

The Homeland(s) of Marxism: Labor Power, Race, and Nation After *Capital*



Gavin Walker

Abstract At the end of the twentieth century, Alain Badiou once wrote that “Marxism no longer has a historical homeland,” but had instead at last been “expatriated” from the burden of its apparent “origins.” There exists a long polemical history, often within the framework of postcolonial studies, which posits the Marxist tradition as something fundamentally “Western,” something that never fit “the world,” but only its supposed “homeland.” But what truly is the “homeland” of Marxism, if we can even put it this way at all? My principle thesis here is the following: If Marxism’s homeland in the nineteenth century was Western Europe, then its homeland in the twentieth century was above all the Tricontinental—Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This thesis is a polemic, intended to radically alter our view of the intellectual history of Marxism, which methodologically remains deeply fixed to a narrative about itself that is structured according to a model of diffusion. But what if we chose concretely to theorize it another way, to emphasize that the seed of this transfer between centuries lay already in Marx’s work in the years following *Capital*, and that the global impetus to understand the function of *Capital* as a guide to the “critical analysis of capitalist production” came principally from the situation of the “non-West”? This itself would lead us, in a circular fashion, back to the beginning, to formulate a new historical trajectory of development for *Capital*, as the pivotal text of a new global centrality of the categories of “race” and “nation” to the enclosure of the world by capital itself.

Keywords Labour power · Race · Nation · National question · Capital · Japan · Marxism · Marx

Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right. We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians (*Hütern*), who are the possessors of commodities (*Warenbesitzern*). Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1: 94/99

The owner of labour-power is mortal. If then his appearance in the market is to be continuous, and the continuous conversion of money into capital assumes this, the seller of labour-power

G. Walker (✉)
Department of History, McGill University, 855 Sherbrooke West, 7th Fl.,
Montreal, QC H3A 2T7, Canada
e-mail: gavin.walker@mcgill.ca

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must perpetuate himself, “in the way that every living individual perpetuates himself, by procreation.” The labour-power withdrawn from the market by wear and tear and death, must be continually replaced by, at the very least, an equal amount of fresh labour-power. Hence the sum of the means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the labourer’s substitutes, i.e., his children, in order that *this race of peculiar commodity-owners (diese Race eigentümlicher Warenbesitzer)* may perpetuate its appearance in the market. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1: 182/186.

At the end of the twentieth century, Alain Badiou once wrote that “Marxism no longer has a historical homeland,” but had instead at last been “expatriated” from the burden of its apparent “origins.” There exists a long polemical history, often within the framework of postcolonial studies, which posits the Marxist tradition as something fundamentally “Western,” something that never fit “the world,” but only its supposed “homeland.” But what truly is the “homeland” of Marxism, if we can even put it this way at all? My principle thesis in the following pages rests first on an intellectual-historical assertion: If Marxism’s homeland in the nineteenth century was Western Europe, then its homeland in the twentieth century was above all the Tricontinental—Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This thesis is a polemic, intended to radically alter our view of the intellectual history of Marxism, which methodologically remains deeply fixed to a narrative about itself that is structured according to a model of diffusion. But what if we chose concretely to theorize it another way, to emphasize that the seed of this transfer between centuries lay already in Marx’s work in the years following *Capital*, and that the global impetus to understand the function of *Capital* as a guide to the “critical analysis of capitalist production” came principally from the situation of the “non-West”? This itself would lead us, in a circular fashion, back to the beginning, to formulate a new historical trajectory of development for *Capital*, as the pivotal text of a new global centrality of the categories of “race” and “nation” to the enclosure of the world by capital itself.

In the following pages, I want to draw two conclusions that I will advertise from the very beginning. The first is the underlying belief that, in intellectual-historical terms as well as political conclusions, Marxism’s typical theoretical core and periphery ought to be reversed. It is, in fact, the Marxisms of Asia, Africa, and Latin America—and in some ways, their early theoretical genesis in institutions like *The Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTVA)* in the early Soviet Union—that ought to be understood as the central and most topical trends of Marxist thought in the twentieth century, following from the global experience of 1917. Second is the insistence that Marx’s *Capital* has never been a text that must be “adapted” to ostensibly “other” realities, but rather one that already contains a theoretical arsenal for the analysis of a global modernity, conditioned by a specific unevenness always-already located not simply at the geopolitical level, but interior to the logic of capital itself—and particularly the uncanny link between the form of labour power and the national question—that is, something itself global from the very outset.

Globalities of Marxist Theory: The Debate on Japanese Capitalism

Marxist theory, whose fundamental object of analysis has always been a “world” composed by capital, has nevertheless often remained cloistered within a national linguistic landscape and local canonical boundaries. The Marxist *theoretical* tradition in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has often been excessively localized as data rather than conceptualized as theory, treated as a horizon solely for the local political resolution of the national question. Yet for Marx, the national question itself was always-already global in character, insofar as he noted that the sole “precondition” for “world history” was the moment “when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker selling his own labor power on the market,” a meeting that nevertheless must be *historically* mediated within a local conjuncture. This conundrum, then, linked from the outset the clarification of capital’s *formal* emergence locally to the emergence of the world as such as an object of analysis. This tension of the national capital and the “world of capital” constituted the central problematic for the late-developing capitalist nations, particularly Japan in the 1920s–30s. The theoretical innovations that were required in the conjuncture not only had to contend with their direct political application but also formed a space in which theory served to allegorically deal with problems of history, from the unstable historicity of the capital-relation, itself torn between its local and general aspects, to the conjunctural pressures of a rapid insertion into the category of “world history.” We ourselves ought to develop this historical tension of globality within theory today, in order to productively complicate the conflation of “universality” under capitalist society with “the West,” and in turn to generate in theory *new universalities* for Marxist thought.

In the autumn of 1904, the Sixth General Congress of the Second International was held in Amsterdam. The world situation, preceding the abortive 1905 Petrograd Revolution, was poised on a knife-edge, nowhere more than Northeast Asia, where the region was engulfed in the Russo-Japanese War. Since the mid-Meiji period, in particular by the 1890s, the Japanese empire had expanded in an ever-increasing circular movement out from its central islands, with troops extensively stationed in the Korean peninsula in the aftermath of its historic defeat of the Qing in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 (which saw the Japanese come to dominance in Taiwan and the beginnings of colonial presence in Korea) coming gradually into conflict with the Russian empire’s far eastern edges, setting up a confrontation of two “late-coming” imperial powers. At the Sixth Congress, the most memorable and powerful address in the minds of the delegates of world revolutionary politics was that of the Japanese socialist theoretician and social revolutionary Katayama Sen. Katayama’s remarks were transcribed by another active transnational militant from the Polish section of the Russian Social-Democrats named Rosa Luxemburg, whose own writings on the national question would become central documents of twentieth-

century Marxism.¹ Katayama did something quite unprecedented in the midst of war: He declared openly that the interests of the Japanese working and popular classes and all nationally oppressed peoples in the Japanese empire lay not with “their” nation, but against it. Plekhanov gave a similar speech from the Russian group. In essence, this episode can be seen in part as one of the first historical moments that twenty years later, in the mid-1920s, would lead to the debate on Japanese capitalism.

Although it is a remarkably little-known fact outside of research on the history of Japanese philosophy and social thought, Marxism was one of the most dominant strands of theoretical inquiry in Japanese intellectual life throughout the bulk of the twentieth century: From its initial entry into the Japanese intellectual world in the late 1800s, Marxist analysis quickly came to constitute a vast and osmotic field that permeated all aspects of academic life, artistic practices, forms of political organization, and ways of analyzing the social situation. Numerous episodes testify to this: For example, the first language in which a *Collected Works* of Marx and Engels was published was not German, Russian, English, nor any other European language, but was in fact, Japanese.²

As the major “developed” country relative to its neighboring states and primary imperialist power in East Asia, the Comintern considered Japan the most important and pivotal target for the revolutionary project, but in the wake of the ’1927 Thesis, which emphasized that the 1868 Meiji Restoration had not yet been fully accomplished as the necessary bourgeois-democratic revolution and transition to modern world capitalism, the question thus emerged: Was Japanese capitalism in the 1930s ready for socialist revolution—in the conditions on the ground, was it possible to discover the revolutionary subject of this process? In the clarification of this question emerged the famous and influential “debate on Japanese capitalism” (*Nihon shihonshugironsō*), a debate whose centerpiece was the clarification of the essential questions of mode of production and the historical process of articulation of the social formation: What stage of development was Japan actually in—how, and by what means, had Japanese capitalist development proceeded, and did there exist a concomitant total development of the social formation as a whole, thus producing the political consciousness necessary for the revolutionary transition? Was the basic economic category of social life in the villages—the form of land-tenancy rent (*kosakuryō*) – a “holdover” or “remnant” of feudalism, something *partially* feudal, or a product of the development of modern world capitalism? The debate on

¹Reading the first-hand reports of the famous American socialist Daniel de Leon, the Chairman of the delegation of the Socialist Labor Party of America, written for the *Daily People* from August–December 1904, we encounter de Leon’s memory of the Katayama-Plekhanov handshake: “Apart from rousing the Congress from the languor it was drooping into, and driving it to frenzied applause, the handshake of Plekhanoff [sic] and Katayama at that place was a pathetic rebuke to Capitalism, whose code of practical morality was at the very hour being exemplified in the heaped-up corpses of Russians and Japanese on the battlefields of Manchuria. It contrasted the gospel of practical humanity that Socialism is ushering into life, with the gospel of practical rapine that Capitalism apotheosizes.” See the articles reprinted in Daniel De Leon, *Flashlights of the Amsterdam International Socialist Congress 1904* (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1924), 20.

²This section draws from my longer discussion of the debate on Japanese capitalism in Walker (2016), especially chapters 1 and 2.

Japanese capitalism, in its encyclopedic sense, took place between the mid-1920s and the mid-to-late 1930s, a concentrated period of approximately 12–15 years. This debate, while unquestionably central to Marxist theory, had an exceptionally broad influence on the formation of Japanese social thought, and on the formation of the modern Japanese social sciences.

In the debate on these questions, there emerged roughly two positions: One, which became that of the Rōnō (“Labor-Farmer”) faction, who argued that the land reforms instituted in the 1868 Meiji Restoration—a bourgeois-democratic revolution—had begun the solution to the “backwardness” of the countryside, planting the initial seeds that would lead to full capitalist development; and another, which became that of the Kōza (“Lectures”) faction (representing the mainstream line of the JCP and the Comintern), who argued that the Restoration had not been a full bourgeois-democratic revolution, but rather an incomplete transition to modernity, and that Japanese capitalism was only partially developed, on a primarily feudal basis. The ’1927 Thesis, in splitting from earlier emphases on the immediate socialist revolutionary process, installed the conditions for the split between the JCP and the Rōnō faction (particularly Yamakawa Hitoshi and Inomata Tsunao). But in its ’1932 Thesis, the Comintern position reinforced this line even further in parallel to the world situation, by calling for a mass-based bourgeois-democratic revolution against absolutism and feudalism concretized in the form of the emperor system (*tennōsei*).³ The primary authorial and conceptual influence on this period of Comintern policy on the “national question” was Otto Kuusinen, who, in the 12th Plenum of the Comintern in this same year, called in general for mass-based actions which subordinated communist demands to the immediate needs of the broad mass front. By arguing that a directly communist political platform would alienate and keep the party separate from the rural poor and the “non-advanced” strata of the working class, this call essentially began the transition in the Comintern to the line of the popular front adopted a few years later in 1935.

In Japan, the Kōza faction’s position and dominance of this debate were comprehensively established with the publication of their 8-volume *Lectures on the History of the Development of Japanese Capitalism* (*Nihon shihonshugihattatsushikōza*) in 1932.⁴ The works in this volume were in preparation well before the publication of the ’1932 Thesis and therefore should be seen not as an expansion of the position of this Thesis, but rather as preparing the ground for the hegemony of its position in the wake of the ’1927 Thesis. Noro Eitarō, a leader of the JCP, who was arrested and died in prison two years later in 1934, oversaw the compilation of the *Lectures*. Noro could be seen as the one who most concretely laid the groundwork for the overall conceptions of the Kōza faction. For him, the only way to truly and effectively articulate the political consequence of the theory, the proletarian strategy, was to focus on the “particularity” (*tokushusei*) of Japanese capitalist development. The reason for this, Noro claimed, was that, without understanding the “dominated” (*hishihaiteki*) mode of production (i.e., the agrarian semifeudal structure of the countryside), one

³See *Kominterun: Nihon ni kan suru teze-shū* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1961).

⁴Noro Eitarō, ed. *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsu-shi kōza*, 8 vols. (Iwanami Shoten, 1932–33).

could not understand the particular way in which the development of the productive forces had necessitated a turn to imperialism. This basic logic could be understood as the backbone of the position staked out throughout the volumes of the *Lectures*.⁵

Outside Japan, on March 2, 1932, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, Kuusinen, then the leader of its Eastern Bureau, and charged with preparing analyses of revolutionary conditions in East Asia, made a presentation on Japanese imperialism and the nature of the Japanese revolution, in which he argued that the Communist Party of Japan had at the time made errors in its underestimation of the role of the imperial system and the struggle against feudalism.⁶ In this text, Kuusinen makes a number of decisive points, highly influential on but also influenced by certain existing positions within Marxist theory in Japan. Perhaps the most important formulation is as follows: “We observe the uninterrupted and limitless oppression of the peasantry, conditioned by the exceptionally powerful *remnants of feudalism* (*hōkensei no zansonbutsu*). The Japanese village is for Japanese capitalism a colony contained within its own domestic limits (*Nihon shihonshuginitottejikokunaichiniokerushokuminchi de aru*.” He continues: “Japan’s bourgeois transformation remains remarkably incomplete (*ichijirushikumikansei de ari*), remarkably inconclusive or non-determinate (*ichijirushikuhiketteiteki de ari*), and is in essence *partial and unfinished* (*chūtohanpa*).”⁷ Precisely because of these features, he argues, Japanese capitalism is crippled or deformed. In May of the same year, 1932, the Western European Bureau of the Comintern released their decisive statement, “Theses on the Situation in Japan and the Tasks of the Japanese Communist Party,” the so-called ‘1932 Thesis mentioned previously, based in large part on the analysis undertaken by Kuusinen in the March documents.⁸ The ‘1932 Thesis is not a purely historical document; quite to the contrary. It is a document of revolutionary strategy and tactical considerations in the immediate situation. By focusing on the nature of Japanese capitalism, the Comintern highlighted precisely Kuusinen’s “three features” above: They focused on the emperor system, not only as a “feudal remnant,” but as the living and institutional concretization of Japanese imperialism, the thing that linked together both external plunder and internal oppression.

When I wrote my recent book, *The Sublime Perversion of Capital*, which utilizes the above scenario as a point of theoretical departure, my main sense was that the

⁵On this point, see Norō Eitarō’s earlier *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsu-shi*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1930).

⁶Otto Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu: 1932 nen sangatsu futsuka no Kominterun shikkō i’inkai, jōnin i’inkai kaigi ni okeru dōshi Kūshinen no hōkoku” [Japanese imperialism and the characteristics of the Japanese revolution: Comrade Kuusinen’s presentation to the Executive Committee of the Comintern, Meeting of the Standing Committee on March 2, 1932] in *Kominterun: Nihon ni kan suru teze-shū* (Aoki Shoten, 1962), 102–119. For a general overview of this period of the Comintern’s international policy, see *The Communist International, 1919–1943: Documents*, vol. 3: 1929–1943, ed. Jane Degras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁷Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu,” 104.

⁸“Nihon ni okeru jōsei to Nihon kyōsantō no ninmu ni kan suru teze” in *Kominterun: Nihon ni kan suru teze-shū* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1962), 76–101.

previous existing studies of the debate on Japanese capitalism, in all languages, particularly English, Japanese, French, and German, but also Russian, had emphasized excessively a sort of *delimited and nationally or civilizationally bounded* documentary history of this debate at the expense of understanding its *globality* and its *theoretical* core, and this fact has implications for what the tasks of historiography are at all. That is, what interested me then, when I began this project, and what continues to interest me, was the question of what really was at stake in this debate after all. In the end, I thought, the terms in which the debate on Japanese capitalism took place served to occasionally obscure the genuine struggles at issue in its essence. To cut a long story short, the specific nature of the “transition debate,” as it took place in Japan, was not so much a social-historical reckoning with the origins of *Japanese* capitalism, so much as it was an indirect debate on the global status of the subject in history, and the relationship between the theoretical content of Marx’s *Capital*, and the immediate political-historical scenario, in which knowledge of the direct conjuncture always furnishes the necessary background to political action.

The trends of historiographical analysis, largely associated with the JCP historians, always emphasized this sublime and deterministic concept of “feudalism”—“feudalism” became in this optic, a stand-in or container of significations for all that was “premodern,” “backward,” inadequately social or civic in the modern sense. In turn, this entire field of understanding tended to position a clear and orthodox continuum from primitive society to its capitalist present, relegating the feudal to an index of failure, a failed leap or incomplete transition to the modern and immediate now. Thus, feudalism was generally understood in two ways: either as the remote and overcome past, which was now falling into an infinite regress of meaninglessness, or it was understood paradoxically *as* the present, as a discursive marker for Japan’s supposed inadequacy on the scale of modern life—in this latter sense, feudalism came to be a marker for an entire series of supposedly “cultural” features: tendency toward bureaucratization, stagnation in the labor market, hyperexploitation in the countryside occasioned by the ideological backwardness of the peasantry, tendencies toward militarism, secrecy, and mystification at the political level, an inability to overcome the features of a putatively “closed” and coercive social order. The main tendency in theory, installed by the JCP historians, was precisely to link up those features of nominal “Japaneseness” at the common-sensical level with a world-historical program that would not only “explain” these features on a global scale, but that would also provide a master narrative for the inability of politics to sufficiently respond to the immediate situation. Here, politics proper was rendered impossible or structurally stillborn by means of the national formation’s incapacity to objectively leap to a new basis of accumulation, which would therefore produce, in the course of generating new social and economic forms, a new political subject.

Let us recall the formulations of Kuusinen and the Comintern’s Eastern Bureau, practically shared by the majority of the Koza-ha thinkers and their disciples throughout the discipline of history: Japanese capitalism was for them characterized as “incomplete” (*mikansei*), “inconclusive or non-determinate” (*hiketteiteki*), and “partial

and unfinished” (*chūtohanpa*).⁹ That is, for the Comintern, Japanese capitalism as such *does not yet exist*—the total social system that an economic life founded on the category of free labor would produce has not yet emerged. And it is this that is treated as the “precursor” (or indeed the “preface”—this somewhat “literary” question of narrative should be kept in mind) to the possibilities, not only of another social order, but the possibilities of politics as such. Here, I think it is extremely important to point out that one co-thinker of this tendency, Yamada Moritarō, put forward a significant and widely misunderstood version of this argument in the early 1930s, when he argued, not that capitalism in Japan did not exist, but rather that it did exist, and this was not disabled by putatively feudal features, but rather precisely *enabled* by them. By describing the “thought-image” of Japanese capitalism as “semifeudal,” Yamada made a decisive wager by inserting this “semi,” this weird element of undecidability that refused the substantialist fantasy of the transition as a “single and contentless” leap from one modality of life to another, as if these were clearly bordered and bounded entities from which one was either “inside” or “outside.”

In some sense, this “feudality” for Japanese Marxist theory in the 1930s functioned as a kind of *sublime*. But why describe this multivalent concept of the feudal as something “sublime?” What is intended by this formulation? I want to emphasize this point in two directions: In essence, the debate on Japanese capitalism was a debate on the nature of feudalism in Japan (the nature of *kosakuryō*, or tenant farm rent, for instance), but it was also a debate over the meaning of modes of production themselves. That is, it was a debate that considered the truly essential meaning of the analysis of modes of production: the relationship between structure and subject, the possibility or closure of politics—of class struggle—within the analysis of the overall structural features of the economic and social scenario, one that was conditioned by forces outside the purely subjective and experiential. In this sense, the feudal was always remote from this debate—it enabled a set of discursive operations that made the feudal a metonymic device: It could stand in for backwardness, it could generate in one word a whole morphology of development, it could stand in for “Japaneseness,” an inadequately modernized conception of culture as a stable stratum of givenness, for example.

Let us return then to the peculiarity of this feudal sublime, located around the emphasis on two questions: The insistence that “free labor” is the condition *sine qua non* for the establishment of modern capitalism, and therefore in turn, for the emergence of the modern political subject of a stable and “normal” national society. In essence, in contrast to Weber, Yamada reminds us that this absolutely did not characterize the employment of labor at the outset of the Meiji period, when the legal character of state formation did not serve to free the Bakumatsu peasantry from its extensive oppression, but rather enforced the already-existing oppressions by means of a new legitimacy. But does this mean that what emerged in Japan in the Meiji period was an “incomplete” or only “partial” capitalism? We have here recourse to Marx to clarify this point for us. If, as we recall in Marx’s own terms, the “normal” transition to capitalism in the English countryside is one “fable” or

⁹Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu,” 104.

story among others, what sets it in motion? What is the “prelude” or “preface” for the development of this “normal” narrative of capitalist development that Weber imagines and was *negatively* imagined in the debate on Japanese capitalism? For Marx, there is a specific answer:

The purchase of labour power for a fixed period is the prelude (*Einleitung*) to the process of production; and this prelude is constantly repeated when the stipulated term comes to an end, when a definite period of production, such as a week or a month, has elapsed.¹⁰

This *Einleitung*—and we see clearly the literary term here: preface, introduction, preamble, prelude—shows us that it is above all the *purchase* of the labor-power commodity that is the necessary moment of commencement for capital, and the emergence of labor power, as we now know from texts like Yann Moulier-Boutang’s crucial *De l’esclavage au salariat*, is in no way dependent on the specifically European presupposition of “free labor” as conditioned by juridical or de facto “freedoms.”

To return to the “prelude” of this discussion, the transition debates on the origins of capitalism have tended, all over the world, to share similar visions of these competing narratives staked out in the earliest of the major theoretical debates worldwide on the transition, the Japanese one. This is not to suggest that the many later debates on the transition merely reproduced the same schema of analysis, but rather to emphasize that the Japanese debate, the Indian debates of the subsequent decades, the debates in China, in Latin America, and elsewhere in the non-Western world, were not merely parochial or provincial debates on “national development,” but of global significance, insofar as their object was the *local* inflection of *global* capitalism. If anything is “sorted out” or “concluded” from this earliest debate—or indeed from the debates of the 50s, 60s, and 70s—it is precisely that *the* transition, understood as a unitary and single moment of the spark of modern social and economic systems, has always been absent, and no amount of documentary evidence has ever changed this; but that its meaning, and the struggle over its allegorical content, has never ceased to function. In thinking the nature of this debate—so formative for the humanities in the Japanese case that we can scarcely find a field it did not impact—historical analysis runs up against the limits of its ceaseless drive or compulsion for data because nothing in the debate could be settled except by that older model of historical analysis, a form suspended between philology and philosophy, in Croce’s terms. It is in this sense that a thinking of the contemporaneity and direct globality of the formative moments of the Marxist tradition in Japan remind us: Its point of departure was not “Japan” as some sort of alien, remote situation of excessive theoretical peculiarity, it was the nexus of social forms generated between global capital and the form of the nation-state, a nexus which continues to structure our conjuncture in the present.

So let us attempt to expand, in broader theoretical terms, what the analytical framework of Marx’s *Capital* offered to the world of Asia, Africa, and Latin America—its real twentieth century homeland—on the decisive questions of race and of nation,

¹⁰Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 567; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd 1 in *MEW*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 592.

two terms that were assured a central analytical place for Marxists in the non-West as a function of the specificities of the local advent of capitalism and its inevitable intertwining with the history of colonialism.

The Nation Form and the Labor-Power Commodity

die Erbsündewirktüberall. [...the “original sin” is at work everywhere.”].¹¹

Although the national question has a long polemical history, not only within Marxist theory but in the most broad political sense,¹² the relation between the supposedly “political” content of the national question and the supposedly “theoretical” content of the critique of the political economy remains complex and open.¹³ Typically, this relation was posed in a structure of two separate strata: Theoretical analysis of capitalism’s local development would furnish the basis on which the national question could be resolved on the level of strategy with an accompanying specific political line. But this tendency therefore treats the national question as something inherently separate from the inner logic of capital itself. In order to disrupt this prior reading, and reassert the centrality of the national question to the capital-relation itself, we will investigate certain paradoxes that characterize the labor-power commodity. This strange commodity, which never attains a stable existence, but that is rather always within capital’s circuit of positing (*Setzung*) and presupposition (*Voraussetzung*), must be assumed to be capable of reproduction. But its reproduction does not take place in the style of any other commodity: It is something *indirect* for capital, an effect of the worker’s body that must, in effect, be given from the outside so that the inside may function in the style of a logical process. Because of this exteriority, Marx emphasizes to us that the value and price of labor power can only be determined by means of a whole field of “historical and moral factors.” Here is where the “nation form” is always entering the picture, but not merely as a corollary moment: Rather the nation form is a mechanism that is always-already located at the alpha and omega of capital, where the volatile play of force and torsion cyclically repeats itself in the form of crisis.

Labor power and land are the two elements of capitalist production that can be circulated as commodities, but that *cannot be originally produced as commodities*. Rather, they must be “encountered” or “stumbled upon” *historically*—in the process of the “so-called primitive accumulation”—in order to function thereafter *logically*. Already this introduces a rupture or gap into capital’s own image of itself as a social totality in which all social relations are expressed (*darstellt*) as a pure field

¹¹Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 589; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd 1 in *MEW*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 620.

¹²See Haupt, Löwy, and Weill 1997.

¹³The following two sections draw from Gavin Walker, “Citizen-Subject and the National Question: On the Logic of Capital in Balibar,” in *Postmodern Culture* 22, no. 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

of exchange. Because labor power cannot be produced *directly*, as in the case of all other commodities, its presence can never be assumed to be stable or assured. Therefore, in order to traverse this gap so that capitalist production can be established as a circuit process, capital must continuously utilize the form of the *relative surplus population* to pretend or act *as if* the labor-power commodity can be limitlessly supplied, or to *indirectly* produce it, so to speak. Only by means of this “immaculate deception” can capital expand itself in the form of the business cycle. In turn, the relative surplus population must always be formed through something that appears *external* to capital, through which it can be aggregated and managed. This typically appears in the modern world in the form of the *border*, or in the form that Balibar has often referred to as “the anthropological difference.” In other words, when Marx describes the irrationality that characterizes the form of labor power as a commodity, it is no accident that he refers to the modern proletariat as “this *race* of peculiar commodity-owners.”¹⁴

In order to clarify how “the anthropological difference,” based on the fundamental figure of the “citizen subject,” can be understood in the social logic of capitalist society, we must also look for the antecedents of this theoretical problem in the historical production of the *individual*, a continual movement of inclusion and exclusion with which the individual is imagined and constructed. This production of difference by means of an oscillation or torsion between inclusion and exclusion culminates in the discourse of citizenship, which underpins not only the modern state form but its genesis in the form of empire and colony. Here, we confront immediately the “logic of contractualism” that grounds the creation of the citizen, the “free” contractuality of social life that stabilizes the “enclosures” or “borders” of the regime of citizenship, installing a discourse of governing and managing the state centered around what Locke called “property in his own person.” This logic of the citizen as the bearer of this strange “property” of his or her own person called “labor power” shows us how the contemporary management of the nation-state is inseparably linked to the reproduction of the aggregate capital. In turn, this mode of analysis can also show us how the figure of the *citizen* is the nodal point through which we can see the function of racism *within* contemporary global capitalism.

The operation of this strange thing can therefore be summed up by emphasizing that labor power, while it can function as a commodity (as variable capital in the production process), *cannot be a commodity as a direct product of capital*. Thus, the whole issue of labor power shows us this torsional and recurrent loop, whereby it must be presumed in order to exist, yet the condition of its very presupposition itself presumes that what should be a *result* of the process must somehow be there *at the beginning*. That is, in order to control and maintain something which it, in fact, cannot control, capitalism forms a means of producing the labor-power commodity “as if” it were, in fact, under its direct jurisdiction. What it requires is the formation of social-historical institutions capable of inciting forms of the “historical” and “moral” aspects of the field of physical life (from which labor power is drawn) that are “suitable” for

¹⁴Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 182; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd 1 in *MEW*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 186.

capitalism's own reproduction. Thus, capitalism's specific form of population is a complex aggregate of techniques that are overlaid like a grid on the existing "natural" stratum of bodies, words, physiognomies, affects, desires, etc., which recalibrates and reformulates them as "countable" or "computable" by capital as inputs for its circuit process:

Capitalism turns all products into commodities – it turns labor power itself into a commodity as well, but it cannot produce this labor power *as a commodity by means of capital*. As a result, in order to completely commodify labor power, capital requires the industrial reserve army. *Yet, unless this industrial reserve army is formed by capital itself, capitalism cannot posit the social foundations of its own establishment as one historical form of society.* (Uno 1973: 497)

That is, capital is repeatedly exposed to its inability to produce the foundations of its own order. Yet, without in effect "convincing itself" of the possibility to generate itself, capital cannot expand, because its expansion presumes the availability of labor power, which in turn presumes the industrial reserve army effect. Capital can give form or direction to the relative surplus populations that appear in the territorial domains of capital's manifestation, but the industrial reserve army effect paradoxically presupposes that wage labor, and therefore, a working population exist. Because of this presumption, the excess population that would guarantee capital's ability to act *as if* it were capable of producing labor power directly is a *result* of capital's untraceable "beginning" (*Anfang*), which should always logically precede the ordering of the population, at least the concept of population as presupposed by the modern state. But if capital therefore presumes this *Anfang*, it must silently or magically repeat the beginning over and over again every time the circuit C–M–C' reaches its end. In effect, because the labor-power commodity cannot be presupposed as a stable input for the production cycle—owing to the fact that it itself must be produced *by other means* on the *outside* of the capital-relation—the circuit of capitalist development is always passing through conditions that mimic its origins, conditions that always insert an element of chance or contingency into a process that capital itself would prefer to represent as "smooth" and stable.

Capital must repeat the violent capture of the "beginning," the violent verso of the supposedly "smooth" cycle of circulation, but this cannot rid itself of this fundamental "condition of violence" (*Gewaltverhältnis*) (Balibar 2009: 110), located in its logical alpha and omega, the labor-power commodity, whose "indirect" production is located paradoxically outside commodity relations. An excess of violence is haunting the capital's interior by means of this constantly liminalizing/volatilizing forcible "production" of labor power. Precisely by this excessive violence, capital endangers itself and opens itself up to a whole continent of raw violence, and it is exactly on this point that we see something important in terms of the question of how capital utilizes the "anthropological difference" to effect the "indirect" production of labor power, how the nation form is entering into this historical circuit of violence to "force" labor power into existence.

The primal violence, sustained as a continuum or "status quo," appears as a smooth state, a cyclical reproduction cycle without edges. But this appearance or semblance of smooth continuity is, in fact, a product of the working of violence upon itself:

Violence must erase and recode itself as peace *by means of violence*. In other words, when we encounter the basic social scenario of capitalist society, the exchange of a product for money, we are already in a situation in which the raw violence of subjectivation—whereby some absent potentiality within the worker’s body is exchanged *as if* it is a substance called labor power which can be commodified—is covered over by the form of money, which appears as a smooth container of significations that can serve as a *measure* of this potentiality. But in order for labor power to be measured and exchanged *as* money, there must be a repeated doubling of violence. What must remain on the outside of the capital as a social relation is paradoxically what must also be forced into its inside, perpetually torn between the forms of subjectivation that produce labor power as an inside, and the historical field of reproduction in which the worker’s body is produced on the violent outside of the capital.

In this sense, the commodification of labor power is the “degree zero” of the social itself, the apex or pinnacle of the social relation called capital. But this “thing” indicated by the problem of the commodification of labor power, or more specifically the excess or seeming (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power,¹⁵ is also an analytical or theoretical object that “discloses” the limits of the social itself. In other words, the original “accident,” the chance or hazardous historical encounter between capital and the owner of labor power, is continuously being set in motion by capital in the circulation form of the buying and selling of labor power, where we see the basic social “antagonism” (*Gegensatz*) between capital and labor. Yet when we enter the “hidden abode of production,” we discover not the stable yet concealed ground of this relation, rather we discover the site of its ultimate expression of “contradiction” (*Widerspruch*): We are immediately thrown back on the fact that although labor power cannot be originally produced by capital as a commodity, it can be *circulated on the surface as a commodity*; that is, the excess or absurdity of the commodification of labor power can be overcome without being resolved. Thus, this historically excessive or irrational accident of the original encounter that is being incessantly reinscribed on the circulation surface of social life, leads us from history to logic in the sphere of production. But critically, we are not presented here with something like the “truth” or pure relation of “depth” that lies “behind” or “below” the surface. Rather, we see that a certain process of coding is always taking place. What is coded as free contractual exchange between substantial entities of purely random origin is recoded in the sphere of production as the logical impossibility or even absurdity of the stability of this relation itself.

This relation of (im)possibility—in which capital cannot produce labor power directly, but can circulate it on its surface *as if it had*—is above all a question of *reproduction*, a question that returns us to the link between the national question and the form of labor power as a commodity. The paradox of the modern nation-state is that, while the nation and the state cannot be said to coincide, but rather must be kept separate in order for there to be a process of referral between them, nevertheless the

¹⁵This is the point on which Uno Kozo’s work has developed a set of important and original theses related to the originary and unavoidable absence or impasse of rationality characterizing the position of the labor power commodity. See on this point Walker (2016).

nation is always utilized by the state in order to trace the contours of its interiority. Thus, this installs a permanent site of slippage within the nation-state as a form. On the one hand, the state must utilize the nation in order to imagine itself as an interiority with clear borders and demarcations that would separate it from a general exterior, itself composed of other interiorities. In turn, the nation, as a purely ideational link between individuals that cannot be strictly located in terms of territory, institutions, or boundaries, must rely on the form of the state to provide it with a determinate field of localization, a concrete sphere within which one nation form can be said to be dominant or hegemonic. This process of referral, in which state and nation essentially require each other in order to image themselves as pure interiorities that could then legitimate a given hierarchical arrangement of phenomena in the form of a community, is therefore always linked to the question of *reproduction*. On this point, we can turn to a famous letter of Engels:

According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, *in the final analysis (das in letzter Instanz bestimmende Moment)*, the production and reproduction of actual life (*wirklichen Lebens*). More than that was never maintained by Marx or myself. (Engels 1967: 462–465; Engels 2005: 34–36)

What is intriguing and important here is the concept of the production and reproduction of “actual life” (*wirklichen Lebens*),¹⁶ that is, the reproduction not only of the “social factory” that is the worker’s physical body (itself the site of production of labor power), in other words, the literal reproduction of the body through the consumption of means of subsistence, which takes place *outside* yet internal to the sphere of circulation; it also means something much broader, what Foucault called, in the *History of Sexuality*, the “entire political technology of life” (Foucault 1979: 145). Here, we would require a focus not only on labor power, and its complex role within the dynamics of capital, but especially on its “bearers” or “guardians.” Marx reminds us that precisely because commodities, including labor power, cannot themselves go to the market and sell themselves, we must have analytical recourse to their “bearers” (*Hütern*). That is, we must have recourse to the historical forms of individuality that furnish the social bodies within which labor power, the *archi*-commodity at the origin of all other commodities, could be produced, reproduced, and “borne” to the market so as to be exchanged. Paradoxically therefore, we see something crucial here that once again Balibar has drawn our attention to: the somewhat “absent” or “blank” character of the proletariat that position most central to the sphere of circulation, wherein the possessor of nothing but labor power exchanges it as a commodity for a wage. Let me quote an especially crucial passage from Balibar here at some length:

Everything takes place as if the proletariat as such had nothing to do with the positive function that exploited labor power carries out in the sphere of production, as the “productive force” par excellence; as if it had nothing to do with the formation of value, the transformation of surplus labor into surplus value, the metamorphosis of “living labor” into capital. Everything

¹⁶We should note that the concept of “actual life” in Marx and Engels cannot be encompassed in the vitalist understanding of life: Rather it is here specifically *social life* that is at stake, the entire life of a social formation, not an abstract and quasi-mystical conception of life. I owe thanks to Benjamin Noys for discussions on this point.

occurs as if this term connoted merely *the “transitional” character of the working class* in a triple sense:

- (1) The condition of the worker is an unstable state, perhaps even a state of “marginality”, of exclusion from a relation to “normal” social existence (a society that proletarianizes itself thus tends towards a situation of generalized insecurity).
- (2) It perpetuates a violence that characterized initially, in an open and “political” manner, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and for which it later substitutes a mechanism that is purely “economic” in appearance, simply because it is juridically normalized.
- (3) It is historically untenable and thus implies another transition that erases the previous one, and through which capitalist accumulation prepared its material conditions. (Balibar 1997: 223)

In essence, Balibar links together two critical moments in the unfolding of the capital-relation: Its unstable *history* in the “so-called primitive accumulation” or process of enclosure, and its unstable *logic* in the form of exchange, the moment in which labor power, itself generated in the volatile contingency of history, must be *presupposed* in order to “convoke” itself when its “bearer” exchanges this inner potential for a wage. In essence, therefore, we see that the entire question of how something like the nation form could constitute one of the crucial “historical and moral factors” of the formation of value is linked to *repetition*, a repetition that defectively erases its own defects in order to operate as logical rationality. The transition here thus indicates not only the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but the constantly repeating transition of the *saltomortale*, or “fatal leap” of exchange, the irruption into existence of the labor-power commodity, this absent potential that links together capital’s history and capital’s logic in an intimate relation to the nation form.

Translation and Transition

The concept of transition is not only concerned with the historiographical identification of the transformation of the basis of a given social order, or the “articulation of modes of production.”¹⁷ It is also a temporal question, beyond simply the possibility of *periodization*, and encompassing the question of how divergent temporalities, divergent trajectories of development, could be located within the same sphere and within the same overall site, that is, the *world*. The transition is thus not simply a notion of how an individual social formation or a given “nation form” can be understood in its emergence, maintenance, and transformation; more broadly, the transition is a concept central to the historiographical discovery of “the world” as itself an integrated unit of analysis. In turn, the transition itself has long been a crucial site of contestation around the ways in which the world could or could not be understood as a unity. That is, the concept of the transition has always been profoundly linked to

¹⁷For reasons of length and topicality, I cannot extensively enter into a re-examination of the “articulation” debate here, but it is necessary to read and re-read this debate in our current moment. For an overview of the questions at stake, see Foster-Carter 1978.

the history of *representations of the world*, a history that links together the national question and the inner logic of capital.

Capital is always operating retrospectively as a relation, preparing the ground of its outside from within its logical orbit. This perverse irredeemable quality of capital's historical time is miniaturized within the *logic* of "civil society"—the citizen, whose existence cannot be grounded in any substance, but only abstractly in the law, must be legitimated by the retrojection of a "national subject" that would give continuity to something purely discontinuous, heterogeneous, and contingent. This process of "fixing" or "ordering" is always-already present in capital's form of *presupposition*. That is, by "presupposing" its own "suppositions," capital acts in such a way as to ensure that its limits are sealed off, removed from the historical process. Yet, precisely by therefore according such an essential place to history, capital acknowledges at all times its fundamental weakness or the defective moment in its logic: The contingent "continent of history" is the field of flux wherein the practical expressions of the *representations* essential to the image of a continuous subject are inscribed, and this field of history cannot be accounted for in capital's logic as such. But capital attempts to do just that in the form of its own peculiar historical time. It conjures itself up from history that it inscribes back onto the historical process, giving consistency and continuity to an accidental moment, a continuity that then serves as a legitimating device, a narrative that capital appeals to in order to prove itself.

It is precisely on this point that Sandro Mezzadra underscores the importance of the "postcolonial condition" that contemporary capitalism inhabits.¹⁸ In other words, because the reliance by capital on the schematic array of differences furnished and maintained in the contemporary world constitutes the concrete reality of the globality of the present, we must connect contemporary capitalism to the long and complex history of "the continual movement of inclusion and exclusion with which the individual is imagined and constructed" (Mezzadra 2008: 43). This production of difference by means of an oscillation or torsion between inclusion and exclusion culminates in the discourse of citizenship, which underpins not only the modern state form but its genesis in the form of empire and colony. Through a "prehistory" of the postcolonial condition, we are alerted immediately to the chain of signification between the logic of the citizen as image of the state and the logic of property (Locke's "property in his own person," or labor power) as a microphysics of capitalist development as a whole. This dual homology traces for us the inscriptions of power that irreparably condition the modern regimes of citizenship and that continue to show to us what is at stake in the state's policing of the figure of the citizen.

It is no longer a surprising or shocking historical intervention to note that the regime of control constituted by the discourse of citizenship is something that has a directly colonial legacy, but it remains an important task to theoretically demonstrate *how* the political and juridical theorizations that accompanied the colonial project attempted to *naturalize* "precise racial hierarchies" in the division of the earth itself, recalling among others Schmitt's notion of the originary *nomos of the earth* that char-

¹⁸See Mezzadra 2008, and on Mezzadra's work see Walker (2011a).

acterized the juridical field of the colonial era, the *jus publicum europaeum*.¹⁹ What we must constantly emphasize is the cyclical deployment of borders, margins, limits, interiors, and exteriors, in the historical production of the “colonial difference,” the means of recoding the “incommensurabilities” of the world as hierarchical commensurabilities, whereby the underdeveloped or colonized are temporally located in a permanent “waiting room of history.” It is no surprise therefore that these conditions of the historical production of difference, located within the production of the nation form itself, not only condition the emergence of labor power, but therefore condition the entire circuit of capital itself:

The historical conditions of [capital’s] existence are by no means *given* with the mere circulation of money and commodities. Capital only arises when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker selling his own labor-power on the market. This one historical precondition comprises a world’s history [or, a *world-history*] (*dieseine-historischeBedingungumschließt eineWeltgeschichte*). Capital, therefore, ushers in from the outset (*von vornherein*) a new epoch in the process of social production. (Marx 1962: 184; Marx 1996: 180)²⁰

We see here a complex integration of the formation of the *world* with the production of labor power as a commodity, two moments without which the concept *world* itself is unthinkable, the *single* and decisive precondition of world history itself. Without this precondition, a concept like “world” could not be produced precisely because labor power, while generated in relation to the nation form, also reveals a new universality of the possibility of *proletarianization*. In this sense, it is only because the logical world of commodities (what Marx called the *Warenwelt*) and the historical world of bodies are volatily amalgamated together in the form of labor power that we can have a concept of “world” at all. Yet, this systematic logic of capture is only part of the story. The paradox of the historical formation of the colonial difference and its juridical recoding is that it is being continuously undermined from within by the “discovery of equality” (in Fanon’s phrase) that the increasing integration of the world implied (see Mezzadra 2008: 28; 52–55). In other words, by integrating the world into a single schematic, based on the unit of the nation-state, the colonial project also produced the conditions for a global politics of equality, by placing “difference” into an overall framework of “commensurability.” It is precisely this moment that shows us the way in which the history of the anti-colonial movements, those political irruptions that demanded the nascent equality implied in the organization of the world be raised to a principle of society, continue to impact our world today, insofar as it is irreversibly and irrevocably “a” world. Therefore, the experience of the twentieth century, which we are living through, can be characterized by this colonial paradox—on the one hand, this “discovery” of the world as a world produced an “irreversible threshold” in the historical process of planetary unification. On the other hand, insofar as this unification is a historical

¹⁹See Walker (2011b).

²⁰Translation modified. The term “comprises” in the second to last sentence (“...umschließt eine Weltgeschichte”) also indicates an “enveloping,” “enclosing,” or “encompassing.” This “topological” sense should be kept in mind.

tendency that emerges from the colonial scenario, it also shows us that the colonial project is always tensely moving in two directions at once: It requires the form of *confinement* above all else (and it is on this point that Mezzadra's work has opened new and complementary analytical directions to Balibar's thought)—the bordering of groups, national languages, racial hierarchies, bounded spaces, and so forth—and at the same time the principle of equality or globality that is produced under the effect of the colonial enclosures is precisely the revolt against this confinement or bordering itself, the development for the first time of a world *as* world (rather than a world as collection of divergent parts); therefore, this form of enclosure “constitutes the fundamental principle and at the same time, the internal limit, of the colonial project” (Mezzadra 2008: 53–54).

Today, we remain within this tension or paradox, in a world in which “humanity” itself is framed, in the final analysis, through its historical character of *irreversibility*. This irreversibility is contained in the fact that “the violence of origin imposes a common language which erases forever any experience of difference that has not been mediated by the colonial relations of power and by the logic of global capital” (Mezzadra 2008: 65). It is here that we see the link to the transition.

The transition, Balibar argues, takes shape in a particular way, what we might call a dialectic of *limit and threshold*, through the gradual emergence of the “elements of the nation-state,” those elements that have gradually begun to “nationalize” society. Here, we can think not only of socioeconomic apparatuses, such as the examples Balibar provides of the reemergence of Roman law, the development of broad mercantilism, and the “domestication of the feudal aristocracies.” We can also conceive here of a certain dynamics of *translation*, wherein the historical forms of language, diffused in entirely different arrangements according to localities, rituals, and so forth, experience an increasing concentration into the early elements through which the nation is concatenated and pulled together. Translation, in this sense, would be precisely the experience of the historical formation of the national border as an *ideational* moment, the process through which “this side” and “that side” of a gap could be posited, the moment when two sides are presupposed, in turn necessitating a *regime of translation* between them.²¹ Thus, “the closer we come to the modern period, the greater the constraint imposed by the accumulation of these elements seems to be. Which raises the crucial question of the *threshold* of irreversibility” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 88).

The question of the “transition” therefore, is linked in Balibar's work, to this concept of “threshold,” a concept for which Foucault provides us a careful formulation: “What might be called a society's “threshold of modernity” has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, the man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics place his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault 1979: 143). Foucault's vocabulary here of “wager” as the key to the transition between *apparatuses of the limit* and *apparatuses of the threshold* should be linked back into the interior of the social relationality that

²¹On this crucial concept of the “regime of translation,” see the many works of Naoki Sakai.

composes “capital.” What is wagered is the capacity of “life”—that is, specifically *social life*—to both generate the building blocks and shoulder the burden of this social relation that is capital. Capital originates as a social relation capable of initiating and rejuvenating certain internally produced formations of relation. This is the sense in which Althusser long pointed out that capitalist reproduction is never the simple reproduction of the material basis of capitalist society, but rather the reproduction of *the relations that allow for this reproduction itself*. Capital, as a social relation, can initiate and maintain itself but only as a *defective* circle, or a circuit process that never quite reaches its cyclical starting point (see Nagahara 2008, 2012). In order, therefore, to bridge this gap marked by the (im)possibility of the labor-power commodity, the “whole political technology of life”—the statements, formations, apparatuses, modalities, and so forth that sustain the arrangement called “life”—must be mobilized to seal over the contingency of this “wager.” And it is exactly this constancy or inseparability of capital from its putative “outside”—the form of the nation and so forth—that Althusser identified as the “naïve anthropology” of humanism haunting the world of capital (Althusser 1970). Capital’s “wager” on “life” constitutes a “vicious circle,” one which never adequately returns to its starting point, because the whole sequence of presupposition forms an abyssal and regressive chain, in which something must *always* be given: “the homogeneous given space of economic phenomena is thus doubly given by the anthropology which grips it in the vice of origins and ends” (Althusser 1970: 163).

In the final analysis, Balibar reminds us that “it is the concrete configurations of the class struggle and not “pure” economic logic which explain the constitutions of nation-states” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 90). Without a doubt, this is correct. But is it not also the case that the entire schematic of Marx’s *critique* of political economy is devoted to showing us precisely that the “concrete configurations of the class struggle” always haunt and contaminate the supposedly “pure” interiority of the logic of capital? The labor-power commodity, the product of a historical accident in the form of a contingent encounter (the “so-called primitive accumulation”), is given a central role within the *logical drive* of the capital. How could the relation of self-expanding value form itself as a circuit, as a cyclical and repeating process without *presupposing* the presence of the labor-power commodity, which is precisely that which can *never* be strictly presupposed in capital’s interior? In other words, from the very outset of the form of exchange relations, the labor-power commodity, which is a product of a volatile and purely contingent history, is made to function *as if* it could be assumed to be “pure economic logic.” This is exactly where the secretive role of the form of the nation comes into the most inner moment of the logic of capital, a moment which behaves as if historical considerations are axiomatically excluded, a moment intimately related to capital’s most fundamental phenomenological “conjuring trick” (*escamotage*) (Derrida 1994). In this sense, we ought to push Balibar’s argument slightly further by emphasizing that the “concrete configurations of the class struggle” and “pure economic logic” are in fact *always contaminated with each other* in the historical experience of capitalist society.

In other words, this “naïve anthropology” or “the anthropological difference,” which is supposedly excluded from the circulation process or the “total material

exchange” between “rational” individuals, is in fact located at its very core. The form of “the nation” is already contained at the very origin of the supposedly “rational” and “universal” process of exchange, a process that acts as if it represents the smooth and perfect circle of pure rationality, but that is permanently suspended between its impossible origin, which it is compelled to cyclically repeat, and its end, which is equally impossible because it would relativize the circuit of exchange and expose it to its outside, which it must constantly erase. Thus “civil society” itself must remain in its state of insanity or “derangement” forever pulled in two directions of the production of subjects. It cannot exit this “deranged form,” but must try perpetually to prove its “universality” simply by oscillating between these two boundaries, two impossibilities: its underlying *schema of the world*, which “seems *absent* from the immediate reality of the phenomena themselves” because it is permanently located in “the interval between origins and ends,” a short circuit that incessantly reveals to us that “its universality is merely repetition” (Althusser 1970: 163).

Just like the representation of translation as pure exchange (Sakai and Solomon 2006), the *transition* must always be represented as if it were a natural growth, a “simple and contentless” leap of inevitability from “one side” to “the other.” But when we closely examine the transition, we find something truly disquieting: We discover not that the transition is an accomplished fact of history or a necessary step in the evolution of social life, but rather that the transition is an endless loop of “falling short,” never accomplishing its task, but always erasing or recoding its failure. In this sense, the paradox of civil society is not that it is “strong,” “weak,” “absent,” “inverted,” and so forth. It is rather that civil society is never fully established anywhere, precisely because the exchange process on which it is based must always “traverse” the historical outside while pretending to be a pure interiority, a pure logical circle. What sustains this circle that is always not quite returning to itself is its repetition. But because this circular logic of civil society in the world of capital is compelled to repeat, it is also compelled to constantly re-remember its incompleteness, contingency, and relativity, a problem that remains in the everyday life of society in the form of the “indetermination” of the citizen (Balibar 1991: 53). In other words, the figure of the citizen itself, the juridical and political figure in whom is incarnated the historical body producing labor power, remains in a permanent state of incompleteness or chance, a figure that depends “entirely on an encounter between a statement and situations or movements that, from the point of view of the concept, are contingent. If the citizen’s becoming-a-subject takes the form of dialectic, it is precisely because *both* the necessity of “founding” institutional definitions of the citizen and the impossibility of ignoring their contestation—the infinite contradiction within which they are caught—are crystallized in it” (Balibar 1991: 53).

Marx’s *Capital* shows us—and showed generations of thinkers throughout the non-West—that “world” as a concept, “world” as a project, remains incomplete. But this incompleteness also restores to us a politics of the world, a politics that would restore precisely those “concrete struggles” to their central place in its “incompleteness.” Above all else, it is in linking together the logic of capital, the history of capitalism outside Western Europe and North America, the transition from subjects to citizens and back again, the emergence of the nation form and its regime of

“anthropological difference,” that can show us the *persistence of politics*, the open politicality that always remains within the core of the supposedly “rational” and closed social forms we inhabit. In the face of another world crisis, a crisis in which the reproduction of the aggregate capital has come into a clear conflict with the tendency toward an increase in the rate of appropriation of surplus value, we also see that this moment of crisis in the capital-relation is mirrored in a crisis of the nation form and the existing arrangements of the “anthropological difference.” By repeatedly exposing us to the politicality that can never be erased from the logic of capital and its complicitous inner relation to the nation form, what discloses itself to us in the text of *Capital* is the fact that another arrangement of social life is always possible that another sociality, beyond the enclosure into capital and the nation, remains a potential in the history of the present.

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