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Clean Capitalism? Ambiguities in Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* from a Global Perspective

“What could possibly show better the character of the capitalist mode of production, than the necessity that exists for forcing upon it, by Acts of Parliament, the simplest appliances for maintaining cleanliness and health?”
(Marx 1867: 484)

1. Introduction

Clean or dirty? What is capitalism's purity level? Understanding as “clean” a society free from personal power and direct force, capitalist market economies have been distinguished from feudal societies because of the absence of direct force in their exploitation. Can we, therefore, call capitalism “clean”? Or is capitalism just a society with less direct force and personal oppression, and therefore less dirty in a human sense? And is there an inherent tendency towards impersonal powers, that is, market forces and the rule of law? Karl Marx – famous for his most profound critique of capitalism – has always tried to reveal the oppression, power relations and exploitation behind the miraculous façades of modern societies. But Marx himself – as I claim – had a most ambiguous and partially problematic underlying understanding of capitalist development, tending towards cleaner power relations and forms of exploitation.

“The anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape,” Marx writes in *Grundrisse* (Marx 1857-58: 42) and suggests that there would be a historic necessity, a teleology, determining a particular development in history and, at the same time, a scientific method that understands the previous stages of life by starting from its results. The same was applied to the understanding of human history:

Bourgeois society is the most developed and many-faceted historical organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, an understanding of its structure, therefore, provide, at the same time, an insight into the structure and the relations of production of all previous forms of society the ruins and components of which were used in the creation of bourgeois society. (Marx 1857-58: 42)

The modern world, according to a widespread interpretation of Marx, shows “premodern countries” their own future. Thus, the inner truth of “premodern” societies can only be understood out of the fully developed bourgeois market economies in Europe and the US; the clean “laws of motion of capitalism.” Suchlike paragraphs of *Grundrisse* are often quoted referring to Marx's method. But was this really his take on a theory of society and history? Is every capitalism just an image of European development? Is

“clean” Western European parliamentary regulated capitalism the inner truth, the clearest empirical expression of capitalism as such?

The second half of the 20th century was packed with debates on the development in former colonies. Scholars relating to Marx’s writing were leading figures in these arguments. Orthodox Marxists claimed that postcolonial countries ought to follow the same stages from feudalism to capitalism as their European examples. These ideas resembled widespread modernisation theories very much, which usually held a bias towards the Containment Policies against the spread of socialism in the so-called Third World, which becomes very clear in the title of W. W. Rostow’s book *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1966 [1960]). In the Soviet Union the thinking on development was very early dogmatically bound to a stage theory in which postcolonial countries ought to follow the stages from their semi-feudal state to capitalism in order to proceed to socialism afterwards. Doubts about this teleological understanding of history expressed in the upcoming debates on the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) were quickly silenced by Stalinist rule.

In the aftermath of the Chinese revolution, India’s independence, anti-colonial and socialist takeovers in Africa and the Cuban revolution, this dogmatic understanding of history was seriously contested. It was mainly peasant-dominated societies that strove for a socialist path of development, right out of their so-called “precapitalist conditions.” As a result, the floor opened up for new interpretations that were strongly inspired by Mao’s thinking, Latin American dependency theory or later on the Indian Subaltern Studies Group. The focus of many of these rising debates was a very important question: How to understand the post-/neocolonial societies through Marx’s categories.

While these debates reflected upon the forms that capitalist accumulation can take as well as to what extent capitalism intervenes into local communities and how these processes integrate them into global capitalism, they uncovered widespread shortcomings of fundamental categories and definitions derived from Marx’s thinking. In the light of these debates I am going to read some important aspects of Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy* against the grain. Focusing on “free wage labour,” “free competition,” average prices and further aspects, I will show that in Marx’s understanding of the “inner organisation of the capitalist mode of production, in its ideal average” (Marx 1894: 818), he systematically excluded power relations and personal dependencies, at least from the sphere of circulation of capitalism. This perspective is a product of problematic scientific abstractions, supposedly representing the “pure laws of motion of capitalism.” The essential features of capitalism itself seem, as a consequence, to be pretty clean. Direct force is, if anything, conceptually banned from the realm of circulation to the sphere of production. Taking up the concept of capitalist reality as “dirty capitalism” (Buckel 2015, Buckel/Oberndorfer 2018)¹ and contrasting

1 Sonja Buckel and Lukas Oberndorfer use the terms “pure” and “dirty” in a slightly different way than I do. With the concept “dirty capitalism” they intend to put forward an understanding of capitalism as an entanglement of multiple relations of domination (Buckel/Oberndorfer 2018: 41).

it with “clean capitalism” in Marx’s writing helps us understand Marx’s ambiguities in this respect and enables us in a second step to outline possibilities to include “dirty capitalism” into Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*.

2. The Force of Abstraction and the Basic Structure of Capital

In his *Critique of Political Economy* Marx, like no other scholar, tried to delineate the general features of “capital in its basic structure” (1894: 266). In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy: Volume III* he uses the mentioned notion of “the inner organisation of the capitalist mode of production, in its ideal average” (1894: 818) to clarify once again his objective. In a more Hegelian way to put it, Marx writes that he aims towards “a general analysis of capitalist production. In a general analysis of this kind it is usually always assumed that the actual conditions correspond to their conception, or, what is the same, that actual conditions are represented only to the extent that they are typical of their own general case” (1894: 142). But what is capitalism’s “general case,” what is its “ideal average”?

To find out, Marx uses a certain method. In the preface of *Capital: Volume I* he elaborates on the scientific method of Political Economy, in contrast to natural sciences: “In the analysis of economic forms [...] neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both” (1867: 8). Thus, abstraction is the tool to carve out the true “inner organisation” of capitalism and to distinguish it from contingent particularities of concrete real capitalisms. In this way Marx follows, as Paul M. Sweezy puts it, an “abstract-deductive method which was such a marked characteristic of the Ricardian school” (Sweezy 1946: 11). Through “successive approximations” Marx moves conceptually step-by-step from the more abstract to the more concrete. But Sweezy notes that there are fundamental differences between Marx on the one hand and the classical and neoclassical school on the other. These differences have to do with the decisive question: “what to abstract from and what not to abstract from” (Sweezy 1946: 12). What is the nature of the objective and what are its essential elements? Marx aims towards a historic understanding of the categories constituting his understanding of capitalism. In *Grundrisse* he illustrates this regarding the terms of labour and capital. Labour is a “modern category”; only through the generalisation of commodity production and the abstract capacity of labour to produce value can the general concept of labour make sense (Marx 1857-58: 24). The same is true for the concept of capital. Capital is not a thing, nor an investment as such, but a circulation process of value with the incarnated motive to valorise, embedded in competitive market relations (Marx 1857-58: 412). For Marx these terms only make sense as part of a historic and specific mode of production. Therefore, abstractions are historic and not independent of social practice. Capitalism and its categories describe a certain period of human history, which was embedded in a global history from its very beginning. But what particular features correspond to this historic period?

The appearance of the resulting scientific object heavily depends on the underlying question. For Marx the objective was clear: “to lay bare the economic law of mo-

tion of modern society” (1867: 10). But the “law of motion” is not a mere intellectual abstraction but a “concrete universal,” a “real abstraction” which is based in the structures and actions of society itself (Heinrich 2006: 155-57). Therefore, the totality of capitalism is not a sum of preceding intellectual abstractions but is present in the everyday life of any capitalist society. The analysis of empirical reality, relations, structures and action itself provides the abstract categories. Abstractions always visualize one thing and, at the same time, make another invisible. They, so to speak, do harm to reality. That is also true to Marx’s “ideal average of capitalism,” it emphasizes one thing but obscures the other. My thesis is that Marx’s abstractions tend to produce a scientific object which I call “clean capitalism.” As I will show, he tends to abstract from personal power relations at the labour market, the persistence of personal dependencies of small producers, power relations regarding pricing at global markets and the everlasting presence of different modes of production in capitalist societies. These abstractions are plausible insofar as they stress the specific features of capitalism which distinguish it from other modes of production (Wood 2002, Gerstenberger 2007). Of course, impersonal power, competition and widespread wage labour in industrializing centres are surely of utmost importance for Western capitalisms. But are these the essential features of capitalism itself or only of a particular Western capitalism, predominating in the centres of the world system? Is personal force really just a feature of a long past “so-called primitive accumulation” (Marx 1867: 704-48) or is there a tendency towards personal power relations or even monopolisation in capitalism instead (Marx 1867: 750)?

3. Marx’s Essential Features of Capitalism

The classical definition of capitalism distinguishes it from feudal or slave societies. The defining feature seems to lie in the type of domination over labour. Capitalism thus is defined, in contrast to slave labour or servitude, as a “system under which labour-power had ‘itself become a commodity’ and was bought and sold on the market like any other object of exchange” (Dobb 1950: 7). In this understanding, specific relations of production are “nothing else than the various forms which the subjugation of labour assumed historically” (Banaji 2010: 52). Modes of production are, in this way of thinking, defined through forms of exploitation of labour. In capitalism, accordingly, the labouring classes are only forced to sell their labour power by the lack of other possibilities to fulfil their needs. Furthermore, whereas in precapitalist modes of production an extra-economic, political or personal compulsion was necessary to force the working population into an exploitative relation, this is realized through “freely chosen” contracts in capitalism. Jairus Banaji calls this way of understanding capitalism a “formal abstractionism” which became “one of the most widespread and persistent illusions of vulgar Marxism” (Banaji 2010: 53). He speaks of “forced abstractions,” which identify “relations of production with particular forms of exploitation” (Banaji 2010: 54). In how far are these “forced abstractions” and the concept of “free wage

labour” a defining or an essential feature of the “ideal average of capitalism” in Marx’s critique of political economy?

For Marx the difference between commodity production and *capitalist* commodity production depends heavily on the act of exploitation of labour, which he in fact understands as the exploitation of *free wage labour* (Marx 1867: 582): “The capitalistic form, on the contrary, pre-supposes from first to last, the free wage labourer, who sells his labour power to capital” (Marx 1867: 339). On the other hand, *Capital* is spiked with details on direct force in the sphere of production, slavery even or forced labour (Marx 1867: 399-402, 575, 745-48, 754). These notions draw from his readings on reports of factory inspectors, newspaper articles, reports of colonial administrators etc. and deal with child labour, colonial conditions, bonded labour and slave plantations in the United States. But for Marx, however, these forms of capitalist exploitation seem to be arbitrary and exceptional forms of subjection of labour to capital. Thus, Marx’s general understanding of the exploited subject in capitalism is expressed in the following sentences out of *Capital: Volume II*:

As a matter of fact capitalist production is commodity production as the general form of production. But it is so and becomes so more and more in the course of its development only because labour itself appears here as a commodity, because the labourer sells his labour, that is, the function of his labour power, and our assumption is that he sells it at its value, determined by its cost of reproduction. (Marx 1893: 121)

This assumption of a dominant form of subjection of labour in the form of wage labour leads to the well-known conclusion on how forms of exploitations are connected with types of domination:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, [...]. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers [...] which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same from the standpoint of its main conditions – due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances. (Marx 1894: 777-78)

For Marx it seems “free wage labour” is the adequate form of exploitation in capitalism, this contract-based relation of the economic classes where no “other than economic pressure” (1894: 777) is required. Other forms seem to be arbitrary variations that are consequently not systematically integrated into his analysis.

At the same time Marx himself describes conditions under which capitalism tends to use slavery or bonded labour. E. G. Wakefield, a British politician and a key figure in the colonisation of Australia and New Zealand, had the idea to design a colo-

nisation scheme combining labourers, artisans and capital to migrate jointly into the new world. Marx describes his history in the last chapter of *Capital: Volume I*: “First of all, Wakefield discovered that in the Colonies, property in money, means of subsistence, machines, and other means of production, does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative – the wage worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free-will” (Marx 1867: 753). This is how – Marx notes – he “discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things” (Marx 1867: 753). Mr. Thomas Peel (1793-1865) – an early settler of Australia – nevertheless formed a consortium to found a colony at Swan River in Australia, as Marx describes in the following:

Mr. Peel [...] took with him from England to Swan River, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. Mr. Peel had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 300 persons of the working class, men, women, and children. Once arrived at his destination, “Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.” Unhappy Mr. Peel who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River! (Marx 1867: 753)

Capital in this context is clearly understood as a relation of power, which cannot survive through purely economic dependency, but needs – under certain conditions – other forms of domination of the working population:

as soon as (in the colonies, e.g.) adverse circumstances prevent the creation of an industrial reserve army and, with it, the absolute dependence of the working class upon the capitalist class, capital, along with its commonplace Sancho Panza, rebels against the “sacred” law of supply and demand, and tries to check its inconvenient action by forcible means and State interference. (Marx 1867: 634)

“Free,” contract-based wage labour, with only economic force involved, where the worker can “freely” dispose of his commodity, seems to be the only form of capitalist exploitation necessary to be considered, out of many possible forms. The possible existence of capitalist slave labour is entirely accepted by Marx also in his remarks on slavery in the US: “The cultivation of the southern export articles, cotton, tobacco, sugar, etc., carried on by slaves, is only remunerative as long as it is conducted with large gangs of slaves, on a mass scale and on wide expanses of a naturally fertile soil, which requires only simple labour” (1861: 39). Nevertheless, on the high level of abstraction and thus at the end of the day, when only the purely capitalist laws of motion count, free wage labour, in Marx’s eyes, as the passages quoted earlier show, seems to be the only adequate form of exploitation for capitalism.

4. Indirect Subjection of Labour to Capital

Another thread where Marx is stuck in his notion of a clean and pure capitalism is his take on formal and real subsumption of labour to capital. In Marx’s original sixth chapter of *Capital* written in 1863-64, called “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” he elaborates on the terms of formal and real subsumption. Formal sub-

sumption describes the historical adoption of precapitalist techniques and processes of production by capitalist accumulation, but already under the control and property of capital. Real subsumption of labour to capital, in contrast, signifies a fundamental transformation in the methods and techniques of production, qualifications and discipline of the workers, very specialized labour processes etc. under the control and property of capital. Thus, Marx has a historical understanding of formal and real subsumption in which formal subsumption more and more passes over into real subsumption as the concrete processes and techniques of production change. The difference does not lie in the ownership or the control over the means of production – in both cases capital owns and controls them – but in the transformation of the labour process from a handicraft into a process dominated by the stroke of the machine.

Both of these forms, formal and real subsumption of labour to capital, in which the direct producers are converted into obedient workers who do not control their processes of production, I will call *direct subsumption* of labour to capital. Here capital directly possesses and controls labour. To distinguish it from relations of exploitation where capital dominates labour without directly controlling labour and owning the means of production, I will add another category: *indirect subsumption* of labour to capital (Graf 2014: 13-17). There are many forms of this subsumption, not only in the peripheries of global capitalism, where we find for example Monsanto establishing a dependence of the small farmers to their crops, through single-use seeds, corresponding fertilizers etc. in agriculture, or second tier suppliers for the car industry in industrial India. We also find this subsumption in the centre of global capitalism, where piece wage is transforming into outsourcing, suppliers or small producers like dairy farmers are dependent on their monopolistic buyer etc. Here, looking at forms of indirect subsumption of labour to capital, we immediately notice that power, personal dependencies and extra-economic force comes back into capitalism, especially, but not only, under neoliberalism and peripheral modes of development.

In what way did Marx include such forms of indirect subjection of labour to capital, heavily depending on power and personal dependencies, sometimes slavery, debt bondage or other forms, into his *Critique of Political Economy*? Do they correspond to “the inner organisation of the capitalist mode of production, in its ideal average” (Marx 1894: 818)? As the following passages show, for Marx, the transition from formal to real subsumption is, above all, a historic one. He thought that every production would, bit by bit, be subjected directly under capital and everyone without ownership of means of production would convert into a “free” wage labourer, and complete proletarianisation would outnumber any other type of relation of surplus extraction. Insofar, Marx forcibly expelled personal and direct force from his decisive categories:

If the relation of domination and subordination replaces those of slavery, serfdom, vassalage, patriarchal, etc., relations of subordination, there takes place only a *change in their form*. The form *becomes freer*, because the subordination is now only of an *objective* nature; it is formally speaking voluntary, *purely economic*. (Marx 1861-63: 432; original emphasis)

Against the background of today's empirical insights on global capitalist development, it is necessary to understand why in certain contexts indirect subjection of labour to capital is prevalent. From digital capitalism in the centers to cash crop production and informal sectors in the peripheries, manifold forms of indirect subjection of labour to capital play an important role. To a varying extent market power, monopolistic supplier-buyer commodity chains, personal dependencies, debt bondage, caste, family and local authorities are a necessary feature of this form of exploitation. When Marx was confronted with such relations, he understood them as pure remnants. With direct reference to India, Marx considers the role of usury capital and merchant capital in this process of subjection of labour to capital:

Another example is merchants' capital, in so far as it gives out orders to a number of direct producers, then collects and sells their products, in which connection it may also advance raw material, etc., or also make monetary advances, etc. This is the form out of which the modern capital-relation in part developed, and it still forms here and there the transition to the capital-relation proper. [...] Both of these forms [...] are reproduced as parallel and transitional forms within the capitalist mode of production. (Marx 1861-1863: 428)

Thus, for Marx, indirect subjection of labour to capital is just a transitional form to the *proper* capital-relation. Therefore, extra-economic power will be – in his view – generally speaking replaced by *purely economic* relations.

5. Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham – Clean Market Relations?

In the fundamental statements in *Capital*, class relations in capitalism result from a purely economic relation:

The class relation between capitalist and wage labourer [...] is a purchase and sale, a money relation, but a purchase and sale in which the buyer is assumed to be a capitalist and the seller a wage labourer. And this relation arises out of the fact that the conditions required for the realisation of labour power, viz., means of subsistence and means of production, are separated from the owner of labour power, being the property of another. (Marx 1893: 37)

The violent relations of exploitation are banished from the circulation processes, where there “alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham” (Marx 1867: 186), into the dark sphere of production, where it becomes clear that the worker is “bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but – a hiding” (Marx 1867: 186). In his representation of the capitalist factory regime, Marx describes all forms of force, power and domination of man over man. These power relations seem to gain importance only after the “free contracts” on the markets exchange of equivalence has happened, “by means of an act done by mutual consent. They must, therefore, mutually recognise in each other the rights of private proprietors. This juridical relation, which thus expresses itself in a contract [...] is a relation between two wills, and is but the reflex of the real economic relation between the two” (Marx 1893: 95).

Feminist theories have criticised this understanding of capitalism, as capitalist wage labour always heavily depends on a sphere of reproduction mainly based on women's work, constituting a patriarchal grounding of male dominated capitalism (Federici 2004, Winker 2011). Not only in factory but also in households, personal power is present in capitalism "in its ideal average." This leads to a distinction between "primary" and "secondary exploitation," following Klaus Dörre (2015). Primary exploitation follows the principle of exchange of equivalents, as mentioned above, whereas secondary exploitation refers to relations of appropriation of labour of others based primarily on extra-economic coercion. Such distinctions must be included into a theory of capital's fundamental laws of motion.

The absence of power applies also to Marx's theoretical understanding of markets. Free markets and perfect competition are underlying assumptions in Marx theory (Shaikh 2016: 333-39). The ordinary individual producer is a price taker. In the introducing comments on the 37th chapter on ground rent in *Capital: Volume III* Marx notes: "The assumption that the capitalist mode of production [...] rules over all spheres of production and bourgeois society, i.e., that its prerequisites, such as free competition among capitals, the possibility of transferring the latter from one production sphere to another, and a uniform level of the average profit, etc., are fully matured" (Marx 1894: 608). Marx always kept in mind, though, that in real existing capitalism there is a tendency towards centralization of capital and market power. Market power is especially important when it comes to the labour markets and to antagonisms behind supply and demand. "Social demand" depends essentially on the relation of forces between the social classes. Here collective interests, organisations and antagonisms play an important role. In a critical take on neoclassic theory Shaikh writes: "It is one thing to analyze the properties of balance, as Marx does in his Schemes of Reproduction and Sraffa does in his pricing schemes. It is another to treat these balance conditions as actually existing states" (Shaikh 2016: 344). Nevertheless, throughout *Capital* Marx assumes that commodity prices correspond to their value or to their prices of production. Formation of prices containing power relations are not conceived of at this level of abstraction. This might be valid in terms of the presentation of his theory, unfortunately it led to an understanding of capitalism according to which exploitation through unequal exchange is only an exception and market relations are "in the ideal average" stripped of power relations.

This is especially problematic in the conception of the world market. There is no "free competition" of countries, workers and companies on the global markets. There is at first the problem of different currencies, dividing the worldwide markets into fractions. For Marx, there was one commodity, like gold, working as the "money of the world," "universal money," treating every nation alike (Marx 1867: 153-56). Today, however, we have to understand global currencies as being part of a global hierarchy of currencies. There are weaker currencies and key currencies. Moreover, as dependency theory emphasises, terms of trade in global markets are highly unequal; core countries protect their markets by tariffs and profits are channelled to the rich coun-

tries (Dos Santos 1970, Arghiri 1972, Harvey et al. 2010). Today a great share of global trade is trade under the control of huge companies, pricing is a part of their power over their production network. Thus, global markets cannot be understood in terms of “perfect competition” (Smith 2016: 272-77). Thus, we have to understand exploitation as a mechanism of domination being present not only in the realm of production but also in market relations.

Marx had, furthermore, in his early writing, a symmetrical understanding of the integration of every country into the world market, meaning that every country develops from an agrarian to an industrial capitalist economy. This is especially clear in his articles on India in the 1850’s. At the beginning he is completely convinced that British colonialism plays a destructive but also progressive role in developing India. As the British also establish the railway in India, they definitely induced industrial development:

You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with railways. The railway-system will therefore become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry. (Marx 1853: 220)

Many years later, in 1881, in his drafts for a letter to Vera Zasulich, a Russian Marxist, he rejects this overly optimistic view towards British colonialism and sees only vandalism and destruction in it (Anderson 2010: 229-36, Lindner 2011). But the idea that industrialisation, and therefore comprehensive proletarianisation, was going to dominate all countries and would be the only path of development prevailed throughout many years of Marx’s thinking. The “typical features of capitalism” were explained, using the employment of big machinery as the only possible path of capitalist development and a focal point of social conflict. An unequal global division of labour, forcing different countries into different positions, dependencies and uneven developments, seemed unconceivable for Marx at this time.

6. Marx Later Insights and a New “Ideal Average”?

Throughout his life, Marx’s thinking went through many “epistemological breaks,” as the French philosopher Louis Althusser declared. This did not only concern his method, but also insights on a more empirical level. Kevin B. Anderson in his book *Marx at the Margins* raises the question of how Marx’s engagement with the peripheries of global capitalist development of his time have influenced his *Critique of Political Economy*. Anderson claims that his understanding of capitalism was fundamentally influenced by these investigations. He changed his mind regarding political movements in the peripheries, which he started to see as important political subjects; he started to acknowledge different parts of development and realized that different regions of the world need different scientific concepts to understand them, an insight counteracting his earlier Eurocentrism (Anderson 2010: 180, 213-17, Lindner 2011:

119-22). In a letter from 1870, Marx writes: “After studying the Irish question for years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this is decisive for the workers’ movement *all over the world*) cannot be struck in England, but only in Ireland” (Marx 1870: 473; original emphasis). Ireland, at that time a colony of Britain, characterised by Marx as the agrarian Hinterland of the British industrial development, now enters the play as the decisive figure of global working-class movement. At the same time in the drafts for letters to Zasulich, who asks him whether Russia has to proceed to capitalism or can jump from an agrarian into a socialist society, Marx comes to the conclusion that there is no master key to history (Marx 1877).

Moreover, Marx integrated important insights on the global division of labour into *Capital*. He understands that the history of capitalism must be understood as part of the history of colonialism (Lindner 2011: 119):

A new and international division of labour, a division suited to the requirements of the chief centres of modern industry springs up, and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field. This revolution hangs together with radical changes in agriculture. (Marx 1867: 454)

Thus, his engagement with the non-European world, Russian agriculture and history, Indian colonialism, the Irish and Australian colonies and the political and economic developments in North America provided him with very important insights. Regions he earlier merely conceived as “premodern” and precapitalist societies, with no independent path of development, enabled him to gain new knowledge about how capitalism itself develops, but also regarding how a transformation into socialism could take place. However, Marx did not integrate all these insights systematically into his *Critique of Political Economy*.

“It is the great merit of E. G. Wakefield to have discovered, not anything new about the Colonies, but to have discovered in the Colonies the truth as to the conditions of capitalist production in the mother country” (Marx 1867: 752), Marx writes, referring to Wakefield, the British politician and coloniser mentioned earlier. Wakefield discovered the necessity to use force to establish capitalist relations of production. In Marx’s eyes this discovery should be transformed into a scientific discovery regarding the nature of capitalism: Force plays the most important role in the establishment of capitalism. This is a fact that immediately comes to the fore when looking at the colonies but also reveals a truth about capitalism as such. Marx did not draw the conclusion that direct force is permanently needed to reproduce class relations and capitalist relations, especially on a global scale; but he thought that the “dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist” once capitalist relations are fully established (Marx 1867: 726). This is an important point where Marx could have integrated his insights on direct force as part of capitalist rule and class relation systematically into his *Critique of Political Economy*.

Moreover, it is necessary to integrate into today's political economy an understanding that "free, contractual wage labour" is only one of many forms of exploitation in capitalism. Apart from impersonal market relations and purely economic force, there are impersonal dependencies, power, debt bondage and racialised forms of class relations (Quijano 2000), power relations that have to be systematically integrated into our understanding of capitalism. There is a political moment – as Heide Gerstenberger shows – down to the core of this relation. While Marx believed that slavery was not profitable in the long run, Gerstenberger shows that historically capitalist accumulation used all possible forms of exploitation and it was mainly political reasons and social struggles why slavery in many countries made room for "free wage labour" (Gerstenberger 2017: 11-12). Acknowledging this idea enables us to understand the heterogeneity of class relations and the reproduction of subaltern classes in different global contexts (van der Linden 2008). This is also true regarding the articulation of different modes, Marx recognises the simultaneous presence of a plurality of modes of productions in colonial societies and observes that the capitalist coloniser "tries to clear out of his way by force the modes of production and appropriation based on the independent labour of the producer" (Marx 1867: 752). But in that way, he acknowledges the presence of multiple modes of production only in colonies and sees it merely as a temporary obstacle for capitalism (Wolpe 1980: 3). Later research following Marx points out that there is a persistence of multiple modes of production not only in the global periphery but also in the core countries.² Especially feminist and postcolonial critique point out the relevance of spheres of reproduction that are oriented towards use value and a subsistence or "need economy" (Winker 2011: 1-4, Sanyal 2007: 189). Furthermore, Marx did not systematically integrate an understanding of "indirect subjection of labour to capital" (Graf 2014: 16) into his *Critique of Political Economy*. Capital tends to subject non-capitalist modes of production to its accumulation processes without necessarily dispossessing small producers. Capital integrates small producers and informal services into global production networks. This is, as mentioned above, not only true for (semi)peripheries of the world system, but also for the internet economy in posh cities such as London, Berlin or New York.

Looking at the global division of labour, we need an understanding of capitalism that systematically integrates power relations into global pricing, terms of trade, the hierarchy of currencies and vast production networks. Global markets are not markets of "perfect competition," but markets forcing and favouring very different paths of developments. Some countries for example – like Marx mentions himself – are made to specialise in exports of agricultural products and mining. As Marx believes, every

2 David Harvey refers to direct force being necessary because of the ongoing process of primitive accumulation. He calls it "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003: 137). This approach systematically includes direct force into an analysis of capitalism. The only problem is that force is not conceptually anchored within the capitalist relations of production but at the border of capitalism, where it relates to non-capitalist realms.

country will modernise through industrialisation. This view also fails to understand the importance of natural cycles for many economies till today. Only in his later days did Marx deeply investigate questions of agriculture and “metabolic rift” (Saito 2017).³ This is also important for our understanding of the dynamics of conflicts, as different paths of capitalist development are not only characterised by particular forms of subjection of labour to capital and dominant industries, but also by particular types of class relations, resistance and opposition. Overexploitation of natural resources in extractivist capitalisms produces socio-ecological conflict dynamics often articulated by Indigenous groups (Gudynas 2014, Svampa 2015) rather than by unionised labour movements. This is to say, the crucial dynamics of conflict in many places of today’s global capitalism might not be oriented towards “free” wage labour and purely economic interests.

7. Conclusion

All in all, Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy* (1859) is full of ambiguities regarding the persisting role of personal power in capitalism, the necessity of a complete proletarianisation of the working poor and power relations regarding prices. Concerning the pure economic laws of motions of capitalist societies Marx seemed to be sure that their basic structure had to be scientifically understood as a “clean capitalism” with a tendency towards real subsumption of labour to capital, “free” wage labour and the laws of “perfect competition.” Such abstractions were rightly criticised for their Eurocentrism. Understanding capitalism today and on a global scale makes it necessary to come to an understanding of capitalist modes of production in their articulation with other modes of production, various forms of subjection of labour to capital and different forms of exploitation and power relations regarding control of labour but also markets. Marx’s categories in his *Critique of Political Economy* in this respect must be enriched with their articulations of dirty capitalism, the relevance of direct and personal power relations, not only regarding the exploitation of men and women, but also the exploitation of nature, as human relations have created a dramatic and growing “rift” between capitalist growth and natural cycles.

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3 Metabolic rift means a distortion in the relation between human modes of living and production and natural cycles.

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