception of history, opening up the guiding idea of the future of a society of free and equal men and women as the ultimate goal of history to the dimension of an eschatological hope that embraces the political programme of social liberation within the horizon of the mystery of the restitution of the fullness of life to the precarious contingent human life. In other words: It is the proposition that the "utopia" of the "Kingdom of freedom" finds a correlation in the eschatological hope of the "Kingdom of God" and that this correlation does not deny but rather enhances human forces to struggle for the realisation of the "Kingdom of freedom" in history, since it can mobilise in man

[9] Cf. Comisión para la doctrina de la fue (ed.), *Instrucción sobre algunos aspectos de la "Theología de la liberación"* (1984) and *Instrucción sobre libertad cristiana y liberación* (1986). Concerning the debates, see for example Hugo Assmann, "Cristianismo y marxismo" (1987); Horacio Cerutti, "La recepción del marxismo por el pensamiento cristiano latinoamericano" (1988); José Comblin, "Théologie de la liberation et marxisme" (1987); and the monographic issue "Marxismo y teología de la liberación" of the journal *Cristianismo y Sociedad*, n. 98 (1988).

[10] See for example Ignacio Ellacuría, "Historización de los derechos humanos desde los pueblos oprimidos y las mayorías populares" (2001); Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (1998); and Jon Sobrino, *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas* (1999).

spiritual reserves that protect him, for example, against discouragement and despair in the face of failures in the historical struggle for his liberation.

- Thirdly, the perspective of relativising the "power of power" as the centre of the dynamics of the task of *humanising* society and man. This does not mean underestimating the importance of structural changes that must undoubtedly be brought about by the reversal of hegemonic power relations in today's societies, but rather warning against the tendency to idolise power as the motor of all change. It is therefore a matter of opening up a perspective in the dynamics of human liberation that strips power of all traces of sacredness and subordinates its political exercise to the higher ethical obligation of daily service to life.
- Fourth, the thesis that the task of liberation, if it is truly understood in the sense of a struggle for the *integral humanisation* of life and man, cannot neglect the pedagogical moment of the personal, inner transformation of each individual, and that for this reason it must flank the politics of structural change with pedagogies for the cultivation of a human affectivity of solidarity and compassion that promotes the ethical perfectibility of people. In a sentence: promote justice in societies and goodness in people's hearts at the same time.
- Fifth, and in line with the previous point, the thesis that the spirit of the Marxist vision of the "new man" enriches its dynamic of anthropological transformation if it opens up to the biblical horizon in which the "new man" is one who is reborn from the spirit, that is, from the principle of goodness and mercy, and who is therefore capable of interrupting in his life and in society the chain of evil in the world.[11]
- Sixth, and finally, this critical observation: Marx's view that a fully *human* society leads to "the true resurrection of nature" (Marx 1966, 84; for the German original see Marx 1968, 516), although it contains an important indication for correcting the anthropocentric excess of modern European humanism, is not, however, sufficient to develop a non-anthropocentric humanism that leaves behind the project of man degrading nature to a source of resources to be plundered for his benefit, and that rather ushers in a new era in the relationship between man and nature by organically integrating the human being into the higher order of creation. In a word: the theology of creation can function here as the correlate that reorients the synthesis between nature and humanism, intended by Marx as a solution, to one of the contradictions of European thought, namely the conflict between man and nature.

[11] It is not without interest to recall Fidel Castro's response to the Brazilian theologian Frei Betto's question on the quest for development of the spiritual life in a communist society: ". . . we seek the broadest possible material and spiritual development of man. It is precisely in these terms that I speak of education and culture. You could add, also, his spiritual development in the religious sense." (Betto 1985). On the subject of the new man in a comparison of Marxist and Christian views see my study "Der neue Mensch bei Ernesto Che Guevara und Ignacio Ellacuría" (2012) and the literature cited therein.

So much, then, for the points I wanted to make. I think they are enough to make it clear that, as I said, in the dialogue between Latin American liberation theology and Marx's work,[12] there are attempts to open up pathways that take us "beyond Marx and beyond Europe", based on an *ecumenical* attitude that does not understand "going beyond" as a negation or a rejection, but as a dialogue in the search for common ground based on the *resonances* and (why not?) the *consonances* that one can only hear at the frontiers.

## 7.3 Final Remark

I end my reflections with a brief comment on Martin Heidegger's judgement of Marx. I do so for two reasons. First, because it is directly related to the theme of this book; and second, because it lays out a position diametrically opposed to what I have presented.

According to Heidegger, Marx's thought is not only in line with the unfathomable background of the history of the West, but is also its extreme exaggeration, precisely because of the radical humanism that underlies it, that is to say, because it affirms that there is *only* man and that, therefore, all history is exhausted in and with the making of man (cf. Heidegger 1986, 393).[13] Thus, in Heidegger's interpretation, Marx's radical humanism, far from offering a perspective of "health" in the face of the basic "illness" that is European history, what it does is to obscure even more the horizon within which Europe is moving. For Heidegger, therefore, Marx is one more witness to how Europe has gone astray and it would therefore be absurd to try to recover his thought as a way to move forward in the task of overcoming the nihilism through which Europe is losing its way.

It is quite a different reading we have presented here when we interpret Marx as an extreme frontier of Europe; but of the Europe that fights for reuniting human history with meaning, that is, of the Europe that, against the worst of itself, is committed to the realisation of the *humanity* of man as a way for history not to disappoint the hope of meaning in man and that thus calls, beyond its borders, for the founding of communities of workers for meaning, in any time and in any place.

[12] For a systematic presentation of this mutually fruitful relationship between Marxist thought and the vision of Latin American liberation theology see Ignacio Ellacuría, "Marxismo y teología de la liberación" (2000).

[13] Heidegger bases his judgement on Marx's well-known statement in his "On the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", where he writes: "And the root, for man, is man himself". On Heidegger's conception of nihilism as a constitutive movement of Western history in general see also Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'" (1977, 217 and onwards) and "Zur Seinsfrage" (1976).

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# Chapter 8
# Mariátegui and the Decolonization of Marxism: A Latin-American Perspective


**Alfredo Gomez-Muller**

**Abstract** Underlining the constant reconfiguration of the senses of and connections between Marx and Europe, in particular as incarnations of the idea of universality, Alfredo Gomez-Muller explores the fluid, decentred and decolonial perspective of the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui. He studies how Mariátegui valorised myth over "scientific socialism", reconsidered the human dimension of the "spiritual", and elaborated "Inca communism" against the eurocentrist idea of "primitive communism". Gomez-Muller thereby suggests that Mariatégui already, half a century before the emergence of post-colonial studies, started decolonizing Marxism, both from within and without.

**Keywords** Marxism · Eurocentrism · Communism · Inca · Postcolonialism · Decolonization

## 8.1 On the Use of the Notions "Marx" and "Europe"

The question of the relationship between "Marx and Europe" requires a prior clarification of the meaning of these two proper nouns. They do not designate totalities with a perfectly determined and univocal meaning, by virtue of which they would be definitively associated, for example, with the idea of the "universal". Rather, both nouns designate singular historical processes, within which multiple differentiations take place, constantly re-signifying the relationship between the same and the other. Through the ceaseless interplay of these resignifications, the "borders" between "Europe" and its "Other", between "Marx" and its "Other", are constantly deconstructed and reconstructed.

Characterized by tensions and antagonisms, these differentiations and resignifications can give rise to fixed or fluid forms of identity and difference, or, more precisely, of the relationship between identity and difference. The Marxist

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differentiation between "scientific socialism" and "utopian socialism" could correspond, for example, to a fixed form of Marxist "identity", produced in a certain politico-cultural context within the formative process of Marx's thought and of Marxism. Similarly, the self-institution of the particularity of "Europe" as a "universal" model of "civilization" – opposed to the "barbarism" of "non-Europeans" – represents a fixed and closed (identitarian) form of European "identity", corresponding to a certain narrative of the economic, political and cultural process named "Europe". Other narratives of the "Europe" process, like other narratives of the "Marx" process, are possible. In particular, they open up the prospect of a more fluid, non-stagnant conception of these two historical processes.

Among other accounts of the "Marx" process, one of the most important was created in Latin America in the 1920s, after the great European catastrophe of the First World War. Its author, the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, has long been "forgotten" both by a certain "official" Marxism and by that part of European historiography that remains "oblivious" to non-European cultural productions, to which Marx himself belongs, at least in part. There is a link between these two "oversights": in differentiating itself as "scientific socialism" from other socialisms, Marxism posits modern European science as the absolute and universal model for the production of "truth", including in the realm of practice. It claims to be the only true socialism, to the exclusion of all others, just as "Europe" claims to be the only model of "civilization", to the exclusion of all others. Despite its "critical" character, this Marxism participates in the Eurocentric ideology that underpins the colonialist enterprise. Both "forgettings" are political acts, involving both *willful ignorance* – in the sense of La Boétie's voluntary servitude – and the *act of ignoring* – in the sense of treating someone "as if their person deserved no consideration". "How could it be otherwise, since, following Buffon, the whole anthropology of the Enlightenment concurs in making civilized man the most interesting being in creation?" (Duchet 1971, 18). In the logic of these two "forgettings", the "Europe" process and the "Marx" process intersect in a multiplicity of identity-based and (post)colonialist narratives.

Mariátegui's Marxism is a political act of the opposite sign: faced with "scientific" socialism, he affirms the importance of "myth"; against the philosophical "materialism" that would define Marx's position, he highlights the human dimension of the "spiritual"; opposing the Eurocentrism underlying the "Marxist" discourse on "primitive communism", he proposes a program of socialist reconstruction of Peru based on the notion of "Inca communism". It is from this last "controversial" notion, which nonetheless appears as a fundamental element of his thought, that Mariátegui integrates cultural and political difference within the "Marx" process, thus inaugurating, half a century before the emergence of post-colonial studies, a form of decolonization of Marxism. From this gesture of decolonization, at once "theoretical" and "practical", we can attempt to briefly reconstruct three elements that seem to us of particular importance in relation to current critiques of the sources and foundations of the social sciences: (a) The plural of "communisms"; (b) Compound time; (c) The *spiritual* as ethico-symbolic creation. Before addressing

these three points, it is worth examining briefly Mariategui's use of the notion of "Inca communism".

## 8.2 The Idea of "Inca Communism"

By Mariátegui's time, the idea of "Inca communism" was already quite widespread, both in Latin America and in Europe. In Peru, it was used from the first decades of the twentieth century by conservatives (Tudela, Riva-Agüero, Belaúnde) as well as progressive intellectuals, anarchists and indigenists (Arouet Prada, Arratia, Salazar, Urviola, Ugarte). In Europe, it was present in a wide range of research, marked by very diverse political orientations: *L'Empire socialiste des Inkas* (1928) by Louis Baudin; *La justicia del Inca* (1926) by Tristán Marof (Gustavo A. Navarro); *L'Empire des Incas et leur communisme autocratique* (1924) by Georges Rouma; "Der Kollektivismus der Inkas in Peru" (1924) by Hermann Trimborn, among others. The previous decade had seen the publication in Paris of the French translation of Oscar Martens' *Un grand État socialiste au XVe siècle. Constitution historique, sociale et politique du royaume de Tahuantinsuyu, État des Incas* (1910), whose original German edition had been published in 1895, a year before Heinrich Cunow's research on Inca "agrarian communism" appeared.

By this time, the idea of "Inca communism" (or "Inca socialism") already had a long history. Its origins were clearly political and related to the history of modern "communism", which in the early 1840s essentially referred to an economic system founded on the principle of the *community of goods*, understood as an egalitarian system of redistribution based on the common ownership of goods and services necessary for human life. Étienne-Gabriel Morelly, who has rightly been placed "at the forefront of the history of the origins of socialist thought" (Soboul 1997, 127), was probably the first to see in the government of the ancient "Peruvians" a realization of the principle of the community of goods (Morelly 1753, XLI); in the following century, the "communist" Étienne Cabet took up this vision of the Incas' "Peru" in 1842, implicitly identifying it with "communism" (Cabet 1846, 427, 479). A few years later, in 1854, appears what is probably the first explicit characterization of the Inca system as "communist": its author, the physician and philosopher Ange Guépin, maintains that the "Peruvians were subject to a communist theocracy, very paternal and very skillful in its government" (Guépin 1854, 801). With the development of various forms of "communism" (or "socialism") within the nineteenth-century labour movement, use of the term spread to fields such as history and anthropology: Lewis Henry Morgan notes that the Iroquois gentes practised "communism in living" (Morgan 1877, 69), while Marxist writers began to use the expression "primitive communism" to designate the socio-economic organization of the people described by Morgan, which Marx himself characterized as the organization of "primitive communities" (Marx et al. 1978, 322–333). The remote sources of the political significance of the idea of "Inca communism" go back for the most part to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's description of the "good government" of the

Incas in his *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609), which was translated into French in 1633 and very soon aroused the interest of reformers engaged in the search for solutions to the extreme misery afflicting much of the population of the European continent.[1] Mariátegui's use of the notion of "Inca communism" is part of this long political history, from the point of view of which the question of its validity as a historical or anthropological category remains incidental. His main reference seems to be César Antonio Ugarte, who published his *Bosquejo de la historia económica del Perú* in 1926; to a lesser extent, Mariátegui was most probably influenced by certain indigenous and anarchist positions, such as that of Angelina Arratia in her book *Le communisme en Amérique* (1920).

## 8.3 The Plural of "Communisms"

Mariátegui addresses the question of "Inca communism" mainly in two texts. The first is the famous collection *Seven Essays on the Interpretation of Peruvian Reality* (1928); the second is a report drawn up jointly with Hugo Pesce for the First Latin American Communist Conference (Buenos Aires, 1929), entitled "The Problem of Races in Latin America". In the *Siete ensayos*, Mariátegui uses the expressions "agrarian communism", "Inca communism" (*comunismo inkaico*), "indigenous communism" and "indigenous socialism" to refer both to the basis of the Tawantinsuyo's economic and social organization,[2] and to the communal practices subsisting in certain Andean regions at the time (Mariátegui 1977, 54, 63, 76, 83). In "The Problem of Races", written for members of the Latin American section of the Comintern, the expression "agrarian communism" appears once without a complement (Mariátegui 1981, 62), and another time followed by the adjective "primitive" (ibid., 68); in addition, we also find the expressions *primitive collectivism* (ibid., 60) and *primitive Inca collectivism* (ibid., 68). Despite their diversity, they all possess the dual temporal meaning used in the *Siete ensayos*: "Inca communism" is indeed something that existed at the time of the Tawantinsuyo and, in this sense, belongs to the past; yet – and here we touch on one of the richest aspects of his thought – "Inca communism" is at the same time something of the *present*, which exists in certain practices of Andean communities and can be articulated with the "communism" derived from Marx. In other words, "Inca communism" is something from the past that remains in the present as a social and cultural memory involved in the construction of the future. This idea that "communism" is *plural*, and that articulations are

[1] We offer a first approach to the history of Inca Garcilaso's contribution to the renewal of political and social practices and theories, in our book *La memoria utópica del Inca Garcilaso. Comunalismo andino y buen gobierno* (Gómez-Muller 2021). A shorter French version was published in 2022. Some elements of this book are used in this article.

[2] The name Tawantinsuyo referred to all the territories under Inca political and administrative authority. It extended from the south of present-day Colombia to the north of Chile and Argentina, covering an area of over 2,500,000 $km^2$.

possible within this *plurality*, was difficult to accept by the Marxist orthodoxy of its time, in both its communist and social-democratic versions. Indeed, it clashed with the established discourse of the Communist and Socialist Internationals concerning "primitive communism".

Despite everything that might separate them, these two versions of "Marx" shared the same linear, evolutionary, positivist schema of pre-established "stages" in the "development" of societies. A scheme based on the modern ideology of "Progress": at the outset, there was the stage of "primitive communism", from which one "necessarily" passed, through the development of the productive forces, to the stages of slavery, feudalism and capitalism, before arriving at the "final" stage, which would be that of "socialism" (considered by some Marxists as the "inferior" phase of communism). In this perspective, the conjunction of "primitive communism", considered the most backward thing, and Marxist "socialism", considered the most advanced thing, appeared to be a contradiction in terms. For example, "Leoncio",[3] the Brazilian delegate to the First Conference, argued that "agrarian communities" were not an option, as "the degree of economic development achieved by Latin America no longer allows regression to the regime of primitive communities" (Secretariado Sudamericano 1930, 295). For this evolutionary "Marxist", the advent of a communist society requires a "clean slate" concerning any past and any cultural form he deems outdated. In Latin America, in Mariátegui's time, this "clean slate" meant the elimination of Indian cultures, which were summoned to become "modern". Similarly, the "clean slate" implied the idea that there was only one universal model of "communism" – "modern" communism – and that there was no link between "primitive communism" and the supposedly Marxist communism of the late 1920s.

This last point is explicitly formulated, with regard to "Inca communism", by Heinrich Cunow, an ethnologist and member of the German social democracy. Cunow was probably the first author to characterize Inca institutions as a form of *primitive communism*. Using the term in 1890 in a sense equivalent to that of Engels' 1888 *Urwüchsigen* communism,[4] Cunow intended to designate the ancient egalitarian socio-economic forms structured on the basis of *gens*, the category used by L.H. Morgan in *Ancient Society* (1877) to name an initial form of social integration based on kinship ties:

> What in these [Inca] institutions is regarded today as similar to our present concepts of socialism (...), is nothing other than that primitive communism which is found among various tribes as the natural product of social forms based on kinship relations. Only that in Peru this communism had succeeded in attaining a higher form than we are accustomed to recognizing in primitive peoples (Cunow 1929, 12–13).

[3] The first name "Leoncio" is probably a pseudonym.

[4] In a note he added to the English edition of the *Communist Manifesto* (1888). The prefix *Ur* designates origin, initial, first, primordial, fundamental. In this sense, it can be synonymous with the French adjective "primitif", in its original meaning.

The opposition between the "primitive" and the "superior" indicates from the outset the ideological framework in which Cunow operates. The originary (*Ur*), the primitive in the sense of source, primordial, initial or first (*urwüchsig*) tends towards the negative and ideological meaning of "primitive" or "archaic", interpreted as something backward and inferior in relation to the later state of "evolution", which would be "superior". The word "primitive" becomes equivalent to the word "inferior", as with Lévy-Bruhl.[5] Based on these presuppositions, Cunow assigns the experience of this "backward" communism to a past definitively overtaken by the "development" of "now civilized" societies (Cunow 1933, VI). This understanding of the "primitive" as something completely outdated, deprived of what comes after, underpins Cunow's categorical assertion that "the institutions of the Inca Empire have nothing to do with imperial or democratic socialism (. . .), [with] our present-day concepts of socialism" (Cunow 1929, 12). What comes afterwards, in this case, is the state conceived as an institution of power opposed to ("civil") society, and understood in an evolutionary perspective as a mark of human "progress".

In a political and cultural context dominated by Eurocentric prejudice bequeathed by the colonial regime, according to which "civilization" and with it moral and political knowledge can only come from Europe, Mariátegui's recognition of the political, ethical, economic and social value of the subsisting "Inca communism" acquires a decolonizing dimension. It cracks a monolithic model of political thought and practice based on copying and imitating European models, and affirms the Andean creativity that has produced a moral and political knowledge admired since the seventeenth century by a Europe open to otherness. It argues that "communism"/"socialism" is to be thought in plural, including in the sense of cultural plurality:

> Socialism (. . .) is to be found in the American tradition. The most advanced primitive communist organization that history records is that of the Incas. We certainly don't want socialism in America to be a tracing and a copy. It must be a heroic creation. With our own reality and in our own language, we must give life to Indo-American socialism (Mariátegui 1981, 249).

And, in understanding "American" socialism (of the Andes or elsewhere) as a living memory, he also thinks of the political plural in the sense of temporal plurality as a constitutive dimension of presence.

[5] According to the *Petit Robert*, the adjective *primitive* refers, in its first three meanings, to origin, first and source; in its fourth and fifth meanings, which relate to human beings, the word has the negative, ideological meaning of "undeveloped" and "uncultured".

## 8.4 Beyond Evolutionary Linear Time: Compound Time

Mariátegui's articulation of surviving "Inca communism" with the idea of "communism" constructed by the "Marx" process is also a kind of invitation to another experience of time. Leoncio's rejection of the *actuality* of surviving Andean "communism" is underpinned by an experience of time (a *temporality*, in the sense of Heidegger and Sartre) in which the "present" is absolutely separate from the "past". In the linear understanding of time that underpins European evolutionism and its ideology of "Progress", of which the discourse of "Leoncio" is but a Latin American and colonized expression, the past tends to be equated with the outdated: the past is what is "backward", what no longer has any meaning or value in the present. The generalization of this mutilated experience of time in both of the "Marx" and "Europe" processes is reflected in Vera Zasulich's famous letter to Marx of February 16, 1881: "Lately, it has been claimed that the rural community, being an archaic form, is doomed to ruin by history [and] scientific socialism. Those who prophesy such an outcome call themselves your disciples par excellence, 'Marxists'" (Zasulich 1881). The Russian revolutionary goes on to explain that these "Marxists" support "the theory that all the peoples of the world are compelled by historical necessity to go through all the phases of social production", and asks what the "citizen Marx" thinks about this.

In his first draft response, Marx seems to distance himself from these "Marxists". The elimination of the capitalist social system, he writes, will involve

> a return of modern societies to the "archaic" type of common property, a form in which, as [Morgan] puts it, "the new system, to which modern society tends, will be a rebirth (a revival), in a higher form, of an archaic social type". So we shouldn't let the word "archaic" frighten us too much (Marx 1881).

In the latter part of his life, Marx learned – not least from his reading of Morgan and Kovalevsky – not to "let himself be frightened" by the reference to the "archaic". From the perspective of Progressive ideology, the archaic is indeed frightening, and the Russian rural community as outdated as the Andean community described by Mariátegui. However, beyond the negative approach of *not* allowing oneself to be frightened, Mariátegui outlines a positive approach that involves *welcoming* the "archaic" or, more precisely, the collection of utopian memory where the idea of communism(s) as a shared responsibility towards the vulnerability of the human and the living in general is constantly being rebuilt. An approach based on an experience of the plurality of times, which we must constantly (re)compose. Welcoming the "archaic" in this way is not just any act, nor a simple political tactic. Welcoming the "archaic" is the political act par excellence, in other words, the act of opening up possibilities on the collection of utopian memories. A political act that is an act of memory.

## 8.5 The Spiritual as Ethico-Symbolic Creation

The elements of ancient "Inca communism" that survive in the present are not only socio-economic (*ayllu*, communal work, mutual aid, etc.). Following Castro Pozo,[6] who is his main source for the contemporary reality of the *ayllu*, Mariátegui considers that the "Inca communism" subsisting in communal life also has an ethical and cultural dimension, comprising specific ways of conceiving and signifying relationships between humans and between humans and the land. "The Indian has not become an individualist, despite the laws of a hundred years of republican rule (. . .). On the other hand, communism remains the Indian's only defense" (Mariátegui 1977, 83). "Communism" here is the opposite of "individualism". It is a vision of the world, a conception of the social bond, or a "spirit" that gives meaning to a specific economic and redistribution model. The "communist spirit" is expressed through modes of social relationship based on association, cooperation and solidarity (ibid.). And in the first decades of the twentieth century, as in the time of the Tawantinsuyo, association, cooperation and solidarity were essentially based on working the land. And yet, in Andean cultural memory, what we call "land" does not have a purely utilitarian, let alone mercantile, meaning. Above all, says Mariátegui, it has the "metaphysical" meaning of a vital cycle and the foundation of life: "The Indian has married the earth. He feels that 'life comes from the earth' and returns to the earth" (ibid., 47, 54). To "marry" means to bind oneself intimately, so that the act of "marrying" the earth is tantamount to constituting something in common with it. The human being who "marries" the earth is not bound to it by a bond of pure exteriority. In Andean cultural tradition, the deep bond between the earth and man is symbolically expressed by the figure of Mother Earth, as Valcárcel recalls in a 1925 text that Mariátegui transcribed in full in the *Siete ensayos*. The earth, says Valcárcel,

> is the common mother: from her womb spring not only the nourishing fruits, but man himself. The earth provides all goods. The cult of the Mama Pacha and the cult of the Sun (*heliolatría*) go hand in hand, and both the earth and the sun belong to no one in particular. The aboriginal system of ideas (*ideología*) associated these two concepts, and from this was born agrarism, which is both communal ownership of the fields and the universal religion of the day-star (ibid., 54).

Commenting on this text, Mariátegui notes: "For this reason, inka communism (. . .) is called agrarian communism" (idem.). The "agrarian communism" of the Andean *ayllu* is therefore not just a form of communal land ownership, nor is it just a system for organizing work based on reciprocity and mutual aid. It is all of these things, but above all it is a way of "seeing" the world, a way of looking at the earth as the common Mother of us all. And it is precisely insofar as the earth is the Mother common to all, that it can be common in the unity of the Common (*ayllu*). "Work"

[6] In 1924, Hildebrando Castro Pozo published his book *Nuestra Comunidad Indígena*, one of the first sociological studies devoted to present-day Andean communities. In 1936 he published *Del ayllu al cooperativismo socialista*.

therefore takes on a completely different meaning than under the capitalist regime, as association, cooperation and solidarity mark not only the relationship between humans, but also the relationship between humans and living things in general. In this connection, Mariátegui refers to the "spiritual elements of the communal economy" (ibid., 87), which are valuable from the point of view of his socialist project, and which do not seem too far removed from the "spirituality of work" evoked by Simone Weil following "Rousseau, George Sand, Tolstoy, Proudhon [and] Marx" (Weil 1949, 125). Here, the *spiritual* of the communist "spirit" can refer to the ethico-symbolic creation of a general conception of the human as a vivat being who cares for other living beings, both human and non-human. Such a conception of the human includes a general conception of nature as a non-object and of the relationship between the human and the non-human as a communicative relationship (listening and speaking), thus opening up the possibility of a meaning (orientation and significance) of the human in the world.

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European-centric, positivist Marxism, which embodies one of the most stagnant forms of the identity "Marx", has long regarded Mariátegui's Marxism as "heterodox". And, indeed, there is in this Latin American and "therefore" (!) "non-Western" thinker a series of heterodoxies in relation to a fixed form of Marxist identity defined by its imaginary status as "scientific socialism". In his very brief existence – he died at the age of 35 – Mariátegui sketched out a plural idea of communisms, a conception of political action based on the experience of compound time, and a revaluation of "myth" or the ethico-political dimension of the spiritual. All these positions are linked to a fundamental heterodoxy: openness to the *heteros*, to the other, which underpins his practice of decolonizing "Marx". For Mariátegui, "Marx" is not a homogeneous "block", nor a doctrine that forever holds the only key to historical progress. His relationship with "Marx" is non-dogmatic, fluid and differentiated: there are elements in the "Marx" process that are valid from a critical perspective, and others that are not: those that belong to a Marx that is certainly "too European".

Mariátegui's decolonizing approach has become an important theoretical reference for postcolonial criticism. In Latin America, thinking about the decolonization of culture and life has existed for a very long time, and is therefore not the result of some intellectual "fashion". If we are to "take seriously" the questions posed by contemporary postcolonial/decolonial criticism to the human and social sciences, we must first avoid reducing this criticism to its most caricatured expressions, and restore its historical depth – of which Mariátegui's work is a constitutive element. Beyond certain current caricatures that convey a rather simplified vision of "Europe", its "Other" and their relationship, genuine postcolonial /decolonial criticism expresses a demand for cultural and political transformation that is rooted in the history of societies marked by the (post)colonial fact, and concerns both colonized and colonizing societies. Within this history, Mariátegui has contributed to the emergence of a new model of intersection between "Marx" and "Latin America", but also, indirectly, between "Marx" and "Europe", beyond the postcolonial forms of

evolutionist and positivist Marxism as well as those of Latin American and European "identities".

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# Chapter 9
# Racializing the Analysis of Capitalism: Towards a Decolonial Political Ecology – Mining Neoliberalism and Environmental Degradation

**Anuarite Bashizi, Cécile Giraud, and Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka**

**Abstract** Studying the mining sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo using a grounded approach, Anuarite Bashizi, Cécile Giraud and Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka adopt a Marxian and ecopolitical analytical framework in order to consider the interconnexions between ecological deterioration and primary resources, post-colonial politics and international financial institutions, class struggle and the international division of labour. In emphasizing the systematic race relations that structure the exploitation of the racialized work force as well as the access to natural resources, and underlining the heritage of colonialism in the form of "global coloniality", the authors argue that a decolonial approach to political ecology and to Marxist capitalist analysis is necessary in order to apprehend the realities of exploitation in Africa.

**Keywords** Marxism · Postcolonialism · Racialization · Capitalism · Political ecology · Class struggle · Neoliberalism

> Can Africans create African futures within a modern world system structured by global coloniality? (. . .) Today global coloniality operates as an invisible power matrix that is shaping and sustaining asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and the

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> Global South. (. . .) Global coloniality continues to frustrate decolonial initiatives aimed at creating postcolonial futures free from coloniality. (. . .) Within this context, Africans have emerged as fighting subjects for a new world order that is decolonised, deimperialised, open to the emergence of new humanism and African futures (Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2014).

## 9.1 Introduction

In proclaiming that the racial question will be the decisive front of struggle in the twentieth century, the father of black sociology W.E.B. Du Bois seemed optimistic about the ability of Marxist and socialist-style struggles to produce socially desired results (Du Bois 2007). However, he was pessimistic about the ability of class struggles to substitute for racial issues (Du Bois 1998). From this point of view, racism should not be reduced to the "collateral damage" of economic oppression, but should rather be understood as a singular issue resulting from hegemonic strategies (San Juan 1989, 1). For non-white peoples who have experienced modernity as a rationality referring to the globalisation of the "rationalizing, universalizing and objectifying mode of thought" (Darcis 2022) deployed by the West since the fifteenth century and articulated to racial capitalism, it was therefore necessary to rethink the historiography of the relationship between modernity, capitalism and race (James 1963).

For the black radical tradition and black Marxism, capitalism has not historically been the great modernizing engine that would have produced the European proletariat as a universal subject, and European civilization has not worked towards homogenization through capitalism, but rather a differentiation of peoples that has constantly exaggerated differences through the racial prism (Williams 1994). We must therefore see capitalism as "racial capitalism", that is, as the process of deriving social and economic value from another person's racial identity (Robinson 2000, 2023). We must therefore stop believing, as Marx and Engels did, that European bourgeois society rationalized social relations. On the contrary, racialization was a material force that permeated the social structures of capitalism. Capitalism was structured by racialization and, as a result, produced inequalities between groups (Roediger 1994).

In this article, we attempt to draw the consequences of this theoretical perspective of black Marxism for the question of ecology, and for political ecology more specifically. Like Marxism, to which some authors of political ecology refer, the latter implies an interest in different dimensions of the situations analysed: (a) political economy, which shows how the exploitation of natural resources produces winners and losers; (b) the site of ecological degradation, which shows the relations of exploitation at work; and (c) the question of scale, which shows the relations between the local and the global and enables us to understand the international division of labour. This left-wing political ecology perspective in the USA has been strongly influenced by Marxist political economy, which focuses on the realities of inequalities arising from global capitalism. Yet, by considering that men make their history in circumstances that they have not chosen themselves and

which are therefore handed down to them from the past, Marx showed that human agency is highly constrained and socially conditioned. This implies that, beyond the existence of this global capitalism, we must also explain the types of social relations that make it possible (Isaac 1987). This is not to deny the realities of the inequalities arising from global capitalism that political ecology denounces, but rather that this capitalism has social conditions of existence that should be the focus of theoretical analysis (ibid.).

Race is one of the factors that made global capitalism possible, but one that has been largely neglected in the political ecology approach. Indeed, by combining Marxism with peasant studies (Scott 1976), cultural ecology gave rise to a political ecology in which the aim was to understand how the increasing capitalization of exchange had negative consequences for the environment, but also introduced famine and economic marginalization among peasants (Watts 1983). But political ecology overlooked the fact that this process took place in a colonial context structuring the social conditions of existence where, on the one hand, these peasants were colonized blacks and, on the other, some of the less fortunate whites who suffered the consequences of these crises fared much better because they were white – racialization was present in all strata of capitalism's socio-economic stratification (Robbins 2004). This shows that, not only can capitalism achieve accumulation only by producing relations of severe inequality between human groups and races (Melamed 2015), but that its consequences must also be grasped from the social and racial differentiations it produces and on which it is based. This is why we propose the idea of a decolonial political ecology that integrates the question of race into the analysis of the relationship between the degradation of nature, political economy and questions of scale.

More empirically, based on a case study of mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this article shows how the analysis of environmental issues using a political ecology approach leaves out one dimension of the problem studied: in the case of the exploitation of natural resources in the DRC, the environmental and social degradation it produces also unfolds mainly through the domination of white bodies and minds over black bodies and minds, in a context of global coloniality that makes monopolization and degradation possible. This is why we argue for a decolonial approach to political ecology, capable of taking into account the processes of racial differentiation that make hoarding and environmental degradation possible, and the racial effects of these practices. In other words, the article shows that while the Marxist tradition, which has strongly inspired political ecology, has enabled it to study the relationship between environmental degradation and political economy, it has not been able to grasp the way in which the power relations at play around environmental degradation produce a series of differentiation and hierarchy based on race. It is this limitation of political ecology in its relationship with Marxist-inspired political economy that this article will attempt to highlight, using the case of mining modernization in the DRC, and more specifically in the Twangiza mines in Luhwinja.

The article uses data that were anthropologically collected by the authors between 2016 and 2020 on mining by multinational companies in eastern DRC. Around

100 interviews were conducted with agents of multinational companies, artisanal miners, local populations, administrative staff, local and provincial entities and political and customary authorities. These interviews focused on the reforms introduced by the Congolese government on the basis of recommendations from international financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund), on the implementation of these reforms by the Congolese government and international mining companies, and on the perception and reactions of local populations to these various measures and actions.

In the points that follow, we (a) develop the issue of mining modernization as it has unfolded on a specific site in the eastern DRC, its consequences and the reactions to which it has given rise on the ground, then (b) return to theoretical explanations of the field in terms of decolonial political ecology, global coloniality and capitalism, before (c) proposing a brief conclusion.

## 9.2 Mining Modernization and Land Grabbing in Twangiza

In the early 2000s, Africa's mining sector experienced a veritable commodity boom, driven by ever-increasing demand for mineral resources and rising commodity prices on the international market. At the time, mining-rich African countries were experiencing an influx of foreign investors (Bashizi and Geenen 2015). Numerous multinational companies invested heavily in new industrial mining projects in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Eritrea – countries that prior to 2000 were not on the list of mining destinations – but also in the DRC.

In view of this mining boom, the International Financial Institutions recommended that the Congolese government implement a policy to modernize the mining sector and open it up to private investment. The aim of this initiative was to boost the Congolese economy, restore the rule of law and the principles essential to good governance, and thereby improve living conditions and combat poverty (Mazalto 2008). As part of its mining modernization policy, the Congolese government has signed some 60 mining contracts with multinational companies (Kilosho et al. 2021). Since the early 2000s, populations in regions with high mining potential in the DRC have witnessed an influx of multinational mining companies bringing large-scale mining projects to their territory.

However, by acquiring mining concessions in the DRC, these companies have also got their hands on the area's other natural resources, often using them as they see fit (Bashizi 2020a; Bashizi et al. 2016). From the exploration phase onwards, mining companies have implemented strategies to monopolize the land of indigenous communities, often expelling them outside their operating perimeter (Geenen and Claessens 2013) and onto degraded land unsuitable for agriculture (Bashizi 2020a, b). Luhwindja, a chiefdom in eastern DRC, is one of the communities where part of the population has been deprived of several hectares of land and expelled

from its territory by a Canadian mining company called Banro for industrial gold mining.

Luhwindja is a mining zone located in the province of Sud-Kivu, in the east of the DRC, covering an area of 183 $km^2$ and inhabited by some 95,101 people, with a density of 519 inhabitants per $km^2$. The area is currently very well known both nationally and internationally, thanks to investments by the Canadian multinational Banro, as part of the government's policy to modernize the DRC's mining sector.[1] In 2005, Banro arrived in Luhwindja to begin exploration work with a view to industrial gold production. The rhetoric that the Banro company used to win the trust of the local population and gain acceptance in the community, had to do with improving people's lives and promoting local development through promises such as job creation and the granting of work permits; the rehabilitation of roads, schools, markets and stadiums; and the electrification of the chiefdom. There was even a slogan printed on the hats and T-shirts of the Banro workers, which read: "Kesho bora zaidi kuliko leo" – tomorrow will be much better than today. And, as we were often told during our interviews, a good part of the local population believed it. As one of our interviewees put it: "Yes, we had every reason to believe so. We were still in the exploration phase. The plant was still under construction and people were saying that when we started finding gold, it would still be very good."

At the end of the exploration work, Banro decided to set up its plant in the Luciga group, where the Twangiza mine is located, and opened the subsidiary Twangiza mining.[2] For several decades, the Twangiza mine was exploited by the local population, and represented the lungs of the Luhwindja chiefdom's economy.

The Twangiza mine covers almost the entire area of the Luhwindja chiefdom (180 $km^2$ out of 183 $km^2$). The area has been inhabited for several decades by populations engaged in agriculture, livestock breeding, mining and trade. These populations have built their lives, their history and their identity here, and have made it their own "territory". In order to exploit its mining concession, the Banro company proceeded to relocate the populations and destroy the local environment. These practices were accompanied by a discourse of development: professional mining in the region was supposed to bring prosperity and modernity to the local population. At the same time, the open-pit mining method used by the Banro company led to increasingly severe and often irreversible environmental effects, such as loss of vegetation, detour of rivers, water drying up, mountains being destroyed, air pollution and so on.

[1] Since 2018, Banro Resource Corporation has been restructured and is now owned by two shareholders: the Chinese Baiyin Nonferrous Limiter Group and the American Gramancy Company. Today it is Banro Corporation LtD, a subsidiary of Newco, a company based in the Cayman Islands. This information is available at https://www.thierryregards.eu/2019/06/banro-mine-extraction-or-gold-kivu/ (accessed February 28, 2020).

[2] In addition to the Luhwindja mining concession, Banro holds three other concessions in the DRC. In total, it holds a mining permit covering 2790 $km^2$. Its Luhwindja mining concession, known as Twangiza Mining, covers 180 $km^2$ of the 183 $km^2$ Luhwindja chiefdom.

### *9.2.1 Relocation and Land Grabbing*

Under the current DRC land code, the soil and subsoil belong to the State. However, the mining code takes precedence over the land code. This means that anyone who obtains a mining concession can demand the eviction of anyone who holds a land concession. It was under this law that Banro demanded the eviction of the Luhwindja peasants living on the concession it had received from the State. The artisanal diggers also had to be evicted, as they had not received the concession on which they were operating from the State.

Most of Luhwindja's population do not hold title to the land they claim to own. Many had acquired land under a customary contract and passed it on to their heirs without ever obtaining any document to prove their ownership. To claim their land rights, the Luhwindja population relied on their customary rights, even though these were not recognized by the Congolese land code. Indeed, as most of the Luhwindja population did not hold legal title to their land, they had no legal ownership of the land they were claiming. However, they did have very real customary and social rights, which have always had an impact on access to land. This is a case of legal pluralism: according to legalistic logic, Banro is the first to acquire this concession and is therefore its sole owner; but on the basis of customary law, the population has the right to use this land, which, by virtue of custom, grants them rights to the land. As the most powerful player, Banro succeeded in expropriating several households. In return, it granted minimal compensation to the expropriated households, and by way of compensation, it built them houses whose quality left much to be desired and on an isolated site deemed inappropriate by most of the population. For the latter, the development of the relocation site is seen as an insult to the people of Luhwindja, an injustice and a lack of respect and consideration on the part of Banro. As one of our interviewees put it:

> Housing had never been a problem for us in our village. Even if we had ten children or several wives, we built enough houses to accommodate everyone. We used to feel more 'Mushamuka' (responsible) when we had several houses or huts in our backyard inhabited by our children and grandsons. That's why you'll find that in every village there are at least three to four houses or huts in each yard. One for the father, one for the girls, one for the boys and another for the mother and kitchen servants. Now here I find myself confined with my eight children to a small house with two small bedrooms and a living room. It really hurts me to see the girls and boys sharing the same room, to see the eldest sleeping on mats in the living room, or to see my wife and I sharing a bed with a child [. . .]. We no longer have any privacy here, it's really scandalous the life we're forced to lead in these houses.

According to local tradition, family members do not share the same roof, but live in different houses or huts in the same courtyard. Although there were many houses in the courtyard, it was quite vast, surrounded by banana trees, with fruit trees, vegetable gardens, play areas for children and areas for livestock. All these comforts are nowhere to be found on this relocation site.

With a feeling of anger, disappointment and humiliation towards the Banro company, many farmers didn't even take possession of the housing offered. Others began sabotaging their homes by breaking down walls, tearing out windows, doors

and roofs and selling them on in neighbouring villages. Many of those who had no choice but to accept these homes in spite of themselves saw their standard of living deteriorate day by day, due to their psychic state of dissatisfaction and resentment, unemployment, hunger, the absence of replacement arable land for their agro-pastoral activities (their main sources of income), the site's isolation from the rest of the population and from school, health, commercial and religious infrastructures, etc.

### *9.2.2 Capturing Artisanal Mining Sites Through Displacement*

When Banro acquired the mining permit for the Twangiza mine, it also acquired ownership of all the artisanal mines – whether in operation or not – located within this perimeter. In 2011, when Banro began its exploitation phase, the artisanal mining activity of around 9000 people (artisanal miners and their dependents) was suspended in all artisanal mines within the perimeter of the mining concession granted to Banro.

However, since the artisanal miners had no alternative and could not live without their artisanal sites, they succeeded, with the help of civil society, in negotiating access to two artisanal mines called Kadumwa and Lukunguri. Their access to these mines was only temporary, as the Banro company could decide to take them over at any time. In its discourse, Banro seemed to minimize the number of people dependent on artisanal mining in Luhwindja and to underestimate the role of this activity in maintaining the socio-economic balance of households. And as a Banro agent told us:

> The relocation of artisanal miners to Kadumwa and Lukunguri will not be a problem for Banro. When we took over the Mbwega site, most of the artisanal miners found other occupations in other sectors, and many of them went to Bukavu to look for work. On the Kadumwa or Lukunguri sites, there are only a hundred or two hundred people left [. . .] so we're not going to sacrifice the development of the whole community for these few individuals. These people will move away from these sites when the time is right, and nothing will stop Banro from doing its job.

At the end of the study we conducted with the Organisation Gouvernance et Paix in 2015, the Kadumwa and Lukungurhi sites had a total of 46 wells, 42 of which were in Kadumwa and 4 in Lukungurhi (36 other wells in Lukungurhi had been buried by landslides). We counted 2600 artisanal miners on these sites – a generally young population with an average age of 35. There were also almost 35,100 people directly dependent on this activity. Based on these figures, it can be estimated that people living from artisanal mining would represent around 38% of Luhwindja's population (estimated at 95,206). During this period, average daily production from these two sites alone was estimated at 39.9289 grams of gold, or 1756.8716 USD (at a price of 44 USD per gram). This gives an idea of how much the mining activity contributed to the household income of the population of Luhwindja and neighboring chiefdoms.

Which, by inference, means that the relocation of artisanal miners has had a severe socio-economic impact on both the miners active on these sites and their dependents. Banro's rhetoric about promoting local development was ultimately a fiction and a ruse used by the mining company and the Congolese government to grab land from local populations.

## 9.3 Mining and Environmental Degradation

A large part of the local population has come to realize that, over time, Banro's industrial mining activities have become a real obstacle not only to the access and sustainability of agrarian and mining resources, but also to water and forest resources. In fact, the Twangiza mining concession granted to Banro contains not only gold ores, but also forest areas, groundwater resources, rivers and several water wells used by local communities for household needs and various works. By acquiring this concession, Banro also gained control over some of these resources, which have subsequently deteriorated as a result of industrial mining activities since the exploration phase.

### *9.3.1 Degradation of Water Resources*

Our interviews reveal that during the exploration phase, the Banro company had to carry out drilling work. It had to drill to depths of over 500 m to collect samples of the deposits. This work seems to have caused some environmental damage. A local resident recounts:

> During the drilling operations, Banro's big rigs would drive pipes into the ground, reaching depths of 600 meters. The pipes came out with soil samples for the laboratory. Some time later, however, it was noticed that the flow of water from sources close to the boreholes diminished, and the water gradually stopped flowing [. . .]. When Banro's machines sank the pipes into the ground, they sometimes reached and crossed the water table. This diverted the flow of groundwater that supplied the water sources.

These are the explanations given by the inhabitants of Luhwindja for the phenomenon of water sources drying up as a result of the drilling works. These explanations were supported by several engineers working in the field of water addiction in Luhwindja. During this period of water shortage – which is said to have lasted more than 5 years before an alternative solution was proposed – users of the dried-up water sources were forced to fetch water elsewhere, often from very distant locations.

Our interviewees also pointed out that, with the presence of the Banro company, the risk of pollution from mining activity was threefold: the risk of water pollution from cyanide, the risk of water pollution from the discharge of waste into watercourses, and the risk of water pollution from mercury. In its gold extraction process,

Banro uses cyanide to recover fine gold particles from crushed rock. Once used, the cyanide is discharged into an artificial lake built on a diverted river that collects toxic wastewater from the Banro plant. This is known locally as the "cyanide lake" or "Jubi Lake". The release of cyanide into the environment is a source of great concern to the local community, despite the fact that it is retained in a tank deemed sufficiently safe by the company's agents.

A large part of the population of Luwhindja believes that the chemicals contained in this water have consequences for their health, vegetation, water resources and air. This community has never stopped sounding the alarm, but no one has intervened on their behalf on this issue. As one farmer put it: "We've seen cows die in the field after drinking water from Lake Jubi. This lake is a real danger for us. Sooner or later, the toxic water stored there will cause serious tragedies in this village". Another complained:

> Our so-called drinking water sources are no longer drinking water. They are in the process of being contaminated by the infiltration of toxic water from the cyanide lake. Even if Banro denies it to this day, sooner or later she'll prove us right [. . .]. Our misfortune is that we are defenceless.

It's true that we don't know how to limit the damage caused by cyanide, because its chemical degradation uses products that are also pollutants (Amegbey and Adimado 2003). Some people spread chlorine in polluted water to destroy the cyanide, but this is also secondary pollution (ibid.). "And even if the damage were not evident today, what will happen to this environment after Banro's mining contract comes to an end?" asks one farmer. The fact remains that waste rock from former gold mines is rarely inert. They continue to permanently and dramatically pollute surface and groundwater in particular, and the environment in general (Libaude et al. 1992; Cottard and Marroncle 2001).

### *9.3.2 Degradation of Forest Areas and Microclimate*

The presence of the Banro company's mining activities in the Luwhindja chiefdom has been a major factor in the degradation of the area's forest cover.

Established on the Mbwega mountain, a forest area already threatened by artisanal miners and populations in search of charcoal, the arrival of the Banro company has accelerated the process of deforestation of the Luhwindja forest cover. First of all, in order to reach the gold-bearing vein, the Banro company began by felling trees over large areas, before uncovering the ground with heavy machinery that tore up everything in its path. Then, having evicted thousands of households from its perimeter and relocated some of them, the latter are finding it so difficult to access the land that they have started to explore the forests. Dislocated from their living environment, dispossessed of their land and deprived of their means of subsistence, Luhwindja households have been forced to resort to the forest, clearing areas for farming and grazing their livestock. Others are involved in charcoal production and

marketing, in the hope of ensuring their families' economic security. The agricultural land developed in the forest is highly fertile, specifically for the production of potatoes and corn, the staple crops of the region. This land has attracted farmers from other villages.

Directly or indirectly, our interviews show that the Banro company has contributed to the accelerated opening up of forest areas, the effect of which is now being felt on the micro-climate. This can be seen in the major disruption of seasons, temperatures and rainfall observed over the past two decades. Although it is well known that climate disruption in a given environment is not always caused by deforestation in that environment – the latter can also be affected by climate disruption from elsewhere – but since forests play an important role in maintaining and regulating the microclimate in an environment, it is possible that the loss of forest in the environment in question exposes it to microclimate degradation, or accelerates the process and sometimes even contributes to the phenomenon. Luhwindja's climatic situation is not unique. In recent years, the phenomenon of climatic degradation has been observed in several other areas of the Kivu region. However, according to the perceptions of the people of Luhwindja, there is a link between the climatic degradation of their environment and the disappearance of the forest there.

Finally, we note that, at the outset, the people of Luhwindja believed in Banro's discourse on development, and counted on the company's promises to meet the challenges linked to employment, and road, educational and health infrastructures. However, some of these promises never materialized, and those that did were only partially or inadequately fulfilled. Thus, disappointment, suffering and indignation are the feelings of many people in the Luwhindja chiefdom towards the Banro company. As we heard our interviewees say several times: "Banro is lying to people, it is a big problem." Very few of its promises have been fulfilled. Some of our interviewees believe that if Banro has initiated some actions in Luhwindja, such as the rehabilitation of certain stretches of road, it is because this was obviously in its own interest. The best roads in Luhwindja are those leading to Banro's factory. The other roads in the chiefdom are hardly ever used by Banro's machines, so they did not attract Banro's interest in rehabilitating them.

## 9.4 Decolonial Political Ecology, Global Coloniality and Capitalism

While the case of Luhwindja (a) demonstrates the consequences of land grabbing through mining, it also (b) shows how these are part of a form of global coloniality with (c) racializing effects in the differentiated exposure of bodies to these consequences.

### 9.4.1 Mining Modernization

From a political ecology perspective, the Luhwindja case illustrates a situation in which there are winners (the Banro company, the Congolese state), and losers (the population). The practices leading to environmental degradation reveal several types of exploitation: of man over nature, of large economic players over small local players, but also of one way of life over another (modern and productivist vs. traditional and subsistence-based). And the analysis of the local cannot be made without an analysis of scale, which notes the irruption and stranglehold of the global on the local. But it is also worth noting how Banro manages to impose itself on the local: through a series of discourses on development and modernization. Indeed, since the 2000s, the Congolese government has embarked on a modernization process, with the recommendation and support of development cooperation institutions. So-called "modernity revolution" programs have been put in place, based on a capitalist rationale and the pre-eminence of growth.

This discourse on modernization (Peemans 2002) is based on the idea that local practices are "traditional", and therefore archaic, bad, inefficient and in need of modernization. This discourse attempts to discourage the artisanal mining system, which is seen as less effective for economic growth, as it generates low incomes and is difficult for the state to control. This led to the promotion of a so-called "modern" system, i.e. industrial mining, which offers intensive production. However, the process of modernizing the mining sector has been "insecure", as it has not been able to promote people's well-being and guarantee sustainable development, especially for the poor. The race for modernization and economic growth has therefore been at the root of an "insecure modernity" (Bréda et al. 2013). It is insecure because it has disrupted the balance of territories and negatively transformed the lives of populations, generally the poorest, creating psychic and social suffering.

In order to gain acceptance for and pursue a modernization process – despite its potential to create insecure modernity – the players involved in mining modernization programs have resorted to a certain discursive tactic: they consider natural resources as autonomous elements within a territory. However, the lives of local populations are not organized in this way. Natural resources are not perceived as a series of elements considered separately. The environment exists as a whole that supports economic security and daily life. By disconnecting natural resources and the environment, the discourse on modernization no longer enables people to perceive the connections that exist between different natural resources, and their relationship in terms of environmental degradation and effects on their lives.

This discourse on modernization only promotes the idea that the industrial exploitation of mining resources results in the creation of wealth, which is necessary to solve the country's economic problems and meet the social needs of the population. Mining modernization has thus seen mining as a separate resource, and on this basis has implemented policies that have lost sight of the other components of the territory, including other natural resources. This modernization disconnects mining resources from the territory as a whole, making degradation possible.

Modernization presents itself as a form of emerging capitalism, but one that destroys the territory and social harmony. We must therefore ask ourselves whether modernization is necessary, or whether it merely destroys the foundations of societies. And yet, the discourse on modernization is still active and well received. Indeed, it is not at all obvious how perverse this form of modernization is, given that it promotes a dominant discourse on development that attempts to veil the negative realities of modernization on the environment and people's lives.

### *9.4.2 From Modernization to Global Coloniality*

Such a discourse on development presents development first and foremost as economic growth, but with the need for populations to break out of the mental categories of traditional societies and adopt a mentality described as rational, and for political institutions to reform themselves in the image of Western institutions. In this modernization process, the role of the state is to impose the norms of the "new order of things" on the traditional population. The state must build infrastructure and create favourable conditions for growth by facilitating private enterprise, recognized as the real engines of growth. Lastly, the modernization project is legitimized by reference to the population's well-being, and the idea that growth will have a positive impact on the general population.

In the field of natural resources, this again translates into the idea that natural/mineral resources can be exploited for the benefit of a population, as in the discourse of valorisation. But this exploitation is not carried out by this population. Typically, it is carried out by private companies facilitated by the state, or by state-owned enterprises. The population can only hope that the taxes paid by the companies will be used to fund public services, or that they can be hired, or indirectly benefit from the company's presence. As in most countries in the world, the state is the owner of the subsoil, and it is the state that decides on concessions and royalties. The mining activities pursued by local populations are often devalued or even criminalized. In order to contribute to development, it is said that these artisanal activities need to be "modernized" and "formalized".

While modernity as a historical period was made possible in large part by colonial practices, modernization as an ideological process and its discourse on development are closely linked to the question of global coloniality, in different respects: through its capacity to hierarchize people and lifestyles, through its capacity to impose a certain type of relationship between people and nature, and through its capacity to organize production. Global coloniality refers to the persistence of colonial forms of domination, which did not die out after the end of direct colonialism, and which can still be seen in the articulation between the place of the periphery in the international organization of labour and global racial or ethnic hierarchies. Global coloniality is revealed through the cultural, political or economic domination exercised by dominant racial or ethnic groups over dominated racial or ethnic groups.

In the case of Luwhindja, global coloniality is what makes social and environmental degradation possible. The Banro company's discourse on development and modernization is based on this idea of the hierarchy of people and lifestyles: the Western standard is set as a model and internalized by the population, who initially believe the company's promises and allow themselves to be subjugated and stripped. Reality, however, soon catches up with them. Global coloniality is also what enables a certain discourse on nature, based on the modern Western idea of the separability of man and nature, to partition the various constituent elements of the environment and consider them solely as exploitable resources. Finally, for over a century, global coloniality has organized the international division of labour: the periphery extracts resources, the centre adds value.

### *9.4.3 Political Ecology, Global Coloniality and the Effects of Race*

Political ecology is "a scientific current, mainly Anglo-Saxon, whose field of study lies at the crossroads between ecology, environmental policies and the populations that transform environments and are the object of policies" (Arnauld de Sartre et al. 2014, 24). It links political economy, stakeholder action and the environment. Taking into account actors' perceptions and their cultural filters, the political ecology approach makes it possible to analyse how power relations create environment-society interactions and how discourses or narratives construct truths about the environment and development (ibid.). Environmental changes are then the results of power relations that affect actors and their living environments (Robbins 2012, 3).

In this sense, the political ecology approach criticizes neo-Malthusian ideas that attempt to explain these environmental changes through demography (Gautier and Benjaminsen 2012). It also criticizes theories of modernization and economic efficiency, trying to show that environmental changes are also the result of the inappropriate adoption of modern economic, management, exploitation and conservation techniques (ibid.). Political ecologists thus support the general theories that "the accumulation of capital necessarily weakens the ecosystems on which it depends. These theories demonstrate the difficulties that environmental variability represents for capitalists" (Robbins 2012, 23).

But while political ecology is concerned with how power relations shape environment-society relations, it has everything to gain from taking into account this particular type of domination – coloniality – which is based on racial distinction, and which also produces racial effects. These racial effects are perceptible on at least two levels. Firstly, the discourse that makes global coloniality possible is based on a legitimization of exploitation based on skin colour. Secondly, the effects of this coloniality are expressed as suffering which, in this case, has a colour: black.

It is true that this discourse legitimizing exploitation on the basis of racial differentiation no longer really applies, but it no longer needs to be expressed,

insofar as it has already been sufficiently internalized as a result of repeated practices producing racial differentiation and hierarchies. The racial effects of global coloniality are expressed through the pain, fatigue and suffering of black people affected in their lives, their bodies and their material conditions.

## 9.5 Conclusion

This article has shown how mining modernization in the DRC, and more specifically in Twangiza, has led to the relocation and land grabbing of poor local populations. The grabbing of artisanal mining sites through the eviction of populations in the name of mining modernization promoted by international financial institutions and applied by the Congolese government has been at the root of environmental degradation: the degradation of water resources, forest areas and the micro-climate. This whole process has led to the disillusionment of the population in the face of the unfulfilled promises of modernization.

This environmental degradation coupled with the suffering of the population has made possible a mining modernization that is part of global coloniality as a modern global power structure that has been in place since the dawn of Euro-North-American-centric modernity and functions as a matrix of invisible power that shapes and sustains asymmetrical power relations between North and South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Certainly, for the poor populations of Africa expelled by multinationals in the name of international mining modernization policies, the major challenge is to show the relationships between these modernization policies, environmental degradation and relations of exploitation at different scales. However, this political ecology of mining modernization should not ignore both the global coloniality that underpins this modernization on a global scale and its racial effects. In other words, to think today about the relationship between capitalism and the degradation of nature from the perspective of Marxist political ecology is to deepen the theoretical proposal of this article: the need for a decolonial political ecology.

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# Chapter 10
# The Irish Mistake: Marx, Ireland, and Non-European Societies


**Matthieu de Nanteuil**

**Abstract** Matthieu de Nanteuil examines Marx's relationship with Ireland. He shows that the Irish case enabled Marx to develop his dual critique of capitalism and colonialism. While Marx's analysis of Irish class relations is not entirely convincing, his description of a society emptied of its own forces under the impact of colonialism – literally "depopulated" – is visionary. In this respect, Marx develops a narrative that links economic critique to the symbolic sphere. There is, however, a flaw in this approach. By attempting to show that colonialism was simply the extension of capitalism beyond national borders, and by equating colonial practices with the domination of one mode of production over another, Marx overlooks a dimension that is essential to understanding colonial brutality in Ireland: the religious dimension, which consisted of subjecting a Catholic population (the Irish) to Protestant tutelage (the English). This flaw is the reason why Marx underestimated the cultural component of colonialism, as well as the diversity of cultural traditions as a means of resistance to colonization. This limitation should not, however, lead us to believe that Marx ignored non-European societies. His attention to detail, visible in many places in his analysis of the Irish case, testifies to a rare sensitivity to geographical and cultural differences. Marx was looking for a "general principle" that would enable him to analyse colonialism in the age of the Industrial Revolution, without seeing that this concern for the "general" was at the same time an obstacle to the full recognition of non-European singularities.

**Keywords** Marxism · Ireland · Population principle · Colonialism · Eurocentrism · Decolonization · Religion

In a famous text on the "proletarian revolution", in which he justified the use of state violence, Lenin responded to one of his main political opponents, Kautsky, who defended the democratic path to socialism. He wrote: "The learned M. Kautsky could have observed this law of bourgeois democracy on the occasion of the Dreyfus

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affair in republican France, the lynching of negroes and internationalists in the democratic republic of America, *by the example of Ireland and Ulster in democratic England*, the persecutions and massacres organised against the Bolsheviks in April 1917 in the Russian democratic republic. I deliberately borrow these examples not only from the time of war, but also from the pre-war period, from the time of peace" (Lenin 1972, 52).[1]

We were in the years following the October Revolution. Ireland ("Ireland and Ulster", in Lenin's words) was now summoned to the ranks of the greatest tragedies that shook the world in the nineteenth century. It is on a par with slavery in the New World – the lynching depicting the real situation of African-Americans, even *after* the Civil War – or the Dreyfus Affair – the manifestation of anti-Semitism at the heart of the *secular* Republic. But what do we know about this oft-mentioned 'Ireland'? And how does Ireland appear in Marx's own text? What treatment does Marx give it or what reading grid does he use to evoke it? Are we sure, for example, that what he says about it is in line with the society of the time?

These are the questions we aim to answer in this chapter. In so doing, we shall see how Marx constructs his critique of colonialism, but also what its limits are. To put in a nutshell, this critique situates colonialism as an extension of capitalism – what he came to call imperialism – but this inaugural gesture leads him to obscure the specifically cultural dimension of colonial conquest. This obscuring can be seen in Marx and Engels'silence on the religious dimension of colonisation, which ensured the undivided domination of Protestant England over Catholic Ireland. It is at the root of Marx's misunderstandings of non-European societies, the Asian ones in particular (Saïd 2003).

## 10.1 "To Hasten the Catastrophe of Official England": From Simple Evocation to Revolutionary Watchword

As is often the case with Marx, the analytical planes are intermingled. This applies not only to the scientific disciplines he draws on in the course of his work (philosophy, sociology, economics, history, etc.). Above all, it concerns the *variety of narrative registers* he uses to understand a given issue – in this case, Ireland in the broadest sense. This variety is visible at three levels: a purely 'evocative' register (the country is mentioned as one illustration among others), a descriptive register (its characteristics are described in detail), and a strategic and polemical register (Ireland

[1] This way of haranguing the crowds by mentioning Ireland echoes Marx's harangue in Capital: "Mutato nomine de ta fabula narratur! ["Change your name, it will be your story", quote from Horace, Liv. I, satire I, v. 69] Instead of slave trade, read labour market; instead of Virginia and Kentucky, read Ireland and the agricultural districts of England, Scotland and Wales; instead of Africa, read Germany" (Marx 1969, 202).

is resituated in a chain of dominations and constituted as the starting point of the world revolution):

– *an "evocative" register.* The first time Ireland appears – in the *Gründrisse*, a series of texts dating from 1857 to 1859 –, it is briefly mentioned in the context of a development on the various strategies for colonial conquest. This may seem a little late. Ireland is absent from the writings of the late 1840s and early 1850s, even though this period corresponds exactly to the Great Irish Famine (1845–1852), the greatest humanitarian disaster of the nineteenth century in Western Europe.[2] In fact, Marx only raised this issue at a time when he was trying to sketch out the contours of a general economy. It should be noted that Ireland was always seen as a negative extension of England, which was itself constructed as the world centre of capitalist domination. In Ireland, the colonial conquest was therefore conceived from the outset as *the domination of one mode of production over another*. This is particularly noticeable in the following extract:

> However, in the trivial form in which they were raised above, they can also be settled with a word. In all conquests, there are three possibilities. The conquering people imposes its own mode of production on the conquered people (e.g. the English in Ireland in this century, partly in India); or it allows the old mode of production to survive and is content to levy tribute (e.g. the Turks and Romans); or there is a reciprocal action which gives rise to something new, to a synthesis (partly in the Germanic conquests). In all cases, the mode of production – either that of the conquering people or that of the conquered people, or even that which results from the fusion of the two – is decisive for the new distribution that emerges. Although the new distribution is a precondition of the new period of production, it is itself a product of production, not only of historical production in general, but of this or that particular historical production (Marx 1963a, 251).[3]

[2] From 1845 onwards, mildew ravaged almost all potato crops in a country that depended entirely on potatoes. But the Great Famine was not just a "natural event". Initially *contained* by the English Conservatives, who tried to help the Irish population by importing grain, it was *amplified* by the liberal policy that took over in London from June 1846, "a policy blinded by the dogma of 'laissez-faire', [which] was characterised by the most obtuse good conscience, the most total improvidence, the most deplorable narrow-mindedness combined with the most stubborn national egoism" (Joannon 2006, 258).

[3] The other instance of "Ireland" at this time is found in a footnote: in a text published 2 years later, Marx criticised the analyses of William Petty, "the father of English political economy" (Marx 1963b, p. 306). A seventeenth-century author largely ignored by the general public, Petty had been interested long before Smith in the division of labour and the saving of time required for production ("His genial audacity is revealed, for example, in his proposal to transfer all the inhabitants and movable property of Ireland and Upper Scotland to the rest of Great Britain. This would save labour time, increase the productive force of labour, and make the king and his subjects richer and stronger" (ibid.). By referring to this, Marx shows that nothing can stop liberal economic thinkers, who are entirely focused on progress in the division of labour, even when this might require the massive displacement of populations. A little further on, unmasking the identity of the descendants of Petty who dominate the Whig wing of English political life, he reminds us that Petty was inclined to "pillage" in Ireland, under the "aegis of Cromwell", then under cover of the achievements of the "glorious revolution". In Marx, the link between Ireland, plunder and the "law of population" is constant (see below).

– *a descriptive register.* With these elements in place, Marx goes on to engage in an in-depth descriptive analysis in *Capital*, combining a phenomenological approach to the experience of workers with an analysis of their objective situation, with the help of numerous demographic and economic data. This second aspect is amply deployed in the seventh section of chapter XXV of Book I of *Capital*, entitled "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation": after examining the effects of accumulation on the English proletariat in general, he reviews a dozen English counties and then delves into the Irish case. This approach complements the look he took at working conditions in chapter X on "The working day". Referring to the Irish bakers, he wrote: "In the years 1850–60, bakers' boys in Ireland organised large meetings at their own expense to protest against night work and Sunday work [. . .]. [. . .] As a result of this movement, exclusive day work was established in Wexford, Kilkenny, Clonnel, Waterford, etc." (Marx 1969, 192). Marx completes this description by insisting on the way in which the bosses tried to repress these popular movements:

> In Limerick, where it was generally agreed that the workers were suffering beyond measure, the movement failed against the opposition of the master bakers and especially the milling bakers. The Limerick example had a knock-on effect on Ennis and Tipperary. In Cork, where public hostility was at its most intense, the masters defeated the movement by dismissing the workers. In Dublin, they put up the most stubborn resistance and, by pursuing the main leaders of the agitation, forced the rest to give in and submit to night and Sunday work (ibid.).

– *a register that is indissociably strategic and polemical*. Lastly, a final narrative register completes the previous two: it is particularly present in the Marx-Engels correspondence and, more specifically, in the letters of 1870. These letters still contain many descriptive aspects: Marx is constantly on the lookout for information and details, drawing on extracts from his diary, recent writings and so on. But little by little, as tensions within the First International increased,[4] Ireland's status really changed. It was no longer a question of evoking the harmfulness of capitalism or dissecting its inner workings: perceived by Marx as the weakest link in capitalist domination, Ireland became the scene of a radical reversal, the starting point of the world revolution. The narrative is completely transformed: the term itself designates less an object than a watchword, less a signified than a signifier. Let's read it instead: "You can see straight away that I didn't let myself be guided by feelings of humanity alone. There are other reasons at play. To speed up the social evolution of Europe, we must hasten the catastrophe of official England. To do this, we must strike at Ireland: it is its weakest point. The loss of Ireland would mean the end of the British "Empire" and the class struggle in

[4]The International Working Men's Association was founded in London in 1864. From 1869 onwards, it was divided between a "centralised" approach, close to Marx, and an "anti-authoritarian" approach, close to Bakunin. The repression of the Paris Commune proved fatal to the movement, although it continued until 1876. In a recent article, Martin Deleixhe shows that Marx "made a clear theoretical about-turn on the subject of Ireland's political and economic situation and its importance in the international class struggle after 1867" (Deleixhe 2020, 309).

> England, which up to now has been chronic but has not emerged from its lethargy, would take on acute forms. But England is the world capital of landlordism and capitalism" (Marx 1984a, 312). And further on:
>
> After years of dealing with the Irish question, I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and it will be decisive for the labour movement all over the world), *must be struck not in England, but in Ireland alone*.
>
> On 1 January 1870, the General Council endorsed a confidential circular I had written in French (only French newspapers have repercussions in England, not German ones) dealing with the relationship between the struggle for Irish national independence and the emancipation of the working class, and consequently with the position to be adopted by the International Association on the Irish question.
>
> I will give you here very briefly only the essential bridges. Ireland is the bulwark of the English landed aristocracy. The exploitation of this country is not only the main source of its material wealth. It is its greatest moral strength. It represents, in fact, the domination of England over Ireland. Ireland is therefore the great means by which the English aristocracy maintains its domination *in England itself* (Marx 1984b, 343–344, emphasis added).

Thus, Ireland is not only a possible place for the revolution, but the nodal point where it must concentrate all its efforts. The interest of such an analysis lies in the way Marx moves successively from one register to another and simultaneously opens up several perspectives, without exhausting them entirely. How can we understand him?

## 10.2 The Gradual Construction of a Negative "Ideal-Type": Between Class Relations (Antagonism) and Long-Term Analysis of Capitalism (Depopulation)

There is no obvious answer to this question, so we need to develop some working hypotheses. The one we wish to put forward in this chapter is the following: Ireland is the very stage on which Marx elaborates, indeed experiments with, his dual critique of capitalism and colonialism. To account for this, let us first recall the extent to which modern Ireland was built under the yoke of English colonial domination. There's no need to rehash the history of this island of a thousand faces. In a leading book on the subject, Pierre Joannon writes about eighteenth-century Ireland in a chapter entitled "L'Irlande coloniale" ("Colonial Ireland"):

> The eighteenth century in Ireland, whose birth certificate was the signing of the Treaty of Limerick and whose death certificate was the passing of the Act of Union, was the golden century of the undivided domination of the Protestant colonial *Ascendancy*. If it had to be summed up in one sentence, it would be that of Lord Chancellor Bowes: 'The law does not presuppose the existence of what is called a Roman Catholic Irishman'. The law in question was the civil law: that which specified the extent of the rights and freedoms attached to the status of subject of Her Gracious Majesty, which only the Protestant faithful of the established Church were entitled to avail themselves of. Catholics, and to a lesser degree

> non-conformist Protestants, were subject to a series of criminal laws that constituted the most meticulous code of proscription, discrimination and exclusion that ever sprang from the fussy mind of a legislator determined to separate the wheat from the chaff. Depending on whether it was civil or criminal, the law drew the dividing line between Protestant colonisers and Catholic colonised: for the former, dignity, rights and freedom; for the latter, opprobrium, incapacity and servitude. The former existed in the full light of day, while the latter were pushed back into the shadows of non-being (Joannon 2006, 124).

Ireland was not the only English colony, but it was the closest, and also the most rebellious. It was all the more emblematic because the English used Ireland to "test" the brutality of their colonial system. Finally, Ireland was the only intra-European colony. All these factors were present in Marx's mind when he took a close interest in the situation.

### *10.2.1 Classes and Class Relations in Ireland*

What Marx is developing in Ireland is first and foremost the possibility of extending his own theory of social classes to societies other than those in which the European Industrial Revolution was born (France, Germany, Belgium). But it is also the opportunity to put such a theory to the test of the colonial fact. In words that are reminiscent of current events in Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Marx and Engels – and here the dialogue between them is particularly important – emphasise two trends which, although opposed, seem to reflect a profound transformation of Irish society. On the one hand, they evoke the exponential growth of commercial activity, which goes hand in hand with the intensity of urban life, the depopulation of the countryside and the militarisation of public space by British troops. This time it is Engels who speaks out:

> Ireland's trade has grown enormously in the last fourteen years. The Dublin gateway is unrecognisable. On the quayside in Queenstown, I heard a lot of Italian spoken, as well as Serbian, French and Danish or Norwegian. There are indeed a good many 'Italians' in Cork, as the comedy says. But the countryside itself seems literally depopulated, and one is immediately led to think that there are far too few men. The state of war is also obvious everywhere. The Royal Irish [British troops stationed in Ireland] are everywhere beating the pavement in groups, cutlasses and sometimes revolvers in their belts and truncheons openly in their hands, in Dublin a battery was driving through the city, which I have never seen in England, and soldiers everywhere and everywhere (Engels 1984a, 177).

On the other hand, they go on to talk about the omnipotence of the landlords who, despite the Gladstone Act which sought to destabilise them, continued to exercise absolute control over tenancies. By assimilating the latter to "precarious tenures" (Engels 1984b, 319–320), Engels is even explicitly referring to the feudal world, which would have continued to this day, as Marx himself would defend in his preface to the *Gründrisse* (1857–1859). But there is something implicit in such a reading: in Ireland as in England, in the feudal past as in the capitalist present, in Europe as in the regions subject to colonial rule, class relations function in an

identical way. A few months later, Marx reinforced this analysis, while adding an additional dimension, that of "depopulation", to which we shall return later:

> You will also receive, later this week or next, the *Landlord and Tenant Right in Ireland, Reports by Poor Law Inspectors. 1870.* And also the *Agricultural Holdings in Ireland. Returns. 1870*. The Poor Law Inspectors' reports are interesting. They also show, among other things, as do their *Reports on Agriculture Wages* that you had, that since the famine, *open struggle has begun between labourers on the one hand, and farmers and tenants on the other*. [. . .] On the whole, the fact that I reported in my passage on Ireland is confirmed, namely that the increase in wages was more than offset by the rise in food prices, and that – with the exception of the autumn period – a relative surplus of labourers was really built up, despite emigration. In the *Landlords and Tenant Right Reports*, it is important to underline the fact that the progress of machinery transformed a mass of handloom weavers into paupers (Marx 1984c, 351–352, emphasis added).

This long passage is decisive, not so much for Marx's account of the Irish situation, but for what it tells us about his own analysis. At first glance, one might expect Marx to denounce the omnipotence of the landlords: there was no doubt about it in his time, since the landlords were the representatives of capital in the rural world.[5] English in their vast majority, they constituted the most obvious, the most "objective" side of domination. But Marx was interested here in the conflict between two other actors: the "peasants and farmers" on the one hand, and the "agricultural workers" on the other. In practice, the peasants and farmers are the small Irish land tenants who, bound by asymmetrical leases that tie their hands, are responsible for the actual exploitation of the land; the agricultural labourers constitute the mass of precarious workers, the Irish agricultural proletariat so to speaks. Without status or income, they wander from farm to farm in search of a subsistence income.

By emphasising the conflict between these two social groups, Marx achieves several things in one: (a) beyond the general observation that capitalism fractures society, he shows that this fracture occurs within Irish society, which is essentially rural; (b) it is a struggle between the lowest social strata or, more precisely, a struggle in which the most precarious must turn against those who directly dominate them; (c) this struggle is open-ended: Marx describes a potentially destructive process, while leaving open the horizon of revolution. It should be noted, however, that Marx interprets colonial domination only in terms of the domination of one mode of production over another. Admittedly, the point is to identify the way in which class antagonism is displaced and prolonged under colonialism. However, his interpretation of the colonial phenomenon is that of an extension of capitalist domination to other regions of the globe, not that of colonialism as a separate socio-historical phenomenon with characteristics distinct from those of capitalism. His analysis of class relations in nineteenth-century Ireland is situated within such a vision: it extends what was already at work in *Les luttes de classe en France* (1852), without succeeding in isolating features that would differentiate it.

[5] In a passage already quoted, Marx writes that "England is the world capital of landlordism and capitalism" (Marx 1984a, 312).

Such an approach would be open to criticism, and there has been no shortage of it. The class sociology of Irish society corresponds only imperfectly to the way Marx sought to portray it. By not addressing the link between "farmers and peasants" on the one hand and "landlords" on the other, Marx sidesteps one of the Gordian knots of colonial domination, namely the *subjection of land tenants* to English colonial power[6]; he also underestimates the precariousness of their living conditions and, more broadly, the *common condition* they shared with many agricultural workers, due to a profoundly deteriorated economic situation, especially after the Great Famine; finally, he fails to see the *cooperative relationships* between these social groups in the face of colonial domination, particularly around the local churches (cf. below). If we were to leave it at that, his analysis would be limited in scope. And the slogan he gives to the International – "I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England must be struck [. . .] in Ireland alone" – would be of little interest.[7]

### *10.2.2 A New Population Law?*[8]

It is at this point, however, that a completely different perspective emerges, one which partially contradicts the analysis in terms of class relations: Marx shows that the ultimate aim of colonial domination in Ireland is the "clearing" of the countryside, in other words the creation of a relative surplus of agricultural workers. This surplus never ceases to grow, so that the Irish population finds itself outnumbered on its own soil. Clearly, the colonial conquest goes well beyond class antagonism: it is a matter of bleeding a country of its own population, by creating socio-economic conditions (progressive concentration of land) and socio-legal conditions (asymmetrical leases) such that agricultural workers have less and less to occupy their arms. . . In the case of Ireland, Marx uses the vocabulary of "population drain" [bloodsetting]

[6] Pierre Joannon wrote: "The social climate was at the heart of the problem. Excellent in England, where a fruitful collaboration between farmers and landlords was developing, it was degraded in Ireland, where the exactions of some were matched by the apathy of others. No one invested in agriculture, the peasant because he couldn't afford it or for fear of being sacked or having his rent increased, the landlord because he might tomorrow be expropriated by another rebellion. The main concern of landowners [. . .] was to get rich as quickly as possible, by committing as little capital as possible" (Joannon 2006, 167).

[7] Contrary to Marx's vision, Joannon insists on the heterogeneity of the Irish rural world under colonialism: "We can see that the Protestant landed aristocracy was hardly more homogeneous than the Catholic peasantry. Alongside the absentee landlord, the non-resident owner of several thousand acres, there were many small hobereaux, middlemen who held the tenants to ransom, and squires obliged to stay on the land from which they derived the bare necessities of life [. . .]. The most hated by the peasants were these little country gentlemen, who leased the land to the large landowners for a lump sum and sublet it to them at exorbitant prices" (Joannon 2006, 136–137).

[8] On the use of the concept of "population law"in the European context, see Etienne Balibar's contribution below.

and "depopulation", constantly weighing up the decrease in population against the increase in income and profits:

> England, a country of developed capitalist production, and above all an industrial country, would have died of a *population drain* such as Ireland has suffered. But Ireland is now no more than an agricultural district of England, separated from her by a wide canal, and which supplies her with wheat, wool, cattle, and recruits for her industry and her army. *Depopulation* has taken much of the land out of cultivation, has considerably diminished the product of the soil, and, in spite of the increase in the area devoted to the rearing of cattle, has brought about in some of its branches an absolute decline, and in others a progress scarcely worthy of mention, for it is constantly interrupted by setbacks. Nevertheless, as the population has *declined*, the income from the soil and the profits of farmers have *risen* steadily, the latter, however, with less regularity (Marx 1969, 517, emphasis added).

Colonial domination does not simply consist in organising or reinforcing the exploitation of local labour power: it consists in turning it into a useless, supernumerary force. Here, Marx's portrait of societies under colonial rule becomes clearer: it is not so much that of a *subjugated* society as that of a society *drained* of its own strength. The Irish countryside is seen as an immense available territory, a kind of automatic garden ("an agricultural district of England", see above) that expansionist capitalism should be able to use without limit. Faced with such a development, the only way out is emigration, i.e. the forced displacement of the colonised population outside its own territory, another name for "banishment". Of course, the exploitation of rural workers does not cease, but it is supplanted by a phenomenon that both legitimizes and overtakes it, creating the spectre of a "society without humans", at the disposal of a foreign power. Without saying so, Marx here renews his first analyses of subjugation, as the experience of a consciousness alienated from itself. With colonialism, however, it is no longer the worker but society as a whole that discovers itself "emptied of its own substance" and "alienated from itself". In contemporary terms, we might say that Marx envisages, if not the end of *the* world, at least the end of *a* world. In the conclusion of the passage devoted to Ireland in *Capital*, the tone of his text is somewhat *frightening*, combining the rigour of economic analysis with the best features of social painting:

> The leonine law that in Ireland, as in England and Scotland, an imperceptible number of large landowners carve out for themselves from the annual income of the soil is so *monstrous* that the wisdom of the English State finds it advisable not to provide the same statistical material on the distribution of land rent as it does on the distribution of profit. [. . .] The fact is that as the population in Ireland decreases, the land rent increases; that depopulation 'does good' to the lords of the soil, and therefore to the soil, and consequently to the people, who are only an accessory. He therefore declared that there were still too many Irish in Ireland and that the flood of emigrants was not taking enough away. To be completely happy, this country would have to be rid of at least a third of a million peasants. [. . .] Between 1851 and 1861, concentration eliminated only some of the farms in the three categories of 1 to 15 ares, and it is these that must disappear before the others. We thus obtain an excess of 307,058 farmers and, assuming that their families consist on average of four heads, a figure that is too modest, there are now 1,228,232 'supernumeraries'. [. . .] And, as appetite comes with eating, the big landowners will soon discover that with 3,5 million inhabitants, Ireland is still miserable, and miserable because it is overloaded with Irish. It will therefore have to be depopulated further if it is to fulfil its true purpose, which is to form an immense grazing area, a pasture vast enough to satisfy the devouring hunger of the English *vampires*. Like all

> good things in this world, this advantageous procedure has its downside. While land rent accumulates in Ireland, the Irish accumulate in the same proportion in the United States. The Irishman, ousted by the ox and the sheep, reappears on the other side of the Atlantic in the form of the Fenian. And opposite the declining Queen of the Seas, the young giant republic looms ever larger. Acerba fata Romanos agunt/Scelusque fraternae necis (Marx 1969, 524–525, emphasis added).[9]

In fact, it seems that Marx is returning here to a question that he had not dealt with at the time of its emergence, but which this time haunts his analyses: the Great Famine. Looking at the long-term tendencies of capitalism, he writes: "The famine of 1846 killed more than a million people in Ireland, but they were just poor devils. It did no direct damage to the country's wealth. The exodus that followed, which has lasted for 20 years and is still growing, decimated men but not – as the 30 Years' War had done in Germany – their means of production" (Marx 1969, 518). One of the greatest humanitarian disasters of our time is thus explained through a structural analysis of capitalism, whose development generates a lasting reversal of means (means of production) and ends (human beings). According to Marx, the causes of the Great Famine are still with us; worse, they have only taken root in the emerging economic regime.

## 10.3 Colonialism, Between Nation and Religion

Thus, another discursive strategy was at work. While proposing a fairly restrictive interpretation of colonialism as the domination of one mode of production over another, Marx lent a quasi-apocalyptic dimension to his analyses: the landscapes of a nation under colonial rule shelter the ruins of a disappearing world. Such a perspective was lacking in his earlier work, which focused on a more immediate apprehension of social relations. It shows the extent to which Marx sought not only to situate himself in the long term, but also to account for the dual economic and symbolic dynamics at work in colonialism. Even more than exploitation – which goes hand in hand with workers' resistance –, the colonial enterprise *prefigures* the shift towards a world without humans, a "de-humanised" world. Anchored in rigorous argumentation, this rhetorical form is reminiscent of the "spectre" that opens the *Communist Manifesto* (1848): it underlines the extent to which Marx seeks not only to convince but to paint, to tell a story. Even if it remains based on a socio-economic reading of social relations, colonialism opens the way to a collective narrative – a tragic narrative –, with all that this entails in terms of figures of speech and appeals to the imagination.

[9] Once again, Marx mentions a quotation from Horace, as if to place his work in the great cycle of Greek tragedy: "Acerba fata Romanos agunt/Scelusque fraternae necis" ["A bitter fate pursues the Romans, and the unholy crime of killing one's brother", from Horace, Epodes 7, "Is not this blood enough?"]. Marx seems to be emphasising here how Capital destroys the foundations of human brotherhood and, in the Irish case, how the English kill their own brothers. . .

But there is one final question: how do we account for the process of colonial domination as such, and how do we emancipate ourselves from it? In other words, what reading does Marx propose of this question, and what strategy does he envisage for overcoming it? Two other issues emerge in connection with the colonial question: the national question and the religious question. On the first, Marx is very forthcoming; on the second, he says practically nothing. While he takes the measure of the demands for independence of many peoples around the world and shows how they relate to the dominant economic regime, he fails to identify the specifically cultural forces behind the colonial conquest, and the forms of resistance that might emerge at this level. Thus, although the narrative of colonialism is open to the symbolic, the analysis of the colonial phenomenon obscures its cultural side.

### *10.3.1 The National Question: A Cold Anger*

With regard to the Irish case, Marx thinks long and hard on the intersections between the social question and the national question. His initial perspective, that of class antagonism, was split by the effects of nationalism, making the prospect of a transformation on a global scale all the more difficult:

> And here's the most important thing: every English industrial and commercial centre now has a working class divided into 2 hostile camps: English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The average English worker hates Irish labour because he sees it as a competitor responsible for lowering his *standard of living*. [Facing it], he feels himself to be a member of the dominant nation, and thus becomes the instrument of his own capitalists and aristocrats against Ireland, consolidating their domination over himself. He feeds religious, social and national prejudices against [the Irishman]. It behaves towards him in much the same way as *poor whites behave towards niggers* in the former slave states of the American Union. The Irishman pays him back with interest of his own money. He sees the English worker as an accomplice and stupid instrument of English domination in Ireland.
>
> [. . .]
>
> England, the metropolis of capital, until now the dominant power on the world market, is for the moment the most important country for the workers' revolution and, moreover, the only country where the material conditions for this development are relatively ripe. To precipitate the social revolution in England is therefore the main objective of the International Workingmen's Association. The only way to precipitate it is to make Ireland independent. Hence the task of the International: to bring the conflict between England and Ireland to the forefront everywhere, and to take Ireland's side openly everywhere. The special task of the Central Council in London: to awaken the English working class to the consciousness that the national emancipation of Ireland is not for them *a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment*, but on the contrary the first condition of their own social emancipation (Marx 1984b, 345–346).

In reality, he is angry. . . discovering that national passions were stronger than social logic or class interests. Etienne Balibar writes: "The Franco-Prussian War [and] the Paris Commune [. . .] plunged Marx into depression. The European war went against Marx's idea of the guiding forces and fundamental conflicts of politics. It relativises

the class struggle in favour, at least apparently, of other interests and passions" (Balibar 2001, 10).[10]

Many studies have looked at the way in which Marxism came up against nationalism, breaking the groundswell of internationalism. In the case of Ireland, these works converge to underline the split between English and Irish workers (Polin 2021). By the way, Marx has just expressed this in no uncertain terms, and part of the historical function assigned to the International will be to overcome this antagonism – in vain. For Olivier Coquelin, one of the best specialists on this question, Marx has opened the way to recognition of the political and social rights of the oppressed nation. In other words, he espoused the idea that world revolution should make the emancipation of colonised peoples a priority for political action, even against the immediate interests of the working class of the dominant nation (Coquelin 2007, 2018). Martin Deleixhe qualifies this analysis by showing that Marx and Engels failed to account for movements *within* the two working classes and, in particular, the role of Irish migrants in England, which could have paved the way for a "proletarian transnationalism" (Delheixe 2020). In any case, Marx's attention to colonialism would have made his work an essential beacon for the emancipation of colonised peoples.

This is not exactly our analysis: while Marx was obviously interested in the colonial question and, logically, took the measure of the divisions that cut across the national working classes, he never gave himself the means to think of the colonial phenomenon in terms of the imposition of a *cultural model* beyond the domination of a *mode of production*. As a result, he fails to see that colonialism does not simply involve antagonistic interests or differentiated class dynamics. What is at stake is something else: colonial domination mobilises cultural schemas organised around the hierarchy of peoples and ethnic groups – and this matter primarily concerns the working classes of colonial nations.

### *10.3.2 The Religious Question: A Troubling Obscurity*

In our view, this deficiency in the analysis can be seen in the way Marx and Engels almost completely overlook the religious dimension of the English colonial presence in Ireland, beyond a few anecdotal references. On the Irish situation in the nineteenth century, Pierre Joannon writes:

> [In the eighteenth century], the Westminster Parliament and the Dublin Parliament vied with each other in ardour and imagination to dispossess the decolonised of their land, their rights and their faith. [. . .] An arsenal of discriminatory measures regulated every detail of the life of the Irish Catholic, from birth to death. Catholic child could only grow up by repudiating his religion and his identity. His teachers had been expelled and his schools closed; he had no choice but between ignorance and the Protestant school where he was inculcated with the

[10] On the way in which, in the nineteenth century, the social question triggered nationalist passions, see (Hobsbawm 2012).

> values of colonial society. [. . .] It is impossible to list all the laws that burdened Irish Catholics for nearly a century. Suffice it to say that they were passed for a very specific purpose, not to change the religion of the country's inhabitants and bring about their assimilation, but to consolidate the power and property of the Protestant *Ascendancy*. [. . .] In fact, they do not seem to be directed against religion as much as against the good of Catholics. [. . . .] Colonial privilege rested on three pillars: the possession of land, the main source of wealth and influence in the eighteenth century; the monopoly of political power, the guarantor of the existing social order; and identification with the established Church, the religious guarantor and essential cog in the colonial system (Joannon, 126, 130, 131 and 135–136).

In Ireland more than anywhere else, there's no doubt about the religious dimension of colonial domination.[11] It could even be said to have played a central role, given the constant interweaving of religion and politics that marked the end of the religious wars in the region. Of course, this does not mean isolating the religious dimension from the other components that led to the subjugation of the "green republic": as always, the religious aspects interfere powerfully with the economic and political aspects. The fact remains that religion is, in Joannon's own words, "an essential cog in the colonial system". So the question arises: why does Marx and Engels not say a word about it? In doing so, Marx makes not *one* but *two* mistakes: he fails to see the extent to which a large part of the Catholic Church is on the side of the people, even if it may have more conservative views on societal issues; he misunderstands the Irish working class, whose revolutionary objectives (social emancipation) are powerfully supported by the local churches, which provide the link with the elites capable of carrying forward a project of national independence (political emancipation). Joannon writes: "The proscription of the Catholic clergy strengthened its position among the people. The fight for land, which had hitherto been the decisive motive for Irish action, became confused with the fight for religious freedom. The miserable peasant became an accomplice and the person responsible for the hunted priest. In return, the priest, being the only educated man, soon became the leader and guardian of the community, both socially and religiously. [. . .] In Ireland, the Church had returned to the days of the catacombs. [. . .] The Catholic Church, the only refuge that still allowed the colonised to express their collective personality in the face of the colonial world, thus marked the limits of an incomplete Anglicisation, since the latter had not succeeded in erasing the differences between the English and the Irish. [. . .] [In the nineteenth century], one thing is clear: the expansion of Catholicism and the emergence of democracy were concomitant" (Joannon 2006, 129 and 224–225). In short, Marx misses the cultural foundations not only of colonial domination, but also of resistance to colonialism. How are we to understand this?

[11] An exhaustive analysis would have to include the linguistic dimension, given that the domination of Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland resulted in an all-out attack on the language of the colonised, Gaelic.

## 10.4 Conclusion: Eurocentrism by Default?

One possible answer may come from Joannon himself. Referring to Theobald Wolfe Tone, a young Protestant lawyer at the Dublin Bar who invented Irish nationalism – and, in particular, the United Irishmen's Society in 1791 –, he notes: "This man of the Enlightenment, an enemy of superstition, naively believed it possible to subordinate religious particularisms to a common republican citizenship freed from all material and spiritual subjection. [His slogan?] 'To unite all the people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, to substitute the common name of Irishman for the particular denominations of Protestant, Catholic, Dissenter. These are my means'" (Joannon 2006, 179–180). It was in fact as a man of the Enlightenment – and particularly as a man influenced by the French Enlightenment – that Marx looked at Ireland.

The author of *Capital* was looking for a *general principle* to explain the English colonial system and, more broadly, colonial expansion in the age of the Industrial Revolution. What is important, then, is not so much his supposed "contempt" for non-European societies and, in the Irish case, for a society situated on Europe's doorstep: on the contrary, his attention to detail shows how sensitive he was to different societies. The issue at stake seems to us to be of a different order: Marx was writing both to set Enlightenment rationalism against itself – by showing that civility masks submission, agricultural development feudalism, industrial wage labour slavery – and to promote a global analysis of the colonial phenomenon – making colonialism the extension of capitalism. But in so doing, the idea that colonial domination could mobilise other forces or call on its own dynamics is evacuated. Yet the function of the religious dimension is very much at play here: it signals the existence of a plane of experience distinct from the economic plane. It opens up societies to a dimension of a different order.

By failing to take an interest in what must be called a form of epistemological otherness, Marxism fails to understand the cultural dynamics of non-European societies, particularly in the way they interpreted and resisted colonial domination. This is what Saïd, and later those who claim to be in the field of post-colonial studies, so often criticised. In this sense, Ireland is the scene of an experiment that reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of Marxian theory in the age of expansionist capitalism. Yet in this area, exaggeration is of no help: if there is a Eurocentrism in Marx, it is a kind of epistemological Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism by default?

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# Chapter 11
# The Eurocentrist Heritage of Marx? On the Evolution of Marxian Political Models: Euro-Mimetic, Counter-Imperialist and Anti-Capitalist


**Anders Fjeld**

**Abstract** Anders Fjeld examines a fundamental ambivalence in Marxist emancipatory politics, related to the question of eurocentrism in Marx's writings: on the one hand, this politics is *universal*, addressed to humanity as such, and inherently internationalist in scope; on the other hand, this politics is *conditioned* by the West-European modernization and industrialization that lies at the heart of bourgeois capitalism and of revolutionary class struggle. Fjeld returns to Marx's texts on British colonialism in India, written during the 1850s, to identify – in accordance with postcolonial criticism – a "eurocentrist period" in Marx, but also suggests, along with newer scholarly study of Marx's later writings, that eurocentrism became more and more problematic for Marx himself, especially in relation to Ireland and Russia. Fjeld outlines the challenges that this poses for Marxist thought in relation to emancipatory politics and capitalist analysis.

**Keywords** Marxism · Postcolonialism · Eurocentrism · Capitalism · Emancipation · Historical materialism

Was Karl Marx a Eurocentric thinker? Has Marxist theory inherited and reproduced Eurocentric tendencies? These questions, central in postcolonial debates, point to a fundamental ambivalence in Marxian theory. On the one hand, Marx's emancipatory project is *universal*, addressed to humanity as such. On the other, Marx seems to suggest that only the industrializing West-European societies, and England in particular, could constitute the *revolutionary sites* of such a universal emancipation. That is, only Western societies in the process of industrialization and modernization, entangled in Enlightenment ideals, and forming the imperial core of colonial peripheries and trade-routes, could engender the social and political conditions of class struggle where the exploitative shackles placed on humanity are prone to be cast aside.

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Did Marx thus, just like the Enlightenment thinkers, understand West-European societies as the cradle of universal emancipation? If so, how does Marx think the relationship between, on the one hand, the growing antagonism "within" West-European societies between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and, on the other, the antagonism "outside" West-European societies between the imperial centres and the colonial peripheries – where the process of modernization, the building of infrastructure, the creation of a super-exploitable "work force", the toppling of traditional and "stagnant" power structures, should eventually bring about the same conditions of emancipation as in Europe, haunted by the "spectre of communism"?

Obviously, Marx is deeply critical of the colonial project, the European elites and Western capitalism but, as is well known, there is always a strategic component to his analysis. It is not a question of simply denouncing the brutal injustice of colonialism, but of discerning explosive and unsustainable contradictions inherent in political and economic realities. Marx's analysis, in other words, is an attempt to discern how, or even *when*, a particular society can enter a historical state of revolution – a revolution with the capacity to deconstruct existing power structures and engender a more just, humane, democratic and collectivist society. In effect, Marx's Eurocentrism hinges on the coincidence of *revolutionary* contradictions with *Western* developmentalism, that is, that only West-European societal development (specifically the British Empire) can bring forth the economic and social conditions wherein an effective anti-capitalist world revolution is possible. But these two dimensions are not necessarily connected. As we will see, progressively Marx challenges both.

The hypothesis I will develop here is inspired by the works of José Aricó (2014) and Kolja Lindner (2022). They focus on Marx's later writings and how Marx begins to challenge crucial elements not only in his earlier and most canonized writings, but also, retrospectively, in later Marxist traditions as well as in postcolonial debates on Marx's Eurocentrism. Through three cases – Marx's comments on India, Ireland and Russia –, I will examine a triple movement in Marx' thought in relation to the analysis of world capitalism and political strategy, from what I propose to call his Euro-mimetic politics in the 1850s (under the heavy shadows of the 1848 uprisings), to counter-imperialist politics in his writings on Ireland particularly in 1870 (before the Paris Commune in 1871), and finally to anti-capitalist politics in his analysis of the Russian commune in 1881–1882, where he effectively seems to "provincialize" Europe.

## 11.1 Eurocentric Developmentalism in India: Marx's Euro-Mimetic Politics

Marx's most unambiguously Eurocentric texts are written during the 1850s, and have been the focus of much postcolonial critique, by thinkers such as Edward Said and Dipesh Chakrabarty. In a series of articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*, particularly in 1853 and in 1858, Marx analyses British colonialism in India. As

Lindner points out: "Since Marx himself never journeyed to the regions of the non-Western world he wrote about, and never carried out systematic empirical research on them, his knowledge derives in part from massively Eurocentric sources, above all British, such as travel writing, parliamentary reports and theoretical treatises" (Lindner 2022, 3).

Marx's articles on India and British colonialism are deeply ambivalent. His critique of the brutal rule, colonial vandalism and Western narcissism of British imperialism is mitigated by or even subordinated to the "modernization process" set into motion by the "exportation" of British capitalism. As he puts it: "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia" (Marx 2007 [1853], 220). This capitalist and modernist development concerns both material conditions and class composition. By breaking with "traditional" values, beliefs and social models, it occupies in Marxist theory somewhat the same analytical space as Feudalism or the "opium of the people" in Europe. Marx is not far from portraying British colonialism as a necessary evil on the road to emancipation.

Marx's understanding of British colonialism in India is clearly tributary to the emancipatory motif of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848: the bourgeoisie creates a society wherein the means of its own overcoming are being developed. The bourgeoisie progressively digs its own grave. Marx even describes British colonialism as an unconscious tool of history: "England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution" (ibid., 218). It is in this way that Marx, in the 1850s, interprets British colonialism in India as a historical "setting-into-motion", uprooting stagnant despotism by breathing a fresh air of insurgency into Indian class relations, and thus deepening the emancipatory contradictions that would enable India to join the proletarian world revolution. This means, however, that British society is at the centre stage of humanity, both as an "unconscious" historical tool and an image of the future for other societies throughout the globe. This is an essential element of what Edward Said criticizes:

> Karl Marx identified the notion of an Asiatic economic system in his 1853 analyses of British rule in India, and then put beside that immediately the human depredation introduced into this system by English colonial interference, rapacity, and outright cruelty. In article after article he returned with increasing conviction to the idea that even in destroying Asia, Britain was making possible there a real social revolution. Marx's style pushes us right up against the difficulty of reconciling our natural repugnance as fellow creatures to the sufferings of Orientals while their society is being violently transformed with the historical necessity of these transformations (Said 2003, 153).

The strongest form of Eurocentrism in Marx's writings thus consists of a combination of these two dimensions: on the one hand, putting Western developmentalism at the centre stage of humanity and, on the other, presupposing that revolutionary

contradictions come about only within the "mature" conditions of industrialization and modernization – that is, that the revolutionary class is not only the proletariat, but specifically a modernist proletariat in a developed industrialized society. Concerning the latter, Marx writes for instance: "Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power" (Marx 2007, 223). These two dimensions come together, I suggest, in a Euro-mimetic political model. Indian society must come to *mimic* British society, and the Indian revolutionary class must *mimic* the European proletariat. The world is a stage, and the director is the British bourgeoisie. . . for now. As Marx writes in 1850 in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850*: "Just as the period of crisis occurs later on the Continent than in England, so does that of prosperity. The original process always takes place in England; it is the demiurge of the bourgeois cosmos" (Marx 1978, 134). It is this kind of eurocentrist historicism that Dipesh Chakrabarty criticizes Marxism for: "Marxist intellectuals of the West and their followers elsewhere have developed a diverse set of sophisticated strategies that allow them to acknowledge the evidence of 'incompleteness' of capitalist transformation in Europe and other places while retaining the idea of a general historical movement from a premodern stage to that of modernity" (Chakrabarty 2000, 12).[1]

In this Eurocentric period, Marx proposes an analysis of world capitalism focused on where societies are headed, deciphering the multiple forces at work as parts of a single coherent society-building process, and interprets British capitalism as the most advanced site of development and revolution-tinged contradictions. In effect, British capitalism provides the interpretative matrix for the general development of world capitalism, figuring thus as a destiny materially inscribed both in colonial domination *and* in national liberation movements around the world.

This Euro-mimetic model also fixes a horizon for revolutionary strategy. In fact, Marx lays out quite a restrictive vision of the internationalism of the proletarian revolution – one could even question if it merits the label "internationalism" at all. It seems rather like a series of national revolutions that each mimic the same model, namely the British proletariat at the peak of modern development. The heavy shadows of the uprisings of 1848 seem to loom over this desperate politics, where all hope is funnelled through a not-yet-attained future of unbearable contradiction, where "vile" and "stupid" British capitalists are the greed-infested and brutal "unconscious tool" of history, and where world capitalism is a gruesome theatre no one will be able to quit without following its script to the very end. With such an interpretation, 1848 could in fact be understood not so much as a decisive setback for the working class, but as a historically necessary step forward. As Marx puts it: "All

[1] Pranav Jani (2004) suggests that although Marx's 1853 articles on British rule in India were indeed Eurocentric, he shifted to a much more anticolonial position after the 1857 revolts. According to Jani, Marx, in his "post-revolt articles", "increasingly turned from an exclusive focus on the British bourgeoisie to theorize the self-activity and struggle of colonized Indians", thus prefiguring the rejection of Eurocentrist thinking in later writings. Kevin B. Anderson (2010) convincingly makes the same argument, studying also Marx's articles on Indonesia and China through the 1850s.

the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both. Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?" (Marx 2007, 223).

## 11.2 British "Colonial Accumulation" in Ireland: Marx's Counter-Imperialist Politics

The question of Ireland figures notably in the *Grundrisse* (1857), *Capital* (1867), and Marx' correspondence particularly in 1870. Marx's interest is deep and diverse. He questions Engels not only on economic and colonial issues, but also on the particularities of Irish geography and housing, like bogs and townlands. The Irish question is highlighted by Aricó and Lindner as a turning-point in Marx's theory and strategy. As Aricó puts it: "From this point, Marx and Engels saw the *national* emancipation of Ireland as the first condition of the *social* emancipation of the English proletariat. We thus face a real 'turning point' in Marx's thought, opening up a whole new analytical perspective with the study of the contradictory question of the relations between class and national struggles, this true *punctum dolens* of the whole history of the socialist movement" (Aricó 2014, 20). It might also signal that Marx has finally left the shadows of 1848 behind – where his strategic frame was built on mimetic chains of intra-national revolution at the very peak of modernity – in favour of an internationalist proletarian movement with the International Workingmen's Association (later known as the First International), established in 1864 (cf. Deleixhe 2020).

Indeed, there is from the outset a notable shift in how Marx analyses the colonial question: Imperialist Britain is no longer understood as an ambivalent agent of colonial modernization and is rather described as a destructive force of careless upheaval and maximal exploitation that, notably, makes itself materially dependent on the continued exploitation of its colony. As Lindner puts it: "Ireland, says Marx, is subject to murderous superexploitation – military, agricultural and demographic [...]. Essential to the accumulation process in the 'motherland' is Ireland's colonial status, not its socio-economic development" (Lindner 2022, 16; see also Cleary 2004).

In *Capital*, Marx studies the disastrous and contradictory effects of the "agricultural revolution" in Ireland – "the change of arable into pasture land, the use of machinery, the most rigorous economy of labour, etc." (Marx 1982, 865–866) – as well as the Irish "depopulation" following the famine in Ireland in 1846. If Marx does not outright name the colonial status of Ireland, he leaves little doubt of its status in the British empire: "England, a pre-eminently industrial country with fully

developed capitalist production, would have bled to death under such a population drain as Ireland has suffered. But Ireland is at present merely an agricultural district of England which happens to be divided by a wide stretch of water from the country for which it provides corn, wool, cattle and industrial and military recruits" (ibid., 860). As for the depopulation, that aside from famine is caused by mass emigration, Marx sees no improvements for the remaining Irish population: "What were the consequences for the Irish labourers left behind and freed from the surplus population? These: the relative surplus population is as great today as it was before 1846; wages are just as low; the oppression of the labourers has increased; misery is forcing the country towards a new crisis" (ibid., 862). In his correspondence with Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt in 1870, Marx emphasizes how the English class society depends on the continued exploitation of Ireland: "Ireland is the bulwark of the *English landed aristocracy.* The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest *moral* power. They represent, in fact, the *domination of England over Ireland.* Ireland is, thus, the *grand moyen* by which the English aristocracy maintains *its domination in England* itself" (Marx 1988b [1870], 473).

In more general terms, Marx is here focused on the fact that the domination of the bourgeois class and the maintenance of capitalist relations of exploitation in imperialist countries, can *only* be pursued if the colonial chain of exploitation is upheld. Without the resources and labour force from the colonies that fuel the home economy, class domination will break down. In his letter to Meyer and Vogt, Marx goes as far as to say that "the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this is decisive for the workers' movement *all over the world*) can*not* be struck *in England*, but *only in Ireland*" (ibid.). He adds that "if the English army and police were withdrawn from Ireland tomorrow, you would immediately have an agrarian revolution in Ireland. But the overthrow of the English aristocracy in Ireland would entail, and would lead immediately to, its overthrow in England. This would bring about the prerequisites for the proletarian revolution in England" (ibid., 474).

In contrast to the Euro-mimetic model, world capitalism is no longer understood as a series of national developments where British industrialization provides a kind of teleological destiny, but rather as a field of intertwining dependencies (or "uneven development" as David Harvey puts it (2003, 2009), see also San Juan (2004)) where the "most" developed (colonizing, imperialist and capitalist) countries are in large part constituted by and heavily dependent on the systemic violence needed to maintain colonial conditions of production. As a supplement to the theory of "primitive" or "original" accumulation whereby the conditions of capitalist production are created in Europe (the enclosures being an essential dimension of the privatization of means of production and of establishing a work-force unable to sustain itself by other means than paid labour), one could look to Marx's study of Ireland to develop a corresponding theory of colonial accumulation, whereby the conditions of capitalist accumulation are engendered in colonies – often with Feudal forms of organization – under the hands of an already established foreign bourgeoisie. In this sense, Marx' study of Ireland can be understood as a Marxist theory of "colonial-primitive" accumulation. As Sandro Mezzadra and Ranabir Samaddar put

it, studying Marx's writings on India, China and Ireland: "the interface of the process of the primitive accumulation, at the heart of which was the forcible separation of producers from the means of production, and the process of colonial annexation of lands was linked in [Marx's] presentation of capitalism as a world force and a continuous creator of world market" (Mezzadra and Samaddar 2020, 250).

There is also a notable shift in revolutionary strategy. The Euro-mimetic model was based on the projection of future unbearable tensions at the peak of modernity, understood as an inevitable journey of capitalist national development all around the world. In regards to Ireland, we are rather presented with unbearable tensions *already present*, here and now, in colonial and imperialist relations. Marx even seems to suggest that these have become truer faces of the capitalist machine than the nationally internal class relations. Rather than mimetic politics with teleological tendencies, Marx here outlines a counter-imperialist politics with the goal of intervening in the chain of capitalist-colonial dependencies, based on the consideration that Western capitalism is part of a capitalist world-system built on a massively disruptive, socially brutal, state-legitimized and violently exploitative global movement of expropriation – without which the bourgeoise would cease to exist.

This counter-imperialist politics is further related to a decisive shift in the analysis of capitalist contradictions. Put simply: extreme contradictions do not need to ripen; they abound in the present. In this sense, the critique of Marxist historicism elaborated by Chakrabarty is, at the very least, weakened: revolutionary contradictions no longer adhere to a historicist scheme where premodern societies must progressively mature into peak modernity in order to interiorize authentic breaking points. Rather, they are indexed on the very nature and continuous process of capitalist accumulation: the greed-infested upheaval of social life, the violent constitution of an (super-)exploitable workforce, the state-legitimized privatization of the commons that provided means of subsistence and productivity for entire populations (thus securing their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the market economy), the marketization of human relations (commodity fetishism), pillaging and dispossession, the constitution of an apparatus of violence and repression against rebellion and dissent, and the cold instrumentalization of human life that is wildly indifferent to systemic generation of misery and suffering. This is similar to what Rosa Luxembourg would later point out (an idea that notably David Harvey (2003) has pursued): "primitive" accumulation cannot be confined to constitutive acts that merely ensure the transition from Feudalism from capitalism; it is an irreducible ongoing process within capitalism caused by contradictions that pertain to its very nature. An important contradiction here is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, which according to Marx is directly related to the ever-widening borders of capitalist accumulation – among the expansive strategies, seeking to relaunch profit gains, we find the imperialist widening of the world market, as well as the marketization of new spheres of the *Lebenswelt* and elements of the natural world. For Marx and Engels, the colonial reorganization of Ireland (or disorganization) is an extreme and brutal manifestation of these dimensions that are simply inherent to capitalism as such – dimensions that are obviously present in English society also, but in a more mitigated and ideologized manner.

However, Marx still does not completely break out of a Western developmentalist style of thinking. Despite all the fundamental shifts in the analyses of capitalism, colonialism and political strategy, England remains the nodal point of world revolution: "To accelerate the social development in Europe, you must push on the catastrophe of official England. To do so, you must attack her in Ireland. That's her weakest point. Ireland lost, the British 'Empire' is gone, and the class war in England, till now somnolent and chronic, will assume acute forms. But England is the metropolis of landlordism and capitalism all over the world" (in a letter to his daughter Laura and Paul Lafargue in 1870) (Marx 1988a, 449). However, considering all the decisive and far-reaching breaks with his former analysis of British colonialism in the 1850s, this lasting conviction of, as Lindner puts it, "England as a superior society" (Lindner 2022, 17) does seem severely weakened. It seems to have become a mere remnant of the keystone it was in the Euro-mimetic model.

## 11.3 Beyond Counter-Imperialist Politics in Russia? Marx's Anti-Capitalist Politics

Marx was involved in debates with Russian revolutionary movements particularly since the publication of *Capital* (see Musto 2020). In 1869 he started to learn Russian and contributed to the Russian translation of *Capital* that was published in 1872. His famous correspondence with Vera Zasulich – with four extensive drafts written between February and March 1881 that were finally discarded in favour of a rather laconic response – seems to strengthen the idea of a general movement away from the Eurocentric thinking of the 1850s and further development of the new theoretical and strategic frame that appeared in the analysis of Ireland. As Teodor Shanin writes: "The four drafts of the reply Marx wrote testify to the immensity of work and thought which underlay it – as if the last decade of Marx's studies with its 30,000 pages of notes, but no new major text finalized, came together. The drafts are testimony of puzzlement but also of a growing consciousness of a new approach to major problem" (Shanin 2018, 1; see also Nimtz 2004; Wada 1983).

Zasulich questions Marx precisely on Eurocentric developmentalism, asking for his "ideas on the possible future of our rural commune [in Russia] and the theory of the historical inevitability for all countries of the world to pass through all the phases of capitalist production" (Zasulich 1983, 98). She presents the dilemma for Russian revolutionaries as follows: either all countries must pass by the phases of capitalist development, from which it follows that the Russian rural commune is an archaic agrarian form that should be abandoned so that revolutionaries can focus their energy on the urban proletariat; or the commune, "freed of tax demands, payment to the nobility and arbitrary administration, is capable of developing in a socialist direction, that is, gradually organizing its production and distribution on a collectivist basis. In that case, the revolutionary socialist must devote all his strength to the liberation and development of the commune" (ibid.). Shanin explains that "to the revolutionary populists and their academic allies, [the commune] was a survival of

the social organization of primary communism, i.e. of the pre-class society, a remnant to be sure but a positive one, both in its present function and future potential. Behind the debate about the historiography of the commune stood fundamental political issues of strategy, of the class nature of the revolutionary camp, and its enemies and even of the nature of the future (post-revolutionary?) regime" (Shanin 2018, 1–2).

In his draft response, Marx clearly signals the abandonment of the historicist and Euro-mimetic model of the 1850s in favour of the shifts observed in analysing the case of Ireland: "What is threatening the life of the Russian commune is neither historical inevitability nor a theory; it is oppression by the State and exploitation by capitalist intruders, who have been made powerful at the expense of the peasants by the very same State" (Marx 1989, 362–363). Marx goes even further here and geographically isolates capitalist developmentalism to Western Europe: "the 'historical inevitability' of this process is expressly limited to the countries of Western Europe" (ibid., 364). This effectively unseats England as the "true" site of revolutionary contradiction and peak development, that Marx still seemed to believe in his letters on Ireland in 1870. Marx seems therefore to move beyond mere counter-imperialist politics – and thus the belief that the revolution of capitalism is only possible by challenging class relations *in the imperialist countries*, even if the strategy is to uproot their colonial dependencies. As such, if the case of Ireland effectively led Marx to reconsider the distribution of capitalist contradictions (that no longer need historical ripening; are no longer are indexed on a mimetic model of peak modernist development; exist in a field of uneven development), the case of Russia seems to inspire another step in the same direction, this time related to revolutionary politics. As Marx emphasizes: "The best proof that this development of the 'rural commune' is in keeping with the historical trend of our age is the fatal crisis which capitalist production has undergone in the European and American countries where it has reached its highest peak, a crisis that will end in its destruction, in the return of modern society to higher form of the most archaic type – collective production and appropriation" (ibid., 357). Not only is the revolution of capitalism no longer indexed on the ripening of capitalist contradictions, but Marx acknowledges that non-capitalist forms of social and economic life already exist *and* that they can follow their own paths of development.

Not only is England no longer the nodal point of revolutionary overcoming of world capitalism, but the very idea of pushing societal contradictions to the breaking point as a precondition of revolutionary success – a fundamental thesis in historical materialism – seems no longer to command politics and axiomatically orient the analysis of world capitalism (see Basso 2015). Indeed, Urs Lindner and Kolja Lindner propose that Marx, at this stage, finally "overcomes" the historical materialism that informed his Eurocentrist writings on India in the 1850s, and that was still present, though severely weakened, in his writings on Ireland (Lindner and Lindner 2022). What Marx considers now is more directly anti-capitalist in spirit. This is confirmed in Marx and Engels's preface to the second Russian edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1882. They pose the same question as Zasulich: "Can the Russian *obshchina,* a form, albeit heavily eroded, of the primitive

communal ownership of the land, pass directly into the higher, communist form of communal ownership? Or must it first go through the same process of dissolution which marks the West's historical development?" (Marx and Engels 1983, 139). Their answer leaves no doubt: "Today there is only one possible answer. If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia's peasant communal land-ownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development" (ibid.). Anti-capitalist forms of society already exist within world capitalism and Marx now thinks that they can (reciprocally) *complement* the revolutionary struggle within Western European capitalism. As Lindner puts it: "Marx no longer conceives of modernization as 'Westernization', which is to say that he no longer regards European development as the sole valid historical measure. Rather, it would appear that Russia is in many respects treated as a model of development for the West" (Lindner 2022, 29).

If the Irish question showed that contradictions need not ripen and that they already abound, the Russian question might well have shown that anticapitalist forms of life need not wait for the "next step", but already exist in partial forms. Thus, revolution is no longer the promise of a historical coming, but rather an immense project already in construction, with scattered sites and potentials, where expansion of and experimentation with already existing anticapitalist forms of life are just as important to the process as the destruction of capitalist power structures and *tabula rasa*-style invention of new forms of postcapitalist life. After the Euro-mimetic and the counter-imperialist political models, does not such an anti-capitalist politics go hand in hand with a provincialization of Europe?

## 11.4 Conclusion

The first cycles of Marx's work have been vastly studied, from the Kantian-inspired social critique in the *Rheinische Zeitung* (Rancière 2024) and the Young Hegelians movement with Ludwig Feuerbach as a key reference, to the historical materialism in collaboration with Engels in *The German Ideology* and certainly in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx draws heavily on these ideas in his analysis of British colonialism in India, where he lays out a Eurocentrist, historicist and developmentalist model – what I have proposed to name his Euro-mimetic politics. Said and Chakrabarty have focused specifically on this period in denouncing the blatant Eurocentrism of Marx's writings. However, Marx's later writings, after *Capital*, have not received the same attention in post-colonial debates. The First International, the Paris Commune and the analysis of Ireland and Russia seem to mark out fundamental shifts in Marx's thought that affect both his analysis of world capitalism and his views on revolutionary strategy. Moving away from his former Euro-mimetic politics, Marx develops counter-imperialist politics in analysing Ireland within the strategic context of the First International (before the Paris Commune of 1871). However, England still remains the key site of proletarian revolution and

social development. Retrospectively, this appears to be a partial movement. At the very end of his life, he takes a step further when he analyses the Russian commune: a step towards the provincialization of Western Europe all while outlining a more directly anti-capitalist politics.

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# Part III
# Marx and Europe, a Dialectic Relationship

# Chapter 12
# Balibar and Europe: Towards Democratic Socialism Beyond the Nation

**Teresa Pullano**

**Abstract** Revisiting Balibar's critical work on the European Union, Teresa Pullano suggests a double and conflictual perspective at the heart of his writing: for Balibar, Europe is "both a philosophical node and a political terrain for theoretical reflection". Attentive to the forms of violence traversing the European continent, that has already been "provincialized", Pullano emphasizes the actuality of Balibar's thought, in particular in relation to neo-racism and postcolonialism. Pullano explores how this actuality and originality of Balibar's thought is further deepened by the constant and mutually beneficial interrogation between Marx and Europe, sustaining the possibility, according to Balibar, of a democratic and socially responsible refoundation of the European Union.

**Keywords** Marxism · Postcolonialism · Democracy · Nation · European Union · Communism

## 12.1 Europe: Ideology and Philosophy

Étienne Balibar has devoted a large part of his philosophical work to the question of Europe. Europe has a dual epistemological status in Balibar's work: it is both a philosophical node and a political terrain for theoretical reflection. In his writings, Balibar sketches out a theory of Europe as a political space, as the object and subject of a philosophy of history, and as the result of the dialectic between social struggles and movements and instituting processes. These dimensions of Europe need to be understood in the light of two issues that run through Balibar's work without being constantly in the foreground: Europe as an ideological formation, and a philosophy of Europe. I propose the hypothesis that, for Balibar, Europe is the stage for the reproduction of social order and structure, and at the same time the stage for the interpellation of the subject, in the double sense inherent to the notion of ideological

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formation (Balibar 2015a). In exploring the question of Europe, Balibar examines how the transformation of the political scene modifies, in the present conjuncture, the way in which the forms of identification of the subject with itself are articulated within the modalities of subordination to power and authority (the theme of the citizen as subjectus) (Balibar 2016a). The reference here is to the thought of Louis Althusser, and the reflection on Europe is an opportunity for Balibar to continue his re-reading of two of Althusser's central themes, namely ideology and the subject (Althusser 1970).

Europe is also the place and horizon – always open and aporetic, to use a term dear to Balibar – of philosophical questioning. Of course, Balibar's thinking on Europe is never Eurocentric. As he says on several occasions, Europe has been provincialized, and is no longer the place where the universal is elaborated, if it ever was. All of Balibar's work on colonialism aims to resituate, within the political and philosophical object that is Europe, the "black hole" of violence that has been perpetrated on other continents and continues to be perpetrated on others, on migrants, hence his concepts of universal racism or neo-racism and that of European apartheid. For Balibar, racism is a complex of practices and discourses that always involve racist theories and the construction of a racist community. And speaking of neoracism implies a new hegemony of racist discourse in Europe today (Balibar and Wallerstein 1997, chapter 1). Racism and colonial practices are still at work in the construction of Europe as a political community, and in its relationship with the world (Balibar 2001, chapter 3).

In this text, I will explore how Europe, beyond any Eurocentrism, remains a philosophical issue for Balibar, from multiple perspectives. Balibar repeatedly addresses the theme of Europe's crisis. This is a classic question in continental philosophy, from at least Husserl's *Crise* (Husserl 2006) to Jacques Derrida's reflections in *L'autre cap* (Derrida 1991). As Roberto Esposito reminds us (Esposito 2016), themes regarding the relationship between philosophy, its structure, *logos* and European history, as well as Europe's capacity or incapacity for a reflexive gaze on itself and the world, are essential features of contemporary continental philosophy. Husserl's Europe is a reality that is always dialectical, as a doubling of origin in one empirical dimension and another transcendental one. Its finality, its *telos*, is an orientation that is always inaccessible, what Jacques Derrida thinks of as "the other heading". Balibar's work, while part of the tradition of a philosophy of and for Europe, is eccentric and unique. His work on Marx, in the different phases of his thought, and his work on Europe feed off each other. Balibar proposes a philosophy of Europe based on Marx, which is what I explore in this text.

## 12.2 Europe as Space-Time

Balibar's thinking on Europe cannot be read in isolation from his philosophical work. Balibar offers us theoretical categories to interpret Europe as a place of politics in the present. These categories concern Europe as a political space, as a historical temporality, as ideology and strategy, as object of struggle and as an institution.

For Balibar, the theme of Europe as a political space revolves around the pairing of identity and alterity. The ever-impossible definition of Europe's geographical borders concerns its relationship to itself, or the question of Europe's identity. As Balibar reminds us, the process of building Europe as a political community always involves questioning the relationship with the other. Europe's "self", writes Balibar, "is nothing other than the web of interactions, relations and forces, of domination and resistance, that link it to the Other, to the non-European" (Balibar 2016b, 165). There is no such thing as a European space that has been drawn up once and for all. On the contrary, Europe is an open space, criss-crossed by different geographical constellations and multiple identities. There are several overlapping and conflicting geographical and cultural spaces in Europe. There is the Euro-American space, the Euro-Mediterranean space and the Euro-soviet space. So there is not one, but several "common homes" in Europe (Balibar 1991, 10). What is more, the European space is liminal, always border-related. Europe is an area of intersection between multiple world-spaces, and in this sense it is articulated and fragmented by the borders that cross and constitute it. These are "social borders", invisible on the map but that materialize with social practices and administrative and legal arrangements (ibid.). Balibar's approach to Europe is thus rooted in a relational and social conception of geographical space. This aspect deserves further exploration, especially in relation to contemporary debates in urban studies and critical geography (see David Harvey).

The space of Europe is always being constructed and reconstructed, it is dynamic, changing with shifts in political and social power relations. Balibar's work on the European space focuses on two categories, that of the border and that of the relationship between globalisation and colonization. The border is no longer a legal and administrative demarcation inscribed in a territory, but has become mobile and extends its effects into spaces that are, conventionally, both inside and outside Europe. Europe is thus characterized more as a space onto which global borders, or attempts to redefine them, are projected, rather than as the sum of clearly defined national territories. Nevertheless, Balibar sees the challenge of constituting itself as a political space as the essential task of the European construction process. Only if Europe succeeds in constituting itself as a space – social, political, but also material – that is, in organizing the trends of globalisation and building a relationship with the Other, the non-European, or the world, will it succeed in constituting itself as a political subject (Balibar 2009). Balibar's suggestion is to think of Europe as a "Borderland", i.e. a space made up of overlapping regions. Balibar defines the "Borderland" as "the name of the place in which opposites meet, in which foreigners can be both stigmatized and inseparable from 'ourselves', in which the notion of citizenship, implying both a community and an idea of the universal, confronts its own antinomies" (ibid., 210).

The European space is a space constructed by relations – political, material and historical relations. It was not only colonization, but above all the struggles of decolonization, says Balibar, that helped modify the world's borders, unifying them. Above all, postcolonial Europe is the result of the universalization of former colonies and the provincialization of metropolises. As a result, "it is impossible to reject universalism, just as it is impossible to remain within its European definition"

(Balibar and Collins 2003). Globalisation, then, is not only that of capital and its elites, but also that of the postcolonial struggles that have transformed the very nature of Europe.

European space is traversed and shaped by temporality and history. Balibar's work presents us with a veritable philosophy of history, i.e. a way of thinking about historical temporality. The representation of Europe's spatiotemporal reality is an element in the constitution of Europe as an ideology. In particular, the representation of European temporality informs a veritable teleology, providing a vision of the finality of the European project itself. According to Balibar, the temporal dimension has always been more important for Europe than the geographical one. If Europe does not configure itself as a stable, defined space, it has nevertheless long fulfilled the function of being a "centralizer" of the world system, identifying itself with the power and spirit of this system, as Hegel would say (Balibar 2014). This is no longer true, however, due to the provincialization of Europe, and this movement has given life, for Europeans, to a reversed teleology, that of Europe's permanent crisis. Balibar establishes a relationship between political teleology and its correlative representation of history, wherein lies his philosophy of history. He writes: "There is a necessary correlation between the choice of certain temporal measures and the identification of certain teleological representations. This derives from the fact that a privileged mode of reading teleologies in history is that of imagining a circular process, in which a certain historical configuration can be said to be returned to the conditions of its constitution, to reproduce the origin or, more frequently, to show the displacement or reversal of that origin" (ibid., 203). What is the genealogy of contemporary Europe? Balibar identifies three historical cycles that could provide a narrative of Europe's present.

He proposes an initial representation of European temporality, rooted in the two approaches of Braudel-style annal history and World System History, and strengthened by his collaboration with Immanuel Wallerstein. We are looking at a long cycle of European history in terms of capitalist accumulation and provincialization, from 1492 to 2001. Europe was constituted as an economic centre, but also as a "capital", a "metropolis", during this long historical cycle. Balibar identifies the attacks of September 9th 2001 as the end of this long cycle and the opening of a phase of war and globalisation guided by the United States and, more generally, by non-European actors, while Europe is subject to decisions taken elsewhere. He interprets this historical cycle as the problem of the relationship between a geopolitical structure centred on the articulation between centre and periphery (capitalism) and the nation-form. The colonial differentiation is inscribed precisely within the history of this process of accumulation and subsequent provincialization. The export and globalisation of the nation-form, invented in Europe, was an essential instrument in the provincialization of Europe itself: "We should take note of the gradual transformation of the nation-form against the domination of the European nations – against those had invented it and used it in the struggle among themselves for world domination – as an essential element in the transformation of world history" (ibid., 204).

For Balibar, the two levels – the national and the international or global – are always interconnected, as in the best tradition of Marxist and internationalist historiography. In addition to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and the American school of World System History, we might also mention the work of French geographer Henri Lefebvre on globalisation. One possible outcome of this long cycle of European history is the disappearance of a centre and the structuring of global relations around transnational networks. Beyond predictions, the interest of Balibar's view on European and global temporalities lies in his ability to step outside the strictly national framework, while offering a complex vision of transnational relations in which power relations and the articulation between economics and politics play an essential role in determining the forms, spaces and temporalities of politics.

Balibar is not blind to the defeat of either socialist or communist supranational formations. The liberal form of supranational construction, represented by the European Union, prevailed. This is the story of Europe's short temporality, what Balibar calls the "short cycle" that begins with the Second World War and ends in 1989, with the end of the Soviet Union. Balibar characterizes this phase of European history as one of conflict between the national form and the ideologies of the twentieth century: fascism, communism and liberalism. We are witnessing a conflict between eschatologies, i.e. ideologies that propose an ultimate end to political construction, particularly in Europe. Even liberalism, in its neo-liberal variant, proposes a world "without history", or the "end of history", pacified and unchanging (ibid., 205).

A third dimension of European temporality concerns the social dimension of Europe. The division of the continent into two rival blocs posed the question of imagining an alternative to the appeal of the communist perspective for Western Europe. Balibar describes this as a struggle for hegemony in Europe between different ideological projects. Social movements played an essential role in the demand for social rights in Western Europe. Around 1989, two simultaneous movements took place in Europe: the end of the communist and socialist threat in the East, and a passive revolution in the West, which eroded the social gains of previous class struggles. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 enshrined the principle of free market competition almost constitutionally in Europe.

Then there is a short third cycle: the history of European integration. This cycle begins in 1950, with the Schuman Declaration and the establishment of the Coal and Steel Community, and reaches a crisis point with the eurozone crisis of 2009. The way in which the EU handled the risk of Greece's bankruptcy in 2015 demonstrated the Union's inability to save one of its member states from economic crisis without plunging it further into political and social crisis. The European Union needs to be refounded, says Balibar, but there is no agreement on the direction this should take. According to Balibar, the contemporary period is therefore characterized as an "interregnum", following Gramsci's dictum, i.e. a period in which "the old (world) is already dead, but the new (world) is not yet born" (ibid., 207). To understand this phase and its possible developments, Balibar invites us to consider both the partitions of the European space and the bifurcations of its political history.

## 12.3 Balibar, Europe and Marxism

Balibar's thinking on Europe offers a framework for reading and interpreting contemporary issues, in order to draw out lines of action for the future. His work proposes theoretical and practical avenues for the renewal of left-wing thought. Balibar criticizes the forces of the European left for their inability to formulate a horizon for political action beyond the nation. He writes: "(. . .) in the new division of power between nation-states and federalist forces, the European left has revealed its inability to create a new historical horizon for emancipation or to develop campaigns for equality and solidarity beyond the limits of the nation-states within which movements and class struggles were formed" (ibid., 210). Balibar himself, in a chapter dedicated to discussing the work of Nicos Poulantzas, describes his own position in the 60s and 70s in terms of "Eurocommunism" and that of Poulantzas in terms of "neo-Leninism". He points out that "these labels reflect the way we tended to perceive each other, rather than the reality of our positions" (Balibar 2010). Nevertheless, we can start from the heritage of Eurocommunism to understand the evolution of Balibar's thinking in relation to Europe and the left.

Before doing so, let us return to the two points that Balibar emphasizes in this text. Balibar's work, like that of Poulantzas's, takes as its starting point a critical re-elaboration of Marxism in "structural" terms. In this sense, the horizon of Balibar's work is that of an internal critique of Marxist thought on the relationship between democracy and socialism. Can we say that there is a relationship between the debates surrounding Eurocommunism and Balibar's thinking on Europe? Eurocommunism can be defined as the idea of a consubstantial relationship between democracy and socialism. This is based on the observation that liberal democracy was established partly through the contribution of the bourgeoisie, but also partly through social movements and the participation of the masses in demanding their rights. According to the reasoning of the Eurocommunist current, formal freedoms "embody a limited form of democracy (limited by the bourgeoisie), but it is a form that is capable of being improved (through the action of the popular masses)" (Weber 1978). This is the position Balibar puts forward in his discussion of the antinomic relationship between citizenship and democracy.

According to Balibar, the legacy of bourgeois revolutions, built on demands for egalitarianism, continues to exert its influence on the condition of our contemporary democracies. This force is identified with a continual articulation or differentiation of insurrectionary and constitutive moments, which constantly poses the question of how the universal can be realized within the form (and limits) of a community that is organized by the state (Balibar 2015b, 5). This is why the category of citizenship, the institution par excellence, is so central to Balibar's work. It enables the articulation of the insurrectionary demands of political subjects with the dimension of rights and that of the state. Balibar is right however when he says that the labels of Eurocommunism or neo-Leninism, applied to his debate with Nicos Poulantzas in the 60s and 70s, do not capture the nuances, either of the fact that Poulantzas himself was associated with the Eurocommunist current, or of the differences that separate

Balibar's own thought and political history from figures like Berlinguer or Ingrao, two of the Italian Communist Party leaders identified with the Eurocommunist current (Enciclopedia Treccani 2010).

Balibar discusses these themes in a text on Althusser and communism (Balibar 2015c). Althusser had no sympathy for the idea of Eurocommunism, which he saw as a "bourgeois democratic drift" (ibid., 16). For Althusser, the strategy of alliance between European Communist parties envisaged by Berlinguer is in opposition to the "orientation of the masses". Althusser's other point of disagreement with Eurocommunism is the relationship between the Party and the State. Balibar writes: "Althusser explains, without going into great detail, that the 'fusion' of party and state constitutes the element common to the Stalinist deviation from Marxism (and indeed from communism) and to the 'socialist' politics that could emerge from the construction of a political alliance between communists and socialists, or more generally 'bourgeois' parties, on the institutional terrain. This is why the Communists must not play this game: they will lose the working class and themselves in the process" (ibid., 19). Balibar points out that he disagreed with Althusser on this point: "I had objected that this thesis was not compatible with the way in which the theory of 'state ideological apparatuses' makes it possible to think what a 'party' is, and I continue to think so" (ibid.).

The question of the state, and the way in which Marxist political theory thinks about it, lies at the heart of the dispute between Balibar and Poulantzas. The question of the state, and how to think about its evolution, is, it seems to me, central to understanding Balibar's work on Europe and the possibility of a "left" political theory on Europe, or, to put it another way, to envisage a Europe in the terms of democratic socialism. As early as the 1970s, both Balibar and Poulantzas were diagnosing a new balance of power, "at a time when the hegemonic state, that of the capitalist bourgeoisie, was being shaken by the internationalization of capital (. . .), and was reacting to the decline of its economic efficiency with a more or less accentuated authoritarian turn, disguised by a 'liberal' discourse" (Balibar 2010, 180). Balibar's reflection on Europe seems to me an extension of the debates of the time on the evolution of the State beyond the strict national framework. For Balibar, Europe is the scale on which to rethink the question of the relationship between institutions, or the state, and the demands of radical democracy. To this end, Balibar points to Nicos Poulantzas's relational thinking on the state as a point of convergence, because "only such a conception can put an end to the myth of the 'exteriority' of revolutionary forces (parties or movements) in relation to the functioning of the state in advanced capitalism" (ibid., 181). For Balibar, questioning the transformations of the state at a time of national state transformation also means analysing the way in which this transformation influences the "very definition of classes".

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Can we read Balibar's work on Europe, on the transformation of the nation and citizenship on a post-national scale, as an extension of his thinking, within structural Marxism, on the transformation of the state and its relation to classes and social

movements? I think so. My hypothesis is that Balibar's work on Europe and on citizenship and its transformations beyond the nation is a translation and extension of a reflection within critical Marxism on the possibilities, within the institutions of liberal democracy, of building passages towards a European path to democratic socialism. For Balibar, the state is nothing other than the institutional effect of social relations. He writes: "the social relations of which we speak cannot be reduced to class relations or relations of production and reproduction of exploitation (. . .): they are also, autonomously, or if you like 'overdetermined', 'ideological' relations" (ibid., 182). The importance of the ideological dimension in the process of European integration is clear: it intervenes in the production of state effects from the transformation of the classes themselves on a supranational level. This is what Balibar calls the double stage of politics in history: the combination of class relations and symbolic relations. This double scene pursues no historical teleology, "corresponds to no invariant pattern, either in the long term or in the conjuncture" (ibid.). Today, we are well aware of the fragile and precarious nature of European democracy and its social achievements. This makes it all the more essential to pursue Balibar's theoretical reflection on the ever-open possibility of a democratic renewal of Europe, based on an internal critique of the legacy of a European path to socialism.

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# Chapter 13
# Exiles in the Twenty-First Century: The New "Population Law" of Absolute Capitalism

**Étienne Balibar**

**Abstract** Addressing the dramatic situation of migrants and refugees in the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-British space, Étienne Balibar mobilizes and questions the Marxist theoretical legacy, in particular the "law of population" and the "general law of capitalist accumulation". Introducing the notion of "absolute capitalism" – the idea that there is no longer any existing alternative economic system to capitalism –, Balibar focuses on the violence inherent to new regimes of mobility and immobility in migration and migratory politics, focusing on borders, exploitation and the segmentation of the labour-force. Contrary to traditional Marxist analysis, absolute capitalism, according to Balibar, is not characterized by stability and self-regulation, but by financial and political instability which, due to a severely limited capacity for control and restraint of violence, opens up for extreme violence.

**Keywords** Marxism · Capitalism · Population law · Finance · Migration · Labour · Nation

I thought that I should present, because of the place and also because of the themes of your current program, something that relates to my current interests for the moral, political, juridical and anthropological issues involved in addressing the dramatic situation of migrants and refugees everywhere in the world, but especially and with specific features in the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-British space; but also something that invokes and mobilizes my long term dedication to the understanding and the renewed applications of the Marxist theoretical legacy – particularly the legacy of Marx himself and his critique of political economy. I am a European Citizen, and I cannot not feel the urgency of thinking about the causes and dimensions of the

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current crisis of the political as such in Europe and in every European country, of which the sheer incapacity of European governments and peoples to invent a solution that is both practical and hospitable for the reception of migrants and refugees from the South, is a crucial component that overdetermines all others. I am an old Marxist, although a critical one, and I believe that the challenges of globalisation, perhaps introducing now something like an "absolute capitalism", more than ever call for an analysis of its tendencies and contradictions *à la Marx*, making use of his tools while at the same time renewing them. Among these tools features prominently one of the most admired but also one of the most disputed developments of *Capital*, Volume One, namely the "law of population" which, according to Marx, is specific to capitalism, forming the reverse side of the "general law of capitalist accumulation". There are very apparent points of intersection between the issue of migrations and their functions, or dysfunctional characters in today's globalized and financialized economy, and some of Marx's striking formulas in the explanation of his "Population Law", foremost the very idea of "relative surplus population" and its subdivisions, which include a "floating", a "latent", and a "stagnant" population (today we might speak of a "nomadic" population in addition). But this remains to be discussed. On the other hand, and in this sense, I am a post-Marxist rather than a pure Marxist, I believe less than ever that Marxist concepts – however rectified and developed – can suffice to provide us with the intellectual and even political instruments that we need, but I will return to this in a moment.

I will begin with general considerations forming the *prolegomena* to a Post-Marxian theorization of the Population Law, if there is one, in the conditions of global capitalism. Such a Law – perhaps we should say simply a "model", to avoid immediately the functionalist and deterministic connotations of the category "Law" that was used by Marx in particular to emphasize his *reversal* of the dominant understanding of Economists of his time concerning the dependency of employment/unemployment with respect to cycles of accumulation and growth. Its consideration will take us from discussing in a preliminary manner issues of terminology relating to migrants, refugees, exiles, to envisaging new regimes of mobility and immobility of populations, and new functions of borderlines in the global world. A Law or Model of Population, of course, cannot limit itself to registering quantitative aggregate variations, it must essentially discuss unequal demographic distributions and differentiated patterns of mobility.

I take my starting point from the current virulent debates in Europe (including Britain), which have equivalents in the U.S. and other parts of the world, about the distinction that ought to be made – or not – between different categories of people who, in increasing numbers, find themselves *on the move*, trying to cross institutional and physical borders (oceans, seas or channels, mountains or deserts), located between countries and more generally geo-political and geo-economic regions. The main distinction is between *refugees* and *migrants*, because it is recognized and officially implemented by administrations, border controls, home security agencies, etc. in order to *discriminate* between populations that are deemed acceptable, or deserve protection, and others who are deemed illegitimate and undesirable (not

completely, in fact, because the affluent economies really *need* all sorts of precarious, low paid, insecure workers and servants, particularly women, which already shows that capitalist demand and cycles must be included here). Refugees are *legally* defined as *groups* in international law: they are supposed to have been subjected to *forced*, involuntary displacement, due to such causes as civil wars or ethnic cleansing perpetrated by dictatorial regimes. On the other hand, Migrants are supposed to be *individuals* who, even if in great numbers, voluntarily decide to seek labour, jobs, conditions of living, out of their *places of origin*, which in practical terms means their *country* of birth and education, by looking for opportunities across a border which also separates different economic situations. Not only this rigid distinction is permanently *manipulated* by the States who define them themselves, but it is less and less adequate to the *real* situation, to the conditions of population flows, the consequences of their treatment, and it is forcefully challenged by activists in NGOs and solidarity networks, as by experts and scholars working on displacements of population today – two categories which also intersect. Not only do the legal criteria defining refugees voluntarily ignore certain massive causes of forced dislocation and exile, such as military interventions (sometimes deemed "humanitarian"), effects of climate change, economic dispossession (which, in the case of Africa today, amount to a veritable *economic war* waged against the "traditional" modes of production and forms of life). But they also, conversely, turn a blind eye towards the effects of the virulent policies aiming at blocking migrants at the border, or if possible pushing them away from its line – such as walls, detention camps, military operations, financial bargaining with intermediary states, etc., which literally create a new, relatively massive population of *refugees* in the sense of homeless, errand groups of people wandering between spaces and borders and subjected to different types of organized violence. For this reason, it has been increasingly the preoccupation of intellectuals and activists who discuss these issues, particularly in Europe, to name or emphasize *categories* that, at the same time, *encompass* all the varieties of displaced people and people on the move permanently or temporarily, while allowing it to identify the critical internal differences and permanent transformations, either of their status or their material situation. Such categories also reflect, of course, a moral and political (I would say *civic*) point of view on the violence we are witnessing and the actions we think should be taken. In the title of this lecture, it is a question of "migrations" in a generic sense, but there is also the name "exiles" which, in France at least, is now of wide use among human rights organizations. There is also "Nomads", which has a more theoretical connotation, because it calls for the consideration of long term historical transformations in the regime of mobility of populations locally and globally, therefore it rejects in the first place the idea that the current condition of refugees and migrants is an *accidental and temporary effect* (which is essentially the pretence of States who claim that they will suppress it or reduce it to a minimum which they control), but also draws our attention to the fact – already at the core of Marx theorization – that there must be a *dialectical* relationship between regimes of mobility and regimes of immobility (of which there are also many varieties). They are polar opposites in a single Model or a single Law, with its economic, juridical, social, anthropological dimensions. Therefore, if something like

a *new regime* of mobility is emerging, which is likely to reverse essential aspects of the dominant ideas about such crucial political categories as *territory, population, and security* (Foucault's famous triadic formula about government), but also *sovereignties, borders, identities*, a *new regime of immobility* that includes a "forced immobility" (the title of a recent Conference on Migrations and Authoritarian Politics in Sweden where I was taking part), must also arise – probably no less complicated and conflictual.

Before I finish these preliminary considerations, I want to add another methodological remark.

In the first place, I want to submit that, on this very question of the dialectical reversals of mobility into immobility and conversely, we can anticipate why references to the Marxian equivalence between a Law of the accumulation of capital and a Law of population that includes its variations end redistributions will be at the same time necessary and insufficient. It will be necessary because the needs, regulating capacities and legal instruments of capitalist development are globally determining, and increasingly so. With more "fluidity" or "liquidity" of capitalist investment has also emerged more "mobility" of the human labour force, notwithstanding the coercive means that are used to keep it under control. But Marx – like other "classical" economists – has a tendency to reduce the phenomenon of mobility to the more or less automatic adjustment to the cycles of capitalist growth, technological change, enlarged accumulation, therefore ignoring or marginalizing the *geographic* and *geopolitical* structures of the dynamic distribution of populations, with its *biopolitical* dimensions (Foucault's crucial invention of a new category that clearly overlaps with Marx's notion of "surplus population" and is in tension with it), and also (my own suggestion) its *anthropological* consequences (the change in the relationship of mankind with its own mobile and immobile "parts" or "kinds" – therefore, in practice, "races" or "genders"). Clearly, we are not deprived of very important theoretical propositions in the last years or decades to address this *other side* of the question of population. That includes the important dialectics of "territorialization" and "reterritorialization" that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is intrinsic to capitalism. In another circumstance, I wish to be able to discuss the use of their contributions. For this moment, I will rather emphasize the usefulness of the Schmittian category of the *nomos of the earth* (as exposed in his book from 1950) where the Greek name *nomos* combines two different meanings: a "law" in the juridical, legal, and a "distribution" and appropriation that is primarily the distribution of land, but can become also applied to people, to population. I grant a privilege to the formulation coming from this "dangerous mind" (Schmitt) because his description of the formation of International Law in the Modern State-System includes a central idea that *violence*, or extreme violence as such, is *unevenly distributed* on either sides of the Great Line that separates the Imperial "centre" of the World from its colonized "periphery" (ironically called the "amity line" by sixteenth century legal theorists). This is an idea that largely coincides with the theorizations by Arendt, Césaire, DuBois or Fanon about the imbrication of Nation and Empire and the drawing of the "colour line" across them. It leads us to the hypothesis that, in the case of contemporary migrations or errancy, as in the case of

past colonization (albeit in a different manner) the *distribution of humans* and the *distribution of violence* into different zones of life and death are intimately connected. That includes processes of elimination and processes of visible or invisible coercion exercised over movements, travel, settlement. From that point of view, of course, we fully understand the necessity of identifying the *border* as a strategic object of reflection: not only its definition and uses, but its fortification, its displacements and multiplication towards the interior of the territories, its *discriminating* political and anthropological function with respect to different types of "humans" inhabiting the planet in our times. "Border" becomes a "Method", borrowing the title formula of an essential book published in 2013 by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, now widely considered a classic.

Such considerations might explain, if not justify, the fact that, deep inside, the object of my research is something like understanding from above and from below the *nomos* of the earth that arises from the transformations in the Law of Population brought about by Globalisation.

Let us now return to the Marxian text and spend some time with the questions it raises. As I already said, the core idea in Marx's theory is the idea that there are *different "laws of population"* which are specific for each historical *mode of production* (his central category to periodize history and analyze social relations), therefore there can exist no such thing as a law or "Principle" of Population, in other terms a *demographic* phenomenon, that is *naturally* determined and transcendent to history and the change, or even the revolution, in the dominant economic structure. This is explicitly directed against Malthus, both because of the epistemological opposition between a biological and a historical materialist standpoint, and because of the harsh, quasi-genocidal, consequences that derived from the Malthusian discourse for the suppression of the *poor* deemed "superfluous" humans. We are here at the core of the clash between two antithetic forms of *biopolitics*, to put it in Foucauldian terms, and this has never been as relevant as it is today, since the question of what to do with the "poor" and their specific demographic trends (whether to employ them and sustain them, or to eliminate them directly or indirectly, or some combination of both) has returned to the forefront and the centre of the civic debate: except that the "poor" Malthus and Marx are conflicting over, are essentially the *domestic poor* (at times they were emigrating, e.g. from Britain and especially Ireland to Australia and America), whereas the poor we are asked today to accept or reject, are *coming from outside*: they are mainly post-colonial poor from Africa, Asia, Latin America. We remember the title of a famous book by Paul Gilroy, John Solomos and others, *The Empire Strikes Back* (borrowed from one episode in the series *Star Wars*), published in 1982 – which however can be heard and used in antithetic ways.

To fully historicize the law of population, Marx explains (in the extraordinary chapter 25 of *Capital* Volume One) that it forms the mere counterpart – or, in statistical terminology, the *dependent variable*, of the law of accumulation, which is a *cumulative and cyclical process* of centralization and decentralization, technological change (in the sense of increasing predominance of the value of the machinery, or the means of production, over the value of the labour force), thus driving

capitalism (and, with local inequalities, this means *Gesamtkapital* as such, or the "total capital" of the society) towards ever greater concentration and capacities to exploit labour. The correlation included the periodic effects of *attraction and repulsion*, or phases of employment and unemployment, the hiring and discharging of masses of industrial workers (and more generally wage laborers), which is directly dependent on what later such economists as Schumpeter will call "business cycles", and also "long waves" of economic activity and profitability, therefore includes *crises* as "regulatory" phenomena, etc. Marx (and I don't think he is wrong) has a tendency to believe that a capitalist regulation of crises always tends to impose the costs of overproduction, speculation and recovery, on the mass of the poor themselves, in the form of starvation or overworking, which also means that the working class needs to adopt strategies, or tactics, of birth control or, alternatively, procreation, to adapt their demographic to survival. Since capital combines strategies of technical revolution with policies of substitution of adult male workers by women and children, who are supposed to be also more obedient, the labouring class may try to raise more children for them to contribute a additional revenue, etc. More generally, Marx's understanding of the articulation of population and accumulation (what he precisely calls the "law") is not purely *economic*, on the contrary, it is completely *political*, and represents a sophisticated elaboration of the concept of *class struggle* as an organic phenomenon, in at least three meanings:

– one, the cycles of attraction and repulsion of labour by capital, leading to the constitution of what, in a powerful metaphor borrowed from the capitalists themselves, Marx calls a permanent "industrial reserve army" of *unemployed workers*, who are waiting to be employed or re-employed, either in the same branch or not, in the same place or not (a change helped by the "standardization" of labour and its progressive "simplification"), and "available" for future use, but momentarily plunged into uncertainty and precariousness. This creates a permanent pressure towards lower salaries (or a counterpressure against rising salaries). It forms the essential instrument to install *competition* among workers, or transform the competition among capitalists into a competition among workers, thus helping maintain, re-establish or increase the *rate of exploitation* of labour. This has, of course, direct and unequal application to the conditions in which, today, capital seeks to introduce low paid, precarious immigrant labour forces onto the labour market, including or above all in the form of "illegal", undocumented but certainly not unwanted migrants;
– the second form in which the cyclical process of attraction/repulsion and the "industrial reserve army" become an instrument of class struggle and class domination, is the fact that masses of human beings who are threatened with unemployment, precariousness and starvation, or simply impoverishment, will never have any other choice than seeking the command of a master (i.e. a capitalist) and subjecting themselves to his orders, the labouring discipline of capital. Even if they change master, they remain modern slaves. As Marx writes: "they are attached to capital by invisible chains". The mechanism therefore

secures the combination of economic dependency and human subjection to power;

– finally, and most importantly for our reflection, Marx explains that the mechanism of attraction and repulsion lies at the heart of the dialectics of *class division* and *class consciousness*, therefore the very constitution of "class" on the side of the workers and the proletariat – not only as an economic and sociological category, but a *political formation* in history. The working class is *permanently divided*, along fluctuating proportions and variable directions, into *two broad antithetic categories*: active and passive, labouring "employed" and non-labouring "unemployed" labour forces, with more or less antithetic interests – a division which is overdetermined by anthropological differences such as skilled vs. unskilled, male vs. female, adults vs. children, etc. he doesn't explicitly include *nationals vs. foreigners*, but today of course we must bring in this crucial determination and see how it reacts on the general cyclical pattern. What is very interesting are the uses of the term "proletariat" in contradistinction to "working class" and "wage labour", since Marx reserves it for either the most precarious impoverished "floating" categories (with the difficult question of the *Lumpenproletariat*, i.e. the boundary zone between the proletarians and poor), or also the virtually unified, organized, revolutionary labour-force that challenges the power of capital, because it has succeeded to overcome the divisions created by unemployment and competition among workers (e.g. through the development of trade-unions). In fact, what Marx wants to explain is this: there is no such thing as a "permanent", "existing" or "developing" *social class*, which would be characterized by its own cumulative process vis-à-vis the capitalist class. The working class *as a political formation*, which we can call a "proletariat", therefore the potential revolutionary subject, is intrinsically *unstable* (Althusser would say: its existence is "aleatory"). *Either it is decomposed* by the "law of population" of capital, or *it can overcome its decomposition* in a *political* process that reverses the effects of the population law. Putting it in the terminology of Italian *operaismo* (especially Mario Tronti), a *political composition* of the proletariat is possible only as negation of the negation, i.e. its internal decomposition, which takes economic forms. But it is also ultimately political. But of course, for this antagonism to evolve in one direction or the other, *conditions* are required, ranging from economic circumstances to culture and ideology. I will ask you to keep this in mind, because in a sense the question I want to address now is: what are the conditions in which this dialectic of composition and decomposition of the proletariat have evolved today, in a globalized capitalism which I suggest to name *absolute capitalism*? Is it possible to transfer the Marxian idea that we find in Marx to the new conditions, or should we admit that the problem itself has been completely displaced?

I must now make this discussion a little more complicated by bringing in additional elements, which derive from Marx's analysis or perhaps must be added to it. My fist point has to do with the correlation established in *Capital* volume One (chapter 25) between two categories, or perhaps two denominations of the crucial category:

"relative surplus population", that I have apparently left aside until now, and the already mentioned "industrial reserve army". In fact, I submit that this problematic equivalence harbours the strategic turning point where we might have to *diverge from Marx,* and take a different path. But we cannot do it if we don't fully understand the structure of his argument. Why? In fact we are here, again, at the core of Marx's critique of Malthus and subsequent demographers. In whichever manner they understood its causes, mixing biological, sexual, cultural determinations, they all spoke of an *absolute* surplus-population or over-population – which for Marx means that the law of population is *independent from and external to* the logic and the space of realization of the capitalist process of accumulation. Interestingly, there are passages in which Marx seems to admit that there exists something like an "absolute" excess of population with respect to possibilities of survival, which leads to processes of extermination or elimination. This is the case when he refers to the Irish famine in the 1840s, although this famine had nothing "natural", no more than contemporary effects of economic war and climate change are "natural". But ultimately, he turns toward the idea that the *absolute* character of surplus-population is only apparent, therefore it is itself "relative" to a general cyclic pattern dominated by capital, which allows for *excesses*, or *extreme forms*. And, more generally, the central idea in Marx's explanation, is that *in the average*, in the "normal conditions" of capitalist development, the surplus-population is completely *relative* to the cyclical movements of capitalist accumulation. Therefore it is also, despite the sufferings, the violence, the chaotic oscillations, the conflictual oscillations, the conflictual effects in the life of the bourgeois society, a phenomenon that is *functional* (including in its function as an instrument of class struggle and class rule). This is something like the Marxian equivalent of the liberal metaphor of the "Invisible Hand" of the Market. But the crucial *mediation* to understand this functionality "in the last instance", is the equivalence that has been established *in practical terms* between the two categories: "relative surplus population" and "industrial reserve army". Capital needs a relative surplus population and it tolerates, or regulates, its fluctuations, because it needs an Industrial reserve Army, and it maintains this "army" because it is generated by the internal tendencies and the *partial contradictions* between technological change, business cycles, competition around wages, and standards of living. . .

Now my suggestion is the following: this construction is beautiful and powerful, it has a remarkable capacity of explanation, but also very *narrow limits* of application, because, despite its intention to *historicize* demographic and economic discussions, *it is in fact a-historical*. Not only does it picture a *self-regulatory* mechanism (through crises and conflicts, admittedly), but it describes *a kind of pure capitalism*. We might believe that, in the age of global capitalism, which is completely financialized, and has now more or less completely *eliminated* every form of pre-capitalist mode of production, and which has incorporated (or is on the way of incorporating) not only production, but also reproduction, services, education, health, entertainment, communication, the possibility of a "pure" capitalism is finally reached. . . It is just the opposite, and I want to progressively move in that direction,

in particular though the incorporation of the *historical elements* that were left aside or misinterpreted by Marx. This will lead me to my third section.

My first suggestion here will be that the process of historicization, or historical "rectification" of the "Law of population", or its incorporation into a more complex and in fact even more conflictual and less deterministic model, has already begun in Marx, albeit in two relatively distinct modalities which have had independent effects.

The first set of considerations, or qualifications, I want to draw your attention to, emerges when, in Section 4 of chapter 25, Marx proposes a more detailed typology of "different forms of the relative surplus population", which consists of three categories:

- *the "floating" surplus-population*, consisting of labourers who are periodically ousted and incorporated, therefore "floating" between employment and unemployment, but also "emigrating" from one place to another following the displacements of production sites (this includes interesting considerations on the *use* of the human body and the distribution of generations among labouring processes: children in particular);
- second, we have *the "latent" surplus-population*, which essentially corresponds to the "flow" of free labour force which continuously arises from the destruction of traditional agriculture and its transformation into capitalist farming: it is a considerable and complex category, in fact, because the idea can easily become extended to the general problem of how capitalism incorporates the surplus-population arising from its development against other modes of production, whether in the Centre (Europe, later North America) or in the colonies of the "periphery"; and the question should also be asked whether the transformation of *Women* from domestic labourers in the household to servants, workers, employees, which has a very erratic way of showing up and disappearing in Marx's text, should become centrally registered in that category, or, in fact, lead to its disintegration;
- third, we have *the "stagnant" surplus-population* – a strange term indeed, which belongs to the moral judgment rather than the sociological description – where we find the most precarious, "disposable" part of the labour power, which Marx says is located chiefly by the statisticians under the rubric of "domestic industry", where the combination of extremely low wages and continuous overworking leads to a permanent threat on the health and lives of the labourers, therefore paradoxically leading to increasing the size of families as a defence mechanism. This category, as it were, is not only in "reserve", but permanently on the verge of *annihilation*, which brings back the spectre of the "absolute surplus" from within the "relative". In fact, this population is not in reserve at all, since it *works,* but in murderous conditions.
- and, finally, Marx seems to introduce a *fourth* category, which had not been announced, namely *pauperism* or the population thrown into begging, tramping, but also criminality: the famous "dangerous classes".

What to conclude from this typology? Two ideas come to mind. One, in describing the *concrete realizations* of the mechanism of attraction and repulsion, with its political consequences, Marx seems to indicate that, at the two poles of the mechanism (in exploited work and in the absence of work), there emerges an *extreme violence* which are de-humanizing, and lead to social if not physical elimination. From the core of the mechanism of "reproduction" in capitalism, a kind of *black hole* is created, where it is not only the class unity, but the society as such (as a system of social relations) that is dissolved. Of course this belongs to the strong moral and political incentives to put an end to the capitalist system through an anticapitalist revolution. But there is another idea: it is in fact difficult to consider a "latent" surplus-population in Marx's sense as a *cyclical* effect of attraction and repulsion. The reason why it can be included in the Industrial reserve Army is that, if capitalism continues its development, *it will have been incorporated* into the labour force that is "available" for exploitation (and of course, until now, this anticipation was verified). More generally, we see that Marx wants to demonstrate, through the unlimited application of his "Law", and through the multiplication of demographic categories, that the *whole society* – nationally, or perhaps even globally: he seems to limit himself to a national point of view – is a *virtual part* of the same working class or proletariat (with very limited exceptions: managers, intellectuals, engineers, bureaucrats. . .). This will include a progressive impoverishment of the 99%, as we say today, and a progressive fall of the society into the "mill" of precariousness and wage labour (one of his preferred metaphors). Which, jumping to the conclusion and returning to a question raised above, seems to indicate that the dialectic of *class unity* or class composition, and the dialectic of the decomposition and proletarianization of the whole society are two sides of the same coin. A problematic idea, I would say, see from the vantage point of contemporary history. Proletarianization and class unity no longer go hand in hand if they ever did.

The other great piece of historicization that we find in Marx's *Capital*, however, goes into an opposite direction. This is the celebrated analysis of "primitive accumulation" (or *so-called*) in chapter 26, that has received extraordinary developments in the history of Marxism, and justifiably enjoys a great reputation today (e.g. in the work of David Harvey, around the idea of "accumulation through dispossession" and the more recent theorists of "extractive capitalism"). Marx had explained that capitalism, *before* entering the cyclical process of its reproduction through "internal" or "intrinsic" means, needed certain *preconditions* to exist, in terms of concentrated monetary wealth or, as we say today, "liquidities", and in terms of a *labour force* that is "free", in both senses of the term: it is deprived of its own means of production and subsistence, and it is released from the bonds of traditional communities which retain their members within themselves generation after generation. And he had described the extremely violent means used in pre-modern England – from the renaissance to the eighteenth century – but also in the colonies (with Ireland as the first of them) to chase humans away from their birthplaces, with the "enclosures" destroying the commons, and substituting humans with sheep on the fields. As Thomas More had famously written, now "sheep eat men". However, he presented these processes as *provisional and transitional*. It is as if there could exist a "relative

surplus-population" *only after*, in the initial period paving the way for the development of capitalism, an *absolute excess* had to be created that would become later regulated or "normalized", notwithstanding its internal violent aspects. As we know, this is where later Marxists theorizing *imperialism* would extend the debate. The first was Rosa Luxemburg, and in a sense, everything derives from her: from Samir Amin to Wallerstein to Harvey and others... What she says is *the transition never ends*, at least as long as there exists a capitalist law of accumulation, because such a law *requires of an outside* to the places of "regulated" exploitation. There is no capacity to maintain the rate of exploitation if there is no *overexploitation and overworking*, but there is no overworking if there is not a permanent process of dispossession or destruction of the remaining "commons" in the periphery of the world: the colony, the semi-colonies, or even the post-colony. Which also means that the process of reproduction of the conditions of accumulation could find an end. But before it finds an end, it is bound to intensify by displaying extreme forms of cruelty that dismember communities, uproot masses of people from their land, prevent them from organizing and resisting...

At this point we might think: *here we are, we got it*... Got what? The broad pattern of explanation that makes it possible to introduce a process of *global migration*, including various forms of extreme violence producing refugees – whether officially recognized of not – into the working of a labour market which is *absolutely and ruthlessly competitive but structurally divided*, aiming at establishing the "war of all against all", and which has overcome *national boundaries* (or, better said, has an absolutely cynical and instrumental use of national boundaries, using in fact borders and border-zones such as the Mediterranean, not just to block and filter passages, but to make entries risky and murderous, *decimating* the migrants on a daily basis in order to keep them as fearful and subjugated as possible). *De facto*, many of the current discourses about migrations or even the population law that encompasses them, in Post-Marxian terms, are *neo-luxemburgian* discourses; And in that sense they renew and expand a possibility that was inaugurated by Marx's analysis of "primitive accumulation", *lifting the limitation* that was inherent in the notion of "primitiveness" (or perhaps pushing it to the other end, towards the "final stage" of capitalism).

I agree that there is something very important here, but in my opinion, there are also insufficiencies. They have to do with a *one-sided* representation of the processes of precariousness and proletarianization in today's Global capitalism; And as a consequence they produce an incapacity to really understand the *conflicts within different segments of the labour-force* (in the broad sense), which make the construction of a single class consciousness – therefore a class in the political sense – more difficult if not unrealistic than ever *nationally and internationally*, and also – to me this is a single problem – generate catastrophic decompositions of democratic politics. Let me try to explain summarily.

To describe the trajectory of Modern Capitalism in the nineteenth and the twentieth century through the lenses of *imperialism*, colonialism and post-colonialism, North-South divide, whereby the condition for the "normal" operations of capitalist exploitation on one side is given by the "abnormal" or excessive forms

of dispossession which continuously "liberate" humans on the other side, is useful – nay indispensable – but it is insufficient. It leaves aside what happened in the "centre" during the same period, and what is happening now to this centre or former centre – however vague the limits are in fact – under the influence of the financialization of Capital, or its new "liquidity". What happened in the Centre was the effect of the class struggle, the resistance, the organization of workers that Marx had called for, but that he witnessed only very partially and briefly. Marx clearly didn't believe that it would be possible *within capitalism* to limit the effects of savage competition among laborers, even if this was the horizon of his idea about class unity. Actually that class struggle *took place*, and it won significant victories, fortified by the political consequences of the world wars and the fear of the communist example after the Soviet revolution (just read Maynard Keynes to be convinced of this). This resulted in the creation of the *social State* (whose equivalent in the U.S. was the *New Deal* and its aftermath) until Reagan decisively reversed the course, in alliance with Margaret Thatcher in Europe. Despite the dangerous connotations, I prefer to speak of *the national (and) social State*, because I want to emphasize the fact that the existence of a social legislation, and especially a legislation that create *subsidies for unemployed workers*, and more or less completely abolished the processes of falling into poverty (never completely and not for everyone, particularly not for all "races" as we know) though *indirect wages and pensions*, this process is strictly conditioned by the fact that the State is a national State, granting social protection to workers or labourers who are also defined as *nationals*, i.e. national *citizens*.

This is of the greatest importance and has political consequences when the social State and its relative mitigation of the mechanism of the Industrial reserve Army are progressively dismantled. But why are they dismantled? It is not enough to invoke an ideology, called "no-liberalism", that has become dominant, especially after the collapse of the Socialist system or its transformation into aggressive national capitalism (the case of China) made it seem that capitalism could become unfettered, absolutely self-referential, fearless of internal and external challenges. We must invoke the economic "basis" of this absolutization of the command of capital over the supply of the labour-force, which is *financialization*, or, to put it in the terminology of Robert Meister, "liquidity". Liquidity involves an increasing power of the financial market to organize, or de-organize, the strategies of production and consumption in order to *maximize* not only "profits", but the value of stock exchange assets, shareholder's value and their derivatives. But when it is combined with the information technologies and the revolution in mass transportation (at the expense of the environment) it also includes unprecedented possibilities to *displace or "delocalize"* production and consumption processes. As some sociologists and economists argue (in France, I think of the work of Emmanuel Terray and Pierre-Noël Giraud), what precedes the mobility of people is the mobility of jobs, which are less and less attached to a stable place, a country or a region, although there is a *residue* of "sedentary jobs" that is shrinking more or less rapidly, especially in the *personal services* or the "care". The result of this pressure that the *nomadism of capital* has exerted on the *sedentarity of labour* has been a huge and brutal *degradation of*

*labour conditions* and statutes which, coming after the relatively stable and dignified situation created by class struggles, class organization, social legislation, produces an enormous combination of despair and resentment. More precisely it produces *objectively* what the great sociologist Robert Castel has called a "de-affiliation" of the old working class from its social collective standing, and a phenomenon of "negative individualism" that is reinforced by the feelings of impotency with respect to the trends and accelerations of globalisation. We might find it totally absurd, but we must understand that even in some cases unemployed or extremely precarious "national" workers, who experience their embeddedness in a strong national tradition now devalorized, view the poor, homeless migrants who are also able to *adapt to mobility* and s = dislocation, despite the violence they experience, as "beneficiaries" of the flexibility of borders.

More exactly, and here I want also to draw lessons from the extraordinary description provided by Saskia Sassen in her book *Expulsions. Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (2014), where she describes different forms of violent destruction of the environment and the mutual support of territories and communities, I would say that the Law of population of "absolute" capitalism today combines *enormous local effects of "absolute" surplus-population* which are only abstractly compensated – and perhaps in fact *not compensated* – at the global level, with *a division or decomposition of the labour-force*, not only between an "active army" and a "reserve army" of laborers, but between (at least) *two kinds of precarious lives*, two different kinds of "proletarians" as it were: one that is hunted away from its birth place and exposed to the violence of States on the roads of exile, one that is stuck in its birth place with a choice between unemployment, shrinking welfare (more and more repressive in its administration: see the movie by Ken Loach *I Daniel Blake*), and devalued work. Not only, therefore, the "contradictions within the people" (Mao Zedong) are greater than ever, but they tend to become nationalized and racialized, fostering all the prejudices and collective hatreds inherited from centuries of slavery, colonization, imperialism. And with this situation, Marx's ideal of a single class consciousness becomes at the same time more necessary in order to defend some crucial democratic values, and more difficult to practically achieve. Or could put it in the reverse order.

"Absolute capitalism" – an expression that has been already in use for some time now on various sides – is a capitalism which, after the end of the *great transformation* taking place in history between the beginnings of European expansion and colonization and the formal decolonization, soon followed by the collapse of socialist states and the decadence of social-democratic policies, has *extended* over all regions of the world, therefore beginning to blur and redesign the limits of centre and periphery, North and South. Above all, it has completely incorporated its own reproduction processes and destroyed every form of economic *otherness.* There are no *non-capitalist production processes*, except perhaps in the form of some "communist" heterotopias, something which is important but limited, having little or no effect on the social environment. One might imagine, therefore, that it has reached a high degree of stability and self-regulation. Just the opposite, as we know, is true, and there is nothing reassuring in that. Not only is it financially and politically

unstable, but it is extremely violent, and it shows no capacity to control or restrain its own violence. The violent effects of the new Population Law are part of this Global Economy of Violence – an important part. There always existed *several patterns* of distribution and exploitation of populations in historical capitalism, and Marx had theorized only one of them. Now that they are fused into a single global but disjunctive and disruptive pattern of precariousness, the political challenge for socialists is greater.

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# Index





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