

A Post-Colonial Critique of Capital Accumulation Today

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The conditions for the accumulation of capital are precisely those which rule its original production and reproduction in general: these conditions being that one part of the money buys labour and the other commodities (raw materials, machinery, etc.)... Accumulation of new capital can only proceed therefore under the same conditions under which already existing capital is reproduced (Italics by Marx, cited by Rosa Luxemburg, *Accumulation of Capital*, Section 3, Chapter 26, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/ch26.htm#doc-2> – accessed on 20 January 2014)

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<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/ch26.htm> (accessed on 15 January 2014)

I seek to view here the debates and discussions on the question of accumulation from a post-colonial angle by which I mean the angle of a critical theory of post-colonial capitalism. I do not however directly comment on the historical debates on the question of accumulation, because much of this debate will today appear as primarily of scholarly interest unless we situate the question of accumulation against the perspective of imperialism, or what can be called its *other scene*, the post-colonial capitalist reality of today's world. From this standpoint I attempt to elucidate its features because such an attempt will help us to develop new insights relating to the enigma of accumulation. Such attempt will also mean locating if you like an absolute other of capital functioning as a determinant of latter's accumulation in today's context. I have also another goal – more ambitious and thus my vacillation and possible ineffectiveness in articulating it. May be at the end of this paper we can ask: What are the philosophical implications of a post-colonial critique of the contemporary dynamics of accumulation, given the fact that such a critique can originate only from within – that is within the post-colonial regime of accumulation? If so, what is the inside and the outside of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation? How do we negotiate the perennial duality of the inside and outside? This question will impel us to recall the classic tradition of revolutionary dialectics, and that will be a fitting tribute to the legacy of Rosa Luxemburg.

1. Boundaries of Accumulation

The process of separation of labourers from the means of production so that they become free wage-labourers for the purposes of capitalist exploitation is not a natural development, but rather the

result of violent confrontations. This process not only speaks of a past, (the process of initial transition from the pre-capitalist to the capitalist mode of production), it continues to this day on a great scale in the post-colonial world. In developed capitalist countries as in the post-colonial capitalist countries the workers erect social and political barriers to the extension of the length of the working day, and therefore capital introduces machinery as a counter-element against the working class. Yet, while capital tries to reduce the number of workers, it also seeks to bring in new workers under its command as an exploitable human resource. The so-called human factor of production is thus always present, and capitalist accumulation must depend on the continuous separation of labourer from the means of production.

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

A post-colonial critique of the accumulation process is built on a fundamental understanding that capitalism demands that all geographical limits to capital accumulation have to be overcome though in different ways, which leads to the characteristic penchant for space. At the same time while production entails geographical concentration of money, means of production (thus proximity to means of production including natural resources), labour power, and consumer markets (all these for higher profits and lower costs), the circulation of capital requires circumventing various boundaries – of space, institutions, forms, financial regimes, labour processes, economic segments, etc., thus requiring the construction of different zones and corridors. Capital accumulation begins in this contradictory mode - whenever and wherever some money is deployed to make more money by exploiting wage labour – with the important proviso that this will require specific conditions to make money in this way and in a sustainable manner. This makes border perhaps the most important institution for capital to circumvent

– national political borders, natural boundaries, borders of markets, boundaries of production sites and circulation, boundaries of cities, borders of norms and violence, and most importantly the border between necessary labour and surplus labour, and thus necessary work hours and surplus work hours. We can see how a post-colonial critique of the capitalist accumulation process requires treating border as method, because a border-centric study necessitates a dialectical handling of a situation.

Sometimes one can take this to an extreme extent (the danger of all logic) and say that that the idea of accumulation of capital is enough, there is no need for an adjective “primitive”, since capital has always included force and violence in achieving the aim of separation of labourers from their means of production, and that capital has always presupposed transition, and thus there is no need to invoke a “primitive” to acknowledge the reality of accumulation. This kind of logic is absurd because it is non-dialectical. It forgets the duality of the inside and the outside of a process.

Lenin always a practical revolutionary was cautious on this point. He said, “New and important in the highest degree is Marx's analysis of the accumulation of capital, i.e. the transformation of a part of surplus value into capital, and its use, not for satisfying the personal needs or whims of the capitalist, but for new production... From the accumulation of capital under capitalism we should distinguish what is known as primitive accumulation: the forcible divorcement of the worker from the means of production, the driving of the peasants off the land, the stealing of communal land, the system of colonies and national debts, protective tariffs, and the like. ‘Primitive accumulation’ creates the ‘free’ proletariat at one pole, and the owner of money, the capitalist, at the other.” (p. 64) V.I. Lenin, “Karl Marx: A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism” (1915, *Collected Works, Volume 21*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, pp. 43-91). Many of today’s Marxists take Lenin to task for being “doctrinaire” and sticking to the letters of Marx. In my understanding Rosa Luxemburg also notwithstanding her complicated expositions on this issue was careful in final formulations, while she debated with Marx’s writings on the origins of accumulation and stressed what can be called “the ground outside” in understanding the process of accumulation.

It also means that we cannot do away with logic and think that historical narrations will give us a clear analysis of capitalism. While determining the reproduction of aggregate social (total) capital we have to keep aside the issue of singularities. In the *Grundrisse* Marx says that the concrete is “the concentration of many determinations.” This is the way in which we can define singularity. Singularity is the concrete. Yet, as Marx tells us the concrete is the point of departure in reality, not in thought. Thus, we arrive at the concrete through a process of abstraction, which means starting from the abstract. In its immediacy, the concrete gives us only what Marx calls a “chaotic conception.” And when Marx adds that

the concrete is the “unity of the diverse”, what is significant is not the words “unity” and “diverse”, but the indication by Marx of the dialectical relation of the two: unity and the diverse. We can approach the issue of accumulation in that spirit without getting bogged down into the endless and sterile debate whether while pursuing a logic Marx is right in clearing the analysis of historical impurities that mark any analysis of the concrete. We shall then see that the unity of the process of reproduction of capital through the process of reproduction of surplus value is the abstraction of many concrete determinations of the process of realisation (including the violent process). Furthermore, this unity yields also to a mode of production of an essential difference. To continue: Unity, if we come to think of it deeply, is a transition of singularities to an abstraction. We have now reached the link between transition and accumulation.

Marx in the second and third volumes of *Capital* showed how markets become crucial for accumulation. Thus global and local capitalist as well as non-capitalist enterprises are interconnected today through global (that is, where exchange happens between entities across national boundaries) and local (that is, where exchange happens between intra-national entities) markets. This is the materialization of a value chain. Neoliberal capitalism through the supply chains (consisting of various modes such as outsourcing, subcontracting, and off-shoring) gives rise to new circuits of global capital. Connected to these circuits are new practices and relationships that produce new subjectivities and a new hegemonic social reality that aims to foreclose the language of class precisely by retaining and underscoring the presence of the so-called informal, agricultural, and the household sectors. Yet Marx showed at the same time how capitalist crisis becomes one of accumulation through the reinforcement of the social in the productive process – thus the resistance of the worker (and the society) does not allow beyond a point the operation of the so-called remorseless laws of accumulation. The State whose singular importance in the accumulation process was brought out by Lenin again and again becomes the crucial site where politics negotiates the inevitable binds that accumulation as a process continuously throws up. There is thus perhaps as some have called “an elective affinity between capitalism and passive revolution: the decentralised nature of the accumulation process, driven by competition among capitals, is evidently compatible with a wide range of political forms, giving scope for individual states to restructure the process” (Alex Callinicos, “The Limits of Passive Revolution”, *Capital and Class*, 34 (3), pp. 491-507 - <http://cnc.sagepub.com/content/34/3/491> accessed on 18 July 2010).

2. Accumulation and Transition

The theme of state in a post-colonial study of accumulation is not accidental. Also it is not strange that in western capitalism theoretical critiques of capitalist accumulation process have almost

done way with the state, as if capitalism unfolded in the long twentieth century without the state machinery and the imperialist order. Politics was once more taken out of political economy. In globally positioned views the state always appears as a minor factor, while in local revolutionary views the state appears always as a crucial factor facilitating globalisation and capitalism. The state facilitates restructuring of capitalist order. It is the site of passive revolution. Most importantly because of all these, the theme of state allows us a sustained engagement with the issue of transition and thus to the specific form of post-colonial capitalism. A salient aspect of the post-colonial situation is the near permanent condition of primitive accumulation as the other of the most modern form of capital, which one may term as virtual capital. Developmental and conflict-induced migration (known as forced migration) within the country and to other countries takes place under primitive and precarious conditions, and female labour forms a substantial chunk of this scenario. Keeping this in mind two perceptive observers describe migration as the “multiplication of labour” (Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method or the Multiplication of Labour*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2013). As more and more virtual capital in form of offshore funds, venture business, hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, internet based investment and banking, forward trading based wealth, etc. reach the post-colonial shores and result in massive property boom, skyrocketing land prices, construction upsurge, and a new surge in the prices of raw material like iron ore, etc., and at times foodstuff, the more people are pushed towards accepting precarious and unorganized work condition, and as consequence there is more de-peasantisation, and appearance of unorganised labour, which can be best described as “immaterial labour”. Flexibilisation here appears not so much in the form of what is called in the West as “post-fordism”, which is based on micro-computerisation, flexible technologies, and the domination of process industries, but much more in the shape of uncertain work profile, uncertain conditions of reproduction of labour, catering to the backward linkages of new capital which is based on various automated technologies and flows.

We can ask two questions here:

First, does this scenario in any way contradict Marx’s analysis? The answer is no, because once again this scenario shows how the social is inserted in an economic process and the economic and the extra-economic are intertwined. The domination of finance over industry and the production process not only needs political and administrative restructuring of supply, investment, banking, and credit norms, it also signals something more fundamental. It points to the dialectical way in which the limits to capital’s expansion function in its life as a continuous process of aggrandizement. Probably Rosa Luxemburg got Marx wrong when she commented, “In fact, he (Marx) made the solution even more

difficult by assuming the capitalist mode of production to prevail universally". (*Accumulation of Capital*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/ch26.htm> - Section 3, Chapter 26; accessed on 15 January 2014). This is because we often disregard how Marx inserted the social in the economic. He not only thought that the definite social relation between men becomes the fantastic form of relation between things through the domination of the commodity form, he also added that each commodity represented a "phantom-like objectivity" when a congealed quantity of homogenous human labour has been abstracted from any concrete determination. "As crystals of this social substance which is common to them all" capitalism foregrounds money as the "universal equivalent", "the social action of all commodities". The unity of the world is made possible precisely because money is the sovereign. As the philosopher will say, money rewrites the social contract as it emerges as a universal and representative power from a process of mutual recognition of various commodities (*Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, New York, Vintage Books, 1977; p. 180). Money has evolved today into virtual forms such as of finance, credit, and promise. In this virtual form it will now link the two ends of accumulation. Primitive accumulation will be spurred by construction boom, land grab, urban expansion, and rampant mining and other kinds of virulent extraction of underground and surface, while virtual accumulation will be spurred by trading in money and finance as commodity in an unbridled manner.

Second, in what way does this condition constitute a predicament for the post-colony? On one hand the post-colony must depend on the State to come out of this scissors attack taking place in the form of a combined appearance of primitive accumulation and virtual accumulation. On the other hand the State is in a bad state today and we do not have yet any other substantive form of national autonomy. Therefore we must work our way through carefully. This sense of caution will help the post-colony retain flexibility and prise its way through the bind of primitive work conditions and the reproduction of the advanced form of accumulation – a bind that leaves almost nothing as social surplus for the post-colony to develop. Precisely for this reason the post-colony will need the most advanced form of politics, whose core will be formed by immaterial labour, signifying the appearance of multitude (workers, peasants, and mass of petty producers) on the political scene. The significance of these two terms, *immaterial labour* and *multitude* goes far beyond the current expositions of these two terms. Immaterial labour and multitude do not work towards realisation of any potential of capital. They create a new reality out of their own existence.

The heterogeneity of labour produced out of the specifics of the accumulation process forces us to grapple with the dialectical significance of transition. The post-colonial dilemma is around the issue of

transition – transition from semi-colonialism and neo-colonial conditions to new democracy, retarded agriculture to agricultural reforms, land reforms, and further on to cooperatives, foreign and corporate-led industrialisation to a balanced industrial growth and the transition of rule from compradors and corporate class to a national popular alliances. However, as Mao Tse Tung on the basis of the experiences of socialist construction in the Soviet Union had argued in *On the Ten Major Relationships* (1956, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_51.htm accessed on 6 February 2014), this transition is not towards a pre-determined socialism; it does not lead to any pre-charted socialist path; the transition will lead to its own future, to its socialism, the sketches of whose future can be seen only by those engaged in a patient search for that. This is what is meant by the word, *praxis*.

3. Accumulation and the Re-ordering of Space

The reality of contradiction is of course greater than the science of it. As of now, the science is developed in the North, while the reality of contradictions in the South surpasses its scientific analysis. The reality of this situation reconstitutes the respective worlds of theory and reality, universal and the determination of historical developments, the continuous search for the realisation of potential and the knowledge that reality makes new grounds, where reality becomes its own constitutive experience. Just like in the West where in the last fifty years there were desperate attempts among the Left intellectuals to escape the world of contradictions, in the post-colony too there have been attempts to argue that the post-colony forms an outside to the world of capital, that the post-colony can escape the features of modern capitalism, such as financial crises, crises of overproduction, existence of a reserve army of the labour consisting of unemployed human resources, and various forms of bourgeois wealth – features that are integral to production and accumulation of surplus-value. Here too attempts have been to discredit Marx's method. Yet precisely these attempts show that material relations are clue to ideological understanding - from the branch of political economy to say politics.

The post-colonial predicament is thus in terms of knowledge production, global logistics, economic specifics, and political subjectivity. The angle of predicament also gives us the advantage of looking at the global scenario of transformation in a new way. Let us recall in this context the decades of the fifties to seventies in the last century when the word "ex-colony" was used by anti-colonial Left movement all over Asia and Africa in place of today's "post-colony". There were fierce debates in the communist parties and among communists as to the path of transformation. Questions were asked: What is new democracy? What is national democracy? What is people's democracy? Perhaps this change of name is a minor question. But in any case, debates like these more than the theoretical

quarrels on transition have to be re-visited. I referred to Mao's lecture on ten major relationships in that context.

The experiences of India, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, and several other countries demonstrate how post-colonial capitalism through this combination of the low and the high forms of accumulation reorders the spaces of accumulation. Reordering of spaces becomes crucial in phenomena such as the return of the land question, resurgence of commodity prices, the reinforcement of the extractive nature of capital (extraction of biological power, nature, sub-soil resources, or cognitive abilities of human beings), etc. It results in new practices of zoning and creating corridors as circulating modes through which accumulation will take place. There are thus continuities as well as discontinuities and new features in the working of the logic of the re-ordering of space. These continuities and discontinuities show how old forms or configurations of space are re-moulded under the conditions of post-colonial capitalism. There are great stakes in this game of zoning and spacing. These stakes concern the bio-political organisation of post-colonial societies (for instance in India there are coastal regulation zones to save the coast and some say to save the fishermen besides the coast, disaster zones and flood prone zones wherefrom human beings are removed to save them and to put in place protection measures such as dykes, earthquake zones where new norms of construction of buildings are introduced, there are even suicide zones which are often dry areas and where farmers, it is said, habitually commit suicide to end miseries of life and debt). All these compel new legislations, policies, and regulations marking the particularities of respective zones and the protective measures for endangered life. These zones thus show how features of nature and of life are getting intermeshed more than ever; and the two separate registers – of nature (with all its vagaries) and life – are getting tied into a new form of existence, which borrowing Michel Foucault's phrase we may call a distinct *bio-political mode of existence*. This life is marked by new regulations for zoning and spacing. At its heart is the logic of economy.

The practice of zoning has assumed heightened importance in the background of post-colonial developmental urges. Highways are to be constructed; mines are to be opened up tearing the secrecy of the forests; airports are to be built; new economic zones like the free trade zones to be set up, agro-industries including fruit-processing units to be established in special areas; likewise power grids are to be set up, and marine product processing units are to dot the coastal regions, besides the ports commanding once again distinct zones. The country looks like an ensemble of zones representing different logics – at times complimentary, but often overlapping and conflicting. All these zones require corridors to function – corridors of information, freight or cargo, money, credit, oil, gas, etc., the medium being somewhere the cable, the ship, intermodal train service, the pipeline, van, truck,

highway, or as in today's time containers as the most long-haul cargo transport, and finally financial corridors. These corridors can be in the form of certain forms of labour linking the zones, or certain forms of transmission of information and finance, or even certain forms of circulation and processing of commodities like roads, pipelines, optical fibres, information highways, or special freight corridors. While analysts often concentrate on the social life of a commodity (which is indeed one of the entry points in understanding the emergence of zones, thus plantation zones, tea zones, life of tea as a commodity, etc.), the need now is to look into the life of labour in its transit forms to make sense of what makes a zone and what links one zone with another. Clearly we are looking here beyond the factory form and trying to understand the newer forms of assembly and chain. This is also the way to make sense of the bio-political organisation of capital and its logistical form.

How will these emerging zones be spaced? The citizen-worker may be a minor figure to populate such a zone, and whole populations may have to be trained to become the denizens of such an anomalous universe. Dispossessed peasants, construction workers from villages, tea shop owners and other street vendors from nearby districts, snooty IT workers – all become parts of a heterogeneous scenario of labour. They all will demand rights, some couched in the language of citizenship, some in bare life terms, and again some couched in gross economic terms of flexibility and money. While we know that these heterogeneous forms of labour will be evened out in the form of a commodity, we cannot say immediately how the new subjectivity of these newly zoned spaces will develop. But it is very much of a possibility that labour in this heterogeneous form may not want to behave like the massed or garrisoned foot soldiers of a disciplined imperial army stationed in a zone waiting for the final battle. We must be ready for a messy picture. Therefore, zoning exercise today may be a precarious one. Because while the governmental and administrative history of zoning may be a long one, the more capital becomes virtual, the more zoning exercise can be subject to the unpredictable nature of fluctuations of capital (primarily capital in form of money and credit) and thus zoning exercise may be self-defeating. It will be as precarious and self-defeating as has been the creation of a euro-zone, as unpredictable as the crash of 2008-09, or the fall of Greece. Within capital there is this immanent contradiction – zoning and flow. Finance capital requires both governmental strategies – zoning and flow - functioning at their utmost efficiency, and thus its insoluble paradox and dilemma, namely, how to return to a balance of the two, how to sanctify and protect the corridor that links the zones and makes flows possible. Is the corridor then *the weakest link in the chain*? Obviously we have the task of re-imagining the Leninist idea. We can now see how the post-colonial experiences of reordering of spaces (think of the special

economic zones in India in the last two decades) enrich the Marxist understanding of circuits of capital. The circuits of capital are always over determined.

Given the fragility of the neo-liberal reconstruction of economy and society in the post-colonial world, the question then will be: Does the strategy of creating zones, corridors, and circuits make the neo-liberal programme of making capital fluid and resilient to shocks? One of the lessons of Marx's analysis of capital is its attention to circulation, which has now become the ordering principle of life under neo-liberal economy. When corridors meant to ensure the circulation of commodities and capital, particularly in their final form, *money*, fail in their tasks, the purpose of zoning fails. In capitalist production while zoning is resorted to as part of division of labour, the productive nature of zoning depends on a successful strategy of maintaining corridors. Corridors guarantee circulation, and the quality of commodity including its organic composition determines the nature of a corridor in question.

Of course we can notice to an unprecedented degree the fact that labour engaged in circulation and in production are getting intermeshed more than ever, so that the hidden process of producing surplus value is becoming more mysterious. Labour is assuming more than ever transit forms due to this reason, and in this situation money begetting more money (which Marx pointed out as the feature of merchants' capital) is determining the fate of corridors, including financial corridors. We must remember that zones in the last quarter of the twentieth century have been created less for production of ordinary commodities or even means of production as commodities, but more for production of money as commodity (typical of these spaces would be Hong Kong, Shanghai, Dubai, Doha, Singapore, Mumbai) – that is to say an environ where production and circulation of a commodity like money merge. Thus we are not dealing with a situation where there is an over production of goods requiring new channels of circulation via public reforms programmes including fiscal reforms to widen the base of consumption (famously the New Deal and various Keynesian programmes), but the consequences of the expansion of the credit system resulting in accumulation of money capital in increasingly abstract, surreal, and virtual or fictitious forms. The basic principle of all such forms has been capitalisation of revenue based on future production of surplus value as well as capitalisation of various forms of credit, such as banking capital or stock transactions in public debt.

The “real” and “financial” spheres remain different, yet they become virtually one. Capital in form of goods and capital in form of money are different, yet they become inseparable in economy. The difficulties in realising profit in the industrial sector is sought to be allayed in the financial sector through emphasis on profits through credit operations, which finally tell back on the economy itself. We are thus facing here the question of several competing circuits endangering the corridors of supply and

circulation, impacting especially on zones. Even though one is the virtual and the other real, yet in a sense both are real; also to be true, one is working as the virtual to the other. Therefore the collapse of the virtual creates new wastelands of capital in the wake of its departure.

Given this background of financial insecurity that has gripped the world, the question then to be asked is, how will it affect the pattern of zoning and linking them? If true to its origin the strategy of zones, corridors, and circuits must have the dimension of security, how would the present development (the crash of 2008) upset the efficiency and maximisation calculus? What will happen to the large insurance infrastructure against sudden losses of all kinds? What will secure the zones against volatile capital flows and the sudden emergence of wastelands, breakdown of circuits due to conflicts, competition, and war, and the neo-liberal way of organising the economy, which is precisely the way of combining the virtual mode and the primitive mode of accumulation? All these inquiries require two changes in our pattern of thinking. First, it means that we increasingly view circuit as a chain (with its weak links). Second, it means viewing more than ever economic relationships as essentially social relationships on which productivity (in other words the productive power of the present economy and its accumulation capacity) depends. These relationships variously mentioned in this paper are between agriculture and industry, industry and services, capital goods and consumer goods, the overall economy and the unorganised or informal or the “need” (a concept used extensively by the late Indian economist Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality, and Post-Colonial Capitalism*, Delhi: Routledge, 2013) sector, growth and infrastructure, economic infrastructure and social infrastructure (such as education and health and skill formation), state and its sub-regions, river basins and dry areas, valley and the hill, capital region and the distant regions, and finally zones of capital investment and the zones of social investment. Transit labour emerges in this context.

Let us review our arguments made till now on the theme of a post-colonial analytic of the accumulation process before we proceed further:

First, Marx’s method of analysing accumulation is both historical as well as trans-historical, sticking to historical singularities as well as pursuing a logical argument in dissecting the category of capital. We are aware of the theoretical and academic controversies around this question. Yet we cannot escape the fact that Marx brings in the issue of primitive accumulation, and calls this the story of “original sin” in theology that is political economy. In other words, political economy does not become science after this. Political economy remains theology. The theology continues, along with the science, as an account of the original sin. It is original, not because from this capitalism as a system originated and then the narrative of the birth of capital becomes a matter of the past, but because it is a

theological story, where in the interest of the structure of the story we need an account of the original sin. This then is a double critique: critique of theology, also critique of the argument of self-reproduction of capital without the overall social mechanism that will facilitate this reproduction.

Second, in the account of the economic life of the capital the State is important as a category. Is budget an economic instrument to dispossess people, to pauperise them, or an administrative method? The budget and the legislations (Marx calls them “bloody”) connect to the State and speak of sovereign power needed to create the space by continuously clearing it up for the dynamics of capital to operate. Therefore the agency and the figure of the State that facilitates and effects “expropriation” is the great shadow hovering over the entire account of capital. I am referring here to Part 8 of Marx’s *Capital* (Volume 1). People speak of the role of the state in accounting for reforms. In this account we must include the myriad of coercive ways deployed by the state in order for capital to function as a mechanism, as a process, and as a machine. We must include the State also as the facilitator of the social conditions of accumulation (by laying down policies, guiding principles, and the legal framework, providing incentives and disincentives, facilitating internal and international trade etc.). The significance of this point is that once we bring in the question of sovereignty, much of the quarrels over interpretation of the theory of primitive accumulation pale into insignificance and irrelevance. Where a national state is absent, the role is played by colonial state or the international political sovereign in form of imperialism. Repeated robbery of Africa is a case in point. Include colonialism in this account, we shall see, the ostensibly free floating account of primitive accumulation undergoes a process of displacement. Consequently we shall have a post-colonial view of capitalism, to wit post-colonial capitalism, which will help us in viewing primitive accumulation as something not of hoary past, but of our time.

Third, to understand all these we have to make the issue of post-colonial capitalism the essential gradient in any analysis of the dynamics of accumulation today. Not surprisingly Lenin stresses the question of colonies and the birth of finance capital; Rosa Luxemburg too situates her analysis of accumulation in the context of imperialism. The angle of post-colonial capitalism implies (i) a combination of the virtual and the most primitive forms of accumulation, (ii) return of the land and other resources question to the central place in political economy as the role of extraction assumes increasing significance in the expansion of capitalism suffering from its own internal contradiction, (iii) new but precarious strategy of zoning and creating corridors for a reconfiguration of the spaces of capital, (iv) the salience of transit labour (simplistically called the migrant labour), and (v) the persisting

significance of the state as the facilitator of the conditions of accumulation). For all these reasons, post-colonial capitalism will be the stake on which the life of capital as accumulation will depend.

Fourth, from this angle any discussion on accumulation of capital must involve then the significant question of the *other* of the category of capital (recall Lenin's emphasis on colonies or Rosa Luxemburg's emphasis on what Marx called the "others" in the capitalist society, that is population groups besides the workers and the capitalists, such as hangers on, parasites, bureaucracy, petty producers, etc.). The *other* stares at the process of accumulation, which must now subjugate the former to complete its own life. Circulation increasingly becomes the stake on which the continuity of accumulation will depend.

4. Implications

The accumulation debate raging for more than a century raises certain curiosities. We can take note how issues of colonialism, imperialism, production of super profit, competition and monopolies, reorganisation of space, different forms of capital, and above all wars, etc. had their long shadows over the debate, and there was perhaps no way it could be anything else. And it was not the case that all these intervening issues were properly integrated in the accumulation arguments. Thus one may ask, in what way does a scientific question become an ideological one? Clearly a scientific question does not remain "scientific" in the sense that contemporary social and political milieu interjects in our discussion. Or one can say, only by negotiating rigorously with the contemporary social and political milieu a scientific question can remain scientific.

In this context we can take note of one discussion. It is a sensitive point, but perhaps not out of context. Amidst the war Rosa Luxemburg wrote in the *Junius Pamphlet*, "The modern proletariat comes out of historical tests differently. Its tasks and its errors are both gigantic: no prescription, no schema valid for every case, no infallible leader to show it the path to follow. Historical experience is its only school mistress. Its thorny way to self-emancipation is paved not only with immeasurable suffering but also with countless errors. The aim of its journey – its emancipation depends on this – is whether the proletariat can learn from its own errors. Self-criticism, remorseless, cruel, and going to the core of things is the life's breath and light of the proletarian movement. The fall of the socialist proletariat in the present (first) world war is unprecedented. It is a misfortune for humanity. But socialism will be lost only if the international proletariat fails to measure the depth of this fall (and) if it refuses to learn from it" (*The Junius Pamphlet* - <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/ch01.htm#n3> accessed on 10 February 2014).

She mentioned in this context the mistakes of the German working class movement. While appreciating and admiring the internationalist character of the pamphlet Lenin wrote, "The first of Junius's erroneous propositions is embodied in the fifth thesis of the *Internationale* group, 'National wars are no longer possible in the epoch (era) of this unbridled imperialism. National interests serve only as an instrument of deception, in order to place the working masses at the service of their mortal enemy, imperialism.' The beginning of the fifth thesis, which concludes with the above statement, discusses the nature of the *present* war as an imperialist war. It may be that this negation of national wars generally is either an oversight, or an accidental overstatement in emphasising the perfectly correct idea that the *present* war is an imperialist war, not a national war. This is a mistake that must be examined, for various Social-Democrats, in view of the false assertions that the *present war* is a national war, have likewise mistakenly denied the possibility of *any* national war" (italics author's – V.I. Lenin, "The Junius Pamphlet", 1916, Collected Works, 4th English edition, Volume 22, p. 308, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, pp. 305-19). Lenin then went onto a discussion on the dialectical relation between national war and imperialist war, and critiqued Rosa's treatment of the chronology of the national wars, as if the national wars collectively formed the preceding stage of imperialist war, and now with the advent of the inter-imperialist war national wars had become impossible. Lenin's observation is significant because in Lenin's analysis of the dynamics of accumulation under imperialist condition colonial plunders and therefore national wars become inevitable in as much as inter-imperialist wars are. The acute awareness to contemporary situation led Lenin to mention the possibility of national wars even in an era of inter-imperialist wars.

Lenin further wrote in his commentary on the *Junius Pamphlet*, "We have dwelt in detail on the erroneous proposition that 'national wars are no longer possible' not only because it is patently erroneous from the theoretical point of view -- it would certainly be very lamentable if the 'Left' were to reveal a light-hearted attitude to Marxist theory at a time when the establishment of the Third International is possible only on the basis of un-vulgarised Marxism. But the mistake is very harmful also from the standpoint of practical politics, for it gives rise to the absurd propaganda of "disarmament", since it is alleged that there can be no wars except reactionary wars. It also gives rise to the even more ludicrous and downright reactionary attitude of indifference to national movements. And such an attitude becomes chauvinism when members of the 'great' European nations, that is, the nations which oppress the mass of small and colonial peoples, declare with a pseudo-scientific air: 'national wars are no longer possible'! National wars *against* the imperialist powers are not only possible and probable; they are inevitable, *progressive* and *revolutionary though* of course, to be *successful*, they require either

the concerted effort of huge numbers of people in the oppressed countries (hundreds of millions in our example of India and China), or a *particularly* favourable conjuncture of international conditions (e.g., the fact that the imperialist powers cannot interfere, being paralysed by exhaustion, by war, by their antagonism, etc.), or the *simultaneous* uprising of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in one of the big powers (this latter eventuality holds first place as the most desirable and favourable for the victory of the proletariat). It would be unfair, however, to accuse Junius of indifference to national movements. At any rate, (s)he remarks that among the sins of the Social-Democratic parliamentary group was its silence on the death sentence passed on a native leader in the Cameroons on charges of "treason" (evidently he attempted to organise an uprising against the war)..." (p. 310).

The war brought to the revolutionary leaders of the European working class movements a new awareness of the need for dialectical judgement. Like Lenin Rosa also attempted to treat the national question dialectically, even though Lenin found her short of the exacting standards that he set for theoretical argument. We have to remember that this was also the moment when Lenin immersed himself in the library in Zurich in daily study of Hegel's writings, particularly *Science of Logic*, the time when he developed the theory of revolutionary defeatism as the policy of Marxists towards their respective belligerent states and governments. This was also the time when he broke with the type of "scientific materialism" with which the Second International had framed its national-chauvinist policies. The Lenin-Rosa debate was not over political tactics only. It involved as we know broader questions involving their respective views of imperialism, national revolutionary wars, etc.

Moving on to other phases in the debate over the accumulation question, we can recall how the connection between war and accumulation became a thorny issue, just as the notion of crisis became integrally linked to the debate. This also raised the question, how do we perceive the crisis? Was war a crisis? Were social welfare and recovery measures, planned in war time, such as the William Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services (1942) and the post-war European Recovery Plan known as the Marshall Plan (1948) linked to the accumulation question? When the war in Iraq began many Marxists in the post-colonial world spoke of a crisis of the finance driven late twentieth century and early twenty first century capitalism, though Marxist writings in the western capitalist countries were playing with completely different issues, such as of culture, citizenship, democracy, and European Union. War never figured in these writings. We also know that in the Marxist writings security and the development of the capitalist economy have been seen less as intertwined factors. Thus in Giovanni Arrighi's mirror of the long twentieth century, the story of money, power, and the origins of our time is one of continuous accumulation and expansion of the capitalist economy with wars occasionally

disturbing the path. *The Long Twentieth Century* traces the relationship between capital accumulation and state formation (over a 700-year period) and argues that capitalism unfolds as a succession of “long centuries,” (long trends) each of which has produced a new world power that has secured control over an expanding world-economic space. Examining the changing fortunes of Florentine, Venetian, Genoese, Dutch, English and finally American capitalism, the book concludes with an examination of the forces that have shaped and are now poised to undermine America’s world dominance (*The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, London, Verso, 2010). This is the view from the top. The period of “long peace” (phrase used by John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989) is also the period of long accumulation. Yet this picture cannot explain the self working of the accumulation process. Indeed both civil and national wars have cleared the grounds for fresh accumulation in various parts of the world. A view from below, which also informs to a great measure the post-colonial argument, tells us to take wars and conflicts seriously, as they clear the grounds for accumulation, exactly as the Marshall Plan had done more than sixty five years back.

To put all these briefly then, the accumulation question which is at centre of capitalism is never at the centre. The centre is always to one side. Capitalism is real, but also the theatre of the world of politics, religion, morality, and of course economic theories – in short of myths and opiates that make capitalism decentred because our own consciousness of the world is framed with illusion, and that is wherefrom our journey begins. Therefore the complete demystification of the accumulation question is always deferred, always beyond, always advancing from illusion towards the real. Philosophical battles are therefore parts of the perpetual war that the bourgeoisie has always wanted to put an end to. Yet no philosophy, least of all materialist philosophy, can exist without this theoretical relationship to force. They bear the marks of a generalised state of war.

We may ask: Is a turn towards the national question justified in a discussion on the accumulation question? Apart from whatever has said till now in this essay, there is one more thing in defence of this turn. In *Capital* (Volume 2) Marx moves from production to circulation – and once again in its most abstract form (reminding us of the first volume of *Capital*), as if in a dialectical play of logical forms. Circulation becomes an abstract process through which capital will shed its old form (the industrial form) and assume new one as it will seek to secure its realisation and self-expansion. Thus, as Marx demonstrated, money capital will undergo metamorphosis within this sphere of circulation. Thus the movement from money to commodity and then increased commodity production to increased money earning is a not a result of buying cheap and selling dear, but a consequence of surplus

production. Production becomes the mediating moment – the moment of producing surplus value, more accurately the moment of realising surplus value. Production of surplus value becomes the dynamic means, at the same time logically a disjunctive leap, to move into the sphere of circulation and back to the exploitative world of industrial production. In the accumulation question then we are continuously crossing borders and boundaries, phases and dynamics, to find that we are witnessing an interrupted series of crises. That is what the post-colonial method suggests. Remember what Marx wrote while concluding “Illustrations of the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation” (*Capital*, Volume One, Chapter 25, Section 5 - <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm#S1> accessed on 16 February 2014):

Like all good things in this bad world, this profitable method has its drawbacks. With the accumulation of rents in Ireland, the accumulation of the Irish in America keeps pace. The Irishman, banished by sheep and ox, re-appears on the other side of the ocean as a Fenian, and face to face with the old queen of the seas rises, threatening and more threatening, the young giant Republic:

A cruel fate torments the Romans,
And the crime of the fratricide