

Kerstin Knopf, Detlev Quintern (Eds.)

## From Marx to Global Marxism

Eurocentrism, Resistance, Postcolonial Criticism

# INPUTS

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## Preface

This book, *From Marx to Global Marxism: Eurocentrism, Resistance, Postcolonial Criticism*, will give readers another opportunity to delve into the tormented history of the engagement of the postcolonial world with Marxism, Marx's ideas, and communist movements. One cannot think of what is described as the Global South without its variegated histories of colonial domination, import of western liberal ideas and enforced with colonial tools of rule, racism, partitions, expropriation of the peasantry, national subjugation, the failure of newly independent countries to realise the dreams of freedom and equality, and the harsh reality of the neoliberal rule of global capital today of which the so-called Global South is a part. With all its past variations, the postcolonial destiny seems to be a universal one. The nation question has become a global question, with the postcolonial regions becoming ever new hunting grounds of predatory capital, victims of external aggression, sites of primitive accumulation, and debt bondage. Yet this situation, known as the postcolonial condition, has become a universal feature today not only because what is often termed the Global South – essentially including large tracts of the Americas, Africa, and Asia – is a vast region with most of the populations on earth, but also because the Global South has emerged within the North in as much there is a North within the South. Migration, precarious work conditions, industrial decline, and financial depredations have bound this world in the last thirty years like never before. Global entanglements have increased immeasurably.

Neoliberalism and postcolonial capitalism have combined in different and uneasy ways. The combined situation has pushed to the fore: (a) logistical expansion, (b) operations of financial capital, (c) newer and more extended supply chains and thus greater and faster circulation of goods and services, (d) and roving bands of migrant labour, as the primary features of our time. In many ways the world looks suspiciously like what it was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which like our time was marked by phenomenal expansion of imperial infrastructure. We may recall Marx's writings on the railways and telegraph in India, writings of others on improvements of steamships to carry increasing number of goods and men that included indentured labour and other migrant labour from India, China, Ireland, and many other countries to the plantations, railway construction sites, mining sites, and ports in different parts of the world. The South was never an entity pure unto itself; it was created as part of global capitalism which is why the entanglements were present in the very story of the birth of capitalism. The story of the South is a story of capital. Hence, any discussion on the South will involve analysis of capitalism, revolutions against bourgeois rule, national independence, and thus ideas of Marx. Pure "Southerners" may not like it. But we are bound by history to the story of the global struggles against capitalism. Hence at least

for several decades to come we shall have to engage with Marx, whose ideas will be enriched with other revolutionary and creative ideas originating in the South. The two essays in this collection on Hikmet Kıvılcımlı's contribution to Marxist historiography in Turkey and the Iranian thinker Ali Shariati's ideas point to this profoundly productive field of study.

In this connection, it is important to note the role of the concept of world market in Marx's analysis of colonialism. As he remarked in *Grundrisse*, "the tendency to create the world market is inherent directly in the concept of capital itself. Every limit appears as a barrier to be overcome." He was acutely aware of the relevance of the global geographical coordinates for the definition of the capitalist mode of production. It allowed a deeper understanding of the "general relations of bourgeois society" – the concentration of capital, division of labour, and wage labour, since it was on the world market that production was posited as a totality and all its moments also, but in which simultaneously all contradictions were set in motion. His engagement with colonialism began in this context. These investigations became the founding moments of his analysis of the "so-called primitive accumulation." Violence, he argued, was therefore inscribed into the conditions that enabled the existence of the capitalist mode of production. In his words:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of blackskins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre.

If ever there was a debate as to whether capitalism was a universal phenomenon, perhaps the present postcolonial condition seems to have put the debate at rest, at least for now. The world moves on. As some of the essays in this collection tell us as if echoing Walter Benjamin, that the bourgeois age makes time appear as homogenous and empty; yet the history of capital's advance is made through incorporating and absorbing varieties and particularities of regions, histories, economies, and power. The same is happening today. Capital's remorseless advance is through crises, yet its effect is to make time and the world one, homogenous, and seamless.

Historical debates have a tendency to take on a quaint air after some time. What were lively few decades a few years back appear as resolved issues now, lying as "dead corpses" of time. Revolution is always popular avant-gardism that shakes the commonplace, banal, and the quotidian. It always latches on to unbelievable conjunctures of the experimental and the everyday. As happened in Russia and China, when the bourgeoisie is absent, revolution proclaims that the proletariat along with the peasantry could stand in for an absent bourgeoisie and spearhead its revolution itself. This is why a revolutionary like Lenin could remark that the Russian working class was suffering from an insufficient dose of capitalism. Revolutionaries always grasp history as a form of non-synchronous time. If previous knowledge says that the time for revo-