Primitive Accumulation in the Early Part of the Twenty First Century and the Need to Re-define Post-Colonialism

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Abstract

Mass population flows have in recent decades provoked disciplinary governmental methods of control as well as innovations at a furious pace in humanitarian methods, functions, institutions, and principles. Governments have discovered why people move: not only because of violence or the threat of violence and torture, or discrimination, but also due to natural disasters, man made famines and floods, climate change, developmental agendas, resource crises, environmental catastrophes, and the like. The humanitarian response has grown accordingly in range. Governments say that they have to gear up not only to emergencies but "complex emergencies" – a scenario that alludes to a complicated assemblage of factors and elements leading to the emergency situation.

Studies of nineteenth century and early twentieth century imperial practices gives much needed background to understand immigration and control practices of the present. Until recently there have been two main historical narratives on this issue. First, labour historians have tried to recognise the political significance of migrations in the later half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, and the ways in which labour migration has shaped the modern nation state. These familiar histories tell us about the trajectory of citizenship, including what we call today "social citizenship", of inclusion and exclusion in modern democracies. Second, along with the writing of general labour history there are specialised studies on the export of indentured labour and the growth of plantation economies, which suggests a different way of writing the history of the nation-state form in the last two centuries, where the extra-nationalist narrative of indentured labour constitutes a different universe.

Understanding the dynamics of labour flow, and therefore the history of immigration is important in order to understand: Why do some kinds of work remain degraded through generations, phases, and economic life cycles? Why do they persist, and thus give lie to the thesis of evaporation of degraded manual work? Is there any relation between the emergence of advanced forms of work and the degraded forms of work? Is it merely an issue of technology or does this issue lead us to a greater question of how work becomes labour and how a particular labour regime obtains at a particular point of time and pattern of wealth and life reproduction? I believe these questions pertaining to this colloquium form an extremely significant set of inquiries today – significant both for the theme of post-colonialism and more importantly, for the lives of the people

of the South (by which I mean people living in the countries of the South and in the underbelly of the countries of the North), whose work and life experiences form the core of the task to redefine the post-colonial.

The issue of primitive accumulation of capitalism, in other words post-colonial capitalism, speaks of the nature of work today, life cycle, and the demands for social justice. While the issue of relation between work and life cycle is relatively direct, the proposed question of primitive accumulation and some aspects of work in contemporary post-colonial world raises the point of inquiry will be: If primitive accumulation is essentially a matter of accumulation by coercive means, then what are the aspects of life that are vulnerable for use towards primitive accumulation? Also, what are the forms of coercion today? Thus I propose to argue how certain conditions of migrant labour, dalit labour, women's labour – all these become key to the persistence of conditions of primitive accumulation, and thus the issue of transformation of the conditions of informal labour becomes a question not only for citizenship and democracy, but also one of social justice, without which we cannot struggle against post-colonial capitalism.

I

Why do some kinds of work remain degraded through generations, phases, and economic life cycles? Why do they persist, and thus give lie to the thesis of evaporation of degraded manual work? Is there any relation between the emergence of advanced forms of work and the degraded forms of work? Is it merely an issue of technology or does this issue lead us to a greater question of how work becomes labour and how a particular labour regime obtains at a particular point of time and pattern of wealth and life reproduction? I believe these questions pertaining to this colloquium form an extremely significant set of inquiries today – significant both for the theme of post-colonialism and more importantly, for the lives of the people of the South (by which I mean people living in the countries of the South and in the underbelly of the countries of the North), whose work and life experiences form the core of the task to redefine the post-colonial.

The issue of primitive accumulation of capitalism, in other words post-colonial capitalism, speaks of the nature of work today, life cycle, and the demands for social justice. While the issue of relation between work and life cycle is relatively direct, the proposed question of primitive accumulation and some aspects of work in contemporary India reflect on the question of social justice in a critical way. The point of inquiry will be: If primitive accumulation is essentially a matter of accumulation by coercive means, then what are the aspects of life that are vulnerable for use towards primitive accumulation? Also, what are the forms of coercion today? Thus I propose to argue how certain conditions of migrant labour, dalit labour, women's labour – all these become key to the persistence of conditions of primitive accumulation, and thus the issue of transformation of the conditions of informal labour becomes a question not only for citizenship and democracy, but also one of social justice, without which post-colonial democracy cannot be realised.

A simple fact: To understand post-colonialism, we should go back the histories of colonialism. In that spirit I want to tell in the first place and as my opening remarks here the reasons as to why should we go back to the histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth century immigration. This history was neglected in our received historical consciousness, which remained dominated by nation-centric narratives and dissertations. These national histories will have to be revised in the light of the studies on migration. The migrant emerged as the figure of the abnormal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the context of the circles of insecurity that made up the nationalist universe. If we want to redefine post-colonialism and grasp the role mobile subjectivities play in the modern imperial-national universe, we have to now theoretically formulate the significance of the historical question of immigration and control practices. But before that, recognition of two things is necessary:

• First, more than any other strand of history writing, labour historians have tried to recognise the political significance of labour migration in the later half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. Since Stephens Castles and Godula Kosack's joint work on *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe* (1973) some excellent studies have appeared on labour migration and they indicate how a different history of the nation form can be constructed. Such a history would tell us also the histories of the trajectory of citizenship (including what Marshall termed as "social citizenship") along with histories of inclusion and exclusion.

• Second, along with the writing of general labour history we have special studies on export of indentured labour and the growth of plantation economy, which again suggests a different way of writing the history of the nation-form in the last two centuries, where the extra-nationalist narrative of indentured labour constitutes a different universe. These two facts only show the permanent disjuncture between the history of the nation form and that of the differentially constituted labour form. This is the background in which we must posit the issue of the historical continuity of primitive accumulation and reflect on the way we can redefine the post-colonial.

II

This need for re-definition is all the more urgent because post-colonial studies left out the question of the labour form and has engaged through much of its life in "culturalist" explanations in a self-defeating way. Even when it dealt with labour, it was again through the prism of "belonging", and not through an examination of the being of the labour, that is to say the transformation of the form of labour and hence the labour process. But I do not want to spend my allotted time in explaining this point. I just want to mark out this fact, and I hope my submission here will at the end make clear why I am emphasising the need to re-define the post-colonial. In fact the new crop of historical studies on various aspects of the welfare state and schemes, inspired in some cases by the Foucauldian theme of

governmentality, suggests a different way of understanding modern governance, where a study of the nation, is not at the centre of our political understanding; in its place we have the still largely unwritten history of governing a mobile, unruly world of population flows occupying a much more critical place of significance. These works have given us a sense of the hidden histories of conflicts, desperate survivals, and new networks growing as well as old networks being transplanted across great expanse and zones. Studies of hunger in the nineteenth century, of itinerant movements and preaching, transportations of coolies, spread of famines, shipping of children, adult girls, trafficking in sex, labour, and human organs, and welfare legislations to cope with this great infamy tell us how actually we have arrived at our own time of subject formation under the conditions of empire. This is certainly different from the tradition of nation-centred histories. We must begin from this point.

Take the case of transportation of indentured coolie labour, or that of the children. We know something of the transportation of the coolie labour; but we know very little of the ways children were sent across seas and deserts as labour force. In *Uprooted – The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada – 1867 to 1917* (2008) the historian of the transportation of child labour Roy Parker gives us detailed accounts of exportation of hundreds of boys and girls from England to Canada in the later half of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century – to work in Canada, to be beaten, sexually abused, slave laboured – all to build up Canada and to rid England of its poor destitute children. Similarly girls, boys and single women would be transported in the decades of the first half of the twentieth century to the stark Edwardian homes in Australia, where (for instance in Adelaide, today the building being known as the Migration Museum) it would be written on the wall by the charity institutions and city councils, "You who have no place else on earth enter this home – never to look back to the outside world, but to take this as home". There is this astonishing collection of documents and writings, done by Mary Geyer, and published by the Migration Museum on the occasion of the Women's Suffrage Centenary in South Australia (1894-1994), titled, *Behind the Wall – The Women of the Destitute Asylum, Adelaide, 1852-1918* (1994), which tell us the destitute migrants' lives behind the walls. We have some other studies conducted little earlier, such as *Uprooted Children – Early Life of Migrant Farm Workers* (by Robert Cole and Senator Mark Hatfield, 1971). Hunger marches began in the later half of the nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth century - in both new and old worlds, colonial and colonised countries - in search for food and job. It is important to see the exportation of coolie labour as part of this broader history, much of which is still concealed. Works like *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism – Studies in Indian Labour History* (Eds. Rana P. Behel and Marcel van der Linden, 2007) or the earlier published classic work by Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast – Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (1989) suggest the broader connection that we must diligently pursue in the interest of understanding what is happening today. In another recent diligently reconstructed account of the late nineteenth century famines in the context of El Nino spells – *Late Victorian*

Holocausts and the Making of the Third World by Mike Davis (2002) – we again have a different picture of the making of our time marked by famines and massive population movements induced by dry weather, floods, hunger, and the forcible exit of large peasant communities from the emerging global food market. And on the top of that add the histories of formation of large armies to fight wars in distant lands on the basis of recruitment of massive number of men of various nations on earth. This history is to be found in country after country, also at global level. This is also true of another process that accompanied this phenomenon. I am referring here to the process of development of the basic technologies of governing population flows and trying to achieve in each case the right composition of the population, *the right mix*, as it is termed now, leading to partitions and new boundary making exercises. Two issues have come closer as marks of modern time through all these – on one hand mixed up, messy, population flows, provoking desperate governmental methods, on the other hand innovations at a furious pace in humanitarian methods, functions, institutions, and principles. I do not have the time here to detail how these two phenomena interface today, which I should at least point out , is significant in the context of today's discussion on primitive accumulation.

Suddenly governments have discovered why people move. They have discovered that people move not only due to violence, threat of violence, torture, and discrimination (by now banal causes), but they move also due to natural disasters, man made famines and floods, climate change, developmental agenda, resource crisis, environmental catastrophes, and the like. The humanitarian response has grown accordingly in range. Governments say that they have to gear up not only to emergencies but "complex emergencies" – a scenario that alludes to a complicated assemblage of factors and elements leading to the emergency situation. To understand how these two issues of our time have come close, we need to go back again to the histories of population movements in the later half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was then that the basic control systems were put in place, such as recording the foreigner, developing labour market management tools to use immigrant labour for a capitalist market and for control of domestic labour, and finally developing a detailed surveillance system. In this, law, but more than law, new administrative practices proved crucial. The feature of modern democracies practising various social exclusions developed during that time. This is how the societies of the settled with their pre-ordained divisions of labour wanted to return to equilibrium, when the patient had been cured of the problem. By controlling the abnormal, who was generally the migrant, normalcy was to be restored. It was during this time that governing the migrant became a task of attending to pathology.

The discourse of abnormality was produced from real life events. For lack of time again I desist from referring to some of the fascinating historical works, but one instance immediately coming to mind is the story of an immigrant - an unemployed, homeless man, a Kabyle from Algeria Khemili Mohamed Sulimane - whose life in the 1920s-30s has been brought to light by a historian of immigration

in France. Clifford Rosenberg, from whose work, *Policing Paris – The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (2006, pp. 141-44) I cite this reference, has shown how events like this were used by colonial authorities to give shape to their immigration policies, precisely when part of the colonial political class voiced humanitarian concerns also in order to institute some protection measures for the immigrants. Humanitarianism developed as part of this scenario. As a clinical task classical humanitarianism wanted to change the soul of the "abnormal", therefore there were educationists, pedagogues, missionaries, administrators, and thinkers working on the issue of how to reform the abnormal societies. Modern humanitarianism had to combine the old techniques with new ones of care, protection, information gathering, interference, intervention, and invention of a skewed theory of sovereignty, a one-sided theory of responsibility, and the gigantic humanitarian machines which would liken to the trans-national corporations (TNCs). In practical terms this means today managing societies, which produce the obdurate refugees and migrants to stop them from leaving the shores, to keep them within the national territorial confines, and eventually to manage societies in "an enlightened way". Colonial and metropolitan experiences both show, how in this period of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, policies on control and management of societies were enunciated. Relief organisations emerged, which technically would mean an end to vulnerability. Managing moving population groups became the *deux ex machina* of modern governmentality. And again it was in this period that the government first became aware of its paradoxical task: how much to keep these groups beyond the pale of visibility and how much to allow them to be visible. Mary Dewhurst Lewis shows in *The Boundaries of the Republic* (2007) that to the extent to which migrant labour became crucial for expansion of industries, it had become visible. On the other hand in a nationally constituted polity and market, keeping immigrant groups confined to almost invisible spaces also acquired high priority. Governments had to deal with enormous confusion: (a) Who was a refugee? (b) What to do with the displaced due to famines, disasters, and epidemics? (c) What was the extent of government responsibility? (d) Was mitigating hunger a task of the government or was this a sign of inefficient and abnormal population groups? The attempt to solve these dilemmas found expression in various law-makings, regulations, directives, new manuals about care, camps, shelter, food, water, and medicine, while even more initiatives were taken to *anticipate* the arrival of migrants in order to keep them at bay, and therefore to build up specially trained forces to prevent the latter's entry. The main body of new humanitarianism emerged in this time. "Destitute asylums" resembling prison houses were set up by charitable institutions to welcome survivors, particularly girl and elderly female survivors. In all these one common feature appeared, possibly for the first time, that of treating the migrant as the source of insecurity. The victim of forced migration was now an active body, whose soul no longer needed to be saved because the destitute, wretched body would soon and inevitably die, but because this was now an unruly body requiring management and control. This is the point where the migrant emerged as the subject.

Let us also note one more paradoxical aspect of our time first noticed in this period. If the production of the labouring subject has thus its dark and illegal side, often representing what we have come to call the primitive mode of accumulation, and this complicates the scenario, yet there was also the fact that governments around this time started to pass laws and take steps towards making the immigrant a natural part of the society, because by and large the reorganisation of labour market must happen within a free juridical space, and that was when various provisions for naturalisation, domicile rights, citizenship laws, etc. began to be made, and the relation between blood and territory was sought to be defined or clarified. It was hoped that such naturalisation would help in the multiplication of labour, at the same time retain the heterogeneity of the global space of capital without which global domination of capital was impossible. What all these implied in simpler terms was that labour flows, which migration flows ultimately are, must be controlled and regulated with laws and governmental techniques, though these techniques had to be underwritten by a capitalist rationality, which must be housed and sourced back therefore to a sort of sovereign power. In short it was in this period that the marriage of two different rationalities – state and governmental – took place. Rights and risks were combined in this period. This was an anarchic process and not a thought out and deliberated one. Even though this period was marked by intense administrative centralisation, yet the administrative centre could do things only to certain extent, while police, municipal clerks, local politicians decided at the ground level in the suburbs and distant frontier towns on how and to what degree to execute those directives because they had to have always the primary task in mind – that of ensuring the society running. The fate of the migrant in various parts of the world was not therefore uniform. Migrant's rights did not develop through any human rights norms; no guarantee was secured from an altruistic civil society and well-informed public sphere. They evolved through contentious claim makings of various collectives, and equally complex constitutional and jurisdictional battles. Refuge, refusal, discourses of security and insecurity, and consequent actions by governments and social collectives made this process extremely contingent. It happened in India also. In the period between the establishment of rule of law in 1860s and passage of various national security provisions in the 1930s and early 1940s we have all the sure indications of an emerging democracy that would be marked by inclusions and exclusions, and a differentially constituted national labour market. The nationalist history we read is therefore one but only in a mythical way, because this myth hides at the same times other turbulent processes of population formation and development of control techniques, only the final signs of which we get in the passage of the Citizenship Act, the Foreigners Act, and the finalisation of the immigration rules. This is perhaps what Theodor Adorno termed as "negative dialectics" (*Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, 2000) – a case when the more we try to think of the nation form distancing ourselves from the material process of labour, the more we are hurled back to the violent and contentious history of the labour form.

In short, in this reappearance of the issue of primitive accumulation in our cognition of social reality, the pervasive phenomenon of migrant labour has played a big role. The ways in which migrant labour is managed, controlled, and monitored tell us how extra-economic coercion still remains crucial in this project, and how a different sort of globalisation, for lack of a better phrase we may term this as "subaltern globalisation", accompanies globalisation of capital. More than legislations, we find administrative regulations and sheer physical controls marking the primitive process of accumulation, and please remember that this primitive process is still on precisely because the labour in question is migrant, situated on what Sandro Mezzadra calls the "borders of citizenship" ("Borders, Confines, Migrations, and Citizenship", trans. Maribel Casas Cortés and Sebastian Cobarrubias – May 2006 http://observatorio.fadaiat.net/tiki-index.php?page=Borders%2C%20Migrations%2C%20Cittinzenshp). There is thus one more reason in the relative neglect of labour history, and that has to do with borders. We ignored the fact that a good part of the nation form we were studying had been based on imperial structure/s, and the state this nation was attempting to build was already leaning on imperial traditions and contexts to grow up. The particular constellations of territory, authority, and rights which supported the emergence of the nation state had imperial lineages in more than one way. Empires had been characterised by several kinds of population flows. Barbarians had appeared periodically in history against empires. Barbarians represented migratory movements, and in the context of our time we may say they have had a decisive impact on the way border as an institution has to function today.

III

Migrant labour takes us to the way in which the distribution of life opportunities is determined by the form of work. Here again the need is to examine the different ways in which the conditions and forms of work determine the life opportunities, and the one of the effective ways to probe this issue will be to engage with accounts and analyses of the work performed by migrant labour – one of the major sites of primitive accumulation. From this angle we are interested both in internal labour migration as well as cross-border labour migration – and once again from the point of primitive accumulation – in the issue of trafficking in labour. Clearly here again we discover the thread tying the form of labour, the quality of work, and the particular renewal of life. In fact we need to see in this context the strategic role of various labour regulatory mechanisms (including ILO conventions) in perpetuating the division of labour in two segments – primary and improved. This brings us to the question of how labour, or at least most of the labour, under post-colonial conditions, is governed. This is related to the broader import of labour regulations in democracies, in this case democracy in a developing country. It is not that government does not have unorganised labour in mind when it speaks of industries and industrial regulations. Yet we must ask how exactly are most forms of work - in this case India - subjected to governmental

gaze with the consequence that these forms turn into what we call normally "unorganised labour"? What roles therefore do governmental regulations play in this respect? The question throws light on the social conditioning of the division between what is called creative work and the so-called non-creative work, for it is here, in the later case, the worker we may bluntly say has no career. Do labour regulations ever provide the labourer with a case to opt out of the informal conditions? Do these regulations not on the other hand aim to keep the unorganised, informal labour in the permanent condition of instability, dreariness, with no prospect for occupational mobility?

Therefore one can reflect in a new way (this is of course not exactly new, but remained obfuscated by what passes on as "post-colonial studies") on the question of work under post-colonial conditions and in the context of the production of life cycle. Thus not only we are to discuss how work is reproduced, but how this predicates the production of life cycle. Gender, race, occupational enclosure, generational skill and knowledge, and several other associated issues contribute to the existence of particular forms of work – and thereby the ways in which wealth would be reproduced and life cycles would be patterned. There is a need for further research to show how within the category of "work" we have the elemental inequalities and conflicts raging, we also have what the late social theorist Charles Tilly would have called "categorical inequality", which means inequality produced out of categories. All these take us back to the fundamental question of unorganised labour and primitive accumulation in developing democracies. Hopefully this discussion will throw light on the theoretical and social implications of the question of work today in the context of the global South (the global South includes the South in the North), in short a post-colonial redefinition of the issue of work and accumulation.

In the overwhelming context of the current global developmental discourse today and the growth of new technologies, linkages, and growths in certain sectors, coupled with a marked emergence of the culture industry, we can reformulate the post-colonial question on the basis of the following five inquiries:

- Is primitive labour a thing of past, an exception, and remainder of the past? Or, is it an integral part of the emerging scenario particularly in the context of the role that migrant labour plays in the framework of globalisation?
- Who are most of the workers today and how are they represented?
- How is most of the work governed today?
- The illusion of capital without pain and the contemporary nature of the process of primitive accumulation
- Finally, the significance of these issues for a new theory of citizenship and democracy.
- Let us in somewhat sketchy way see the implications of this way of seeing.

First, today, in the context of globalization and amassment of new riches, there is once again the argument that work has transformed in many areas, and work is directly producing wealth to the worker. We can also listen to the slowly emerging,

half sure voices of economists that after all division of labour is not so much of a reality, that it is giving way to discrete forms of labour – labour that transgresses boundaries of different forms, regimes, structures, etc. In this new euphoria, whose source can be perhaps traced to a kind of repressed anxiety about the persistence of "low" and "crude" forms of labour and a desire to escape this world of vulgar labour, we can witness the appearance of an anthropological economics, which deduces economic truths from a limited anthropological, particularly ethnographic work. The high (pure economic) tales and the low (limited ethnographic research) tales of economics have met each other today – the meeting point is, how to explain away labour at this time, in the early years of this new century? Or, to put more accurately, how is work to be represented today? We need not be astonished that the debate over how to perceive work has renewed today, reminding us of the situation of hundred and fifty to two hundred years back when new forms of production and work raised the same kind of commotion in human thinking.

Second, we shall have to take into cognisance the way labour is organised today in order to get a sense of the contemporary forms that most of the work may assume. There is a striking conjunction of two factors in this respect: Precisely when we hear that the world of labour is not relevant any more, we hear at that same time the talk of abolishing labour protection laws in various countries including India because these laws supposedly prevent production, they are stumbling blocks to progress, and union power needs to be curbed severely. On the other hand trade union acts have suddenly become bones of contention. The trade union verification carried out by the Ministry of Labour in India tells that trade union membership has increased significantly, and that the trade unions have not depoliticised. Organised trade unions and the new forms of labour organisations around unorganised labour – both are more and more representing the unorganised workers. With labour market flexibilisation, the nature of bargaining is also changing. More than ever, suddenly launched direct actions by workers are combining today with old style bargaining. All these show that the preponderant form of work now has deep influence over the politics of work also. We have to realise the broader significance of the existence of this kind of labour in terms of accumulation, capital's logic, and the social separations or divisions (of work and property, labour and wealth, producer and the product, etc.), and therefore relations, which capital as an embodiment of accumulation represents. In this way we shall be able to find an answer to the question: How can we characterise the life of the post-colonial – at least one part of it – from the point of labour? How to interpret the two permanent appellations to post-colonial labour, *illegal* and *irregular*, which mark the flow of unorganised labour?

Third, two investigations will be critical at this point: (a) the various ways in which migrant labour occupies a distinct place in a labour regime; (b) due to the role migrant labour plays in shaping the regime of labour, the inquiry as to how labour forms becomes discrete. On the whole in this inquiry we shall have to see how forms of semi-bonded labour, unorganised labour, migrant labour, women's

labour, rural labour, and other forms of primitive labour become appropriate for a globally advanced economy and society.

Fourth, we shall have to examine present nature of governmental rationality that wants to retain yet control the primitive labour conditions. One part of this rationality is the way labour laws work. In this context we shall have to investigate the role of the various loopholes in the legislative measures (We have to address here to the issue of national legislations and the significance of the "local" in determining the actual conditions of work), the universally evident difficulty in their implementation (such as the almost total absence of labour inspection arrangements at the block level in India), and what is perceived as "lack of awareness" of these measures in unorganised labour. In such condition existing at the beginning of the new century the critical point to note will be: Is there any necessary connection between this permanently informal condition of labour (that is informal condition of work, of regulation of work, reproduction of work, reproduction of labour power, which includes the informal condition of labour market institutions) and the maintenance of a reserve army of labour that capitalist production always needs? We may also ask taking one extra step: Is there any necessary connection between the existence of such a reserve army of labour and the process of primitive accumulation? The important thing here will be to understand the connection between the three phenomena –unorganised labour, formation of a reserve army of labour, and primitive accumulation – and thus the two processes – of work and accumulation.

Fifth and this follows from the previous point, the inquiry will have to proceed on the following line – Can there be capital without pain, prosperity without misery? This will make us re-visit the accumulation debate, particularly the debate over primitive accumulation. On the basis of the Indian experience of development the question to be probed will be: Is primitive accumulation a historically past stage, or is it contemporary and still relevant to the growth of each phase of capital and wealth? And therefore, the connected inquiry: how do the process of primitive accumulation and the resultant production of wealth through extra-economic and coercive means reflect on contemporary forms of work and the involved life and wealth cycles? At least prima facie speaking, unorganised labour in India stands free in a double sense – dispossessed, and thus free of attachments and free as a juridical person to accept any condition offered to him/her. And again, it is in this sense, s/he stands as a member of a vast (reserve) army waiting to be drafted into the lines of organised production. Globalisation has only hastened the process of expropriation by turning large numbers of peasant proprietors into unorganised labour. Though some prefers to call it "primitive globalisation", all past phases of globalisation had this feature of displacement and expropriation of petty property holders, and the present phase is not an exception. In my earlier work on tannery industry in Kolkata I showed how informal and at times beastly conditions functioned as the basis of a sophisticated leather goods manufacturing industry headed by giants such as the Bata, Adidas, Gucci, and other fashion products manufacturers. More significantly that study

showed the blurred line of distinction between formal and informal conditions of labour, their deep links, and the possible ways in which today's organised labour can become tomorrow's unorganised, or the unorganised of the past can be the organised labour of tomorrow. This mutually alterable condition can be seen in the ways the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are emerging in India today and absorbing labour in them. In short, we can note some of the global signs of the process of primitive accumulation in the first decade of the twenty first century – a process aided and facilitated by the existence of surplus labour and the administrative strategy of creating special methods as spaces of exception to the "normal" process of capitalist accumulation and development. In this differential use of space for accumulation, we have one more secret of the durability of the unorganised state of work in India. This state of conditions needs to be deeply inquired into.

The events of economy are never pure economic movements, and as Karl Polanyi would have said, they represent double movements, in the sense that when the market has historical movement, at times threatening the society itself within which it moves, the society also moves at the same time. The division is thus to repeat social. Though today's forms of primitive accumulation occur in contexts quite different from the earlier ones, yet for labour the democratic agenda remains the same, namely, remembering, retaining, and winning anew the hard gains in form of socio-economic rights and entitlements, often the result of past battles. These entitlements and rights institutionalised by welfare states are like forms of social commons, now targeted by the neo-liberal project. We have to probe why in such condition re-formed consumption patterns are unable to change the fundamental hierarchies in the organisation of work, and thus why finally the anti-poverty programmes, such as the ones prescribed by the World Bank, fail as they have failed in India. What emerges thus notwithstanding the "modernist" economic measures is a picture of the working population as a discrete formation with this image having enormous consequences for a theory of labour democracy, which is at heart of any significant theory of popular democracy. The implications are on the theory of collective actions, which are occasioned by primitive accumulation, and discrete formation of popular resistance. The issue of precarious, informal conditions of labour occupies a strategic place in this situation that is marked by what David Harvey calls in *Spaces of Neoliberalisation – Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* "accumulation by dispossession" (2005, p. 31), which in its turn is facilitated by strategies of privatisation, financialisation, and redistribution of resources in favour of the moneyed classes through fiscal and monetary means.

Appearing as exception in a formally organised democracy, informal labour poses a challenge to the modern strategy of producing out of the worker the autonomous juridical figure of the citizen (who can claim on an equal basis all due entitlements) and on the other hand maintaining sovereign power to buttress conditions of accumulation. Primitive accumulation and the heterogeneity of labour signify this permanent contradiction of a democratic polity. This is where

post-colonial problematic culminates – that is making sense of a democracy, which wants the equality of citizens as a condition of the reproduction of a shared life, on the other hand which has to allow differential conditions of a labour regime so that wealth can be reproduced and life can go on.

Listeners, I hope, will appreciate now why I am claiming that the post-colonial predicament is global. It is not only a characteristic of what is known as the global South. The predicament stays within the underbelly of what is known as the global North, and nothing could be more illustrative of this predicament than the current dilemma of this continent - where we hold this discussion - as to how to negotiate the bodies of the strangers and aliens, monitor them, make them "docile", allow their presence but only in a measured way so that races, lives, and habits can be mixed towards the prosperity of capital. In this new politics of race we have a peculiar kind of bio-politics to understand whose nature we have to go back to Marx. This bio-political scenario is marked by the simultaneous but contradictory practices of control and flight symbolising the two phenomena of capital and migration. The scenario also indicates the new apparatuses of governing turbulent societies. But it also indicates different ways in which labour as a subject is emerging amidst the post-colonial governing apparatuses.

A perhaps minor question at the end: Why call it "post-colonial capitalism", why not "neo-colonial capitalism"?