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*For Michel Chossudovsky, a teacher
and a friend*

Preface

Resist to exist

This work addresses the issue of imperialist practice as a subset of waste accumulation. It does so in reference to Syria, a country subjected to imperialist war and, upon whose territory, the results of the power play may shift global power balances. The work is partitioned into four chapters, but it is best read as a single essay. In what follows I will try to introduce some of the issues raised herein.

Empires practice imperialism. Empires subordinate masses and nations and exact tribute from them. The reason and means by which tribute is exacted change by changing historical circumstance. Imperialism assumes new forms and there are many ways to define imperialism. Each definition depends on the angle one takes or the level of abstraction one assumes. For instance, I can depart from my understanding of capital, the dominant social relation in the historical stage known as capitalism, as that relation which ‘drips with blood’ (as per Marx 1859). Such is not a hyperbolic statement. Unlike past forms of imperialist barbarity, the violence of capitalism is both means and end. In the era of monopoly-finance capital, stretching from the turn of the last century to the present, the stimulus for imperialist wars has risen in tandem with the crisis of capital. The principal contradiction of capital, the capital–labour contradiction, has further moved into a North/South divide. The resolution of capital’s contradictions depends more and more on the degree to which imperialist countries oppress and exploit developing countries. This shift of the imperialist class structure from a class to class exploitation into the utter ruination or financial enslavement of other nations signals a change in the substance of the imperialist class, and hence the specificity of modern imperialism.

At another level of abstraction, one more related to the current existential crisis of humanity, imperialism, the intense or more violent facet of capital, metabolises more of man and nature to meet higher profit rates.¹ Capital produces commodities,

¹ The term imperialism is either used as a condensed form of the capital relationship or as imperialist practice. Whenever imperialism appears as a subset of accumulation by waste, what I mean is imperialist practice.

but it has more than proportionately produced waste. As things stand, the pollution and destruction to man and nature are already cataclysmic. Such waste, the environmental degradation and war, is the product humanity pays for in order to self-harm. For instance, humanity pays for toxins and trash to be removed. It pays for the diseases that these wars and polluting elements generate. It pays for the waste of militarism and war effort. Its method of payment for waste and waste products is twofold. The first is the straightforward way; it pays out of its wage share in clean-air taxes and medical bills. The second way is not so straightforward; it pays for waste by shortened lives.

Very low wages decrease life's quality and expectancy, while the waste and wars all on their own are lethal to life. These modes of payment undercut human life. In value terms, they reduce the necessary labour or the social cost of the reproduction of labour. Waste is a mode of accumulation by which capital simultaneously expands and disposes of labour before its historically due time. Transfers in money value form and real value in exchange for waste products show that the diktat of the law of value, the law that allocates resources under capitalism, forces people to pay for the wars and the erosion sustained by nature from the necessary labour time or value by which they reproduce their own lives.

Furthermore, the irreplaceable and combined loss to life and specie since the onset of capitalism and its wars is un-compensable by any amount of neoclassical or hypothetical consumer-surplus. The wealth, the heap of commodities, cannot remotely offset the outstanding war losses or the enormous damage sustained by nature thus far. Wealth is more a heap of poisonous commodities than a heap of useful commodities. The metabolic rift, Marx's way to describe the fatigue of nature when subjected to the oppression of profit driven production, morphed into an abysmal rupture. At last, humanity has given itself more problems than it could handle, or as such, the irrational has become real.

Waste is the internality of the capitalist system as opposed to the commonly held view of externality. However, it should rather be said that waste is neither an internality nor an externality, it is the system, the *organic whole* whose components, whether realised in waste or set-aside and wasted, equally obey the predisposition of waste production. Just as the natives of the colonies and current global population are superfluous to the reigning ideology, the economic textbooks of yesteryears designated water and air as free and abundant resources. It may have taken a while for environmental waste to exchange for a price and be recognised as value, but imperialist war has always been central to the general category of waste. Its value manifestations in price are innumerable and time incoherent. In a system of metabolic production subjected to market forces, it is the resultant of the latter that determines which constituent part of the system acquires a price and when, but that in no way means that value corresponds to price. At any rate, that prices converge to natural prices, long term average costs or price of production is a hypothetical accounting framework. The only real relation is the balance of power by which capital drives a wedge between value and price, footing a low wage bill relative to profits. The neo-Ricardian omission of the value category is an omission of the organic nature of production, especially the value provided by a Third World

violently consumed in war or decommissioned by imperialist aggression to become a predicate or pedestal for the industry of their 'more advanced culture.' In an un-interrelated, ahistorical and asocial neo-Ricardian world, value lost its significance because each physical production activity has no contiguous social relationship of power such as imperialism associated with it. But that was not the Marxian category of value. The genocidal wars or war for war's sake and the waste for waste production are not un-transformed value without a price, not matter how low the price. Commodities do not produce commodities. Social man or society produce to be reproduced in a system driven by symbolism and not the reified context of things producing things. Just as the losses to nature have acquired high prices after a long gestation period, as the masses of the Third World rise, their historical losses, which had then sold for pittance, will acquire astronomical prices as compensation for colonial plunder. The contribution of power to price formation irrespective of its value content annuls the so-called transformation problem. There is a closer relationship between the rate of exploitation and the degree of oppression than that between the rate of surplus value and its price form. The case may be that the losses to earth are a window of opportunity that avails itself to us in order to drag into the mainstream debate the uncompensated past victims of imperialism, man reproduced by nature, *ergo* social nature, as under-paid value in their own right.

Waste has its own market-gestation time. In the case of imperialist wars, the cycle closes with the war spending cycle and the duration in which the mown lives, through real and ideological channels, begin to reduce necessary labour. In the case of the environment, it exhibits a lengthy turnover cycle, a social-time determined cycle, or the time at the command of capital. As of late, through the deliberations of markets for exchange, environmental waste accumulated over many years acquired a price and/or a money form of value. It entered the value chain and became the product of a value relationship. Waste, including the waste of militarism, becomes the product of the labour of society, or the time it takes to produce the commodities and the lives with which society *sustains* or *unsustains* itself. Waste is certainly an undesired product, but then again to use the old adage, 'people make their own history, but they do not make it as they please.'

Capital brutalises its labour and natural inputs to reduce costs and concomitantly raise profits. At first, society pays a superficially low price for a useful commodity that short-changes the real costs to nature and man. The cheap inputs that went into the making of that commodity include the moneyed and non-moneyed losses to nature and man. Society finds itself paying for the abusive measures of production employed in the past. At this juncture, society pays for the war damage in taxation and lost lives and for what capital discloses of the natural disaster. Why capital discloses so little of the natural disaster? The production of knowledge, science and scientists kowtow the power structure. The subordination of knowledge to power, an axiom of the sociology of knowledge, brings into the picture the possibility of concealed natural losses, losses that resurface as the planet fries at some future date.

Ninety-seven percent of scientists concur that climate change is man or rather class-made. Peculiarly, that is the same figure for the percentage of physicists who

adhered to national socialism in Germany during the Second Great War. Scientists here only legitimate observable phenomena. In Mount Hermon, one of the oldest farming communities on earth, the farmers lament the disappearance of the snow cap as early as June in the summer season. Stories of climatic perturbation abound. Scientists work in research areas and projects funded and conditioned by capital, for which man and nature are open season. Just as there was little valour in documenting meteors as scientific facts by the Royal Society, there is also little valour in establishing as scientific fact blatant variations in climate or loss of specie.

In 'Unprecedented Crime: Climate Science Denial and Game Changers for Survival,' the authors, Carter and Woodworth (2018), argued to outlaw ecocide and 'indict corporate and governmental bodies identified without hyperbole by the authors as guilty of crimes against humanity.' However, the intelligentsia, the personification of the power of dominant ideology, sit atop the social pyramid. The scientific community and its scientists, vulnerable to the flattery of the rich and their Nobel Prizes, whom 'they serve without imagination but with great zeal,' are just as culpable in remaking the environmental tragedy. No pleading of *Gründlichkeit* (the thoroughness that the obsequious pursue in effecting orders), the very word used as justification for crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials, exonerates scientists who daily observe in their experiments that substance admits contrary qualities (Aristotle's Categories), yet their political agency is blighted by formalism. By formalism, I mean the resignation that emerges in popular consciousness as the desired change becomes an alienated ideal, a puritan idea, which materialises only when all of humanity becomes a clone of all that is virtuous. Waiting for the impossible to happen before engaging in direct action is least scientific. The futility of struggle, the theological notion that nothing could be changed because people have not changed, undermines effective opposition to ecocide, imperialist genocide, or accumulation by waste in general. The anti-formalism, the struggle of ideas, which lingers from times past until the present, mirrors the class struggle, a struggle to date countered by the inflated 'I' of liberalism, class privilege, status and consumerism.

People are not supposed to mature into some non-existent ideal or acquire a revolutionary consciousness by messianic élan to effect change. Just as science progresses despite the impurities of experiments, and just as scientific categories grow from the inalienable bond between theory and practice, so too are the social-scientific categories as each different component of the substance, here the social class, exercises its own cultural and political particularity in anti-imperialist struggle. The anti-imperialist or historically definitive category becomes a moment, a stage or a part of the same substance, the anti-systemic struggle, which circularly gels in the praxis of anti-capital. Scientists, whose contribution to knowledge is defined by commodity expansion and militarism, exhibit a defeatism that stunts their ability to *practically reason* the necessity for cross-global organisation against capital as the sole ethical imperative. The hitherto known and, worse yet, concealed environmental disasters are the product of their reigning ideas. The only sure thing is that scientists are just as guilty of imperialist practice and ecocide as the political class.

Doubtless, work, the activity of labour, metabolises both subject and object, man and nature, to produce additional value. The profit motive however, imposes a production of value that draws on the intensity of labour and the role that nature plays in supporting the production of commodities, which in turn supports the reproduction of human labour. Man is both the building block of capital and the culmination of capital's activity. Under capital, the consumption of nature and man is means to private ends signified in money form. Alongside imperialist wars, the erosion of nature undermines the material and spiritual support platforms of the working class. The climate calamity, austerity and war uproot people from direct production everywhere. Just as primitive accumulation, they deracinate and socialise labour and resources on a massive scale. Imperialist wars and wars of colonisation, in particular, uproot and disperse the human and physical assets of whole nations. However, just as the forms of primitive accumulation intensify in different shapes in response to the crisis of capital, so does their key form of exploitation, commercial exploitation, whose most striking appearance is slavery. The eradication of sources of independent support for labour de-subjectifies and caps the autonomy of the working class.

As in imperialist war, the degradation of nature by capital, the incarnation of the impersonal and objective forces of history, is means to control or regulate the reproduction of labour. Labour is the source of surplus value, the unmediated profits. The erosion of the social and natural support platforms of labour, the measures that reduce populations or shorten life's expectancy relative to the historically determined level, shrink the share of value from the social product obtained by labour or undermine the spirit of labour; the spirit of labour here refers to fighting subject in the working of class, which would otherwise enhance the share of labour from the social product. A definitive relationship is established between shortened quality and length of lives with surplus value. As a measure of variations in surplus value, an index of the reduction in the quality of life, life expectancy and the deaths in wars, mirrors the facts of social production more closely than variations in profits signified in the dollar form. Life expectancy, for instance, could parallel the changes in the rate of exploitation, but the time lags are those of abstract time. Abstract or social time is the historical time in which the repressive groundwork set by the law of value, the wars and the evisceration of nature, intensifies the dollar profit efficacy of the socially necessary labour time in production. The counter implication of such formulaic approach brings into focus Istvan Mészáros's suggestion that socialist growth is 'the expansion of ecologically benign use values rather than an unlimited increase in merely quantifiable material outputs (Mészáros 1995).' The end of the value relation is the gradual termination of capital as the consumption of man and nature, the production of waste for profits.

To be sure, the category of value in political economy is not some goodness to things as current in colloquial vernacular. Value is a category of the market economy under capital, transforming by its own contradictions, and mediated by a competitive market process, which reconstitutes the social condition for additional value making by the most egregious and violent ways. There is not a dark or a lighter side to value. Value dereproduces as well as reproduces society by market

deliberations. Value is aesthetically and ethically repulsive. The waste product and waste production have long been significant to production and value relations. Nature and people are either hired as inputs for pittance or commandeered by imperialist aggression into slave-like conditions. Nature here is the social nature that presupposes the reproduction of social and biological life. In the circularity of life's reproduction, the production of waste is associated with a significant rate of exploitation. It literally consumes lives in the making of commodities, which are also in great part waste.

The waste category is a domain of accumulation with sub-industries. Accumulation is a social process. The production of waste has long been instituted in forms of social organisation and introjected in thought, such that many fail to see it as either the system or as just a part of the system. Waste's sub-industries include militarism and its imperialist wars, the industries of pure waste. As such, waste just like the sub-stratum of energy, articulates and undergirds the whole of social production. Moreover, just like other commodities produced and alienated from the labourers, waste, the very death of man and the environment, acquire a price determined by the power of markets, and as such their exchange for other commodities, as opposed to the needs of society, dictates the allocation of resources or how society self-sustains. Waste products also acquire a fetish quality. Fetishism in its class related aspect means that the price or money form of commodities as a form of value becomes a weapon against working people. The production and exchange of waste determine the reproduction of life or how we live.

Imperialist war is a prerequisite for the expansion of capital and its market economy and the outstanding industry of waste. It is a permanent feature of the market economy. It engages labour and consumes labourers. It is a foundation for the expansion of other industries. War is not an inherent attribute associated with human fallibility. War occurs under different historical conditions at different periods for reasons which requalify its content or the laws reformulating its being. The imperialist wars of the finance age do not materialise for the same reasons as the ones prior to the age of monopoly finance. The permanent state of war in the age of finance is a significant surplus value engine. It produces much waste and also extinguishes or redeploys many resources in an already overproducing world economy.

As the world economy began to overtake the economy of the world in the long sixteenth century, as per Fernand Braudel, war in its early forms employed waged soldiers and sailors. Imperialist war was a precursor of capitalism and the first capitalist industry to relocate to the Southern hemisphere. The nature and people that white colonists encountered abroad and exterminated were inputs and outputs in a market of war and waste. The living and the dying in wars had value, generated surplus value by their very lives as input and deaths as output. Destruction exchanged for a price, and thusly, the genocides were a market for the skins of natives. Yet, such atrocities were not recognised as such in the European corpus. Wasting lives in war was not an industry; it was simply the loot of a humanity predisposed to war by inherent myth. These past imperialist wars are mostly

explained outside the circuit of capital, outside value relations, and vacuously as an inherent bent of all empires.

As any other theory emerging from Europe, the Western Marxist theory of value is also Eurocentric. Immersed in empiricism, it mostly assumes that value is an object or a thing. It omits the subject, labour or capital, in value. It more significantly neglects value as a historical process within a value relationship. It especially overlooks the power relation in control of time and space, the imperialist power that lays the historical foundation for actors to act upon.

Because Europe currently feels the deoxygenation of the planet and because natural waste has acquired a heavier price, the 'noble savages,' the ex-colonies and their territories, by logical implication, are no longer just vestiges whose past or current devastation did not generate any value. Just as professed by Indian-American wisdom, the insistence on the unity of man and nature, modern rates of pollution appear to have brought the dead in colonial and imperialist wars back into the circuit of capital.

Ironically, the Third Worlders are fortunate as a result of the environmental degradation because they could re-enter the discourse as victims of capital, just as nature did. The war-wasted lives are inputs, necessary predicates for the expansion of production, and outputs. Although capital indifferently metabolises both man and nature, the aristocratic nations mourn only nature but not Third World man. It is as if the human population is an infestation of some mammal species, which requires culling by Safari hunting trips. For capital, it is much easier to compensate nature with a token tax than paying compensation for colonial and ongoing imperialist slaughter. The rate of population reduction relative to the secular trend, which actually grows by the imposed underdevelopment upon the Third World, is a tendency in overproducing markets counteracted by the power balance of the class struggle.

Unlike pre-capitalist times, modern imperialist war has different drivers. Looking back at the twentieth century, it has also been irrational and devastating. Under finance-monopoly capital, private appropriation and imperialist rents more than sever the correspondence between what people need and what people produce. Waste, militarism, wars and war technology are foremost examples of what people do not need, yet society continues to produce. These are alienated processes falling outside social control. The better machinery of modern times accentuates overproduction and induces wars that resolve crises of overproduction. Even the machinery, which is intended to reduce the waste, will still search for cheaper inputs in unregulated areas, abuse nature, in order to relieve a supposedly divisible natural disaster elsewhere.

Accumulation by waste, militarism, and imperialist wars are class-made events. Classes are the state of social being of people. Unfortunately, waste and imperialist war are introjected conditions because of their differential existentialist impact upon social classes. Some classes and nations hurt more than others. Just as there is a 'keeping up with the Jones's,' there is also the 'we are lucky we are not Starving

Yemenites.’ There are many ways to explain herding, the formalised, or rather phantasmagorical, mode of thinking that grips popular imagination. Wilhelm Reich’s way was to dub it a class-mental disease, a phenomenal-sickness, originating from the ideological apparatuses, which force upon the psyche an *identification with power* as means of survival (Reich 2014). For the less psychoanalytical Davis (1993), the insecurity of the transition to a better world pushes huge sections of the working class into cohabitating with capital, a pragmatic or short-sighted position held by an otherwise alienated working class. At any rate, the war of ideas is chiefly a struggle against formalism. It is a struggle to de-reify perceptions, to put back gradated change as scientific observation from which categories evolve, and to extirpate the lethargic conservatism that dominates popular culture. Revolutionary change auto-suffices by the degree to which the contradictions of capital are laid bare before labour.

For now, a society of the spectacle (as per Guy Debord) tolerates a race to the bottom, so long as the other suffers more. It rejects the ghastly shows of Islamic State (IS), yet it is oblivious to the much bigger crimes of the power structure, the policies of austerity, war and wanton environmental rampage, committed by the institutions and ideas propelled by Western-suited people in charge of the planet. The bigger daily crimes are not aired by the media. The only revolutions on TV are of the coloured sort, the ones that crushed Libya and the Ukraine, the sort in which people vote for politicians that deprive them of basic necessities and a better natural environment. De-sensitisation to war and waste is capital’s ideological trophy. Capital produces the waste and the willing waste-consuming subject.

The accumulated wealth, power and the culture of imperialism are altogether the historical surplus value. The world’s uneven power structure is no conspiracy, it is there to be seen, and it is a product of imperialism. This structure is the objective and impersonal force of history, a crushing structure commanded by the fetish of auto-growing waste. Beyond their peace-loving cant, capital’s institutions systematically, practically and as a matter of historically established fact, justify the ruination of labour and the environment. As more is taken from people and the environment at cheap prices today, more is being put into profits, more of life’s quality and expectancy will have to be sacrificed tomorrow.

Capital is an uncontrollable social relation. It is its own compass to the process of being as a whole and the social map by which the whole reproduces by the simultaneous act of wealth creation and destruction. The war outside the commodity is a magnification of the contradiction of the value relationship within the commodity: the repulsion between use and exchange value. So long as the product of labour and its usefulness are forcefully alienated from the direct producer and mediated by exchange, war and its violence are a must. Although humanity has always produced waste by waste and sold it, at this historical juncture, humanity wars for the sake of war, wastes more for the sake of waste. This is an unprecedented degree of alienation, the estrangement of consciousness from social being.

Imperialist wars destroy wealth stocks, indenture natural wealth and labour, reduce the number of labourers, or force more people to become refugees, and hence lessen the wage bill. Imperialist spending on wars exhibits positive returns

and crowds in the private sector. War spending absorbs and redeploys excess accumulated financial and monopoly profits that would otherwise not generate much in return and/or fuel other crises. Militarism and its war spending are also stopgap measures to redress power balances and to pull a market out of its slump. Producing waste by war is lucrative in the immediate term, and it diminishes the share of value accruing to labour, in the long term.

Such is the overarching spectrum of reasons for the imperialist war visited upon Syria. Why would the US be interested in a few billion-dollar trade with a country whose GDP was around 40 billion US\$ in 2007? The war in Syria is impetus for the expansion of militarism and its associated indebtedness, supported by US-security issuance. It is this win-win situation with the expansion of militarism fattening finance, undermining labour, while creating huge waste, which makes US-led capital the only imperialism. The US-led imperialist is defined by its type, the imperialist rentier type as well as by its principal function, the intensification of accumulation by waste.

Postscript: An ontology of imperialism as intensified waste

At this point, I would like to interject with an aide memoire about the origins of waste in Marxian political economy. To begin with, Western Marxism primarily *measures* the metabolic rift by the rate of depletion of nature relative to its rate of replenishment or generalise Marx's view of entropic capitalism from 'the disruption of the soil cycle in industrialised capitalist agriculture, which constituted nothing less than a rift (Bellamy-Foster 2013)'. The point here is that it over emphasises *measurement*; that is, it tracks theoretical development from the immediacy represented by empirical fact. Adjacently, it rather pedantically searches for the word metabolism in Marx to establish a negative dialectic of nature. Such an approach considers waste more a functional aspect of value as opposed to an intrinsic characteristic. In the latter case, the waste momentum does not arise from facing resource limitation, but rather waste, the purposeful wasting of man and nature, is a sphere of production and an end in itself. As waste itself becomes a product of production, the idea that the wasted peoples in imperialist and colonial wars alongside nature were outputs, as well as inputs into surplus value making, comes to the fore.

In the negative dialectic of capital, presupposed by a relation of subject to object or man to nature, waste is a principal category and a domain of accumulation. Immanently, waste within the contradiction of the forces shaping history, the totality, is the concrete manifestation of the more abstract process: the practice of the law of value in surplus value making. In view of the retreat in anti-systemic forces, waste as a concrete surrogate of the law of value reveals itself as the primal or leading moment of capital. Yes, other moments/relations exist, but only waste and waste producing relations guide the development of capital. I am not synthetically deriving waste on the basis of some *a priori logic*; nor, am I saying that

waste actualises because it can be inferred on the basis of first principles, or from an unchanging attribute of man. The production of waste is both profitable and it undermines the autonomy of the working class and the development of its revolutionary consciousness.

In more abstract but real terms, waste, the natural degradation, the wars, the erosion of the biological bases reproducing man, is a process into which capital, the unity of subject/object, resolves/culminates in order to not auto-dissolve. Theoretically, it is defined conterminously by following capital's own objective development in time while assigning to these developments historically definitive categories. That law of motion of capital, the actualisation of waste, is no other than the law of value.

In *Capital*, Volume III, Marx drops the tone of the critique of political economy in Volume I, the economics of his days, for the more holistic language of revolutionary science. He leaves behind the fake neutrality of positivism, which he adopted from time to time only to critique it. In the passage below, as he explains the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, he also illustrates that the transmutation of value into prices occurs by outright immiseration.

[t]he rate of self-expansion of the total capital, or the rate of profit, being the goal of capitalist production, its fall checks the formation of new independent capitals and thus appears as a threat to the development of the capitalist production process. It breeds over-production, speculation, crises, and surplus-capital alongside surplus-population. Those economists, therefore, who, like Ricardo, regard the capitalist mode of production as absolute, feel at this point that it creates a barrier itself, and for this reason attribute the barrier to Nature (in the theory of rent), not to production... The creation of this surplus-value makes up the direct process of production... But this production of surplus-value completes but the first act of the capitalist process of production — the direct production process. Capital has absorbed so and so much *unpaid* labour (my emphasis) ... Now comes the second act of the process. The entire mass of commodities, i.e. the total product, including the portion which replaces the constant and variable capital, and that representing surplus-value, must be sold. If this is not done, or done only in part, this can be bound up with a total or partial failure to realise the surplus-value ... the conditions of direct exploitation, and those of realising it, are not identical... It is no contradiction at all on this self-contradictory basis that there should be an excess of capital simultaneously with a growing surplus of population (Marx1894).

Marx points to the historicity of capitalism, its moribund state, with nature subsumed under the totality of production. The social crisis is itself both reason and consequence of the economic crisis. Alleviating the economic crisis entails and requires the relative, and possibly absolute, eradication of man and nature, the pillars that presuppose and support the reproduction of man. In that sense, capitalism is one big rift or contradiction that underlies all of its processes, including nature.

Accumulation and the expansion of exchange value, the spark and end of capital, materialise by the creation of surplus value and its concrete form in waste. Waste is not an intended or unintended consequence of capital accumulation, it is actualisation of capital accumulation. Every social–natural system is entropic, however, capitalism is overly so. The transformative resolution, the historical mediation

of the social oppression of labour, all the dread of the labour process making up value, into profits, baffles the minds of metaphysical economists in search of formal consistency. Formal logic is removed from the real grounds upon which the law of value, the immiseration proceeding in abstract or social time, consuming both man and nature, the latter is literally the life of man, constitutes the heart of economic activity. What they do not understand is why making someone really miserable, not just unhappy with the disutility of labour, makes profits.

Mainstream economists eschew the concrete, the actual pains of paid and *unpaid* labour in the making of surplus value. Notice here too that in the above-quoted passage, Marx reemphasises *unpaid* labour, the labour of birth and the labour of the trenches included, as a constituent of surplus value. In Marx's holistic perspective, the perspective of Capital Volume III, the factory unit of English political economy has already morphed into global and social production. The latter includes the metabolic order of war and enslavement amongst other plunders, realised as always in social or abstract time, the labour time repressively condensed and readied for consumption by capital.

For the economists, all that exists are the appearances of prices and quantities, but these do not exist on their own. They are the market-mediated expression of the social category, the state of becoming of value by the practice of the law of value. Social immiseration, the law of value at work, follows from the edicts of markets and contributes to markets. However, the concept of surplus value, a concept alien to old and modern economics, a concept that cannot be processed by formal tools, includes the disposable time of human beings *qua* the social time considered both necessary and, more determinedly, unnecessary for the optimal functioning of capital. It is this relationship of unnecessary labour, its excess labour time, to waste, which is a lacuna in political economy.

Advancements in productivity along with underutilization, 'profoundly affect the nature of productive activity itself, determining at the same time also the ratio with which a given society's total available time is going to be distributed between the activity required for its basic metabolic interchange with nature and all the other functions and activities in which the individuals of the society in question engage' (Mészáros 1995). Mészáros further follows up by saying that 'as a result of the absurd reversal of productive advancements in favour of quickly 'used-up' products and *destructively dissipated resources*, 'advanced capitalism' tends to impose on humanity a most perverse kind of 'from hand to mouth' existence. This perverse existence, under the reign of capital, degrades the energy of the system (entropy) or, equivalently, the potential value, the store of wealth in the stock of social labour time available to the social system. Every consumption process is also production. In my work, I have considered the destruction of resources, including the human resource, especially by means of imperialist war, as a form of production. The realisation of the war commodity, the dead and the waste, is the final realisation stage.

The stock of value *qua* wealth, the physical form of the social product derived from a history commanded by capital, is not only waste because of the observed pollution component, but it is *immanently* waste. Immanence here means that waste

has to happen, necessarily but not exclusively, because of logical and historical reasons inherent in the contradiction between social production and the private appropriation characterising capital. Real wealth, the incremental additions of added surplus value, is the pile of commodities. It is this real wealth that actualises as wasted nature and humans whose metabolism, the value wrought by their consumption, contributes to surplus value but whose costs are *unpaid*; why so?

A falling rate of utilisation follows a falling rate of profit or a crisis of overproduction. The expansion of exchange value, riveted by surplus value, is the only goal of capital, as opposed to use value being a social end in and of itself. For capital, the usefulness of the commodities it produces is rather means to an end. It produces in a way that expands value, a value whose substance is socially necessary labour time, subject to market exchange and private ends. However, because of the domination of exchange value over use value, value proper or the alienated but objectified labour time, the self-expanding category, grows by its waste form. The violent repulsion between use and exchange value grows by consuming cheapened humans and nature, and by lacing the commodity with the deleterious component that shrinks the lifecycle of labour and its share in necessary labour. Coincidentally and necessarily, the bomb is an example of a namely-waste commodity, which also mows lives as per its usual business—the dead are the products of its production cycle.

Conversely, the well-being of society emerges from the balance of the class struggle or the way it manages its surpluses, specifically, its disposable time, or the time that is above what is necessary for maintaining the capital-determined level of living standards. Capital, by reason of its internal contradiction, the contradiction of rising production relative to excess population ‘seeks to resolve itself through expansion of the outlying field of production, but the more productiveness develops, the more it finds itself at variance with the narrow basis on which the conditions of consumption rest (Marx 1894)’. Here emerges the constant crisis of overproduction and the necessity to manage the demographic side of the labour process with measures of depopulation. Marx is blunt about capital’s unconcern for human beings.

Hence the concern of the English economists over the decline of the rate of profit. The fact that the bare possibility of this happening should worry Ricardo, shows his profound understanding of the conditions of capitalist production. It is that which is held against him, it is his unconcern about ‘human beings,’ and his having an eye solely for the development of the productive forces, whatever the cost in human beings and capital-values—it is precisely that which is the important thing about him. Development of the productive forces of social labour is the historical task and justification of capital. This is just the way in which it unconsciously creates the material requirements of a higher mode of production. What worries Ricardo is the fact that the rate of profit, the stimulating principle of capitalist production, the fundamental premise and driving force of accumulation, should be endangered by the development of production itself (Marx 1894)

In parallel, severing what society needs from what society produces means that even the commodities that support life will be *persistently* laced with poison. I say, persistently to draw attention to the tendency for auto-destruction or the

phenomenon that capital *inherently* dictates that surplus value should assume the form of waste. What is namely being sold on the market are not the civilian-end use commodities or the wars to protect the American way of life, it is the sudden or premature deaths, which also encapsulate socially necessary time in the production of waste. The destruction of nature aims at the destruction of man and the remaking of his consent as power; that is de-subjectification or the premise upon which surplus value is made within the actualisation of the value relationship. As said, wasteful production re-actualises surplus value in profits and attenuates permanent crises. Waste is itself a commodity and, otherwise, internal to all the civilian-end use commodities. Waste foregrounds the reproduction of both labour and commodity production.

Since Ricardo, the contradiction between capital and population was ignored or assumed under an abstract law (the metaphysical abstract of forms). Capital creates the overpopulation and consumes it in the historical process governed by profit making for profit making. In the process of exchange, as society willingly buys the commodities or the wars, prices conceal value. Fetishism hides in exchange value the waste/death within the surplus value. Along with socialist ideological retreat, or as exchange value overly conceals surplus value, it also further dominates use value. The hegemony of exchange value in forms of consumerism heightens the tendency for waste and the dependence of monopoly/finance capital on the spread of waste. Militarism and wars, the pure forms of waste, domains of accumulation on their own, burgeon. The more the process of exchange obscures the reality of surplus value making, the more private its substance, the control of labour and its associated socially necessary labour time, also become. Unbridled capital, the capital that acts as the political expression of the social class, yet represents the vested interest of each individual capitalist, reduces the living wage, deepening its own crisis. The freer the rule of capital, the more irrational history becomes and the more it will approach its logical end. It oppresses labour and replaces living with dead labour, thereby limiting the scope for its own expansion. The ensuing surplus population, its death, immiseration, the destruction of nature or waste become concrete moments of the same category, the law of value and its surplus value. Marx does not need to be so specific about a relationship of capital with nature that mainly arises from land abuse in agriculture, otherwise he would be either logically deductive, meaning he constructs his whole logic from an observed fact in agriculture, or ludicrous, meaning, he provides boring details about agricultural abuse and projects these as characteristics of the capital relationship. Capital for Marx is one auto-destructive process. Conveyed adequately, surplus value is then the metabolic rate at which nature and people perish by the diktat of capital's social time or the time conjured by capital to expand exchange value and, correspondingly, value.

For mainstream economics, the concept of surplus value is non-existent. It simply cannot fit into their perfect models. Marx unmasked the reality by exposing the hidden surplus value, with 'the demolition of the theoretical chains which bind us to the monetary system, the concepts and social constructs which reflect the fictions of bourgeois society (Marx 1894).' He stressed that a real violent

contradiction exists between the realisation of surplus value and realisation of profit. As such, the harmonious identity arrived at by transcendence and auto-negation prevalent in Hegelian contradictions disappears. Marx's contradiction, the transformation of social reality to support human life, is destructive. As I further contend in this work, capital is a system of high entropy.

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Abstract

This work investigates the meaning of imperialism with reference to Syria. With so many international forces contesting Syria, and some prominent Western scholars equally ascribing imperialism to the US, Russia and China, defining who is imperialist may clear some of the fog in the war of positions - not Gramsci's war of position vying for control of civil society. A misdiagnosis can provide the imperialist with the intellectual fodder to prolong the war. In addressing the issue, I begin to situate the Syrian conflict in the regional historical continuum. I then posit that the modern imperialist war visited upon Syria is both a production domain intrinsic to capital and an application of the law of value assuming the form of destruction. The destruction of which I speak is a reinterpretation of the concept of waste as developed by the late philosopher István Mészáros. Lastly, I posit that imperialism is an intensification of reproduction by destruction. Such processes, particularly the measure of war as a subcomponent of accumulation by militarism and waste, are peculiar to US-led imperialism, which I argue is the sole imperialist power at play in Syria and elsewhere.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Imperialism in Reference to Syria



Abstract Syria and its geopolitical context, the Middle East, are the playground of intense global contradictions. It is there where global differences are exploding and where they might be resolved. The Middle East, with its entwined war and oil economies, is the mainstay of the US's global hegemony. The control of oil and war flows or intensities is of tremendous social and monetary value. To formulate a hypothesis about imperialism and permanent militarism without an emphasis on the shifting balance of global powers attendant upon the rise of China, the intervention of Russia in Syria and the suite of crumpling states across the Middle East, would be at best short-sighted. As the regional and global structural crises deepen, a tipping of the balance of forces in Syria and its surroundings against the dominion of the US and its allies may precipitate a shift in the global system.

In this work, I investigate the meaning of imperialism as a subcomponent of accumulation by waste, permanent militarism and the insight Syria imparts to such accounts. Harvey (2018 and in earlier works) has argued that the US is no longer 'the imperialist power' and that China and Russia are as hegemonic or imperialist as the US. I contend that such qualification is erroneous. It de-substantiates the concept of imperialism; it strips it of its ideological determinant and defines it either by its material constituents or metaphysical attributes. As such, it potentiates US-led imperialism and justifies further aggression against Syria and other nations of the developing world.

In probing this issue, I first begin to situate the Syrian conflict within the regional historical continuum. I then posit that the imperialist war visited upon Syria is both a production domain intrinsic to capital and an application of the law of value assuming the form of destruction. The destruction of which I speak is a reinterpretation of the concept of waste as developed by the late philosopher Mészáros (1995). Lastly, I posit that imperialism is an intensification of reproduction by destruction. Such a process, particularly the measure of war as a subcomponent of accumulation by militarism and waste, is peculiar to US-led imperialism, which I argue is the sole imperialist power at play in Syria and elsewhere. A discussion of the interconnected

questions of who the imperialists are, what necessitates wars of destruction in the current imperialist stage, and why is war innate to capital may clear some of the fog in the war of positions associated with Syria.

1.1 Why Should a Discussion of Imperialism Reference Developments in Syria?

Syria and its geopolitical context, the Middle East, are the playground of intense global contradictions. It is there where global differences are exploding and where they might be resolved. The Middle East, with its entwined war and oil economies, is the mainstay of the US's global hegemony. The control of oil and war flows or intensities is of tremendous social and moneyed value. To formulate a hypothesis about imperialism and permanent militarism without an emphasis on the shifting balance of global powers attendant upon the rise of China, the intervention of Russia in Syria and the suite of crumpling states across the Middle East, would be at best short-sighted. As the regional and global structural crises deepen, a tipping of the balance of forces in Syria and its surroundings against the dominion of the US and its allies may precipitate a shift in the global system. Just as the defeat of the Ottomans at sea in the sixteenth-century unleashed European savagery across the globe, today, we must consider the possibility of an end to the dominance of that civilisation from the very corner of the world that witnessed its beginning.¹ An end not only to the physical dominance of such civilisation but also to its amassed war-inducing cultural stock, its dominant ideas, operating by so many shades of social and cultural discrimination, which is the true poison asphyxiating life on the planet.

In the age of nuclear deterrent, imperialism stakes new territories either by economic incursions or military encroachment. In the case of economic incursions, the US's financial and economic hegemony is being compromised by China. China is the nemesis of US-led imperialism. China is converting dollar assets into real assets in an otherwise US-controlled or owned planet. In real terms, China controls much of the production of use value, the consumer goods satisfying the demands of the planet. It is only natural that it will also soon control the money flows and/or the means for exchange value.

As to how military encroachment operates in the days of nuclear threats, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US presidential national security adviser, best illustrates such cases. For instance, he has recently (2015) recommended that the US and its allies deploy troops to Baltic states to deter Russia from staging a possible invasion of those countries.² Once US troops are in, the Russians are further encircled upon. Not much could be done when the terror of nuclear war hangs in the balance. Anecdotally,

¹Throughout the text, I use the descriptors European, Western, Southern or Northern in the ideological sense, in contrast to the geographic one.

²Brzezinski: US Should Deploy Troops to Baltics, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2015/01/21/brzezinski-us-should-deploy-troops-to-baltics/>.

Brzezinski should have been known for staking territory first, or put your foot in the door first, under the nuclear umbrella, rather than financial and other forms of containment.

Propelled by auto-expanding finance in search of markets and real assets to underwrite the huge volumes of paper dollars, the US-led capitalist class engages in imperialist practice. Such practice involves the production of huge waste products, the wars, the pollution and devastation to man and the environment. To be sure, the waste, the militarism and the wars are themselves sub-articulated domains of accumulation, industries in their own right and means to prop up a profit-driven, but decaying, system.

However, in 2015, Russia entered Syria by invitation and had since tipped the balance of forces in favour of the Syrian government. Meanwhile, on the economic expansion side, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has gathered steam and infiltrated new corners of the globe. At the time of writing, one can safely say that the US empire is in retroversion. Account taken of the tightening NATO noose around Russia in Europe, its courageous move in Syria is not all out of desperation. Russia operates under Chinese clout.

Meanwhile, the US has shifted into protectionist mode and declared economic war on China. All else holding constant, China's rise is inexorable. Short of an unthinkable US first strike upon China or, less severely, a tightening of control over strategic resource areas, there is little the US can do to delay the speed at which it will be unseated. For now, the Litmus test of Empire appears to be the performance of the US in Syria, one such strategic resource area. To hedge the domino effect, the US empire must win there, or else it might come to an end there.

1.2 History and Syria

Mainstream accounts trivialise history. They personalise it as storytelling in chronological time. History, however, is the objective and impersonal force, the concomitant of social forces that command space and time. With regard to Syria, history was a crushing historical structure. Since its birth as a state, there were massive and disproportionate imperialist forces assaulting it. Apart from its significant losses of war and territory, its capital city, Damascus, has remained within reach of Israeli medium-range artillery since 1967. The imperialism that has engaged Syria has also restructured its class formation, and nearly obliterated it as a state. Not a single resource in post-independence Syria escaped the war effort. Schools, hospitals and industry have nearly all been lost in the whirlwind of the real and ideological war.

Even during the onslaught of fundamentalist mercenaries during the current war, Israel declared publicly what many in the Middle East have suspected has been the real policy of the US and its allies: 'to see a continuing conflict in which the two Syrian sides wear each other down as a better outcome than the decisive victory of

either (Cockburn 2013).³ Israel here was the mouthpiece of history personalising the interests of US-led imperialism. As a state, it is a *by-product of imperialism* constructed around an ultra-nationalist ethnic group armed with nuclear weapons. Lest one forgets, imperialism is the violent facet of capital, which accumulates by destruction and by relative and absolute depopulation. By depopulation, I do not mean that the sturdy current of global population growth is turning negative; not yet at least. What I simply mean is that in relation to what the population growth rate should have been, it is undercut by an imperialism, which banishes the social support mechanisms required for the reproduction of the population, the relative depopulation that reduces life expectancy, or it absolutely kills part of the population by means of war, the absolute depopulation. To the value system of the imperialist class, the progress of capitalism so far more than offsets the loss of peoples and nature.

Syria was a country organised around its national defence forces, and once these weakened, much of the country was lost. Also, as the living security of its people and productive capacity make the backbone of its national security, once these waned as a result of its adoption of neoliberalism between 2000 and 2011, its national security waned. For US-led imperialism, wrecking Syria, wrecking and not just containing it, provides that additional dose of power that strengthens its hegemony over the Middle East. Reflexively, the only rational policy for Syria is to combine development with popular resistance. However, its policy was not much its own. The disfiguration to its own national class structure, its externalisation, because of its successive defeats in wars and the downfall of the internationalist socialist movement, shifted more of its autonomy into the hands of imperialism. The country as a whole gravitated into the specialised industries of the region bolstering imperialist accumulation at the global level, the industries of war and oil.

The implicit but commonly held hypotheses are such that while the control of oil entails wars, whoever controls oil, especially in the Middle East, has the whole world on a very short leash. The twin of oil control is war making. In terms of output, the war's efficiency is the optimal rate of consumption of both living and dead labour per unit of additional value simultaneously realised and produced. Value as a philosophical category is aesthetically ugly and morally repulsive (Lukács 1952 [1980]). War's output is literally the waste that is produced and consumed. It is easy to imagine waste as output because humanity consumes much more waste, loss of humans and nature, than it does in what is commonly known as consumer goods or civilian-end use commodities. War consumes/realises military materiel, nature and people. It is itself waste and it is central to the broader category of accumulation by waste, which is the predominant activity of the age as exchange value trumps use value or disuse replaces use. Another way of seeing this is as follows. Because war is production by destruction, it follows that the more it destroys, the more it produces. Workers' lives are inputs into war as production and the war dead, the wasted lives and annihilated natural species, are the partial products of that industry.

³Cockburn P., Syria crisis: The teetering balance of power has whole region on edge. Israel's position is firmly based on its own self-interests <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/syria-crisis-the-teetering-balance-of-power-has-whole-region-on-edge-8802643.html>.

1.3 War and Historical Surplus Value

Just like other industries, war profits originate in the making of surplus value. They stem from the value of the many hours of labour condensed and consumed in a very short chronological time span. On the whole, they issue from the relative reduction of the population. Because war financing is state funded, the profits of war are also the profits of finance. Allegorically, such is a match made in hell. Imperialism mobilises the monopoly surpluses and induces more wars as a resolution to idle assets. It requires financing and its expansion of financial debts triggers the onset of unbridled fiat money growth and financialisation. In return, the hegemony arising upon imperialist wars underwrites the newly minted or electronically emitted money supply.

For the imperialist class, war is a win-win situation. It is itself a market and an industry, more appropriately, a furnace of production. In addition to the usual trappings of an industry, it has the additional quality of transmuting some of its concrete labour into abstract labour without recourse to the deliberation of the markets for exchange. Through the deaths attributed to war, it acutely compresses or shortens peoples' lives to meet the requisites of social time or the demands of the law of value for the type of socially *necessary* labour required for production as waste. It depopulates as an end to its own production process. War produces deaths, which is an immediate end to the transmutation of abstract into concrete labour, while at the same time it represents an effort to resolve overproduction by setting aside resources, including the human resource.

Overproduction need not be a global oversupply of commodities. Production is a social process that matures under the command of the reigning power or capital and within the confines of the receiving market, or the market to which the overproduced commodities are destined. Things are overproduced in relation to the class that cannot fully afford what is being produced. It is overproduction only to its respective market or enclave, which through the power of its sponsoring capital goes on to disengage the resources of other markets that could potentially threaten its expansion. Capital arrests the expansion of potentially competing capitals by the most egregious means. In doing so, it has to regiment and discipline the labour process, reduce the labour costs or necessary labour and indulge in measures that set the rate of labour's reproduction—the wage bill falls by reducing the average wage or the number of labourers, especially those living longer lives and receiving pensions, for instance.

War is an economic activity that falls under the larger rubric of accumulation by militarism. It engages in the making of surplus value. In the case of war, value is not just the thing being produced, the dead body or waste; it is a relation of subject to object; the things workers produce (objects) and the workers themselves organised in classes or strata (subjects). Just as all other commodities, the value of war products has substance or is a unity of the thing being produced with the forms of organisation and consciousness codetermining its production. This is a different substance from that of David Ricardo's labour value. His was only the *material*

substance, the objectified labour in the commodity, as distinct from the dialectical category of substance described above, which also includes a social subject.

In Marxian substance, workers reclaiming what they socially produced will depend on labour's solidarity and revolutionary consciousness, and of course all other vectors of the class struggle. Workers' struggles reflect the contradiction between use and exchange value within the value relationship—what is public against what is private. For workers to be successful in their struggles, they have to overcome their own capital-reared subjectivity, or the subject whose consciousness is the product of capitals' ideological rule. Capital produces the commodities and, through ideological means, the consciousness that furthers the expansion of commodity production. It collapses subject and object through various modes of reification. Wresting what is social or of use to society from being privately appropriated in money form requires a revolutionary mode of thought. Not only a change in the concepts with which workers perceive themselves and their material circumstances, but also how they tie these concepts together in ways that transcend the platitudes of the dominant ideology. Although the rate of surplus value wrought by the militaristic class may be doubly large because war's fervour often breaks and divides working people, what people struggle for in the anti-war movement is more reclamation of the pre-supposed value, the conditions for their very existence, inherent in human life and the nature that supports life.

Just as there is no metaphysical identity between quality and quantity, the dialectical categories, there is no identity between price and value. There is a concrete or dialectical identity in which categories pass into each other. Similarly, the rate of surplus value cannot be reconciled with the rate of profit. Value to price is a relationship of essence to appearance whose measure is the law of value, the practice by which the social conditions are repressively reconstituted to make the most profit for the least cost, or to pay labour wages at below subsistence. Knowing or deducing a specific price from value is impossible. Knowing the law of development by which value assumes the money form is possible. Knowability is different than knowing. Through imperialism, the further the price wrought by the direct producer in the global South sinks below value, the cheaper the Southern wages become. Hence, necessarily but not exclusively, the profit shares of the Northern ruling classes rise.

As to the role of the higher Northern-quality machines, which produce higher end commodities that fetch higher sums of money, these have to be thought of as components of historical surplus value. They are not the product of civilisational advance; they are rather the products of colonial butchery that has culled other subjects in the production process, the subjects of value relations, of the machine elsewhere around the globe. The development of the Northern machine has necessitated the de-development and the massacres of the South; unnecessary labor set aside by violence to ensure the efficacy of necessary labor. It has also contributed to the stock of cultural or racial superiority of which the delusion that the Northern proletariat owns the machines and are the sole creators of the higher rates of the relative surplus value. Lo and behold, the analytical breakdown of surplus value between its relative and absolute components, the indifferentiable historical content of the profit rate, lends itself to measurement by the very currency of the power with the highest wealth and profit

rates. Historically, the machines and their commodities are primarily determined by the prematurely extinguished lives of Southern subjects, the subjects composing the value relation, in the drudgery of work or wars.

A theory of value exposes the way society structures its reproduction. Mentally distinguishing the value category from the money form allows us to examine the conditions of each separately. Value formation is a global process. It begins and ends in human reproduction under capitalism. It is the labour of birth or the labour of the trenches as well as the factory work. Although the prices or the money sums will be much lesser in the South, value equally appertains to the rights of the most under-changed working classes on the planet as well as the Northern industrial working classes. The subject in value, the power the labourer exercises in the process of de-alienation, cannot be measured; or, if measured, it contains a bias. In value, all the working class is alike or different not by the quantity it produces but by how strongly it opposes capital and its imperialism. It is such power, which influences the price system, and determines the differentials of the global social wage as well as the share of the social wage. Such theory of value, the decisive moment in the totality that is a subject–object value relation, is the basis of an ideology that is both scientific and *just*—not as in absolute justice, but the *just* in the just wars of the class struggle or the struggle against US-led imperialism. The emancipatory subject here is an internationalist solidarity, which struggles for the repossession of the social product of humanity and, in doing so, it recovers the planet from certain doom.

1.4 Background

For Syria, the prospects are gloomy. That a reactionary force composed or backed by the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia, could attack Syria, a secular state with a modicum of sovereignty, yet with popular opposition to the war remaining at best lukewarm, is a matter of some concern. That the democratically elected imperialists might have taken the planet to the brink of nuclear war on 14 April 2018, the day of the last US-led attack on Syria, yet only few panicked, also raises concerns. Imperialism has already taken us to the brink and it might even take us further, if not by nuclear winter, then by eroding the planet itself. **Recycling and sorting trash to avoid natural calamity under the rule of capital is a ludicrous joke masquerading as science.**

There is no escaping social planning. ‘We must organise man and nature’ (Davis 1991). Yet not a single day goes by in which the mainstream intelligentsia does not deprecate communism—heretofore the ultimate form of planning. Across Europe and in the US, the Western masses are so ‘comfortably numb’ such that they vote in droves for governments practicing imperialist war abroad, fascism or variants thereof. Apart from the fact that there are thousands of Marxist professors, yet communist

parties exhibit membership counts in the hundreds, the unprecedented silence and impotence of the peace movement as the US, Britain and France bomb or intoxicate the planet is testimony to capital's ideological victory.

As to the imperialist war on Syria, it resembles those visited upon Iraq, Libya and Yemen. By the alibi of the 'evil' leader, US-led imperialism promotes and funds reactionary jihadists, empowers sectarianism, incapacitates the state and lays the groundwork for endless war. However, historical agency is neither that of an evil leader nor of the transhistorical psychological traits and inclinations of a clump of individuals. The abstract (metaphysical abstract) or isolated subject does not exist. The individual is a social relationship reflecting the many social relationships of the social order, of which only the relationships organised to produce a political impact by means of organised political action count as agency. That is why President Bashar al-Assad, the person, should not be an excuse to trample upon the collective rights of the Syrian people.

Syria defied predictions. The army did not fragment along tribal or sectarian lines. The steadfastness of Syria discredited the mainstream's nonsense that it is some primeval formation governed by sectarian hatred. The recent victories of the Syrian Arab Army against US-led imperialism and its mercenaries are significant because they have checked obscurantism, its Euro-American sponsors, and its social agenda. The anti-imperialist strands within the Syrian leadership must be lauded for doing something *right*. However, it is not that *right* still. Syria's ruling class composition comprises former comprador elements for whom reconciliation with imperialism remains a possibility. The owners of holding companies eying the expropriation of public wealth are again promising to be loyal guards of the Israeli Northern armistice line. Such comprador elements have in the past weakened the living security of the working class and, in turn, compromised Syria's national security. Their reconciliatory stance, the free market logic, blurs the vision of leadership regarding the radical, or rather existential, nature of the struggle against imperialism.⁴

1.5 What Is at Stake?

Speaking to the Syrian corps diplomatique on 20 August 2017, Syria's president, Bashar Al-Assad, remarked that imperialism had no interest in destroying Syria, it merely wanted it subdued and intact (Al-Ibrahim 2017).⁵ That is not what happened. Syria is in a state of ruin. The Syrian president spoke of a counterfactual history. One cannot entertain counterfactual history as a process that has no predetermined outcomes because the likelihood of the other outcomes is not known, especially after the fact (Hobsbawm 1997). Moreover, it is redundant to speak of what would have

⁴A good chunk of what exists in Syria, its capital stock and people are no longer around. The losses are significant de-existentialisation. However, the existentialist threat also reaches the president himself. See Durden (2017), Israel Threatens To Bomb Assad's Presidential Palace. <https://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-08-29/israel-threatens-bomb-assads-presidential-palace>.

⁵Abdo Al-Ibrahim (2017).

happened when we know what has already happened. After several years of war in Syria, the disaster and all its outcomes are there to be known. **They are *ex-post facto* proof that US-led imperialism in the Arab region pursues a clear policy of state decapitation and depopulation** (Kadri 2017b).

In politics, agents are exposed to two sorts of messages. The first is the *doublespeak* of International Relations, ‘the negotiations’, ‘the threats’ or the drivel that ‘the EU cannot absorb more refugees’, etc. This last point is particularly laughable. It is as if there ever was a time in capitalist history in which there were no wars and refugee flows reworking the grounds for the reproduction of capital. As for the second message, it is history that shouts it. History is not the person of an abstract president commenting on this or that incident and tossing events one way or another. History is the totality of social relations of production, capital, given by history itself; it is the alien and immaterial force that runs our lives—*historia est deus*.

To paraphrase Mészáros (1995), capital, the dominant relation of history, is not a material entity, let alone a rationally controllable mechanism, but an ultimately uncontrollable mode of social metabolic control. It escapes any meaningful degree of human control precisely because it has itself emerged in the course of history as a most powerful totalizing framework of control into which everything else, including human beings, must be fitted, and prove thereby their ‘productive viability’, or perish if they fail to do so. One cannot think of a more inexorably all-engulfing totalitarian system of control than the globally dominant capital system (Mészáros 1995). We were all born into a world whose pre-existing ideology, forms of social organisation and institutions shape and reshape our living conditions. These institutions and ideologies are the concomitant of past class powers that had organised them to promote their corresponding interests.

For instance, during the 2016 US electoral campaign, the phrase ‘Trump is anti-establishment’ became the refrain of the mainstream media. However, such a buzzword was not to last. Had the working class apprehended the deeper meaning of the concept of establishment, that is, the social and institutional apparatuses of class rule, the tremors of such an understanding and their aftershocks upon popular consent and the reigning forms of consciousness could have been daunting. To best illustrate objective and impersonal history, this notion of ‘establishment’ is helpful because it snaps a still picture of capital’s forms of social organisation and its ideological framework—the instruments of capital. Figuratively, the populace can vote Trump or the much more morally astute character of Bozo the clown, yet history’s manifestation in the empire’s organisational structure of power, its establishment, so to speak, would still run things at the behest of the leading world financial class—the instigator of the capital relationship.

As profit-making under conditions of overproduction requires the cheapening of inputs and the setting aside or destruction of humans and nature—underutilisation or disengagement of resources, the particular history of which I speak is the history manifest in waste, wars and measures of depopulation. This history is a surrogate of the vicious facets of capital, and its deliberate aim is to reduce by violent means the value of natural and human inputs, both social nature. Although it bears resemblance to Hegel’s *Weltgeist*, that immutable and cosmic, impersonal and purely creative

force with an evolving design, it definitely is not the same (Hegel [1831] 1956). It is more attuned to Marx's history, the materially founded social relations, the actuality recomposed in thought dialectically as a concrete totality. In formulating the relationships pertaining to the totality, Marx takes into consideration nature, organic bodies and objective-social ideas. Hegel, on the other hand, and fittingly so, considers an abstract totality located in the heavens, or a totality of forms of thought unrelated to their correspondingly changing substance in the real world. Idealism is not too different from monophysitism in the sense that reality conforms to divine ideas. The chasm is very deep. For Hegel forms are reasons for themselves. So pure being for Hegel makes the beginning as pure thought and immediacy itself, simple and indeterminate; and the *first beginning cannot be mediated by anything* or be further determined (Hegel 1830). Meanwhile, for Marx, no form, category or abstract idea can be reason for itself (materialism). All that exists in thought and in the material world is interconnected and changing. Marxian categories are historically specific categories drawn from a period in which a particular social phenomenon prevails, such as commodification under the historical stage of capitalism.

However, both philosophies posit an uncertainty to history, a forked path of development and reverse development. Uncertainty in idealist history arises from uneventful periods dulling spiritual development, which meanders back and forth by disruptions to the self-realisation of species being, and culminates in the transcendence of man into the absolute idea. In typical idealist manner, this is a process of humanity working itself up to a non-existent ideal or the absolute, which is *causa sui*. Materialist history relates to changes in consciousness determined by changes in the material circumstances of life; its ideal is the mediation of theory into practice, otherwise, praxis evidenced in revolutionary struggle. The current 'ideal' is underlaid by the real state of socialist defeatism whose counter-development shifts the ideal from a state of egalitarianism into a state of barbarism. Subject to the prevailing hegemony of capital countered by negligible anti-systemic organisation, humanity seems lightyears away from bearing the Marxian utopia. To reword Marx (1852), most of us may continue to be irrelevant historical agents or to make history as we do not desire, under imperialistically imposed and lopsided power structures, given and transmitted from the past, until *necessity* deems otherwise.

One such undesired historical event, the Syrian war, persists as I write in late-2018. For Syria, history, the overdetermining structure transmitted from the past, the resultant vector of colonialism and imperialist class power that chart its *state of becoming*, is its own to the degree it successfully engages in anti-imperialist struggle. By such definition, an anti-imperialist Syria is not a failed state, no matter the physical ruin. The state as the institution that mediates the disparate interests of the proletarian class and global capital, as per Meszaros (2017), stands or fails not by the loss of territory in anti-imperialist wars, but by its servility to imperialism (Kadri 2015). Just as there was a struggle for Syria, the heroic struggle of the Syrian people and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) has to date largely stifled imperialist ambitions.

Six years after the start of the war in 2011, the SAA had regained significant territory. Still, there are in late-2018 three significant areas outside government control:

the Turkish Northwest, the American/Israeli North and South. True, the balance of forces has tilted in favour of Syria, but the conflict persists, pregnant with the potential to ramify and intensify.

The advance of the SAA under the Russian aerial shield humiliates the US. At this point in time, American put-down is not something to be taken lightly. With the rise of China, push has come to shove on the stage of global power balances, and no face-saving measure will redeem the American empire. This begs the question: what more ominous messages does history adumbrate for Syria?

Forecasting events by the bitter harvest of Arab history can only portend more disaster. Since the ethnic cleansing and occupation of Palestine in 1948, there have been significant Arab defeats and loss of territory to Israel, a long Lebanese war punctuated by smaller ones, and many Iraqi wars. And although Egypt has had its last war in 1973, it nevertheless was devastated by the neoliberal policies instituted after the Camp David Peace Accords. Egypt's case is a pointed reminder of Lin's (1965) remark that 'war brings destruction, sacrifice, but the destruction, sacrifice and suffering is much greater if no resistance is offered to imperialism as the people become willing slaves'. Egypt's current rate of abjection and the malnutrition of its children could only bespeak of tragedy incurred in wartime-like conditions.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the number of war and war-related deaths in the Arab Mashreq is in the millions. The number of refugees is even greater. Together, deaths related to war, expulsion from the land, and premature austerity-related-mortality, or deaths occurring long before the historically determined life expectancy, are tantamount to depopulation. Note that this is not different from a whole history of systemic depopulation under capitalism, but the rising number of casualties and refugees in Syria connote a country experiencing extermination by attrition. Such is the region's unwavering historical trend.

Unlike the hypothetical history posited by the Syrian president, what real history wanted, real history got. The president and everyone else are soberly reminded that the course of events in this region cannot escape the grip of imperialism and accumulation by militarism [militarism as per Lenin (1916) and Luxemburg (1913)]. Militarism and its subcategory of war are both subcategories of the larger category of accumulation by waste. Militarism appears as waste in Marx's Economic Manuscripts. He refers to war 'as the direct equivalent of a nation throwing a part of its capital into the water (Marx 1863)'. As a concept, it comes out clearly with Engels in Anti-Duhring (1877): 'Militarism dominates and is swallowing Europe. But this militarism also bears within itself the seed of its own destruction'. It begins to appear as a pre-eminent means for the realisation of the surplus in Lenin's early works.

Waste arises first in production. The concept of waste as treated by Bauman (2003) rightly addresses and criticises the consumerism of the modern world⁶. However, it

⁶Rarely cited for his contribution, Thorsten Veblen was a pioneer in the study of the sociology of waste in the sphere of consumption. The late Arthur K. Davis considered that wasteful consumption was just as central to Veblen's work as emulation, leisure, recognition and conspicuous consumption. Factually, these concepts are interrelated because to conspicuously consume in order to be recognised or gain status implies more wasteful consumption. For Veblen 'capitalism frustrates science and workmanship, and incites to waste, fraud, and artificial scarcity is the upshot of

does not cover a process of production growing by its waste side and controlled by monopoly capital. Its selection of consumption as a behavioural pattern removed from a primacy of production overlooks the laws of capitalist development, especially its law of value. In a planet controlled by abstract as opposed to concrete time, everything and everyone is waste to some degree. There are different levels of waste, and some are wasted more than others by their class positions. In such class rifts co-aligned with misery, the culprit is not an 'abstract' capital. It is the real structural divide between imperialists and the conquered masses, especially those of the developing world. It is not the idea of capital in the last instance that oppresses the slave, it is the slave owner.

A similar case can be made in regard to Anselm Jappe's work, the *Autophagic Society* (2017). Jappe's concern is to combat the automatic subject of capital which inhabits everyone as the subjectivity of capital. However, the real development of this structured whole arises by the law of value, a production side concern, which he fails to address. When he addresses the production side, he does so as an abstract whole composed of productive and unproductive labour. This dichotomy is central to Eurocentric thought and it will be thoroughly critiqued later in the text. That some are productive while others are not counters the thesis of the social wages or the fact that it takes a whole society together in a state of flux to produce and earn a wage share of total income. His separation of concrete categories such as productive and unproductive labour is formal. As such a concrete law of value that embodies all human beings as productive beings cannot be found, and so what is found is the divisible economic state of the world and not its indivisible social side. The law of value does not equally brainwash everyone. It is imperialism, the most severe practice of the law of value with its mode of commercial exploitation, which founds the culturally engrained supremacy of western civilisation. Capital as a historical process is its imperialism.

Imperialism as defined by Lenin and Luxemburg with its many forms since the early twentieth century could effortlessly allow it to double for capitalism proper (a take on Goldman [1976]). Militarism and its subcategory war are both means and ends. Capital accumulates by means of war and war is itself a sphere of production, not only in the making of the weapons but also in the financial spin-offs, the tech-development, the very act of mowing down lives to stubble as an intermediate and final department of production, and other moments of cultural reproduction. Militarism as a domain of accumulation is not the same as military Keynesianism. The latter is the chimerical version of military spending denoted in price-accounting, the supply and demand for militaristic materiel and corresponding state spending. The former accounts for the impact of war on value outlays denoted by the consumption of

Veblen's analysis of the existing order (Davis 1957). In another more remarkable passage, Davis explains how for Veblen 'the technological apparatus, by virtue of the obsolete and hence arbitrary institution of private property, is privately owned. And the owning business interests consistently restrict output to increase their profits. They can readily do so, whether the modern machine process, pictured by Veblen as an endless chain of specialized dove-tailing links, is artificially broken up into wastefully competitive sections, or whether it is unified under monopolistic trusts. Hence arises Veblen's definition of ownership as "the legal right of sabotage."'

lives, the many hours of labour or the social cost of labour's reproduction and its total impact in money form in relation to how it regulates the rate of surplus value creation.

Militarism is an object of capital, while 'capital itself ultimately controls this automatic and rhythmic movement of militarist production through the legislature and a press whose function is to mould so-called public opinion' (Luxemburg 1913). It is sort of like the factory, in its social organisational structure, its industrial culture, the class system that reproduces it, the salaries of the professors who promote it, all lumped together. As an investment area, militarism unlike other investment areas that dip as time goes on, always has the potential for growth. It is a peculiar province of capitalist accumulation capable of infinite expansion (Luxemburg 1913). It is the social, cultural and financial spheres altogether, which balance the reproduction of the capitalist order through metabolising high rates of human and natural inputs. Remember, too, that the imperialist state—unlike dependent states or a single individual—creates credit as it borrows. The financial obligations it emits also oblige it to further expand by imperialist aggression to underwrite the fictitious (excessive) part of its debts. Imperialist state debt is both the financial instrument afforded to its own financial class at low cost due to global seigniorage and the harbinger of future imperialist wars. Only harbinger, the *casus belli* is the balance of the class struggle that enacts the condition for social reproduction as war.

Under crises of overproduction, the metabolic rate of value *destruction* and *creation*, production proper, organically entwines the war with the civilian economies. Once capital severs the correspondence between use and exchange value, or what society produces and what it needs, the waste economy dominates. It sits tightly at the heart of capital.

In radically disengaging itself from the structural constraints of use-value as tied to human need and real consumption. Once this is accomplished, and thereby the humanly meaningful measure of legitimate aims and objectives is repudiated as an intolerable fetter to 'development', the road is wide open to displace many of capital's inner contradictions. And this can go on for as long a historical period as the new outlets and modalities of realisation remain free from the pressures of saturation on the one hand, and from serious difficulties in securing the necessary resources *for the cancerously growing and ever-more -wasteful pattern of production* on the other. This type of, by Marx unexpected, structural change in the capitalistic cycle of reproduction is accomplished through a radical shift from genuinely consumption-orientated production to *destruction* (italics are my emphases). (Mészáros 1995)

However, the destruction of which Meszaros spoke only glosses over the destruction of human lives. The reason is not because it is too horrid a subject to explore. It is rather his mentioning of capital's civilising mission that makes it cumbersome to reemphasise depopulation as part of *destruction* into his argument. The commodification *qua* objectification of labour under capital's ideological hegemony re-establishes the morality with which capital dispenses of human resources. Formulaically, the rate of depopulation is positively related to capital's ideological hold, and inversely related to the rate of human resource utilisation.

Unlike pre-capitalist days past when empires amassed tribute from expanding the population and investing in new irrigation techniques and infrastructure, the modern

capitalist system devours labourers' lives whole as commodities. Prior to the current capitalist mode of production, the one in which our lives came to depend on the market—that is before people started to sell their labour for a wage in mechanised factories that produce in excess of market absorption capacity—empires rarely smashed the peasants and their low-tech tools. They needed them for tribute. Long periods of stagnation and stability took root, *longue durée* as they have come to be known, because although political regimes may change, the economic base of society experienced few upheavals. The ancient conquering empire would soon repair the irrigation canals and restore stability. Pre-capitalist crises were crises of underproduction and underconsumption, primarily caused by nature. Ours are crises of overproduction and socially engineered underconsumption. Such overproduction may occur in a narrow market relative to an impoverished whole and it may be the general case. Cereal overproduction is immense, but hunger is nurtured by capital, which through its imperialism extends everywhere to regulate the labour process and, primarily, so that no other power threatens its own progress.

War is an event in which the same labour input contributes both as living and dead labour. War regulates the reproduction of labour and its stock of labour power just as capital does for any other commodity in surplus. It scraps some commodities and it scraps human lives. War also eases the expropriation of resources and cheapens labour. War is both killing as an end in itself and killing as end to strengthen the warring party's position. There is always the issue of competition with other capitals, which disciplines the avarice of empire for blood, but the regulation of the size of the reserve army of labour is a matter which coheres with the rationale of history.

A corollary necessarily follows. As capital through war and extreme oppression reduces humans to objects, that is, to their labour power, it also undercuts the subject in the value relationship. In so doing, it de-subjectifies labour, or renders human beings object-like or into a slave-like condition.

In the organic relationship of living to dead labour, the accounts may be simple. The more labour transmutes into constant capital or dead labour, the less variable capital or living labour, capital would require—technology displaces labour. However, a human being is producer–consumer. She serves as an input with her labour while she produces commodities, as well as the subject who participates in or commands the various stages of the realisation of that commodity, its consumption. She makes a commodity and may consume other commodities. War with its several social time-defined stages of realisation is a slightly more complex production–consumption process. In one blatant aspect of this process, a labourer makes the bomb, but the bomb consumes a labourer. Although consumption as a whole is entropic, the higher degree of auto-degeneration in war requires further explanation.

Commodities exchanging on a market permanently plagued with a crisis of overproduction determine the measures for the allocation of resources. They shape the law of value. These commodities tell us what to do and assume a god-like or fetish status. In the commodity as it exists objectively, outside of us, the private, or exchange value, is set against the social, or use value, and these opposites repulse each other. We are in a world where the commodity we created is a demi-god (a fetish) at war with itself to expand in money form, or as it sells on the market. All the commodities

we create roughly constitute our wealth. The owners of commodities create the conditions and the credit for the expansion of the market for commodities, and mostly do so by means of violence. They outline the conditions and the credit for production on the cheap and sale more dearly. The source of profit is not to be found in the lower prices of inputs, or the reduced costs of capital and labour relative to revenues. Such is an accounting equation. Production is a social dynamic and profits arise via the social or political measures taken to reduce the price of a single input, the labour input.

Put differently, through commodity fetishism, or as commodities double for people when they exchange for each other, they signal the conditions to be *necessarily* established for their own expansion. They do so to the degree they are both objective, falling outside of social control, and driven by their own internal contradiction. The less the leverage of labour in politics, the more the order created by commodity society commands people to live by its rules. History, through its forms of organisation and reigning ideas, must meet the demands of commodity fetishism, or to be sure, reflect the violence attendant upon the repulsion between use and exchange value. In one such permanent feature of the system, its expansion by violence or war corresponds to the demands of expanding capital in its various stages of development. Under monopoly-finance capital, there is reason to believe that a different class context for war making than any other time prior to capitalism has appeared, and it requires more of the violence for its own reproduction. So much so in fact that Lenin subtitled his essay on imperialism with the caption, ‘the highest stage of capitalism’.

In terms of militarism and its wars under the monopoly-finance historical stage, there are two principal motives to consider. First, militarism absorbs and redeploys money surpluses—originating in Lenin’s thesis in his work on imperialism (Kalecki 1943). This is a point upheld by many others since the early twentieth century. Second, militarism and its wars regulate the reproduction of labour, via immediate or protracted depopulation. The rate of population growth under capitalism is lower than what the historically determined level would be for social reasons. The mainstream regards the premature deaths of the many in faraway places, areas inhabited by ‘cheap’ labour as a mere humanitarian nuisance, as opposed to being the pivot of the social dynamic. Eurocentrism invariably falls back onto an identity of price with value. Cheap things or people are of cheap value and therefore unimportant to the restructuring of the social system. Although the impact of violent depopulation or severe austerity measures reducing life expectancies upon revolutionary consciousness is impalpable, in pure physical terms, depopulation influences the rate at which the stock of labour power or the potential of the unused value available to society fluctuates.

Kalecki (1943) posited that governments prefer to invest in the military because social spending crowds out the private sector. Since the time Kalecki wrote, the interest-bearing capital, including its fictitious component, the financial assets to which there is no corresponding real value, money supply and debts have risen faster than any previous time and well-beyond the demands of the real economy for moneyed assets (for a definition of fictitious capital Fine [2013]). From where Kalecki stood, he could not have envisaged the skyrocketing dollar debt of US empire

to which much of the present and the future stock of humanity's labour should be held as collateral. The de facto ownership of conquered or collapsing states by US-led imperialism, the control of strategic resource flows, the regulation of the stock of labour available for production and or the pillage/commodification of what remains of nature are altogether the US debt's, *qua* dollar issuance guarantees, or collateral.

Since Kalecki also, the real-wealth surplus grew. In consequence of higher profit rates and rising dollar supplies, wrought through financialisation, the money signification of the surplus also grew. The price-associated signals for future wars are ticking away at a much higher frequency, albeit, tempered by the nuclear deterrent. However, the real source of profits remains surplus value, the consumption of physical and intellectual labour in the shortest time span possible—as still unmediated by exchange, and neither finance nor exchange. War intensely consumes labour as material substance by consuming the labourer. It literally sucks the life out of labour. It may also through the war-enhanced power position of imperialism bolster the leading ideology, the dominant ideas that instil defeatism or de-subjectify the vanquished masses. Ideological power is a vortex falsifying all that is real, including the structure organising knowledge. It continuously rewrites history in ways that beautify the existing order; 'it profanes all that is sacred'. Even all the revolutionaries and peoples massacred by empire become through logical positivism or variants thereof a constituent part of the grandness of the existing order. Figuratively, Geronimo and many of his people died, but that too was necessary for all that is good now.

However, in terms of the concrete condition of reproducing labour to be realised-consumed as living labour, as the conscripted soldier or his victim, militarism as a domain of accumulation remains the hottest spot to produce surplus value. It produces dead with living people using advanced machinery. Imperialist war also expands the commodity and the monetary base/space upon which value as a social relationship thrives. Put tersely, war is itself production, and the mediation/resolution of production crises.

1.6 A Didactic on Capital with Reference to Syria

In a world of underutilised capacity and resources, the class at the helm of imperialism does not gain much from a subdued and intact Syria. In terms of prices, the wars may cost trillions, which in turn become the credit of the financial sector, while trade with Syria is scarcely in the billions. **In more foundational terms—that is, in value terms—the wars create surplus value and recreate the conditions for the future expansion of surplus value.** The latter is an instantiation *qua* manifestation of the law of value. The Syrian president, more appropriately the Syrian ruling class, failed to understand the *essence* of imperialism as war. Imperialist wars are the principal function of the law of value by which the value relation inherent in the commodity expands. Essence here is not the ludicrous notion of essentialism prevalent in the study of mainstream identity politics; the sort of impressionistic approach to history in which 'primordial' identities such as the imaginary constructs of Sunni-Shia or the Serb-Croat are locked in a hate-war relationship transmitted from the distant past.

Essence is the dialectical category referring to the various relationships constituting the value relationship as totality; value exists in and through the value relationships predominant under capitalism. The capital relationship corresponds to the value relationship as appearance, or as a magnified reflection. Essence here is the various moments of value, abstract, use, exchange value and the moneyed mediation in modern finance realised in the contradictions at the heart of the commodity itself.

The essence of value is what distinguishes capital's social product from previous forms of social products. That the value objectified in the commodity and its use value repulse each other is a partial or abstract view of essence. Similarly, exchange value functionally resolves the ontological contradiction between value and use value, which is a concrete development of the concept of essence. Analogously, militarism intensifies the contradiction between the labour of society and the social ends that commodities serve, and through increased militarisation and wars, it realises all such commodities including part of the excess labour power: it destroys the labourer. Militarism and its commodities are anathema to what is useful to society.

Analytically, capital first has to (the intrinsic relationship) and then it needs to (the functional protrusion) conduct wars. These are codetermined and/overdetermined, but not sequential/teleological processes. Holistically, there is neither first nor second. There are also no monism or dualism of opposites, as 'one-sided truths, fragments which await their integration in a third' (Croce 1915). Let us just say that there is the totality in a state of flux or contradiction based self-differentiation.

For instance, the making of a commodity often involves no sequential order insofar as the events that occurred during its production. Even its consummation in consumption may not be its final stage of realisation, simply because the energy it delivers leads to some unpredictable outcome for it could be poisoning nature. Conceptually, various stages of social production can be compounded into a single process and are said to be codetermined and/or overdetermined. Unlike the stagism of analytical time, or the fairy tale story of the factory owner who arranges everything, from A to Z, to produce commodities, reality is circularly causal (overdetermined). Production, whether it involves civilian or military cycles, is a co-temporal predicate of its own components. It occurs in real time (social or abstract time), or the time at the command of capital or history under the command of capital.

So far, the production and exchange of commodities, their intensities, are signalled by a profit cycle. These are concurrently the projection of the violent contradiction within a commodity, the contradiction between use and exchange value, or between the social and private aspects of the production process. The eloquence of the Marxian system of thought, its logical consistency as it historically mediates the part into the whole, is such that it begins with the commodity as an objective thing, which is replete with violence and which as it expands it imparts the violence to everything around it. The subjugation of use to exchange value becomes the retreat in civilian-end use commodity sales and or a realisation crisis—a classic crisis of underconsumption, which is then propped by rising militarism, the economy of pure waste (Lenin 1916). Such a system is an auto-reinforcing process of production, which grows by means of violence.

That imperialist war serves as mobiliser of surpluses and means to control sources of raw material is central to debates on militarism. Militarism is the determining moment in the whole of the production process. It is the sturdiest of the social relations/domains of accumulation supporting capital. Ultra-chauvinistic formations such as those of Gulf Islamists or Zionism's possibly rank high in the imperialist order because of their militaristic character. Imperialism to militarism is its constituent class and its mode of operation. In the domain of accumulation known as militarism, the empire's war class acts as imperialist. However, war as production or war as the practice of the law of value evades debate. The war's shade of the law of value reallocates resources to expand value. Its more violent implementation applies to peripheral labour processes necessarily subjected to different/higher degrees of depopulation.

Often the second contradiction of capitalism, competition between capitals, occupies central stage because of the information it imparts to the Fox news-like pundits of capital. However, the source of profit is in the primary or first contradiction, in labour vs. capital and/or the primary dynamic of the value relationship. Because the value contradiction cannot expand to produce surplus value without socialising the private continuously, without the side of exchange value tearing apart the social or use value side of the commodity through violence, inter-competing capital cannot expand without violence. To produce surplus value, the various capitals compete to control production at its source. Hence, the first and second contradictions of capital are interrelated.

Imperialism in the literature of radical national liberation movements, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, is also said to be *capital's violent facet*, its state of becoming by means of violence. **As capital in its imperialist stage intensifies the production of waste, its assault of the environment and man, Arab or any other developing peoples' anti-imperialist struggles cease to be primarily territorial wars, or wars for the liberation of territory such as Palestine; they become wars for the liberation of man before territory. Freeing national territory is instrumental only insofar as it repels imperialism.** The national liberation struggle becomes a last-ditch fight to defend the very physical and spiritual existence of Arabs and other developing nations people (Habash 1971)—here the reinvention of past biblical myth to justify Zionist national rights only contributes to the extermination industry of the present; Marx could equally have said exterminate, exterminate that is Moses and the prophets.

Imperialism's law of value imposes resource underutilisation by premature resource extermination. It either takes away labour's platforms or social forms rearing/incubating labour and its political expression, like states or unions, or it casts away a stock of labour power and/or labourers. Unlike previous modes of production, socially exercised depopulation is systemic to capitalism. It articulates the foreground, the demographic growth condition, for commodity production and for commodity as self-expanding value. For intrinsic reasons **Capital cannot improve wellbeing because the regulation of the vast supplies of the reserve army of labour is a domain of accumulation itself.** The rates of relative depopulation or at times

extirpation vary contingently upon the strength of imperialism as it comes up against national liberation movements.

The products of war are in part the wasted lives as commodities. Humanity's alienation from such commodities is doubly problematic. It is extreme estrangement from the human-self. The product alienated from the labourer is her own being or life. Moreover, as we take our orders to produce more of the war commodity from such commodity exchange, the war and its products become yet more alienated from potential social control. The market, the practice of imperialist violence falling outside of social control, mediates the allocation of war resources by the racist strands of ideology it sows. A vivid example of such war market success is the Apartheid that flourishes with any form of settler colonialism. A political corollary of imperialism practiced as racism, for instance, Zionism as per UN General Assembly Resolution 3379, connotes that for the vanquished people to negotiate their fate with empire without significant retaliatory power, hastens their own pace of auto-eradication. *Pax Americana*, if at all it fleetingly emerges during the Arab region's currents of violence, it silently disembowels societies without the sound of gunshots. Whether by *Pax Americana* or *Bellum Americanum*, the crushing of the potential for life in these developing societies remains a historical necessity. Egypt is a case in point. Automatically, the self-defence of Arab working classes requires the conscription of most resources in anti-imperialist struggle, especially the human resource.

Unlike the much talked about environmental catastrophe, *constant* war, the war led by imperialism and diffused from the contradiction at the heart of commodities, is muted by the dominant class in command. Indeed, the phantasms, the resurrection of wars of ancient culture and races, are much talked about. However, these do not exist. Constant war is a domain of accumulation upon which the whole system ascends. To most strata of the Western classes, protecting the environment is a wholesome affair, whereas the massacres abroad by imperialism or the grind of severe austerity; these are either trivial or unrelated to capital accumulation. Capital is fathomed as mostly nourishing, whereas in reality its metabolic rate of reproduction consumes environment and man *together*. The false dichotomy man/nature holds for class reasons.

Although the accumulation of wealth by colonial wars and wars of encroachment was decisive to the initial rise of capitalism, later to its resilience, the deaths of an estimated 900 million people in colonial and imperialist wars since 1500 are foolishly attributed to a cross between manifest destiny and unintended consequences (estimates roughly based on Jaffe [1981]). **That capital consumes man and nature means that both inputs are objects of the same law of value. We cannot arrest the consumption of one, without arresting the other's for the obvious reason that, for an end to capital's reproduction to come about, the law of value must be halted altogether.**

The environment cannot be saved by Western environmentalists or an intelligentsia, which posits that imperialist wars abroad are unrelated to their struggles, or that the rise of the South will precipitate Western collapse. Such ideas are based on the myth of apocalyptic economism; the liberation of the dominated South would broaden the scope and character of the class struggles inside the dominant countries

and create increasingly favourable conditions for the proletarian struggle in all countries (Lauesen 2018). At any rate, that wars strengthen capital's real and ideological hold, its rally around the flag spinoff, or that they catharise the state as the instrument of capital, will in a roundabout way as they also cheapen the inputs derived from nature/man, expedite the rate of humanity's auto-consumption over and above the replenishment rate. As posited in the preface, for much of received theory, the imperialist war, if it exists at all, is just a transhistorical predisposition of empires associated with some fallibility of man.

Rehypothesising: because the Third World has been cheapened in money terms, it either does not enter or does not count for much in the dollar-denominated economic circuit. The often-aided news item that most of humanity accounts for an insignificant share of world income, and most are plagued with cultural or territorial conflicts, reconfirms by the demonstration effect the image of developing-world insignificance. However, such chasm also reconfirms the international class divide, not only that between capital and international labour but also between the privileged sections of working classes in aristocratic nations and the rest. **The allegedly 'immutable' international class divide, associated with 'inferior cultures or races', has become an advertisement for more of the imperialist wars intended to protect the Northern, especially the American, ways of life.** Of course, the imperialist centre does not use the expression inferior cultures or race per se. It, in fact, never ceases to remind us of its humanism and that black or Third world people are equal or as intelligent as white people. However, by Fanon's reverse social psychology reinterpreted here in the spirit of the above text, in the equality of races proclamation while the system diffuses the idea of scarcity, there is so little to go around for everyone, serves as a threat to Northern or white privilege, and as such it eggs on the extermination of Southern people (Fanon 1952).

What is peculiarly awry in the calculation of war-loss in human life, unlike the capital stock, nature and labour are generally treated as bountiful and cheap. By capital's diktat and optic, this is true. There are far more workers relative to spare capacity; possibly also free oxygen. Moreover, the market signal structures production for profit in a way that necessitates redundancy. It replaces living labour with machines or dead labour. However, it is labour as subject in the value relationship, as opposed to object or *material* substance, which reconstructs the historical conditions for Western machine-making. **As Southern labour fails to oppose the de-industrialisation/incapacitation of its own social formation, it loses its battles for national autonomy, the Northern-type industrialisation proceeds unchallenged. Hence, the machines of the North are literally the dead labour of the South.** The North arrested the development of the South via its colonialism and later imperialism and restructured its own technical capacity to the demands of profits and markets. Both colonial pillage and the arrest of Southern development contributed to the tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise.

Prior to capitalism, technology was shared to promote higher output in peasant farming, which generally exhibited low to decreasing returns. Under capitalism, the increasing returns of technical progress are twice alienated from social control. First, technology is privately owned, and second, the production of technology follows

the demands of a market overtaken by socially funded military R&D, materiel and technology.

The value associated with the market phenomenon only arose as our lives became dependent on the market economy under capitalism. True, markets always existed, but never to the point where all social life depended on them. Under capitalism, nearly everyone must sell their labour on the market for a wage. Markets have the same name; it was called a market then and it is called a market now. However, the current markets are of different substances—defined as the inner unity of all its diverse elements, including consciousness (how it is perceived), which is an active cause of all its forms. As time and social relations change, the underlying conditions for production and exchange also change. Changes in form and content, the dialectical substance, correspond to specific historical categories and are not deviations from formal concepts. This market as substance does not need an ideal or a god to move it. Prior to capitalism, the performance of puny markets for long-distance trade in luxury goods did not cause unemployment and famines on a large scale, as do markets since c. 1500. Markets have come to represent the social foundation of our existence. Their growth has magnified their negative impact.

As questions of degree matter for scientific investigations, so do the questions of calibrating growth of markets, their commodification of life, to social and natural adversities. However, no effort is spared by the reigning ideologues to avoid such an investigation. The ‘essentialism’ of the mainstream, the idea that markets always existed, or the intrinsic hate between sects or tribes are examples of formal ideas that re-emerge every now and then to explain the failure of markets or the constancy of war.

Nothing should be transhistorical or the same across history, *including logical forms*. The word war itself, just like the word market, has a different content and determination as time goes on. Empires will still seek tribute and imperial rents, but one must look further into the shifting reasons of encroachment wars under capitalism, its commodity fetishism and financialised market economy. History is not a process of the idea, a rational reality, it is a system of forces as per Croce (1915). But to add a solid groundwork to Croce, these are forces shaped by ideas determined by material circumstances, or by the way people engage in production to reproduce themselves.

History is not a uniform landscape in which a formal concept explains *all*, because *all* that exists is a variation of that formal concept. Historically specific circumstances require specific explanations. Regarding pre-capitalist imperialism, Lenin emphasised that ‘colonial policy and imperialism existed before the latest stage of capitalism, and even before capitalism... but general disquisitions on imperialism, which ignore, or put into the background, the fundamental difference between socio-economic formations, inevitably turn into the most vapid banality or bragging, like the comparison’ (Lenin 1916). And he adds, ‘even the capitalist colonial policy of previous stages of capitalism is essentially different from the colonial policy of finance capital’.

Capital, which is ‘rotten to the core’ (as per Marx 1859), is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society. It must form the starting point as well as the

finishing point of analysis. Under capitalism, humans are born of capital, not only to be its alienated labourers but also to systemically and systematically have their blood spilt. In the era of monopoly-finance capital, however, the potential for bloodletting rises as the principal contradiction of capital–labour further lodges in the North/South divide, or as imperialist countries enslave and exploit developing countries. This shift of the imperialist class structure from a class to class exploitation into ‘the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world’s population by an insignificant minority of the richest advanced capitalist countries (as per Lenin 1920)’ is a change in the type of the leading bourgeois gauged by changes in new forms of exploitation.

To establish a break in the character of the imperialist class resulting from a degree of change in the mode of production, to rethink an end to imperialism’s Leninist substance, one must establish an end to the imperialist class that reproduces capital by militarism. Every other symptom of the imperialist order can change by degree, its financialisation, capital flows, concentration of power and assets (fixed or financial), etc.; however, **the one point that may spark a theoretical departure from the old definitions of imperialism is the substance of the imperialist class.** Did such a class change from the days of the First Great War or the Second Great War when ‘...the bourgeoisie of each of the imperialist states, hurling themselves pell-mell against their enemies and against the walls of the world, making use of a war to divide up the world anew in order to escape from the economic and political crisis, go on to create an even greater economic and political crisis’ (Mao 1939),⁷ or has US-led imperialism acquired a different substance? It is in the unity of logic with historical developments issued/discerned from the practice of the law of value, which intercedes every moment of capitalist history, that the nature and reasons of imperialism and its imperialist wars, such as the one ripping apart Syria, are to be found.

1.7 The Syrian Political Landscape

In earlier works (Kadri 2012), I argued that in the Syrian context, the world appears to be reliving a proxy war for the division of peripheral formations resembling to some degree a pre-First World War scenario. I also maintained that considering the impressive Sino-Russian versus American power play, the Syrian war entered a single phase, which is a war whose scope for resolution depends on the unlikely attenuation of international contradictions. Israel’s helplessness before the advances of the SAA under the Russian umbrella is ample evidence of the impenetrability of the international power balances.

A cocktail of foreign forces dots the Syrian landscape. There are Americans and Russians atop the pinnacle, and further down, Turkish, para-governmental Iranian

⁷Mao (1939) Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, The Second imperialist war, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_33.htm.

troops, special Israeli forces, Israeli intelligence and aerial operations, and some nominal presence of European troops (Gowans 2017). As was the case in Iraq before 2003 when the US allied with the pro-Zionist Kurdish forces to aggress the Iraqi state, the US controls the mainly Kurdish sections of the Syrian territory and aggresses the Syrian state. For the time being, the endurance of the central state, the unity of the SAA and the resurgence of Arabism in official discourse mitigate Syria's descent into an Iraqi scenario—the scenario of many constitutionally recognised formations within Iraq whose lifeline is US-led imperialism. The US's pretext for its presence centres on the removal of Assad and Iranian or Iranian-related troops⁸. The Russians consider their success in Syria a step towards loosening NATO's suffocating encirclement. The Turks harbour an expansionary plan while pursuing the anti-Turkish Kurds. The Iranians resist the combined threats of the Israeli-Saudi-American alliance. Although the US's agenda is allegedly to contain Iran and Hezbollah, its alter-objectives are about the *continuity of the war itself*, at a stalemate equilibrium and the fracturing of the Sino-Russian alliance.

With respect to *war's continuity*, as already mentioned, US militarism accommodates historical necessity or as the commodity/value self-expands by means of violence. Militarism is not only a platform for exchange or finance, it is as Luxemburg (1913) stressed, a *domain of accumulation*, which means that it involves the production of historically significant surplus value that undergirds the global profit rates. At least by the damage to the planet and humanity incurred to date, waste *qua* militarism is both crucial and immense. **There is so much waste such that the civilian-end use economy, the economy of iPad's, trousers and what have you, serves as a tributary to accumulation by waste. The wasted people and nature that went into production, and the waste that come out of production, is bigger than what is perceived to be actual production.**

Conflating two aforesaid points, accumulation is not only about stocking up a heap of commodities that constitutes wealth, but it is also about the reproduction of the class agencies and their ideologies that manage the creation of wealth. A mainstream definition of accumulation lacking the social agency component, such as the superficial adage 'the conversion of some portion of surplus value into additional (constant and variable) capital, to produce more surplus value', is no different than the Keynesian identity, Savings = Investment. Accumulation is the social process—not the things that presuppose the social process, which involves value creation as well as destruction. The class in charge of imperialism extracts usurped value from conquered

⁸The US has a token military presence in Syria. However minimal it is, because of the power that backs these troops, especially nearby Israel, the areas that they occupy represent insurmountable barriers to other forces. Even if these troops pull out as envisioned, the US will still hold as a strategic objective the capitulation of Iran or the co-optation of Russia as a blow to China, (discussed in Kadri 2017). Rearranging alliances, appeasing Turkey by giving it a free hand in Kurdish areas, and securitising its other allies, are rearrangements that serve the purpose of thwarting China's development. There is as always a realignment of tactical moves to meet strategic objectives, but the order of priority to Empire is clearly China. The foundational objectives are both the continuation of the debilitating war in Syria as a sphere of production and the restitution of US power.

formations via super and commercial exploitation, while concurrently consuming value to produce more commodities or waste with or to regulate social reproduction.

The value of living people or resources consumed in war, wasted for negative or shadow prices imputed in production as the cost of waste, need not be dubbed negative surplus value. The knack for empiricism, which splits value into positive and negative surplus value, in a 'known' relationship of value to price, stems from a class position that reasserts the fallacy 'capitalism bears progress'. The 'known' qualifier here delineates impossibility of knowing for there cannot be an ideal interface between what is social and what is economic. The value associated with every commodity is at the same time useful and dis-useful. The value relationship in expansion projects both its usefulness and its waste. **Socially, surplus value is not an accounting operation, an arithmetic exercise to which prices or numbers are pinned; it is a history of the exploitation of labour mostly wrought by violent repression.** The value category is a product of a wholly negative dialectic: the barbarism of the capitalist production process.

Over the last 6 years, the Syrian war has shown that Israel, once the uncontested regional power, has been cut down to size. As Iranian and Turkish militaries manoeuvre around Syria's porous borders and closer to historical Palestine, the next inter-regional war may involve adversaries of spectacular powers. The potential for an existentialist war, which lingers in the background, adheres the rationality of capital. As capital proceeds by pauperising while advancing tech-knowhow, the less-nuclearized will definitively achieve higher levels of nuclearization. In an order characterised by the war of each against all, the existentialist threat is omnipresent because whether by reverse engineering or any other means, nuclear or another form of devastating technology are within stone's throw. The militarism and the production of waste are affected by the irrationality of the persons appended to rationally arranged ruling classes. Needless to say, these persons in charge promoting the war and environmental disaster are personally affected by their own acts; wither rational choice. The case could be extended for jailed or executed Third world leaders who, despite compromise, face a sad end at the hands of an imperialism, which grows by devouring its labour and its lesser partners in its industry of war.

Addressing a similar issue of rational history and irrational people who war at the behest of capital, Mészáros (2001) labels such processes as the ultimate rationality of developed capital, which in vain requires it to bring under control every corner of the globe as well as redress its irreconcilable antagonisms. Such rationality corresponds to the logic of capital at the present historical stage and it is at the same time the most extreme irrationality in history, including the Nazi conception of world domination (Mészáros 2001).

Incidentally, Istvan Mészáros lays more of an accent upon European history. Although his notion of waste is comprehensive, he illustrates it with a case of western-consumerist waste—the example he provides addresses the waste content of a cosmetic product, being 90% waste. Environmental degradation, more so than the imperialist wars visited upon the former colonies, figures more prominently in his work. However, the **colonial and imperialist slaughters are decisive to capitalist history and rationality.** Growth at any cost founds the rationality of impersonal cap-

ital. Its internal reasonability becomes vivid for everyone to see when the infighting of past and contemporary proletarians intensifies. Nothing could be more intelligent than de-substantiating workers, transforming them into a lump of flesh, squashing their consciousness, as they dig their own graves instead of that of capital. Even though, unfettered capital is the undertaker of humanity. That capital's inner logic has momentarily, only momentarily, become the received wisdom of the working class is self-evident from the way workers passively accede to the planet's erosion. History, capital incarnate, is only irrational as it experiences a discontinuity or as its contradictions burst at the threshold that informs revolutionary consciousness, in particular, the renunciation of private property.

As the struggle for power in Syria thrusts forward, the Russians are appealing both Israel and the US with concessions in an attempt to end the conflict and consolidate their gains. At present, it appears that no Russian compromise will attenuate the empire's thrust for war. The longer US-Russian discord dominates, assuming Russia is not lured into the US's orbit, the more China, the nemesis of US empire, quietly strengthens in the background. As the deafening sounds of the airwaves tell us: the US is in a race with time to arrest China's inexorable rise. In many areas of industrial development, China exceeds the US and it will most likely unseat the US in terms of nominal economic size within a decade (Hersh 2016; Kadri 2017a). Russian deal-making, the tactical gameplay along the lines of its envisaged constitution for Syria, which effectively restructures the country along ethno-sectarian lines, albeit to the wishes of Zionism, remains in the offing (Sputnik 2017).⁹ A cursory reading of the proposed constitution shows that it replicates the Bremmer-designed Iraqi constitution of 2005. It reformulates the state upon socially divisive fault lines through reinforcing imperialist-constructed identities, the genre by which the bigger chunk of the Syrian social product flies out as imperial rents. And to be certain, the biggest chunk of the Syrian social product is not locums or Damascene brocades, it is militarism, wars and the waste—the continuation of the war and debilitation as in Iraq is the real rent. It is the type of product that mainstream academia peddles with the many conferences treating the impassable but hallucinatory Sunni–Shia divide. Not that bourgeois democracy is ideal, but such constitution relegates citizenship to caste-like structure instead of equal legal rights combined with unequal social rights citizenry characteristic of western formations.

There is the run of the mill consequences of states intended for the less developed 'races', or peoples whose 'spiritual development' has not yet flourished into individual freedoms, such as the orientalist-conceived Arab. It is not the vitriolic vocabulary of orientalism or Eurocentrism, which is at issue here. It is rather these imperialistically designed states, which are crucibles for continuous inter-communal fighting. By short-changing the political rights of huge sections of the working class, such sectarian design corrodes the security of the social formation. By implication, constitutionally devised Arab religious citizenship transmits historical legitimacy to Israel's state Jewishness. Constitutions turning the sect or ethnic group into the hierar-

⁹Sputnik (2018). Full Text of the New Syrian Draft Constitution, accessed the on 6 June 2018, <https://sptnkne.ws/dy4J>.

chically structured meta-citizen fragments labour's power and shift the appropriation of surplus into the purview of the comprador class.

Apart from all the measures aimed at emaciating Syria, the multilayered nature of the current struggle within it remains at least threefold—current as in the time of writing for this is a shifting landscape. The US must extricate Iran from Syria, confine Russia and, possibly in an adjunct manner, stymie its nemesis, China. This last point relates to the substratum of US power, its real and ideological power stock, its regaining momentum as a result of victory in Syria or, more pertinently, as permanent war in Syria curtails China's Belt and Road plans. Unless a crisis, financial or otherwise, devastates one or another of the major international players opposing the US, direct inter-superpower confrontation as politics of last resort remains remote, but no longer improbable (US presidents used to act mad, but they could be real-mad at the current stage). It has to be recalled that capital's auto-devastation mechanism, its inner DNA code growing in a conducive environment of de-subjected labour, defines history's *ultimate* rationality.

Closer to home, the Saudi/Israeli-Iranian divergence, which is first an American-Iranian dispute over Gulf hegemony, may yet inflame the region. Indubitably, the Arabian states of the Gulf are vassals of US empire. To attribute to them a historical agency of sorts, as per the avalanche of literature blaming the Gulf for curbing social progress, is perhaps a farce, but more so an underhand practice to exonerate US empire from its excessive human rights violations. Blaming Arab de-development on Arab monarchies shifts blame to the Arab stereotype. At any rate, an intensification of the lukewarm conflict to the point of lowering oil supplies through the Hormuz Straits may fleetingly harm oil-importing countries, principally China. It may also dislodge a debt avalanche as Chinese capital illicitly scurries for dollar markets. However, as I have argued in Kadri (2017a and 2018), China is far too auto-sufficient to incur significant damages.

The state of play in Syria has changed with direct Russian intervention. Just before Russian involvement in 2015, ISIS and its ilk were gaining ground. The prognosis of the situation in Syria prior to Russian intervention was that ISIS could well have connected across Hama to the Northern border of Lebanon, the Akkar region, where it had enjoyed some support and continued its advance to establish a corridor to the port of Tripoli (From a conversation with an Arab journalist stationed near the conflict at the time). Whether this assessment is factual or not, it is illustrative of the fact that Iran, present in Syria then, played a lesser role vis-à-vis the role later played Russia in tipping the Syrian power balance. The presence of Russia in Syria, a move unlikely in Soviet times, has already curtailed the Israeli free fly-zone. Moreover, Iran is perceived as a sectarian entity and as such it may represent a liability to a Syrian government whose redeeming qualities may be Arabism and secularism.

At a further remove, Iran remains a softer imperialist target than nuclear North Korea. Although nationalist Iran is not structurally anti-imperialist, at least by class content, the US's appetite for war, will edge it into more radical positions. While Iran has, in the past, tacitly combined forces with the US against the Yugoslav republic in the Bosnian war of secession, armed anti-Iraqi sectarian factions during the US embargo and invasion of Iraq, and has a history of collusion with the US

in Afghanistan, and may be willing to compromise much autonomy, it is far too big/self-reliant for a social formation overlooking the Gulf waterways, to be left intact. Moreover, apart from Iran's size and indigenous capacity, which unnerve the hegemon, capital must auto-differentiate by conflict within its own ranks. To control and appropriate surplus value, it must be in control of the social structures producing surplus value. That is, the US has to be in control of more than just the trade aspects, and/or commercial and financial channels to remain at the helm. These alone, without the means to control the intensity of work, the reproduction of labour and the share of necessary labour, do not create value.

Inter-capitalist wars continue to culminate capitalist development. The anti-systemic or anti-imperialist movements, or what little remains of that, form odd alliances with previous partners of capital, like Iran, in struggles of national liberation. To draw from past regional lessons, **the US empire is not in the habit of harbouring gratitude for services rendered by junior class partners and, more innately, it cannot entertain the prospects of peace or accept 'yes' from Iran as an answer to its conditionalities.**

On the day the US reneged on the Iran nuclear deal, Iran's US-educated Javad Zarif, the minister for foreign affairs, delivered a message in which he invoked the name of the American-demonised former president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, in an effort to draw sympathy from Western audiences.¹⁰ However, at this historical juncture, not much could be done to sway Western opinion from its imperialism—**'Westerners' do gain from imperialism and through cross-border international class alliances, they form ideas, such as our better machines produce more value or that we vote therefore we are better, which promote more of the imperialism and further imperial rents. To infuse the debate with the 'other' view is for the moment futile.** It is as if the Arab adage, 'there is no life in whom one calls upon', holds true for all times.

That minister should have remembered that Saddam is a martyred hero for many of the Arab working classes, and as such the seasoned diplomat inadvertently alienated many would-be Arab supporters. As in any explanation of a world relevant event, there are many histories (as in stories) of the Iran–Iraq war. Both Iran and Iraq accused each other of attacking first. Also, Saddam may have shaken hands with Rumsfeld, however, Iraq at the time of the war was a Soviet satellite, while Islamic Iran was repressing its own communist movement. **During the war, Iran resorted to buying weapons from Israel to continue a war that Iraq was losing and wanted stopped. In more conclusive terms, it is neither Iraq nor Iran that initiates historically relevant events in a most strategic region. Real or social time is at the command of the reigning US-led imperialism and its ideology. Little does it matter who did what first in chronological time, because the war and its continuation were decided in Washington. Saddam's fall is partly related to his insistence on ending the war early as a result of the losses incurred due to gross miscalculation, which ran counter to the US's wishes (Taqi 2008).** However, **the critical historical reason for the war remains**

¹⁰The televised address can be watched here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYOnXL6R-B8>.

to lay imperialist hegemony to a strategic region, the Persian Gulf, by measures that incapacitate its surrounding states.

US Empire, through its command of history, cannot run against the grain of war making as production itself and as means to dispose of its economic surplus. Zarif's poorly chosen reconciliatory remarks exhibit the hokum of the US's formal educational system of which he is a product. The game theoretic approach to international relations, in which knowhow of Persian bargaining over carpet prices provides for excellent strategizing, is insignificant to US empire because Iran has to be made insignificant no matter how good its strategy. The chief reason the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal, was reached is because Russia and China weighed in on the process. American disciplinary training leads one to read history like personal fairy tales. It reinforces ignorance of the class-historical process and its relevant historical agency. In addition to the embargos and sanctions, Iran will most likely be further aggressed. It cannot afford to be alone or to be secluded by its reticulation through the politics of Shiism, and still reduce the impending losses of a confrontation with imperialism.

In the broader picture, the US's effort to drive a wedge between China and Russia at minimum cost to itself, as happened when Richard Nixon snared Mao Tse-Tung in 1972, has not borne fruit; at least not to date. In terms of size and gravitational pull, China's pole attracts an array of states disgruntled with the US's mode of 'accumulation by the gun' and the kitsch of Hollywood-type culture. It may be too early to envisage the future, however, the current alignment of forces in the shadow of China may be actuating the transition to a more balanced global order.

In respect to imperialist war targeting Iran, Syria or elsewhere and its relation to political economy, it is best to keep in mind the following aide-memoire. Because war as consumer of resources balances the global shortcomings in the rate of exploitation, while at the same time, it shapes resource allocation, it is both pervasive and permanent under capitalism. Here, I have carried out a concretisation of the production process, usually envisioned as that of the single factory, into what it really is: a complex supply chain organised over several geographic areas and predetermined by the measures taken to pave the appropriate social grounds for exploitation. In the case of war, these appropriate social grounds require, for instance, the construction of conflicting identities that eliminate the prospect of working class solidarity. War by proxy, in Syria and elsewhere, is a case in point.

With a changing global balance of forces, the types of wars that were visited upon Iraq and Libya are becoming more difficult to implement in another place. It is no longer possible for the US to choose the form of war it wants, because it no longer has crushing superiority over the enemy from the very start (captioned from Gramsci's [1971] remark). China, like Russia, favours the integrity of the Syrian state. China also recognises the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. This alone challenges Israel, the global spearhead of US-led imperialism. It is no secret that the Zionist movement advances the objectives of imperialism beyond Israel and its surrounding areas (Nederveen-Pieterse 1984). Theodore Herzl (1896), a leading figure of Zionism noted that 'for Europe we [Zionists] shall serve there [in Palestine] as part of the rampart against Asia, and function as the vanguard

of civilisation [sic] against the barbarians'.¹¹ Its unabashed interventions in areas experiencing flagrant human rights abuse from which the US's and Europe's veneer of moral righteousness holds them back, such as the case of Israel cooperating with embargoed South African apartheid in the nuclear weapons field, are outstanding.¹² Israel's colonialism blended with the myth of the chosen people is the modern version of American frontierism with which China and Russia have already come face to face in Syria. At a more general level, Israel's intent to debilitate Syria has little to do with any existentialist threat it faces, and more to do with a settler society carrying out the mandate of imperialist history as unadulterated capital. It is after all the belligerence of imperialism that weaves the warp of time for or against existentialist threats.

1.8 A War of Positions

Positions on the Syrian question are truly about the right of people to bread and democracy, a right that is only wrought in anti-imperialist struggle. In the dominant anti-Assad, or anti-Syria to be exact, narrative, the stance of the Gulf states, Israel and the US objectively aligns with much of the liberal or Western Marxist posture. Western Marxism may be distinguished from revolutionary Marxism as per Ho Chi Minh's statement to the 1924 Fifth Congress of the Comintern.

Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that so long as the French and British Communist Parties have not brought out a really progressive policy with regard to the colonies, have not come into contact with the colonial peoples, their programme as a whole is and will be ineffective because it goes counter to Leninism. I will explain myself more clearly. In his speech on Lenin and the national question Comrade Stalin said that the reformists and leaders of the Second International dared not align the white people of the colonies with their coloured counterparts [Hence WW I]... According to Lenin, the victory of the revolution in Western Europe depended on its close contact with the liberation movement against imperialism in enslaved colonies and with the national question, both of which form a part of the common problem of the proletarian revolution and dictatorship.

Defining who is the imperialist defines the position on Syria. In 2003, Fred Halliday (a star academic), amongst many others on the liberal left, supported the invasion of Iraq. The gist of that argument was that although the US and its European partners were imperialists, the Iraqi regime was fascist. Post-invasion events in Iraq have discredited this position and reaffirmed that fascism cannot appertain to a developing country opposing imperialism. The point 'imperialism against fascism' was an imperialist class position meant to obliterate Iraq by demonising its leadership.

¹¹Quoted from Machover (2012), Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution, Haymarket Books.

¹²Revealed: how Israel offered to sell South Africa nuclear weapons, The Guardian 23 May 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/23/israel-south-africa-nuclear-weapons>. Also see: How Israel helped Latin American death squads, 21 June 2018, Middle East Monitor <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180621-how-israel-helped-latin-americas-death-squads-part-1/>.

The US-led assault on Syria presents us with a similar case. A nuanced form of justification for the US assault on Syria emerges from the writings of another star academic, David Harvey. It has to be remembered that under capital's control, the revision of history serves as an input into imperialism and its contemporary war industry. To illustrate: Kostas Mavrakis's inquest into Alain Badiou's fame (Mavrakis 2017), points out that Badiou is a great theoretician, yet it is only his position on multiplicity undermining particularity, implying a demotion of the particularisation of others in national struggles, which promotes his celebrity status. To be sure, Badiou is clear in his anti-imperialism, while Harvey is not. Harvey conveys a message that does not cross capital at strategic intersections, or one that implants in the popular image the failure of the Soviet model as support for the dictum that capitalism remains the best there is. Theoretically, he declares capitalism a failure, but ideologically he either shuns revolutionary violence, or sneaks into the discourse the notion that socialist construction is an impracticable ideal. In turn, the dominant power employs his language to further its own position. Much of the anti-systematic theorisation is lost as capital's apparatus focuses on the pronouncement: 'terrible socialism'. Insidious bits and pieces from *batinite* Marxists, the ones besotted with Western democracy, are selected and flaunted by the mainstream to re-asertain the reasonability and inevitability of the existing order.

The gist of Harvey's argument dilutes imperialism. Harvey analytically figures two processes to capitalist development, one of accumulation and overproduction, and the other about territorial expansion (Harvey 1981). Nicely enough, territorial expansion releases the bottleneck of overaccumulation by dispossession. Controlling space corresponds to the redeployment of fixed capital assets abroad, or longer term investment, which ensure higher returns over the long-term vis-à-vis financial papers. Modern forms of dispossession are never at the scale of primitive accumulation (Harvey 2008). In his reply to Harvey, Smith (2018) theorises that by downscaling forms of primitive accumulation, which are central to modern imperialist practice, Harvey denies imperialism. To this Harvey-Smith debate, **Lenin's sociological definition of imperialism, the primacy of politics, the ideological underpinnings of the imperialist order that trail from centuries back, by which dominant capital reproduces as the leading social relationship, is missing.** As such, the discussion hollows the concept of imperialism. It cleaves the mode of consciousness from the determination of imperialism, the ideological forms of which for example Churchill's (1919) idea that 'the retention of gas as a permanent method of warfare spreads terror and lacerates uncivilised tribes', still designates the undercurrent of present day imperialism.¹³

Moreover, and in connection to the same fallacious flow of ideas, as things explain things without subjects, long-term investment in fixed assets becomes *causa sui*, whereas a higher frequency of their reliquification by destruction, through the value-making processes of war and reconstruction, is more profitable to capital than returns on static assets over the long run. To remove the sphere of finance as a trigger and

¹³Churchill (1919) War Office Memo <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/churchills-1919-war-office-memorandum.html>.

an end of imperialist expansion is to remove the reliquification of all ‘that is solid, all that is supposed to melt into air’, by means of war and imperialist expansion.

To construct a concept of imperialism as object without a subject, or eclectically related to its subject, situates one on an ideological spectrum, or in a political position of sorts. Harvey and Smith are not just being theoretical; they are ideological first. Primitive accumulation, overproduction and dispossession are interpenetrative dialectical concepts, which mean something as a totality in relation to the historical context, which is also the class context. In the end, they should mean something in terms of their impact on anti-imperialist struggles.

Contrary to how it has been anecdotally put, Harvey’s imperialism is not without an address. No such nebulous arrangement exists in a social order; imperialism also is not just an idea. For Harvey, imperialism is found in any space where capital realises its capital as fixed stock. Much capital has been fixed and flows in and out of China; China is thus imperialist. Such ‘new imperialism’ shifts blame away from ‘whiteness’, used here in the ideological sense. Smith (2016) on the other hand confuses a mode of accumulation with its form of exploitation, emphasising super-exploitation while neglecting commercial exploitation and war as a sphere of production.

The Leninist, the historically specific monopoly-finance imperialism, differs from both accounts. In the monopoly age, finance unlatches the expansion of capital. **Just as in any turnover cycle, accumulation begins with money and returns home in more money—the objective of accumulation in a financialised world remains money itself.** To restate an axiomatic point, financiers disdain the real production process. Meanwhile, for profits to grow by *sublated* surplus value, the working class has to consume a lesser portion of the surplus product. Alongside this mechanics, capital grows by a process of auto-consumption, a metabolic order, to which imperialist war is a partial resolution (Lenin 1916). **It is in auto-consumption where the primacy of politics, the sociological nature of imperialism, which lays down the trajectory of surplus value making, comes to the fore.** There is in the Leninist approach a social agency moulded by the developments of its historical circumstance, not just logical concepts assuming different degrees of intensity. It is the imperialist class that has changed in the Leninist view, not the gelatinous concepts of primitive accumulation or spatial-fixes, etc.

Branding powers other than the US and its allies as imperialist is a breaking point for Syria because it equates aggressor and aggressed. Amidst a dilution of imperialism, one is at liberty to choose between competing imperialisms and even support the recent attack of the US, UK and France, which showered Syria missiles in mid-April 2018, because it is either an anti-imperialist position, an anti-Russian or Chinese position, or a tactic of ‘lesser evilism’. **Many powers are present in Syria and locked in a proxy war, but the power to which war is foundational in financial and ideological terms is the US.** Vltchek (2018) notes that the US, UK and France are already responsible for hundreds of millions of human lives lost on all continents for centuries, and have zero moral mandate to judge or punish anybody. However, it is not the moral mandate that counts in defining imperialism. These Western formations are solely mandated by capital to act as such or to act as imperialists; how so?

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Chapter 2

Sociological Imperialism



Abstract This chapter argues against the empirical bent in the study of imperialism and explores its sociological basis. It principally illustrates that what differentiates twentieth century and current imperialism from its previous historical forms cannot be solely attributed to an intensification of the symptoms of imperialism in war and economic usurpation. It is rather the changing quality of the imperialist class, a class whose predisposition to disparage real production and to grow by the acquisition of imperial rents, namely, through the channels of finance and war, bestow it with its new identity. Since the early twentieth century until the present moment, the biggest chunks of imperial rents have been carved out from the steady erosion of nature and wars.

2.1 Against Empiricism

That Russia and China are as hegemonic or as imperialist as the US erects an ideological barricade for all the reactionary forces aligned against Syria to hide behind. Harvey is no different from a backlog of social democratic leftists that have supported American imperialism for more than a century. The current state of left organisational and ideological defeat is a direct product of what that liberal left has sown, especially with its anti-Sovietism. What purpose does it serve to vaunt anti-Stalinism other than buttressing the current 'aristocratic' class position; the position of the North, whose every bit of social science is the reigning idea behind the daily massacres of imperialism.

To support his point, Harvey offers an empirical account of shifts in financial flows associated with super-exploitation, which demonstrate a geographic tilt in wealth towards the East. His, he says, is not a rigid imperialism with a 'rigid geography of core and periphery set out in world systems theory;' it is rather 'uneven geographical development, proliferating and differentiating divisions of labour, an understanding of global commodity chains and spatial fixes... and the construction and destruction of regional economies within which a certain 'structural coherence' (or 'regional value regime') might form for a time'. Such teleological course concludes in an

empirical account, the spatial fixes, to which any other opposing empirical account is falsification. Where there are more spatial fixes, we find more imperialism, or not even imperialism, just hegemony.

The moment the subject, the specific capital, tinkers with the financial channels and the degree to which it centralises or concentrates capital, which it does every millisecond, a ‘new and improved’ theoretical concept of imperialism arises. The quantity of capitalist assets and rents defines the imperialist. Such is more a model, or a stillborn theory—a theory born wrong. Not that theory is supposed to be right, but at best its analytical or categorical component should hold steady within a *periodised* historically definitive time frame, else it is just absurd falsification of reality, the sort that says what you see is not what you see.

A formal theory’s interface with the facts bears only its falsification of the facts, whereas a historically grounded theory constructs its universal as the mediated general condition from a multitude of empirically observed differences (Ilyenkov 1977). This statement cannot be reduced to diversity within unity. Theories, which track observations constituting the epiphenomenon without addressing the general laws of development or the history behind the rise of the epiphenomenon itself, fail to account for the historical transformation of the particular into the general, or to be explicit, the mediation of the subject itself as history. This development of the subject of history is the development of the imperialist class, its imperialism, as history.

How is contemporary imperialism different from imperialism in Marx’s time when Britain competed with other imperialists and exported its colonial loot to Canada and Australia? How is this different from imperialism in Roman times? Long-distance trade routes would shift wealth from place to place, but the heart of Empire remained Constantinople. Is there any uniqueness in recent developments to warrant an overhaul of the Leninist theory of imperialism? One significant difference between imperialism then and now readily jumps to mind. In c. 400 BC, Sun Tzu posited that the acme of skill is to capture the enemy’s cities without assaulting them and to overthrow his state without protracted operations; however, in today’s world, many countries fall upon the anvil of empire and are set ablaze as if for no apparent reason. An understanding of the difference is of relevance to defining modern imperialism, to clarifying who the imperialist is and, accordingly, to laying the intellectual groundwork on how positions on Syria are to be formed, and to what ends.

Empiricists and economistic conceptualisations of imperialism thin down the concept to the point where the statistical fact and its interrelatedness homogenise all the social actors. In numbers and quantities, all are of the same material substance. Moreover, because *measure* or statistical significance varies to the whim of the statistician, many countries can be categorised to some degree as hegemonic or imperialist, some significantly more so than others perhaps. In a posteriori empirical terms, any or all the forces involved in the international class struggle become imperialists because they must share some degree of US-led imperialism—for instance, they exploit, erect physical assets, export capital and receive it. In empiricism bereft of categorisation, quantity trumps the identity of the subject—identity is the quality that differentiates the subject.

The omission of content and reliance on quantity, on the size of fixed capital assets in space, capital flows, market extensions, etc., on the Syrian stage implies

that the imperialist American, Zionist and Saudi alliance resembles the Russian, Chinese and Iranian alliance. However, for a quantitative or statistical approach to determine the gradation of imperialism, the agent of that imperialism must be of similar material substance, or at least of univocal historical qualities. It is possible to build an argument of this nature only when the initial building block of social theory is the abstract man of metaphysics, not the socially mediated man, the class or the masses. Once a discussion of imperialism begins to decide on the nature of the imperialist class from selective facts rather than the history of facts or events affected by historical agency, it departs from the Marxist tradition. It departs from the premise of the Marxian social man.

Marxism has even refused to parrot the saying that it is 'man' who makes history, because this expression is exploited by bourgeois ideology which uses it to fight another true expression, one vital for the proletariat, it is the masses who make history (Althusser 1971). An organic intellectual severs the synapses of capital with capital's conceptual constructs. He or she would never let build a momentum for the re-embellishment of western civilisation. In times where the membership of revolutionary socialist parties at the heart of empire would all fit into a bingo hall, not for a brief moment will the science of imperialism produced by 'illustrious' professors escape the clasp of dominant ideology in meaningful way. I am presupposing that it is the combination of potent socialist organisation and the masses that cradles revolutionary action.

Harvey says his theory is not rigid. There is nothing more rigid than pinning capital to space as a start to the definition of imperialism. It is a thingification of capital—capital the living breathing social relation, which is 'not a thing, but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society, which is manifested in a thing and lends this thing a specific social character (Marx 1894)', becomes a thing. To conceive of imperialism as a world system of economic-financial accumulation, which can only be crushed by a world unity of the peoples led, no doubt, by their red academics is farcical. Imperialism as such becomes an amalgam of well-defined units, with a more sophisticated epistemological vocabulary, or a more refined methodology (*not method*) with a zest for universalism which truly belongs to the messianic vision of the grand epoch of the white man's burden. Harvey's approach to imperialism follows the old structuralist–functionalist hegemonic ideology, with merely a Marxist flavour, but not at all, at the end of the day, Marxist (paraphrased from Abdel-Malek 1977). Spatial concepts or core/periphery concepts referencing fixed geographic notions bereft of a sociological definition of imperialism belong to the universalist–reductionist tradition and is one of predetermined historic necessity (Abdel-Malek 1971); and the critique in this paragraph is thought through from the writings of Anouar Abdel-Malek a leading proponent of Third Worldism. It is opportunism to capitalise on the conceptual frailty of some third worldists to discredit the theories of the developing world. Not all third worldist project a static notion of concepts such as metropolis/hinterland predicated the theory of imperialism.

To revert to a broader scope. Capitalist history, the totality of the social relations of production, which in our case are capitalist relations, can be summarised as capital,

a totalising relation without limits and with a rationality of its own, which transforms everything social into private-class wealth and power. It basically rips apart the worker from his tools or means of production just as it erects barriers between use and exchange value or between anything social and private. It does so *determinedly* by means of violence (social not formal determination, that is it gels necessarily but not exclusively). Such contradiction of capital and labour, the first contradiction, principally projects itself onto a North/South plane. The practice of genocidal colonialism is its first form. To reassert, this oneness or totality that is capital makes history—in relation to anti-systemic labour of course. Its parts, sub-articulated with it and born into the frame of this one totality capital, make history; however, not as a conglomeration of atomistic individuals or formal subsystems, but as mediated agency whose political thrust is relevant in relation to the *necessities* of historical transformation.

In relation to past-Western narratives on imperialism, Abdel-Malek noted that such a sophisticated epistemology cannot conceal Western deep enmity towards the East, especially China (Abdel-Malek 1971). China is part of the oppressed South. It has not colonised nor lived off the avails of colonisation. Abdel-Malek's understanding of *imperialism as sociological is not anomalous. Marx's definition of capital is also sociological*. By sociological he meant a study of capitalist systems in the framework of the international balance of forces as the two basic component elements of the world struggle against imperialism: the united world front of working classes and national movements, facing the constellation of conflicting colonial and imperialist forces (Abdel-Malek 1977). It follows from Abdel-Malek that it is not the economic symptoms, such as those of capital flows, which chiefly define imperialism. It is the politics of the class struggle. In such politics, the sociological dynamic is to denude the subterfuge that furthers the rule of capital, as in the primacy of politics.

2.2 Concretising Some Forms

To illustrate or give structure to ideas, the world is governed by huge class organs or institutions like the UN, the World Bank, NATO, the IMF, etc., and their corresponding ideologies. To further illustrate, there is no right or wrong or good and bad in dominant ideology; it is the spirit of a history, which is, as I recall here once again, impersonal and objective. There are class ideologies, and the ideologies of class institutions serve the imperialist class. Furthermore, these are not democratic institutions—democratic in the sense of having equal representation. They are principally ruled by the powerful US leading class, which is heir to the colonial European empires and its historically amassed stock of culture, power and wealth. Naturally, such a lopsided power structure trailing from the past favouring the Western World produces rules of the game and ideas that promote the interest of the Western ruling classes and their class allies downstream. It reproduces by maintaining unequal political, social and trade relations. Reciprocally, US-led capital commands these organisational bodies because of its practice of imperialism. The loop closes as these organisations recontribute to perpetuating imperialism, the wars and the uneven

global structure that favour the imperialist class. For now, let us not just say these are facts, but this much we know after the fact.

At a more basic level, for capital to serve its interest, that is, to produce things to sell on a market for profit, it also requires wars to extract raw material, oil extraction that pollutes, for example, and union busting to lower wages. Warring for raw materials is a widely debated point. However, the imperialist system must beautify the ugly reality and concomitantly initiate ideas that convince even the people that are suffering that this is the best world of all the possible worlds. It cannot just say, we are going to kill the Arabs for their oil. For capital, this is the role of ideological production, which is just as important as commodity production. Capital produces the commodity and, through its schools, temples and media bombardment, its apparatuses, it also produces the human being who is submissively adequate for the uncritical consumption of that commodity.

These political organisations, also known as capital's ideological apparatuses, are the obvious instruments of imperialism in the class struggle. For example, they can write a Charter of the United Nations whose objective is to criminalise and possibly end wars, while at the same time foment the condition through the same charter for the expansion of wars. That the United Nations is a joke that the world cannot do without is there for everyone to see.

Of the subterfuges of the class struggle, what is not so obvious is the role played therein by the price system. Surplus value, which is the source of money profit, is never expressed in prices during its extraction. Prices are flawed representations of value, because value creation is a process of production, or a social relation. It is only after its realisation on the market that it assumes a price form determined by the power rapport of that market. The act of purposeful labour, work and the prices monetising the work are different and one and the same by the power parties (the classes) involved in determining the value process itself.

For capital, prices—the money form—arising from commodity exchange are of value on their own and a tool, which assumes the form of the dollar. This tool or dollar form serves as a signal to capital, and to which capital responds by controlling labour and creating/destroying value to **first reassert class power (primacy of politics)** and, second, to engage in the actual act of production for profits. Through the primacy of politics, the reassertion of class power, capital uses the symbolism and the actual content of the money form, which is alienated value, to ratchet the exploitation of working people. The money form, just as physical coercion, cheapens workers and reduces their power. The fact that workers in Greece can submit to paying back an odious debt, which is in reality the credit of the financial class, is an opportune example.

Capital, the abstract relationship, manifests itself by the practice of the law of value, the social and violent measures, which cheapen man and nature to the commandment of the commodity and money forms assuming god-like natures, their fetishism. It does so by dialectical inversion as commodities assume a price/money form, and vice versa subject to the entropic demands of capital, or the drain of value from the working class. The application of the law of value, the law that often creates the abject conditions for the allocation of resources, requires a primacy of politics,

the determinacy of solid bourgeois class rule. Figuratively speaking, without that, nothing happens.

2.3 Excessive Entropy

As to destruction, the entropic mode of the system, its waste, sustains its viability. In the intrinsic drive of capital to permanently disengage or extinguish people and nature, the tragic act itself becomes simultaneous value destruction and production, accomplished sedulously. The forsaken man contributes to accumulation because of her *constructed* excessiveness—there are far too many people—and, also because her diminution lowers the cost price or wage—reducing the numbers of the working class lowers the wage bill and the wage rate by the degree it disempowers the working class. This should not be counterintuitive. The grip of stultifying platitudes, the variants of the demonstration effect or by the more evolved trickery of the society of the spectacle, effaces the real subject, the power of the working class, which is what reduces or increases the price of labour, not their numbers. Power also regulates the price of nature (always nature and man supported by healthy nature in unison). Although the rising cost price of tropical or subtropical commodities rises by production constraints (Patnaik 2016), **the real driver of the falling terms of trade over time is the power reconstituted by imperialist assault**. The mindboggling or counter-intuitive point should be how most people have come to think of other people as just things whose greater numbers reduce the price of their labour.

Capital destroys directly and indirectly through war and through its assault on nature. Nearly all commodities are destined for exchange under capitalism and, of late, nearly all commodities can be said to be underlaid with a socially and environmentally deleterious content. Deadly pesticides, the child- or slave-like labour and the blood of wars are ubiquitous. Their use value transmutes into a dis-useful state at a rate commensurate with the rising real and ideological power of imperialism.

So, the commodity of which I spoke earlier, and which is at war with itself to expand in money form, now wars upon its consumers. Considering the already achieved, ongoing or impending environmental ruin, **all the commodities that constitute wealth also constitute a heap of things laced with venom**. The meaning of the word wealth has changed to correspond to the changes in its historical content. Nearly, all are informed of the harm already incurred by man and nature, but a recent report says it is politically unlikely that humanity can avoid the damage, which requires transforming the world economy at a speed and scale that has ‘no documented historic precedent’.¹ Such conditions alter the Marxian concept of wealth (as defined by Marx [1867]). To the extent the ruling class can afford the costs of clean envi-

¹Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>.

ronment, such wealth is more or less its own; however, altogether, the impairment is irreparable.

The novelty in the living process is twofold. First, the poisoned commodity, as it is consumed, it consumes the labourer at a faster rate relative to the historically determined level of life expectancy. Second, in comparison to the huge damage already sustained by the environment, the good side of the wealth (unpolluted) already accumulated, adds to naught. So far, the waste, within the wealth and apart from it, exceeds the supposedly good wealth, if there ever was such a thing. Because the trajectory of the system is implosive, the costing of the historically destructed inputs, man and nature, exceeds any price tag associated with the usefulness of the value in the current of wealth.

Much of nature has perished/been polluted or is perishing at higher rates Ajl (2018, 2019). The absurd state of eschatology as forecast by environmental scientist, oddly not theologians, appears to hold; however, it does so not on account impending planetary demise, but on account of the lives and nature that have been extinguished so far. I am reasserting that the current losses are huge in two ways: in the loss already sustained relative to a different human/environment sensitive mode of production, and/or, that an assessment of the natural loss now is simply astronomical. *Ex-post facto*, in terms of value, it can be safely said that unfettered capital excessively abuses nature and man. Paradoxically, the class walls, which in the past kept the trash/chemical poison and pollution out of prestigious campuses or areas, are less effective.

The subject of the entropic system projects itself in the nexus ‘owners of commodities and the commodities as fetishes’, which creates the conditions for the expansion of the market by waste and by means of war. It shapes both the conditions for production on the ‘cheap’ while concealing the true social costs. Through commodity fetishism, or as the *objective* commodities exchange for each other driven by their own internal contradiction, these things having godly powers lay down the conditions for their own expansion and decisively so through violence. As per the usual, the qualifier *objective* here connotes beyond social control. Not the each and every profiteer, it is these things, the commodities that labour created, which order the malleable ruling class to waste or go to war.

2.4 A Periodised Imperialism

The imperialism of the capitalist age, as process of wealth expansion, differs from any other time prior to capitalism. Fetishism, the illusion of the epoch as Marx had said, now standing for the germane relationship of capital, impels imperialism. It prevailed in Marx’s and Lenin’s time and it does so now. However, as finance and monopolisation intensify, financial expansion, the more mysterious form of the fetish incarnate in the commodity, begins to take more of a lead in the social process of imperialist expansion.

In his critique of Hilferding's definition of finance capital or that the banker is being transformed into an industrial capitalist, Lenin (1916) reemphasises the *primary* role of finance capital to imperialism:

It is silent [Hilferding's explanation] on one extremely important fact: the increase of concentration of production and of capital to such an extent that concentration leads, and has led, to monopoly... The concentration of production; the monopolies arising therefrom; the merging or coalescence of the banks with industry – such is the history of the rise of finance capital and such is the content of this term... under the general conditions of commodity production and private property, the 'business operations' of capitalist monopolies inevitably lead to the domination of a financial oligarchy.

Here, we see a shift in the character of the leading class from industrial capitalist to a financial oligarchy. The process goes on to our modern times, the times of financialisation, in which the industrialist also becomes a financier (Patnaik 2009).

However, in our age it is not only financialisation that has deepened; commodities are not so useful anymore. Not only bombs, even apples and oranges pollute poison, and consume us. Retheorising, the degree of the war outside the commodity has become a magnification of the degree of the contradiction of value within the commodity—that is, as the product of labour and its usefulness are forcefully alienated from the direct producer and mediated by exchange, the rate of waste and wars also has to rise.

More and more, instead of just going to war for apples and oranges, humanity wars for waste products and for war itself. However, compelled by financial expansion, mankind wars more for the sake of war. Since the twentieth century and its big wars, this change remains a question of degree; for inner content to change, the subject and the reigning ideas have to undergo a *volte face*. Wars reinforce the capital relationship and circularly entrench expansion by waste at all levels of life's reproduction. In other words, wars as production processes are a steep state of alienation.

It is possible for indulgence in inane Occidental individualism to desensitise the social being while the Occidental collective wreaks havoc upon humanity, which prolongs the vicious circle. The sort of desensitisation, which convolutedly speaks of 'fascism as love', or alternatively that 'the most sincere love and desire to care for others does not guarantee humanity... mankind is in a desperate situation—what can destroy it, is also a condition for its survival'.² Just as history becomes bereft of moral responsibility, so does humanity by the metaphysical substance of its Lacanian or Augustinian 'human nature'. Still I cannot address the issue of herding towards a precipice in all its complexity without an understanding of alienation as a real material process stripping the developing world of its resources; by alienation, I do not have in mind the sentimental aspect of snatching humanity from its own humanity. In addition, I am just underscoring the unprecedented gap between social being and social consciousness as one accounts for the damage to species under the rule of capital so far.

²Julie Reshe 'Fascism is love' <https://medium.com/@juliereshe/julie-reshe-fascism-is-love-75cb054c3801>.

There is a differentiated quality in the products of waste and militarism. The production of waste has been instituted in forms of organisation and introjected in the social psyche as indispensable. All commodities, apples, oranges, and *bombs* are produced and alienated from the labourers who produce them. They acquire a price determined through exchange and the various powers governing the market, and as such their exchange price *qua* their money form, as opposed to how useful they are to society, comes to dictate the inner workings of the social metabolic order. This much we already know, however, by including *bombs* in the range of commodities, I have included a purely waste product under the category of commodity production and its entwined fetishism. This is the new issue here.

The money form of commodities has always been a fetish and a weapon against working people. It factually and symbolically contributes to apportioning lesser value in the form of wages and, as such, maintains the capital-designated profit margin. Unlike the lesser waste component in the apples and oranges, the bomb commodity is both literally a weapon and symbolically a weapon by its fetishized quality and moneyed form.

The social individual or the corporation is sub-articulated with an imperialism, which must be conceived of in holistic or class terms. In one of its forms, imperialism is the concentration of the capital relationship in higher forms of violence and repression. As the products of labour require inputs from all the world, the wages become the wages of all the world's working people differentially distributed amongst them by the way they auto-differentiate or construct their own identity or skill differences as political power instruments. The global wage share of total income rises with internationalist solidarity and vice versa. The content of value (market-mediated content), the socially necessary labour time that society invests in a commodity is like nature: it does not belong to a tribe, as per the American Indian proverb. **The ruling class can still pay a certain section of working people higher wages (a signification of higher necessary labour), but overall it destroys or immiserates many others, which normally reduces the overall share of labour from the global product.**

The wars of the imperialist class, its austerity and assault on the environment, disproportionately immiserate and reduce the numbers of working people in the third world, of course relative to a secularly rising demographic trend. The war dead, healthiness and longevity divides mirror the international class divide. Capital, not necessarily capitalists, is keenly aware of the class divide and the social nature of production, inversionally, its primacy of politics—all the more reason why the emphasis in the study of the value relation should squarely lie on its de-reification, on the exposure of the subject or class. **As the roots of profits lie in surplus value, the class control and pauperisation of the working class, the imperialist wars visited upon the working classes, capital's first contradiction, and inter-imperialist wars, the second contradiction of capital, combine to deliver surplus value and the conditions for making higher surplus value.** War is form of production and grounds for reproduction.

Of the totality that is the waste category, militarism is financially significant because of the money created as empire issues bonds to absorb/redeploy the monopoly-accumulated surplus. The bonds/T-bills expand the assets of the financial sector and its capacity to lend and further expand the money supply, and financial profits. The private sector free rides on the war-economy tech-innovation, or as the

state invests in the military and leaves health care or education to the private sector. At a foundational social level, **militarism is key to the resilience of capital because it lowers the value inherent in human lives. It reduces their relative numbers and strips the communal will of working people by undermining their potential or actual forms of social organisation reducing the overall share of the working class from necessary labour.**

Tangentially, US corporations may account for more than half of the globe's business sector, but the transmutation of much of the world's firms through the dominance of finance, open borders and the store of value in the dollar, in the global entities that they have become, sheds much of the national differences between all that is dollarized capital. The financialised production sector differs from a nationally based industry whose returns are stored in a national currency and whose capital account is regulated. **Owing to the liquidity of much of the international business sector, it is best categorised by its financial characteristics as opposed to its national origins.**

On the other side of the spectrum, the fact that labour auto-differentiates by its ethnicity or identity is a matter attributed to capital's ideological supremacy. **Capital's ideological ingenuity is such that it is internationalist for capitalists and national chauvinist for workers.** The two principal poles of the first contradiction of capital are the **homogenised or dollarized capital and the fragmented global labour.**

War, the principal form of the practice of militarism, functions as both an adjunct to the capitalist wage system and a wage system in itself. It lowers wages by commandeering third world states—**states are forms of social organisation that potentially express the will of people as people transmute into masses**—and it also employs workers for wages. The masses here are peoples armed with revolutionary consciousness. **The modern forms of imperialist wars which destroy states are massive forms of enslavement.**

It is this bequeathed historical stock, the social class relations, **the rationality behind doing everything and anything for profits at any expense, all the while mobilising people who believe in the catchy phrase 'the system is great' to promote that agenda, which is the crushing power of capital.** The perception of power varies by the respective class angle. For the generic Northern academic, there is a Cartesian duality in the structure of power, its soft and hard side, as per the sort of analytics that separate real aspects of phenomena in the mind to recompose it as a synthesis or false reality in the mind. There is rarely an interpenetrative power structure whose gravitational field is inclined to genocide for instance. In the words of Nkrumah (1964), 'the concept of an object cannot be properly formulated in idealism. Having once dismantled the world, idealists are unable to put it together again... It is as if one could not have soup any more, but only its ingredients'. As to the Third Worldist perspective, a child in Gaza who has experienced Israeli bombardment has a firmer apprehension of power, not because of its horrors, but because she sees the deliberations of capitalists and the bombing as one, the oneness of thought and the act itself in the dropping bomb; thence, the higher plane of knowledge, the womb of revolutionary consciousness.

Such an imperialist system has proven resilient. Its organised dimension subsumes the working class and the formation of its ideology. Its oscillation between forms

of chauvinist social democracy and fascism shifts in response to the power of anti-systemic labour. Whereas crises of overproduction conjoined with acute income inequality raise the rate of luxury consumption, the waste component in consumer products, militarism acted out in imperialist wars is altogether waste commodities. Militarism grew alongside the crisis of capital not just as its adjunct. It is the principal relation and sphere of capital's reproduction. Naturally, it also culturally reproduces the subject that determines the production of waste. The war-related cultural stock, the spread of democracy by drones, re-weaponises militarism and its imperialist practice.

At yet a more abstract level, imperialism is the state of becoming of the global law of value in its most violent forms. A sociological understanding of imperialism does not preclude the use of structural concepts such as core/periphery or East/West nor limit them to geography. These are ideological descriptors, which assign structures to the forms of class struggle. Arthur K. Davis, a pioneering theorist of core/periphery applied the conceptual dyad to the study of the relation of the native Indians to the white Canadian settlers (Davis 1960). The overwhelming repression reigning upon the surviving Canadian Indian population in the 1960s is a continuity of expropriation by annihilation. Indian morbidity, their principal cause of death and a life expectancy that is about half that of the white folk are continuations of the Canadian white settler society's mode of imperialist extermination. As a paragon of structurally racist formations, Canada's hate culture is of the standard sort in which everyone is equal before the law, but some are highly unequal socially.

For Davis, metropolis and hinterland, cast as ideological hypotheses, are the instrumentalized forms at the heart of the class struggle. They bring to light the structures affecting the continuing slow massacre of the natives.³ Similarly, the use of core/periphery or North/South as structural cleavages primarily mirrors the class power and ideological chasms between imperialism and national liberation movements. These social cleavages are antecedent to war and expropriation by financial means. Whiteness and other social and cultural identities predate capital. They acquire their new genocidal character and function as per the exigencies of capital. They are the identity that capital as subject personifies in the shape of a given social structure. Together, the resultant of class struggle and its ideological formations constitute capital. The class struggle reacquires a new form of social organisation, an identity or a structure, which then lays down the demarcation lines between capital and labour. In differentials of the same capital, just as the white colonial of yesteryears exterminates, so does the democratic-liberal capital surrounded by token brown people.

³It should come as no surprise that the politics of Canadian liberalism, just as its earlier genocidal practice, devastated the lives of natives. The data from the mid-eighties show that in most socio-economic indicators, the native population fares so badly when compared to the white cohort. See Canada 150: whitewashing the genocidal history of colonialism <http://communist-party.ca/statement/2526>.

2.5 Lenin's Imperialism

Lenin refers to imperialism as parasitic or decaying capitalism, in which oligarchies strive 'for domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations' (Lenin 1916). It is nation exploiting nation of which, as I have emphasised in Kadri (2017a, b), the principal form of exploitation is commercial exploitation and, only subordinately, super-exploitation, which earmarks imperialism.

As such, it is not a replication of primitive accumulation in the colonies, forms of primitive accumulation, the forced transformation of the private labourer into the social labourer appear everywhere. The real primitive accumulation mostly appears not in the case of the single worker or the communities of the English countryside, but in the case of transforming the private property of a nation, including its people, the resources of a developing nation owned by its people, into the strewn socially available assets ready to be engaged or dispensed of in the capitalist production process. Imperialism deploys these resources either in slave-like work conditions or into waste through austerity and bombardment. Its chief mode of exploitation is all the developing resources via state destruction/control. It is a higher degree of exploitation that defines a higher rate of surplus value than any other because it is slavery. Horne's (2017) account of how the rise of the commercial class in Europe unleashed massive slavery and American Indian and other genocides, the measures of which founded the rise of capitalism, corresponds with Marx's position.

Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that has given the colonies their value; it is the colonies that have created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.... Without slavery, North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe out North America from the map of the world, and you will have anarchy – the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations (Marx 1847).

The other significant point apart from how Marx established how modern capitalism has been built on the backs of enslaved labour is that slavery has given the colonies their *value*. Value requires a market for exchange and a mode of exploitation to be produced. Commercial exploitation, the consumption of lives incarnating value is itself an exercise of the law of value and a process of capitalist production. The consumption of Africans and American Indians in slavery and genocidal war is itself a stage in production and a measure of exchange under capitalism. A rising commercial class, the class with us to date in the form of financial capital, practices commercial exploitation via imperialism. Commercial exploitation prevailed under primitive accumulation and it involves slavery in individual cases or *en masse*—the enslavement of nations. The forms of primitive accumulation experienced in Europe, the pauperising of the peasants by foreclosures to reduce their power and create the wage slavery masquerading as free wage labour, is practiced as outright genocide and slavery in the colonies. So pervasive were the gains from slavery according to Horne (2017), such that John Locke stipulated that 'every freeman of Carolina shall

have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion so ever (Quoted from Horne 2017). The system according to Horne runs on slave rather than free wage labour.

The early commercial exploitation arrangements occurring in the primitive phase of capitalism have been supplanted and replaced by a system of commercial exploitation characterised by combined austerity and imperialist wars carried out under the veneer of humanitarianism. Full blown capital articulates peripheral modes of production, and because there is only one capitalism, it is the highest form of capital that identifies with capitalism. The higher form of capital, the category of capital used as its reference point, is not that of the Northern liberal state. It is its articulation by violence of the Southern states.

There is the powerful capital of the centre with which other capitals are articulated. The past practice of primitive accumulation, 'the imposition of capitalist relations by blood and fire', persists to one degree or another everywhere, as it must since the crisis of capital also persist. Commercial exploitation is a degree of exploitation that involves the consumption of de-subjectified social classes, slaves without a modicum of negotiating power of the free wage labourer. In English primitive accumulation, the expelled labourer enters a work contract as a slave-wage earner to be industrially exploited, whereas in the colonies, the commercial exploitation attendant on primitive accumulation imposed by imperialist guns, even that superficially free contractual affair is annulled. Imperialist violence condemns whole nations to absolute or relative slavery—with only minor conditions of wage slavery.

The Leninist designated phenomena particular to the imperialist stage (beginning at the turn of the last century), such as capital concentration and centralisation, monopoly finance and export of capital, and the division of territory are a dialectical whole that simultaneously grows by market expansion and brutal violence (Lenin 1916). On top of that, the general 'characteristic of capitalism' that the ownership of capital, the money capital and the rentier are separated from the application of capital to production, 'imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which this separation reaches vast proportions' (Lenin 1916). It is even separated from war as sphere of production. More important, 'the supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy; it means that a small number of financially powerful states stand out among all the rest. The extent to which this process is going on may be judged from the statistics on emissions, i.e., *the issue of all kinds of securities*' (Lenin 1916). It is not only that the US floods the global market with the issue of securities and T-bills, but it also boosts the burgeoning culture of financial parasitism, which breeds an imperialist class whose higher bent for war pushes against the walls of the modern nuclear deterrent. There is a reasonability to history as capital. As sturdier becomes its rule, the more it will reach its logical end, the more it will curtail its organised dimension, specifically that which may thwart capital's inner drive for war. This organised dimension, the category that at the same time creates the stabilising welfare state of the North and the imperialist belligerence in the South, may erode not only because of capital's crisis, but also because of the ideological defeatism of labour. It is at that intersection of labour's defeatism with capital's necessity for

war that the unthinkable becomes possible. Because these ontological crises have not come to maturity during Marx's time, one cannot ruminate Marx's critique of political economy for a holistic theory of modern imperialism.

However, Marx also envisioned the centrality of imperialism. An accounting scheme assessing what it takes to cover the cost of labour's sustenance or to lower necessary labour as per Marx (1867), does not entail fighting unions only, it is predicated upon changes to the mode of production to which imperialism and commercial exploitation are precursors. The order of the changes occurring in the more industrial centre of an integrated global production system originates in imperialism, in the de-subjectification of the developing world. Neglecting Marx's social philosophy for his economics de-revolutionises Marx.

Lenin's characterisations of the new features of his age, what was new about imperialism in his time, are a totality whose analytical breakdown, his five characteristics of imperialism in the monopoly finance age, is presented for the sake of perspicuity. Lenin was accused of being undialectical over such exposure. Theoretically, these features are social time-defined moments whose mediation in imperialist wars ease 'the contradiction between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and spheres of influence for finance capital on the other' (Lenin 1916). Here is the motivational relationship which situates Lenin's approach in dialectics—there is a contradiction of accumulation resolved in war. Lenin asks, what means other than *war* does capitalism have to overcome its contradictions? Lenin is quite dialectical. After all, Lenin annotated the *Conspectus of Hegel's logic and practiced revolution*. Praxis is the definitive dialectic.

Lenin's imperialism elevates the notion of capital as the European 'war of each against all' to the international level. The novelty in his structure is the necessity of inter-imperialist war and the war of imperialists against the colonies. He displaces the first contradiction of capital, the labour–capital contradiction, to a North–South pole. The inter-imperialist war, the second contradiction of capital, takes its cue from that displacement. Both contradictions are simultaneously wars and forms of exploitation superimposed onto the colonies. The second contradiction is not secondary; his imperialism is a theory of irrevocable inter-imperialist wars. Addressing the necessity of inter-imperialist rivalry for capital, Mészáros (2015) notes that 'the formation of modern nations has been accomplished under the class leadership of the bourgeoisie... in accord with the socioeconomic imperatives inherent in the self-expansory drive of the multiplicity of capitals and their drive for greater territorial control, in ever-intensifying conflicts with one another, which might culminate in the potential annihilation of humankind in our own time'. In the in the absence of anti-systemic struggle, the nuclear deterrent tempers an otherwise war-prone system, but for how long?

As the crisis of capital deepens, the social measures taken to redress the condition for value creation worsen. Apart from the national class wars, inter-capitalist wars are also value formation processes. Value formation is both destruction and creation of value occurring in social time. In its somewhat unrestrained forms, the forms of capital currently experienced, which entrench the waste component in production, the law of value realises its logical objectives. Absurdly, it may unquestionably consume

the lives of labour in war and austerity. Imperialist wars as an application of the law of value culminate in the ultimate condition of waste, the logical end that only fools can imagine to be true (a pun on George Bernard Shaw), annihilation.

Imperialists do not reconcile their differences by sharing the imperialist loot in its moneyed form. They either must control production at source or control the channels of value transfer through finance. There is a threshold at which diplomacy between imperialists ceases and inter-rich nations conflict flares. Lenin's explanation of that threshold is also sociological because in his version of imperialism, a financial-industrial class that is moved by the higher turnover of the financial surplus and its signals, and that is engaged in competition by the degree it imposes control and commercial forms of exploitation on the colonies, competes for the value as well as the moneyed share. Finance, exchange, and mergers and acquisitions do not create value, but their intensification shifts the accent on waste production or the sort of value that dereproduces society. The regimentation, regulation and consumption of labour and labour power in a holistic production process by the most egregious means do create value. The bigger European colonial powers in Africa tolerated the smaller colonial powers, such as the Belgians, because they carried out the atrocities necessary for commercial exploitation at their behest, else the Belgians would have been booted out of the Congo (Emmanuel 1970). A sociological understanding of imperialism, a comprehension of production as a social process, offers a stronger theoretical foundation, a foundation rooted in value relations, as opposed to price manifestation, to inter-imperialist conflicts.

2.6 Imperialism and Nature

I will reword or re-abstract some thoughts to illustrate the relation of value to its money form. In relation to the concept of surplus value, the flow of wealth is the outcome of surplus labour or the labour above that which is necessary in value terms for labour to subsist. That 'production is first a social relation' relays the subject to object *rapport* in the value relationship. Social production situates agency in class rather than the development of the productive forces and or reified capital. In other words, profits arise from consuming the value of the cheapened labour inputs. The value of necessary labour falls by means of coercion or war, or other measures that cheapen labour. The steadily higher rate at which capital metabolises man and nature in production underwrites the profit rates. While capital acts first to cement its rule (primacy of politics), the 'economic', the moneyed form of the surplus value symbolised in profits, is said to be determined in the last moment: capitalists compete for a higher moneyed share of profits rooted in a surplus value that grows by the emaciated or pre-maturely extinguished lives of the *Lazarus* classes. The money form signification, the dollar value, varies as the mediated *measure* of higher surplus value and/or lower necessary labour. Considering *the subject* in the value relation and technology as part of *the historically amassed surplus value*, the higher profit rates imply a higher rate of imperialist aggression.

Accumulation by waste, the militarism and war economies, are conduits of value in the global market. That war as waste is an end in itself is broader than just a wasteful productive procedure undertaken so long as its product can be profitably imposed on the market (as per Mészáros 1995). It is also more wide-ranging in scale than the concept of the military/industrial complex, which ‘appropriates and dissipates apparently limitless resources and over-produced capital funds’ (Mészáros 1995). The accent in my approach is upon the wasting of human lives as a domain of accumulation and a process of production in which depopulation derives from the intrinsic motion of capital, its competition which replaces living labour with dead labour and literally dead labour.

Marx’s characterisation of capital as a horrid relationship was not only metaphorical. The crushing of Eastern industrial development to launch Western capitalism is an industry of killing, and the process itself is a subject or a historical agent of European industrialism and its industrial revolution. Marx’s discovery of labour power as a commodity, whose exchange regulates the reproduction of labour, strictly expresses the fact that there are many more dead people in the East, resurrected as zombies in the constant capital of the West. Technological advance, so to speak is more than just the German labour that went into making the tool and die required for machinery.

Yet, liberal marxism never ceases to remind us that capitalism is progressive. The already established loss of species, the damage to man and nature so far, plus the many forecasts that the planet is a minute or two to midnight, write off any notion of progress. Although the risk of nuclear conflagration factors into assessment of ‘midnight’, here I only consider the ‘by now’ incurred ecological disaster. Under capital too, there is less of nature to value in the future than the present in absolute terms. The empirics of the loss, the dollar amount, cannot be rendered with any reasonable degree of exactitude, but figuratively it has been put as either being crushed by a 50- or 100-tonne train; little difference does it make.

Aside from the cost of natural depredation and the permanent loss of natural stock, the fundamental issue remains that capital devours the planet for the luxury of the few. It is not the physical limit of resource use that is at issue, it is rather the relationship of capital, which reproduces man and the social nature by the disposal of man and nature. The depletion-scarcity of a natural resource is often constructed socially, but even if it were true in the odd case, exhausted resources cannot convince capital to alter its mindset. Things do not speak. Such is the work of the class struggle.

Eco-imperialism sickens the Southern working class. Emissions relate to wealth and 70 percent of all global carbon emissions come from 20 percent of the world’s population (K. Anderson on Democracy Now, Oct 9, 2019). Because the minutes to midnight’s clock ticks faster by pollution and other misuses of nature, the excessive abuse of the environment by some peripheral formations, their protracted mass suicide through abuse of their own environment, is ironically a sort of mutually assured weapon of mass destruction.

In such a secularly auto-implosive order, the very use of the dictum progressive capitalism echoes a class position. For the sake of argument let us posit that progress is *relative* to the social efficacy (social not private or economic) of resources available to a society in a specific historical phase. That is there is harm inflicted on man and

nature, but the gains imparted by capitalism, our historical stage, offset such harm. To begin with, progressive capitalism rings like a cigarette advert. It is a catchphrase that resembles the hypothetical concept of the consumer surplus in neoclassical economics. People should be happy with the price at which they bought their commodities because otherwise they could have been paying a much higher price. The difference between what they paid and what they could have paid is the neoclassical predicate of the consumer surplus. In welfare terms, this definition is nonsensical because there is no negative welfare or people who cannot pay at all. However, let us just say that the concepts of consumer surplus and progressive capitalism are sort of ideological stopgaps that assuage the guilt of those who are disproportionately benefiting from the rents attendant upon a barbaric production process.

Historically, and I refer to twentieth-century social democracy, almost every social alternative, the more the socialised health and education, performed better than societies with uninhibited capital. The social alternatives, as proven in terms of the social efficacy defined above, were better than the private ones. At least, the post-war golden age beats the leaden-age neoliberalism. However, capital has inculcated the pro-forma phrase ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA) to this current system in the popular cultures almost everywhere. To this very notion that there is no alternative, Mészáros, who happened to be a professor of logic, used to say that he would fail a student who says that there are no alternatives to an existing reality. Yet the catchphrases TINA and the market economy (capitalism) is progressive continue to foreground the advance of capital by the very generation, which has suffered and is likely to suffer most from such an advance.

The real price being paid for what a minority enjoys in luxury consumption has always been too high. Capital has its roots struck in colonialism. For that leisured minority, most working people can be cordoned off by some identity as the inferior others. The current and most outstanding labels for the others’ inferiority are: they do not deserve to share in the wealth because they are too primitive to use advanced machinery, or they are the ‘others’ by their national identity or colour, they can be poor because of constructed labels such as their culture, etc., but humanity cannot fully cordon-off the environment. The toxins in the environment extend to the physical being appended to any social class—it gets everyone—in proportion to class position. Social humans, not the endogenous inner workings of nature, impact the environment most in this epoch of the Anthropocene. Now that nature’s blowback, its global warming, has come home to roost, capitalism has unfolded on its *essence*—a social system of entropic auto-consumption growing by the rate at which it over-metabolises man and nature.⁴ Capital grows mainly by waste. No amount of consumer surplus

⁴Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the

accumulated so far redeems the current, let alone the future losses of planet earth; on logical grounds, wither progressive capitalism.

The narrow environmentalism of 'save fauna and flora' neglects the organic nature of capital for which it is necessary to expand not only by metabolising nature, but also man. In the making of surplus value, nature is consumed only to consume man. The latter phenomenon, the consumption of man as borne out by the laws of capital, the absolute and/or relative exterminations engaging the Third World, remains less noticed in mainstream media than natural degradation. There is a clear vested interest why the privileged class favours the disciplining of environmental pillage, but not the drive for imperialist wars and genocide. A degraded environment quietly injures its constituents, whereas genocides, the practice of commercial exploitation, contribute to rising surplus value and profits as a result of the immediate pecuniary benefits of war. For the ruling classes, the current situation could be described as a trade-off between slow self-inflicted damage from environmental toxins versus huge wealth from imperialist wars. Both wars and natural slaughter through the consumption of labour and labour power, contribute to surplus value.

However, this consumption of man and nature by capital, in the case of man way before his or her historically ordained time, is an internality to capital, as opposed to the ludicrous concept of externality. It has reduced the price of consumables, the necessary labour, for nearly five centuries. Slavery, the genocides of the natives, and the destruction of Syria and Iraq are not killing for sport. They are the commercial exploitation or the 'pedestal', as per Marx, of Northern wage slavery (Marx 1894). Man and nature are commodified and as commodities, they are co-determined with the whole of production. They are neither before nor after the sale of a run of the mill commodity, a car or a bomb; they are realised in social time, the time at the command of capital. Social time is not in any way similar to chronological or sequential ordered time. It is the time in which what happens in a day equals what happens in generations (paraphrasing Lenin) and more. It is real time or the time in which the analytical breakdown of cause/effect assumes its dialectical unity.

As global society manages the reproduction of its labour in production for profits, one is reminded that man, the social class man, is the first and last building block of capital accumulation. She serves as input with her labour or her life and receives a share of the social product—a human being is used as the input to an output allegedly destined to serve mankind. Within the confines of the existing capitalist order, the order that destroys resources, resulting in the already established and impending environmental disaster and the persistent depopulation, capitalism can be said to be regressive in absolute, as opposed to relative, terms.

Externality is logically or formally true, but realistically or operationally false. As a concept, it is an anti-working class weapon, just as every other concept of the

present forlorn state of those countries... Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.' (Engels 1876) Engels F. (1925) *Dialectics of Nature*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.

mainstream. It is the cant that conceals capital's waste commodities from the rest of its production operations—although production is a single indivisible process under capital.

Let us entertain this externality concept. As mentioned in the preface, the extinction of so many irreplaceable species may yet prove Marx wrong: Humanity appears to have given itself more problems than it could solve—Marx says the opposite of that. In another example, Africans and Arabs live longer not because of the oneness of humanity, but as a result of drugs for malaria initially developed to treat bovine parasitic diseases in British dairy farms. Also recalling, the 'negative externality', the waste, is the dominant trend in the development of capital. The same alienated production processes, the socially unaccountable measures of technological development, apply to nearly all progress experienced under capital. **Even, the momentary social gains of the welfare state in the North are in part the bribes to a working class that combats the rise of communism and national liberation movements elsewhere.** Yet, western civilisation never ceases to remind the planet that without its great discoveries, life expectancy would have been much lower than that which prevails. Colloquially capital says to working classes, true we end your life much earlier than you could live to under the prevailing circumstances, but if it was not for my more advanced European civilisation, you would have died at say 20 years of age in your jungles or desert. This Western culture, the culture of capital, its stock of knowledge erected by imperialist wrought wealth, is such that few venture beyond the lifebuoy ethic to ask, why are Yemeni life expectancies 30 or 40 years lower than Europe's? It is this sort of cultural (culture as in store of knowledge) rape that inseminates defeatism in the developing world and to which Amílcar Cabral replied as follows. 'A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture. Thus, it may be seen that if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture' (Cabral 1970).

Value is this particular relationship in which a labourer, through the labour invested in the commodity, produces things that it does not own or have use for, and that such a contradiction (abstract labour (value) vs. use value) resolves as the commodity exchanges for money (exchange value), from which the labouring class must earn less than what it takes to acquire a decent standard of living relative to the wealth prevailing at the time. The commodity is the object and the people organised in social relationships to produce it by their socially necessary labour are the subject, and together they are the first moment of the value relationship. Unrestrained or domesticated by the social fascism of Europe masquerading as social democracy, this contradiction implies that it is practically impossible under capital's ideological hegemony for the plight of man and nature to prevail.

In theory, the law of value corresponds to the historical disasters that lay in its trail of destruction. Here and there the war, repression and regimentation abound. As to measurement across time, it is absurd to compare someone dying from poverty

and depleted uranium exposure in Fallujah at the age of say 43, and at the same time, say she should be happy, because in Sumerian or Neolithic times, she would have at best lived to 23 years. Apart from its incoherence, time is of shifting quality, or conditioned by the set of social relations determining its structure within a given period. Comparing the development of different historical periods along chronological time requires qualification to lessen arbitrariness. In any case, irreversible time does not easily lend itself to measurement, not because of the ludicrous ‘stationarity’ of the mainstream, but because of shifts in its content, in the prevailing phenomenon, which call for a re-periodisation of history.

Under the crushing weight of the reigning ideology, it would not have been possible to protrude into the mainstream discussion with the point that capital wastes humans, especially as part of the peripheral environment, until the environmental problem caught the attention of the media. The environment may be the Trojan Horse of the cause of the masses. That a member of the Royal Academy insinuates that depopulation is a solution to overpopulation does not inconvenience capital and its scholarship. Reworking the numbers of capital’s victims by mathematical formulae is the acme of positive science. Ruling class ideologies and their corresponding institutions serve the imperialist class often with recourse to the normative considerations of protestant self-flagellation. The sort of auto-repression that says doing the work of capital is doing the work of God.

It is also worthwhile from capital’s ideological optic for Madelaine Albright to author a recent book titled ‘Fascism: A Warning’, as she did lately; for in this instance capital arrogates to itself the right to mass murder by the pretence of crusading against fascism. Evidently, the fascism Albright targets is not real fascism, but the fascism captured by the American war movies. The real fascism, the racial/cultural superiority of the West, its ironclad forms of organisation and the whole of the international trading and financial systems corporatized by the power of NATO, is always with us in imperialist practice. It assumes, as it must, novel ideological forms, as in R2P, whose industrial exercise combines the destruction of man and environment.

In capital’s class-based ethics, through its meliorism or technological determinism, all the past waste can be righted by new technology. What occurs now is *just*, no matter how horrible, because at a future date capital as progress will make the world better. Mechanisation, the functional response to social expansion privately appropriated by capital, disserve people. Competing capitalists must create the conditions for unlimited supplies of indigent labour and captured natural inputs to produce with the cheapest possible costs. What had bettered the world in the past is its social policy, its land reforms and universal health care, etc. and these are the anti-capital personified, the antithesis in the law of value. At this historical juncture, gradational improvement, piecemeal reversal of natural decay, carried out under bourgeois reformism is no longer an option. As Mészáros (2001) had put it, ‘for the extermination of humanity is the ultimate concomitant of capital’s destructive course of development. And the world of that third possibility, beyond the alternatives of ‘socialism or barbarism’ would be fit only for cockroaches, which are said to be able to endure lethally high levels of nuclear radiation. This is the only rational meaning of capital’s third way’.

The open shafts by which capital escapes the regulatory measures on a distraught planet are plenty and vast.

Thus far, there is an inner penchant for the adage ‘capitalism is progress’ in western Marxist or liberal discourse. For instance, Joan Robinson’s line, ‘it is worse not to be exploited than to be exploited by capitalists’ is one such refrain. A natural end of such statement would be Ayn Rand’s advice to the natives not to fight the civilising mission of white men, else they would continue to live a primitive existence. Under capitalism, little if anything or any corner escapes the guns of capital. Because gunning down native people, or a similar activity of immiseration or a debauchment of the environment, is itself a form of *production articulated within capital*, the social relation that is capital does not impart progress. There might have been progressing in the quality and quantity of some detectable aspects of the commodities produced so far, but that is an instantiation of a social relationship that cannot for internal class reasons be construed as progressive. In terms of what could be done with the technology, in relation to what is done, capitalism is the most regressive stage across human history. For any rising living standard under capitalism, the mechanics are such that more working people and nature *must* be immiserated or annihilated. Of course, there is an inescapable ethical side to that, but what I mean here is the material side of the substance of value, the reaction for remaking social life under capital is catalysed by consuming human life itself. The use of the verb *must* is not meant for hyperbolic reasons. Such process is both logically and historically demonstrable.

Another platitude for capitalism as progress is Joseph Schumpeter’s capital’s creative destruction; last used by Harvey in the Smith–Harvey debate (2018). At first such a statement appears benign, because since the dawn of time, any creation requires destruction. However, just as any ideological platitude, this caption of subject (man) and object (nature) is so true across all history such that its use is quite malign. To counter argue this position, I will rephrase and expand the point on the tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise.

First, there is the macabre. Creativity cannot abound in the replacement of living by literally dead labour; the value outlays in the organic composition of capital involve human lives as value, or the disciplining of the labour process, the regulation of labour’s reproduction, by imperialism practiced as the law of value. Intensive production under monopoly capital requires an increasing number of dead labourers as inputs—here factory production begins in the bombing of Iraq. The immiseration/deaths of labour and capital are self-reinforcing in no sequential order. Capitalistic technological change is a product of a fetishized market. It is alien to society and its social needs. Second, the argument for progress or lack thereof is not an empirical test of whether society has more destruction than creation relative to the conditions of ‘stone-age populations’. It is also not about the discovery of new technology, which scraps the stock of old machinery precipitating a crisis, all the while improving the technological component in the productive forces (capital de-valorisation theory as in Perelman [1999]). It is neither some ingenious change of social relations in the English countryside that ushers capitalism by increased productivity, as per Wood (2002). The inevitability of producing under competitive conditions for a growing global population and its rising demand for higher output would contin-

uously resolve the contradiction between the moving parts of the machine and its energy source resulting in higher technology (reducing kinetic loss as per Marx's chapter on machinery [1867]). Such machine advance under capitalism is not social, cultural or civilizational progress. Technical progress is socially funded and privately appropriated as means of waste production and slaughter. Historically, as opposed to subjective probability, machine advance cannot be sort of 90% acceptable and 10% unsatisfactory. It is either or.

Furthermore, the capitalism as progress proclamations are Eurocentric. They neglect some four billion people in the Third World whose labour and lives are excessive to an overproducing system. They overlook the constant social crisis plaguing the planet, as distinct from a crisis constituted by negative GDP growth over two successive quarters in the Western business cycle. In a globally integrated production process, the frequency of Western economic crises lays the groundwork for the constant social crises elsewhere, including its wars. Capital already disengages much of the world's human resources, just as it scraps old machinery. Measurement of progress depends more on the value system espoused by the measurer; that is, the values of the class in charge, rather than the actual or objective development of the value relationship.

As said, capital metabolises through value destruction as well as value creation, not just by scrapping the value of old machines. Value is a social relationship presupposed (ontologically) by objectified labour (substance) (presupposed as used by Rubin [1972]), but whose subject is political agency or the resultant of the class struggle. Capital's ultimate end is to scrap the subject in labour, to objectify labour. From the exchange value stage of the value relationship, the law of value emerges as allocator of resources, not just the machine resource, all resources. Nonetheless, disengaging old technology and renewing it enhances the technical composition of capital and the combined production of civilian-end use and waste commodities, or just waste. Together, competition and/or blind accumulation force the production of waste upon capital, albeit, at higher rates. In the contest to overcome space by time, capital's time becomes social or abstract time, or the form in which the desired labour time for time. In the next chapter I discuss how capital has to cheapen labour time, shorten transaction and distance time.

Before I move to the next chapter I must put things in perspective: the real argument for progress is about the achievements of *internationalism*, as opposed to purely nationalist forms of working class struggles. Internationalism is in a race with time in which the working class must in the last moment see capital as a fiction of its own making and collapse the distance between its actual and potential power. As a rule, inter-working class solidarity above nationalism, sectarianism or sectionalism is the benchmark for internationalism and progress.

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Chapter 3

Value and Space



Abstract Humanity produces waste and by now it has produced more waste than other useful goods. Waste reduces life expectancy by gradation of class. The lowest classes reside in the space known as the Third World and are subjected to wrath of imperialism, eco-imperialism or wars. They are most affected by waste. Working people pay dearly to clean and to treat themselves from the ills of waste, which in turn undermines the share of working class wages by the degree of waste tax or by the degree it shortens the lives of working people. It undermines the value of global necessary labour to the benefit of surplus labour, and hence, profits. Although waste is an existential threat, it burgeons within the confines of the profit system to the relative benefit of the bourgeoisie. All are hurting by the decline of nature, but the working class more than others. War is the most effective form of waste production. In this Chapter, I reincorporate the war and waste economies into Marxian thought as value relations. It is not for ethical reasons only that imperialist war and environmental wreckage should stop, it because on an ontological or value relation level the victims of war and toxins are commodities sold and consumed as waste by the imperialist victors of war.

3.1 Forms of Exploitation

Fast moving productive forces, of which mechanisation is one component, also heighten the speed at which production relations change. The part of production relations that is imperialism obliges by cheapening inputs. Recalling: to raise profit rates, capital must reduce necessary labour, the share of value wrought by workers and their families, which in turn imposes upon capital the task of altering the mode of production (Marx 1867). Imperialist wars rearticulate less developed modes of production, best restructure value relations and re-foist the rule of capital.

The impact of war or environmental degradation upon the shortening of human lives is endogenous to the system. Commodity fetishism, the rule of commodities, has an insatiable appetite for cheaper inputs, only to be tempered by working class solidarity. While individual capitalists pursue profits, capital's organised dimension,

the institutions of finance-monopoly capital representing the global class whose wealth is dollarized, induce US military spending and reaffirm capital as the dominant social relationship by balancing resource redistribution.

Forms of exploitation mutate. They went from the early manufacture or cottage-type industry and the entrapment of slaves (early commercial exploitation) to the recent more generalised forms of commercial exploitation, exemplified in the wars and famines of the modern age. In one particular instantiation of commercial exploitation, the destruction of weak states evicts part of their populations and creates coolie-like floating mass of refugees. Modern forms of slavery prevail to prop up capital accumulation as it experiences deeper crises. Commercial exploitation is both pedestal for industrial capital, it generates the slave-like labour, and it is an industry itself. Its war-side is militarism at work. Just as commercial exploitation is pedestal to wage exploitation, so too is wage exploitation pedestal for the propagation of commercial exploitation by the continued practice of imperialism.

Lenin's imperialism of the finance monopoly age cannot be reduced to its symptoms observed in a mass of wealth by geographic space, super-exploitation and flows of financial capital (as per Harvey 2018). It is principally about the transformed historical agent, the monopoly financial class practicing value usurpation by financial means egged on by financial expansion. What to do with the huge stock of amassed monopoly/finance moneyed-surplus reshapes the money owner into an imperialist itching for the next war. The mode of consciousness in the dialectical category of substance has to change for the substance of imperialism to change, otherwise growth in the degree or shape of material wealth does not imply a change in the definition or quality of imperialism. Here, imperialism is a historical stage governed by the strength of revolutionary consciousness.

The imperialist centre enjoys imperial rents through the value carried forth by the money forms that subsume more than just the value of immediate super-exploitation, but also the value attendant on violent reproduction under the pressures of the labour process. That is so because the process of monetisation and commodification under advanced capitalism integrates all sorts of concrete labour into a single category, abstract labour. Moreover, the measurement and recognition of the surplus value usurped from the Third World cannot be derived solely on the basis of 'the last 40 years spike' in Southern super-exploitation and rising capital outflows therefrom as per Smith (2012). **Super-exploitation as a foundation of wealth is a ubiquitous condition of the capital relationship across time and the recent outflows of value in the money form need not necessarily imply that more surplus value arises only therefrom. The value turnover cycle in social time is different from that of conventional time.**

That Chinese companies superexploit Africa and re-export capital or that an African ruling class exploits its own working class and exports financial capital to Swiss banks does not qualify them as imperialists. China is hard at work dumping its American dollar assets that are more a burden than conveyor belts of imperialist rent acquisition. The data provided by Michael Roberts shows that China is not investing abroad through its state companies because of 'excess capital' or even because the rate of profit in state and capitalist enterprises has been falling (Roberts 2015, 2018). Roberts criticised such an approach for lending the lie to the common idea among

some Marxist economists that China's export of capital is similar to the export of capital by imperialist nations, whose investments in projects abroad absorb 'surplus capital' at home. In the case of China, the possibility of growth from internal investment or via an internal flying geese paradigm is significant, given its size. However, Roberts raises concerns over the law of value operating in China with billionaires at the top undermining 'the commanding heights' approach of the communist party, the idea that although the economy is capitalist, it is commanded by communists. He cites the afflictions of the momentary relaxation of capital control in 2017 as an event that may just augur the nature of things to come.

However, the operation of the law of value is not only internal to China. It is also about US imperialist squeeze and how that shapes class formation within China. China's defensive position is fortifying labour in China. It is no secret that China's investments prioritise security, especially, energy security as with its investments in Malaysia and its potential port in Oman—there, negotiations stalled over China's request to use the port for military ends (China Daily 2015).¹ China itemises its national economy together with national security. It converts the moneyed assets into real physical assets abroad to dump the dollar and gain future footholds.

The law of value, here US aggression, takes its cue from market signals and operates socially and politically. It is international and political, with economics being relevant in the last moment. It cannot be partitioned into this or that country's law of value. The reason Japan accepted devaluation during the Plaza Accords of 1985 is because its state and capital lacked autonomy vis-à-vis US capital. That is not the case with China. The rise of Xi Jinping and his advocacy of a return to Marxism is not all the product of his personal wit. A return to more socialist practice, the building of the national front, is the one way China's nationalistic capital, as well as its socialised sectors, can sustain the US's impending crunch. China's social and economic measures respond to the demands of the national economy also as it comes under imperialist pressure.

In addition to imperial rent extortion, for the symptoms of super-exploitation and fixed capital assets derived value to define imperialism (as per Harvey 2018), they have to inform about the reproduction of the global labour process. The Harvey (2018) scheme, the fixed capital resolving the overproduction imbroglio, is not the decisive relation underscoring the regimentation or reproduction of labour. Imperialism regulates the reproduction of labour via the combined impact of austerity and wars of encroachment. **Neither Russia nor China control the International Financial Institutions and their culture of neoliberalism-imposing austerity.** Moreover, all the symptoms of imperialism without the *wars of encroachment* symptom do not make imperialism.

Apart from its military reach, the cultural hegemony of the US, its underlying belief system that all other humans are dispensable, exteriorise in every symbolic form it expresses. Even the liberally touted issue of gender equality *others* developing societies, which impose gender repression issuing from an opposition to imperial-

¹China Daily (2015). China's Silk Road Initiative 'offers vast opportunities' China Daily, 10 November 2015, available at <http://en.rdcy.org/displaynews.php?id=16302>.

istically imposed underdevelopment. In some developing Islamic societies, gender repression, which mounts as figuration in mores and tradition, is an imperialistically reared modern practice to oppose the symbols of Western societies. The war of identity feeds the imperialist war. Imperialism chooses an enemy that incites war and does not undermine capital's rock, its private property. Perhaps not so anecdotally, but all one has to do is take note of the many university workshops relegating developing world problems to culture or religion, in order to prove that the US is the sole cultural or imperialist power.

As imperialism concentrates the expression of the law of value, its practice must tell us how labour is regimented or socially organised to allocate a stock of labour power determined from the total labour available in production, to create value through imperialistically imposed forms of exploitation. Unlike Ricardo's theory of value, determined by the physical amounts of labour, the material substance, measured in an average private or concrete labour time, Marx's value is said to be assessed *after* market deliberations. Ricardo's value is an unmediated concrete substance. The different qualities and intensities of labour are non-additive. Their object, the commodity, experiences exchange by the one-sided functional needs of society, as opposed to having a momentum of its own, as a social object whose internal contradictions transform it into a money form. The commodity serves a function to society but Marx's socially necessary labour time, abstract labour, is alienated and mediated in money form. The abstract or the general is the state of becoming of the many concrete or particular concrete labours that acquire a measure in money form through exchange.

Ricardo's reification or thingification of value, that value is just the labour in the object, allows for the use of the value category as a nationalistic category; value within the national space. From a Ricardian angle, the formation of fixed capital assets over a specific national space can be independent of the international financial and power relations that have fashioned them. The real world is only the material with which people work upon a specific space independent of its history. Such an approach permits us to posit that English wealth is the product of concrete English labour, the product of the physical and intellectual effort of only English workers, and not the interrelated or historically amassed value through imperialism. The history of the object is the history of the transformed material within it and not the social relations reconstituting it. Such is a metaphysical method of reasoning in which the concrete amounts to what is perceptible in a given space or span of time, whereas the abstract is a form of the concrete that cannot be seen, it is an ideal form.

The emphasis on *after* supra is just for theoretical determinacy, because in the overdetermined whole, where logical categories, form and content, essence and appearance, etc., follow no particular order, it is the logic of the market and its fetishism that dictates the intensity of the law of value. Marxian value is the 'particular' or 'concrete' labour mediated into a 'general' or abstract labour through the market for exchange. It is theoretically constructed from dialectical categories of thought explaining the development of labour as it ascends from concrete to abstract, social/private as opposed to an actuality that cannot be organised in thought, the eclectic selection of observations from an imperceptible whole. The latter simply says,

one picks and chooses facts from reality to satisfy one's desires; a theory whose rigour is either of the type 'I like it therefore it is true,' or 'if I can put my ideas in mathematical symbols, my theory is rigorous.' Marxian rigour is about following the development of the object in time, in relation to the social forces that shape it. It is historical rigour and uses the categories of logic to interpret the development of the subject, and hence it is rational; in reference to the dialectical law of unity between the rational and historical as per Ilyenkov (1977).

As said, this Marxian 'concrete' is different than an average time estimated from diverse conditions of labouring delivered into production as effective units of labour. It is the labourer as the social relationship. Such is not the metaphysical abstraction of man to which real man is some perversion thereof. The concrete is the development of the abstract, just as the abstract is the development of the concrete in the real history the object or as the development of the object itself as reflected in thought (Subjective dialectics) (Ilyenkov 1977). The share of labour socially allocated for commodity production would only be the material substance of value, its ontological determination or its state of physical being, which is the substratum of a law of value whose concrete totality is the intermediation of subject and object, or more broadly, how society decides on what to do with its resources *post*-market deliberations. Once the law of value dictates the development of society, the balance of the class struggle becomes the compass of its development.

In the forms it assumes historically, the law of value proceeds from an abstract/concrete one-sided situation into concrete/abstract or novel historical conditions (concrete and abstract are categories of thought or logic, not the sensually perceived nor immediacy). Society changes its forms of social organisation in relation to profit making and its related crises, and hence one must follow the history of the developments in these forms. Harvey's (2018) prism of imperialism as 'the differential geographical mobilities of capital, labour, money and finance and the rising power of rentiers and the shifting power balance between various factions of capital (e.g. between production and finance) as well as between capital and labour' is a false concreteness. It is a partial reflection of facts as they exist now, whose history is an un-interrelated Ricardian type concrete; imperialism is identical to things whose history is the history of things.

As a case in point, it is not a coincidence that militarism as a domain of accumulation and its imperialist wars are absent from such Eurocentric views. The question of whether militarism is a value and moneyed sphere, significant in and of itself, is not asked. Being selective of the facts, omitting developments in the militarism/war phenomena as regimentation, production of commodities and reproduction of labour, is to chop a leading component operating within the law of value manifest in imperialism as capital, as totality. The militarism, its associated class, and financial expansion are the core of imperialism.

Harvey acknowledges 'the significance of Marx's theory of relative surplus value which makes it possible for the physical standard of living of 'Northern' labour to rise even as the rate of exploitation increases to dramatic levels impossible to achieve through the absolute surplus value gained in the global South.' Another better Western machines and higher surplus value argument. Disputing Harvey's analytical/logical

point is just as impossible as disputing wages being equal to the marginal revenue productivity of labour in neoclassical economics. It is a tautological suggestion: the dollar-denominated wealth is greater in the North, and so is its surplus value, and vice versa. It is not just in the past that developing world industrial development was denied to predicate Northern industrialism, it continues to be denied.

Reality, however, it is not analytical and as I have already mentioned, the stages of the realisation of the commodity, including the realisation of labour power, are historically co-determined. In a process where technological innovation is also derived from war-alienated technology and the money form responds to imperialist power arising from the production of the very war-alienated technology and its realisation in war, it is imprudent to draw boundaries between relative and absolute surplus value. In any case, *immediacy, the mass of profits*, what is given in a phenomenon as a whole, annuls dichotomy, or the possibility of that whole developing from unrelated objects or antinomies. Historically, all and everything makes profits.

The divergence of the exchange value of labour power (the wage rate) from its value (the social cost or the value outlays on labour reproduction) in price form over time foreshadows the alienation of use value (the productivity of labour power so to speak) from the labourer and foregrounds the rate of exploitation. As the slave-like or commercial rate of exploitation rises, so does the departure of value from price, like an open scissor over time. However, time here is capital's time. It accounts for more than just incomes designated by GDP components measured over chronological time, or a designated period of the turnover cycle, which is often used to mirror the departure of value from price. Open scissor analysis to track the discrepancy between value and price, the sort that says the price of a Maxwell House coffee jar rose from ten to twenty times over the price of a kilo of coffee beans earned by the direct producer, cannot gauge the cost of reproduction responding to capital's compression of time nor the imperialistically imposed power and culture of submission reconstituted over centuries. It fails to notice the historical subject in the value relationship or the historical surplus value.

The same applies for Patnaik and Patnaik's (2016) notion of imperialism tailing the rising supply cost price of semi-tropical or tropical commodities. Imperialist expansion predates the imperialism associated with commodity expansion. The transition to capitalism is an auto-transformation resulting from the wealth wrought by an already existing imperialism altering the dominant social relation. There is a dialectic of continuity as well as discontinuity in history; there is no total negation of the past. History remains *sublated* accumulation by real acts in real time as it auto-negates gradually as well as in leaps and bounds; hence, the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity. The ex-ante or ex-post terminology deployed by Patnaik overrides social time. At one point in the argument it must be noted that just as the price of the semi-tropical good invites imperialism, imperialism revamps its price. Capital, in its imperialist form, does not identify with the concrete world of prices or price systems. Prices are products of the competition between the many capitals of capital. Competition is what capital does. It is not the *essence* of capital, imperialism is its essence. That said, the work of the Patnaiks remain a vital contribution to social science. My point is simply that in a class system amassing historical surplus value,

disputing resources and control of value formation, imperialism is a must with or without the tropics.

The Patnaiks account for the natural limits of value expansion, but not its limitless social dimension, the hidden capital. Humanity is social time determined, the time which is apprehended by reason and overcome by the ideology that opposes capital and its violently imposed conditions (Marx 1867). To begin a study of imperialism from the category of rising prices, limitation by agricultural space or to put things on a one to one basis between prices and imperialism, that the cost price moves up hence imperialism hastens, overlooks the fact that the initial price formation, the very idea of prices for these semi-tropical goods, is itself a development of imperialism. There cannot be an immediate interface between material circumstances and any sort of ideological development, and, or theory cannot emerge as pure spinoff on empirical observation without a categorisation by subject or agent of history. A better starting point would have been the making of commercial exploitation by a commercial class.

Capital remains hidden beyond the visible world (Althusser and Balibar 1965). It is the social relation that disembowels the forms of organisation of labour, its institutions, its ideologies and rights. The rise of commodity production is a synchronic development at the heart of imperialist expansion. History is not linear, a story of selected events or snapshots projected on a wall. It is subordinately the auto-transforming social conditions that are best read in terms of the dialectic of the ascent abstract to the concrete. Capital exists in social time, the abstract, while price forms are evidenced in their measure manifest chronological time; that appearance of the price form, appearance as one-sided abstraction, observed in the conventional measure of time, is one of the shapes that capital as essence assumes. It does so not by subjective assessment, but by the uncertainty appertaining to history.

Meanwhile, all the inputs into production, the globally integrated production process, all idle assets are legal or *de facto* property and, as such, are economic categories, influencing the production process and exchange either by being consumed, set aside or destroyed. That is another reason why we say nature is social nature; recalling the first is nature in unity with man, which reproduces man. These also include the variable capital consumed in a shorter time span to undergird a higher rate of surplus value. The law of value with its stultification/ideological dummification of the masses and imperialist wars eases the digestion of all inputs. Just like the environment, which is not tribal, there is a single law of value and it is not tribal or nationalistic. The neoclassical heuristic precept that capital is mobile, but labour is immobile, which is also implicit in Eurocentric Marxism, is faulty not only because the flow of refugees is rather steady or varies to the desires of history as imperialism, but because value transpires in abstract labour and its social time, beyond a space whose determination occurs in the market for exchange. Literally, the guns of capital reach labour wherever it is. Variable capital, its value outlays account for all the labour on a global scale that was required to reproduce labour itself as a precondition to produce a commodity; all the decapitated societies whose workers, whether engaged in production or not, whether dead or alive, are or were also social relations and sources of the same value.

For the mainstream, the greater mass of peoples, the ones associated with low wage or price tags, are insignificant to production because they are statistically or

culturally/institutionally insignificant. However, the mainstream begins with a price or price tag formulated by the historical power to render anything but itself significant. The real events, the voyages of European discoveries or butcheries, the workings of the law of value, these are said to be either stationary or their shocks are unsustainable within the system. Their effects do not last long enough to impart wealth. Aside from the fact that the price itself as a conceptual construct is a fetish deployed against people, the ‘voyages of discovery’ are still ongoing in the war on Syria and elsewhere.

Historically, imperialist wars act as multi-level realisation platforms, which are also countercyclical to the US–European business cycle. Although the exchange of commodities signals what atrocities to commit to produce value or how to abide by the law of value, things do not do things. Co-equally, just as a capital is a cross-national relationship, the better machines are products of crushing their cross-national subjects—labourers. Lower quality technology moves across borders to corners where necessary labour—the wage and environmental-use rates—is minimal, but never to the point where the tech-know-how empowers the subject, labour. China’s rise breaks this rule, because its people have drawn strength from a sovereignty built by the likes of Mao Tse-Tung and Lin Biao to nationalise knowledge in production.

The same point put at another level of thought: within capital as social totality there is a tendency to shift resources to equalise the rate of profit, but it is a tendency only since the rate of profit rises by the rate of exploitation, which is also handled by imperialism and its commercial exploitation. Resources across the planet are differentially cheapened to the requirement of production, they follow the contours of the global political divisions, while ensuring that the Third World owners of resources, the masses, are subjected to imperialist version of the law of value. On the underside, the process of cheapening, the repression and waste are themselves industries and sources of profits.

Class power, market power and imperialism reformulate prices. They also bump up the rent component in Northern wages. They do so from products of machines and cultures whose subjects are principally the historically devastated. The consumption of the products of these machines, the cars or laptops, are not the final realisation stage in the commodity cycle. These commodities are also waste, and their interim realisation is a precursor of expanded militarism. The waste side of the commodity is paid for in moneyed taxes, in moneyed value form, to be collected as trash, and the accumulated planetary trash stunts life expectancy, which is later paid for by the real value reconstituting human life. To re-emphasise, militarism actualises as concentrated trash/waste production.

In the social time of capital, the bomb dropping and the victim dying may be a point of final consumption or realisation; not the laptop sale. The turnover cycle, social time defined and waste laden, is unending, but should it ever end, it should end with the consumption of man. Moreover, superior quality machines, including the military ones, are not the property of the Northern working class. Harvey’s (2018) stance on relative surplus value, the better machinery as originator of bigger wealth, conceals the full spectrum of the kaleidoscope of wealth makers. It drops the *absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*, the condensation of the law of value, whose

function is to devastate the historical agency of labour. This law together with the organic composition of capital compose the order that dictates the creation as well as the destruction of value in anachronic (social time determined) realisation. In the organic composition of capital, outlays on variable capital are a single share from the global social product. Value, the socially necessary labour dissected by capital from humanity, derives from an international, as opposed to a national, source.

Principally, the perniciously overlooked points in Western Marxism are the following.

First, imperialism, the subject that historically caused the stunting of productive forces in the South by pillage, reconstructs the price by which surplus value is gauged.

Second, the production of waste and militarism, including no less the wasting of humans, is the furnace of surplus value creation and a stage of realisation. It is bewildering why in discussing imperialism Harvey skips militarism as a chief domain of accumulation. In militarism's wars, surplus value must assume its highest rates as the labourer and his or her labour power is consumed in imperialist war industry.

Third, in drawing boundaries between productive and unproductive labour and absolute and relative surplus value, there is an arbitrariness, which reeks of subjectivity, because these are in reality, as dialectical categories, the same, just as the concrete intermediates the abstract, and circularly value is assessed in the currency/price form that imperialism imposes. Neither the profit rate nor the product itself allows an unbiased quantification of its past or how it came about.

Fourth, the law of value is social, and therefore a historical relationship; it amasses not only the wealth (the heap of commodities/their poisonous side too), but also the culture necessary for the violent extraction of the wealth.

For a social product, determined by social productivity, produced to the demands of the law of value, which underutilises and sets aside/destroys resources, letting bourgeois-owned machine quality and the price of commodities associated therewith determine the rate of 'surplus value' may imply that American workers, many of whom enjoy historical imperialist rents, are wholly more value significant than the millions of war-dying Africans and Arabs. As I have argued above, this machine-based approach to surplus-value making is just like asking someone you meet for the first time, how much do you weigh instead of who or how are you. Machines simply presuppose value as products of historical surplus value.

Let us entertain the quantitative aspect of value. To reproduce the global order by expended muscle, blood and lives, the South has given much since the colonial genocides starting in the long sixteenth century. The production and realisation of war, its war machinery and commodities (waste and wasted humans), backstop and sustain capital's metabolic order. They are the pronounced peak of the capitalist cycle of waste. With the power of hindsight, accumulation, the putative *bona fide* social process whose dialectical measure is the increment of surplus value, has become more of a negative dialectic—it grows from bad to worse by more waste. The power balance of the class struggle, especially the counter-revolutionary ideology sown by Western Marxism, tips inordinately against the working class and in favour of waste. For now, the negative dialectic, the barbarism, may be here to stay.

The fetish incarnate in the price sketches the shape of social conditions by the demands of the profit rate. The money form of surplus value mediates waste commodities concomitantly with other commodities, which in today's world are also of some toxin content but of *less* waste. I say *less* instead of non-waste because, at rock bottom, very few commodities do not pollute. Waste is not some negative surplus value or externality that occurs on the side of the system. This is not about how much of the object is harmful or wasteful, it is about its inner content, or how when unopposed capital sickens the reproduction of the social system; profits at any cost. By definition or by its very being, surplus value is the adversary of the working class and is the category of 'ugly' in aesthetics, if we were to invent such a category (Lukács 1952).

For Mészáros (2007) waste accumulation consumes value productively to ensure the reproduction cycle.

At the same time, on the other side, no partial 'correctives' can be transferred from the operational framework of capital into a genuinely socialist order... For also in that respect we would always be confronted by the radical incompatibility of value determinations, even if in that case the value involved is destructive counter value, corresponding to the ultimate—necessarily ignored—limits of the capital system itself. *The systemic limits of capital are thoroughly compatible with waste and destruction.* For such normative considerations can only be secondary to capital. More fundamental determinations must take the precedence over such concerns. This is why capital's original indifference to waste and destruction (never a more positive posture than indifference) is turned into their most active promotion when conditions require that shift. *In fact waste and destruction must be relentlessly pursued in this system in direct subordination to the imperative of capital expansion, the overwhelming systemic determinant* (may emphasis).

Waste, with militarism holding centre stage therein as per my hypothesis, is practically a system whose associated auto-degenerative ideology has taken hold of the imagination. Formulaically, the rule of capital, through a combination of wage system and imperialist intercessions, reduces the cost of the reproduction of labour by wasting millions of labourers from an already large stock of labour. One ought to reassert that there are never too many people. However, capital fabricates its own private criteria for efficiency, scarcity and excess. This living labour vis-à-vis dying labour nexus, which mediates immediacy, the ongoing events or history, the contradictions resolved in the present phenomenon as given to the senses, the society whose current reproduction consumes a significant part of global living labour as commodities, the labour whose lives have been cut short by imperialist war and misery, is at the command of the cross-national, namely Western bourgeois class system. That there appears to be a correspondence between the money form of *value amassed in wealth and the Western space*, it is because the dollar wealth is issued in the US, 'the risk free market;' hence, the contribution of finance to determining the spatial structure we call US imperialism or, more loosely, the West.

Western standards of living fluctuate in proportion to human and other resource utilisation, the loot arising from the pauperisation and slaughter of imperialist wars and the payoff of the welfare state to troop labour for future wars. Differentiated labour is the foundation of capital, its desired labour process. As the recent stagnation in US working class standards of living has shown, any moral component holding wages at above subsistence is moribund, morally class-utilitarian and power relations contingent. Tangentially, Sensing the dangers of a rising China may attenuate the

retrenchment in US working class incomes. Here the practice of the primacy of politics may also require the co-option Blacks and Hispanics in the US's farcical war of world democratisation. Altogether these income-generating activities and distributional arrangements are subordinate to class rule—these measures hinge on developments in anti-systemic organisation.

3.2 The Elusive Measures of Value

Relatedly, the notion that the South protrudes into the value chain only when it is superexploited with better machines, reduces value to its analytical substance (a Ricardian concrete labour). The value relation, which is subject/object, transmutes into a commodity presumed in price form that cannot easily lend itself to measurement. Value as object is a moment within the totality of value relations whose measure depends on assessing the power that the subject (the resultant of the class struggle) exercises in underpricing and wasting. Designing a system of accounts in still-time to capture value in terms of dollar prices 'poorly describes what is rarely analysed' (Niebyl no date).

In the totality that is the production of value, global labour in all its aspects is subsumed by capital: productive and unproductive, the living and the dying in the wars and in the grind of the labour process. Equally, the relations of production in their totality constitute what are called the social relations, society, a whole composed of various aspects, differing limbs of an organic system, a structure in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another [Lebowitz (2003) restating Marx]. The same applies to Lenin's concept of totality: it is the interconnected whole, *the production relations of the globe*, in which there are no 'obstacles separating the civilised slaves of imperialism from the uncivilized slaves,' [Minh (1974) restating Lenin]. Ho Chi Minh also notes that for Lenin the victory of the national liberation movement is a precondition for emancipation; hence, my emphasis in the italic highlights Lenin's break with the laggard tradition limiting the totality to Europe.

It is not the revolutionising of machines or the productive forces that forerun socialism, it is revolutionary consciousness; I am not idealising class, but there are material bases for forms of autonomous working class organisations independent of technological advance. Lenin was not the first to recognise the revolutionary readiness of the less developed formations. Marx had turned his attention to the less developed formations, especially Russia, after the collapse of the Paris commune in 1871 (Hobsbawm 1964; Emmanuel 1972). Even as early as 1858, F. Engels could already witness the English working class succumb to the bribery of imperialist plunder: '...the fact that the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that the ultimate aim of this most bourgeois of all nations would appear to be the possession, alongside the bourgeoisie, of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat.' By 1882, Engels had a firm view on the issue: '... You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as the bourgeois think. There is no

workers' party here, you see, there are only Conservatives and Liberal Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies.'

Analysing 'in' the West or analysing 'away' the East by the level of development in the productive forces, the objects only, is reification/thingification, or turning social agency into a thing. It de-revolutionises Marx and reduces him to an economist whose job is to count how productive the American worker is in terms of dollars that imperialist powers construct relative to other commodities produced in the South and priced in the same dollar. The partition of labour by productiveness or skill differences, as the state brokers the share of wages from a social product to the working class, is part and parcel of the false reality. Not all that is given in immediacy, in the phenomenon, is false reality, only that which falls under the ideological hammer of capital such the productivity-wage nexus, for example. Timewise, the commodity cycle is open-ended and ends with waste. As imperialism intensifies, the waste cycle relocates further to the South; there will be more waste dumped onto the developing world. That Northern workers deserve more in wages in relation to their productivity, misses the point that the wealth upon which productivity arises is the historical surplus value. The living wage or falls by labour's solidarity. Not only national labour's solidarity, but solidarity with the labour in the corner of the globe whose armed struggle against imperialism weakens it. To hypothesise that Northern wages grow by better machinery agrees more with national socialism than Marxian internationalism.

Even with the constancy of war, as a sphere of accumulation that briefly dislodges the crisis monopoly/finance capital, Harvey (2018) presumes that violence is somehow an accessory to accumulation, not a domain of accumulation proper. He says 'neither of us (meaning Smith also) deny that value produced in one place ends up being appropriated somewhere else and there is a degree of *viciousness* in all of this that is appalling' (Harvey 2018). *Viciousness* is not an accessory to the system, it is the system, the waste, the war, the crux of imperialism.

First, the appropriators of the surplus are not atomistic individuals residing upon spaces detached from structures and/or social forms of organisation or states. They are the financial class. The planet, that is the spatial dimension, is dispensable and secondary to the abstract social relation, which is the real capital—the class power relationship, as opposed in its manifestation in real estate building structures.

Secondly, as to violence and its sociology. Violence is capital's state of becoming; its imperialism as it expands value. None can add violence to capital. It is its inner logic and outer manifestations. Every form and structure of capital, even its art form, is ghastly. Fanon's (1967) 'violence is man re-creating himself,' pointedly equates violence to capital. The value relationship, the tug of war between abstract labour, use value and exchange value at the heart of the commodity, replicates socially or externalises by violence.

The sociological nature of imperialism is about the class content of international relations as the practice of the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation. This internationally applied law is forgotten in the Western Marxist body of thought. Once more, Marx did not employ the adjective absolute for rhetorical reasons. Surplus value, the accumulation of the heap of commodities *qua* wealth, has the extreme

poverty of the developing world, the tons of plastic waste and the war dead, etc., as its alter image. Capitalism is a global system whose imperialist reach and wars integrate the world into a single production process. The absolute general law of accumulation itself is the de-concretisation of the law of value. These laws are intermediations of each other as they propagate particular forms of repression into general austerity or war-like conditions—for instance, the practice of US imperialism abroad is in part a reflection of the racism inside the US. Together, they are what dictates pauperisation and depopulation as both content of value and the grounds for its symbolic form in money.

Recalling, the absolute law clearly requires a stock of labourers and their labour power to be sifted, reduced in numbers and regimented to produce commodities with the lowest share of necessary labour (living wage share). Under high rates of monopolisation and financialization, crises of overproduction and their associated underutilisation of resources, the law further pauperises. It also systemically depopulates—always relative to the secular historical trends. By dialectical inversion, the absolute general law also bears upon the law of value.

Overproduction is a *social reality*, not just the fact that there are too many commodities, which imposes underutilisation of resources. Since the onset of globalisation (circa 1970), the crisis became yet more structural (Mészáros 1995). The purely economic rate of demand for labour fell further. And with the advent of neoliberalism, both in ideology and practical policy measures, capital ditched the more expensive labour. The auto-consumption of value by means of destruction reasserted itself as the mainstay of capital. In the production sphere, capital required more violent incursions of all sorts upon labour. While the Southern workers engaged in sweatshop and war industries, the Northern shift towards communication, service and finance bolstered the class of aristocratic workers; everywhere but more so in the centre. Across the world, the division of labour assumed three forms, the mass of poverty workers that eek a living at below subsistence, a minority of industrial workers, and another lump of aristocratic workers disproportionately present in the North but with its tail-ends in the South. Through the sphere of circulation and finance, imperialism distributed rents in the form of payoffs and earned the fidelity of many subordinate class partners around the world.

To understand the resilience or perseverance of such a model, let us return to basics. As already postulated, capitalist crises are about overproduction and socially inflicted underconsumption. Europe's '*mission civilisatrice*' was more to stymie the industrialisation and native population growth in the colonies; the genocidal process itself was a co-industry of industrialism. The dominant ideas, the mindset that reduces complex historical time to 'before and after,' to the desires of time as imposed by capital, presumes that these were crimes that occurred in the distant past with only an ethical or a psychological residue remaining today. Yet, in the shadow of the same laws of capital, modern imperialism intensifies its assaults and commits its atrocities on daily basis. Although direct colonialism may have ended, the colonialists founded colonial modes of production whose human and other resources are captured for pittances, smashed, and/or held in suspended animation.

The point I made that nothing escapes the rule of capital and its guns, means that man and nature are commodified value, either actively or in waiting—the latter because commodities obey the time ordained by capital, abstract or social time. This latter inference is not too tangled if we think about it this way: the class in power decides the time for production, the time to engage and act, and so we cannot think of time only in terms of an independent conventional or chronological order. The moments or the social relations of capital constituting the category of society, also organise the time of the social order in line with the production of surplus value (I revert to the misuse of social time below).

Just as hegemonic imperialism controls space, time is also at its command. Real time, the duration of the social action itself, compressed or lengthened in the chronological time it takes to produce commodities, is also socialized or is independent of the particular. Time adheres to the conditions of the social order and becomes social or abstract. For instance, all the pollution humanity already produced, all the waste, which counted for nothing before, has now, that is after some length of time, entered the market to be sold for a price—as in taxing Green House gases. The price paid or yet unpaid for the toxins is effected or delayed in socially decided time, or according to the wish of capital. In other words, pollution was never free of charge. It was something of value whose time to enter the market and exchange for a money price is power derived or decided by the power of capital.

Moreover, because capital is a social relationship for which the politics of cementing its class rule is a matter of priority, it is neither the development in the productive forces nor the number of unemployed that define a modern versus ‘antiquated’ mode of production. Capitalism is the universal condition. Seen holistically, relative to what the development of the productive forces could have improved versus what it has really accomplished, especially the ongoing wars and degradation of earth, the modernity of US–Euro capitalism proves the *darkest* period in humanity’s history.

War, the social process, and its sub-articulation of cross-border class ties are how imperialism suppresses Third World development. Imperialism also rearranges the conditions for exploitation by warring against labour everywhere, especially in the South, and against itself. These are the first and second contradictions of capital respectively all moulded into one. As the century of monopoly-finance dawned, Engels (1893) was asked if he thought that there would be war in Europe. He answered: of course. And prophetically commented that ‘the armies confronting each other in the future will be so immense as to make all previous wars mere child’s play in comparison with the next war.’ Not long after, Lenin’s theory of imperialism arose as a reassertion of the leading role war plays in the international class struggle. Imperialist aggression occurs at the intersection where the expansion of financial capital lays the groundwork for the bourgeoisie to auto-transform into imperialist and to transcend the national boundary. As the turnover cycle of financialisation picks up in frequency—its unsubstantiated or collateral-lacking credit/money expansion seeking control and monetising previously un-commodified assets—it pressures production and the grounds for production with cheap inputs, including war, both as production as the groundwork for the provision of cheaper inputs, into higher rates and into short gestating, high earning and/or ephemeral investment. The violence associated

with restructuring value relations reciprocates the requirement of higher production in kind, but of course in the unkindest of ways.

Although the production sphere comes first, financialisation, the spread of the dollar as the world currency and wealth holding medium, further welds together the national origins of wealth to the dollar as the universal money form. It welds together bourgeois relations in a hierarchically structured order with the US-related financial class atop the pyramid. Adjacent to this, the US-dominated law of value, by the openness of neoliberalism, hitches more Third World assets. It would want more of the short gestation capital-earnings to become the rule for the rest of the world. However, weaker-state destruction, even of the US-friendly type, is also one such conduit for higher returns. The more dominant capitalist classes, the imperialists, perform fratricide and sacrifice their weaker partners and their formations in wars for the sake of war; the more the business of waste, the more financial profits enlarge.

With respect to the stock of resources and inventory, it is not enough for an obedient comprador bourgeoisie to idle the national resources (including people) by following neoliberal recipes, they must partly abolish them. In globally integrated production obeying the rule and time of capital, everything is commodified and of value within its own social-time-determined turnover cycle—not the quarterly or yearly profit reporting. To put things differently implies that the ‘noble savages’ and their territories were just things whose destruction did not generate any value, a sort of killing for naught. What is historically significant differs from what is statistically significant. The former is about the social relation establishing the subject of value, the latter is about the empirical measure of value that the subject, now dominant capital, has constructed to attack the working class, delude it, and enhance the condition for the making of surplus value.

In relation to its deeper crisis, monopoly-finance capital commercially exploits, underprices value and depopulates at higher rates. Then as now, the decaying nature of capitalism is the escalation of imperialist aggression abroad and the acceleration of the rate at which finance crushes excess capacity in times of overproduction. Such is a constant state of affairs.

It is the social reality of overproduction, the deeply engrained belief that the market functions in the best interest society, whose other side is the permanent crisis of underconsumption in the developing world along with the counteracting effect of war, which characterises the system. The intensity of the crisis varies by the rate of value usurpation that imperialism imposes. The time necessary for capital to convert the labour of commercial exploitation into higher profits is social time. On the flip side, the persistent assaults of imperialism trigger working class reactions of all sorts. Some undermine capital and some, like Islamic fundamentalisms and the for-itself gender identity, buttress capital by reinforcing the identity politics that divide labour. Altogether, however, imperialist expansion in the ex-colonies still faces off against the few national liberation movements that do not assume the forms of self-defeating identity politics. In objective terms, in terms of their politics aligning with an anti-systemic historical trajectory, the labour of history whose many struggling identities against imperialism hammer on that inflamed knot in capital, the liberation in their ‘national liberation’ should exceed the ‘national’ in their ‘national liberation,’

otherwise wither emancipation (Frank 1982). At any rate, optimism or not hinges on the sturdy current in imperialist aggression, imperialism's insatiable appetite to oppress, which necessarily draws resistance in all forms.

Historically, the series of US-led wars and military bases abroad ascertain constant imperialist threats and aggression as facts. Logically too, there must be imperialist aggression. By definition, imperialism is 'as an attempt to impose an all-embracing world system of hegemony through the efficient use of the military-industrial complex, which manifests itself through the direct control of *space*, as a framework and a preliminary to depth penetration and subjugation' (Abdel Malek 1977). Just as imperialism cannot be defined by its manifestation in super-exploitation and the flows of capital, Abdel Malek also redefines *space* as means to an end. Unlike Harvey's notion of spatial fixes, Abdel-Malek subordinates space to geopolitics. 'The military-industrial complex which wields power of decision in the more advanced states brings to bear all the resources and potentialities of hegemonic imperialism in their maximal combination of scope, intensity and durability through the political uses of space, i.e. geopolitics' (Abdel Malek 1977). Thus, space, as well as fixed capital assets are secondary to the geopolitics of the financial class whose more salient personification is the military-industrial complex. The physical, the space and real assets, is of moribund nature vis-à-vis the politics of capital. As imperialism expands by finance, its ultimate fetish or god, it recycles any fixed assets in the process. All these supposedly fixed assets will appear as mere branch-plants that could be packed and moved or scrapped.

Harvey's concept of space is philosophically pragmatic, as in it belongs to positivist pragmatism. For him, space and imperialism co-define each other. Imperialism collapses into or identifies with space. The space, the thing itself, obscures its subject. We no longer know who is really in control of capitalist reproduction by imperialist means because they all are, the things as well as social classes. As such, the practice of imperialism in relation to space is neither in excess nor in deficiency; it auto-suffices in objective reality, as per the definition of truth in pragmatic philosophy (comparable to Charles Peirce's definition of truth). His imperialism self-demonstrates in the practice of shifting capital assets and wealth from West to East as pure empiricism. It is formal-concept instantiation and not historical materialisation. Who could argue with the fact that wealth is accumulating in the East, in China, and that wealth in the modern capitalist age must involve a trait of imperialist practice? Then again, who could argue with the historical fact that the leading social force initiating the build-up of wealth by dollarization and imperialist wars is US imperialism?

Harvey's approach overlooks class as history and the relation of capital flows to cross-border class ties, as opposed to geographical space. As a conceptual edifice, this mode of thinking omits the study of social interrelatedness in time and, hence, historical surplus value. This does not imply that it precludes story telling as the history behind the facts. In such a framework, the social history of development instantiates as an 'idea' in space instead of the real historical process, the series of events reconstituting power and wealth by the *determining moment*, the most powerful relationship within the totality that is capital. As ideas or forms assume a shape, here spatial wealth, the shape they assume is different than when intermediated

processes assume a shape. For instance, in the former, the idea and its corresponding physical being, would allow Aristotle not to question slavery and to posit that it is natural in a democracy, as he did. In the latter, he would have prompted him to question why in the process of reshaping man as slave by slave owners, the slave appears to be recontributing by her own psychological metamorphosis, as if naturally, to her own condition of slavery. It is one thing to say that many layers of the cross-cutting ruling social class practiced imperialism, and it is another to say that in the many layers partaking in the practice of imperialism, the US layer is the imperialist continuously attempting to violently remould the historical subject, the working class, into the submissive lackey. In giving structure to formal ideas, in selectively categorising from facts as opposed to a history of social relations, Harvey also minimises the inter-Eastern class contradictions apparent in international relations as well as the exploitation of Chinese workers by American corporations.

Any level of details, process of categorisation, or level of abstraction about imperialism, is scientifically adequate in the way it contributes to proletarian struggles. Not a single spewed theory is unideological. My hypothesis is as follows. **The concentrated-centralised capital of the dominant global class, the US-led capital class, remains the prime historical force. This very historical 'subject' or class is heir to the colonial class, its culture, and is the current executioner of the planet. The imperialist subject that wields the weapon of the dominant ideology also reconstructs the means by which reality is grasped and organised in thought, the popular modes of apprehension and the logic by which it is commonly acceptable to be exposed to the risk of early death, but not acceptable to renounce the addiction of waste consumption.** Historically amassed ideological control, the cant of obsequiousness, strikes deep roots and shapes the modes of perception that inhibit revolutionary consciousness.

The empirics of imperialism are those of the multi-layered bigger picture of accrued wealth and the means of control of value transfer through financialisation. These larger empirics of the control mechanisms do not set apart the reproduction of Third World labour from the circuit of capital. They certainly do not underrate the waste and war economies. All partial empirical representations must be subordinate to a level of detail that corresponds to the levers of control, the signification of wealth in money forms, from which the changes in the value shares of different classes are readily inferred.

3.3 A Portrait of Control

Besides the commonly traded label of 'white privilege,' the ideological stock, the additions to the vast historically accumulating rents earned by the US-led class, through its dollar as the conveyor belt of value, are there in the stock of dollarised world assets. Denominating world wealth holdings in dollars is de facto US-led class ownership of world assets, and to lesser degree, world monetary policy. The US practically sets the interest rates for the world, the cost of credit or what it takes to furnish the conditions for monetary policy grounded growth. Its debt issued to finance

wars substantiates the moneyed expansion supplied as the credit already afforded to private financial institutions. In combination with interest rate policy, US dollar debts inflate the money stock and the price of assets for its own class. This fuels the growth of returns to financial institutions from speculative activities. The steady flows of US debt also feed the fictitious capital, the financial part of the economic surplus that searches for collateral in new austerity or wars.

On the other side of the coin, ‘the dollar debt exposed developing world’ is subjected to fiscal austerity by the International Financial Institutions. Through its agencies, including the many students of the Chicago school heading developing countries’ central banks, US-led capital imposes liberalisation of the capital and trade accounts. Not only through price and barter terms of trade that the channels of resource and value drain proceed, but also through capital flight and the intermittent crises that unleash the sale of national assets at fire-sale prices. Value drain foundationally occurs through the low prices earned by the masses of the third world for their resources, products and labour. The tendency for low prices is the result of power balances and the synthetic impact of US-engineered fiscal and monetary policies, which ensure through wage depression that the value content delivered to the peripheral working classes falls. Being short-leashed with heavy external debt service, the indebted countries forfeit their sovereignty over exchange rate policy. As such, US-led capital also sets most of the world exchange rates, which in import-dependent countries becomes the price of all prices, especially, the prices associated with the food security of the working class. As devaluation strikes, inflation rises, at least, by the rate of dependency on imports. By controlling two major macro prices, the exchange and interest rates, US-led capital class can lower the price of others’ assets and acquire much of their value with the paper dollars it prints. In addition to the value usurpation reconstituted by means of war, US-led capital enjoys historically unprecedented imperialist rents.

Moreover, lacking sufficient sovereignty, the Europeans and the Japanese are under the US security umbrella. US-led capital has the power to underwrite dollar creation and to assume much of global debt as credit for its class or wealth. Chinese debt held by foreigners, in comparison, is insignificant (Tsui et al. 2017a, b). As China attempts to reassert its sovereignty, John Bolton, a most puerile U.S. national security advisor, is not far off the mark in saying that there is one super-power and everyone’s role in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is to limit its advance. Mr. Bolton recognises the power and value that bombing defenceless nations generate for imperialism more than the swathe of Western liberal or Marxist academics. He knows that no matter what neoliberal concession or compromise Iran, Syria or Libya would submit to, US-led capital responding to the mandate of history favours low-calculated risk war aimed at their debilitation.

The dollar remains the international currency. Most value of what is traded trades in the dollar and stores in the dollar. The mostly de-sovereignised world holds the dollar, the medium of value transfer and saving. Over two-thirds of all world reserves are

held in dollars (Reuters quoting the IMF [2017]).² For weakly autonomous countries, the dollar doubles for most national currencies. The weaker they are, the more the dollar dominates. Effectively, as a safe asset, the dollar lures much of their national wealth to turn liquid and acquire the dollar form. As national wealth does so, the national state provisions asset speculation with money supply by carrying more dollar debts. In a sense, the state supplies additional money to support dollar–asset inflation and speculation through indebtedness, the returns on the inflated assets are shifted abroad into safer dollar markets, while the working population carries the bill for the debt.

The unrequited transfers, the uncashed cheques so to speak, of the commodity producing Third World, especially the Gulf states, cannot strategically be theirs. Even China scurries with its Belt and Road spending spree, to swap risky real assets abroad for dollar wealth, which could be deflated or has been deflating on a trend. The global money supply, with its fictitious capital component, namely dollar debt that has no corresponding real value, is mostly US debt; as mentioned above, it is also the credit of the US-led capital class. The astronomical rise in the dollar supply (as per Hudson 2003) is the bulk of the money form of value. Despite China's ranking as the second biggest economy, global borrowing in Yuan is insignificant (Wong et al. 2017). In nominal dollar value, China is second to the US by a long shot because US-led capital subordinates Europe and Japan. Trump's protectionism is an effort to bring Europe and Japan further into the fold; to reconstitute something along the line of the old anti-Soviet alliance that delivered victory to the US in the past.

However, the strength of China is real. The reasons for its inexorable rise are in its indigenous productive forces, size and ownership or encroachment upon US-led capital owned assets abroad. One is reminded that US world hegemony is a form of control over world assets. Control is a form of de facto ownership. Under the cover of the nuclear deterrent, every country selling assets to China or scurrying for Chinese goods and finance is being lost to China. The ports that China buys are examples of buying into what is actually or potentially US strategic assets and property.

Counterintuitively, the US-led class strength is in its indebtedness. **Undoing the status of the dollar as world reserve currency is first undoing the power of US imperialism, its militarism and ideological apparatuses.** It is undoing the knowledge consensus, the generated consent, which is the *substance* of US power, or the false knowledge imposed through ideology that the US is powerful enough to sustain its dollar—that the substance of power in knowledge originates with Friedrich Engels. At such a point, the point at which consent *fractures*, resisting formations, such as China, will fully confront the strength of the US Treasury as the entrusted paper of world debt.

Although the expanding US debt, as credit afforded to global financial institutions, is also means to expand economic activity, given its excessive size, it is also a means to expand bubbles and militarism as economic activities. The inordinate expansion

²Reuters (2017) U.S. dollar share of global currency reserves rises in fourth quarter: IMF, Reuters, 31 March 2017, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-forex-reserves/u-s-dollar-share-of-global-currency-reserves-rises-in-fourth-quarter-imf-idUSKBN17220L>

of money is under the purview of the financial rentier *qua* the imperialist class, which through the pressures it puts on overproduction-ridden production to proportionate financial expansion, shifts productive efforts to waste and wars. This is once more by definition the novelty of the imperialist type whose war-bent is contingently constrained by the nuclear deterrent; hence, the militarisation of space.

Tangentially, the US's treasury bill transferability as collateral has not arisen on account of the ingenuity or creativity of US financiers. Just as the speed of non-value creating exchange reduces the costs of circulation of production by driving capital beyond the spatial barrier or by annihilating space by time, so does the speed of non-value creating finance (rephrasing Marx [1863] or treating financial transaction as non-value creating exchange). The developments in financial know-how and derivatives are the functional response to rising exchange and finance, in the one instance, but also their astronomical speed and size, are both the answers to militarism and the spurs for more wars. In the next Chapter, I discuss the issue of crushing space by time and how the U.S. still stands as the only imperialist.

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Chapter 4

One Imperialism



Abstract Imperialism generalises commercial exploitation to nations. Just as a slave is not paid for her labour, a nation is not paid for its human and natural resources. It carries exploitation to extreme ends in the process of value destruction by the industry of war. It is a symptom of capital and capital's state of becoming as it auto-negates to obey its own laws of development. It is capital's way of mitigating the falling rate of profit. It is war making to disengage or allocate resources under permanent conditions of overproduction. Imperialism is a mutation of the law of value by the practice of violence. Although wars and violence existed in all class societies, their underlying reasons change as per the material circumstance of social reproduction. In the monopoly-finance age, imperialist belligerence counteracts overproduction by the intensification of waste production. In this chapter, I make the case that US-led imperialism remains as imperialist as it was during the twentieth century and lingers as the sole imperialist force.

4.1 Re-theorising Imperialism

For much of Western scholarship, the Third World enters the value chain through its puny money form, the total price of its income or trade, which is insignificant vis-à-vis Western income. The development of the forces of production—of which technology is one component—does not fully lay the foundation of higher incomes in the centre. It presupposes wealth concentration, but not variations in income over time. The latter is the residual of class power balances. As such, imperialist power through the suppression and exploitation of other formations creates wealth. The stabilisation payoffs to the Northern working classes contain a rent component derived from imperialist super and commercial exploitation.

Uneven global wages erected upon analytical notions of productive and unproductive labour, one-sided abstractions unmediated as the concrete or working class, the more universal category, are the veneer that justifies the further misery of the developing world. Disparate wage structures based upon hallucinatory skill and productivity differences, or undeveloped concepts promote inter-working class divi-

sions. The argument that sectarian or nationalist struggles by northern unions for higher wages, in due course, lead to an internationalist solidarity flies in the face of the facts. To date, introverted Western nationalist reform countered revolution. The Western Marxist point may be that those who do not possess the better machines in the developing world, a condition caused by imperialist assaults in the first place, are to curtail their forms of struggle, all the while waiting for bourgeois democratic reform in the centre to bear fruit. *Post facto*, however, the segmentation of the forms of labour struggle is itself capital, while anti-systemic capital is in the demolition of its strongest ideological constructed link: the falsity that prioritising reform in the centre heralds revolution.

However, is machine-associated value all there is to value? Value is not the machine nor an object on its own. It is the historical relationship that violently reconstitutes wealth making. In the socially necessary labour time consumed at every stage of the production process, there are, in addition to human effort, human lives serving as inputs. In such a social value cycle, I posit that the consumption of human lives is the final realisation stage of an economic cycle. War is better suited to close the loop in a turnover cycle than the sale of civilian-end use commodities fetching a certain price on a market because war as a social event is far more relevant historically as both a social and an economic cycle.

The billions of the de-sovereignised Third World seize little of the moneyed form of value because of a lopsided power structure. Such structure entails more than the usual symbolic and non-symbolic paraphernalia of power; it is the now-internalised received-theory, which ceased to question development based upon the premise of private property. Mainstream theory is ahistorical because to do otherwise delegitimises capital. Just as the weather is currently being compensated, so will the past victims of capital. The system's bent for war arises from the fact that profits trail capital's force, a force to which the power associated with the legitimisation of private property contributes.

The conflict-ridden nations of the Third World impart a decisive share in global value formation. Contingently, upon how the price form associated with the power of the subject in the value relation is accounted for, the share of value acquires a measure. Already, one may interject that the genocides and other forms of imperialist violence engage their subjects or objects with higher machinery—humans are both subject and objects of war. Value assessment depends either on the power of the subject in the value relation or the way the price form is said to reflect value.

The ruling class is not homogenous. It holds a crosscutting relationship with its various sublayers. It is structured along a vertical command line. It is at the mercy of capital and may shape value formation by warring against its own elements, especially the weaker formations. Where to draw the line in the assessment of value depends on the mode of categorisation or on where we demarcate space, time and the power of the historical agency. The price form departs from value by the ideological influence of the party judging value¹. Value assessment is a subjective exercise that tails either

¹Neoliberalism, as it arrives in Europe, becomes a bout of madness in an otherwise sane history. Here is how a less than radical thinker, Pierre Bourdieu explains the disfiguration of reality by

labour or capital. Nowadays, from designing the accounting system to the method of measurement, capital oversees each step in the measurement of wealth, income and the reasons for discrepancies. It first shows that the low moneyed share Third World value is associated with its low machinery, as opposed to the low power of the vanquished. Second, it masks the fact that the central mass of wealth is the historical surplus value, chiefly earned and which continues to be earned by colonial and/or imperialist powers.

In a world subjected to the rule of commodities, capital and its money form of value are false reality. It is the appearance that does not reveal the essence as it conceals the labour process from which a commodity arises. Essence, the internal laws of development that nest at the commodity level but drive the whole system by violence, never coincides with appearance. If it did, we would not need science because the appearance of things explains everything. This progression by non-reconciling essence and appearance argument was made by Hegel in the science of logic, and there it is attributed to Aristotle (Hegel 1830).² However, Hegel in appeasing the Prussian court would break rank with his own logic and declare that the state as appearance is the realisation of species being as essence. As already mentioned, Marx's materialism prohibits such identity. For methodological reasons or for the basic premise of materialist categorisation, which postulates that no concept is reason for itself—that is, no forms, Marx cannot, even for a fleeting moment, ascertain that the form of the state is the essence of man or vice versa.

However, unlike what the positive connotation, the commonplace meaning of the term value implies, unrestrained value making is a most perilous process to humanity. Value is a class relationship whose war and pollution side hold determinacy. Unchecked, the value relation, its concretisation in the law of value especially its absolute form, will destroy all in its way. To expand on my previous illustration: value is not just the thing itself, it is a value relation or a set of contradictions in which, value (socially necessary labour time) or value proper contradicts the alienated use value; the resolution of this contradiction is its mediation by exchange,

the reigning power. There is no mention of violence abroad nor neoliberalism as a vehicle for broadening the stage for imperialist wars. At any rate, the point on moulding reality the whim of power, is in evidence. 'Theory that is de-socialised and de-historicised at its roots has, today more than ever, the means of making itself true and empirically verifiable. In effect, neoliberal discourse is not just one discourse among many. Rather, it is a strong discourse—the way psychiatric discourse is in an asylum ... It is so strong and so hard to combat only because it has on its side all of the forces of a world of relations of forces, a world that it contributes to making what it is. It does this most notably by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relationships. It thus adds its own symbolic force to these relations of forces. (Bourdieu 1998). See Bourdieu P. (1998), *The Essence of Neoliberalism*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, <https://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>.

²In Aristotle's categories, the idea of substance, which is later worked out as mediated universal or general, appears as follows. 'The most distinctive mark of substance appears to be that, while remaining numerically one and the same, it is capable of admitting contrary qualities. But one and the selfsame substance, while retaining its identity, is yet capable of admitting contrary qualities. The same individual person is at one time white, at another black, at one time warm, at another cold, at one time good, at another bad.' <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/categories.1.1.html>.

whence exchange value, which is the abstract or social measure assuming a money form, partly privately earned by the capital class. Capital, the totality, follows the map handed down to it by this value contradiction at the heart of the commodity. Each moment of the value relation, regimenting, cutting short lives and choosing the appropriate labourers whose living wage bill is cheap, wresting their products from them, and grabbing the money form of exchange value, involves coercion by ideological and violent means. All these measures are overdetermined, they follow no sequential causal order, and occur in abstract or social time, the ‘time that annihilates space’ as per Marx (1859).

In relation to imperialism, the debilitation of resource abundant weak states provides cheapened value and higher moneyed profits. Money, in turn, is as complex as society. It is the value corresponding to the mass of labour power, a fetish that co-aligns with the machinations of the law of value, a fictional asset that charts the future path of capital, especially its wars and signification of the degree of power capital exercises over labour in its process of reproducing value. Much more can be said, but it is all these at once.

The commodity form corresponds to a value relation that constitutes the kernel of capital. Its value (its relationship as essence) cannot be quantified or matched to price (final appearance) without arbitrariness. What ‘people in control’ do to price their products, the violence, the mark-down and mark-ups, etc. is a continuous resolution of so many contradictions continuously mediated in the spheres of war and finance, in short, imperialism. Even if all values are said to match the total product measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross Product (GP), which accounts for capital’s demand during production, this would still be wrong because the GDP or GP, like any other mainstream concept is class constructed. Even if we use the class-conscious Kalecki system of accounts, which considers the incomes of the separate departments and classes in price form, we would still not be able to distinguish where in the value process is the share of working class or Southern formation without being subjective. That is not only because the GDP and GP moneyed measures consider financial operations or forms of depreciation as value added (Hudson 2018), it is because the structure of prices itself cannot coincide with value. These are two different substances to begin with.

The same applies to Smith (2017) as he argued for a higher share of value contributed by low-waged Southern workers submitted to super-exploitation measures. Standard economic data are defective and misleading. Accounting price forms originate from the system of national accounts whose foundational neoclassical concepts of value and value added are themselves prices circularly determined within a specific power balance and accounting time span—the turnover cycle one chooses to gauge value. However, even in an earnest endeavour to assess value and shed the falsity of national accounts systems, assessing the power of the subject in the value relation would still make any assessment biased. For if the price form in wages or profits mirrors the power of the subjects in the value relationship, labour and capital, then it can equally be said it is the weak or strong power of the subject that has already designed the accounting system and bases for price formation to begin with. The price to power relation is tautological. As such, all such measurements are faulty

at a foundational level. The only non-faulty reality is the social production process, which includes wars and hunger as final and intermediate stages of production. This is real. The Eurocentric forces shaping history are themselves immeasurable and yet they set the measure of value and the unit of measure. That is not to say no measurement is possible. The Third World should also have its accounting system and measure of what constitutes the relationship of its prices to value. The price can be capital's false reality as well as labour's.

Returning to our previous point so that to shed more light on the issue, prices coincide with values only in the impossible state as subject identifies with object or, phantasmal-like condition, as people become things or fully internalise or identify with capital. In ideal form, in the identity used as the basis of mathematics, or in the example given above, as in Hegel's definition of the state as the realisation of the ethical idea, state and the individual coincide as essence appearance, subject matches object, both as formal ideas. However, in Marxian materialist terms, in a world structured around class and power relation, subject and object, 'the socially organised workers regimented by a labour process and producing the commodity' and 'the commodity itself,' depart from each other by the mutually reinforcing ideological and real powers of the ruling class. For the Third World, the dominant power form is the power of imperialist ideas and guns. Analogically, there is no unbiased measure of value just as there was no war to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis during the US invasion of Iraq.

To identify the real worth of commodities, the developing world's contribution to value, one ought to probe beyond appearances and define the social force that mediates the immediacy, the power, historically hard at work, to midwife the present as history. 'Beyond the immediate existence of things' is beyond the false reality put forth by capital (Mészáros 1995). More elaborately, capital is an abstract social relation, the totality under capitalism, whose abstract time is elevated into a fetish that dominates all our activities (Lukács 1919; Ilyenkov 1961)³. Abstract in Marxian thought is not an idea unrelated to the world. It is a concept that captures a one-sided aspect of the historically real, a specific social relationship in its process of becoming or historical development. In short, the abstract, just as the concrete, is a mental and dialectical category, which unlike the 'add new info as you go system' of metaphysical abstraction, develops out of its own contradiction. Both the abstract and the concrete intermediate one another and remain a one-sided view of things;

³Just to be sure, the real time of which I speak is the time of impersonal history. This is abstract or social time, or the time commanded by history to discipline and sift labour for maximum surplus value, but whose concrete manifestation is chronological time, to which it is subordinate. This time has a past, present and future, but knows no sequentiality because the decisions of dominant capital fall outside the personal will. This is quite different from Heidegger's personal time which springs from personal despair, 'the remorseless baring on the individual's inner nothingness. Lukács notes that such time is associated with pseudo-objectivism, he says: 'in Heidegger's diseased philosophy, however, real time is de-secularized and becomes devoid of content, theological, concentrated purely on the element of personal decision. So the whole pretentious point of Heidegger's philosophy of time and history does not go beyond his ontology of everyday life. For its content is still merely the inner life of the modern philistine frightened to death by nothingness, a nonentity in himself, and gradually becoming aware of his nothingness.' (Lukács 1980).

obviously since they are both mental as opposed to actual processes. The abstract is real or has an actual referent in real history, not just the object but the relationship that is the object.

Since value as *material* substance is socially necessary labour time, the struggle for time is a struggle to regulate the reproduction of labour, or the global stock of labour time. Capital must control the time delivered in production from the total labour available to society, all the while reducing the outlays on wages. The wage is social, and wages are the wages of the social class. The time targeted for regulation includes the time encapsulated as value in human lives—the social cost of the reproduction of labour. Human effort as well as lives are used as inputs in civilian-end use commodity production and waste or military-end use commodities—more generally, waste accumulation. Labour's struggle to control time, the struggle for abstract time, is not only a struggle to re-appropriate social time or social product in a specific space as in shorter working days as happens in imperialist Europe. These shorter working days are an asset to capital as they impose longer days elsewhere in the developing world. It is a struggle for the homogenisation of labour, bridging wage gaps and working conditions across the globe, and for the de-alienation of labour as it reclaims not only the commodities it produces but also longevity and the environment. Labour is in a struggle to de-commodify itself. The time that labour struggles for is a time structured around its control of production, or one derived from asserting its historical role as subject in the value relation and in the class struggle. Abstract time is a derivative of the value relation. To control time, labour must own the real and ideological means of production.

4.2 The Struggle for Time

To put things in perspective, the categories of Marx's capital undergo a process of ascent from the abstract to the concrete and vice versa; for instance, labour is abstract or social and private or concrete depending on its stage, or moment, in historical development as captured in thought or whether we move from simple to mature capitalism. Labour itself is a social relationship that develops in relation to its context. As said, unlike the metaphysical notions, abstract is not a 'form' of the real or actual, while concrete is the real or an observable actual thing; that is metaphysics. In Marxian terminology, both abstract and concrete are logical or thought categories drawn from a multifarious and indefinite *actuality*, the *phenomenon*. *Actuality* is the sensuous world from which a selection of abstractions is deemed historically relevant. What is crucial for reproduction at the heart of the phenomenon, the selected abstraction, for instance, labour or the commodity, assumes a defined form in thought. Furthermore, labour's characterisation as abstract or concrete is a reflection of its real development—substance or concrete labour, the effort afforded to production within a labour process acquires a social nature after market deliberations and it becomes social labour. So is, for instance, the conception of time as concrete or abstract. Both categories, abstract and concrete labour, are an intermediation of one

another depending on how time is consumed to the demands of production as dictated by markets. Abstract time and concrete time are together the real historical time that lends itself to conceptualisation. Dialectically, they represent the process, the resolving measure, by which capital socialises time in production.

Because capital's socialisation *qua* commodification is totalising, so is the time in which it operates; abstract or social time is also totalising (Lukács 1919; Ilyenkov 1961). Abstract time, the time that satisfies the exigencies of exchange, governs concrete time, the actual time it takes to produce commodities. Such time is not the hours on the clock in a factory. It is the time of the labour process as a whole or the time in which the working class, with all its components, productive and unproductive, including the time of mothers raising children, get consumed subject to regimentation to produce value. Abstract time indicates the optimal rate for the transformation of use into exchange value. However, as a conceptual moment in capital or social production, such time is not primary. It is, as everything else under capitalism, a derivative of fetishism or the rule of commodities. The real agent of history is the social class, in relation to its forms of consciousness subsumed in the class struggle. The real agent is history auto-differentiating under the spell of commodity fetishism, which is a slight variation upon the Althusserian position. In the order of determination within the totality, capital the resultant of the class struggle in correspondence to the dominance of the rule of commodities, holds primacy; the more alienated the working class, the more the of commodities.

The regulation of concrete time is the regulation of the reproduction of the labour force and its associated costs. Such regulation is the dialectical measure (measure as mediation) of the contradiction between abstract and concrete time enacted by the power balance of the class struggle. That is how many people are put to work, for how much time, how many are shed as unemployed or literally killed and what conditions force them to work for almost nothing. Such is the practice of the law of value as it allocates resources. It is the law of value, guided by capital, which fell under the spell of fetishism, and subordinately to reified abstract time, which collapses concrete into abstract time. Fetishism, itself an attendant moment upon alienation, provides the veneer by which capital deracinates human agency from social relations. Uninhibited fetishism is the basis of the false reality. It renders capital all the more fictitious. Although these moments of the totality, fetishism or its associated alienation, including the dominant measure of time are reciprocally conditioning, fetishism is central to the ideological reproduction of capital. It occupies an antecedent place in Marx's logical ordering: it 'clings to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities and which is therefore inseparable from commodity-production' (Marx 1867).

Fetishism is there at the start. It is the precursor for the construction of false reality via the production of ideology. The fetishism of late capitalism, the rule of commodities, has become so powerful such that commodities related to waste, the destruction of man and nature have come to stand atop the pinnacle of the 'divine' commercial order. One often hears that wars and pollution are ephemeral conditions that technological advance will redress, but we have had more than a century of technological advance that has cost us hundreds of millions of lives in wars and war-

related deaths; save the calamity of the environment. Positive tech-determinism is the ultimate thingification. It is not the thing or the commodity, or *the metaphysically abstract idea of time*, which triggers the march of history, it is the ruling class in relation to other classes, the class struggle, taking its cue from the mystified market in which the exchange of commodities reigns.

In relation to the abstract idea of time: Instead of laying the accent on a social class absorbed by the dominant ideology as the motor of history, Postone (1995) formalises/prioritises the role of abstract time in an abstract totality within historical development. Underestimation of class struggle reeks of the Eurocentrism of reigning ideology. As a point of departure, totality, the interconnections of the whole, is an appropriate starter. Relating the particular to the whole, the particular social relation, the moment to its abstract origins as in relating time to the social time of capital, distinguishes proletarian science. But this is not how Postone understood totality.

Moreover, to reduce time to the time that 'productive labour' inputs into production, which as the time to produce becomes shorter with technological progress, it reduces the need for productive labour, and hence the struggle is no longer between labour and capital but between that time which reduces the demand for labour and labour (as in Postone 1995), is just a totality of formal ideas. Workers are not against the machines that reduce employment, they are against the class that does. This stagist (as in proceeding in stages) story is based on the analytical category of productive labour, and therefore it is not only formal but hollow. Whereas labour as a whole subjected to the labour process, including its cost of reproduction, is the real category of labour, in Postone's narrative, it became just a form or just an idea of 'productive labour'. In a sense, this reductionist idea of productive labour is no different than the effective labour hours input into production. In a very Eurocentric manner, he discounted history and most of the planet, the supposedly unproductive masses of the developing world, to an unnecessary and ahistorical lump of flesh. At a seminal level, this says Europe brought the machines to Africa, but they killed one another instead and did not develop. Such a totality cannot supersede the set of social relations, the class relations, determining the movement of the whole. That whole as totality is the concrete conception of history, capitalism in its current phase, with capital as its seminal relationship. To just identify abstract time, as in the development of the idea of time as opposed to the development of the real object, the history of a people subjected to slaughter as industry, together with the ideas organising its existence in space and time, is to duplicate Hegel's metaphysical totality. In fact, that is exactly how Hegel thought about Africans, a people to whom slavery was salvation because they were not aware of their own freedom.

The formal idea in question is, yet again, productive labour. Such concept of productive labour may be mentally isolated to constitute the crucial moment of social totality. However, as an abstraction or a concept itself, productive labour should not be the form of 'productive labour'. Apart from the fact that as a form no one knows what/who this productive labour is—that is like all forms they have logical being but they really do not exist; a more adequate concept of productive labour should be organically tied to and indifferentiable from real labour and its reproductive process. Productive labour should not be chopped from the concept of the working class, the

class whose members by their very coming into existence altogether earn the social wage.

In its abstract state, productive labour as a conceptual construct and as used by Marx is a relationship within itself and to its environment. It is a one-sided view of the real; productive workers are social in nature because social man, the class as whole, emits a social product to which a social wage corresponds. Productive labour exists in a state of flux between its abstract and concrete states determined by the sub-totality of labour within capital. It is re-engaged or reconditioned by the totality that is capital. For instance, productive labour is social labour determined by the labour process. The Marxian abstract is not a form (the form associated with idealism) and that is why Marx's thought represents an epistemological rupture with Hegel. For Marx, the categories, like being and nothingness, are not ideal forms whose interpenetration is the actual. Each concept is itself *ex-ante* a relationship before it enters into another relationship. The forms as forms in Marx differed from Hegel because the Marxian forms as forms disappeared and the conceptual reality became the state of becoming of each object in relation to itself and other objects in its course of development.

Again, Postone's totality is a totality of formal ideas. Once dissected, these forms such as productive labour and time, which are reasons for themselves, cannot be reassembled to reconstitute the totality form which they were derived. Neither each concrete productive labour is additive, nor can the social product be referred back to concrete labour. The intermediation of the market refers value to abstract labour, the social labour of the working class as a whole whose determination is the labour process. The one-sided categories of productive and unproductive ascend from their particular to their general condition via the mediation of the market and the response of labour to the law of value. All these concepts never work apart. The Eurocentrics either confuse concrete for perceptible actuality—the observable but imperceptible phenomenon—or sound as they do because once we say social class, we include the global working class and its history in the value-making process. It is exactly the historical surplus value that Eurocentrics avoid.

In a Hegelian totality, the real, the actual law of value, the impetus and the aggressions of capital, by which abstract time, the time required to produce at minimum costs, dictates the concrete time, the regimentation of the working class to fit into capital's desired chronological time, vanishes. In a world of pure ideas, imperialism like fascism does not kill real people, it kills the idea of these people; all acts are a deviation of the ideal, and hence for Postone, the left that supported Vietnam and Cuba and divided the world into camps was wrong because it is a deviation of the ideal, possibly a moral ideal as it 'too often found itself in the position of being the mirror image of Western nationalists (Postone 2010).' Time as an idea for Postone becomes a formal notion of itself. If it refers to something real at all, it does so in reference to the democracy, cultural or psychological traits of the more advanced countries—the Achilles heel of the Frankfurt School.

However, genuine abstract time is about the time by which capital usurps most out of people, especially the masses of the Third World, for the least cost. By posing abstract time just as an ideal remotely related to its object, which excludes the con-

crete time it takes for capital to expand by colonialism and imperialism, to cake-walk into Iraq as it did in 2003, the interconnected reality disappears. It only becomes the interconnected ideas. The way the constant flux of refugees, the depopulation, the de-subjectification, as in the control of peripheral states, arising from imperialist wars, which lowers the social cost of the reproduction of labour and the minimum subsistence wage everywhere, does not make its way into ideal notions of time. This also happens for the supposedly ‘natural reasons’ of low-moneyed returns obtained by Southern labour, and the view that higher relative surplus value stems from mechanised Western factory work, which by leap of faith found a culture of democracy. Just as Hegel thought that the developing world is too spiritually underdeveloped to leap ahead in history, so too here is the developing world whose lower quality machines entrench ‘despotic modes of reason’ and hold back liberal development.

Such omission serves an important ideological point for Postone, it allows him to invert reality and say that people who regard the struggle against Israel as progressive are taking something reactionary and regarding it as progressive (Postone 2010). The violence of imperialism spearheaded by Zionism abroad fades from the picture. There are no two Camps and no North and South. Incidentally, Harvey does the same thing by way of empiricism. Every action is gauged against the formal and the categorical imperative, therefore, the struggle becomes a struggle of pure ideas as opposed to praxis, which must engender errors.

It is through the signals offered by the exchange of commodities doubling for humans that imperialism, including its Zionist offshoot, ascertain the law of value and the socially necessary labour time. True, they do so in relation to social or abstract time, but such is the real time in which Third World labour perishes at astronomical rates in the industry of war—not so much because Europe passes down old machinery for the Southerner to be super-exploited with to count for something!

Abstract time is the concept that captures the degree to which the *global* time—not the European only factory-labour clock—is to be controlled. That is more than just the working hours spent in the factories. It is about lessening the stock of potential labour time, or the shortening of lives way before their historically determined expectancy with relentless depopulation. It is the primacy of politics or the stabilisation of imperialism as the historical imperative that depopulates. Apart from capital’s war and its neoliberal austerity, examples of such events include the deaths of children under 5, which are on average 25,000 each day, mostly from causes preventable with low-cost, proven interventions (UNICEF 2010).⁴ Another blatant example of depopulation by imperialist war is the Congo, since 1961, it lost anywhere between 15 and 25 million people as a result of imperialist assaults (Pan African Alliance 2017).⁵ These estimates vary, but they always rotate in the ghastly sphere. Such is not a list of past events.

⁴UNICEF (2010) 25,000: The average number of children dying each day is 25,000, *UNICEF, April 2010*, available at https://www.unicef.org/factoftheweek/index_53356.html.

⁵The Pan-African Alliance (2017) ‘A Nightmare In Heaven’ — Why Nobody Is Talking About The Holocaust in Congo, Medium, 11 April 2017, available at <https://medium.com/@PanAfricanUnity/a-nightmare-in-heaven-why-nobody-is-talking-about-the-holocaust-in-congo-53f8ab27fb97>.

4.3 Imperialism as Depopulation

Depopulation, the reduction of population growth relative to the historically determined level, is with us and ongoing. It requires an explanation. To shed labourers and reduce the stock of labour time, capital must assume all the levers of control, including the ideological ones, which transform people's destitution into defeatism. People perceive the wars and the natural calamity as natural or as the best amongst all other alternatives. Capital, the impersonal force unbound by ethical standards, cannot be adduced from its appearances alone, the prices or its high-end commodity. Amidst this fetishised reality, capital, the real social force behind things attempts to efface itself. However, it is not difficult to detect the social class that is capital as the real class in charge. The objective developments of capital, how it overcomes competitive pressures via technological change, the way it imposes dividedness amongst the working class or through the elimination of living labour—depopulation is really what unmasks its true image.

As to technological development, people may increasingly identify the physical assets of capital with the capital class itself. Consider automations or robotization such as an Uber–Google self-driving car or an automatic cash dispenser outlet. The rapport between the individual and the machine is an immediate contact between worker and physical capital without tertiary or intermediate labourers. In case of the cash machine, the customer is directly dealing with the Bank and its ilk, its managerial class, stockholders and trust boards, its leverage upon the state, its ideological apparatuses in universities and media outlets, its financial arms, etc. through contact with the machine, which is contact with the thingified features of the ruling social class. However, with so much ideological power at the disposal of capital, wrought from the disorganisation *cum* differentiation of the working class at this juncture, the embodiment of the social class in things and machines becomes a presumptive fact, or a *machina fit deus* (machine becomes god).

However, capital's twin, its fetishism extending the falsification of all that is real, may also wear away by the objective development of capital. As labour-saving mechanisation reduces the middleman, confronting the machine can transmute into a confrontation with capital proper. Capital's strength or weakness is a function of the degree of subjugation of the working class. People can pierce the fog of false reality to realise that capital may expand by its own internal laws, but it is the functional requirement of society which is the bedrock of its longevity. Capital can 'produce to abuse' until a conjunction with revolutionary consciousness ministers to society the management of its social production. So far, capitalism has proven to be an invulnerable social order so long as its prime constituent, labour, remains subsumed by capital's social and ideological forms, institutional bodies, its states and the psychology of war.

The intensity of twentieth-century imperialist wars and measures of depopulation marks a higher order of transmutation of the law of value from the particular case into the more general absolute law of capitalist accumulation. Marx uses the descriptor *general* in the absolute *general* law of accumulation for a reason. The law of value

as a particular or concrete category ascends into the abstract or absolute general law it generalises itself. In the dialectical inversion, it is the general condition, the exploitation and immiseration of the planet as a goal for capital, guided by its own momentum, which is going to lay down the rules. The general, the more liquid and moneyed face of capital through financialisation becomes the starting category for analysis.

In Lenin's periodisation of imperialism, in setting it as a historical phase, the rate of exploitation must respond to economic expansion in scope and scale, the concentration and centralisation of capital and the swings of the financial crisis characterising the monopoly age. For this comprehension of imperialism as an intensification of the practice of the law of value to become categorical, to become rooted in the categories of historical materialism, tracking the development of the changing concept, imperialism, in relation to its changing historical foundations requires a re-qualification of the financial impetus for wars as it develops in the twentieth century.

Lenin's explanation is that as finance capital heightens the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, war as means to resolve that contradiction becomes, more so than ever, the mechanism for the advancement of capital's interests. Projecting Lenin's logic upon modern times, it is the concentration and centralisation of capital in terms of financial assets and structure of power, which lead to the transition phase where surplus value from longer working hours in super-exploitative conditions plays a much lesser role in redressing the crisis than the waste, militarism and war-related accumulation. Only the *smelting of man and nature* in war, the depopulation, at times the liquidation of practically all the culturally resisting population of the dominated country (Cabral 1970), the reduction of the human being to his or her labour power, would contribute a higher rate of surplus value under monopoly-finance capital. Such a process is ongoing.

Lenin envisaged that the masses will fight back, and that imperialism, the last stage of capitalism, will be defeated; recalling that he subtitled his work on imperialism with the caption, the last stage of capitalism. Contrariwise, imperialism continues unchecked. However, as I alluded to in the preface, Lenin's projection would still be right for the wrong reasons because at the current rate of planetary erosion, at least in terms of innumerable lost species, imperialism may still be the last stage of all that exists.

4.4 Empiricism as Ideology

Just as Niebyl (n/d) observed, without the labour process as the source of structural change, everything in Western Marxism lends itself to quantitative assessment. Concepts that are formal, whose quantity shrouds their identity, appear 'so real to be the incarnation of the abstract and theoretical and its transformation into the concrete and practical all in one' (Niebyl n/d). For much of Western Marxism, the method of thought, if it exists 'as method for much of what is there is just methodology' (Abdel-Malek 1977), is rooted in a priori abstractions. It is either empirical thought

that mimics settler colonialism, only self-reasoned facts serve the expansion of theory, or metaphysical as in being fantastical like a non-existent father—Christmas notion of the ideal. In the former, through the subordination of science to ideology, empiricism popularises new concepts, such as ‘paradigm,’ which are new facts of power like the setting up of settler colonies, and then it invokes them as the paradigmatic assumptions that further expand theory. The latter is the formalist qua positivist, culturally essentialist type of reasoning.

These methods obviate interconnectedness, the ties of ‘the independent, autonomous neighbours’ extrinsically or accidentally related, and their elements, all form the members of a totality, the distinctions within a unity evaporates (Marx 1859). Formalism splits the real object from its actual self and with it also ‘the organic interconnection of parts,’ the Hegelian totality as reworked by Marx. It also splinters the idea of totality that Lenin described as ‘the universal, all-sided, vital connection of everything with everything’ (Lenin 1914). In such false concreteness, in omitting the contradictions within the object and reference to how the whole bears upon the different parts in its development, it is possible for the law of value to be partitioned, as opposed to being a universal law. In this mentally apportioned world, the politics of imperialism, the war dead and the looted wealth, are a side show that do not prefigure in the assessment of western economic performance. Imperialism contributes nothing to western economies, so to speak.

Speaking of partitioning the law of value, Harvey designates the determinacy of imperialism by its geography. In Harvey (2018 and earlier works), Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan together with China have grown and a new empire arose in the East. Apart from China, the remaining countries exhibit little or no autonomy from the US. Their sovereignty matches the free will of a rat hooked on heroine in a Skinner’s box (in reference to psychologist B. Skinner). Although Harvey appreciates the interface of geopolitics with imperialism, he fails to fathom capital and its imperialism as abstract laws. Naturally, he also misses the concrete totality attendant on the development of such abstract laws, especially the ideologies and institutions realised in imperialist wars. He fails to grasp that China would not benefit from war, whereas for the US it takes a ‘good’ war, possibly one with Iran at the time of writing or soon thereafter, to further the vested interests of its capital.

The mainly Northern foot soldiers fight and tax-fund the imperialist wars. Yet capital is under no obligation to honour their sacrifice. It escapes to the South for cheaper wages and natural inputs. The Western emphasis on the moral component for the rise of northern wages is rooted in the idealisation of capital as a Northern virtue. Capitalism is conceived of as the intellectual property of Europe and a product of the genius of European civilisation, as opposed to ‘the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population... and the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins’ (Marx 1867). To be sure, Northern decent wages include the indecency of rents attributed to genocide and better income redistribution through the welfare state, as capital scrambled to sink the Soviet project.

Soviet fall and Neoliberalism have since 1990 freed the hand of capital. It is not mainly relative surplus value which made it possible for standards of living to rise,

as per Harvey (2018); it is also not the laggard effect of the absolute surplus value gained in the more impoverished arenas of capital accumulation, which allegedly determines the lower Southern standard of living. I am facetiously using the inane language that pretends to know how much relative to absolute surplus value exists in a commodity. The absolute and relative components of surplus value are neither time/space distinguishable nor differentiable. Such interpretation in terms of size of dollar price is a falsity. The US prints and prices the dollar by its hegemonic process. The global nature of production has long rendered the planet into a single factory in which the social order dances to the rhythm of war and profits. If anything, by socialist ideological construction, it is the Southern sections of the planet whose relative surplus value is highest, although abstract and relative surplus values are not in a race with each other.

Just like the concept of productive labour, the concept of relative surplus value, that which has arisen as a concept in nineteenth-century type factory work, counts only as a one-sided abstraction. As categorisation transcends it into the more general concept of the social product, it becomes a logical predicate, but not a historical predicate, of global reproduction. Apart from the fact that the share of relative surplus value is determined arbitrarily, continued emphasis on the dollar price share of relative surplus value is misleading. The emphasis on the analytical divide, relative versus absolute surplus value or productive versus unproductive labour, is not innocent. As always, in an ideologically imbued system, in a system whose cultural undertones persist in Europe and its Eurocentrism, the real is a moment of anti-imperialist struggle in the development of the false. The false are the symbols, the cant, the ideological veneer, by which imperialism conceals or advances its atrocities. The real reality is the globally integrated production, the miserable conditions of production, the sick reproduction of labour and the planet as a crucible of exploitation, war-bound, to be opposed by working class struggle. To omit the oneness of production, the dialectic of the real within the unreal, because of the fetish of the price systems or constructed national forms that the West itself has created, is Euro-chauvinism.

What is more, the degree to which waste and militarism enter exchange and contribute to the actual and physical standards of living is historically decisive. Militarism is the gyro that balances the system altogether. The unity of relative or absolute surplus value incarnate in an amalgam of smog, bombs and other commodities also constitutes the social product. The alienated products of labour in an alienating form of production are wealth. Wealth is a stock of good and/or bad commodities. Value, the socially necessary labour time involving the consumption of natural inputs and human lives, is harmful to humans. It is a class-related relationship whose waste, war and pollution side trigger the motion of the system. In such a chaotic order, it is class power that determines income shares.

The distribution of wealth is 'invariably concentrated in the hands of privileged classes', as aptly put by Harvey (2018), not that there ever was a moment without a wealth class divide. Statement as good as apple pie across history. However, classes acquire forms of social organisation in states and supra-national forms, such as NATO, EU, which are means of capital. In such a power order, it is the sovereignty of Russia and China that permits them to retain wealth in physical assets or in

financial means other than the dollar. The constituent of sovereignty is working class security, or what transpires of it as power in the state. In the US's structurally racist order, the predominance of social inequality reproduced under the *de jure* rubric of political equality, the working class is divided insecure, and hence un-sovereign. Its remarkably lacking revolutionary consciousness is the outstanding product of what has been sown in it by Western Marxism. It is this sort of Marxism, with its partitioned theory of value, the sort that says the US has more wealth because of its higher surplus value or contents itself with the bombing of Libya or Yemen, which is equally responsible for the lost resistance of the American workers as their living standards dipped.

Within the Northern welfare state and its economistic unionism, a bond has grown between the state and workers whose imperialist-currency-denominated wages first set and then follow imperialist-currency-denominated growth in productivity. As argued above, such imperialist-currency wages or prices of labour reflect the value wrought by global social production. However, they hide within them the imperialistically grabbed value transfers, and as such the very notion of surplus value becomes a tool to justify the exploitation of the South. They privilege some workers, but only to the extent that they damage many others.

As US wages stagnated since about 1980, and as financialisation undermined the US industrial structure, Harvey (2003) described the parting of national capital with its working class as 'traumatic, if not catastrophic'. He says that the US 'was complicit in undermining its dominance in manufacturing by unleashing the powers of finance throughout the globe (Harvey 2003)'. That account appeared the year of the US invasion of Iraq. That war was more of an outsourcing enterprise of American capital and industrialism than the much-flaunted garment factories in China and Bangladesh. In Harvey's work, imperialist aggression is toned down or muted. Not a single utterance on the contribution of war to value making or how neoliberalism also implied the privatisation of war, a measure by which capital frees itself to test the limits of popular tolerance to threats endangering human existence.

For the US capital class to undermine its own working class should be wholly natural and expected. The US is heir to centuries of European racism, to which its stock of culture (culture as store of knowledge) corresponds. It is this class culture, the kill for profit culture, which must be unlearned and to whose evolution the rise of China is a stopper. Resistance to that capital and its imperialism is meaningless in economistic unions and demands for more Northern state welfarism. Even Milton Friedman was aware of political stabilisation and supported basic income for all Americans. But would the Western Marxists depart with the fact that current Western wealth is a power constructed fact, just the colonies of the Palestinian West Bank which have become the property of the state of Israel, constructed by imperialist pillage; these should not be used as a benchmark to justify the higher Western wages. Should not the theme of compensation as a right, not just for the environment but of people, be the central point of their struggle?

4.5 The Actual Picture

‘The euthanasia of the rentier,’ Keynes’s way of reconstructing the anti-communist Western formation after the great depression is the dogma to which Western Marxist thinkers adhere. It has to be recalled, it is the rentier of the centre, not the imperialist rentier that is being opposed. Financial and industrial capital are not dichotomous. Both were always part of the same process of value extraction. However, with financialisation they further fused together as industrial capitalists became financiers (Patnaik 2008): industrialists speculate and buy back their own stocks, in addition to financialising the commodity market, especially oil, etc. The industrialist has come to disparage his own industrial base as he bloomed into the financier to whom imperialist endeavours under the reach of US hegemony is far more lucrative. Of the capital class, the imperialist class is both financial and war-industrial at the same time. The imperialist type of capital is doubly charged to expand value.

War industry spending and imperialist wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars, played a crucial role detaching the dollar from the gold standard or the commodity-based standard. However, the dollar did not part with the commodity-based collateral altogether. As the supply of money rose, its chief commodity collateral became oil (Patnaik 2008, 2009). Oil does not exist in uninhabited lands; the labour and the lives of many in the weakly secure states where oil is found became the future collateral of the dollar (Patnaik 2009; Kadri 2016). And as Patnaik discusses, the oil shock of 1973 and its associated high interest rates represented the pretext that introduced austerity and the control of private finance over public spending.

Imperialist wars were the first big industries that went South. From the early days of colonial plunder, these wars were so successful such that they speckled the European languages with elements of the war vernacular. The women of the colonies became squaws, and the European discovered his whiteness (Abdel-Malek 1963). However, Orientalism, a restructuring of the language to correspond with imperialist pursuits, is not just a set of pejorative literary remarks, it is engrained in the reproduction of the material basis of capital. It reproduces its imperialist class foundations.

The same war industry, in part personified in the immense size of the American military industrial complex, pressured the fall of the Soviet Union. It also induced the rise of neoliberalism and the grounds for the civilian-end use manufacturing in the North to relocate South. The war-finance nexus, the bent for waste, sketches the future of capitalism. Symbolically, it is the feasibility of deploying a certain number of kilotons in explosives against a starving nation, which augurs the next war.

The organised dimension of capital, through its state or state-like institutions, allocates the moneyed resources and the jobs, but it does so in a manner that satisfies the profit of the whole class, not the narrow interest of the few producers. Its groundwork is the splintering of labour, its systemic depopulation, both answering to the primacy of politics and reducing the necessary labour; ideological suppression as well—all as part of the labour process. Managing resources to preempt a global solidarity of labour and revolutionary convergence is the principal aim of aristocratic

nations (Emmanuel 1970). Harvey's (2018) claim that 'the working classes within the global structure of contemporary capitalism are far more competitive with each other now than they were in the 1960s' is superfluous. Inter-working class divideness is a barometer of capital's strength. Fascism is the ultimate form of capital, because at a sedimentary level, the rate of exploitation mirrors the rate at which capitalist ideology reigns. For instance, the current central working classes' acquiescence to their countries' alliance with Saudi Arabia as it bombs Yemen or Syria, as they devastate other countries, induces severe modes of repression associated with the labour process across cultures and nations. The imperialist circles need to shift the whole burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of the working people while enslaving weaker nations and that is why they need fascism (Dimitrov 1935).

The question that many do not ask is would international solidarity rise if the jobs come back from the South to the Northern welfare state now? Internationalist Solidarity in the centre did not rise in the past, prior to neoliberalism where the false credo of social democratic reform going hand in hand with revolution created many of the Northern decent jobs, and it will not now even if the North becomes a decent job haven again. Western empiricism engages the facts as they are in their ahistorical form. They do not question their past development and if they do, it happens in a cursory manner. For instance, capital-creating jobs to shift income from one national space to the next is an issue related to the sphere of circulation, the class-to-class transfer and appropriation of the surplus. These jobs become rent components paid to a working class that capital can control. Confining struggle to the fight over shares of wages and rents from the social product is a game under the control of capital. 'Nationalism over class' is another yardstick of capital's power.

The absolute general law of accumulation operates on a global scale. The increase in the productivity rate that followed neoliberalism has resulted in an increase of poverty globally (Chossudovsky 2006). Chossudovsky's point deals with the crux of the matter: job creation under capitalism is class struggle derived. It also deals with the restructuring of enterprises and the relocation of production to cheaper-wage countries, which have contributed to the rise of unemployment and a fall in farmers' incomes. The pressure to keep recipient country wages low meant further pressure on the countryside to produce the excess labourers. In both the North and South, the new international economic order is fuelled by human poverty and cheap labour. Either because of the unemployment rate or low-wage employment, living wages and standards of living were squashed. Global unemployment acts as a lever that regulates labour costs globally (Chossudovsky 2006).

The diktat of neoliberal relations of production unravels production-related constraints and ensures a rising operating rate of exploitation. However, imperialist wars do the same thing at a faster rate, they reduce necessary labour by reducing labour outright. They also disengage productive resources. Imperialist wars are components of the wage system that ensure the reduction of the social costs of the reproduction of the working class. War uses the war dead and the deaths related to the austerity associated with war to lessen the outlays on variable capital. As a domain of production, war accelerates through military technology the replacement of variable with dead capital. War is in some sense a super-neoliberalism.

Accumulation by waste, sub-categorically, militarism and war, consumes not only the value of labour power, but also the value inherent in human lives. War's production and realisation stages occur in social time. These are chronological time-independent stages or anachronic stages in which war as consumption may be any phase of the realisation process. War as production is peculiar because it employs labour which is 'alive', living labour, the war machinery (dead labour) and labour consumed as input (the war dead), all of which contribute to value. The war dead, in particular, is the input and product at once whose rate of exploitation is gauged by the shortest time span (sudden death) dictated by the exigencies of social time. In war, just as slaves do, most people enter unwillingly into their work or death. Moreover, war and its technology are alienated social processes that spur increasing rates of military investment whose average product, unlike investments in other consumption items, rises by the intensity of war itself.

Investment in the physical capital of militarism and its associated culture continue to grow. Logically and historically, the belligerence of the US, its command of the global law of value transfigured in imperialist practice, has to grow to redress crisis. In between the US's choice of an Iran or a North Korea bombing, the world braces itself for the sort of accidental American incursion on Russian forces in Syria that may spark a big war. The redivision of territory between empires has morphed into a redivision of sovereignty between the US and national governments over a specific state. To re-theorise imperialism in the language of Ilyenkov, a new theory of imperialism should appear as a more comprehensive and concrete theoretical expression of the essence of the same facts, the same object and the rational kernel of the previous theory is included in the new one as its abstract component (Ilyenkov 1961), and I may add, that it is not one that detaches the present from its past by quantitative determinations. Degrees of sovereignty, fixed assets in space and capital flows emerge from a more or less condensed imperialist relationship. Higher degrees of waste, state destruction and disengagement of assets also emerge from a higher rate of capital's metabolic order. There is an escalation of finance, a strengthening of the imperialist rentier and interrelatedly war continues to resolve outstanding contradictions, but such higher rates of barbarism are not grounds for an overhaul imperialist theory. The 'kernel,' the seminal relationship and its class type, do not qualify a re-periodisation of imperialism.

China and Russia ward off US-led imperialism to this day. The past is ongoing into the present. To posit that China or Russia exercise power in new spheres of influence, and hence are imperialists, is to assume that these nations have developed a *culture* of imperialism—facetiously, the Rambo of Hollywood or the star academic whose definition of imperialism crosscuts with the US's strategic interests in destroying Syria. To consciously overlook the fact that it is US-led capital whose formation is dependent on war is either obtuse or malign. For its war dependency, the US's capital class oversees the ideology and function of every international institution and apparatus of culture. Such control over the means of the production of knowledge to support imperialism, of which the dubious undercurrent of Western Marxism that has critiqued past socialist performance from the standpoint of liberalism, is strictly US based.

Imperialism mutated from finance monopoly capital (up to the point of the Second Great war), into a second phase, which disciplined the avarice of monopoly to re-ascertain capital's rule as a result of competition with the Soviet socialist model, and into the current phase of fiat dollar hegemony and financialisation (Patnaik and Patnaik 2017). The latest phase of imperialism, the neoliberalism plus wanton interventions, parallels the organisational and ideological defeat of socialism. The rise of concepts such as TINA (there is no alternative) and R2P are examples of what was borrowed at the ideological level from the mainstream to make the present as history. Other important signals include not only the truncation of the spectrum and the topics that are up for debate to the desires of capital, as is well known, but to debase the counter argument by either bringing all the discussion to capital's playing field, or by eschewing as nonsense any method of thought other than positivism or metaphysics, such as dialectics. The state of socialist ideological defeat can be laid out in the way Western Marxists transplant historical agency from US-led imperialism to the Sheikhs of the Gulf, the Imams or some ragtag identity; a most drole approach is that which shifts historical agency from imperialism to the Arab stereotype of Gulf states. Moreover, nothing remains of the Keynesian propositions of full employment with rising living standards. Even Marx, who struggled with language to escape Eurocentrism, has been domesticated by Western professors and chauvinised as he now belongs to the 'Western' corpus.

Imperialist value usurpation related to war prominently figures in the circumstances shaping consciousness. The dollar, a chimerical measure of value, simultaneously funded ISIS and the mainstream educational institutions that dehumanise obscurantist Islam as justification to aggress the Muslim world. It is now common knowledge that ISIS is Gulf—Western created and funded. That the Gulf states, whose rulers are the guardians of the oil commodity for capital and whose assets are dollarized, are remotely secure or sovereign and or they can take a decision on their own is too illusory to discuss. The Gulf's sovereign is US-led imperialism. Hence, it is US-led imperialism, its selective democracy, which is the ISIS or other obscurantist Islamists, abuser of foreign workers and women in the Gulf states and bomber of Yemen. These forms of oppression occur under capitalism and appertain to capital's law of value practiced as modern imperialism and not to the ancient Islamic civilisation or its scriptures.

Sharia law, for instance, a vast and diverse body of knowledge reflecting the complexity of the human condition for centuries, including litigation regarding homosexual partnerships at around the ninth century AD, has been reduced to the selected brutalities associated Saudi Arabia. It is only under capitalism that the melting away of the boundaries erected to protect the feudal social division of labour that the huge massacres associated with imposing cultural homogenisation became rampant (Marx 1844). It is only when the acquisition of wealth of the bourgeois in each social group necessarily expands by undermining its own working class as well as the working classes of the other groups that identity politics becomes the fuse for permanent identity war. The 'blame game' of liberalism demonises post-colonial subjects by reducing them to a single strand of their cultural identity. Platitudes of this genre are the logic of fascism. They lump together the diverse pre-capitalist cultures into

a single heading such as the Muslim, the African, the Arab, while politically or constitutionally empowering the select 'identarian' whose innate bourgeois proclivity, the idolization of private property, tallies with the strategic goal of imperialism.

Capital is both abstract and real. It alienates labour power and turns it 'into an independent power, a ruler and buyer of its producer' (Marx 1894), a social force, which confronts the labourer with violence. Capital's atrocities are its industry or the furnace of value making, the war, governed by the resultant vector of the class struggle. The Syrian humanitarian catastrophe is itself a process of setting aside value, shifting value and destroying value. Although the space upon which the imperialist war occurs is Syria, such war as destruction is both consumption and production of value in multi-temporal and spatial arenas. The war instantaneously triggers a chain of production and consumption subprocesses associated with several multinational players involved in the war.

The Western Marxist concept of value purposely overlooks the lost lives at the altar of imperialist wars. Value making is theorised as an empirical account occurring in a teleological order. Re-wording for the sake of perspicuity: the better machines of the Northern hemisphere whose subject is a history that has culled Southern competition by genocide, are priced in dollars, its workers are paid dollar wages, producing mostly waste-laced commodities denominated in dollars, which are then consumed by an ideologically bewildered mass as value to reproduce the value of labour with which society reproduces. Teleology is a useful illustrative tool. However, reality is not teleological. Even if we assume there are stages of development in the value story leading to a final realisation stage, we must account for the power differential of the subject and its consciousness in the definition of value. We have to know what value is, the horrid social relation, before we measure it. The subject is the class, including the imperialist class, that conditions the labour process. As such, quantification of value is quite a task because the imperialistically conditioned slave like and dead labourers are almost unaccounted for in the mainstream. The sum of prices of all commodities within a given advanced nation, which also are waste-laced commodities, shuns the subject, its history, and hence the real value contributed by the underclass of the Third World.

Western Marxism ponders its own national theory of value—not the universal one. Its rule of thumb is: the West has so much in wealth at present, so let us start our assessment of value as of now and forget about the past. It is besotted with the productivity of the single worker or those of the many workers like her in a nation, while it discards any reference to the social (global) nature of productivity and the cross-national or historical class as subject of value. It certainly eschews ongoing wars, overdetermined production (non-sequential stages in anachronic time), and historical surplus value. Although the working class is interlaid within capital's forms of social organisation, the Western Marxists sentimentalise a romantic form of the working class, incarnate in white unionism, its constructed white socialism, as the revolutionary conduit and the precursor of emancipation. That only European industrial workers make socialist revolutions is a proven farce. By civilisational determinacy, their privileged and academic sections are the ideological breeders of counterrevolution. The

gap between what is expected of the Western working class, in the measure by which it could tear down the imperialist centre and what it does, is phantasmagorical.

Industrial workers have declined in numbers. An already dwindling industrial proletariat, treated as an ‘isolate,’ is not the chief agent of history (isolate as per Niebyl n/d), because the outwardly appearances that such labour assumes are related to the functioning of the value relation (the essence) and its law of value (the appearance), or the process by which capital moulds the international labour to profit making. A proletariat is a living process, a mediated immediacy, whose transformation unfolds in relation to shifts in the revolutionary consciousness of the working class. The immediate forms of the proletariat, the revolutionary working class, are the broad global class alliances, which include the unemployed, the poverty wage workers and the peasantry as agents of history alongside the dwindling industrial class.

The definition of an evolving imperialism must be *adequate*. It must conform to the dialectical laws of thought, principally the law of ascent/descent from the abstract to the concrete and the law of unity of the historical and logical, in their correspondence with the value relationship. The law of value, the concrete, moves into the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation, the abstract, practiced at a global level as imperialism. It is necessary but not exclusive to the US to engage in constant war (the historical) as a resolution to its crisis of overproduction (the rational or logical). To obfuscate the true nature of imperialism by reconstructing a pro-imperialist stance from the diverse data of capital flow—there is super-exploitation and flows of capital from the East, the East has become wealthy, and therefore China is imperialist—is ludicrous. The extension of such an approach renders a grocery store owner into an imperialist (Kadri 2018).

Just by relating space and capital flows to the crucial issue of military spending, the broader picture and its violence, which is itself a sphere of accumulation, brings the true imperialist into light. Whereas China’s military spending may benefit some local industries, US military spending is crucial to waste accumulation, monopoly-finance and value destruction on a global scale. It also reproduces the global power of monopoly-finance capital. China does not export its commodities at cheap wages nor does it dump its surplus in dollar money form because it is imperialist. It is avoiding imperialist aggression. Moreover, China’s dollarised transactions widen the space of American monetary control and, reversely, buttress US-led imperialism.

Capturing the symptom from diverse phenomena that redefines imperialism, the mutating social law of value in forms of extreme violence, whether it is the export of capital or the space upon which wealth concentrates, must pinpoint a metamorphosis in the subject of history, the imperialist class, that defies the course of unity between the logical and the historical over the twentieth century. Empirics against empirics, symptoms against symptoms do not suffice to make the case for the admission of new imperialists into the US-led club of imperialism. The imperialism before us has reached full maturity as the US–European coalition concentrates power and delivers it in new forms of aggression, regime change and state decapitation. Although the historical is much more difficult to follow than the logical, as per Ilyenkov (1961), historically, China and Russia remain in positions of national self-defence. Logically, an argument to absurdity (reduction to absurdity), which says that China and Russia

do not aggress the planet to usurp its value, as discussed so far, suffices to prove that US-led imperialism is the sole imperialism. One may add that militarism and the production of war is a US specialty. The encirclement of Russia and China and the hundreds of military interventions/bases are also cases in point. Moreover, the US aggresses China, economically (tariffs and other measures), diplomatically (relations with Taiwan), politically (propaganda war) and geopolitically (China is said to be a national security threat). Apart from the further concentration of finance and the higher frequency with which the financial surplus induces warring, the US-led imperialist class appears to have undergone a change of degree but not a change of substance. It remains imperialist and hegemonic.

In such an imperialistically overwhelmed context, the rise of China defies the logic of history.

China, a sort of factory of the world, controls the production of use value, and the US, the production of exchange value. The first real opposition to the five centuries long Western imperialism has arisen, an opposition armed with the capacity to close the technological gap in weaponisation with US-led capital. The West needs China, while China is the West's impending nemesis. Moreover, the overwhelmingly socialised economy of China, its model of sovereignty and self-reliance has already propagated by ideological contagion. It may yet prove that the national liberation movements remain the fundamental matrix of social dialectics, the primary route out of dependency (Abdel-Malek 1981).

At this historical interval, two principal camps, the imperialist US-led camp and the Sino-Russian camp are at play. A third camp of free and un-jailed Western academics, whose power is the 'word' (in the biblical sense) and, which has less tanks than the Vatican, paraded its affinity to the spontaneity of the Syrian revolt as follows. 'This is a revolt that was sparked by the children of Deraa and the sit-ins and demonstrations of the youth in the cities, the peasants of the rural areas, and the dispossessed and marginalised of Syria. It is they who rallied non-violently through protests and songs and chants, before the regime's brutal crackdown.'⁶ Beneath the 'nuanced' romanticism that is devoid of revolutionary class hatred, such statements exhibit an adulation of Western and Zionist democracies. They are extensions of BBC type narrative, where so many factual details are given with the aim of obscuring the history of the structure of power capable of delivering final blows. The sequence of facts trails in a pristine order, except for the single most important fact, which is best put colloquially: who did or can really do whatever to whom. The point is how could anyone think that Syria can transform into anything better with Israel, a most aggressive arm of imperialism, by its side. Within the confines of the outstanding balance of power, such petition uses the tragedy to demonstrate that Israel is a sit-aside observer that harbours nothing but democratic hopes for its neighbours.

For over seven decades, Syria has been subject to imperialist assault and it could have never chosen the time to respond. Every time it was bombed by Israel, its government spokesman would say, Syria will choose the time to hit back. It rarely

⁶Solidarity With the Syrian Struggle for Dignity and Freedom <https://www.change.org/p/solidarity-with-the-syrian-struggle-for-dignity-and-freedom>. 8 April 2013.

did, to the extent that the catchphrase, ‘choose the time to respond’ became a current joke. Real time and the decision to act are at the command of US-led imperialism. The professors and their ilk formulate a Syria position outside of social or real time, which again crosscuts with the strategic interests of imperialism.

This ‘anti-campist’ professorial camp tacitly promotes pro-imperialist identities and the death of millions of Iraqis and Syrians. An earlier variant of such position supported the pro-US factions in Kurdistan Iraq against the Iraqi government. Since the days of Mustafa Barzani, Kurdistan Iraq was a Zionist imperialist funded base whose chauvinistic identity politics has since 1959 contributed to the killing of millions of Iraqis—through alliance with the US. The pro-Kurdish stance has recently evolved in support of Rojava. The illustrious academics, with David Harvey at the helm, call for the protection of the politically correct and unveiled Kurdish women from the wrath of other Muslims that veil their women (Guler 2015).⁷ ‘Rojava was an alternative to the crisis created all over the world by capitalist modernity and should be supported and developed’ (as quoted Harvey in Guler 2015). However, this is not fashion war. Syrian Kurdistan is peppered with US military bases. In April 2018, the pentagon announced that it plans to arm 65,000 Kurds (US Department of Defence 2017).⁸

Yet again, the astute signatories think outside of social time, outside history and outside the balance of forces. In Syrian Kurdistan, there is a factional movement growing under imperialist tutelage, and early signs of ethnic cleansing, as in shooting Arabs returning to Raqqa, or giving the houses of Arab Christians to Kurds are emerging (Bahnam 2018).⁹ However, the real issue, to which all other concerns dim in significance, is the strength the US gathers from occupying and installing military bases in this corner of the world. While for the society of spectacle, news channels exhibit the minor crimes of ISIS or Kurdish fighters, the bigger crimes carried by abstract capital, and its US-led imperialism, lurk in the shadows. Marxist analysis, an understanding of the historical moment, the calculus of the actual balance of forces, is not the strong point of these professors [a slight rephrasing of Krupskaya’s ‘The Lessons of October’ (1925)].

4.6 Only One Imperialism

Now that the planet, not only people abroad in the Third World, is confirmed to be wasting away, we can be sure that the world has entered its most barbaric age. With

⁷Syrian Kurds accused of ethnic cleansing and killing opponents <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/18/syrian-kurds-accused-of-ethnic-cleansing-and-killing-opponents/amp/>.

⁸Justification for FY 2019 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) COUNTER-ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA (ISIS) TRAIN AND EQUIP FUND (CTEF). http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2019/fy2019_CTEF_JBook_Final.pdf.

⁹<https://mobile.twitter.com/maytham956/status/987829017008050177>. #SyriacCatholic Archbishop of Hassaké Msgr Jacques Behnam #Hindo: #Kurds are taking houses of Christians in North-East Syria to give it to refugees from #Afrin to change demographics of the area.

the power of hindsight, we can be sure it did so since the long sixteenth century or the dawn of capitalism. Western scholars who still put the question as a choice between barbarism or socialism were not on the receiving end of barbarism then but may be so today because of the existential natural threat, albeit depending on the quality of their health coverage. Capital auto-differentiates. Conjunctions could occur where international labour may prevail as a result of reading its emancipatory politics in internationalist value terms, as opposed to the better 'European culture, labour and machine' theory of value. For the time being, on account of the defunctness of the social alternative, humanity may remain stuck in its barbaric stage.

In spite of the rise of China and, with most time and space remaining at the command of US-led imperialism, capital has a free hand to crush many things in its way. Socialists are first organisationally, and secondly, ideologically weak. They are mostly resigned to non-violent struggle in a world in which violence is an industry and a way of life. Rephrasing Franz Fanon, violence is the necessary means to reproduce life under capital. In times of socialist ideological defeat, one cannot easily entertain the dream of building a social democratic state in an Arab region whose political alternatives are of the Islamist-colour and its mode of integration with the global economy is mostly through war and oil.

Turnarounds are inevitable, but not necessarily for the better. The stakes are high, and contradictions are acute. The case of imperialism today mimics events during the First Great War.

The longer the war drags on and the more acute it becomes, the more the governments themselves foster—and must foster—the activity of the masses, whom they call upon to make extraordinary effort and self-sacrifice. The experience of the war, like the experience of any crisis in history, of any great calamity and any sudden turn in human life, stuns and breaks some people, but enlighten and tempers others. Taken by and large, and considering the history of the world as a whole, the number and strength of the second kind of people have—with the exception of individual cases of the decline and fall of one state or another—proved greater than those of the former kind (Lenin 1915).

Unlike 1915, there is less reason for cautious optimism at the current juncture. The spectre of communism now is a fragment of its former status. The estrangement of history, its alienation from responsible social control, emerges in cultural strands adopting resigned attitudes to the supposedly inherent death drives of humanity, or the notion that destruction is itself a cause for being. The only glimmer through the biting existentialist threat is as Ilyenkov's posited, that reason appears in the universe as the inverse process to entropy, as a challenge to doom. However, under the prevalence of religious eschatology and despondency breeding the absurdities of bourgeois social psychoanalysis, the ongoing 'calamity may stun and break more people than those enlightened and tempered.'

US-led imperialism interlaces value at all the phases of global accumulation by squashing nature and the lives of people against its constructed market or identity butcheries. For Western Marxism, depopulation by acute neoliberalism, genocides in Rwanda, the Congo, Yemen and Iraq, and the destruction of states, are worth their value in the imperialist money form at which they traded. The death of poor people in poor nations is cheap in money terms. Millions of lives went for almost nothing in

dollar terms. However, the social cost of labour's reproduction is value and is of value. The de-subjectification of these nations, their de-sovereignisation and relegation to stone-age-like conditions, and the reduction of their stock of labour, infuses the global value relationship with significant moneyed profits. War is huge in value as well as money terms.

What more remains there to be said about the value content emerging in the war industry and appearing in price form?

Equating the sum of the values of commodities to the sum of the prices they command in a given nation is a faulty measure of value. Measurement depends on the systems of accounts espoused. In the salient account, there are those who are lucky enough to be exploited by capitalism and those who are not. The unlucky ones, the masses supposedly unexploited by capital not that there is anyone un-exploited by capital, whose product measured in dollar is pittance, are apparently the masses upon whom cheap modes of slaughter also fall. They are more dispensable than others. To theorise the value of Third World lives as low, and so are their incomes or prices, is the sort of valuation that becomes received theory by the power of US aircraft carriers. In an interlocked system of global production, the annihilation of these living values by cheap and less costly methods, influences the rates of labour reproduction and power, and hence, the global profit rates. Moreover, besides the power of weapons, the impression of ideas upon the alienated labour mass adrift in abstract time without a social alternative, ideas such as 'capital is freedom,' or that its 'bourgeois electoral system is a democracy,' are power representations other than guns, but possibly more powerful tools of labour subjugation.

Likening price to value elides concrete totality. It detaches the actual commodity, be it the product of labour or its labour power, from its subject, the working class. It then reassesses the value of the commodity by the power of prices, their fetishised qualities, which capital itself has originally devised. This circular thinking vitiates historical surplus values or de-historicises the process of value making.

Consider Syria as an example of an imperialistically aggressed order. Under assault, it degenerated into a weak social formation. The Syrian ruling class, conditioned by Syria's productive incapacitation and the many wars Syria lost to the US-Israeli alliance, cannot be excluded from what came to be the current Syria. Without that history of imperialist aggression as agency disfiguring a social formation to set it on a course of auto-destruction, Syria becomes just a prophetic word, an instantaneous being and not the actual social class formation that it is. It is only the mainstream's evisceration of history, which allows the Syrian government to be slotted for critique as if it is a super-agent of history in its own right.

That Syria is an undemocratic country and that it is part of a Third World that contributes little value, whereas the West's advanced machinery and democracy are of high objective and moral value respectively, amounts to a false understanding of the value relation. Not that democracy here means anything. The value category on its own is both immoral and never free from moral valuation. The nonsensical Kantian moral equivalence, such that both the US-led imperialist class and the Syrian ruling classes are equally culpable, is not a moral condemnation in a history to which morality is alien; such statements are either vacuous or strictly propaganda.

Capital as history is both organised and chaotic crime, with imperialism as its agent of expansion genesis. A social class cannot be split like a salami sausage to apportion moral condemnation to its various slices. The substance of the dominant class is its US-led imperialism and its power, and the imperative, the appreciation of what is historically necessary, is in combatting this power. No moral value-comparative judgment can be made unless what is intended is an effort to justify the sacking of Syria by the alibi of its leadership.

A US-led capital whose imperialist rent accrues by the combined means of finance and violence is the only imperialism. It is impractical to speak of sub-imperialisms, as in Bond (2018). More precisely, imperialism is about which of the dominant capital or capitals exercises violence to expand. By means of extrapolation, percentile measures of wealth concentration would turn anyone into sub-imperialist at one point or another. History's development is not some statistical exercise, into which one assigns subjective probabilities to several factors leading to an outcome. For that to be realistic, the actions of humans, their social classes, and attendant ideologies would have to either be made outside of a humanity that thinks for itself before embarking on a course of action, or not by the objective and impersonal forces of history. A historical fact lies beyond a calculus of probability. History is the concomitant of the class struggle, in which, necessarily but not exclusively (contingent on the class struggle), the US-led imperialist reproduces by militarism and other measures of waste. The US-led capital class is in control of finance and most global value transfers in its money form.

In Syria, for instance, the US–Israeli alliance determined social time or the pace of time until the Russian intervention in 2015. Israel control of space shrunk because it is left with fewer options due to Russian defences. Until recently, nearly all the South was owned by the North—*de facto* by military superiority or *de jure* through the dollarisation of its assets. The South largely remains the North's austerity and war industry playground. However, with the rise of China, the global tectonic plates are perilously shifting. To prematurely envisage that China or Russia are imperialists as of this moment because China in the future will be a bigger economy, is quite audacious and hypothetical.

Counterfactual theorisation aside, Russia after the Cold War was socially devastated by the US. Since colonial days, Chinese labour struggles against conditions of wage slavery and much of the value it produced remains tied to US dollars. China's developmental practice in Africa and its position on the Palestinian question cement South–South alliances (Moyo 2016).¹⁰ The Sino-Russian conglomeration is yet to call for preemptive strikes against demonised nations, a trademark of US-imperialism in the twentieth century. It is deceptive to add empirical facts on flows from hither and thither to prove that China or Russia are hegemonic and imperialists—evidently hegemony is quite different from imperialism, but here used in the context of hegemony as practiced by imperialism. To separate or add certain empirical observations

¹⁰U.S. politicians get China in Africa all wrong By Deborah Bräutigam April 12 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2018/04/12/china-africa/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a75bfad6666e.

from actuality does not conform to laws of capitalist development unless it refers the data back to the social constituents of that law of capitalist development, which is its leading class. Who did it (imperialism) and for what purpose? And the answer is: the leading US class, the dollarised class, is the originator and the final resting place of dollars, the money value form, in a dollarised world.

History is not a salad. It has laws of development, which means it is the product of organised social agency actualised in ideological, cultural and institutional practices. The law of value, and its ascension into the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation, is the law by which global society reproduces itself. Such law allocates resources aided and abetted by imperialist practice. As argued so far, imperialist wars are a wage system themselves and also act as regulatory components of the broader wage system. In comparison to Malthusian analysis, which speaks of absolute overpopulation in relation to welfarism leading to moral delinquency and catastrophes, the Marxian wage system is far less optimistic. It says what I already have been at pains to show, overproduction requires permanent depopulation. What living humans consume includes not only the labour of humans, but literally commodities and service which *necessarily* include dead humans as well. Unlike any other mode of production, under capital's rule, it is necessary to depopulate not only to lay the conditions for cheaper production or to cut short the wage bill by reducing labour's longevity or its value share by austerity; it is necessary because the very act of war, more broadly waste production, is itself an industry with astronomical rates of surplus value.

4.7 Summary and Concluding Remarks

This work addressed imperialism as an intensification of the capital relationship and its waste accumulation. In a word, it says imperialism is a historical phase commanded by an imperialist class that grows by means of war and waste. It also says that imperialist war and eco-imperialism are necessary to redress the crisis of capital. As the crisis intensifies, so do the imperialist measures that waste lives and waste the environment to waste lives. Because profits stem from the realisation of commodities and are socially constructed, their reconstruction requires both the dead person as the living object realised in the waste economy, and the living person dispirited to happily consume the waste. Thus, waste-side accumulation, including its imperialist war side, is an end in itself. It is the negative dialectic that steadies the rate of capital accumulation because it metabolises socially necessary labour time at a higher rate by the very consumption of human lives. The negative dialectic, the barbarism, begins the moment labour power sells as a commodity, a process that commodifies people. The reproduction of such commodity (labour power), which is itself value, entails the consumption or the setting aside of the sources of such value, which are people. Humans produce commodities and are consumed by the things they produce. Imperialism heightens the latter aspect of reproduction and lessens the outlays on necessary labour (subsistence wages).

Surplus value is a historical category, which involves the making of the ideology required for the reproduction of the surplus. More important, power, the weight of colonialism trailing from the past and the many US military bases of today, underwrite the value of the dollar. I am allowing myself the luxury to say 'many US military bases' in such a 'fluffy' manner, as opposed to mainstream scientists who count the tanks to supposedly abide by academic scientificity; as in investigate the obvious. However, the obvious is not the ludicrous. It is not probing the number of tanks and the military bases of which the internet is replete with information, which constitutes science. Such practice is more of a service to intelligence centres. At any rate, English empiricism is more an ideology of empire than a philosophy. Insofar as what identifies value or what is of value, it is the social force, imperialism or the imperialist class recently refrained by the nuclear deterrent, whose practice creates and assigns the distorted measures value.

An accounting system, which considers the cost of labour reproduction in universal terms and class power relations in the formation of value, is the working class measure of the surplus value. To measure value in terms of dollars, without quantifying the dimension of power and the commodities serving as inputs/outputs in social time, and/or produced by waste and militarism, short changes the Third World. It best be recalled that every resource or every form of property is also an economic category and that under capitalism and its capital relationship, all is set to be exchanged in abstract time or set aside momentarily by the exigencies abstract time. The resources of the developing world are the property of the peoples of the Third World engaged by the labour of the developing world. Although the dollar productivity of Arabs and Africans is immense through militarism, environmental pillage and, more specifically, through commercial exploitation, the assessment of their relative surplus value mirrored in dollar money form, in terms of their super-exploitation in 'Nike-like' factories, is trivial. They may not possess the 'right shoe-making machine' and its sweatshop, but they possess the labour and natural resources for which they must perish way below the historically determined life expectancy of their time in order to lock the global accumulation order into the positive profit space. That is the historical function of surplus value.

Just as in any production process, waste *qua* militarism realises a commodity as an object and reconstitutes the subject. It consumes humans, the environment and war materiel, and it shapes the ideas and the people who promote its own expansion. The best stock of people are those estranged from themselves and their societies. The best ideas are the sort prevailing by the social-psychological intrigue of capital at present, the apathetic working class attitude as the planet eats away at itself. The Anthropocene and its associated threats to life are changing things, but most believe that the damaged nature, the things, will speak back to us to invent a solution without coordinated social action arresting capital.

Imperialist wars enhance the power of imperialism or tip the balance in the class struggle—history—in its favour. Just as it colonised and enslaved people in the past, imperialism in its neo-colonial mode raises the intensity by which it rips apart states and commands their sovereignty. To take away the will of peoples, their sovereignty, is to enslave them partially or totally. Exploitation assuming forms of slavery, that

is commercial exploitation, generates crucial forms of surplus value, which in turn undergird high profit rates. The US-led war on Syria is just another example of such practice.

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