

**Review of *From Marx to Global Marxism : Eurocentrism, Resistance, Postcolonial Criticism* ed. Kerstin Knopf, Detlev Quintern, Inputs: Trier, 2020. Paperback. pp 269. € 34.50**

### **Mursed Alam**

Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task. It remains before us just as unquestionably as we are heirs of Marx, even before wanting or refusing to be.... – Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

Every seeing has a direction, every seeing is done from a particular place and time...Marx wrote from a particular historical context, we are reading him from a different historical context.... Marx has not been analysed from the perspective of India. – Sudipta Kaviraj, *Marx and the Search for Heaven*

I am no ist or cist. Marx is my brother. - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Other*

Karl Marx never saw the much anticipated revolution happen during his life-time. And we are living a time that witnessed almost all the experiments in socialist revolution arguably fail. Does this mean the end of the road for Marx's thoughts and Marxist politics? Certainly Marxism has lost its aura in the academic circle, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of neoliberal hegemony across the world. Marxism is generally criticised for pontificating a grand narrative—therefore impervious to difference—of human liberation, for its supposed Eurocentrism, its Enlightenment legacy in providing a blueprint of universal telos of history, class exclusivity etc. Much of the criticism is valid. But that does not mean that Marxism has lost its analytical purchase? On the contrary, since the global financial meltdown in 2008 - and in the post-COVID 19 world—there has been a renewed interest in Marxism and Marx' thoughts. Recent experiences have shown that even during the pandemic global inequality has increased exposing the sinister and exploitative nature of capitalism. Rather than a thinker of socialism (Marx did not write much on the nature of a future socialist world), Marx is better known for his prognosis of capitalism. Certainly capitalism today is not what it used to be during Marx and Engels' time and the changing dynamics of exploitation and imaginaries of human liberation also call for a critical engagement with Marx's ideas today. Kerstin Knopf and Detlev Quinterm edited *From Marx to Global Marxism: Eurocentrism, Resistance, Postcolonial Criticism* is an

important contribution in the ongoing debates on the relevance and possible horizons of Marxist politics today. The book does not treat Marx as a prophet while never losing sight of the critical relevance of Marx's ideas today and thereby perhaps does the best service to Marx and Marxist politics.

### **Marx Today: Questions and Return (?) to Marx**

Marx, as Lenin wrote, combined three traditions in his thinking- the German critical-theoretical tradition with which Marx engaged as a Young Hegelian, British political economy and French utopian socialism. He, however, critically engaged with these traditions of thought- deconstructing their aporias and lacunas for a materialist understanding of the human condition and liberation from exploitation. As is well-known, Marx's ideas of liberation of humanity inspired 'the wretched of the earth'- both in Europe and outside. In fact, the first socialist revolution happened outside of industrialised Europe- in a semi-feudal society like Russia. Needless to say that Marxism also animated the hopes and utopias of most of the former colonised countries- from Africa and Asia to the Middle- East. However, much before the fall of the USSR, the reports of Stalin's excesses, and the attack on Tiananmen Square in China made many disillusioned about the actualisation of the Marxist utopia. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union bemused the Marxists across the world

while enthusing the capitalist block with triumphalism. However, the triumphalist march of neo-liberal economy has pushed millions across the world to precarious existence as there have emerged greater and sharper ways of disenfranchisement and exploitation with the continuation of primitive accumulation and violence. Trickle-down economics have failed and global inequality, as shown by Thomas Picketty and the recent Ox-fam report, has sharply increased. There have emerged enclaves of the North in the Global South and South in the Global North. The spectre of Marx is therefore haunting the world. But how to respond to this hauntology of Marx? How to re-animate our politics today? Does that need an uncritical return to Marx, as some advocate, or do we need to, if necessary, think beyond Marx and incorporate the critical voices both from within Euro-American contexts and from the former colonised countries in order to pluralise our understanding of Marxist politics today? In fact, the Marxist tradition is rich with diverse critical voices ranging from Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, M N Roy etc. How to profitably make use of such critical voices? Marxism needs renewed and auto-critical immunity to assert its relevance and that involves new hermeneutics of Marx that rescues him from being bracketed within closures of isms. Such de-constructive understanding of Marx will enable a real homage to him as done by important interlocutors like Badiou, Zizek and Derrida.

## **The Book under Discussion**

The questions, therefore, that animate the discussions on Marx and Marxist politics today are many. We can mention some of them here - Why is there a right-wing shift of the working class across the globe? What Marx can offer in a time when the very existence of the planet Earth is threatened? How to re-envision and reenergise class politics? What about the implicit historicism in Marx's thought? How to overcome the Eurocentrism of Marx and of dominant Marxist thinking even today? Some of these questions provide the philosophical and political arch that holds the chapters of the present book together.

## **'Dirty Capitalism' and Marx's Prognosis**

Apart from the introduction and a preface by Ranabir Samaddar, the book is divided into five thematic sections. The first section, *Critical Re-reading of Marx* comprises of three essays by Jakob Graf, Kolja Lindner and Urs Lindner, and Hans S. Brass that scrutinise some of the basic tenets of Marxism in the light of recent theorisations and current geo-political conditions.

Jakob Graf start off by drawing our attention to the ambiguities in Marx's conceptualisation of capitalism as found in Critique of Political Economy. Marx, in order to provide a general notion or an "ideal average of capi-

talism” abstracted from the prevailing conditions in England and other western countries. As abstractions do, Marx in his conceptualisation tends to ignore the specificities to understand the “laws of motion” and provided what Graf calls “clean capitalism” with real subsumption of labour to capital, “free” wage labour and the laws of “perfect competition” (53). Thus, questions of existence of direct, personal force, slavery or forced labour are put aside, despite evidence to the contrary, in order to abstract a “general case” of capitalism. But this “general case” which is applicable for understanding capitalism across the globe smacks of Eurocentrism. Graf calls for an understanding of capitalism as “dirty capitalism” that takes into account the persistence of multiple modes of production, various forms of subjugation of labour to capital and different forms of exploitation and power relations regarding control of labour and in markets to overcome the Eurocentric biases of such a general theory of capitalism.

Kolja and Urs Lindner further question the very centrality, even validity of historical materialism by taking into account the philosophical breaks in Marx’s thought towards the end of his life. Instead of projecting Marx as a theorist of historical development, they highlight Marx as a materialist philosopher and critical social scientist who overcame, even revised his teleological and Eurocentric notions of historical growth. They identify significant problems of historical materialism, such as

its “linear directionality” to world historical development that robbed the proletariat of agency in the inevitable course of history, as well as its Eurocentrism as in this schema of history the West seems to provide a model or standard for pre-capitalist societies to follow. Marx was influenced by Hegel’s idea of world history and his understanding of non-Western countries were based on the travelogues of Bernier. Thus, in India the lack of private property made it stagnant socially and China appeared to be “living fossil”. Thus, the British rule in India was thought to be ultimately bringing India to the course of historical development. But Lindners emphasises Marx’s openness to learning and revising his position throughout his life. They point out that Marx in his later writings, such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, *The German Ideology*, *The Civil War in France* and in his letters to Vera Zasulich show greater sensitivity to the non-western experience and ways of living. Thus, late Marx develops a “conception of a multi-linear, path-dependent historical development” (70) while “Orientalism is replaced by a more realistic account of non-European societies” (70). He could, therefore, see in India “act of English vandalism, pushing the native people not forwards but backwards” (69), and how ‘Russian agricultural commune could appropriate the fruits “of Western capitalism production” “without subjecting itself to its modus operandi”’ (69).

Hans H. Brass critically analyses the critical legacy of Marxian utopia of building a just society with human

dignity and equality. Marxian utopia is marked by concreteness with three clear objectives- mass prosperity, freedom of the individual in harmony with the community and the restoration of the dignity of work by ending alienation. However, the twentieth century experiments in state-socialism failed in countries such as Russia, China or Tanzania with untold suffering for the millions. Does that mean that every experiment in Marxian utopia is bound to fail? Brass, however, does not think so. Rather, he points out that the Marxian utopia has ‘lost nothing of its justification, namely “to overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being”’ (94) and suggest middle range social utopias for the 21st century based on the economic theories of Burczak, Gibson, Ostrom or Amartya Sen.

The three chapters of section one, therefore, critically engage with the continuing importance of Marx’s thought and lead us the creative dialogue between Marx and the non-European, something which does not often feature in volumes Marx.

### **Creative Osmosis: Marx in Conversation**

The second section contains examples of the ways non-European thinkers rethought and re-imagined Marxist politics. Hikmet Kivilcimli (1902 -1971) was the leading politician and thinker of the socialist Left in Turkey. During the fifty years (half of which he spent in prison) of his political activities, he wrote numerous



works on Marxist theory. Opposed to Eurocentric interpretations of Marxist theory, he tried to 'localize it and thus strengthen its universality' (103). His 'thesis of history, based as it was on L. H. Morgan's classification of barbarism as lower, middle and upper stages and Ibn Khaldun's (whom Kivilcimli saw as the "Marx of the Islam") dichotomy of "barbarians versus civilizations", saw historical changes in pre-capitalist and non-European societies as a result of the conflict between the barbarians and civilizations. The barbarians, as the bearers of primitive socialism and community life in contrast to degraded civilizations marked by private property and high stratification, bring about historical changes in the conquered civilizations. Kivilcimli's historiography, therefore, goes beyond official Marxism in order to theorise historical and social changes in the non-European societies.

Seyed Javad Miri analyses Ali Shariati's reading of Marx to examine whether an Iranian Marxist perspective tuned to the social realities of Iran is possible. Shariati was an important Iranian thinker whose critical approach to Marx's ideas provided an alternative to the official Leninist-Stalinist approach of the dominant Tudeh Party that had isolated it from the common masses. Shariati took issue with Marx's materialist critique of religion as Eurocentric and points out the importance of religion as "a force in the Iranian context which could be utilized in the uprising of the masses" (Shariati quoted by Miri). He

distinguishes between the religion as prevalent in a given historical period and religion as the existential –ethical form of self-consciousness that can serve as an antidote to atomism of modern society while its extra-material orientations can help build a just society.

Yakov M Rabkin acquaints us with a different iteration of Marxism in his discussion of the ‘uneasy relationship’ between Marxism and Zionism. He points out how the socialist ideas that inspired the early Zionist movement were gradually compromised to achieve the objectives of Zionist settler colonialism of Palestine.

The thinkers such as Kivilcimli and Ali Shariati, and their Marxian *ijtehad* , point towards an important direction for taking Marxian ideas and politics forward. They never rejected the critical value of Marx’s ideas of human liberation and justice while at the same time were grounded to their historical –social context and did not hesitate to re-fashion some of Marx’s ideas from their vantage point.

### **Marx and Social Struggle in the Postcolonial World**

The formation of the working class has been a topic of much debate in the Marxist quarter- something replayed in Chibber’s (2013) criticism of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s study of the jute workers of Calcutta. Two opposing approaches are at loggerheads here- whether class is a

product of objective material conditions; or apart from material issues, socio-cultural and political issues play a part in the formation and continuity of class. Marx in *Capital Vol-I* discussed how the process of primitive accumulation dispossessed the mass of people from their means of subsistence turning them into workers. However, he did not deny the importance of subjective factors as it is through the struggle to defend their class interests that 'class in itself' becomes 'class for itself' ( we may use the term 'class for themselves' as well to refer to the subjective content ). E P Thompson, in his seminal study *The Making of the English Working Class* pointed out that class is not a structural fact but the outcome of a historical process of struggle, experience and consciousness. Thus, while material and economic factors play a seminal role in the formation of class, the importance of cultural issues can hardly be undermined. Keeping this debate in mind we may approach the chapters under this section which provide a complex picture of continued exploitation and struggles.

Najeeb V. R. in his study of the making of the Mappila Muslim working class shows critical role played by the religious and cultural practices of the Mappila Muslims of the tea plantations in Tatamala and Cherakara in the formation of class solidarity. Apart from the obvious issues of exploitation and mistreatment by the management and the middlemen, such religious-cultural practices, Najeeb argues, strengthened the class solidarity by

creating platforms for inter-religious dialogue and co-living. The intervention of the trade union in the daily affairs of the community also helped build trust among the Mappila Muslims on the unions thereby strengthening the labour unity.

How does capitalism reproduce itself? Is capitalist accumulation in the designated spaces such as the factory where relative and limited surplus value can be appropriated is sufficient for its reproduction? One Marxist approach built on ideology critique and Gramsci's concept of hegemony point towards the survival of capitalism through the consent of the subordinate. Opposed to this ideology specific approach Chibber (2022) brings in political economy approach to point out that the workers are forced to participate in the capitalist process because there is no exit option, because the alternative is starvation. So, instead of consent they are coerced or compelled to participate in their own exploitation. Additionally, the concept of continued primitive accumulation of Marx, the incorporation of non-capitalist "exterior" into the circuit of expropriation (Luxemburg) or the accumulation by dispossession (Harvey) whereby the commons are privatised involving violence, plunder, war, colonisation etc. provide the necessary fillip to capitalism in its reproduction. G.L. Goncalves and Sergio Costa in their study of the financialisation of the port district of Rio de Janeiro after the declaration of the space for the 2016 Olympics, point out how the entan-

gled nexus of state and private players, together with the discursive formation of a degraded/ empty space that needs developmental intervention, led to the accumulation of capital. erasing the history and memory of the space.

Ramzi Darouchi further points out the inadequacy, rather inapplicability, of the concept of 'Asiatic Mode of Production' as a methodology for studying the non-European societies. He analyses the history, economy and politics of Egypt to point out how during the Mamluk Sultanate, Egypt developed "autonomous capitalist tendencies" that departed significantly from the Eurocentric and static conception of the non-European societies such as Egypt as found in the concept of AMP. Such capitalist development was stalled by imperialism in Egypt. He also calls our attention to the history of resistance to foreign rule in Egypt tracing its present outburst in the Arab Spring Movement of 2011 that was caused, apart from socio-economic reasons, by the demand for dignity of a country trapped in foreign debt under neoliberal reforms. Both the facts, such as the autonomous development of capitalist tendencies in Egypt before Napoleonic take over and the history of resistance premised on social change call for the recognition of independent paths for the development of non-European societies. Ramzi, however, does not call for a particularistic approach to the differentially articulated capitalism in different regions of the world, rather he calls for a "global

frame in which social realities reproduce in the face of globalised capital” (165).

### **Beyond Marx: Marx and the Location of the Critique**

The final section, “Beyond Marx: Critical and Decolonial Readings” opens with Aditya Nigam’s essay ‘Uneven Development and Historical Time’. As the title suggests, Nigam engages with the question of ‘epistemic violence’ underlying the philosophical discourses of capitalism and modernity premised on the idea of historical time as totality. In such a totalising understanding of capitalist modernity, the persistence of pre-capitalist modes of production- and of being- are either relegated to the past or written off as the outcome of the inherent logic of capitalism, denying them any agency. Rather than reducing the pre-/non-capitalist modes of production- being as appendages of capital’s history, Nigam talks about the necessity of holding onto the “idea of their chronological priority and externality to capitalism” without “delegitimise[ing] their existence and their agency- for they continue to offer resistance to capitalism throughout its history and into the present moment” (216). Nigam hints at an important theoretical breakthrough- in distinction to “capital”, he views capitalism as “a disposition, a mode of being, a way of relating to the world” (203). Therefore, the modes of being that reside outside the accumulative logic and rational-ontological way of

relating to the world need to be given its due theoretical legitimacy.

### **The Spectre of Decolonisation: Marx as Synecdoche of Socialism and Pluralisation of Ideas**

Since the Fall Campaigns of 2018 that rocked the universities and public spaces adorned with figures associated with racism, colonialism and white supremacy, the spectre of decolonisation has come back to haunt academic and intellectual debates. How does Marxism fare in this debate? Deborah Nyangulu alerts us to the structural Eurocentrism inherent in nomenclatures such as Marxism. She points out that the eponym Marxism- that refers back to the proper name Marx as founding figure of revolutionary and socialist thinking – does reiterate the violence of Eurocentrism by sidelining other figures and their thoughts on socialism. Even such hyphenated formulations such as Marxist-Leninist-Fanonian or Marxist-Leninist-Maoist are trapped in “euro-diffusionist” model in which revolution flows in a supposedly matrilineal fashion from Marx through Lenin to Fanon or Mao reducing them to “derivative adaptations”(224). She thinks that “any reclamation of socialism in the present must take place via way of decolonisation” (225). The solution does not lie in annexing the non-western thinkers to Marx but “by fostering collaboration, solidarity, and building collective movements of resistance, in which the circulation of ideas is not linear but circu-

itous” (224). She calls for clearing an intellectual space “to centre African thinkers as key ideopraxists of social thought” (220). She critically engages with African socialist thinkers and politicians such as Franz Fanon, Julius K. Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah and their male centric views to finally draw our attention to the inclusive ideas of intersectionality theorised by practiced feminists of African descent that ground multi-axis subjugation and social justice causes.

### **Anthropocene- Capitalocene- Imperiocene & Justice**

In the face of climate crisis staring the earth, the social scientists have come up with various neologisms to characterise the human shaped age such as anthropocene, capitalocene or imperiocene. Since Dipesh Chakrabarty published his essay on the anthropocene in *Critical Enquiry*, there have been debates on the role of capitalism, which Chakrabarty is said to have downplayed, that plunders the earth and fuels people’s greed leading to the present crisis. The age of capitalism has also been an age of imperialist wars and colonialism. Any discussion on the anthropocene, therefore, cannot be complete without addressing issues of imperialism. Detlev Quintern returns to this issue of imperialism vis-à-vis the thinking of Marx and Engels. During the 19th century imperiocene, writes Quintern, began to shape life’s future, leaving a devastating imprint on earth and progressively



destroying the balanced macrostructure of the cosmos. How does Marx and Engels' thought fare vis-à-vis the imperialist plunder of the world by the western countries such as England, France, Germany etc. and the anti-imperialist struggles in Africa, Asia and America? Quintern points out that the deterministic and "the linear model of historic-societal development" not only lead Marx and Engels to accept imperialism as necessary that would revolutionise "backward" societies in Africa, Asia and America, but even characterise the anti-imperialist movements as misguided and self-defeating. The brutal suppression of anti-imperial struggles such as the Taiping Resistance in China, the 1857 War of Independence in India does not draw much sympathy from Marx and Engels for the unprecedented human casualty because "capitalism was necessary for these territories to achieve communism, inescapable and therefore colonialism was preferable" (240). Marx, therefore, trumps "morality and ethics for economic theory" (239). Such "technology based salvation ideology" and "stereotypisation of modes of living" in Asia, Africa and the Americas lead Marx to ignore the spiritually or religiously inspired anti-imperialist struggles in the colonised countries. Religion, therefore, is not just the "opium of the masses" but can also be "a driving force for anticolonial resistance" (235) which needs to be understood and given its due valence. Instead of an industrialised-modernised world leading to communism, as Marx and Engels hoped, we have witnessed the development of a military-industri-

al complex with continuous militaristic violence against the South. Therefore, justice after Marx has to “revive a universal commemorative culture of the long histories of anti-imperialist resistance” as well as “the heritage of Asian, African, and American cosmovisions and philosophies (e.g. Buen Vivir in Abya Yala/America), which, in written or oral forms, are in clear contrast to the Aristotelian hierarchising of life” (245).

The final section of the book focuses on Engels' years in Bremen and an important interview with the editors of the book. Those interested in Engel's formative years may look up to the chapter in this section.

### **Theologisation of Marx and Marxian *Ijtehad*: Towards Epistemic *Samata***

The book, therefore, cautions us against a theologisation of Marx and encourages us to engage with his ideas critically and creatively to imagine newer horizons of emancipatory politics in changing historical and geographical contexts. Such an *ijtehadik* or hermeneutical approach to Marx is recently offered by Sudipta Kaviraj in his Bengali book *Marx O Swarger Sondhan (Marx and the Search for Paradise)*. Commenting on Marx's methodology of historical analysis, Kaviraj points to Marx's open minded acceptance of the different economic modes in his very naming of diverse socio-economic conditions in such geographical settings such as Russia, Germany,

Slavic countries or Asia- as Russian, Germanic, Slavic or Asiatic Mode of Production. This gives us a Marx who was open to difference and willing to learn from different modes of economic/ historical conjuncture. On the other hand, Kaviraj points to the famous line in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* – “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class conflict”. Does Marx mean, asks Kaviraj, that there was already a developed class politics in the feudal society? Or does he point towards the hierarchical and exploitative nature of such societies where the term ‘class’ can be viewed as an empty signifier that can be interpreted as ‘general division’ in society. Class, therefore, stand for two things in Marx- the economic division in capitalist society and as any division that is manipulative in a particular historical conjuncture. If such a hermeneutical approach to Marx is taken, we may creatively re-envision Marx’s views on emancipatory politics by aligning with different articulations of exploitation and oppression in different historical, geographical and social settings. We may, therefore think of a dialogue between Marx and Ambedkar in the Indian setting where ‘class’ may mean caste or the issues of minority rights in an increasingly right-wing populist age or migrant’s plight in the exploitative and war-ridden global capitalist world-order.

Kaviraj further directs us towards the synchronous imaginary between the communist and theological emancipation. Both- communism and religion- searches

for a *swarga* or a paradise where humanity is liberated from exploitation. We may therefore find allies in those thought antithetical to prevalent Marxist politics - Marx may sit in willing conversation with Kabir or Lalon in a search for liberation of humanity. Such an opening to the thought traditions of the heterodox and divergent religious practices that question and go beyond the institutionalised religion might suggest ways to salvage religion from being weaponised by fascist and right-wing political forces.

### **With and Beyond Marx**

In 2018 the world celebrated two hundred years of Marx's birth anniversary and naturally there were monographs published, books edited and discussions held in remembrance of Marx. The present book, too, is an outcome of such an effort. Here in South Asia we would be remembering the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of India in 2025. In a time that is witness to the triumph of fascist forces in India and the hold of the communist parties is receding every day, we perhaps need to think our politics creatively- with Marx and beyond Marx. The future is not given and the location of the critique- therefore of politics- needs to be kept in mind. Marx should neither be reduced to a metonym of Europe/ Eurocentrism nor should he be viewed as a prophet. The book calls for many Marx (es), not the monolithic deified Marx who is ossified as the

fountainhead of orthodoxy but a Marx eager to learn – and importantly change his views. Marxism is no doxa, the book seems to be suggesting for critical Marxism. Perhaps this would be a proper way to remember ‘brother Marx’.

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