A CRITICAL REVIEW OF MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY ON TRANSITIONS: ANTIQUITY, FEUDALISM, CAPITALISM

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Ezgi Burcu Işıl, certify that,

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ABSTRACT

A Critical Review of Marxist Historiography on Transitions:

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The main objective of the present thesis is to locate the question of historical transformation, in the form of a transition from one mode of production into another, in a framework comprised of the notions of *structural contradiction* and *crisis*, *transformation of quantity into quality* and *reading history backwards.* To this end, this study focuses on the historical problems of the transition to capitalism and to feudalism, respectively, from a comparative perspective with the hope that the similarities and the differences between the mechanisms of change behind each historical transition may offer some insight into the *problematique* at hand. The analysis is based on critical reading and detailed discussion of the secondary sources, and predominantly Marxist and Marxian literature, on these historical transitions. Accordingly, a discussion of the Marxist/Marxian historiography on the question of transition in relation to the broader context of the political and ideological environments constitutes the second layer of analysis. In addition to the main historical focus, some contemporary extensions as well as political implications of these debates are also discussed. This thesis, therefore, aims to point out some new perspectives from which it is possible to approach the problem.

TEZ ÖZETİ

Geçişler Üzerine Marksist Tarihyazımının Eleştirel Bir Değerlendirmesi: Antikite, Feodalizm, Kapitalizm

Bu tezin temel amacı, tarihsel dönüşüm sorunsalını, üretim biçimleri arasındaki geçişler ekseninde, yapısal dönüşüm ve kriz, niceliğin niteliğe dönüşümü ve tarihi geriye doğru okuma kavramlarından oluşan bir çerçeveye yerleştirmektir. Bu amaçla, mevcut çalışma kapitalizme ve feodalizme geçiş problemleri üzerine odaklanmakta ve karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısının, bu tarihsel geçişlerin değişim dinamikleri açısından taşıdıkları benzerlik ve farklılıkların anlaşılmasına ve tarihsel sorunsala dair bir kavrayış geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunabileceğini savunmaktadır. Analiz bu geçişler üzerine yazılmış, ağırlıklı olarak Marksist ve Marksiyen bir yönelim gösteren ikincil kaynakların eleştirel okuması ve detaylı tartışması üzerine kuruludur. Dolayısıyla, Marksist tarihyazımının siyasi ve ideolojik çevrelerle ilişkisi üzerinden tartışılması, analizin ikinci kısmını oluşturacaktır. Temel tarihsel odağa ek olarak, bu tartışmaların güncel sonuçları ve politik uzantılarına da değinilecektir. Dolayısıyla, bu tez, geçiş sorunsalına yaklaşım konusuna bazı yeni bakış açıları geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction: A theoretical overview

The present thesis started as an effort to make a contribution to a long debated historical and theoretical problem -the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The topic has been a well-trodden area of research for historians having affinities with Marxist and non-Marxist scholarship alike. Intellectual interest in the birth of capitalism started with the pioneer of classical political economy, Adam Smith, and continued with the so-called fathers of sociology, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Especially after Marx's distinctive formulation of the problem in relation to his specific understanding of history and historical change in the context of his analysis of capitalist mode of production, the problem of transition began to attract increasing attention from Marxist historians, social scientists and economists.[1] In a sense, "given that Marxism evolved, centrally, as an attempt to understand the laws of motion of capitalism, it was only natural that Marxist historiography tended, from Capital onwards, to focus on this issue".[2]

This continuous popularity of the subject is explicable both in terms of its intellectual and scholarly value, and its politically loaded and practical character as the questions raised by this historical transformation did not confine themselves to the terrain of a long-gone past alone, but imprinted themselves to a number of crucial issues

[1] Harvey J. Kaye, *The British Marxist historians: An introductory analysis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 24-25; Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p16.

[2] Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 95.

about contemporary problems as well. A part of explanation of this contemporaneity can be found in the fact that the debates on the transition problem were never detached, purely scholastic exercises for the production of academic knowledge for its own sake. On the contrary, they were politically loaded from the beginning in a double sense. Firstly, the way in which the participants of these debates conceptualized the issue of transition was deeply embedded in the general theoretical frameworks they employed to analyze modern capitalism; so, their definition of capitalism and understanding of its historical movement constituted an integral part of the way they theorized about pre-capitalist modes of production -this holds true for Marxist as well as non-Marxist parties of the debates. To give an example, this practical aspect becomes particularly visible in the so-called "mode of production debate" that took place all around the globe starting from the 1960s and 1970s and reached its peak in the contexts of Latin America and India as "this issue concerning the nature and causes of systemic change moved from being simply about transitions long past to addressing the question of contemporary obstacles to capitalist development in the so-called Third World".[3] The most contemporary form through which the question of transition manifests itself, on the other hand, can be found in the debates on the historical meaning of the concept of "primitive accumulation" and the possibility of its existence in novel forms at the heart of present-day capitalism.[4] Secondly, the topic offers some prospects for future as well since the

[3] Tom Brass, "Against forgetting (our) history: Karl Kautsky and Rodney Hilton," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003): 126. For a brief but comprehensive survey of the Indian mode of production debate, see Alice Thorner, "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on Classes and Modes of Production in India*," Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 51 (1982): 2061-2066. As for the work of the dependency school, though it comprises a wide array of scholars, Andre Gunder Frank constitutes a good representative for the Latin American context, see Andre Gunder Frank*, Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America: historical studies of Chile and Brazil (*New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).

[4] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Tom Brass, "Unfree

identification of the emergence and the early history of capitalism makes it possible "to challenge the naturalization of capitalism and to highlight the particular ways in which it represents a historically specific social form and a historic rupture with earlier forms"[5] and by extension, such an awareness is likely to "have implications about a putative transition from capitalism to socialism."[6]

In this context, as it became increasingly clear that this problematic was not solely confined to its seemingly historical boundaries, a proper understanding of the issue started to call for a wider framework to be adopted. After all, what is the real significance of this debate, if we leave aside that exclusively historical and scholarly side of the topic as an object of antiquarian interest -even though it *is* indeed interesting? Isn't it the fact that this transition signifies the origins of our times? And furthermore, don't all those grand questions about beginnings and ends of historical phases, ages or civilizations, actually stand on the terrain of that one, majestic theme -of historical transformation and laws of development. In other words, it is a matter of making sense of the development of humanity itself. At this point, it became obligatory on my part to include into my inquiry on the transition to capitalism another comparable historical transformation, namely the transition to feudalism, in order to be able to employ a comparative perspective -not a comparison of geographies, temporalities or different

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Labour as Primitive Accumulation?" *Capital & Class* 2011 35, no. 1 (2011); Tom Brass, B*, Labor Regime Change in the 21st Century: Unfreedom, Capitalism and Primitive Accumulation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013); Michael Perelman*, The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000). Lately, the literature on the issue of "contemporary" primitive accumulation has proliferated and took the form of a series of empirical investigations into "land grab" and modern enclosures.

[5] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London, New York: Verso, 2002), *8.*

[6] Wallerstein*, World Systems Analysis,* 14.

developmental trajectories, but that of transitions.

1.2 Transitions, periodization and reading history backwards

The debates on historical transitions have multiple layers of significance. First and foremost, they constitute an attempt to get a grasp of a theme left rather undeveloped by Marx himself -the nature of pre-capitalist modes of production and their transformation into other forms- as "Marx never clearly defined the concept of class, nor fully developed a theory of transition or crisis."[7] Although Marx's general theory is strongly dependent on a historical understanding of society and change, as manifested in his continuous concern to locate philosophy and economics on a historical terrain, a systematic analysis of pre-capitalist modes of production is missing from his texts, apart from some historical sketches scattered in his writings, which nevertheless provide an insightfu99l guideline for the researcher.[8]

Firstly, in the *German Ideology*, the periodization of pre-capitalist modes of production takes the form of a scheme consisted of tribal, ancient communal/State and feudal ownership of property.[9] This scheme, rather than presenting a unilinear

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[7] Andrea Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography: Perspectives on Roman History," in *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Chris Wickham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.

[8] These writings mainly includes the manuscripts used for the preparation of *Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital,* published under the title *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie,* and especially the section titled *Formen die der Kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen,* translated as *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations.* Also, the famous Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* is another good example of Marx's general conceptualization of historical change. Beside these two seminal works, scattered references to history can be found throughout Marx's studies, such as *German Ideology, Capital and the Communist Manifesto.* On the other hand, the late 19th and early 20th century witnessed an increasing interest in history by the Marxists stimulated by the developments in the field of anthropology: This is particularly visible in Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State*. Lastly, the urgent problem of historical transformation in Russia also played its part since it opened up new avenues into the pre-capitalist forms of organization and institutions, mainly focusing on the fate of the village commune.

[9] Karl Marx, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations,* trans. Jack Cohen, ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 122-127. Realize that this categorization is mainly based on forms of ownership, rather than a systematization of different modes of production.

periodization, depicts the ancient and feudal societies:

> . . . as *alternative* routes out of primitive communal society, linked only by the fact that the second established itself on the ruins of the first. No mechanism for the breakdown of the former was outlined, though one is probably implicit in the analysis. Bourgeois society in turn is seen to arise, as it were, in the interstices of feudal society.[10]

In the *Communist Manifesto,* which largely draws from the scheme developed in the *German Ideology,* Marx refers to the relations of oppression between "freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman". These are, however, rather cursory references. In the *Preface* to the *Critique of Political Economy*, the only specific reference to real historical periods comes from Marx's "brief, unsupported and unexplained list" in which he presents a periodization composed of "Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois" epochs.[11] Beside this general framework of historical change, we witness here a conspicuous absence of "any statement about specific historical periods, forces and relations of production whatsoever" as well as any reference to the concept of "class".[12] A proper, historically-oriented analysis of the periodization sketched out by Marx in the Preface can be found in the *Formen* from which the Preface draws its material. Here, compared to the previous periodization, "the chief innovation in the table of historical periods" is the Asiatic mode of production.[13] In this scheme, on the other hand, Marx and Engels

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[10] Eric J. Hobsbawm, introduction to *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations,* by Karl Marx (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 32.

[11] Ibid., 11-12.

[12] This may be partly because they constitute "merely special cases of social relations of production at Particular . . . periods of history" if we think about the overall development of humanity: Ibid., 11.

[13] Ibid., 32.

acknowledge the possibility of "a direct transition from primitive society to feudalism, as among the Germanic tribes."[14] Accordingly, the periodization developed here is not simply a stagist, unilinear and universalistic scheme. On the one hand, in the *Grundrisse* as well as the *Preface*, Marx is mainly engaged in setting out "the general mechanism of *all* social change" through which historical movement comes about: The main objective in both works can be identified as Marx's overarching concern "to formulate the *content* of history in its most general form" which is defined as "progress". On the other hand, this is not a "simple unilinear view of history, not a simple view that all history is progress. It merely states that each of these systems is in crucial respects further removed from the primitive state of man."[15] It is an understanding of the "evolution" of humanity "in a more general sense."[16]

At this point, it should be underlined that the historical details of this specific periodization was based not on theory but empirical observation which took shape within the existing structure of historical knowledge of the time and shared with it the same drawbacks and inadequacies.[17] On the other hand, as Hobsbawm underlines:

> The general theory of historical materialism requires only that there should be a succession of modes of production, though not necessarily any particular modes and perhaps not in any particular predetermined order. Looking at the actual historical record, Marx thought that he could distinguish a certain number of socio-economic formations and a certain succession. But if he had been mistaken in his observations, or if these had been based on partial and therefore misleading information, the general theory of historical materialism would remain unaffected.[18]

[14] Hobsbawm, introduction, 35.

[15] Ibid., 38.

[16] Ibid., 36.

[17] Ibid., 20-26.

[18] Ibid., 19-20.

On the other hand, Marx's methodology and his use of the notion of *reading history backwards* as a reverse chronological movement in analysis is crucial to understand the real significance of this scheme of periodization. Before this, however, *reading history backwards* requires some qualification and justification for its use since it is a quite loaded concept which often falls prey to accusations of inevitability, teleology and fatalism in historical thinking. First and foremost:

> Reading history backward . . . does not mean that Marx accepts a cause at the end of history, a "motor force" operating in reverse, a teleology. Instead, it is a matter of asking where the situation under hand comes from and what had to happen for it to acquire just these qualities, that is, it is a matter of asking what its preconditions are. In this case, the search for an answer is aided by what we already know about the present, the result. Knowing how the "story" came out, placing such knowledge at the start of our investigation, sets up criteria for relevance as well as research priorities.[19]

This point is crucial to understand Marx's "list" of historical epochs mentioned above since a substantial literature has been produced on whether slave mode of production was a necessary phase for all societies to go through in their march towards feudalism, or by the same token, whether feudalism was a necessary step in their movement towards capitalism etc. Not surprisingly, Marx's allegedly linear and universalistic conception of historical development has been exposed to a considerable amount of criticism from a wide variety of theoretical schools, from post-modernists to the representatives of the subaltern school, for its modernist and totalizing outlook, in neglect to the diversity and particularities of historical and local experiences, as it was claimed: this, in turn, produced a large body of scholars who set out to refute these

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[19] Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 118.

accusations by endorsing the above-mentioned periodization in an even more assertive, dogmatic and schematized manner. Here, however, the crucial point is that:

> Marx seldom treats feudalism as just another mode of production alongside capitalism . . . Also, feudalism is seldom examined as the mode of production that produced capitalism -hence, the relative neglect of the former's dynamics. Instead, feudalism almost always comes into Marx's writings as the social formation in which the immediate origins of capitalism are to be found . . . It is as an essential part of capitalism that feudalism is studied. Thus, it is the particular ways in which the disintegration of feudalism occurs that is of prime interest to Marx, for it is here that he uncovers the preconditions of capitalism. And the same applies to earlier periods, for the roots of capitalism extend even there. They are all precapitalist and of interest primarily as such.[20]

Marx's periodization, therefore, should be seen under this light: rather than being a strict, historical prescription that aspires to encapsulate the developmental trajectories of *all* human societies in a single formula, this scheme should be seen as an outcome of the methodology employed by him, and hence as a part of the presentation of his findings. As Hobsbawm underlines:

> . . . moving from capitalism back through its preconditions to feudalism and slavery there is not pretension of offering these three stages as a model of development through which every country must pass . . . This is another example of the difference between necessity read backward from the present and necessity read forward from some point in the past. Its wide popularity notwithstanding, what's called the "Marxist periodization of history" is but another unfortunate result of standing Marx's method on its head.[21]

Accordingly, before moving into feudalism, the structure of the capitalist mode of production should be put under scrutiny as the identification of its emergence comes only after its initial definition vis-a-vis what had preceded it. Therefore:

> Examining currently existing capitalism backward through its preconditions and results leads in due course to the origins of the system … in order to trace the transformation of feudalism into capitalism, distinctively capitalist preconditions

[20] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 120.

[21] Ibid.

> and results get replaced as the main objects of study by the suspended presuppositions of feudalism. The question that guides research still is what capitalism -now viewed in its earliest stage- required, and the direction in which study proceeds remains as before: backward.[22]

Accordingly, what is at hand is "the necessity of the *fait accompli"* which seems to be "only graspable retrospectively": in this sense, "necessity read backward into the past is of an altogether different order than the necessity that begins in the past and follows a predetermined path into the future."[23] Methodologically, therefore, just like "human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape", the study of capitalism constitutes the starting point for the investigation of feudalism itself.[24]

On the one hand, in historical theory in general and the transition problem in particular, though empirical evidence constitutes the crucial starting point, still "it will always require something more in the nature of a theoretical framework to explain why and how the elements and agents of a society worked in a particular manner."[25] Therefore, theoretical clarification is of prime importance. On the other hand, "Marx regarded every relationship as determined by history, and his dialectic thus involved a unity of theory and empirical historical fact."[26] Accordingly, the study of the nature of pre-capitalist modes of production urgently calls for more comprehensive engagement with empirical historical material inasmuch as a solid theoretical framework is crucial.

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[22] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 119-120.

[23] Ibid., 118-119

[24] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 105. Marx further adds that "bourgeois economics arrived at an understanding of feudal, ancient, oriental economics only after the self-criticism of bourgeois society had begun." Ibid., 106.

[25] Asok Sen, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 19, no. 30, (1984): PE-50.

[26] Ernest Mandel*, Late Capitalism*, (London: NLB, 1976), 16. This view is in large part the opposite of what the Althusserian structuralist school envisions for Marxism.

In this respect, there is an easily identifiable lacuna in Marx's work with which Marxist historians are justifiably occupied: The nature and transformation of pre-capitalist modes of production is a topic in which the methodology and the framework provided by Marx becomes much more important than his last say on the problem. The theme of historical transformation, therefore, occupies a central place in Marx's work as well as in the later "Marxisms": What the transition debates demonstrate is this open and continuous concern to make sense of structural change and historical development.

At this point, I would like to stress that there is no consensus, even among the Marxist historians themselves, as to the real character of these transitions, about the nature of the modes of production that preceded them or even the *true* way of conceptualizing a mode of production. However, what all these historians have in common is their extensive, obsessive and rather selective reliance on Marx. It is important to underline that this tendency is not confined to the problem of transition but has much deeper intellectual roots as it has been pretty popular to underline the incomplete condition of Marx's thought or the so-called contradictions and absurdities that plague his theory. While I definitely do not consider Marx to be an unfalsifiable, canonical figure as there are indeed lots of lacunae in his overall work, I think that a good amount of the criticisms directed against him comes from a lack of understanding by the critiques and the advocates alike. In the first case, most of the criticisms that target Marx are not *actually* directed against Marx himself, but against what goes under the name of Marxism (and indeed, *a lot* goes under the name of Marxism) –and more often than not, it is the official Marxism of the 3rd International which has seriously crippled what it had aspired to claim as its own in the first place. As Mandel remarks, the result was:

> . . . the temporary paralysis of theory that resulted from the apologetic perversion of Marxism by the Stalinist bureaucracy, which for a quarter of a century reduced the area in which the Marxist method could develop freely to the barest minimum. The long-term effects of this vulgarization of Marxism have still far from disappeared even today.[27]

On the other hand, it is an irony of life that a misunderstanding of a friend may be more harmful than a well-directed critique of an opponent, and Marx is painfully exposed to such well-intentioned misapprehensions in an almost systematic manner. One of the main problems in Marxist scholarship is the fact that everyone has his own personal Marxism. This is a big step forward from the highly schematized and simplified, *true* version of socialist theory advocated by the 3rd International, of course. It means -or at least it should mean- that a specific method and framework, without being turned into a frozen and absolute canon, is constantly employed to understand society and history, and its validity and usefulness is examined anew. It further means that it is open to new discoveries, new concepts, new questions and new frameworks from which it nourishes itself (surely, I am not talking about an undifferentiated eclecticism here). However, once utterly opposing theoretical schools start to have the claim to be the true heirs, true students of Marx, arguing that their version is the true version of Marxism, quotations drawn out of their context begin to fly around, put on the glorious duty of proving the point of this school and refuting the assumptions of that school. This is, unfortunately, what has been going on regarding the debates on the transition to capitalism as well.[28] Lenin brilliantly criticizes this tendency as he endorses that it is possible to identify a

[27] Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 24.

[28] This trend was already visible by the late 19th century as Marx himself ironically responded to Guesde and Lafargue in a letter when they attributed their own ideas to him and claimed their position to be Marxist: "If that is Marxism, then I am not a Marxist".

multiplicity of paths to capitalism:

> Of course, infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible, and only hopeless pedants could set about solving the peculiar and complex problems arising merely by quoting this or that opinion of Marx about a different historical epoch.[29]

With these concerns in mind, however, it will still be necessary to return to Marx himself throughout this thesis, not in order to reproduce that habit of countering an interpretation of a specific issue with an argument supported by an even more specific reference to Marx, but in order to locate the assumptions proposed by almost mutually exclusive theoretical schools the common characteristics of which only comes from their source of reference, as all *can* and *do* find a supporting argument in this or that sentence of Marx. Therefore, it is always important to contextualize and criticize such self-proclaimed *true Marxisms* with their ideological baggage. Before moving further, therefore, I would like to point to the political and ideological environments in which these debates took place as they directly shape the vocabulary adopted and formulas used to shape the problematique of historical transformation. This is mainly because the debates on these historical transformations are very much related to the debates on contemporary problems and hence there is a reciprocal relationship between the two -one shapes the other inasmuch as it is in turn shaped by it. This last aspect not only means that transition debates have profound practical and political implications, but also that they can be understood only within the larger social and intellectual context in which they are conducted. Accordingly, the changes in the main terms of the debates become rather instructive to understand the constructive character of historical, economic and political conjunctures and the related ideological and intellectual atmospheres on the problems

[29] Vladimir I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 33.

raised by the Marxist analysts and critiques of capitalism. Accordingly, I would like to draw a general picture of the political context and ideological environment in which these debates were carried out, in order to establish some connections between the specific historical backgrounds, the form of the questions and the timing of the debates: The politically loaded character of the debates necessitates this as well.

1.3 Politics, ideology and Marxist history-writing

In terms of history-writing, Marxism had an immediate influence on the initial development of economic history "as a distinct field of inquiry" while "the content and method of the Marxist interpretation took longer to make an impact" as far as the overall approach to history is concerned. The first instances of a conscious and programmatic study of history in the framework of historical materialism can be found in the Soviet Russia while an interruption came about with Stalin's final takeover of power and the resultant "subjection of historical work to a strict Party line". This, on the other hand, "coincided with the emergence of Marxism as a powerful intellectual stimulus in the West", which was in turn fostered by "the crisis in capitalism as a result of the Great Crash of 1929 and the apparent bankruptcy of liberal democracy in the face of Fascism." However, the majority of the studies on history produced in a Marxist framework in the 1930s was advanced mainly by the political activists and the members of the Communist Party and in this respect, it occupied a rather marginal area in the academic field in general.[30] Approximately until the WWII, the majority of the Marxist history-writing was produced not by academics, but by self-educated historians who had an immediate relationship to political parties and trade-union movements and hence, were mostly

[30] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (London: Longman, 2002), 224-225.

concerned with the practical and political aspects of history rather than production of exclusively academic studies.[31] It was only from the 1950s onwards that the impact of Marxism began to be felt on a broader scale, extending beyond those who were actively engaged in politics and affiliated with the official Party line.[32]

The developments in the field of anthropology, on the other hand, certainly gave a strong impetus to the increasing interest of the Marxists in the pre-capitalist modes of production. This trend becomes particularly visible in Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State* as well as his correspondence with Marx on the *Mark.* On a more practical plane, the fate of the Russian village commune in transition to capitalism (or socialism) and the related question of historical transformation played their part as well. A more general and focused renewal of interest with this topic in Marxist circles, however, would come with the Transition Debate of the 1950s.

As the decade following the WWII was marked by significant economic growth and an increasing conservatism in the capitalist countries, we observe the emergence of a tendency to reformism displayed by the majority of the European leftist parties as they started to share the general conservative atmosphere of the time. The American counterpart of this European trend was the increasing tide of anti-communism which completely blocked the way for any influence of socialism whatsoever. In this context, the term “capitalism” started to lose its value along with the concept of “class” as the predominant liberal ideology of the period advocated for a gradual betterment of the social order within the confines of the existing system hand in hand with the expansion

[31] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labor: further studies in the history of labor*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 1-2

[32] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 225.

in society of the democratic ideals carrying the stamp of "no social classes and hence no class interests." What the triumphant announcement of the "end of ideologies" marked in reality was the victory of the liberal-bourgeois ideology and its normalization as the natural order of things.[33]

On the other hand, these changes in the political and ideological environment found their academic reflection in economics as they pushed the general trend towards the "desocialisation and dehistoricisation" of the profession that had started in the late 19th century even further. Whereas the classical political economy had constituted "a unified social science", the marginalist revolution put its seal on the "separation of economics from other social sciences, especially economic history and sociology" from the late 19th and early 20th century onwards. In conjunction with the gradual establishment of the hegemony of neoclassical economics in the academy, there emerged "two parallel developments: the Keynesian revolution of the 1930s, and the further mathematisation and formalisation of mainstream economics following developments in microeconomics and general equilibrium theory."[34] This separation was further institutionalized with the confinement of these fields to their own spheres of macroeconomics and microeconomics respectively, as Marxist political economy was virtually put aside.[35] After the WWII, therefore, the dominant paradigm has been that of the neo-classical economics which has been "taught almost exclusively as standard, and

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[33] Emery Kay Hunt and Mark Lautzenheiser, *History of Economic Thought*, (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2011), 517-518.

[34] Dimitris Milonakis and Ben Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the social and the historical in the evolution of economic theory*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-2. The initial use of the term "political economy" rather than "economics" is also telling.

[35] Hunt and Lautzenheiser, *History of Economic Thought,* 517-518.

often without reference either to irrefutable criticism or to alternative approaches that at most cling for survival upon its margins."[36] This came about, however, not without serious problems:

> . . . the marginalist revolution was attached to a huge intellectual compromise. On the one hand, its analytical principles are universal, not historically or conceptually rooted by time, place, activity, stage of development, etc. Such is the nature of abstract appeal to utility, production function and other categories that survive, primarily unmodified, to the present day. On the other hand, economics detached itself from the other social sciences and confined its subject matter to the science of the market.[37]

In terms of economic history, on the other hand, "cliometrics" or the "new economic history" which developed in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA has also failed to bring history and society cast out by the neo-classical school back into the picture since it had been integrally linked to the basic tenets of the latter from the start.[38] The problem here is that, as Boldizzoni sharply puts, "the (unconfessed) aim of cliometrics is not to increase our knowledge of the past. It is to create narratives of the past compatible with neoliberal economics, and often it is a highly ideological exercise to endorse specific worldviews, theories, and policy recommendations."[39]

Regarding socialist politics, on the other hand, we witness "a structural divorce" between theory and praxis by this time[40] which can, in turn, be located in the broader

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[36] Milonakis and Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics*, 4-5.

[37] Ibid., 6-7

[38] Francesco Boldizzoni, *The Poverty of Clio: Resurrecting Economic History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.

[39] Ibid., 5.

[40] Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, (London : Verso, 1989), 29.

historical context marked by the victory of Stalinism, increasing bureaucratization of the USSR and the emergence of the idea of *Socialism in One Country* leading to "the failure of the socialist revolution to spread outside Russia, cause and consequence of its corruption inside Russia."[41] The confinement of socialism in one country also led to the loss for Marxism of an "international horizon" as "theory gradually contracted into national compartments, sealed off from each other by comparative indifference or ignorance."[42] Another result of the separation between Marxist theory and political practice hand in hand with the absence of a revolutionary mass movement is the closing of the gap between Marxism and bourgeois theory, marked by the increasing influence of the bourgeois over Marxist one as a result of the replacement of "the proletarian practice."[43] Historically, as Anderson comments, "the hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is . . . that it is a product of defeat."[44]

In this context, the "unparalleled objective consolidation of capital throughout the advanced industrial world" and the unprecedented rate of economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called "Golden Age" of capitalism, undermined the traditional conviction that the end of the capitalist mode of production was near.[45] In the context of national liberation movements and the atmosphere of anti-communism, the doctrine of developmentalism moved into the stage and set the agenda for all the "underdeveloped"

[41] Anderson, *Considerations,* 42-44.

[42] Ibid., 68.

[43] Ibid., 55-56.

[44] Ibid., p.42.

[45] Ibid, p46.

countries to "take-off" and turn into properly developed consumer societies, i.e. become capitalist. Accordingly, in the post-war period, "a central political concern of the then-dominant Keynesian theory was unsurprisingly not just economic reconstruction (mainly in Europe and Asia) but also development planning (in the Third World)."[46] The consolidation of capitalism in these "backward" countries, therefore, became the hot topic of the day. This political agenda begot its own body of knowledge about the "underdeveloped" countries in the form of the modernization theory[47] which was employed to pacify communist and national liberation movements, and hence functioned as a widely used tool of political legitimacy.

If we look at Britain around this time, we see that the period between 1945 and 1960 witnessed a marked increase in the number of manual workers, as they constituted almost the 70% of the English population by the 1950s, and a related prominence and visibility in trade union movements and political struggles. On the other hand, the Labor Party became increasingly integrated into capitalism and mainstream politics in the general conservative atmosphere of the 1960s. This, in turn, created serious doubts for historians as to the objectives and methods employed by the Party as they became increasingly alienated from official politics and got interested in the independent struggles of the working class.[48] This period approximately corresponds to the

[46] Tom Brass, "Capitalism and Bonded Labour in India: Reinterpreting Recent (Re-) Interpretations," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 35, no. 2, (2008): 179.

[47] In the modernization theory, the objective to be achieved takes the form of a movement from the traditional to the developed society: this is a stagist, Eurocentric and universally linear understanding of development.

[48] Andrew Miles and Mike Savage, *The remaking of the British working class, 1840-1940,* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2-6.

emergence of the so-called *Communist Party Historians Group,* which would later turn into a well-established tradition through the founding of the journal of *Science & Society* and become renowned for the conduct of the famous *Transition Debate* in the 1950s.[49] One of the distinctive features of this group was its preoccupation with the political culture of the English working class with reference to the independent forms of pre-modern political action that had shaped this culture long before official, institutional forms of organizations, trade unions and parties, came into existence. Against the aforementioned political background, this group gained its specific orientation in the form of a "class struggle" school.[50]

The Transition Debate constitutes the classic formulation of the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe: in this sense, it has a historically-specific axis. On the other hand, it carries a more theoretical undertone as well since it revolves around the theme of the *prime mover* -or the law of development- of the feudal mode of production that would lead to the initial development and the following demise of this system, paving the way for the emergence of capitalism.

Initially, the debate started with Paul Sweezy's critique of Maurice Dobb's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, published in 1946, which constitutes a mile-

[49] For the "classic" transition debate largely contributed by the group, see Rodney Hilton, ed., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (*London: Verso, 1978).

[50] For an analysis of this group as a "class struggle" school, see Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians.* After the suppression of the Hungarian Revolt in 1956, many members of the group left the party, such as E. P. Thompson and Christopher Hill, while others, such as Eric Hobsbawm, stayed in the group yet adopted a more critical tone against official politics. Khrushchev's secret speech also made its contribution to the alienation of a good number of intellectuals from the Communist Parties. On the other hand, the prominent Marxist historians of antiquity, E. A. Thompson and de Ste. Croix, were also members of the Communist Party: the former left in 1956 while the latter had already departed by 1939: Averil Cameron, "A. H. M. Jones and the End of the Ancient World," in *A. H. M. Jones and The Later Roman Empire,* ed. David M. Gwyn (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 238-239.

stone for the question of transition. In the first place, this book was not confined to the issue of transition alone: rather, it set out to draw a general picture of the history of capitalism, without having a claim to impartiality and completeness.[51] The part that provoked the most lively debate was, however, Dobb's account of the dissolution of feudalism and emergence of capitalism as Sweezy's critique focused on Dobb's conceptualization of the prime mover of feudalism as an internal one, which the author defines as class struggle: Interestingly, therefore, it was not "Dobb's treatment of the later history of capitalism which aroused the interest of the participants, but what he had to say about those forces which destroyed feudalism."[52] In Dobb's analysis, the nature of the mode of production that preceded capitalism, as well as the process of its transformation and decline, becomes as important as the changes in the structure of capitalism itself for the understanding of its history.[53] On the other hand, Sweezy proposes a completely different model that explains the dissolution of feudalism on the basis of the so-called external factors -the impact of the development of cities and trade on the Western European feudalism. After the initial correspondence between the two, the debate continued in the form of a polemic as supplemented by a variety of contributions from historians of medieval and early-modern periods. This is the general contours of the debate in a nutshell.

Historically, Dobb's book was written at a time when the "reality of capitalism as

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[51] Hence the title *"Studies"*.

[52] Rodney Hilton, introduction to *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton *(*London: Verso, 1978), 11.

[53] Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 18-19.

a distinct economic and social order" was effectively denied and the "economists, historians and politicians were trying to pretend that it had never existed." For the discipline of history, this general attitude was manifested in the form of a "suspicion, not only of theory and abstract concepts, but even of generalizing interpretations which may have relatively little theory about them." Accordingly, the end result was a preference by historians of a form of history-writing mainly based on "amassing of verifiable data."[54] In this political, ideological and academic context which was "hardly propitious for the unprejudiced discussion of a Marxist interpretation of capitalism", Dobb's book was openly neglected, largely due to the author's employment of the notion of capitalism as a mode of production: it should be underlined that, therefore, in an environment where the liberal-bourgeois ideology predominated and the conservative academy rejected even the validity of the term itself, Dobb's seminal work on "capitalism" should not be seen as a mere academic endeavor, but as a choice that carries important political repercussions.[55] As Heller underlines:

> … the catastrophe of the two great wars and the Great Depression focused the attention of Dobb on the transition question because of his sense that the capitalist system had entered into deep, possibly terminal, crisis. The result was an outline of a history of capitalism as a unified system with a beginning, middle and possible end. For him, the transition from feudalism to capitalism became the only clear and well-documented example of a passage from one mode of production to another. And understanding it could help to illuminate possibilities beyond capitalism.[56]

Accordingly, the integration of the feudal period into the very history of capitalism implies, for the participants of the debate, a concern not only with the beginning but also

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[54] Hilton, introduction, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, 9-10.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Henry Heller, *The Birth of Capitalism: A 21st Century Perspective*. (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p3.

the end of the capitalist system: if a socio-economic system has a historically-specific beginning, then it is only logical that it should have an end as well.[57] Lastly, the defense of the primacy of internal factors as against external ones and the related assignment to class struggle of a transformative, revolutionary role in the analysis of the feudal mode of production also have implications for capitalism in the form of an acknowledgement that there is a structural antagonism within this system the end of which could come only with the dissolution of that social contradiction through class struggle. As for the dissolution of feudalism, therefore, what differentiated these historians from non-Marxist ones was their open and conscious emphasis on the "peasant reaction" to the "seigneurial exploitation", in an array from individual, everyday forms of disobedience to collective, organized forms of open revolt, and hence, the outstanding role of class conflict in the analysis: Accordingly, "the 'history from below' element that has been one of the patrimonies of Western Marxism came into play strongly here."[58] The topic of the debate, on the other hand, explains the geographical scope to some extent: As Marx's interest in feudalism was mainly due to its relation to the historical emergence of the capitalist mode of production, England becomes the logical starting point of inquiry. This last point also explains the existence of a highly sophisticated and creative tradition of Marxist history-writing in England.[59]

In the late 1960s and 1970s, there came the first signs "of chronic, if not acute,

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[57] This is the implicit revolutionary aspect of the study of the origins of capitalism. Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism, 8.*

[58] Chris Wickham, "Memories of Underdevelopment: What Has Marxism Done and for Medieval History, and What Can It Still Do?" in *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century, ed. Chris Wickham, C. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011),* 37-39.

[59] Ibid.

social, economic, political, and ideological crises" which would mark a dramatic change in the ideological atmosphere of the capitalist countries. As internal problems of "high unemployment and chronic inflation" were coupled by "international monetary crises" as well as the rising prominence of "civil-rights" and "antiwar" movements, the increasing tide of military invasions and public scandals further eroded people's belief in the possibility of a "benevolent" capitalism that had passed its expansionist and violent phase of imperialism and set out to solve social problems in a peaceful and harmonious way: Accordingly, "these economic, social, and political crises contributed to and were reflected in a severe crisis of liberal Cold-War ideology". May 1968 events in France, on the other hand, signified the end of the divorce between theory and practice with the emergence of "a new period in the workers' movement". Furthermore, the fact that "the onset of this explosion bypassed the French Communist Party" signified the end of the Stalinist hegemony over the socialist politics. In this respect, 1968 marked the end of "the two crucial conditions of the historic non-coincidence of theory and politics in Western Europe."[60] These changes, in turn, found their reflection in the academy not only in the general recourse to radical economics, but also in the growing interest in specifically Marxian political economy and sociology.[61] In a similar vein, developmentalism and modernization theories fell from grace under the attack of the dependency school and the world-system theory in this period.[62] In this period of

[60] Anderson, *Considerations, 95*.

[61] Hunt and Lautzenheiser, *History of Economic Thought*, 518.

[62] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4, (1974): 387-415; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Immanuel Wallerstein, "From Feudalism to Capitalism: Transition or Transitions?", *Social Forces* 55, issue 2, (1976): 273-283;

academic radicalization marked by the emergence of the New Left, Marxism started to have a stronger influence on history-writing since it managed to satisfy "the historian's need for theory" due to its holistic view of society that encompasses all aspects of social relations as "historians have found the notion of the dialectic to be an invaluable tool in analyzing social change of varying intensity, from the barely perceptible movement within a stable social formation to periods of revolutionary ferment."[63] Until the 1970s and 1980s, therefore, Marxism continued to provide a crucial framework for history-writing, through direct affinity or indirect influence, and a rich variety of historical studies was produced within this general framework.[64]

Brenner's study on the decline of serfdom and emergence of capitalism, which opened up a new debate in the 1970s, also reflected this vivified impact of Marxism on history-writing.[65] Firstly, his analysis of the transition to capitalism as well as his general contouring of the feudal mode of production presents "a dynamic model" as an example of the continuing prominence of Marxism in the medieval history-writing while it is distinguished from comparable studies for its employment of "a Marxist grand theory of class conflict, and of property relations deriving from that conflict, as the main motor of socio-economic change."[66] Accordingly, it is one of the strengths of Brenner's work that

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Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*, (New York: Academic Press, 1980); Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 1983); Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*; Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*.

[63] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 226-228.

[64] Ibid., 234.

[65] Trevor H. Aston, T. H and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[66] Wickham, *"Memories of Underdevelopment",* 42.

he avoided from "a pluralist approach" as "he argued explicitly that the dynamic of class conflict was the prime mover of the European economy", leaving no place for any "consensual middle ground":[67] On the other hand, Anderson's study on the development of absolute monarchies in Europe, with the predominant role given to superstructural factors, represents the aforementioned emergence of plurality in the form of a synthesis of Marxist and Weberian elements, with positive as well as negative results for the analysis.[68] Lastly, it was in the context of the crisis of the 1970s that Bois "has explicitly compared the deeper causes of the crisis with those that lay behind the crisis of feudalism."[69] Bois' idea of the "tendency" of the feudal system formulated in a law-like manner, on the other hand, obviously borrows from the capitalist "law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall", which was becoming increasingly popular at the time.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there emerged a period of immense economic and political crisis. Although the process had taken start by the early 1970s, the reality and extent of this crisis was acknowledged only in the following decade, becoming especially undeniable after the collapse the Soviet bloc.[70] In this period, there was a sharp increase in the economic inequality which was discernible in the changing income distribution as "the almost automatic rise in real incomes to which the working classes had got used in the Golden Age had now come to an end."[71] This trend was intensified

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[67] Wickham*, "Memories of Underdevelopment",* 42-43.

[68] Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, (London: Verso, 1979).

[69] Heller*, The Birth of Capitalism*, 4.

[70] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes, The Short Twentieth-Century:1914-1991*, (London: Abacus, 1995), 403-405.

[71] Ibid., 406-408.

with the erosion of security for the working class in the 1980s and was even further aggravated with the extension of this feeling of insecurity to the ranks of "the white-collar and professional classes in countries like Great Britain" in the 1990s.[72] On the political terrain, the crisis of the working-class parties resulted in a "paradigmatic crisis" affecting not only Britain, but North America and Western Europe as well[73] while the long-term erosion of the leftist parties ended up in a massive departure by their young and middle-class supporters: Accordingly, "in the early 1990s labor and social-democratic governments became as uncommon as they had been in the 1950s."[74]

In this context where the political activity by the working class as well as the "aspirations toward socialism" were on a decline, a crisis emerged in "the conceptual frameworks" that had shaped the form and vocabulary of action so far.[75] The change in the political stance of the academics is interesting in this respect. The boom period of the 1960s had produced a generation that had a different relationship to capitalism *vis-a-vis* the older generation of the "New Left" in the sense that the former was the product of a period of economic prosperity and capitalist growth whereas the latter had been formed within the context of war and economic depression. This new generation, which was

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[72] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes,* 416.

[73] Marcel van der Linden, *The end of labor history?* (Amsterdam: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

[74] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 417. This general loss of ideological stance before 1980s had different causes in different countries: In England, it was the involvement of the Conservative government in the academy; in Italy, it was a reaction against the former period of "terror" and a consciousness that revolution was not near and inevitable; in France, it was the demise of structuralist school, the disillusionment created by the newly elected Left-wing government and the domestication of the former 1968 generation, now in more or less respectable positions in academic cadres. This goes with the exception of Spain: due to the post-Francoist context, there was still "a divide between Marxist, more generically progressive and traditionalist intellectuals": Wickham*, "Memories of Underdevelopment",* 32-33.

[75] Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 2.

mainly shaped in the student movements, carried "a very different perception of capitalist normality" which seemed to be "at once deeply opposed to the 'system' and deeply preoccupied with its apparent success." This attitude is related to the belief of this generation that "the hegemonic grip of consumer capitalism, especially its grip on the working class, had permanently neutralized the old oppositional agencies": Even the later revival of working-class movements, in this context, failed to change their idea "that students and their intellectual mentors would have to fill a historical vacuum left by the labor movement, and that class struggle in the traditional sense could be replaced by ideological class struggle."[76] Accordingly, it was from among these student radicals that the later generation of academics were recruited in the end. Then, it is through this direct link hand in hand with the general orientation of the post-Marxism of the 1980s towards ambiguous notions such as "radical democracy", that the concept of "ideological class struggle" turned into "the academic politics of discourse" -and hence, we witness the birth of post-modernism.[77] This process, therefore, had started long before the final collapse of the Soviet communism, the end of which had a mainly secondary effect manifested in "the immediate demise of a religious version of Marxism", i.e. Stalinism.[78]

The academic outlook of this period was underwritten by "principles of contingency, fragmentation and heterogeneity" in the form of discourse analysis and

[76] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class. A New 'True' Socialism,* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), pxiii. The popularity of Maoism and the concept of Cultural Revolution among the student radicals of the period is telling as well.

[77] Ibid., pxiii-xiv.

[78] Wickham*, "Memories of Underdevelopment*, 33-34.

identity politics, coupled by a "hostility to any notion of totality, system, structure, process and grand narratives" while it found a resonance on the political terrain in the form of left intellectuals who were "trying to define new ways, other than contestation, of relating to capitalism."[79] The internal evolution of Marxism itself in relation to the infamous *Realpolitik* of official communism also greatly contributed to this shift. As Blackledge underlines:

> . . . whereas Marx articulated a sophisticated epistemology, the Stalinist tendency to reduce Marxism to a crude form of positivism meant that the resulting bastardised form of historical materialism became highly susceptible to criticisms from theorists and historians associated with what has become known as the 'linguistic turn' in historiography.[80]

Then, what are the implications of this new political and ideological atmosphere for the Marxist history-writing on medieval and ancient history? For one thing, the 1980s and 1990s marked the end of the politically-loaded discussion on medieval history as the majority of the Western European historians had lost their former political stance (this trend can be observed in the change from Brenner Debate to the debate on the so-called "feudal revolution", to give an example).[81] This was a reflection of the general change of tone in the academic scene as social history increasingly lost its former popularity, giving way to "new movements" in the form of "cultural history, gender history, discourse-based analysis."[82] For historical explanation, this overall picture was

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[79] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism, Renewing Historical Materialism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-2.

[80] Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*, ix.

[81] The Brenner Debate was probably the last example of these: Wickham*, "Memories of Underdevelopment",* 32-33.

[82] Ibid., 34.

complemented by a move towards a more eclectic framework which now claimed that complexity and multidimensionality of historical reality required a synthesis[83] -without proper theorization, though, how successfully that "synthesis" was achieved becomes a matter of debate as at certain instances it is observable that even the smallest degree of self-reflection is lost. In a paradoxical way, however, "in medieval economic and social history, far from Marxist ideas being dead or moribund, they are everywhere. But they have been normalized . . . Marx simply becomes a major social theorist of the past whose ideas can be drawn on just like Malthus, or Smith, or Weber."[84] Wickham defines this specific form of pluralism as "a retreat" because such loss of theoretical coherency implies that "critical edge" of historical analysis is lost: "Class analysis used to be subversive", but it is no more. This tendency is manifest in the preference of "middle-range, or tactical, theories" in the form of tentative models, over "long-range, strategic presuppositions": As such, however, these pluralist frameworks fail to pose a serious challenge to Marxism, especially to its "sophisticated variants".[85] Lastly, the recent studies on "commercialization and proto-industrialization in Europe" as well as "parallel analyses for India and China which argued against any obvious European economic privacy before as late as the eighteenth century", though they made valuable contribution to our historical knowledge and perspective on certain issues, seem to have failed in general to provide a viable alternative to replace the old paradigm of class relations.[86] Marxism has been challenged, but it is far from having been overcome.

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[83] Wickham*, "Memories of Underdevelopment",*34-35.

[84] Ibid., 35.

[85] Ibid., 36.

[86] Ibid., 43.

If we look at the scene of economic history, we witness that the "new institutional economics", which had been gaining increasing prominence as a respectable rival and a serious alternative to the hegemony of marginalist theory from the 1970s onwards, reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s. Here, the question is whether *this* one, after its not-so-successful predecessor "cliometrics", managed to fulfill its aspirations towards socializing and historicizing the established orthodoxy of the neo-classical economics. In relation to Douglass North, one of the most prominent representatives of the institutionalist school, Boldizzoni gives a strict answer: "Many think that . . . North has used history to "humanize" economic theory. In fact, what he did was to extend the neoclassical explanatory model to the realm of social relations."[87] In this sense, it has failed to transcend the limitations faced by its predecessor. On the other hand, the picture becomes even more grave once the relation of this new theoretical school to the academic establishment of the period is taken into account: in this context, the development of this new school can be considered as part of "an attempt at product differentiation with deference to the mainstream and is dictated solely by the requirements of academic politics."[88] In the academic scene of the 1980s:

> What was needed was a formula that differed from neoclassical theory just enough not to become an identical copy or to contradict its basic principles; it also had to sound familiar to the dominant orthodoxy. The new institutionalists collected the accusations of unrealism that had tormented neoclassical theory since its beginnings and exploited them to their own advantage. They patiently subjected it to a patching-up operation and then presented themselves to mainstream economists as the ones who could save them from the attacks of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and the like; and this way their chairs were kept safe.[89]

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[87] Boldizzoni, *The Poverty of Clio*, 18.

[88] Ibid., 5-6.

[89] Ibid., 7. North's view of feudalism, moreover, is that of a "a contractual arrangement where labour

The tone of this environment became especially visible when another round of debate was conducted in the same journal as that of the first Transition Debate, *Science & Society,* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Compared to the previous one, this second debate is characterized by a more theoretically oriented outlook as the main concern of the participants seems to be a re-evaluation of the basic premises of historical materialism itself, rather than focusing on the problematique of historical transition *per se.* On the one hand, this new debate displays "the range of theoretical difficulties facing a Marxist approach to historical change which seeks to be fully comprehensive" in a context where official communism had started to lose its last grips on Marxist discussion and the critiques from the post-modernist school had started to pose an increasing challenge that should be taken seriously by the Marxists, whereas the original one had aimed at "establishing the validity of concept of capitalism" at a time when its existence was consistently denied. In a sense, this second debate poses a challenge to the established orthodoxy with its tenets of linear progress, inevitability of communism etc. from *within* Marxism itself. On the other hand, now one can discern "a loosening of ties between theory and practice" hand in hand with "a philosophical mode of analysis" over substantive empirical research.[90] Here, the main axis of the controversy centers on the relationship between the relations and forces of production in the constitution of a mode of production and the ultimate question of which side has the determining effect on the

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services were exchanged for the public good of protection and justice'." Serfdom, in this sense, does not appear to be an exploitative relationship. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 82-83.

[90] Gregor McLennan, "Marxist Theory and Historical Research: Between the Hard and Soft Options," *Science & Society* 50, no. 1 (1986): 85-95.

other. Lastly, and probably most importantly, the possibility of identifying a law of development in pre-capitalist modes of production began to be seriously questioned on the grounds that the "political" and the "economic" spheres of life were not distinct in these societies as economic exploitation was constituted through "extra-economic" means. Accordingly, there emerged a call by some of the participants of the debate for a "synthesis" between different theories of Marxism and a related abandonment of "hard theory."[91] Accordingly, we can find in this debate some repercussions of the post-modernist tendency towards eclecticism and a move away from that "grand narrative" of Marxism, even within the confines of Marxism itself.

Marxist studies on ancient history shares a similar twist of fate with medieval history-writing as well. The relationship between Marxism and ancient history extended well into the early 20th century as it found its best expression in the work of Gordon V. Childe. The discussions on ancient slavery was particularly prominent in Italy where ancient history and Marxism were closely related from the start, in terms of methods as well as scholarship. Especially since the 1960s and 1970s, there emerged "a trend to the formation of research groups which shared not only a closeness or ideological adherence to Marxism but also an interest in historical theory and a similar orientation in cultural politics."[92] The establishment of *Seminario di Antichistica* of the *Gramsci Institute* in Rome in relation to Italian Communist Party was also crucial for the relationship between Marxist theory and archeology: here, "groups of Marxist or Marx-influenced

[91] Roger S. Gottlieb, "Feudalism and Historical Materialism: A Critique and a Synthesis," *Science & Society* 48, no. 1, (1984): 2.

[92] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography", 17.

scholars found an especially suitable field of application for the interdisciplinary approaches they had been experimenting with when they began to look for new applications of the categories of 'mode of production' and 'socio-economic formation' for the historical investigation of Roman slavery", especially from the 1970s onwards.[93] The 1980s, however, in a way comparable to the Marxist history-writing on medieval period, marked a severance of the relationship between Marxism and ancient historiography.[94] Accordingly, Giardina remarks that "while browsing through recent literature on the economic and social history of the ancient world, one rarely encounters the name of Marx, citations of works by Marx, or citations of works grounded in the Marxist tradition" other than for polemical purposes against the "schematic and dogmatic Marxism" which had already left its place to a new Marxist scholarship from the 1960s onwards and hence had already turned into a straw man by that time.[95] Lastly, we find in the literature on slavery an increasing emphasis on the heterogeneity of the slaves and the diversity and particularity of their personal experiences, leading to a reluctance to use a single term to refer to these people. In this sense, the recent orientation has been towards a cultural and sociological depiction of slaves with an emphasis on everyday practices and social implications of slavery, rather than economic exploitation and structural transformation.

The Marxist debates on transitions are the historical products of the 20th century: however, "the issue of transition has by no means been limited to Marxist studies" since

[93] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography", 20.

[94] Ibid., 21.

[95] Ibid., 15.

"from the outset of the modern social science disciplines, the transition to capitalism and industrialism has been a major issue."[96] Although this topic constitutes a common point of interest between Marxist and non-Marxist circles alike, nevertheless, "the terms in which non-Marxist discussions of the subject are conducted are … usually quite different from those used by Marxists."[97] This difference is not only related to the different methodologies and theoretical frameworks adopted, but also to the politically-loaded character of the debates.

As I mentioned above, transition debates not only focus on historically specific problems, but they also raise questions about historical theory and provide crucial insight into the history and the changing character of the capitalist mode of production itself: in this sense, they have rather urgent and practical implications for the problems of modern capitalism. To give an example, while the classical Transition Debate of the 1950s focused on a specific historical problem -the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the Western Europe- the formulation of the problem on the basis of conceptual tools such as prime mover, law of development, modes of production etc., brings this topic well beyond the strictly historical terrain and to the arena of historical theory. Accordingly, it is important not to restrict the issue of transition solely to the confines of the historical experiences of transformation. To give another example, in the case of the transition to feudalism, the identification of the mode of production that was replaced by feudalism and the determination of the relative weight of slave labor in the overall production have implications not only for the definition of a mode of production

[96] Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians*, 24.

[97] Ibid., 25. Also see: Ernest Breisach, *Historiography. Ancient, Medieval and Modern*. (Chicago; London, 1994), 361.

on a theoretical level, but also for the understanding of a relatively recent historical experience -the character of the Atlantic slave trade and plantation slavery which in turn problematizes the relationship between forms of exploitation of labor and the specificity of a historical mode of production.

In a similar way, transition debates intersect with a variety of contemporary problems such as the debates on the forms of surplus extraction, accumulation and crisis in the context of the expanded reproduction of capital as well as the discussions about the agrarian question by the Marxists of the so-called Third World countries that became especially prominent with the development of "peasant studies" and the mode of production debate that was conducted in India and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. Lately, the debate between Brass and Banaji on the role of wage-labor in capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production and the polemic between Brass and Harvey on the concept of "accumulation by dispossession" exemplify the contemporary extension of the transition problem. As these debates are closely related to each other and have important implications as to the nature of capitalist accumulation and by extension, for the political action that should be taken for the emancipation of labor, it will be necessary to return to them throughout the discussion of the transitions: here, the notion of *primitive accumulation,* around which these contemporary debates converge with those on the historical transitions, will be of great importance. For now, however, I would like to proceed to a concept which is crucial for the formulation of the transition problematique in this thesis -namely, crisis.

1.4 Capitalist crisis: Setting the framework

The second significance of the transition problem is that moments of historical transformation and crisis are important signs as they disclose the inner mechanisms and

the structural contradictions of a hitherto properly functioning system in the very moment of the eruption of those contradictions contained so far. Symptoms of distress, in this sense, may become more informative about the body than its examination in a state of harmony. In this context, the debates on the transition from one mode of production to another emerge as basic loci of study through which questions about motive forces of history as well as nature of historical change can be raised. In this respect, these two historical transitions, to feudalism and to capitalism respectively, can be seen as focal points to understand not only the structure of distinct societies from the point of view of their dissolution, but also the common elements of dynamism behind them. This, however, raises the question of whether ancient and medieval societies can be said to have gone through structural crises in the sense that their inner logic of movement puts the further reproduction of these systems in jeopardy in a way comparable to Marx's understanding of crisis in relation to the capitalist mode of production.

In the broadest sense of the term, the concept of "crisis", in the context of capitalism, refers to "a generalized set of failures in the economic and political relations of capitalist reproduction."[98] The explanation of the source and character of these crises, on the other hand, have been subject to much controversy.

The view of the *bourgeois* economics on the emergence of crises is grounded in their conceptualization of capitalism as a self-regulating system which is considered to

[98] Anwar Shaikh, "An Introduction to the History of Crisis Theories," *U.S. Capitalism in Crisis, U.R.P.E* (New York: Union of Radical Political Economists, 1978), 219. http://www.eco.unibs.it/~palermo/PDF/History%20of%20crisis%20theories.pdf.

be "capable of automatic self-reproduction."[99] Accordingly, crises are seen to be "the result of exceptional deviations from the norm" and as such, considered to be external to the functioning of the system: Even when it is acknowledged that crises in capitalism display a repetitive pattern, they are still viewed as "contingent phenomena". For the resulting understanding, therefore, crisis is a case of "market imperfection" which arises due to unwelcome monopolies or state intervention.[100] As such, it has no integral relationship to the mode of production at hand: rather, it constitutes an exceptional situation. Therefore, explanations usually center on the specificities of individual crises the common denominator of which seems to be a hindrance to the perfect functioning of the markets: Accordingly, we fail to find here a systematic explanation of the capitalist crisis. However, as Clarke ably demonstrates:

> The theoretical problem is not to explain the particular causes of this or that crisis … The task is to explain the regular recurrence of economic crises as a normal part of the developmental tendencies of the capitalist mode of production. This has been the task that Marxism has taken upon itself, in trying to prove that crises are not merely superficial dislocations of capitalist accumulation, but that the tendency to crisis is inherent in the social form of capitalist production. The distinctive feature of Marxist theories of crisis is their emphasis on the necessity of crisis as an essential and ineradicable feature of the capitalist mode of production.[101]

Therefore, crises should be conceptualized as repetitive and patterned occurrences "towards which the system is internally driven, by its own principles of operation."[102] In

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[99] Shaikh, "An Introduction", 219.

[100] Simon Clarke, S. *Marx's Theory of Crisis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 5-6. (Online Version), http://homepages.warwick.ac.uk/~syrbe/mst/Crisisbook.doc)

[101] Ibid., 6-7.

[102] Shaikh, , "An Introduction", 219.

this framework:

> . . . it is important to realize that any explanation of how capitalism reproduces itself is at the same time (implicitly or explicitly) an answer to the question of how and why non-reproduction occurs, and vice versa: *in other words, the analysis of reproduction and the analysis of crisis are inseparable.*[103]

While this is the basic objective Marxist theories of crisis have set out to achieve, they do not constitute a single, monolithic body. Because Marx did not produce a complete, systematic theory of crisis, but rather he emphasized different factors in different contexts, it was left to the following generations of Marxists to draw the main contours of such a theory. Accordingly, there have been a wide variety of approaches to the identification of the root cause of crises. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the dominant paradigm was that of "disproportionality theory, with crises being attributed to the anarchy of the market."[104] Later, the theories of underconsumption constituted the main orthodoxy until the late 1930s, the best known version having been promoted by Rosa Luxemburg.[105] In this school:

> . . . it is argued that by itself, the capitalist system is incapable of self-expansion. It must grow to survive, but it requires some external source of demand (like the non-capitalist world) in order to keep it growing. This means that its reproduction is ultimately regulated by factors outside of the system: the limits to the system are external to it.[106]

In this framework, it was because of this inability of self-expansion that "any accumulation tended to negate itself" and in the end, "capitalism tended towards

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[103] Shaikh, , "An Introduction", 219.

[104] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 10.

[105] Ibid., 8.

[106] Shaikh, "An Introduction", 220.

stagnation."[107] Here, effective demand functions as "the limiting factor in capitalist accumulation."[108] For Marx, however, in relation to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production:

> . . . effective demand is not an intrinsic problem. On the contrary, in his view capitalists are driven to accumulate as rapidly as possible, so that self-expanding reproduction, not stagnation, is the normal tendency of the system. This does not imply that the accumulation process is smooth, or that partial crises may not occur along the way due to crop failures, etc. But it definitely does imply that the limits to the accumulation process do not arise from an insufficiency of demand.[109]

Furthermore, Mandel points to a major problem which lies at the basis of this theory -the way Marx's reproduction schemes were used by Rosa Luxemburg.[110] Basically, these schemes were designed by Marx to demonstrate the functioning of capitalist system in a hypothetical point of equilibrium: To this end, economy was divided into two sectors - Department I that produces means of production and Department II that produces means of consumption- and the production in these respective sectors and the circulation of commodities between the two was demonstrated accordingly.[111] This portrayal of the capitalist system, however, cannot be taken at its face value. As Mandel elaborates:

> It is obvious . . . that the overall development of the capitalist mode of production cannot be subsumed under the notion of 'equilibrium'. It is rather a dialectical unity of periods of equilibrium and periods of disequilibrium, each of the two elements engendering its own negation. Each equilibrium inevitably leads to a disequilibrium, and after a certain period of time this in turn makes possible a new provisional equilibrium. Even more: it is one of the characteristics of the capitalist economy that not only crises but also accelerated growth of production, not only interrupted reproduction but also extended reproduction, are

[107] Shaikh, "An Introduction", 226.

[108] Ibid., p231.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Mandel, *Late Capitalism,* 25.

[111] Ibid., 25-26.

> governed by ruptures of equilibrium. There is equally little doubt that the laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production lead to such constant disequilibria.[112]

These schemes, in this regard, were initially used by Marx "to prove the possibility of periodical equilibrium in the economy", rather than vice versa, and hence they fall short of explaining points of disequilibrium. This was, however, exactly what was done by the underconsumption school as they set out "to investigate the problems of the laws of development of capitalism, i.e., the problems of ruptured equilibrium, with tools designed for the analysis of equilibrium."[113] This is why their efforts to locate the origins of crisis in the limits of effective demand, and by extension, their respective analyses of imperialism on this basis of "a theory of chronic market inadequacy", are problematic.[114] In other words:

> The impasse of Marxist crisis theory has arisen primarily because it has tried to establish itself on bourgeois theoretical foundations, and in particular the theoretical foundations of general equilibrium theory, neglecting the critical dimension of Marx's theory.[115]

Underconsumption theory of crisis, however, lost its standing with the crisis of the 1960s that exhibited "a distinct fall in the rate of profit in the metropolitan centers of capitalist accumulation" which seemed to be "not a result but a cause of the crisis". It is from this point onwards that a concept of a fall in the profit rates came to the fore as the main explanatory factor behind crises. However, there was no consensus established yet as to the real mechanisms and nature of this factor: A division can be identified between

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[112] Mandel*, Late Capitalism,* 26-27.

[113] Ibid., 28.

[114] Richard B. Day, *The Crisis and the Crash: Soviet Studies of the West, 1917-1939 (*London: NLB, 1981), 20-21.

[115] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 11.

those who claimed that it was an increase in wages that caused this fall and by extension, crisis, and those "who linked it to Marx's `law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall', with the latter explanation eventually emerging as the dominant Marxist orthodoxy."[116] As for the first explanation, it is pretty obvious that the foundations on which it stands are not so strong. First and foremost, since "the tendential fall in the rate of profit is linked with a tendential rise in the rate of surplus-value, i.e. in the level of exploitation of labour", it is an "absurd" view that an increase in wages would directly and necessarily lead to a fall in the profit rates.[117] Furthermore:

> The periodic crises which result from declining profitability cannot be attributed to labor's demands or resistance, though of course different historical stages and political situations are very important in explaining how the system as a whole reacts to each crisis. As long as capitalist relations prevail, however, its general tendencies will continue to operate. Consequently Marx emphasizes that the task of the proletariat is not only to resist capital but to overthrow it.[118]

As for the second explanation, however, we witness the emergence of an approach that locates the real limits of capitalism in the very logic of that system:

> According to Marx, the limits to accumulation are entirely internal to the process . . . Capitalist accumulation is motivated by profitability. But, according to Marx, accumulation progressively lessens profitability, so that it tends to undermine itself. This is the famous law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.[119]

Capitalism, therefore, is inherently and necessarily prone to crises through which its internal contradictions manifest themselves. This susceptibility to crisis is embedded in its economic logic: As capitalism is the generalized form of commodity production for

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[116] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 47.

[117] Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy. Volume Three*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 347.

[118] Shaikh, "An Introduction", 231.

[119] Ibid.

profit, accumulation and competition emerge as the main imperatives of capitalist production and in the last instance, they create a resultant tendency towards a continuous increase in productivity with the aim of cutting down costs. As accumulation proceeds thanks to the production of relative surplus-value, technological changes lead to continuous displacement of labor. Accordingly, in capitalist system, accumulation is accompanied by the systematic reduction in the values of commodities through this increase in productivity.[120] Furthermore, these two opposing tendencies of the level of productivity and the value of commodities which together constitute the contradictory character of capitalist accumulation is located in the structural separation between the spheres of production and exchange: the level of productivity tends to increase in the sphere of production due to competition that results in cutting down of production costs and displacing living labor whereas the values tend to decrease in the sphere of exchange due to this displacement of labor.[121] Therefore, as accumulation goes on, this *law* becomes "another expression of the familiar characterization of the contradictory character of capital, which depends on the exploitation of living labor, but at the same time tries to reduce it to a minimum."[122] Two points need to be emphasized. Firstly, this explanation does not exclude previous ones, but encompasses them in the form of a general framework as "underconsumption, disproportionality and falling rate of profit theories of crisis are not inconsistent with one another, but are part of a coherent scheme."[123] Secondly, there is no a direct correlation between a falling rate of profit and

[120] Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital* (Pluto Press: London, 2004), 104.

[121] Ibid., 110.

[122] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 113-114.

[123] Ibid., 115-116.

crisis because "Marx does not simply characterize the tendency for the rate of profit to fall as an inevitable secular tendency."[124] The importance of this framework is that it signifies the contradictory nature of capitalism.

Crises, therefore, necessarily arise due to the contradiction between the spheres of production and exchange, "between the production of use values for profit and their private consumption."[125] The main objective of capitalism is, however, profit-making and in the last instance, it is an inability to expand production of profit that will lead to crisis. Due to the contradictory structure of capitalism, the production of profit, by necessity, is to come to a dead-end by undermining itself in the process: The pursuit of profit that leads to increase in productivity, simultaneously reduces the labor needed for production, "even though labor is the source of surplus value." Capitalism is, therefore, inherently prone to crisis[126]: As it carries a structural contradiction, "its dynamism may suspend the contradiction, but it can never resolve it."[127] Accordingly, as Clarke underlines:

> An adequate theory of crisis must be a theory of the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, which establishes the tendency to crisis as something inherent in those dynamics. The limits of capitalism have to be identified as something internal to capitalism. This is what is meant by saying that capitalist rests on a `contradictory foundation' -we have to identify the forces that drive capitalism forward, but simultaneously drive it to its destruction.[128]

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[124] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 119.

[125] Fine and Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital,* 90.

[126] Ibid., 95.

[127] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 95.

[128] Ibid, 54.

A crucial part of this theoretical framework is given by the concept of social division of labor as an indispensable element to the understanding of the capitalist system. As Foley underlines, though unpaid labor is at the source of surplus value, "commodity relations tend to obscure the social reality that supports them."[129] Accordingly:

> In quantitative terms the mystification of the origin of surplus value is achieved by expressing surplus value as a fraction of the total capital advanced (or tied up) in production rather than as a fraction of variable capital, as in the rate of surplus value. This ratio is called the rate of profit.[130]

In this sense, the real nature of the profit rate is lost from sight when one ignores the social relations of production in which reproduction and self-expansion of capital takes place and confines himself to "the level of the individual worker or individual capitalist firm." This illusion is, however, immediately torn apart once "a social viewpoint" is adopted as it is only "then the connection between the total social surplus value and the division of social labor time between workers and capitalists is understandable."[131] This view of capitalism in terms of the broader set of social relations of production is crucial in this context as it was the failure to identify this historical and social specificity that explains the weaknesses of the previous theories: in other words, "it was because classical political economy regarded capitalism as no more than the generalization of simple commodity production that it could not understand capitalist crises."[132]

Now, this historical character and contradictory structure of capitalism carries at least the implication that, at *some* point, its end will come. This does not, however, mean

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[129] Duncan K. Foley, *Understanding Capital: Marx's Economic Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986), 91.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.,104.

[132] Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis,* 118.

that it will collapse by itself in an autonomic way or it is a weak system that has no capacity to rejuvenate itself; but it means that it is inherently unstable and each cycle of reproduction puts it under renewed threat of destruction. The problem is that this is a specific theory after all and we cannot test its validity at this point of history -capitalism is in its place and the only thing we can do is to observe the ongoing trends and make some predictions using the analytical tools we have; and this should be the way to go if we do not want to fall into the trap of seeing signs of death for capitalism everywhere when actually there is none. The empirical justification for this case, therefore, will have to come *post festum*.

On the other hand, the general framework provided by this conceptualization of crisis remains to be of crucial importance because it explains this mode of production through its own internal contradictions, through its own logic of development: here, the nature of capitalism is conceptualized as a unity of the opposites. Most of the theories that try to analyze pre-capitalist modes of production and their dissolution, in contrast, mostly construct a conceptual framework that counterpose forces and relations of production, with different combinations of each, mediated by class struggle in the best case. The problem is that this scheme is applicable to all modes of production and in itself it does not really explain the specificity of any economic system -and just filling this scheme with historical narrative does not make it any more adequate: rather, this scheme should constitute a starting point. The next step is the identification of the laws of development which animates, or sets in motion, this basic scheme in ways specific to each particular mode of production. It is only then we can move from a static picture of history, from a snapshot of reality, into the moving, changing reality in flux. Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production, focusing on its reproduction in conjunction

with the limits inherent to the system, provides a useful model in this respect.

1.5 Transition as Structural Change: Transformation of Quantity into Quality

In the beginning, I would like to draw attention to my choice of the expression of *transition to* capitalism and feudalism instead of *roots* or *origins.* Although this may look like a matter of semantics at first sight, it reflects my specific approach to the problem: I consider capitalism and feudalism as historically specific modes of production which represent a qualitative break with the previous ones, and I think that the term *transition* captures this feeling of historicity much better than *roots* or *origins.* Furthermore, it directs the attention to the modes of production prior to those the emergence of which are under investigation as the development and the dissolution of the former turn out to be of crucial importance to understand the emergence and early history of the latter.[133] Accordingly:

> An analysis of transition has to clarify how an existing mode of production is linked up with another which is becoming and also the theoretical propositions which can explain both this being and becoming. It is also necessary to specify the conditions for the supersession of one mode by another.[134]

An additional problem with the concept of *origin* is the fact that if one searches it enough, he will eventually find it: "We move backward in search of causes whose parameters tend to be preconceived. If we rummage about history long enough (or not long enough) we are most likely to find what we desire."[135] And this is why, for example, we have a literature on a so-called ancient capitalism based on the mere

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[133] Dobb, *Studies,* 18-19.

[134] Sen, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism", PE-50.

[135] Robert A. Denemark, "Core-Periphery Trade: The Debate with Brenner over the Nature of the Link and Its Lessons," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 18, no. 1 (1992): 140.

existence of commerce and money: "Insofar as conventional historiography has confused money with capital, and trade with capitalism, it has discovered capitalism everywhere."[136] In contrast, Marx underlines that:

> All epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics. Production in general is an abstraction . . . this general category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations. Some determinations belong to all epochs, others only to a few. [Some] determinations will be shared by the most modern epoch and the most ancient. No production will be thinkable without them; however, even though the most developed languages have laws and characteristics in common with the least developed, nevertheless, just those things which determine their development, i.e. the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity -which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature- their essential difference is not forgotten.[137]

"Simple categories", therefore, should not be put under such stress to squeeze out of them more than they are capable of saying[138]: This is the real guilt of teleology assigned to the concepts of crisis and transition by those who seek for the birth of civilization or creed of humanity in one or another moment in history.[139] This is why I restrict myself to the qualitative transformation of the society marked by the dissolution of one mode of production and the emergence of another, rather than looking for the formation of *all* the initial elements that will later contribute to the structure of capitalism and feudalism (though this is a legitimate pursuit) and I think that the conceptualization of these processes as *transition* works the best in this respect. Although this requires certain

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[136] Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976), 33.

[137] Marx*, Grundrisse*, 85.

[138] Ibid., 102-103.

[139] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography", 31.

definitions and preconceptions about capitalism and the processed of transition as well, I think that it at least provides a narrower and more coherent framework to work with. On the other hand, a temporal conceptualization of the transitions on the basis of the "moment" when a structural transformation takes place, will be crucial to put the empirical evidence into order: To this end, the concept of the transformation of quantity into quality, as the signifier of a structural transformation, will be of great utility. This is also why the concept of r*eading history backwards* is of crucial importance as it "enables Marx to concentrate on specific features in the rubble of the past that he would otherwise miss or downplay, just as it enhances his understanding -essentially transforming the last moments of a dying system into the birthing moments of a new one- of what is found."[140]

1.5 Aim and scope of the thesis

This thesis focuses on the problems of transition to capitalism and to feudalism through a framework of structural contradiction and crisis, on the one hand, and a notion of structural transformation, on the other hand. Marx's understanding of capitalism is that this mode of production is inherently and necessarily prone to crises through which its internal contradictions manifest themselves. Historically, therefore, a notion of structural crisis comparable to that of capitalism can also be relevant for a proper understanding of the dissolution of the pre-capitalist modes of production.

Since I am mainly concerned with the pioneering role of England in the development of capitalism as the home-country of the Industrial Revolution, the main point of focus is on the Western European developments: by transition to capitalism,

[140] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic, 120.*

therefore, I refer to the original, initial development of capitalism as a historically novel and specific mode of production. Accordingly, the geographical focus of this thesis turns out to be Western Europe as it was in the end of the crisis of Western European feudalism in general and the English system in particular that we find the ground having been laid for the transition to capitalism. By transition to feudalism, on the other hand, I refer to the demise of the Graeco-Roman antiquity in conjunction with the changes taking place in the Western Europe leading to the emergence of a new mode of production, feudalism, in this geography. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on the European, and mainly western European experiences of transformation and is based on a close reading of secondary and predominantly Marxist literature on these transitions. In addition to the main historical focus, some contemporary extensions as well as political implications of these debates are also discussed. This thesis, therefore, aims to be a humble contribution to the question of transition by pointing out some new perspectives from which it is possible to approach the problem.

Throughout the thesis, I employ three major organizing principles. Firstly, the notion of "reading history backwards" turns out to be a crucial tool not only to understand Marx's own analysis of the pre-capitalist modes of production in relation to the emergence of capitalism, but also to identify the moment of transformation through the lenses of the *fait accompli*: in order to understand when and how transition from one mode to another mode of production took place, we should know what essentially characterizes the latter. Secondly, the notion of the "transformation of quantity into quality" makes it possible to differentiate between the gradual accumulation of the preconditions required for the constitution of a new mode of production and the structural, qualitative transformation that marks the transition. Lastly, the initial question

that gave birth to this thesis is whether these transformations can be explained on the basis of a notion of structural contradiction in these modes of production in a way comparable to capitalism.

In the second chapter, I focus on the debates on the transition to capitalism, which are predominantly Marxist in orientation due to the specific formulation of the question at hand. Here, the main organizing framework around which I structure the flow of the argument is the conceptualization of the temporality of transition by the different participants of the debates. Accordingly, I develop a categorization in the form of theories that focus on the English experience, on the European-wide development of feudalism and on the impact of the formation of a capitalist world-system. Notwithstanding the geographical connotations my categorization carries, I am mainly concerned to present these debates through the axis of temporality -between preconditions and results as well as qualitative and quantitative changes. Here, the relationship between feudal peasant differentiation and the expropriation of the peasantry is of crucial importance in conjunction with a general theory of European feudalism to understand the general tendencies of the system.

In the third chapter, I focus on the debates on the transition to feudalism. While the formulation of the problem in the form of a "transition" is specific to Marxism, the extensive literature on antiquity and ancient economy has obliged me to start the discussion with some references to the non-Marxist discussions on the ancient economy: here, I focus on Ancient Athens as well as Republican and Imperial Rome. As the nature of the mode of production that preceded European feudalism has been a widely debated topic, it will be appropriate to clarify this question in the beginning. To this end, I will focus on Ancient Greece and Rome, and question the extent and meaning of market

production, subsistence farming and slave labor in the ancient economy, with the implications these issues carry for the characterization of the respective modes of production. Regarding the transition to feudalism, on the other hand, the debates center on the late Roman Empire. Here, the problem has revolved around the characterization of the Roman economy, on the basis of a slave or an ancient mode of production, and the establishment of the chronology for the transformation of the system. My categorization of the debates in this chapter also depends on a problematization of the temporality of transformation while the transition from slavery to serfdom emerges as a crucial proxy of change.

After these two chapters whereby I survey and discuss the debates on the transition to capitalism and to feudalism respectively, in the fourth chapter, I raise more theoretically oriented questions such as the definition of a mode of production and the nature of historical transformation. Then, I proceed to a definition of capitalism, which is crucial as a general model of a mode of production and for the discussion on the transition to capitalism: Although the identification of the internal transformations feudalism went through is of vital importance for the analysis, an initial definition of the capitalist mode of production in contrast to feudalism and establishment of the point of disjuncture between the two, should be the first move to understand transition. In this context, I refer to the discussions on "extra-economic" coercion and the alleged separation of the "economic" and "political" spheres in capitalism in contrast to their unity in the pre-capitalist modes of production as crucial points for the proper theorization of these systems. Then, by focusing on the concept of primitive accumulation, I develop a tentative argument regarding the transition to capitalism on the basis of the notion of *transformation of quantity into quality*, which gives some

insight towards the understanding of the transition to feudalism in turn.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

2.1 Introduction

As the notion of temporality is of crucial importance to understand historical transitions, an initial establishment of a conceptual framework to understand the link between the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism is required in the first place. On this matter, a variety of theoretical stances can be identified:

1. A newly-forming capitalism within the confines of feudalism had a dissolving effect on the latter and hence, the two coexisted for some period of time:

(a) Feudalism was already going under a period of dissolution/temporary crisis, which was exacerbated by elements: (i) external to feudalism or (ii) internal to feudalism, the development of which had reached a point where their character changed and became incompatible with feudal mode of production. As for (i), capitalism either comes as a perfectly complete external system and transforms this already declining feudal society (or rather subsumes it, as it is now completely defenseless), or that specific external element, say money or credit for example, combined with feudal system, gives birth to a novel formation, which is the capitalist mode of production: in both cases, we have to define whence and how those external effects come and what is their nature, and in the second case, we have to identify the relationship between the external effect and the system it acts upon. In the case (ii), we are to address the contradictory character of feudalism which allows for such a transformation originating from its very own dynamics: here, the nature of the feudal mode of production should be established.

(b) Feudalism was stable, static or stagnant, and could only be dissolved by an

external factor. This could happen in two ways: (i) external factor was a *sui generis* capitalism coming from elsewhere; again, where it comes from and how it emerged in the first place should be investigated; (ii) the interaction between this specific external element and feudalism ended up in a strange fusion and gave birth to capitalism.

2. There was an identifiable time gap/intervening period between the decline of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism. Capitalism was not formed within the confines of feudalism, but emerged from mechanisms and processes that made their appearance only after the latter had disappeared, no matter how the ground for this process was laid down by the changes that took place in the previous mode of production: in this case, the historical gap between the two, which is to form the germs of capitalism, was built on the remnants of feudalism.

Now, if we return to what Marx has to say on this issue, it becomes visible that the complexity of his account is missed greatly in these later approaches to the problem of transition. Marx underlines that the abolition of serfdom had taken place long before the emergence of capitalism: so, they are not synchronic happenings.[141] One should be cautious, however, not to jump into conclusions as Marx goes further on to state that "the economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former."[142] So, we have two quotations by Marx, and two theoretical schools that rely on either proposition to prove that they have the theoretical support of Marx.

In this respect, I argue that most of the existing literature on transition is marked

[141] Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982), 876.

[142] Ibid., 875.

by a confusion regarding the relationship between the demise of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism as explanation of the dissolution of feudalism is automatically taken for the emergence of capitalism, and *vice versa*. The link between the two is not, in many instances, properly problematized. Even if capitalism had begun to take shape within the structure of feudalism, does this necessarily mean that we can take the end of this mode of production for granted? And by the same token, to what extent we can conceptualize a self-sustaining capitalism, which gained a momentum of its own, posing a challenge to the established order, at this point in time? Or from the other perspective, even if there was a historical gap between the dissolution of one mode and the emergence of the other, can we really identify the definite moment when a qualitative, structural transformation took place? To what extent can we temporally differentiate capitalism proper from feudalism? On the other hand, do not we lose the sight of the historical specificity of capitalist mode of production if we set out to trace its genesis to the simplest elements it contains? Or, from the opposite view, can we really understand capitalism without going under such a pursuit? To answer these and similar questions, it is obligatory to identify the three historical moments of the process -the feudal mode of production, the process of transition and the capitalist mode of production- each of which require its due analysis and study.

The question of the relationship between capitalism and feudalism brings forth two crucial problems. The first one is the question of historical periodization. Here, I am not concerned with the periodization of the historical stages of human evolution, or the historical periodization of the capitalist mode of production in terms of the so-called laissez-faire or monopoly stages. As the contributors of the ever-growing literature on transition come furnished with a good load of theoretical assumptions that have

important political and practical implications for the way capitalism functions, it should not be surprising to find them trying their best to remain faithful to their heritage. Quite naturally, therefore, their conceptualization of capitalism sneaks into the way they theorize about pre-capitalist modes of production in general, and feudalism and transition in particular. Most importantly, however, their choice of birthplace and birthday for capitalism seems to be a function of this baggage, and the debates on whether capitalism properly emerged in the form of Merchant, Agrarian or Industrial Capitalism, turn out to be extensions of how capitalism is defined *vis-a-vis* feudalism (or another pre-capitalist mode of production). Therefore, what seems to be an exclusively historical question at first sight (date and place) is, to a considerable extent, a question of theory: "As we choose our dates, so we choose our scale of similarities and differences."[143]

Secondly, the conceptualization of the emergence of capitalism as a qualitative transformation raises the question of primitive accumulation. Leaving aside for now the debates on whether it belongs to the pre-history of capitalism, or as a mere theoretical construct, can still be counted among its methods, the main problem primitive accumulation brings forth is the historical identification of such a structural transformation in its relation to the previous changes taking place in society -in other words, the transformation of quantity into quality. I argue that the famous debate between the schools of so-called merchant and agrarian capitalism can only be understood in this context. Once again, how capitalism is defined in contrast to feudalism occupies a central place in the picture.

[143] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II*, 7.

2.2 Feudal mode of production and theories of transition

In this chapter, I attempt to draw a general picture of the intellectual terrain which has been the scene of competing theories on the transition to capitalism. Rather than sticking to a properly chronological order, I will set out to identify the most important themes that continuously recur in these debates: This is more convenient than giving a complete survey as later debates come out as the derivatives of the previous ones, and can be located in the same theoretical spectrum as the earlier ones. Accordingly, later debates are far more important for their extension of the implications of the previous debates rather than their originality. This is why I will restrict myself to more or less "classical" theories on transition in this chapter and focus on the implications of those later debates in the fourth chapter.

In broad outline, three main schools on the problem of transition can be identified, with due respect, of course, to not-so-insignificant differences between the individual theoreticians and *ecoles*. The first approach focuses on the English experience as *the classic case,* in Marx's words, of the emergence of capitalism and aims at understanding the transformations that took place within the feudal structure and the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism; the second one develops a view of European feudalism as a phenomenon of *uneven and combined development* and sets out to explain the crisis of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism on this basis; and the last school identifies the world economy as the main unit of analysis, the different parts of which are linked together by trade, and proposes a theory that focuses on the development of capital and commodity exchange as the main initiators of capitalism.

This categorization may seem to be arbitrary, as there can be as many ways to categorize the endless stream of theories and debates on the issue as there are

researchers interested in the subject, trying to find a framework to make sense of all of this. I justify my particular choice on the grounds that it seems to be the best-suited one for my purposes. My organizing framework, which may look to be grounded on a geographical form of categorization at first sight, actually draws from my concerns with the problems of primitive accumulation and qualitative forms of transformation in the social relations of production, the proper conceptualization of the temporality concerning the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism, as well as the assumptions of the parties on the nature of capitalism which implicitly or explicitly leak into how transition and feudalism is conceptualized. Although an important dimension of the transition debates was the question of the proper unit of analysis[144], here I am mostly concerned with the temporal implications of this problem, so-to-speak. All the theories I will be dealing with have much to say on these issues, and transition offers a more or less well-defined problematic to start with. Nevertheless, I hope to be able to avoid the trap of lumping a wide-array of theories under the same category just because it fits my purposes as such: though I will *not* be giving a complete survey of the debates and analyses, I will, to the best of my ability, try to highlight the most crucial nuances between them. On the other hand, these theories approximately correspond to what can be generalized as Agrarian and Merchant Capitalism. I am postponing a discussion of Industrial Capitalism for now for the reason that the roots of the Industrial Revolution are to be found in the small manufactures and workshops, and by extension, in the putting-out system and rural handicrafts, the origins of which still require some reference to either Merchant or Agrarian Capitalism -no matter how these two are

[144] Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 16.

defined. The transforming effect of the technological innovations which revolutionized the production process, however, should be put under scrutiny in order to adequately evaluate how real subsumption replaced formal subsumption of labor, and what is the significance of this change for the concept of mode of production in general, and the emergence of capitalism in particular.[145] This last issue will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

2.2.1 From feudalism to capitalism: The English experience

2.2.1.1 Marx: Differentiation, expropriation and primitive accumulation

The literature on the transition to capitalism in England heavily relies on Marx's theorization of the problem. As Brass underlines:

> Because capitalist development in England was the paradigmatic case study utilized by Marx himself, it became in an important sense the bench- mark for all subsequent discussion among Marxists (and between the latter and non-Marxists) about agrarian transformation and its role in a transition from feudalism to capitalism.[146]

In the well-known part on primitive accumulation in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx gives a historical account of the emergence of capitalism in England by skecthing out how two main classes of capitalist form of exploitation, the capitalist and the wage-laborer, emerged there in the first place. The existence of these two novel classes in the midst of capitalism implies that the laborer should be dependent on the market in order to survive, or else, he will not feel the need to sell his labor-power to the capitalist (the issue of "market dependence", in other words).[147] This, in turn, requires that he lacks his

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[145] Karl Marx. *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863* (MECW, Volume 34, 93-121; translated by Ben Fowkes; transcription by Andy Blunden, 2002). Online version. https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1861/economic/ch37.htm

[146] Brass, "Against forgetting (our) history", 126.

[147] Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence," *Journal of Agrarian Change 2, no. 1*

means of subsistence: so, the separation of the producer from his means of production is at the heart of what Marx defines as "the so-called primitive accumulation."[148] This process should have been completed for capitalism to emerge in the first place as it is the historical pre-requisite of capitalist mode of production:

> The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production.[149]

A dramatic transformation in the social form of exploitation, therefore, was the corollary of this transition as Marx underlines that "the starting-point of the development that gave rise both to the wage-labourer and to the capitalist was . . . the transformation of feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation."[150] In this context, Marx locates the beginning of "the capitalist era" in the 16th century and focuses on England as the "classic" case of this process[151] whereby serfdom had already disappeared long before the emergence of capitalism, around the end of the 14th century, and "the immense majority of the population consisted then, and to a still larger extent in the, fifteenth century, of free peasant proprietors, however much the feudal trappings might disguise their absolute

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(2002): 50-87.

[148] Marx, *Capital 1*, 874.

[149] Ibid., 874-5.

[150] Ibid., 875.

[151] Ibid., 876.

ownership."[152] During this period, the agricultural wage-laborers were mostly consisted of small poor peasants and only a minority were full-time workers while even this latter group still possessed a piece of land of their own and continued to have some claim to the commons, no matter how miserable their situation was *vis-a-vis* the middle and the rich peasantry.[153] The transitory period between feudalism and capitalism was, therefore, characterized by the predominance of the free small-holding peasantry while the destruction of this group put an end to this period. As Marx goes on to explain this process:

> In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true above all for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form.[154]

This expropriation on a massive scale, which was "the prelude to the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production", took place in the English countryside of the late 15th and the early 16th century. One important actor in the initial expulsion of the peasantry off the land was the state: the greatest blow, however, came from the landlords who "created an incomparably larger proletariat by forcibly driving the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal title as the lords

[152] Marx, *Capital 1*, 877.

[153] Ibid., 877-8.

[154] Ibid, p.876.

themselves, and by usurpation of the common lands."[155] On the basis of this process lies "the rapid rise of the Flemish wool manufactures, and the corresponding rise in the price of wool in England."[156] The process was further exacerbated by the Reformation in the 17th century.[157] The real transformation in the countryside, however, came in the mid-eighteenth century:

> Even in the last few decades of the seventeenth century, the yeomanry, the class of independent peasants, were more numerous than the class of farmers . . . By about 1750 the yeomanry had disappeared, and so, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, had the last trace of the common land of the agricultural labourer.[158]

This usurpation of the commons and the turning of arable land into pasture, which had started in the late 15th century and continued in the 16th century, "was carried on by means of individual acts of violence against which legislation, for a hundred and fifty years, fought in vain." In the 18th century, however, this whole process was legalised in the form of the Enclosure Acts "by which the landowners grant themselves the people's land as private property."[159] The emergence of private property rights on land marked its transformation into an alienable commodity. Furthermore, as the independent peasantry was increasingly replaced by "tenants at will, small farmers on yearly leases, a servile rabble dependent on the arbitrary will of the landlords", a two-sided movement was put into action. Firstly, there was a trend towards the consolidation of larger farms which

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[155] Marx, *Capital 1*, 878.

[156] Ibid., 878-9.

[157] Ibid., 881.

[158] Ibid., 883.

[159] Ibid., 885.

signified the emergence of capitalist relations in agricultural production; and secondly, the prople expropriated from the land hurled into the towns and turned into the proletariat of the manufactures.[160] Marx summarizes this process in the following way:

> The spoliation of the Church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians.[161]

Having defined the enclosure of the commons and the expropriation of the peasantry from the soil not only as the basis of the modern wage-workers, but also as the origin of the big landowners, Marx sets out to explain the origins of the capitalists and focuses on the figure of the farmer to this end. In contrast to the modern wage-worker and landowner, who owe their birth to the Enclosures to a considerable extent, the emergence of the farmer was "a slow process evolving through many centuries", which was rooted in the feudal period and the different forms of tenure and conditions of emancipation the serfs and the free peasants alike went through. Then, Marx traces the lienage of the modern farmer in England: turning from bailiff into a peasant-like figure and then into *metayer,* he found his modern form when he started to hire wage-laborers, extract a part of the surplus produced by this wage-labor and turn this suplus into profit and ground-rent.[162] His proper transformation into the capitalist farmer, however, came in the 15th and the 16th centuries with the agricultural revolution which considerably

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[160] Marx*, Capital 1,* 886.

[161] Ibid., 895.

[162] Ibid., 905.

increased the previous peasant differentiation: the latter was, in turn, further intensified by "the usurpation of the common lands" which contributed greatly to the farmer's acquisition of livestock and manure.[163] Lastly:

> A further factor, of decisive importance, was added in the sixteenth century. At that time the contracts for farms ran for a long time, often for ninety-nine years. The progressive fall in the value of the precious metals, and therefore of money, brought golden fruit to the farmers. Apart from all the other circumstances discussed above, it lowered wages. A portion of the latter was now added to the profits of the farm. The continuous rise in the prices of corn, wool, meat, in short of all agricultural products, swelled the money capital of the farmer without any action on his part, while the ground rent he had to pay diminished, since it had been contracted for on the basis of the old money values. Thus he grew rich at the expense both of his labourers and his landlords. No wonder, therefore, that England, at the end of the sixteenth century, had a class of capitalist farmers who were rich men in relation to the circumstances of the time.[164]

A crucial consequence of the agricultural revolution was that it led to an increase in productivity, laying even more rural workers off the land and more land off use. This was decisive not only for the further development of capitalist relations in agriculture, but also for the development of industrial capitalism in the long run:

> With the 'setting free' of a part of the agricultural population, therefore, their former means of nourishment were also set free. They were now transformed into material elements of variable capital. The peasant, expropriated and cast adrift, had to obtain the value of the means of subsistence from his new lord, the industrial capitalist, in the form of wages. And the same thing happened to those raw materials of industry which depended on indigenous agriculture. They were transformed into an element of constant capital.[165]

Lastly, this process was marked by the creation of a home-market for the products of this novel form of labor as the former self-subsisting peasantry had already lost its means of production and became increasingly dependent on the market to acquire the basic

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[163] Marx, *Capital 1,* 906.

[164] Ibid., 906-7.

[165] Ibid., 908-9.

necessities of life, which had by then turned into commodities, produced by larger farms and sold to the manufactures.[166]

As Marx gives some hints about the importance of the internal transformations that the feudal system went through in his chapter on primitive accumulation, he even more emphatically elaborates on the existence and significance of differentiation among the feudal peasantry in his analysis of ground rent in the third volume of *Capital.* As Marx traces the transformation of the forms of pre-capitalist ground rent, he underlines that while the nature of ground-rent does not change from an economic point of view, a certain potential for later differentiation among the rural inhabitants is gradually created through the changing forms of surplus-extraction. As rent is the basic form of surplus labor in the pre-capitalist context based on agricultural production, ground-rent initially appears as labor rent: at this point, the direct producer is the owner of his means of production and works both on his own soil and on the estate of his feudal landlord without anything in return (*corvee*). As he produces his own means of subsistence on his own land, it is the days confined to working on the landlord's estate that takes the form of surplus-labor[167]: thus, in this context, "rent and surplus-value are identical" in the sense that "rent . . . is the form in which the unpaid surplus-labor is expressed."[168] As peasant production is characterized by a combination of agricultural and domestic industry and surplus is extracted mainly through compulsory agricultural labor services, Marx remarks that "the possibility of a certain economic development" exists even at

[166] Marx*, Capital 1,* 910-1.

[167] Marx, *Capital 3,* 925-930.

[168] Ibid., 925-926.

this point[169]: While this form of surplus extraction tends to devour any potential agricultural surplus that may stay in the hands of the producer himself, the coexistence of the agriculture and industry in the sphere of peasant self-reproduction at least indicates that some potential for development exists. As Marx observes:

> . . . it immediately follows from labour rent that, taking all other factors as constant, it depends entirely on the relative scale of the surplus or forced labour whether and how far the direct producer is capable of improving his own condition, enriching himself, producing a surplus over and above his indispensable means of subsistence.[170]

Therefore, there is no reason to assume that every household has the same capacity and hence, the same state of being at this point: the network of relationships between households might point to an initial inequality among the peasantry even at this level of development. Therefore, peasantry does not constitute a homogeneous body which takes the form of a "peasant mode of production".

As labor rent turns into rent in kind, its economic nature remains unchanged in the sense that ground-rent still remains to be "the only dominant and normal form of surplus-value or surplus-labor." Furthermore, in most cases, rent in kind is still coupled by the elements of the older form, even when it becomes dominant. On the other hand, rent in kind presupposes a higher level of societal development: As "surplus labor is no longer performed … under the direct supervision and compulsion of the landlord or his representative"[171], the producer now has to work on his own land alone and in this way, he practically has all his labor time at his disposal, despite the fact that a certain portion

[169] Marx, *Capital 3,* 930.

[170] Ibid., 928-929.

[171] Ibid., 930.

of this labor-time still belongs to the landlord without compensation. The crucial point here is that the landlord now acquires the surplus "no longer directly, in its own natural form, but rather in the natural form of the product in which it is realized." Historically, rent in kind in its pure form still presumes a natural economy as well as the combination of rural industry and agriculture: but, in contrast to labor rent, which is basically constituted by compulsory agricultural production, surplus that constitutes rent in kind is a product of this combination. Therefore, the producer has now more opportunity to perform excess labor whose product may remain in his hands as the surplus expected from him does not have to consume the whole of this excess. In the end, rent in kind is accompanied by the possibility of bigger economic differences as it provides the opportunity for the "producer to obtain the means whereby he may exploit the labor of others."[172]

Lastly, money rent characterizes the situation whereby the natural form of surplus product should be turned into the money form: What should be handed over to the landlord is no longer the product itself, but its money equivalent. In this respect, the transformation of rent in kind into money rent seems to be simply a formal transformation of the former.[173] However, Marx adds that:

> . . . money rent is at the same time the form of dissolution of the ground-rent . . . which coincides prima facie with surplus value and surplus labour -ground-rent as the normal and dominant form of surplus-value . . . In its further development, money rent must lead- leaving aside all intermediate forms, such as that of the small peasant farmer- either to the transformation of the land into free peasant property or to the form of the capitalist mode of production, rent paid by the capitalist farmer.[174]

[172] Marx, *Capital 3,* 931.

[173] Ibid., 932.

[174] Ibid., 934.

Accordingly, the commodification of a certain part of the product implies that the nature of the mode of production is changing as the direct producer starts to lose his isolated way of life. In this context, Marx underlines that the emergence of money rent "presupposes an already more significant development of trade, urban industry, commodity production in general and therefore monetary circulation. It also presupposes that products have a market price and are sold more or less approximately at their values."[175] On the other hand, this whole process has important implications for the transformation of the social structure at hand as it is coupled by "the formation of a class of non-possessing day-laborers, who hire themselves out for money"[176] whereby the group of already existing wealthier peasants start to exploit these wage workers and through this exploitation, as Marx observes, "it gradually becomes possible for them to build up a certain degree of wealth and transform themselves into future capitalists."[177] Then, the germs of differentiation exist long before the emergence of capitalism, as a potential to be realized by its expansion into agrarian relations of production.[178]

Marx's historical account, therefore, comprises both the transformations that took place within the confines of feudalism and the crucial developments that came only after its demise. Here, he finds the roots of the modern capitalist farmer among the ranks of the former feudal peasantry, which later went under a process of differentiation, and the

[175] Marx, *Capital 3,* 933.

[176] Ibid., 934.

[177] Ibid., 935.

[178] Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (London: Zwan Publications, 1988), 19.

origins of the modern wage-workers among the ranks of the expropriated peasants. To summarize the argument so far:

(i) Pre-capitalist differentiation among the ranks of the peasantry set the ground for the slow evolution of the figure of the capitalist farmer. This figure was characterized by his production of some amount of surplus above the ground-rent destined for the pocket of the feudal landlord, on the one hand, and employment of wage-labor, on the other hand: Once this surplus found its way to the market, it further exacerbated the already existing differentiation among the peasantry. At this point, market emerges only as an opportunity for the rich peasants as it does not impose a "compulsion" on the producer: it has a subsidiary character yet.

(ii) The Enclosure movement was on the basis of the expropriation of the former self-sufficient peasant from the land and his separation from his means of production. From this point onwards, market starts to exert a "compulsion" as the only way to survive for the dispossessed peasant becomes going to the market for labor to sell his labor-power for a wage, and the market for commodities to buy the basic necessities of life with this wage. This is the origin of the rural and urban wage-laborers.

(iii) The Enclosure movement constituted the historical origin of the modern big landowners, who were able to agglomerate considerable amount of land.

Now, it is one option to identify the emergence of capitalist agriculture on the basis of both "peasant dispossession by displacement" and "peasant dispossession by differentiation".[179] Some questions arise from this: Could differentiation, though the chronological order obliges us to place it at the beginning of the whole process, directly

[179] A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay, "Surveying the agrarian question (part 1): unearthing foundations, exploring diversity," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 183.

lead to capitalist agriculture, or in other words, whether this was necessarily *the* moment of transition, or merely a breeding ground for the later development of capitalism? Could the Enclosure movement, in a context where small-holding peasantry still predominated and differentiation was absent, set in motion a process which would end up in the establishment of capitalist relations of production? In the last instance, these questions come to the issue of the transformation of the quantity into quality and requires a proper conceptualization of the temporal, causal and structural relationship between feudalism and capitalism. This is why the question of transition calls for a proper definition of these modes of porduction.

The large literature on the transition to capitalism heavily relied on Marx's account of the transformation of the rural landscape of England, but focusing on different aspects of his analysis. In this context, the first view on transition focuses on the changes that took place among the medieval peasantry and in the structure of the feudal mode of production, as examplified by the works of E. A. Kosminsky, Maurice Dobb and Rodney Hilton: here, Marx's insight on differentiation was developed, given its historical dimension, and used to explain the question of transition. Crucially, as Byres underlines, "in this broad tradition, it is not the case that the feudal peasantry constituted a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass": on the contrary, stratification constituted an integral part of their social existence.[180] This view can be compared to Robert Brenner's position with his emphasis on the late medieval class struggle between the peasantry and the landlords, and the early modern enclosures which resulted in the

[180] Terrence J. Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry Under Feudalism and the Transition to Capitalism: In Defence of Rodney Hilton," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, no. 1 (2006): 28-29.

expropriation of the peasantry from the land. No matter how much they share, the main diference betwen these two positions can be found in the "causal importance" given by the parties to peasant differentiation in their respective explanations of the emergence of capitalism: "for Brenner peasant differentiation has no causal importance: it is an outcome of transformation and not a driving force in its securing. For Hilton, it is central to transformation as it is not an outcome but a determining variable, a *causa causans* rather than a *causa causata.*"[181] Therefore, differentiation acts here as a marker of their different approaches to the "balance of class forces" in the context of transition to capitalism.[182] This discrepancy between the two can only be understood under the light of the parties' respective conceptualization of the temporal and causal relationship between the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism, on the one hand, and the nature of the medieval peasantry, on the other hand: in this respect, Dobb considered the first capitalists to have risen from the ranks of petty-commodity producers of the feudal system while "Brenner did not like the implicit assumption of Dobb that within the interstices of feudalism lay the basis of capitalism waiting to be unleashed."[183]

2.2.1.2 Peasant differentiation and petty commodity production

The classic instance of the differentiation thesis can be found in Maurice Dobb's pioneering work, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, published in 1946; this view was further developed with the so-called *Transition Debate* that took place in the the

[181] .Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry," 17.

[182] Akram-Lodhi and Kay, "Surveying the agrarian question (part 1), 197-198.

[183] Ibid., 196.

famous Marxist journal *Science and Society* in the 1950s, starting with Paul Sweezy's critique of the aforementioned book and continuing with the contributions to the problem of transition from respectable historians of the medieval and the early modern periods. This book and the ensuing debate laid the theoretical ground for the following attempts at the examination of the problem of transition as the two main theoretical approaches were clearly crystallized throughout the course of the correspondence: The former approach focused on the transformations that took place within the structure of the European feudalism and tried to understand the internal dynamics of this mode of production whereas the latter emphasized the dissolving impact of towns and trade on the feudal system, which was conceptualized as a static and unchanging entity. In the debate, Dobb represented the former approach whereas Sweezy spoke out from the standpoint of the latter. Dobb's main contribution to the problematic of transition, on the other hand, was his open and conscious attempt to explain the emergence of capitalism by drawing on the internal dynamics and contradictions of feudalism (formulated in the concept of *prime mover*) and the class struggle between the agricultural producers and the surplus extractors -therefore, it would not be inaccurate to define his approach as "a theory of class determination", though he was not the first to theorize as such.[184] In this section, I will mainly focus on Dobb in relation to his approach to petty-commodity production and differentiation and postpone a proper discussion of the controversy between these two standpoints to a following section.

As the Transition Debate starts with Sweezy's evaluation of the *Studies,* the first point of his criticism and the main axis of the debate turns out to be the identification of

[184] Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians,* 23.

the dynamics, expressed in the term of *prime mover,* behind the development of the feudal mode of production and its eventual collapse to make way for capitalism. In this context, the concept of *prime mover* refers to "the internal contradictions of feudal mode of production which made for its development and eventual replacement ... its internal dialectic", as defined by Hilton.[185] This notion of *prime mover* is crucial to understand historical transformation since the concept of mode of production not only refers to a particular social organization of production, but also a specific dynamic of change that makes its self-reproduction and hence, development and transformation possible.

Dobb's conceptualization of a mode of production is that of a dynamic unity of relations and forces of production, which have a reciprocal impact on each other, while in the last analysis the relations turn out to be "the shell within which technical growth itself proceeds"[186] whereby the form of labor exploitation becomes determinant of the mode of production at hand. In general terms, therefore, Dobb defines historical development and change in modes of production on the basis of the form of surplus extraction -or form in which exploitation of labor takes place.[187] In this context, the first premise of Dobb's analysis is that capitalism should be conceptualized as "a specific mode of production", the origin of which should be searched in the period when a transformation in the previous mode of production is observed. This moment of change is in turn marked by "the direct subordination of the producer to a capitalist" -the

[185] Rodney Hilton, "A Comment" in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 109.

[186] Dobb, *Studies,* 23.

[187] Maurice Dobb, "A Reply" in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 57-58.

emergence of a novel form of social relations of production between novel classes, in other words.[188] Accordingly, in the case of feudalism, the form exploitation is that of serfdom, which denotes the coercive relations between the producer and the landlord -or "the exploitation of the producer by virtue of direct politico-legal compulsion"- in a context where the level of development of productive forces correspond to *petty mode of production* in which the producer is still in possession of his means of production and performs his economic activity on small-scale production units using a low level of technology. Although Dobb adds that "the coercive relationship . . . was conditioned . . . by a certain level of development of the productive forces", he nevertheless continues to define feudalism on the basis of serfdom as long as serfdom constitutes the "typical", and not an "incidental" form of labor exploitation in society.[189] The question is, therefore, to explain how this change in the form of exploitation came about.

Dobb underlines that "economic society is moved by its own internal contradictions" and in this respect, class struggle becomes a factor of prime importance.[190] Accordingly, Dobb starts his analysis from the conceptualization of the feudal mode of production as one of class conflict between the producers and the surplus extractors and extends this insight into the emergence of a capitalist class from the ranks of the small producers. On the relationship between the decline of serfdom and the emergence of capitalist relations, Dobb states that "the essential conflict generated by a feudal mode of production" is the antagonistic relationship between "the petty mode of

[188] Dobb, *Studies,* 18-19.

[189] Dobb, "A Reply", 57.

[190] Ibid., 59-60.

production" and the relations of exploitation based on "extra-economic compulsion" and hence, between "the direct producers and their feudal overlords". Accordingly, Dobb identifies "the revolt among petty producers" as the main factor behind the "dissolution and decline of feudal exploitation."[191] However, the relationship between "peasant revolt against feudalism" and the emergence of "bourgeois relations of production" is an *indirect* one -not an automatic process, but a long and uneven one which can sometimes be "arrested" in certain contexts. Dobb explains that the "partial emancipation from feudal exploitation" made it possible for the peasants "to retain some element of the surplus product for themselves", which in turn paved the way for not only better production methods and improved technique of agriculture but also "accumulation of capital within the petty mode of production itself" and the related increase in "class differentiation within that economy of small producers.".As for the markets, though they did not impose "any compulsive market dependence" on the peasantry at this point in time, the richer segments of the peasantry increasingly contributed to it to take advantage of the "opportunities" it presented: by further accumulating land and capital, and increasingly getting to rely on wage-labor from the 14th and the 15th century onwards, they had established their position by the 16th century.[192] It was in this way that "the embryo of bourgeois productive relations arose within the old society."[193] In the end, the genesis of industrial capital is located by Dobb in "the internal economy of the

[191] Maurice Dobb, "From Feudalism to Capitalism" in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 165-166.

[192] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry*",* 25.

[193] Dobb, "From Feudalism to Capitalism", 167.

body of small producer"[194] -among the ranks of petty producers from which "*kulak* yeomen farmers rose to become minor gentry", in other words.[195] This account is mostly in line with Marx's analysis of the pre-capitalist ground-rent.

In this context, Dobb concludes that it is "the inefficiency of Feudalism as a system of production, coupled with the growing needs of the ruling class for revenue, that was primarily responsible for its decline": As the peasant producers of the feudal period were already living under conditions of low productivity, pretty close to subsistence level, any increase in the obligations laid on the peasantry would eventually cause "an exhaustion, or actual disappearance, of the labor-force by which the system was nourished."[196] Accordingly, Dobb refuses to locate the origin of capitalism "in the twelfth century as does Pirenne . . . nor even in the fourteenth century with its urban trade and gild handicrafts as others have done."[197] Instead, he proposes that England of the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century seems to be a better alternative to locate the initial formation of the capitalist mode of production whereby

> capital began to penetrate production on a considerable scale, either in the form of a fairly matured relationship between capitalist and hired wage-earners or in the less developed form of the subordination of domestic handicraftsmen, working in their own homes, to a capitalist on the so-called putting-out system.[198]

Accordinglys, one should proceed with caution as to the social character of the artisans

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[194] Kohachiro Takahashi, "A Contribution to the Discussion," in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 87.

[195] Dobb, "A Reply", 64.

[196] Dobb, *Studies,* 42-43.

[197] Ibid., 17-18.

[198] Ibid.

and the upper strata of farmers of the 14th and the 16th century as Dobb underlines that the petty mode of production of this group "was not yet capitalist, although containing within itself the embryo of capitalist relations and even showing signs of coming into subjection to capital from outside." Instead, Dobb insists that this was a transitional period and the initial elements of capitalism had not yet become the dominant factor in the economy. Accordingly, as Dobb concludes, the relations between the producer and the exploiter in this transitional period kept their feudal character[199]: these petty-commodity producers, therefore, "were still, in 1450, rich peasants" and not capitalists.[200] At the same time, however, Dobb's location of the emergence of capitalism in the late sixteenth-century means that the period of transition in between -from the dissolution of feudal mode of production in the 14th century to the initial emergence of capitalism in the 16th century- turns out to be "an intervening period" which "seems to have been neither feudal nor yet capitalist so far as its mode of production was concerned."[201] In this respect, there is an unsurmountable contradiction in Dobb's definition of feudalism on the basis of serfdom: if serfdom was dead by the late 14th -15th century in England, how could the society remain feudal until the bourgeois revolution came about? At the root of this inconsistency lies Dobb's reduction of the concept of mode of production to the form of exploitation of labor. Accordingly, Dobb also fails to explain "the maintenance of feudal class relation" in the period between the decline of serfdom and the revolution of 1640.[202] A part of this puzzle can be found in Dobb's

[199] Dobb, *Studies,* 20-21.

[200] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry Under Feudalism and the Transition to Capitalism", 26.

[201] Dobb, *Studies,* 19.

[202] Robert Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Cambridge Journal of*

confusion of "the era before transition (1350–1450) and the era of transition itself (the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries)" as he seems at times to substitute the explanation of one for the explanation of the other.[203] On the other hand, Mooers suggests that the reason behind this contradiction is "a failure on Dobb's part to see the growth of commodity relations not as something external to feudalism, but as an integral aspect of feudal relations of production."[204] This is why his picture of the transition seems to be inconsistent at times.

Dobb defines the crisis of the 14th century as a marker of the demise of feudalism and hence he emphasizes that "the disintegration of the feudal mode of production had already reached an advanced stage *before* the capitalist mode of production developed, and that this disintegration did not proceed in any close association with the growth of the new mode of production within the womb of the old."[205] On the other hand, in the context of his discussion of peasant differentiation, he argues that "the embryo of bourgeois productive relations arose within the old society."[206] Here, what seems to be a contradiction at first sight may be to some extent explicable in relation to Dobb's changing focus and interest on the subject. His emphasis on the transitional nature of the period between feudalism and capitalism as well as his insistence that feudalism had already gone under a process of dissolution before capitalism emerged can be

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Economics 2 (1978): 123.

[203] *Byres,* "Differentiation of the Peasantry Under Feudalism and the Transition to Capitalism", *26-27.*

[204] Colin Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe: Absolutism, revolution, and the rise of capitalism in England, France, and Germany* (London; New York: Verso, 1991)**,** 26.

[205] Dobb, *Studies*, 19-20.

[206] Dobb, "From Feudalism to Capitalism", 167.

understood in the context of his polemic with Sweezy since Dobb was very much concerned to identify the internal contradictions of the feudal mode of production as the main reason behind its development and demise. On the other hand, we can identify an overarching effort on his side to trace the lineages of the capitalists to the rural producers of the feudal period. Accordingly, peasant differentiation occupies a central place in his analysis and renders his use of the term "embryo" understandable. So, feudalism declined due to its own internal contradictions (class contradiction), and not because a newly emerging and/or external capitalism came to dissolve it; but, at the same time, the ground for the capitalist mode of production was prepared during the feudal epoch, the best manifestation of which, for Dobb, was differentiation and petty commodity production, neither of which indicated capitalist relations until the 16th century.

Lastly, Dobb explains the different outcomes of the general crisis of feudalism on the basis of the different reactions shown by the landowners and the peasantries of Europe, such as military means used by the nobles to suppress the revolting peasantry and the degree of the intensity of the peasant resistance, and hence, he accepts that such "political and social factors played a large part here in determining the course of events". However, in the end, Dobb concludes that social-political factors fail to provide an adequate explanation of the differences throughout Europe and hence, "in deciding the outcome, economic factors must have exercised an outstanding influence": For Dobb, the most important economic factor turns out to be "the abundance or scarcity, the cheapness or dearness, of hired labor in determining whether or not the lord was willing or unwilling to commute labor-services for a money-payment", which in turn seems to have become expanded in places "where the concern of feudal economy was to produce

for a market."[207] In this context, it becomes further visible that, for Dobb, "the causality runs from differentiation to extension of leases and growing use of hired labour" since "it is also implicit in Dobb's argument that differentiation would create an increasing pool of labour that might be hired, from the swelling ranks of poor peasants, for seasonal work."[208] Therefore, one would expect capitalist relations to develop the earliest when peasant differentiation went the furthest as it was the breeding ground for poor peasants who had to work for a wage and rich peasants who were in a position to hire wage-labor. In the end, however, how such differentiation could lead to a qualitatively different mode of production by itself remains unanswered.

Rodney Hilton, on the other hand, develops a view of transition similar to Dobb: his most significant contribution, however, comes in the shape of his Marxist scholarship on medieval English history marked by a "reconceptualization of feudalism, not as a stable and static social order, but as one of contradiction, struggle and movement . . . as a class-struggle society."[209] As Hilton "substantially elaborated Dobb's argument, providing the archival evidence of the character of the transition", it will be necessary at least to touch upon how he conceptualized the feudal mode of production itself.[210]

First and foremost, feudal peasant economy was characterized by subsistence-oriented agricultural production, which comprised farming as well as animal pasturing, based on households and family labor as the main units of production.[211] These peasant

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[207] Dobb, *Studies*, 51-54.

[208] *Byres,* "Differentiation of the Peasantry Under Feudalism and the Transition to Capitalism", *22-23.*

[209] Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians,* 251

[210] Akram-Lodhi and Kay, "Surveying the agrarian question (part 1)", 196.

[211] Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and The English Rising of 1381.*

households or even the peasant communities around which all village life and production were organized, however, were not "economically self-sufficient" in themselves.[212] Therefore, Hilton underlines that "a further element of the socio-economic structure, namely the lordship" should be taken into consideration because "within its boundaries it embraces the separate holdings of the family-based households and the higher stage of peasant organization in the village community."[213] While peasant households and village communities can be found in a variety of social formations, it is in the relationship between these units and the lordship that one can identify the historical specificity of the feudal mode of production: The feudal society is an agrarian class society in which "the principle social relations . . . were between landlord and tenant."[214] The implications of this conceptualization of feudal society for the issue of transition is of utmost importance as Hilton underlines that "it is within the agrarian base . . . that we must seek that fundamental element in the structure of the feudal mode of production which determined its health, growth and decline."[215]

In general, Hilton defines "the growth of surplus product over subsistence requirements" as the main cause of development in pre-capitalist *class* societies. In this context, Hilton underlines that "it was the product of this peasant economy, or rather that

(London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 24.

[212] Rodney Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism," in *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe*, ed. Trevor Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122-124.

[213] Ibid., 124.

[214] Rodney Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society: A Comparative Study (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

[215] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 121.

part of the product which the peasant household was not able to retain within the holding . . . which provided the necessary support for the whole social and political superstructure of nobles, clergy, towns and state."[216] Because the peasantry had to support groups not engaged in agricultural production, it had to produce a surplus over its subsistence requirements, and this surplus was extracted by the landlord class.[217] Accordingly, in the feudal mode of production, "the owners of means of production, the landed proprietors, are constantly striving to appropriate for their own use the whole of surplus produced by direct producers."[218] Therefore, Hilton identifies *struggle for rent* as the driving force behind the feudal mode of production.[219]

As Marx observes that "the direct producer... is by our assumption in possession of his own means of production . . . pursues his agriculture independently, as well as the rural-domestic industry associated with it", the only way for the extraction of surplus becomes through "extra-economic compulsion, whatever the form this might assume."[220] Surplus-extraction, therefore, could take the form of rent in labor, kind or money, as well as "profits of private jurisdiction" and could be practiced through "various forms of direct and indirect coercion." Most of the income of the landlords was based on this surplus extracted from the peasant producers as "demesne production generated a minor and always uncertain proportion of the total income." Therefore, in

[216] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 121-122.

[217] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 24-25.

[218] Hilton, "A Comment"**,** 111-112.

[219] Ibid, 114.

[220] Marx, *Capital 3*, 926.

feudalism, we find a class society in which there was a structural contradiction between the agricultural producers and the surplus-extracting landlords (feudal exploitation), on the basis of a predominantly agrarian economy in which "the basic unit of production was small scale."[221] This relationship of feudal landlords to the productive base and the producing class, therefore, constitutes the paradoxical character of the feudal mode of production:

> We . . . have a landowning class whose very existence depended on the transfer to it of thesurplus labour and the fruits of surplus labour of a class which was potentially independent of it, over which it exercised political, military and juridical power, but in relation to which it fulfilled no entrepreneurial function.[222]

If we look at the medieval peasantry more closely, we find that they were organized in long-established communities. The structure of the villages directly affected the inner organization of these peasant communities as the existence of open fields, grazing areas and commons, as well as the related practices of farming and grazing, required planned, common action on the level of the village.[223] These peasant communities had a more stable existence compared to the aristocratic families which were continuously "eliminated and replaced by conquest" as during the course of their existence, they had developed "institutions, common practices and a consciousness of their own interests."[224] This is a major factor behind the success of the common action taken by the members of the villages against the landlord class. This did not, however, equal to complete homogeneity among the peasantry as "the peasant community was not a

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[221] Hilton, *English and French Towns,* 10-11

[222] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 127-128.

[223] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 29-30.

[224] Ibid., 28-29.

community of equals"[225]: most of the time, "cooperation and even solidarity" coexisted with "internal conflicts".[226] This characteristic is not exclusively confined to England as we find similar stratification within peasant communities all around Europe.[227]

Furthermore, Hilton underlines that this phenomenon cannot be explained on the basis of market oriented production either as differentiation historically preceded it:

> The stratification of peasant communities . . . was at least as old as the earliest records which we have of them. This suggests that such polarization of fortunes as there was between the village rich and the village poor could not simply have resulted from competition in production for the market, important though this factor was from time to time in generating social differentiation.[228]

This pre-capitalist differentiation, as Kosminsky observes, was grounded in a variety of factors:

> Between personal freedom and unfreedom there were many intermediate stages. In the field of tenure this distinction is expressed in the counterposing of villein and free tenure. Nor is there any uniformity in the size of peasants' holdings . . . Considerable differences within the peasantry resulted from their forms of rent-not only as between free and unfree peasants, but within the two groups themselves. We may distinguish between holdings carrying labor services and holdings paying money rent, holdings burdened with heavy services and holdings paying an insignificant symbolic pro recognitione. Finally, as a result of the early phases of the disintegration of feudal relationships, a group of tenants holding for limited periods, the forerunners of the tenant farmers, begins to separate itself off from the rest of the peasantry.[229]

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[225] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 31.

[226] Miriam Müller, "A Divided Class? Peasants and Peasant Communities in Later Medieval England," *Past & Present 195, suppl 2 (2007): 129.*

[227] Isabel Alfonso, "Exploring Difference within Rural Communities in the Northern Iberian Kingdoms, 1000–1300," *Past & Present 195, suppl 2 (2007): 87-100; Monique Bourin, "Peasant Elites and Village Communities in the South of France, 1200–1350," Past & Present 195, suppl 2 (2007): 101-114.*

[228] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 31-32.

[229] Evgenii A. Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956): 197.

These accounts are in line with Marx's analysis of the pre-capitalist ground-rent as both identify existence of some germs of differentiation within the feudal peasantry before the emergence of capitalist relations in agriculture. Nevertheless, this was a "strictly limited" kind of stratification, at least until the late medieval period, and one of Hilton's most crucial contributions was his identification of such limits. Hilton underlines that the inadequate development of market as well as "the technical level of medieval agricultural production, transport and distribution" considerably hindered the development of capitalist agriculture that might have been potentially initiated by the rich peasantry. At this point, the only way of upward mobility available to this group was joining the ranks of the gentry, which was both difficult due to the resistance they faced from them, and self-defeating in that it signalled the end of the peasant character of these agricultural producers, so to speak.[230] Change came only in the early modern period "when the traditional structures of medieval society began to disintegrate, and when the market demand for agricultural products vastly increased": This took the form of "capitalist farming on the basis of the employment of wage labour and the application of a considerable capital investment to the agricultural enterprise." Hilton concludes that, however, until capitalist farming emerged, "poor smallholders and richer peasants were, in spite of the differences in their incomes, still part of the same social group, with a similar style of life, and differed from one to the other in the abundance rather than the quality of their possessions."[231] Although there was a large spectrum of historically "specific forms of dependence", ranging from the servile to the free peasant, the main

[230] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 33-34.

[231] Ibid., 34.

contradiction of the society was between the peasantry and the landlords[232] as "the experience of lordship" made it obligatory for the peasants to contain the divisions and struggles between themselves.[233]

Whereas Hilton does not hold a concept of a *sui generis* peasant economy, or a peasant mode of production in the Chayanovian sense, his preoccupation with the family-based organization of production by a body of producers in possession of their means of production points to the importance of the "specific articulation of the elements constituting the peasants' productive forces", beyond the relationship of exploitation.[234] In Hilton's account, therefore, one of the paradoxical aspects of the medieval peasantry seems to be the coexistence of forces that create a tendency to differentiation, and the limits inherent in the peasant mode of existence that counteract these forces. The specific characteristics of this family economy, though they do not exist in a void, are crucial to understand the technical organization of production, which constitutes an integral part of the feudal mode of production.

This picture is complemented by the coexistence of subsistence and commodity production in the body of the small producer in feudalism. Hand in hand with the augmentation of the demands by the landlords and the state for rent and tax in money from the late medieval period onwards, "the proportion of the commodities which the peasants produced for exchange rather than for consumption also increased."[235] Rents

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[232] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 127-128; Kosminsky**,** *Studies,* 198.

[233] Müller, "A Divided Class?"*, 131.*

[234] Ricardo Duchesne, "Rodney Hilton and the Peasant Road to 'Capitalism' in England," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003):133.

[235] Hilton, *English and French Towns,* 14.

and taxes were paid by the peasantry mostly in money form and the products of the demesne work were "to a considerable extent realized in cash."[236] On the other hand, it should be underlined that "Hilton . . . carefully avoided the assumption that peasants had a natural disposition or compulsion to maximize returns on exchange", as peasant production continued to be primarily subsistence-oriented until the late medieval period.[237] Accordingly,

> The conflict over feudal rent must be understood as taking place within the framework of a society where production for the market was well developed, a society where simple commodity exchange was widespread, but where the bulk of the product, at any rate of grain, was consumed within the family economy ... The obligation on the part of the peasant producer to pay money rent, fines and taxes, and evidence of occasional cash accumulations by rich peasants, implies of course that they had to market a proportion of their product. We must not, however, imagine that these were small-scale capitalist farmers. Very little cash was retained after the payment of dues, and inputs of labour and materials were largely provided from within the family economy. [238]

Therefore, for Hilton, despite the development of commodity production and markets, the richer peasantry still kept its feudal character: "This, however, is by no means inconsistent with the view that feudal differentiation does need to be seen as central in the transition to capitalism" since it is one thing to identify the existence of some elements which will contribute to the later development of capitalist mode of production, and it is another thing to find real-life capitalists in action immediately.[239] As Byres underlines at this point, it would be useful to separate feudal differentiation from

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[236] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 130.

[237] Duchesne, "Rodney Hilton", 139-140.

[238] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 129.

[239] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry*", 29.*

transitional and capitalist ones. Indeed, what extended the confines of differentiation, especially from the thirteenth century onwards, can be explained on the basis of the development of markets for produce and land, both of which would contribute to production for market and accumulation of land by the richer peasantry.[240] Differentiation was further exacerbated by the relative scarcity of labor and the rising real wages after the plague as it led to an abundance of land and a better bargaining position for the peasants vis-a-vis landlords from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century onwards.[241] Nevertheless, this is yet "market involvement by rich peasants" and not "market dependence": this latter would come only after the Enclosure movement and the accompanying expropriation of the peasantry from land.[242] Despite the long history of differentiation, therefore, it had started to gain a new intensity and quality only in the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth century, towards the period of transition.[243]

Regarding the broader context, an increasing disproportionality between the agricultural producers and non-producers, as the base of the former was decreasing, created a situation characterized by "slow cash flow in rents and taxes from the agrarian base": this picture was accompanied by "a general increase in the expenses of the political superstructure". These expenses were "usually paid for out of high interest loans made by merchant bankers" which were hardly turned into any kind of investment for agricultural or industrial production as "mercantile profits remained almost entirely

[240] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry", *40.*

[241] Ibid., 46-48.

[242] Ibid., 45.

[243] Ibid., 30.

in the sphere of circulation."[244] Indirectly, therefore, it was the peasantry that had to undertake the costs of commerce: As the landowning class "constituted at all times the principal market for a range of products, mainly luxuries, which entered into international trade", Hilton underlines that "the urban and commercial sectors of the economy largely and directly depended on the purchasing power of an aristocracy whose income was more or less directly derived from peasant production."[245]

These contradictions in the society were further exacerbated in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and finally erupted in the form of a crisis. The stagnant or falling agricultural productivity of the period was not only based on the population increase and the resultant fragmentation of holdings, but also on the increasing pressure on the peasantry for rent and tax. With due respect to the effects of the plague, the famine or the discrepancy between the "rising industrial and falling agricultural prices", Hilton underlines that "the central feature was a crisis of relationships between the two main classes of feudal society, which had begun before the demographic collapse and continued, even if in somewhat altered forms, during and after it."[246] The levels of rent, though they had been affected by changes in land/labor ratio after the period of demographic collapse, were to a large extent derivative of the "the degree of non-economic compulsion which landowners could apply" and this was in turn directly affected by the previous successful peasant struggles[247] which had, in our case, resulted

[244] Hilton, "A Crisis of Feudalism", 131.

[245] Ibid., 127-128.

[246] Ibid.

[247] Ibid., 132.

in “the declining exploitability of the peasants.”[248] The decrease in the level of rent and the decline of serfdom was accompanied by the “retention of surplus on the peasant holding”, which ended up in “a considerable reduction in the proportion of smallholders and an increase in the average size of the arable holdings of the middle peasantry.” On the other hand, the greatest leap was made by the richer segments of the peasantry, whose accumulation had started to reach impressive levels[249]: One crucial marker of the changing social position of the rich segments of peasantry is the gradual erosion of their former role as intermediaries between the landlords and their fellow peasants as well as “potential leaders of the resistance”.[250] Once “the fall in grain prices and rising real wages” as well as “improvements in agricultural productivity” are included into this picture of decreasing levels of rent and increasing stratification, Hilton concludes that “conditions were evidently favourable for increased production”, maybe even pointing towards the direction of a more systematic market involvement and petty commodity production.[251]

Accordingly, Byres comments that Hilton's approach can be summarized by “three themes, which recur in his work”: internal stratification within peasant communities hand in hand with structural limits on it, the role of class conflict between peasants and lords over rent, and the potential of the peasantry to turn into the later capitalist class.[252] As such,

[248] Hilton, “A Crisis of Feudalism”, 127-128.

[249] Ibid., 133.

[250] Ibid., 135.

[251] Ibid., 134.

[252] Terrence J. Byres, “Rodney Hilton (1916–2002): In Memoriam,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, no. 1

> For Hilton … the motor of change in medieval England was class conflict, which freed peasants from the shackles of feudal control. Obviously, it was not all peasants who would be the agents of expansion and accumulation. It was the stratum of rich peasants whose agency would be critical. Poor peasants, by contrast, were destined to become part of the rural and urban proletariat.[253]

In this respect, it can be concluded that "Hilton followed Dobb's contention that the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Britain was the outcome of the persistent struggle over rents (economic surplus) between landlords and peasants", which led to increasing differentiation and commodity production for markets.[254] Accordingly, Hilton stresses that it was "the solidity and internal articulation" as well as "the inherent contradictions within society" that played the transformative role.[255]

2.2.1.3 Enclosures and *Agrarian Capitalism*

The second treatment of the emergence of capitalism in England comes from Robert Brenner whose seminal article titled as *Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* started the so-called *Brenner Debate* in the pages of the journal *Past & Present.* Here, it can be discerned that the discussion is conducted on two main levels. Firstly, the basic methodological issue is the identification of factors that can adequately explain historical development and transformation in the specific context of the decline of serfdom and the emergence of new property relations that would pave the way for capitalist organization of production and in this respect, the debate takes the form of the exposition and critique of the rival theories and models that

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(2006): 11.

[253] .Byres, "Rodney Hilton,*"* 12.

[254] Stephan R. Epstein, "Rodney Hilton, Marxism and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalis," *Past & Present* 195, suppl 2 (2007): 251-252.

[255] Rodney Hilton, "Capitalism – What's in a Name?", in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 148-149.

emphasize demography, commercialization, tendency of the rate of feudal levy to fall and class struggle, respectively; secondly, this methodological side of the debate carries within it important implications about different conceptualizations of the feudal mode of production and the dynamics behind its transformation as well as the much contested issue of theoretical abstraction in historical understanding and the interaction between what is designed as the "economic" and the "political", which gains an especially interesting character in the polemic between Robert Brenner and Guy Bois, both Marxist historians with different approaches, with "two different applications of the theory of historical materialism".[256] In this section, I will focus on Brenner's critical appraisal of Dobb, his critique of the demographic and commercialization models and his own alternative suggestion: I will focus on the polemic between Brenner and Bois in the following section.

The Brenner Debate revolves around a similar topical axis as the previous debate on transition since both set out to explain the dynamics behind long-term economic development. However, the discussion here is more focused on the identification of the factors that explain "the decline versus the persistence of serfdom and its effects" and "the emergence and predominance of secure small peasant property versus the rise of landlord/ large tenant farmer relations on the land" and it is from this basis on that the parties of the debate proceed to their respective answers to the question of development. As the development of agrarian capitalism takes place in the 16th century England and not in a different place and time, "a comparative analysis of the intensification of serfdom in eastern Europe in relation to its process of decline in the west" coupled by "a

[256] Guy Bois, "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy," in *The Brenner Debate,* ed. Trevor H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin **(**Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 115.

comparative analysis of the rise of agrarian capitalism and the growth of agricultural productivity in England in relation to their failure in France" becomes crucial points to understand this historically specific phenomenon.[257] This constitutes the basis of Brenner's comparative method.

First and foremost, Brenner sets out to put under scrutiny the most widely employed models of economic development which are "constructed almost exclusively in terms of what might loosely be called 'objective' economic forces - in particular, demographic fluctuations and the growth of trade and markets" whose common ground, as Brenner argues, is that "a market supply/ demand mechanism is usually assumed to provide the elementary theoretical underpinnings."[258] The demographic model is based on the assumption of a society with a constant level of productivity and supply of land on the basis of which an increasing population will lead to rising food prices, over-population and famine (and *vice versa,* as this model has a two-phase mechanism of self-correction). The commercialization model, on the other hand, has a "unilineal" conception of development in the form of gradual formation of money rent and the role of this commutation as well as the broadening of commercial relations in the explanation of the emergence of capitalist agriculture.[259] In both models, changes in prices as well as supply and demand provide the basic mechanisms through which different factors offered by these models come to play themselves out -demography in the first one and commercialization in the second one.

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[257] Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," in *The Brenner Debate,* ed. Trevor H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin **(**Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 30.

[258] Ibid., 10.

[259] Ibid., 25.

Against these models, Brenner suggests that “it is the structure of class relations, of class power, which will determine the manner and degree to which particular demographic and commercial changes will affect long-term trends in the distribution of income and economic growth - and not vice versa” because, as he argues, established class structures of societies “tend to impose rather strict limits and possibilities, indeed rather specific long-term patterns, on a society's economic development” whereas they prove themselves “to be highly resilient in relation to the impact of economic forces”. This class structure, in turn, is constructed around the "property relationship" or the "surplus-extraction relationship" between direct producers and landlords. In this respect, Brenner underlines that processes which establish different class structures are “relatively autonomous” in the sense that “they are not shaped by, or alterable in terms of, changes in demographic or commercial trends.” Accordingly, Brenner holds that the transformation of social systems, including the transition from feudalism to capitalism as well as long-term economic development, are explicable on the basis of these established class structures and resulting class conflicts which, in the end, lead to “the reaffirmation of the old property relations or their destruction and the consequent establishment of a new structure.”[260]

In his review article of the *Studies*, Brenner praises the “historically specific” character of Dobb's “theory of economic development” as the strong aspect of his work because “the key to the rise of new patterns of economic evolution is to be found in the emergence of new social relations of production.” He goes on to acclaim Dobb for transcending the “unilineal” understanding of change as hold by trade and merchant

[260] Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure”, 11-12.

capital centered theories and instead focusing on the "internal contradictions" of the system.[261] In the end, however, he finds Dobb's account inadequate because a "theory of feudal economic development and crisis . . . is not in itself to render a full account of the transition to capitalism": instead, Brenner suggests that Dobb should have focused on "the development out of feudal crisis in terms of the internal contradictions and class conflicts" and he should have done this through an examination of the various "responses to crisis" in the context of the separation of the producer from his means of subsistence and the break up of "the fetters imposed on petty production by feudal surplus extraction via extra-economic compulsion." However, Brenner concludes, Dobb fails to transcend "the older conception of direct transition via the rise of the bourgeoisie, external to feudalism."[262]

On the other hand, Brenner finds Dobb's separation between "economic" and "political" highly problematic since in this context social relations of the feudal mode of production is set by class struggle itself.[263] As Brenner underlines, the feudal crisis of the late medieval period was a direct threat to "the fundamental surplus extraction relations which underpinned the ruling class's dominance" and this made class conflict the major channel through which the result of the crisis ("the restrengthening in one form or another of feudal class relations or their dissolution") would be set.[264] Moreover, it can be added that Dobb fails to adequately appreciate the distinction "between the market as

[261] Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition", 121.

[262] Ibid., 122.

[263] Ibid., p.128.

[264] Ibid., 127.

an opportunity and the market as a compulsion"[265], evident in his identification of "the abundance or scarcity, the cheapness or dearness, of hired labor in determining whether or not the lord was willing or unwilling to commute labor-services for a money-payment" as the determining economic factor behind economic transformation.[266] Here, Brenner underlines Dobb's overlooking of the fact that the presence of hired labor is a result of the existence of a market in labor-power, the emergence of which is grounded in specific historical processes, and that decision to enter this market or not was "constrained by the balance of class forces between lord and peasant."[267]

As against Dobb's focus on peasant differentiation and the emergence of the first capitalists from the ranks of the petty commodity producers, Brenner underlines that "beginning from the period of later medieval feudal crisis, from the 15th century onward, England experienced continuous, if slow, development of capitalist social-productive relations in the countryside *under the aegis of greater landed classes.*"[268] The historical sketch goes as such: Demographic collapse in England had led to a failure on the part of the nobles to control labor force and hence, serfdom had practically withered away as "new forms of relationships ... characterized by contract" emerged in its place. In this period, "landlords not only retained their property, but moved to increase it." As the price of labor was high due to the population decline, arables were converted to "labor-saving sheep farming" and through the Enclosure movement, "perhaps the first major step toward capitalist social productive relations took place in the 15th century" hand in

[265] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe*, 28.

[266] Dobb, *Studies,* 54.

[267] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe,* 32.

[268] Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition", 132.

hand with the "development of textile production for both foreign and home markets." When the demand for food increased again and wages declined, there was a return to arable farming, but within a different historical context this time: As the peasantry consisted of serfs no more, farming was practiced now "through the gradual construction of large farms on the basis of bringing in large commercial tenants." Therefore, "the three-tiered system of social relation which has been classically identified with capitalist agriculture" was established in the England countryside by 1640, to the benefit of the landowners.[269] Accordingly,

> The peculiarity of English feudalism lay in its creation of a unique stratum of peasant producers, neither bound to the soil nor subject to arbitrary will, who enjoyed rights equal to those of the lords before the judiciary of the king. This unique development can be seen to follow directly from the absence of the seigneurie banale in the social relations of English manorial lordship, together with the strength of the monarchy within the overall structure of the ruling class. Thus, as Brenner had it, it is a question of historical class formation: it is the historical specificity of England's ruling class of landed lords, and the development of its relationships with peasants over time that is crucial.[270]

On the one hand, it is true that the yeomen rose from the ranks and became capitalists "by taking over on lease the large consolidated farms which had been built up by the landlords", starting a process of capitalist development and class differentiation. On the other hand, as Brenner underlines, the crucial point is that for this process to take start, producers should have been already separated from their means of subsistence and this process can only be explained in reference to the role played by the landowners.[271] Accordingly, he concludes that "capitalism in early modern England thus grew up, to a

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[269] Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition", 133.

[270] George C. Comninel, "English feudalism and the origins of capitalism," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, no. 4 (2000): 44.

[271] Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition", 134-135.

large degree, within a landlord structure – a structure which had been formed out of the fall of serfdom and the gradual undermining of peasant possession of the land."[272] Accordingly, for Brenner, "it is not the case that capitalism developed based on some hardy class of 'kulak' freeholders through 'petty commodity production', as a number of Marxist accounts continue to suggest."[273]

Therefore, the transition from feudalism to capitalism points to a time lag between the dissolution of one mode of production and the initial formation of the other: the major crisis of feudalism, therefore, was followed by a temporal break before the new mode of production emerged. Accordingly, for Brenner, there was no embryonic capitalism which existed within the confines of the feudal mode of production waiting to be unleashed once it found the appropriate ground, despite the fact that feudalism was indeed one of the necessary conditions for the development of capitalism. Furthermore, the original emergence of capitalism was to a large extent a local event despite the fact that the feudal crisis was not confined to one locality alone. Therefore, capitalism is a historically specific mode of production which has its origins in the English countryside of the 16th century and the specific social relations prevailing there: it is a specific mode of production which developed its own economic drives of profit-maximization, competition and accumulation, made the commodity production for exchange on the market its defining element, and marked a drastic transformation of the social relations as labor-power turned into a commodity input for capitalist production and the system of

[272] Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition",138.

[273] Comninel, "English feudalism", 44-45.

free wage-labor was generalized.[274] From this point onwards, what characterized the specific relationship between the producers and the market was, therefore, can be defined as "market-dependence", rather than voluntary participation.[275] Accordingly, "profit – not direct consumption or exchange – became the immediate object of production, and for the first time in history, there developed a mode of exploitation that systematically impelled the development of productive forces": The emergence of such market dependence was specific to England as the country initiator of capitalist development.[276]

The merit of this notion of agricultural capitalism, especially in its classic English model, is that it points to a qualitative transformation in the nature of the social organization of production, rather than a quantitative expansion of an already existing form of economic activity and gradual accumulation of money in the way that models emphasizing commercialization to some extent posit.[277] Transformation of social relations, therefore, is of prime importance: Marx's notion of "primitive accumulation" refers not to a simple accumulation of wealth, but to a transformation of social property relations.[278] The crucial part of this understanding is that capital, as self-expanding value, manifests itself as a specific historical and social relation in its development from

[274] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 73-125.

[275] Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence", 85.

[276] Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence", 85-86. One recent objection to this picture drawn by Brenner comes from Henry Heller, who underlines the crucial role state played in the transition to capitalism and the limited role of markets played in the initial development of this mode of production: "markets emerged at the national level only as a result of prolonged political and class conflicts, and were established by the coercive, legal and political machinery of the early modern absolutist states which gradually cleared obstacles to them: Henry Heller, *The Birth of Capitalism: A 21st Century Perspective* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 6-7.

[277] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism,* 11-33.

[278] Ibid., 36.

money as money to *money as capital.*

Whereas the classic English model of transition presents us the transformation of social relations through the expropriation of the peasantry from land, their divorce from the means of production and the establishment of generalized system of wage-labor, this trend was not necessarily reproduced in the later transitions to capitalism since the *internal* transformations in property relations that England experienced would now be compounded by the *external* impact of the emerging capitalist world economy. As capitalism expanded from its birthplace, however it transformed any place that came under its reach[279]:

> Although the origin of capitalism depended on the social relation between market-dependent producers and appropriators, once commodification and competition became a virtually universal form of social reproduction, producers even in the absence of class exploitation were subject to market imperatives … Those imperatives, in turn, would carry in their wake strong pressures to transform social-property relations, to reproduce the class relation between capital and labour; and as the process of capitalist development took its course, with massdispossession and the general commodification of labour power, there developed wholly new and even more inescapable imperatives of competition and capital accumulation.[280]

In this respect, this transition cannot be seen as "a general European - or at least Western European – process"; rather, it should be acknowledged that "European feudalism in Europe was internally diverse, and it produced several different outcomes, only one of which was capitalism."[281] The emergence of capitalism, therefore, was geographically and temporally specific. It was only after this initial development that a great variety of paths were subsumed under one historical direction by the great transformative power of

[279] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism, 147-166.*

[280] Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence", 86.

[281] Ibid., *73.*

capitalism. In other words,

> Far from being natural or inevitable, the evidence would suggest that capitalism is truly extraordinary - a unique development of English society. Yet, at the same time, its internal relationships allowed it - after, and as a result of, the Industrial Revolution - to take root in any society that had private property, contract, trade, and the other so-called 'bourgeois' social relationships.[282]

In Brenner's account, therefore, long before the emergence of agrarian capitalism, we witness that class struggle by the medieval peasantry against the nobility had ended up in the abolishment of serfdom. The Enclosure movement, on the other hand, marked the historical origins of capitalism: it came about only after serfdom had long been extinct, and in this sense, it is not integrally linked to this first wave of class struggle as it was an act mainly imposed from top. To sum Brenner's account so far:

(i) The class struggle between the peasantry and the landlords, based on property-relationships on land, was the defining element of the feudal mode of production.

(ii) Successful class struggle by the peasantry against the landlords ended up in the decline of serfdom.

(iii) Relatively weaker position of the English aristocracy compared to "their continental counterparts" meant a "trade off" between "economic" and "extra-economic" means of surplus extraction: Accordingly, landlords had to increase the former as they could not increase the latter.[283]

(iv) A novel configuration of class structure and a novel logic of production emerged in the form of Agrarian Capitalism based on the Enclosures and the resultant

[282] Comninel, "English feudalism", 43.

[283] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism,* 99-100.

expropriation of the peasantry. For the dispossessed peasant, this signified a transition from a logic of subsistence to a logic of market ("market dependence", in other words); for the producer, this meant the emergence of the new "imperatives of competition, accumulation, profit-maximization, and increasing labour-productivity."[284]

Methodologically, Brenner's approach is characterized by a disproportional privilege given to class conflict in the analysis of feudal development and decline, in neglect to all other factors. Now, it is one thing to identify a society on the basis of class struggle as the form through which the structural contradictions of the system manifest themselves and it is another thing to take class conflict as *the* independent variable and assign to it all the explanatory power. "Struggle over rent" is crucial, but "this struggle by no means occurred in an unchanging context" and a proper understanding of the changing patterns of conflict requires an adequate appreciation of this very context through which class struggle was carried out.[285] This absence of context prevalent in Brenner's account is at the basis of the problems his account encounters: "if relations of production are your starting and end point, then you have a static model". A crucial difficulty arises from this: if class struggle is a given factor, effective throughout the whole Middle Ages, then how are we to explain the dissolution of serfdom at a specific point in time, other than resorting to contingency?[286] In the end, Brenner's comparative

[284] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism,* 7.

[285] Rodney Hilton, "Introduction" to *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe*, ed. Trevor Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 7-8.

[286] Paul Blackledge,"The Origins of Capitalism." Transcription of the discussion between Chris Harman and Robert Brenner that took place in 2004, with several contributions. International Socialism, 2nd series, no.111 (2006). https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/2006/xx/wbrenner.htm.

method works best when it comes to put under scrutiny the explanatory power of trade and demography; it is not, however, analytically adequate to provide a theory of feudalism and/or economic development by itself. This is, however, what is urgently needed to understand feudal development and demise. As Harman comments,

> The assumption used to be that the feudal period was characterised by stagnation, that pre-capitalist societies saw no development of productivity and no economic growth. The reality, we now know, was that the middle medieval period, from the 9th or 10th century through to the 14th century, saw sustained economic growth in both agriculture and industry.[287]

Furthermore, in Brenner's account, in a way similar to Dobb, Hilton and Kosminsky, the main class antagonism in feudalism is located between the peasantry and the landlord class; in contrast to the latter, however, Brenner's narrative lacks any reference to class differentiation *within* the medieval peasantry. Trying to underline the subsistence oriented character of the medieval peasants and the stark contrast between the feudal and the capitalist logics whereby the process of transition is conceptualized as a change in the logic of production, from the logic of subsistence to logic of market,[288] Brenner undermines any potential for internal stratification and differentiation. In this sense, he conceptualizes peasantry as a homogeneous, monolithic entity. The only dynamic factor that affects the peasantry becomes their struggle against the landlords: their solidarity is sometimes higher and sometimes lower, but this process of struggle does not really affect the internal structure of the peasant communities since it exercises its effect only to the extent that the peasant and the landlord classes are counterposed against one

[287] *Chris Harman,* "The Origins of Capitalism." Transcription of the discussion between Chris Harman and Robert Brenner that took place in 2004, with several contributions. International Socialism, 2nd series, no.111 (2006). https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/2006/xx/wbrenner.htm.

[288] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry", 53-56.

another.

On the other hand, in addition to the rich, middle and poor peasantry, accompanied in some cases by a group of propertyless workers, a temporal dimension can be added with regard to rural differentiation -feudal, capitalist and transitional forms of differentiation among the peasantry.[289] However, "for Brenner peasant differentiation under feudalism has no strategic significance with respect to the transition to capitalism" as he allows space only for "transitional peasant differentiation, next followed by capitalist rural differentiation", but definitely not for any prior one.[290] Accordingly, before market-dependence, Brenner holds that "there were no tendencies within the peasantry that might lead to their dissolution."[291] In this sense, "if Brenner shared the view that the peasant-class struggle was responsible for the abolition of serfdom, he rejected entirely the idea that peasant commodity production was capable of engendering capitalist relations."[292] The crucial point, however, is that even though the main class contradiction was between the peasantry and the landlord class, and differentiation was limited in the sense that "there was a clear absence of struggle within the feudal peasantry", such differentiation still "might deepen within feudal limits", the effects of which still needs to be examined.[293] In this case, the capitalist tenant farmers of the English Agrarian Capitalism came from the ranks of the richer peasantry whose

[289] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry", *21*.

[290] Ibid., 53.

[291] Ibid., 57.

[292] Duchesne, "Rodney Hilton", 132.

[293] Terrence J. Byres, "The landlord class, peasant differentiation, class struggle and the transition to capitalism: England, France and Prussia compared," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 35-*36*.

formation was obviously "the outcome of previous processes of class formation."[294] On the other hand, the victory of the English landlord class can also be explained with reference to "the prior weakening of the peasant community as a result of economic differentiation" as "the breakthrough from below by the yeomanry on the basis of petty capitalist accumulation was a crucial intervening stage in the later development of large-scale capitalist farming."[295] Accordingly, one can identify on Brenner's side:

> . . . the tendency to confuse the preconditions for capitalist development with the analysis of its expansion and consolidation. Thus the creation of "free" social relations is no doubt necessary to the development of agrarian capitalism which in turn is necessary for the sustained development of urban- industrial capitalism. Such processes may be necessary, but are they also sufficient as explanations? There is, after all, no necessity that capitalism emerge with the overcoming of feudal social relations.[296]

In general terms, the so-called "evolutionary view of capitalism" emphasizes the formation of capitalist elements within the confines of the feudal mode of production: this becomes manifest in the use of terms such as *embryo* or *nursery school.*[297] Accordingly, it "conceptualizes the transition to capitalism as a long drawn-out process, which, if we are to understand it, we must see as having its roots deep in feudalism, and which we cannot understand unless we explore those roots with care." Brenner, on the other hand, considers "transition as outcome" and hence, he "does abstract from the process of transition" in his analysis[298], whereby the explanation takes the form of a "big

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[294] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry", 60-61.

[295] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe*, 37.

[296] Robert J. Holton, "Marxist Theories of Social Change and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Theory and Society* 10, no. 6 (1981): 852-853.

[297] Byres, "Differentiation of the Peasantry", 32.

[298] Ibid., 37.

bang theory".[299] In the last instance, however, when the issue comes to identifying the structural change brought about by capitalism, it is Brenner who seems to grasp better the crux of the matter. The question is, therefore, whether the pre-capitalist differentiation among the peasantry can be considered to be a part of the history of capitalism, or whether it only provides the breeding ground for it? Once again, we return to the question of temporality regarding the relationship between feudalism, transition and capitalism.

2.2.2 Western-European feudalism: A case for *uneven and combined development*

One recurring theme throughout the course of the transition debates is the question of the historical specificity of the Western-European feudalism: If feudal mode of production is a world-wide phenomenon the "specific form" of which "varies considerably", then the question of its specificity in the context of Europe comes to the fore.[300] On the other hand, because the demise of this worldwide phenomenon led to the emergence of capitalism only in the English case and "it is very doubtful whether we can speak of a universal tendency of feudalism to develop into capitalism", the discrepancy between what took place in England and elsewhere becomes of prime importance and hence "we have to explain primarily the special reasons which caused this to happen in

[299] Gavin Capps, "The Origins of Capitalism." Transcription of the discussion between Chris Harman and Robert Brenner that took place in 2004, with several contributions. International Socialism, 2nd series, no.111 (2006). https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/2006/xx/wbrenner.htm.

[300] The use of feudalism in non-European contexts is a very debated issue though: one suggestion comes from Haldon and Amin who prefer to see feudalism as a variant of a more general tributary mode of production. As the scope of this section is confined to Europe alone, the focus is on the different varieties of the same mode of production in different European countries and it becomes possible to evade this question. See John Haldon, *State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London; New York: Verso, 1993); Samir *Amin, Unequal Development.*

the Mediterranean-European region and not elsewhere."[301] Locating Europe in the context of the *world* is the second level of such an analysis: the first one is, on the other hand, is locating England in the context of Europe, which requires a general understanding of what characterizes medieval Europe as a feudal system, while local variations and deviations are allowed for.

The general picture of the period between the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and the consolidation of capitalism in the 18th century presents a "long and by no means uniform process" of transformation. The "gradual evolution of feudal economy" until 1000 A.D. was followed firstly by a period of accelerating economic development from the 10th to the 14th century which was to be disturbed by the "major feudal crisis" in the 14th and 15th centuries, and secondly by a new period of expansion which soon gave the "signs of a major break" to be culminated in the the general crisis of the 17th century.[302]

The agricultural and demographic problems from the 13th to the 15th century erupted in a European-wide crisis by in 15th century.[303] As Bloch underlines, "depreciation of rents was a European phenomenon. So was the effort of the more or less thoroughly rejuvenated seigneurial class at re-establishing its fortunes." Regarding the strategies adopted, however, there emerged a divergence between the ruling classes of Germany, England and France. In Germany and England, we witness the "same

[301] Hobsbawm in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism***,** 160.

[302] Ibid., 161-163.

[303] Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1966): 112.

abandonement of the perpetual tenures which had been the main cause of the crisis"[304] due to the fixed levels of rent accompanied by the "monetary collapse" of the 13th century, the combination of which came as a shock to the landlord class.[305] The story, however, was different for France: here, "it was fortunate for the French peasants that although the landlords had captured the judiciary, as a class they lacked full command of the levers to power so firmly in the grasp of their English and German counterparts, namely political authority and control of the main administrative organs." Therefore, the end result in England was the decline of the absolutist rule in the face of a rising gentry benefiting from the Enclosures, agrarian revolution and the gradual expropriation of the peasantry. In France, by contrast, the "victory of absolute monarchy kept "feudal reaction" in bounds", without completely destroying it.[306]

In this context, it was only England that managed to emerge out of the crisis of the 14th century with the decline of feudalism, setting the ground for the later emergence of capitalism. Nevertheless, in relation to the broader European context, it is possible to argue that "each major crisis saw formerly 'leading' countries drop back, overtaken by formerly backward but potentially more progressive ones, like England. But there can be no serious doubt that each phase in its way *advanced* the victory of capitalism."[307] In this respect,

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[304] Bloch, *French Rural History*, 126.

[305] Ibid., p117

[306] Ibid., 134. In contrast to the argument that underlines the consolidation of small peasant ownership in the French countryside, however, Bloch refers to the coexistence of large and small land ownership and "rehabilitation of the large estate" until the French revolution came about. Ibid., 148-149.

[307] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "From Feudalism to Capitalism," in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London:Verso, 1978), 161-163.

> the transition from feudalism to capitalism is not a simple process by which the capitalist elements within feudalism are strenghthened until they are strong enough to burst out of the feudal shell . . . a crisis of feudalism also involves the most advanced sections of bourgeois development within it, and therefore produces an apparent setback. Progress no doubt goes on or resumes elsewhere, in hitherto more backward areas, such as England.[308]

The question is, therefore, to identify the relationship between the common characteristics of the Western-European feudalism in general and the English feudalism in particular, and to understand the English development within this wider context: What kind of patterns of development can we identify in the overall context of European feudalism? And how can we to relate the European-wide medieval developments to the English experience of a structural transformation?

2.2.2.1 Bois and the *law* of feudalism

Guy Bois, in his work titled *The Crisis of Feudalism* as well as in his polemic with Robert Brenner, conceptualizes feudalism as a phenomenon of *uneven and combined development* which can only be understood once the wider context of Europe is taken into account. Although he is not directly concerned with the question of transition, his work on the development and decline of feudalism gives crucial insight into the problem.

Bois starts by identifying the "structural contradiction of small-scale production and large-scale property" in feudalism which manifests itself in *the tendency of the rate of seigneurial levies to fall.* Here, peasant production sets a limit on the landowners' ability to extract surplus. As rents were fixed, landlord income steadily decreased compared to that of the peasantry. Whereas this tendency was balanced by continuous expansion of tenure until the mid-13th century, the end of new establishments resulted in

[308] Hobsbawm, "From Feudalism to Capitalism", 163.

a fall in the income of the landlords. Accordingly, Bois defines the crisis of feudalism as the failure of the ruling class "in maintaining the economic basis of its hegemony": Likewise, he explains the emergence of agrarian capitalism of the 16th century on the basis of the efforts of the landowner class to compensate for the losses it suffered after the "long-term tendency" of decreasing feudal income "had reached a critical point". Drawing on this structural contradiction, Bois concludes that "there is an original dynamic of the long term" whereby "every movement of growth creates economic conditions which are ever more favorable both to the expansion of the dimensions of the unit of production and also to a wider recourse to the wage-earning labour force, while at the same time it increases the pauperization of the day-laborers."[309] Here, Bois seems to "have a conception of a crisis of feudalism that doesn't just happen once but happens successively throughout feudalism" in the form of "cycles". Once such a "cycle" is completed, there emerged "cracks in the feudal relations of production which begin to produce in different ways nodes of crystallisation of capitalist relations of production. Agrarian capitalism in England at the end of the Middle Ages was perhaps the most important node. But it was not the only node."[310]

Regarding the structure of feudal mode of production, despite the fact that "small-scale production was the axis of the system", Bois underlines that "the peasant was in fact inscribed in predetermined social relationships, and the progress of his holding cannot be understood independently of the seigneurial levy to which it was

[309] Bois, "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy", 109-118.

[310] Alex Callinicos, "The Origins of Capitalism." Transcription of the discussion between Chris Harman and Robert Brenner that took place in 2004, with several contributions. *International Socialism*, 2nd series, no.111 (2006). https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/2006/xx/wbrenner.htm.

subject."[311] Likewise, as for the relations of production, Bois states that "originality of the system lies not only in the characteristic of production, but also in a type of exploitation."[312] On the other hand, because the concept of mode of production refers to "specific combinations of relations and forces of production", a definition of feudalism based on relations of production alone (relations of property and exploitation) falls short of a proper understanding of the concept, since, as Bois underlines, "societies can present superficial analogies in their relationships of exploitation without having the same technical basis, organization of production or logic of functioning." In this respect, he concludes that "feudalism is the hegemony of small-scale individual production (hence the level of productive forces that this hegemony presupposes), plus the seigneurial levy secured by a constraint of political (or extra-economic) origin."[313] Therefore, it is on the basis of these constituent elements of feudal structure – the seigneurial ownership of the means of production and the individual character of production process- that "the role of the specific contradictions of feudalism in its own disintegration" can be assessed.[314] This contradictory character of feudalism, on the other hand, was crucial for the development of capitalism, as Bois concludes that "it was from feudalism, and feudalism alone, that capitalism could arise."[315]

Whereas Brenner conceives the difference between England and France, that is

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[311] Guy Bois, *The Crisis of Feudalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984**),** 396.

[312] Ibid., 396.

[313] Ibid., 397-398.

[314] Ibid., 404.

[315] Ibid., 405.

"the emergence and predominance of secure small peasant property versus the rise of landlord/ large tenant farmer relations on the land", as the result of the different class structures and related patterns of class conflict historically specific to each country[316], Bois defines the situation in England as a more *backward* form of feudalism compared to that characterized France. On this basis, he states that the feudal crisis "has its epicenter in the kingdom of France": As France was the country in which feudalism took the most developed form, it was also there that "blockage to growth and the decline in seigneurial revenues took their most acute forms." England, on the other hand, experienced the crisis much less severely due to "its relative backwardness". Accordingly, the feudalism in France could be restructured and enter into a "phase of new growth" which "stimulated in regions beyond its own frontiers developments in the direction of capitalism" despite the fact that "it had itself gone too far in the logic of feudalism for any such expansion in new capitalist relationships to attain within its own boundaries", thanks to successful peasant resistance against the encroachment of land and the positions in state service provided for the landlords as a steady source of income. England, on the other hand, made benefit of the all developments that France was going through and managed to escape "the consequences of the fossilization of social relations which feudal reorganization induced". In this sense, it was *the relative backwardness* of England that made its transition to a new form of social organization possible.[317] Accordingly, Bois underlines that his account differs from Brenner's on two main points. Firstly, Bois sees the emergence of capitalism "as a by-product of the socio-economic

[316] Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure", 30.
[317] Bois**,** "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy", 111-115. In a sense, England was the weakest link in the European feudalism.

functioning of the feudal system as a whole … in the context of the overall development of European feudalism"[318]; Brenner, in contrast, exclusively focuses on the historical specificities of individual countries which are related in his analysis only through comparison. Secondly, in his holistic approach, Bois explains the differences between countries on the basis of the concept of uneven development[319]: Therefore, it is not only a geographical, but most importantly a temporally dialectical sense of historical change that distinctively characterizes his approach.

On the other hand, Bois calls Brenner's understanding of Marxism a *political* one: His main line of critique is that Brenner's account presents "a voluntarist vision of history in which class struggle is divorced from all other objective contingencies and in the first place from such laws of development as may be peculiar to a specific mode of production."[320] In this way, Bois argues that, by defining "pre-industrial society solely by reference to serfdom", Brenner undermines any notion of feudalism as well as mode of production.[321] In this respect, Brenner can be said to have lacked a proper theory of feudalism: his definition is not only too reductionist, but also his methodology is flawed. As Bois underlines,

> Brenner's thought is, in fact, arranged around a single principle: theoretical generalization always precedes direct examination of historical source material. The starting-point is the fundamental principle of historical materialism: the driving role of the class struggle. And he sets out to verify it through decreasing abstraction, by comparing it with the available empirical data. This is characteristic of a system of closed thought, where ideology triumphs over scientific rationalism. The various mechanisms by which the class struggle is

[318] Bois**,** "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy", 114.

[319] Ibid., 115.

[320] Ibid.

[321] Ibid., 116.

> dominant in the historical process are normally so complex and unpredictable that it is very rare that such a unilateral approach leads to anything other than ideological short-cuts.[322]

Lastly, Bois questions Brenner's rather strong emphasis on the extra-economic character of the pre-capitalist surplus extraction on the grounds that once such a quality becomes elevated to being the defining element of the pre-capitalist modes of production, then it might logically follow that economy gains a real autonomy in the capitalist mode of production: in this respect, Bois reminds us of the continuing importance of the "political" sphere in the capitalist economy, such as the crucial role property rights play in the constitution, extension and securing of the capitalist private property. Against accusations of *economism*, on the other hand, Bois underlines that "class conflict is situated at the heart of the historical process" in his analysis: so, search for "an economic theory of feudalism" does not necessarily equal to "economic determinism".[323] Accordingly, Bois underlines that feudal societies also carry some features, such as "rules of economic behavior, long-term economic trends, monetary mechanisms, the processes of the accumulation ... of landed property", that cannot be reduced to the sphere of the "political" alone.[324]

Brenner replies Bois by once again asserting that "feudal system of class relations were politically constituted" and hence, extra-economic factors *could* and *did* act as long-term dynamics of economic development. As against Bois' view of the structural contradiction between small-scale peasant production and large-scale landed

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[322] Bois**,** "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy", 110.

[323] Bois, *The Crisis of Feudalism,* viii-ix.

[324] Ibid., x.

property, Brenner states that "the system of surplus extraction tended to develop according to its own logic, and, to an important degree, without reference to the requirements of peasant production -as a function, in particular, of the lords' growing needs for *politically motivated consumption.*"[325] Then, Brenner sets out to criticize "the guiding conception of Bois", which is the *tendency to a falling rate of feudal levy*[326] by questioning the reason behind the lords' failure to increase their land possessions and charges on the peasantry "by coercive means" to balance those declining levies. He finds the answer in "the lords' ostensibly inherent, long-term structural weakness as surplus-extractors by extra-economic compulsion from peasant possessors", which again brought into the picture "the problem of the distribution of property and of class power, and its determinants." Accordingly, Brenner concludes that "even were we to discover a universal tendency to a declining rate of feudal rent throughout the medieval period, we would still have to explain why the lords allowed it and/or could not prevent it."[327]

The contradiction between Brenner and Bois cannot be simply reduced to different choices of factors to explain economic development -forces versus relations of production or economic versus political.[328] The main difference seems to be the different levels of theoretical abstraction adopted by the parties. Firstly, it should be emphasized that placing structural contradiction and class struggle as opposite ends of inevitability and voluntarism is ill-placed as class struggle can be read as a derivative of a structural

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[325] Robert Brenner, **"**The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism", in *The Brenner Debate,* ed. Trevor H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 232.

326 Ibid., 242-243.

[327] Ibid., 244-246.

[328] Hilton, introduction to *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* 5-9.

contradiction which in turn acts upon it.[329] The ideal situation would be a scheme in which the two would complement each other as class struggle would be logically the embodiment and historically the content of the laws and tendencies of feudal mode of production. However, in the current situation, positing class struggle as an independent variable at the center of a theory fails short of analytical competence, as focusing solely on the antagonistic relationship between capitalists and workers -in the form of struggle for wages, working hours etc.- would not provide a proper understanding of the functioning of the capitalist mode of production (or its laws and tendencies). In this respect, Bois' critique of Brenner's methodology definitely has its merit and his preoccupation with the structural contradiction of feudalism implies a more analytical approach to the issue. On the other hand, the view that economic relations in pre-capitalist societies were constituted by extra-economic factors (as the surplus extraction relation itself was an extra-economic one) once again brings class struggle to the fore and raises the questions: Is it possible to analyze pre-capitalist modes of production on the level of abstraction Marx made for capitalism? Is it possible to establish the logical structure of feudalism and find out its laws and tendencies in a certain abstraction from class struggle itself? Or does the fact that economic and political were intertwined in the feudal mode mean that such a level of abstraction is not possible? But what does this concept of "extra-economic" mean? Can this really be the main locus of comparison between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production? If this is the quality that defines pre-capitalist modes of production, does this mean that capitalism is defined by the rule of the sphere of economy alone? Isn't this understanding a fiction as well? Marx

[329] Claudio J. Katz, "Debating the Dynamics of Feudalism: Challenges for Historical Materialism," *Science & Society* 58, no. 2 (1994): 198-199.

was able to abstract economy from other aspects of social life in his analysis. Is this really because economy had grown distinct from other spheres in reality? If it is not, then how was Marx able to analyze the economic logic/ laws of development of capitalist mode of production? Is it a difference in the level of theoretical abstraction? Or is it the unprecedented complexity of the capitalist system? These are the questions I will return to in the fourth chapter. For now, the implications of Bois' analysis for the conceptualization of the temporality of transition as well as his identification of a "tendency" for the feudal mode of production, remain to be the central matter at hand.

2.2.2.2. Anderson on the feudal state and the transition

The conceptualization of the temporality between the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism takes on an interesting character in Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist State* in which the author sets out to write the history of *Absolutism*. Anderson's main methodological concern is closing of the gap between theoretical analysis and empirical research, or the discrepancy between "abstract general models" and "concrete local cases": in this sense, the concept of *Absolutism* refers to both a "historical category" and all the "impure variants presented by the specific and diverse monarchies of post-medieval Europe."[330] Methodologically, Anderson underlines that three features distinguish his work from "the orthodox treatments of the subject": Firstly, Anderson gives "a much longer ancestry" to Absolutism, extending its history not only to the Middle Ages, but also to the antiquity; secondly, he tries to provide for Absolutism "an equivalent and complementary treatment to its Western and Eastern zones" and hence to address the local and regional divergences within the larger European context;

[330] Anderson, *Lineages,* 7.

and lastly, he refrains from employing a "uniform temporal medium" due to the "enormously diverse" character of "the times of the major Absolutisms of Europe" as he underlines that "this diversity was itself constitutive of their respective nature as State systems."[331] Lastly, Anderson comments that such a history of the *State* should be seen as a counterpart to the "history from below" approach enjoying popularity at the time: Writing a history of the *State* is legitimate, as Anderson reminds us, since "secular struggle between classes is ultimately resolved at the political -not at the economic or cultural- level of society" as "it is the construction and destruction of States which seal the basic shifts in the relations of production, so long as classes subsist."[332] Starting from the history of the absolute monarchy, therefore, Anderson extends his analysis to the issue of the transition to capitalism.

Historically, Anderson defines the emergence of the Absolutist State as a rupture with "the pyramidal, parcellized sovereignty of the medieval social formations."[333] However, he does not see this newly emerging Absolutist State as a class instrument of the newly arising bourgeoisie, as the Marxist orthodoxy holds to be true, but rather as "*a redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination,* designed to clamp the peasant masses back into their traditional social position … never an arbiter between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, still less an instrument of the nascent bourgeoisie against the aristocracy: it was the new political carapace of a threatened nobility." On the other hand, Anderson underlines that this was not the old, traditional aristocracy but it

[331] Anderson, *Lineages,* 8-10.

[332] Ibid., 11.

[333] Ibid., 15.

constituted a "new form of noble power" the existence of which was marked "by the spread of commodity production and exchange, in the transitional social formations of the early modern period."[334] As the decline of serfdom posed a threat to the class power of the nobility, "the result was a displacement of politico-legal coercion upwards towards a centralized, militarized summit -the Absolutist State": therefore, this restructuring can be seen as a trade off between the political for the economic and social power by the aristocracy.[335] In the end, however, the same "apparatus" that secured "the protection of aristocratic property and privileges" simultaneously fostered "the basic interests of the nascent mercantile and manufacturing classes"[336]: Paradoxically, therefore, "economic centralization, protectionism and overseas expansion aggrandized the late feudal State while they profited the early bourgeoisie."[337] This contradictory character of Absolutism, asserts Anderson, is grounded in the fact that it represented the rule "of the feudal nobility in the epoch of transition to capitalism": its demise, in turn, is related to a crisis of this class that came out with "the advent of the bourgeois revolutions and the emergence of the capitalist State."[338] Anderson, however, underlines that Absolutism followed rather different paths in the Western and Eastern Europe: while Absolutism as a Western European phenomenon signified "a compensation for the disappearance of serfdom, in the context of an increasingly urban economy", its Eastern

[334] Anderson, *Lineages,* 18.

[335] Ibid., 19.

[336] Ibid., 40.

[337] Ibid., 41.

[338] Ibid., 42.

counterpart functioned as "the repressive machine of a feudal class" and "a device for the consolidation of serfdom."[339] Therefore, the divergences within the larger European context is crucial to understand the varying class character of the different Absolutist states.

Anderson strongly emphasizes that in the pre-capitalist modes of production, surplus-extraction was characterized by "extra-economic coercion": This means that before the advent of capitalism, "superstructures … necessarily enter into the constitutive structure of the mode of production."[340] In the analysis of feudalism, therefore, "political and legal superstructures" should not be severed from the economic base, but to the contrary, they should be seen as elements integral to it.[341] Accordingly, Anderson underlines that due weight should be given to "the 'superstructural' peculiarities which distinguished western European feudal development"[342] as it is only through "the variant juridical and political superstructures which accompany it" that one can understand the original development of capitalism in Europe and not elsewhere.[343] I will return to this issue of the separation between the economic and the political spheres in reality and in analysis in the fourth chapter.

On the issue of transition, Anderson states that "what rendered the unique passage to capitalism possible in Europe was *the concatenation of antiquity and*

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[339] Anderson, *Lineages* 195.

[340] Ibid.**,** 403.

[341] Ibid., p.401.

[342] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe,* 37-38.

[343] Anderson, *Lineages***,** 402.

feudalism" as he rejects the view that sees historical transformation as "an evolutionary subsumption of a lower mode of production by a higher mode of production."[344] Accordingly, he proposes that "concrete social formations … typically embody a number of coexistent and conflicting modes of production", and hence "the course towards capitalism reveals a *remanence* of the legacy of one mode of production within an epoch *dominated* by another, and a *reactivation* of its spell in the passage to a third."[345] Accordingly, Anderson concludes that "the *concatenation* of the ancient and feudal modes of production was necessary to yield the capitalist mode of production in Europe."[346] Accordingly,

> for Anderson, the explanation of capitalist emergence is not couched simply in terms of a unilinear "stage theory" whereby internal contradictions within one mode of production are seen as moving society onward to the succeeding mode. Rather, capitalism is analyzed as the outcome of a complex inter-relationship between at least two previous modes of production, antiquity and feudalism.[347]

Now, it should be pretty obvious that despite their similarities this account is radically different from Bois's approach: though they both work through a framework that focuses on European feudalism and point to the structural aspects of its long-term development, not only their focus (forces and relations of production in Bois's case and the nature of "superstructure" in Anderson's case), but also their conceptualization of the temporality of transition (while Bois has a strong sense of structural transformation, historical specificites are lost from sight in Anderson's long history of the Absolutist state)

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[344] Anderson, *Lineages***,** 403.

[345] Ibid., 421.

[346] Ibid., 422.

[347] Holton, "Marxist Theories of Social Change", 855.

radically differ. As Marx underlines,

> In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it.[348]

In this context, it could have been a much more fruitful inquiry if Anderson had focused on how simple categories were subsumed under one dominant mode of production: this way, his sense of historical continuity would bear a corresponding understanding of discontinuity and rupture. As it is now, however, Anderson's conceptualization of the temporality regarding transition and his almost "genetic methodological approach towards feudalism" constitutes the most problematic part of this account[349] since in his "overwhelming preoccupation with the c*ontinuities* between the legal, political and economic traditions stretching between antiquity and capitalism", he fails to discern "the crucial discontinuities involved in the transition to capitalism": In this respect, "Anderson's analysis comes close at points to both evolutionism and functionalism."[350]

2.2.3 Cities and trade, *Merchant Capitalism* and world-system theories

The third approach to the problem of the transition to capitalism can be categorized under the rubric of trade-centered theories which focus on the development of cities, urban bourgeoisie and merchant capital as the pioneers of the capitalist mode of production and the accompanying role of colonialism in this process. Although it includes a wide variety of theories and it would be unjust to categorize such diversity

[348] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 106-107.

[349] Holton, "Marxist Theories of Social Change", 855.

[350] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe,* 39.

under the same title, some common points can be identified in their approach. Firstly, they advocate for a change in the conventional unit of analysis -the nation states of Europe: This takes either the form of the inclusion of non-European areas into the analysis for purposes of comparison, or a complete reconsideration of this conventional unit of analysis employed so far and the extension of scope to encompass the whole world. Secondly, more often than not, they lack an adequate analysis of the feudal mode of production and neglect the changes the rural landscapes went through since all the transformative power is assigned to the gradual development of commercial relations: sometimes, this neglect is accompanied by a wholesale rejection of the concept of feudal mode of production itself. Thirdly, the overwhelming focus on trade and money as the constitutive elements of the capitalist mode of production compel the researchers to find the germs of capitalism wherever and whenever they find these elements. The importance of the geographical aspect of this approach and the fresh perspective it brought into the field cannot be appreciated enough; I will be, however, mainly concerned with the second and the third aspects of the problem as it has important implications for the conceptualization of primitive accumulation, structural change and temporality concerning the transformation in modes of production.

2.2.3.1 Dobb-Sweezy controversy: Internal and external factors

One crucial aspect of the Transition Debate that I have neglected so far was the polemic between Dobb and Sweezy on the role of trade and cities *vis-a-vis* structural transformations the feudal system went through in transition to capitalism: this was formulated in the vocabulary of external as against internal factors. On the basis of this controversy, we can identify the opposing definitions of feudalism by the parties. Here, Sweezy starts by defining feudalism on the basis of a notion of "system of production"

as he contrasts feudalism "as a system of production for use" with capitalism as "a system of production for the market."[351] In turn, Dobb criticizes Sweezy for the dichotomy he built between "use" and "exchange" on the grounds that this concept only denotes "the relationship between the producer and his market" and in this sense, it refers to relations of exchange rather than relations of production, unlike the concept of mode of production would do.[352] Indeed, the notion of *system of production* as employed by Sweezy does not say much about the social organization or forces of production, as well as the class structure they accompany: In this way, modern capitalist commodity production for exchange can easily be mistaken for the commodity production in the ancient slave latifundia. Therefore, it cannot be stressed enough, as Takahashi underlines, that "the question to ask as to a given social structure is not whether commodities and money are present, but rather how those commodities are produced, how that money serves as a medium in production": In this respect, "the contradiction between feudalism and capitalism is not the contradiction between 'system of production for use' and 'system of production for market', but between feudal land property-serfdom and an industrial capital-wage labor system." Accordingly, system of production, as long as it is conceived on the basis of a dichotomy between *for use* and *for market*, fails to define "specific historical productive relations".[353] As such, however, it curiously resembles to Brenner's use of subsistence-oriented as against market-oriented logics of production as both suffer from similar analytical deficiencies, despite the element of

[351] Paul Sweezy, "A Critique" in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London:Verso, 1978), 33-35.

[352] Dobb, "A Reply", 58.

[353] Takahashi, "A Contribution", 71.

truth they contain: in this case, however, Sweezy's unfortunate counterposing of natural and market economies confuses the matters even worse.

As Sweezy defines feudalism as a system of production for use, the logical outcome of this line of argument is that, unlike capitalism which is in constant need of technical improvement, feudalism has an inherently "change-resisting character". Although feudalism is characterized by chronic instability in the form of "competition among lords for land and vassals" as well as population growth that constantly leads to formation of a surplus population and vagrancy, this instability in itself does not lead to a transformation, but it only deepens the general misery of the society.[354] Accordingly, Sweezy claims that feudal system contains no internal prime mover; so, when it really develops, the driving force has to be sought outside the system and an external factor should be identified. In accordance with the Pirenne thesis that explains the contraction of city life and economy on the basis of the disturbance of commercial relations by the 9th and the 10th century invasions, Sweezy finds this external factor in the revival of long-distance trade which greatly enlivened town life.[355] While Dobb identifies "the feudal lords' growing need for revenue" as the main reason behind the over-exploitation of the peasantry, Sweezy remains skeptical of the fact that this growing need is an inherent component of feudalism; rather, he claims that it can be explained as "a by-product of growth of trade and urban life."[356] In the so-called *Historical Materialism* debate of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Sweezy tries to clarify this position as he

[354] Sweezy, "A Critique", 35-36.

[355] Hilton, "A Comment", 110-111.

[356] Sweezy, "A Rejoinder", 103.

confirms that trade was crucial in the demise of feudalism and the establishment of the prerequisites of capitalism as he points to the time gap between the decline of the former and the emergence of the latter, finding "no significant connection between the two phases of the transition process."[357]

As Sweezy underlines that feudalism is defined as "a more or less stable economy that was disintegrated by the impact of commerce acting as an external force and developing outside the system that it finally overwhelmed", he lays the ground for an analytical distinction between "natural" and "exchange" economies as essentially antagonistic forms the clash of which is likely to cause the former to dissolve.[358] In this theoretical line, natural economy is defined by the complete absence of money and exchange, as a stagnant and static system. In the case of feudalism, the transition from the natural to money economy is signified by commutation, which eventually rendered traditional demesne farming and serfdom unviable.[359] This is, however, a very problematical view. Being the product of "the bourgeois historical thought", it is exclusively focusing on "exchange, trade, and money" in the neglect to the social relations of production: it is those relations, however, that give those elements of exhange and money their specific historical character.[360] This is also why commutation does not lead to demise of relations of dependence *per se*: the essence of the economic burden on the peasantry who are obliged to satisfy the demands of the landlords does not

[357] Paul M. Sweezy, "Feudalism-to-Capitalism Revisited*," Science & Society* 50, no. 1 (1986): 81-84.

[358] Hilton, *English and French Towns,* 37-38.

[359] Evgenii A. Kosminsky, "The Evolution of Feudal Rent in England from the XIth to the XVth Centuries," *Past & Present*, no. 7 (1955): 12.

[360] Ibid., 15.

change "whether these demands take the form of services to be performed or of dues to be paid in money or in kind."[361] This also holds for the supposedly dissolving effect of market and exchange on relations of dependence: As the "structure of market is conditioned by the internal organization of productive system", the development of exchange in a peasant-based economy is likely to lead to a change into money rent whereas exchange in lords-dominated economy will probably end up in the growth of labor services.[362] The widening of market relations, therefore, can cause revival or intensification as well as disappearance of serfdom and hence, it cannot be considered to be a solvent factor in itself.[363] Even in the context of a money economy, lords will not necessarily replace traditional relationships with contractual ones since they will be as likely to increase the burden on the peasantry as to start production for market exchange.[364] Therefore, it cannot be assumed that there could have been an automatic replacement of serfdom by wage-labor only by the virtue of the development of relations of exchange. Accordingly, while it is true that commerce and money capital *could* and *did* have a disintegrating effect on feudalism, the collapse of this system cannot be assigned to trade *per se.* As Marx elaborates,

> Trade always has, to a greater or lesser degree, a solvent effect on the pre-existing organizations of production, which in all their various forms are principally oriented to use-value. But how far it leads to the dissolution of the old mode of production depends first and foremost on the solidity and inner articulation of this mode of production itself. And what comes out of this process of dissolution, i.e. what new mode of production arises in place of the old, does not depend on trade, but rather on the character of the old mode of

[361] Dobb, *Studies,* 35.

[362] Takahashi, "A Contribution", 76-77.

[363] Dobb, *Studies,* 40.

[364] Ibid., 41.

production itself.[365]

It is in this context that Dobb underlines the importance of "the internal relationships of Feudalism as a mode of production and the part which these played in determining the system's disintegration or survival." Although, as he argues, there is "a complex interaction between the external impact of the market and these internal relationships of the system", the internal factor will have the ultimate effect because external influences work themselves out through the structure of "the old order" which they come to influence: Trade and growth of towns *could* and *did* accelerate the disintegration of the feudal system, but only to the extent that they "accentuated the internal conflicts within the old mode of production."[366] In Marx's own words, trade and merchant capital, in themselves, fail "to explain the transition from one mode of production to the other."[367] Accordingly, as Dobb concludes:

> the disintegration of feudalism (and hence its final and declining stage) came not as the result of the assault upon it of an incipient 'Capitalism' in the guise of 'merchant capital' wedded to 'money economy', as has been commonly supposed, but as the result of the revolt of the petty producers against feudal exploitation.[368]

Dobb elaborates on this point by defining the respective social roles played by the emerging merchant bourgeoisie as well as the well-to-do rural producers and the urban artisans in the period of transition. As for the merchant class, Dobb once again underlines that "it stood in a position of co-partner rather than antagonist to the nobility,

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[365] Marx, *Capital 3,* 449-450.

[366] Dobb, "A Reply", 59-60.

[367] Marx, *Capital 3*, 444.

[368] Maurice Dobb, "A Further Comment," in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978),100.

and in Tudor times partly merged with it", mainly because this class obtained its wealth "from taking advantage of price-differences in space and time" and hence, it exercised "little direct effect upon the mode of production."[369] At this point, profit obtained from commerce was based on alienation -or buying cheap and selling dear[370]whereby "the product becomes a commodity through trade. It is trade that shapes the products into commodities; not the produced commodities whose movement constitutes trade."[371] Accordingly, it is only with the emergence of modern capitalism that trade would be subordinated to industry. Until then, however, even though trade in general "subjects production more and more to exchange-value, by making consumption and existence more dependent on sale than on the direct use of the product" and hence has a deteriorating effect on the mode of production it comes to influence, it still fails to transform it as it continues to operate on the level of circulation alone.[372] This picture was completed by the merchants' fear of "production for the market by the artisans themselves", which led to their reinforcement of dispersion along the lines of production in order to make the small artisans dependent on themselves.[373]

What has been said on the class balance between the merchants, and the small urban and rural producers also holds true for towns as "far from being an antagonistic element within feudal society, towns would be one of its essential constitutive

[369] Dobb, *Studies*, 20-21.

[370] Marx, *Capital 3*, 447.

[371] Marx, *Capital 3*, 445-446.

[372] Ibid., 448.

[373] Hilton, "Capitalism – What's in a Name?, 151.

components."[374] The point here is that cities, as they existed in the context of the feudal mode of production, "were in no sense the linear ancestors of the capitalist world market."[375] Accordingly, it was one of Hilton's greatest merits that his focus on small towns as the loci of market activity and commodity exchange based on extensive, direct peasant participation has enabled him to conceptualize commerce and cities as integral parts of the feudal structure, rather than as elements originated from external effects, such as foreign merchants.[376]

Furthermore, the nuance between the spheres of production and exchange is important for the general understanding of a mode of production. As Marx underlines:

> There are characteristics which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called general preconditions of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped.[377]

Likewise, "the qualities peculiar to the system are more important than the qualities it may have in common with other systems" and in this respect, "relations of exchange" which are, in one form or another and with varying degrees, present in different modes of production in themselves, fail to fulfill this criterion of being the "peculiar quality", or the defining element of a specific mode of production.[378] As Marx underlines, "interest-bearing capital, or, to describe it in its archaic form, usurer's capital, belongs together

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[374] Hilton, *English and French Towns,* 18.

[375] John Merrington, "Town and Country in the Transition to Capitalism," in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,* ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 177.

[376] Duchesne,"Rodney Hilton", 139.

[377] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 88.

[378] Dobb, *Studies,* 27.

with its twin brother, merchant's capital, to the antediluvian forms of capital which long precede the capitalist mode of production and are to be found in the most diverse socio-economic formations."[379] Historically, therefore, neither relations of exchange nor capital are specific to capitalism as "commodity production at the grass roots of society was ... an important component of the early medieval economy, and money as the functional necessity of this commodity production was only rarely absent, if often scarce."[380] We can find, indeed, commodity production, money and trade in the ancient societies as well: their mere appearance, however, does not amount to an automatic transformation of the society and development of capitalism. On the contrary, "the less developed production is, the more monetary wealth is concentrated in the hands of merchants and appears in the specific form of mercantile wealth."[381] Accordingly,

> The independent and preponderant development of capital in the form of commercial capital is synonymous with the non-subjection of production to capital, i.e. with the development of capital on the basis of a social form of production that is foreign to it and independent of it. The independent development of commercial capital thus stands in inverse proportion to the general economic development of society.[382]

2.2.3.2 Banaji and *Merchant Capitalism*

A good example of the view that locates the origins of capitalism in an era of Merchant Capitalism comes from Banaji. Methodologically, against the theories that center on England and Europe, Banaji advocates for a "richer and more complex set of trajectories than the conventional stereotype of capitalist history as a history of the first capitalist

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[379] Marx, *Capital 3,* 728.

[380] Hilton, *English and French Towns,* 152.

[381] Marx, *Capital 3*, 444.

[382] Ibid., 445.

nation" and he proposes that "it was through the rapidly expanding commercial world of the middle ages that capitalism emerged in a more systematic guise".[383] On the basis of this framework, there lies Banaji's definition of capitalism as an unceasing process of accumulation of capital: as such, class struggle, "as a dynamic of historical change", is conspicuously absent from his analysis, just as the centrality of wage-labor for capitalism is lost from sight.[384]

Although Banaji accepts that Marx had mainly focused on "manufacture" and "large-scale industry" in his analysis of the history of capitalism, "ignoring merchant-capital as an antediluvian form", he nevertheless suggests that Marx had at least hinted at the possibility of an earlier capitalist form based on merchant-capital.[385] Accordingly, Banaji refers to a quotation by Marx as an example where he states that "we come across the first sporadic traces of capitalist production as early as the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries in certain towns of the Mediterranean." Unfortunately, however, this quotation defeats the purpose for Banaji: Although Marx states that one can indeed find "first sporadic traces of capitalist production" in the aforementioned place and time, he nevertheless concludes that "the capitalist era dates from the sixteenth century", as a historical epoch of production.[386] While this piece is read by Banaji as an evidence for Marx's latent acknowledgement of the role of trade and capital in the development of capitalism prior to the transformations that took place in the 16th century English

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[383] Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on modes of production and exploitation (*Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 12**.**

[384] Liam Campling, "Debating Modes of Production and Forms of Exploitation: Introduction to the Symposium on Jairus Banaji's Theory as History," *Historical Materialism* 23, no. 4 (2013): 9.

[385] Banaji, *Theory as History***,** 12-13.

[386] Marx, *Capital 1,* 875-876.

countryside, it is often overlooked that Marx goes on to explain this statement on the basis of the changes taking place in the social relations of production in the Mediterranean countryside:

> In Italy, where capitalistic production developed earliest, the dissolution of serfdom also took place earlier than elsewhere. The serf was emancipated in that country before he had acquired any prescriptive right to the soil. His emancipation at once transformed him into a free proletarian, who, moreover, found his master ready and waiting for him in the towns, for the most part handed down as legacies from the Roman time. When the revolution of the world- market, about the end of the 15th century, annihilated Northern Italy's commercial supremacy, a movement in the reverse direction set in. The laborers of the towns were driven en masse into the country, and gave an impulse, never before seen, to the petite culture, carried on in the form of gardening.[387]

As Marx had developed his concept of commercial capital in the context of the 19th century Industrial Capitalism, on the other hand, Banaji claims that it is "logically absurd" to rely on this notion to understand the history of capitalism[388]: such absurdity also explains for Banaji why merchant capital is usually considered to be a part of the history of primitive accumulation rather than a phase in the development of capitalism itself.[389] In contrast, Banaji suggests that merchant capital can subsume labor and dominate production in its more developed forms, and hence there is no need to draw a sharp demarcation line between the spheres of production and circulation.[390] Accordingly, he concludes that:

> . . . the contrast between capitalism as a 'commercial system' and capitalism as a 'mode of production' is schematic and overstated, and a major reason why Marxists have paid so little attention to merchant-capital. In the more developed forms of commercial capitalism, circulation dominates production in the sense

[387] Marx, *Capital 1,* 876.

[388] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 255-256.

[389] Ibid., 272.

[390] Ibid., 273.

> that production is controlled by a class of capitalists who remain merchants and cannot properly be classified as 'industrialists'. The subsumption of labour into merchant-capital is thus irreducible to any single formula, even though Marx tended to associate it primarily with the 'stage' of manufacture. Merchant-capitalists controlled a variety of enterprises from putting-out networks and peasant agriculture to slave plantations and factories in the modern sense.[391]

Banaji singles out Portugal's involvement in the Mediterranean as well as the Atlantic trades as a crucial point in the history of merchant capitalism for Europe: in turn, its previous "confrontation with the commercial networks of Islam" which originated as "an attempt to undermine those networks internationally" seem to be a turning point for Europe[392] as Banaji locates the origins of capitalism for Europe in the 12th century and for the Islamic world and China in even earlier periods.[393] Likewise, Banaji finds the origins of the "the institutional framework of industrial capitalism" in the Merchant Capitalism of Italy in the 13th and 15th century and by extension in the Islamic world of the 9th to the 14th century, with their financial and commercial activities.[394] Accordingly, Banaji considers "the twelfth to fifteenth centuries as the period of the growth of capitalism in Europe ('Mediterranean capitalism') and the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries as the period of Company-capitalism, marked by more brutal methods of accumulation and competition."[395] Marx, however, does not really come to Banaji's help in this case:

> There can be no doubt - and this very fact has led to false conceptions - that the great revolutions that took place in trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, along with the geographical discoveries of that epoch, and which

[391] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 273.

[392] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 253.

[393] Ibid., 257-258.

[394] Ibid., 258-262.

[395] Ibid., 257-258.

> rapidly advanced the development of commercial capital, were a major moment in promoting the transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production. The sudden expansion of the world market, the multiplication of commodities in circulation, the competition among the European nations for the seizure of Asiatic products and American treasures, the colonial system, all made a fundamental contribution towards shattering the feudal barriers to production. And yet the modern mode of production in its first period, that of manufacture, developed only where the conditions for it had been created in the Middle Ages.[396]

In this section, I have solely focused on Banaji's treatment of the origins of capitalism: in this case, all the reservations I have raised against Sweezy holds true for Banaji as well. His analysis, on the other hand, brought about a good deal of controversy and raised a number of crucial theoretical questions. The role of wage-labor in pre-capitalist modes of production and by extension, the relationship between forms of exploitation and modes of production, the identification of phases in the history of capitalism, the transformations in the organization of production and the associated changes in the labor-process, and the historical specificity of capitalism are all important questions Banaji's account raises and I will discuss these issues in detail in the fourth chapter. For now, it should suffice to point out his conceptualization of the temporality concerning the development of capitalism. As Banaji is very much concerned to trace the roots of capitalism to the dawn of human history, it can be said that he possesses "a fine sense of the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity that challenges historians": however, in his pursuit, "there is also the problem, to put it in caricatured fashion, of infinite regress: everything that happens is affected, in one way or another, to some degree or other, by everything that happened before."[397] In this sense, Banaji's conceptualization of

[396] Marx, *Capital 3,* 450.

[397] Henry Bernstein, "Historical Materialism and Agrarian History," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 2 (2013): 325-326.

historical change is one of a long and gradual evolution through which same elements constantly appear and disappear without in effect changing their quality, but only getting combined in different ways. Accordingly,

> In this framing the return to the past becomes a mapping of continuity. Differences in structures are less important than the similarity of essence. Otherness of forms is erased to affirm sameness. Seemingly similar forms are located in an unruptured, linear, homogeneous time, extracted from the specific structures they are embedded in. The past gets incorporated into the present. History becomes a lineage of capital.[398]

2.2.3.3 World-system analysis

Lastly, we have the world-systems analysis, which can be considered to be "the most systematic development" of the market-relations approach.[399] In this broad school, three main characteristics can be identified: Firstly, we see a change in the unit of analysis as nation-state leaves its place to the notion of *world* as a system; secondly, we find a strong emphasis on the historical role played by the accumulation of capital, which resembles to the theory of Merchant Capitalism in certain respects, but has an overtly more systematic approach to the problem;[400] lastly, we find in this school insufficient attention paid to feudalism or occasional rejection of the concept in favor of an almost transhistorical notion of "world-system".

For Wallerstein, "what characterizes a social system . . . is the fact that life within it is largely self contained, and that the dynamics of its development are largely internal."[401] The only historical examples of such systems are "those relatively small,

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[398] Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Lineages of Capital," *Historical Materialism* 23, no. 4 (2013): 11-35.

[399] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe*, 7.

[400] Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis,* 16.

[401] Wallerstein*, The Modern World-System 1*, 347.

highly autonomous subsistence economies not part of some regular tribute-demanding system and, on the other hand, world-systems". The latter is "defined by the fact that their self-containment as an economic-material entity is based on extensive division of labor and that they contain within them a multiplicity of cultures": the historical examples of such world-systems are "world-empires" defined by "a single political system" and "world-economies" which lack such political hegemony.[402] For Wallerstein, the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries witnessed the birth of the modern "European world-economy", which was a novel form of social system as it constituted "an economic but not a political entity".[403] Although this was not the first world-economy in history, the previous ones were unstable and soon turned into empires or became disintegrated. The dynamic character of the modern world-system prevents this unstability as constant technological development initiated by capitalist competition leads to systematic increase in productivity.[404] On the other hand, this world-system is characterized by a geographical division of labor defined on the basis of three basic areas composed of core, periphery and semi-periphery[405]to each of which different "methods of labor control" and related forms of state correspond.[406] This novel characteristic of the modern world-system, that it is based on a world-wide division of labor, is also the reason why its study requires a unit of analysis other than nation-state: A new reality, the world-system, requires new tools of analysis.

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[402] Wallerstein*, The Modern World-System 1*, 348

[403] Ibid., 15.

[404] Ibid., p16.

[405] Ibid., 349.

[406] Ibid., 38.

Wallerstein defines Europe as a "very marginal area in economic terms" which curiously managed to be the birthplace of capitalism.[407] Accordingly, the economic and political structure of Europe at that time needs to be clarified. Although Wallerstein underlines that an analysis of European feudalism remains to be crucial to understand the emergence of capitalism, he nevertheless suffers from a "lack of any theoretical conception of the dynamics of feudalism" itself[408] as his account of the history of medieval Europe is more often than not eclectic and cursory. Regarding medieval Europe before the mid-fifteenth century, Wallerstein rightly rejects the view of European feudalism as a "natural economy" solely oriented towards "self-subsistence" or a "dual economy" in which cities and towns represented a market economy and countryside represented a self-subsistence economy.[409] Accordingly, Wallerstein acknowledges the existence of trade in feudalism as he underlines that these two are not "antithetical" to each other. On the other hand, he acknowledges that there were important limits to this relationship as well since "a feudal system could only support a limited amount of long-distance trade." This is grounded in the specific character of the pre-capitalist trade which mainly "benefited from price disparities and depended on the political indulgence and economic possibilities of the truly wealthy." Accordingly, Wallerstein underlines that "it is only with the expansion of production within the framework of a modern world-economy that long-distance trade could convert itself in part into bulk trade which

[407] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System 1,* 17.

[408] Theda Skocpol, "Review: Wallerstein's World Capitalist System: A Theoretical and Historical Critique," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 5 (1977): 1078.

[409] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System 1,* 17-18.

would, in turn, feed the process of expanded production."[410] Therefore, modern form of trade emerged only with the development of capitalist production, and *vice versa* since capitalism itself developed in tandem with the modern world-system; they are, for Wallerstein, inseparable moments.

The crisis of the fourteenth century, on the other hand, marked the end of economic expansion for Europe that it was experiencing in the previous periods.[411] Wallerstein seems to be in favor of an explanation of this crisis on the basis of "a conjuncture of secular trends, an immediate cyclical crisis, and climatological decline."[412] After this crisis, as he goes on,

> What Europe was to develop and sustain now was a new form of surplus appropriation, a capitalist world-economy . . . what would develop now is the appropriation of a surplus which was based on more efficient and expanded productivity (first in agriculture and later in industry) by means of a world market mechanism with the "artificial" (that is, nonmarket) assist of state machineries, none of which controlled the world market in its entirety.[413]

Therefore, for Wallerstein, "the modern world-system took the form of a capitalist world-economy that had its genesis in Europe in the long sixteenth century and that involved the transformation of a particular redistributive or tributary mode of production, that of feudal Europe . . . into a qualitatively different social system."[414]

It should be underlined that Wallerstein's world-system analysis differs from the notion of Merchant Capitalism based on the gradual expansion of finance and capital in

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[410] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System 1,* 20-21.

[411] Ibid., 21.

[412] Ibid., 37.

[413] Ibid., 37-38.

[414] Ibid., 7-8.

important respects. For Wallerstein, capitalism does not equal to capital *per se* or its gradual accumulation: rather, it represents a qualitative break, a structural transformation brought about by a radical reorganization of economy and politics, and a novel economic logic that puts accumulation to its center. Therefore, historical specificity of capitalism is strongly underlined by Wallerstein, unlike other proponents of world-system theory, such as A. G. Frank. Accordingly, Wallerstein's account is a much more elaborate and nuanced version of these trade-centered theories.

On the other hand, this new world-system is conceptualized to be based on a world-wide division of labor: This corresponds to a real geographical division as different areas that constitute the world capitalist-system contribute to it through trade, which is both the connecting line between different economic zones and the basic analytical tool used to explain the model. In turn, these parts are determined by the whole, by the function they fulfill within the broader context of the world-economy. This, however, amounts to "a reduction of socio-economic structure to determination by world market opportunities and technological production possibilities" and constitutes the most problematic part of Wallerstein's account.[415] As Skocpol explains, "Wallerstein . . . deals with historical evidence primarily in terms of a preconceived model of the capitalist world economy."[416] Furthermore:

> the curious thing here is that, despite the fact that Wallerstein seems to be placing a great deal of stress on the class structures of the major zones of world capitalism, actually . . . he is explaining the fundamental economic dynamics of the system in terms of exactly the variables usually stressed by liberal economists, while ignoring the basic Marxist insight that the social relations of production and surplus appropriation are the sociological key to the functioning and development of any economic system. For this Marxist idea demands that

[415] Skocpol, "Review: Wallerstein's World Capitalist System", 1078-1079.

[416] Ibid., 1076.

> one pay attention to institutionalized relationships between producing and surplus-appropriating classes and allow for the ever-present potential of collective resistance from below. Instead, Wallerstein treats "labor control" primarily as a market-optimizing strategy of the dominant class alone.[417]

In this scheme, on the other hand, "commodification of labor power is not seen as essential for accumulation on an extended scale or for innovation to take place."[418] Accordingly, emergence of wage-labor does not play a central role in transition.[419] On the other hand, Wallerstein's use of the concept of *unequal exchange* in reference to the transfer of surplus from the periphery to the core is criticized by Brenner since this view assumes the existence of "free mobility of capital throughout the system, precisely so as to equalize profit rate" as well as generalized free wage-labor, and these were obviously absent in the 16th century.[420] Lastly, Wallerstein's explanation of the 2nd serfdom as capitalist on the basis of his contention that "trade performs the mission of determining economic development throughout capitalist Europe", is obviously problematic: Historically, "the external influence emanating from the Baltic grain trade exerted only a secondary effect on the internal development of lord-serf relations" as in the last instance, it was the internal transformations of the system in the region that was determining of the outcome.[421] In this context,

> Sweezy's failure to distinguish between the effects of the market under different social conditions and on different social conditions, and Wallerstein's and Frank's failure to understand why the growth of commerce in the sixteenth

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[417] Skocpol, "Review: Wallerstein's World Capitalist System", 1078-1079.

[418] Robert A. Denemark and Kenneth P. Thomas,"The Brenner-Wallerstein Debate*," International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1988): 50.

[419] Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 104 (1977): 55.

[420] Ibid., 63.

[421] Verl F. Hunt, "The Rise of Feudalism in Eastern Europe: A Critical Appraisal of the Wallerstein 'World-System' Thesis," *Science & Society* 42, no. 1 (1978): 44-46.

> century in and of itself was incapable either of underwriting western capitalist development or of moving the eastern economies in a capitalist direction, is rooted in a common failure to distinguish between the historically unique forms which 'the market' has assumed in different historical periods.[422]

Another renowned proponent of the world-system theory is Abu-Lughod, who also sets out to locate the origins of capitalism in the 16th century, but focuses on the previous world-system as the precursor to the modern one. In this sense, the model she employs is basically an extension of the framework developed by Wallerstein in the first place. As for Abu-Lughod, the 13th century world system increasingly "faltered by the middle of the fourteenth century", which led to the emergence of the modern world-system in the 16th century: so, it is on the basis of this modern world system that the West rose to its hegemonic position and this is why the study of the origins of capitalism should be extended to this previous world system.[423] This world system was characterized by "an international trade economy" that spanned from Europe to China and unlike the modern world system, contained "no single hegemonic power".[424] Furthermore, Abu-Lughod underlines the "uneven" character of this system as "a variety of economic systems coexisted in the thirteenth century".[425] What is striking in this heterogeneity is that "the economic vitality of these areas was the result, at least in part, of the system in which they participated" as each zone "had begun to reorganize parts of their internal economics to meet the exigencies of a world market."[426] This is, therefore, an

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[422] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe,* 15.

[423] Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York; Oxford: New York University Press, 1989): 4.

[424] Ibid., 4-6.

[425] Ibid., 353-5.

[426] Ibid., *355.*

exaggerated version of Wallerstein's functionalism as it is now extended to the pre-capitalist world, taking the form of total subordination of the parts to the whole, seemingly without any real interaction in between. Regarding the development of the capitalist world economy -or the "restructuring" of the system, as Abu-Lughod prefers to use this term rather than "substitution" to denote the succession of world systems[427]- she underlines that "there was no inherent historical necessity that shifted the system to favor the West rather than the East", but rather it was the crisis in the East that had allowed for the West to gain the upper hand in the first place.[428] In this version, therefore, any sense of a real break with the previous systems is lost from sight: the emergence of the capitalist world-system represents only another readjustment rather than a structural transformation.[429]

On the other hand, the world-system analysis has turned into almost a caricature in the hands of A. G. Frank and B. K. Gills who propose a 5000 year-old lineage to the modern world-system, in place of Wallerstein's humble and sensible 500 year-old modern capitalist world-system, on the basis of their contention that world-systems are independent of any mode of production.[430] The origins of the modern world-system, they claim, can be found in Mesopotamia in 3000 BCE[431]once it got into systematic

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[427] Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony,* 366.

[428] Ibid., 12.

[429] One recent contribution to this analysis comes from Eric Mielants, "Perspectives on the Origins of Merchant Capitalism in Europe," *Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Publications* Paper 45 (2000). http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/sociologyandanthropology-facultypubs/45.

[430] Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills in "Giriş: 5000 Yıllık Dünya Sistemi" in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı? ed. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 34.

[431] K. Ekholm and J. Friedman, "Eski Dünya Sistemlerinde 'Sermaye' Emperyalizmi ve Sömürü," in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı? ed. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge

interaction with Egypt.[432] Behind the formation of world-systems, the motor force of history appears to be accumulation of capital.[433] According to this view, therefore, world history should be conceptualized not as a series of transitions between stages of modes of production, but on the basis of hegemonic restructurings of spaces of accumulation in the world economy.[434] To Frank, in this context, even the concept of mode of production and transition seem to be meaningless at its best, and ideological at its worst since it implies necessity, linearity and Eurocentricism.[435] This treatment did not go without criticism even from the pioneers of the world-systems analysis themselves: Even when the existence of world-systems precede capitalism, Amin warns us against the confusion of capitalism and proto-capitalist elements in older societies and emphasizes the distinctiveness of the modern capitalist world-system that emerged in the 16th century[436]; Wallerstein further reminds us that accumulation of capital was not a priority in the systems preceding capitalism.[437]

Kitabevi, 2003), 141.

[432] Barry K. Gills and Andre Gunder Frank, "Kümülatif Birikim" in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı? ed. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 176

[433] Frank and Gills, "Giriş", 42.

[434] Barry K. Gills, Introduction, in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı? ed. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 34.

[435] Andre Gunder Frank, "İdeolojik Geçiş Tarzları*",* in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı? ed. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 379-380.

[436] Samir Amin, "Modern Kapitalist Dünya-Sistemi Kavramına Karşı Eski Dünya-Sistemleri Kavramı", in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı?* ed*. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 457-*458.*

[437] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Dünya Sistemleri Kavramına Karşı Dünya-Sistemi Kavramı) ", in *Dünya Sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı?* ed*. A. G.* Frank, A. G & B. K. Gills (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 528-529.

Samir Amin, on the other hand, suggests that the period from the 16th century to the Industrial Revolution should be conceptualized as "a transitional period from feudalism to capitalism."[438] Accordingly, capitalism properly emerged only with the coming of the Industrial Revolution.[439] This transitory period was characterized by the coexistence of a disintegrating feudalism and an expanding long-distance trade while the determining factor was ultimately the former.[440] In this respect, Amin identifies "proletarianization and the accumulation of money-capital" as the two main prerequisites of the development of capitalism. Accordingly, the absence of free wage-labor explains the failure of capitalism to develop in antiquity and feudalism where some amount of accumulation could indeed be found.[441] For capitalism to emerge, therefore, "concentration of money-wealth in the hands of merchants" should be accompanied by "the breakup of the dominant pre-capitalist mode", since only the latter will end up in proletarianization.[442] Accordingly:

> . . . the two elements -long-distance trade and the breakup of feudal relations - interacted with each other so as to engender the capitalist mode of production. The concentration of money- wealth at one pole created potential capital: it took place first among the merchants, then among the new rural capitalists. But this potential capital became real capital only because the breakup of feudal relations released a supply of labor power and proletarianized the peasantry. The latter became wage workers in the employment of the new industrialists or of the capitalist landowners and farmers of the countryside.[443]

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[438] Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 239.

[439] Amin, *Unequal Development,* 31.

[440] Ibid., 32.

[441] Ibid., 31.

[442] Ibid., 33.

[443] Ibid., 36.

Amin underlines that whereas merchant capital existed elsewhere, the proletarianization of the peasantry was specific to Europe.[444] This is explicable on the basis of "the specific character of the feudal mode of production" that characterized medieval Europe as Amin defines European feudalism as a "primitive, incomplete, peripheral" form of a more general tributary form[445] this specific variant of which "occurs in the absence of centralization of the surplus, in connection with the fragmentation of political authority."[446] Accordingly, in relation to transition, Amin adds that "the greater flexibility resulting from the undeveloped character of the feudal mode leads to the more rapid appearance of an embryonic capitalist mode within feudal relations."[447] In a sense, what Bois holds to be true for the European feudalism, conceptualized as a phenomenon of uneven development, Amin translates into the vocabulary of the world-system perspective.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have surveyed the Marxist debates on the transition to capitalism, organizing the discussion around the concept of the temporality of transition and the notion of structural transformation. To this end, I have categorized the debates under three main headings. The first one has focused on the internal dynamics and the transformations of the English feudalism that would eventually lead to its demise, preparing the way for the later emergence of capitalism. Here, the main divergence of opinion is found between the view that focused on the extension of feudal peasant

[444] Amin, *Unequal Development,* 33.

[445] Ibid., 237.

[446] Ibid., 233-234.

[447] Ibid., 242-243.

differentiation and development of petty commodity production as against the view that argues for the determining effect of the Enclosures and the resultant expropriation of the peasantry, which would lead to a drastic transformation in the English countryside, leading the the emergence of Agrarian Capitalism. Here, I have argued that while these two accounts are complementary, the latter has a better sense of a qualitative transformation compared to the former. Secondly, I have focused on the view that considers feudalism as a European-wide phenomenon and sets out to analyze its development and demise on this basis. Here, Bois has argued for a general "tendency" of the feudal mode of production, located in the structural contradiction between small-scale production and large-scale property, leading to the demise of the system in the weakest link of European feudalism, i.e. England. Bois, therefore, analyzes the decline of serfdom on the basis of uneven and combined development of European feudalism in general. From this point on, he explains the emergence of agrarian capitalism as the result of the strategy adopted by the landlord class to counteract against the loss they suffered in relation to political control mechanisms. Anderson, on the other hand, sets out to trace the "lineages" of the Absolutist State and the origins of the capitalist mode of production not only in the Medieval period, but also extending the time frame to antiquity: while he tries to combine all the elements that would later contribute to the development of capitalism, the transition itself as a structural transformation is blurred to a large extent. Lastly, I have examined trade-centered theories which focuses on the role of commerce, cities and finance in the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism, concluding that cities were an integral part of feudalism and hence they could not act as a dissolving factor on this mode of production, that merchant's and usurer's capital were confined to the sphere of circulation alone and, by themselves, they

could not effect a transformation in the productive base, though they could extend and intensify the already existing contradictions in the system, and that the world-system theory not only suffered from some theoretical deficiencies, but also it extrapolated what it holds to be true for modern capitalism to the beginning of its history.

In terms of temporality, my argument is that, an organic link should be established between the dissolution of the feudal mode of production, conceptualized on the basis of its own internal dynamics, and the emergence of capitalism: in other words, the relationship between these two moments should be conceptualized with reference to the concept of the transformation of quantity into quality, in the form of a structural change. This way, the previous changes that paved the way for the emergence of capitalism can be distinguished from the structural transformation of the system and yet can be understood in this very relationship itself: it is a matter of establishing a dialectical sense of historical change, in a sense. A transitional period, on the other hand, should include the period starting from the final crisis and the dissolution of feudalism, extending to the initial development of capitalism: As such, it should refer to a period of structural unstability.

Lastly, I have underlined that the way the concept of a mode of production has been characterized by the different parties of the debate has directly influenced their definition of feudal and capitalist modes of production, on the one hand, and the process of transition, on the other hand.

Dobb, to start with, equates modes of production with forms of exploitation, and hence free wage-labor comes to be the defining element of capitalism. Although it has an important truth in it, this is an inadequate explanation of capitalism at its best and simplistic and reductionist at its worst: we know that wage-labor existed long before the

emergence of capitalism and its turning into the "typical form" in capitalism -beyond the difficulties that entail the identification of the *typical* with regard to the implication of this notion that a numerical preponderance may suffice- does not delineate the special character it gains in this mode of production. For Sweezy, on the other hand, capitalism is the only dynamic system of production whatsoever: accordingly, there is not much to be explained about feudalism since it is already stagnant by definition -here, feudalism emerges as the negative case of what Sweezy holds to be true for capitalist mode of production. Accordingly, the first instances of capitalism, as a system of production for exchange, manifest themselves through the development of trade and cities as the main loci of commercial activity; feudalism, in its opposition to capitalism, emerges as a system of production for use lacking by definition an integral trade and market framework, and hence emerges as a system inherently destined to stagnation.

For Brenner and Wood, transition is encapsulated by the replacement of the logic of feudalism by the logic of capitalism: the movement is, therefore, from self-sufficiency to market-dependence coupled by "capitalist 'laws of motion': the *imperatives* of competition and profit-maximization, a compulsion to reinvest surpluses, and a systematic and relentless need to improve labour-productivity and develop the forces of production."[448] The historical counterpart of this transformation is the disposession of the former self-sufficient peasantry and the emergence of capitalist relations in the countryside. For feudalism, on the other hand, property relations constitute the main framework for analysis whereas class struggle provides the element of dynamism in

[448] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 36-37. On the other hand, the notion of "market dependence" comprises not only those who directly participate in production and exchange of commodities, but also those who lose their means of self-subsistence. For a detailed discussion of the concept of market dependence see: Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence".

historical change: this overwhelming importance given to the feudal class structure is related to the conceptualization of feudal exploitation on the basis of extra-economic coercion -a theme I will return later.

Interestingly, Brenner shares with Sweezy the view that assigns stagnancy to feudal mode of production as proper theorization of development only comes with capitalism: though these two scholars come from diametrically opposing camps, they both hold the contention that feudalism is based on production for use/subsistence whereas capitalism is based on production for exchange/market. Their difference, on the other hand, lies in Sweezy's emphasis on the primacy of exchange over production and the need for trade to flourish for the existing stagnant system to be transformed through its external impact, and Brenner's focus on the feudal class struggle between the peasantry and the landlords which break up the shackles that had contained the production system so far while the novel logic of capitalism comes later to transform the existing relations of production. In both cases, therefore, capitalism is conceptualized to be external to feudalism: for Sweezy, it literally comes from outside of the system and changes it; for Brenner, it comes long after the dissolution of feudalism and without necessarily any organic links to it: Although, historically, feudalism was necessary for capitalism to develop, the possible links between the two are not properly theorized and the dissolution of one and the emergence of the other are accounted for as independent processes to a large extent.

In a similar way to Sweezy, world-system school also emphasizes the central role of trade in capitalism. Furthermore, since modern capitalism is global, this school assumes that capitalism should have started as a global phenomenon from its inception: Accordingly, colonialism, financial operations and trade, as the most important elements

in the formation of a world market, marks the emergence of a global capitalist system which is sometimes extended to the beginning of the millennium and sometimes to the antiquity and beyond.[449] In certain respects, this is a projection of the view of capitalism as constant profit-seeking and accumulation to further back in history at the expense of the central role of wage-labor and class relations for the constitution of the capitalist mode of production. Nevertheless, as the most prominent representative of the world-system school, Wallerstein manages to differentiate between capitalist from pre-capitalist modes of production as he insists that such unceasing quest for accumulation is specific to capitalist mode of production and hence, it cannot be generalized to encompass all previous epochs in history: Amin endorses this view as well. The emphasis on accumulation, on the other hand, is taken to its extreme by A. G. Frank who sees a long process of capital accumulation in the overall human history as it becomes the main drive behind historical development. As the emphasis is on a continuous and, in many cases, an undifferentiated process of accumulation of capital, the historical specificity of capitalism is lost from sight to a great extent.[450] Likewise, in Banaji's case, accumulation emerges as the main law of motion of the capitalist mode of production as focus shifts from the central importance of wage-labor to capital, with unjust neglect to the former: by extension, Merchant Capitalism marks, for Banaji, the origins of the

[449] The best example of this view can be found in: Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, eds., *Dünya sistemi: Beş Yüzyıllık mı, Beş Binyıllık mı?* Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003. The title poses a rhetorical question, of course: it is obviously a 5000-year-old system for Frank and Gills. The most sensible representatives of the world-system school, such as Wallerstein and Amin, argue for a 500-year-old system, and the remaining world-system theoreticians, such as Abu-Lughod, can be located somewhere in between.

[450] For Brenner's critique of this view that naturalizes capitalism as the natural order of things and the expression of the inner reality of men in the form of a *homo economicus*, see: Brenner, “The Origins of Capitalist Development”.

modern capitalist mode of production.

Bois, on the other hand, sets out to find a law of feudalism comparable to Marx's conception of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (TRPF) on the basis of an analysis of feudalism comprised of small scale organization of production by the peasantry on the one hand, and the feudal form of surplus extraction on the other hand. Bois' definition of this feudal law, if it is conceived as a secular trend, is surely open to debate since he obviously models his concept after the capitalist TRPF on the character of which there is no established consensus. For the purposes of this thesis, however, what these two share in common is a concern to identify a mode of production on the basis of the contradictory unity between forces and relations of production on the one hand and an effort to explain how these modes of production dynamically develop, creating at the same time the limits to their own development, on the other hand. The problematique, therefore, concerns the question of how to conceptualize the internal movement of these modes of production comprising the periods of development as well as crisis: this is the real analytical significance of these concepts for the understanding of historical development.

As these examples demonstrate how the definition of a mode of production in general and capitalism in particular implicitly or explicitly shape the way feudalism is theorized, it becomes visible that a proper definition of both will be needed in order to make sense of the transition. To this issues, I will return in the fourth chapter and discuss them with reference to the debates on the transition to feudalism, which is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSITION TO FEUDALISM

3.1 Introduction: Slavery and transformation in the ancient world

The profession of ancient history-writing and Marxist scholarship, before the relationship between the two has been marginalized to some extent with the increasing impact of the post-modernist discourse on historical and social studies since the 1980s, had converged around some basic themes and questions regarding the nature of historical change. In this respect, the relationship between the collapse of antiquity and the development of feudalism has been subject to much controversy in Marxist and non-Marxist circles alike. Accordingly, the debates on "the character of Roman economy and the role of slavery in it" have taken place around the themes of "continuity and discontinuity as well as the use of certain essential concepts of historical change, first and foremost crisis and transition."[451] Here, the question of transition and the definition of the mode of production that characterized antiquity are closely interrelated.

Long before the question of the collapse of antiquity was formulated in the vocabulary used by historical materialism, in the form of modes of production and their transitions into other modes, this issue had already attracted considerable attention from a wide array of intellectuals, such as Edward Gibbon, as the symbolic significance of the grand theme of the collapse of what had been revered from the time of the Renaissance onwards clearly played out the sensitivities of these figures. What is striking in the later literature, on the other hand, is the historians' relative affinity with the themes of exploitation and oppression compared to the corresponding studies on feudalism: the

[451] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography, 15-22.

stark and indisputable existence of slavery, though explained in a variety of manners, makes it almost impossible to deny the existence of human subordination, while the subjugation of the peasantry to feudal landlords had still left some space for the historians with a more conservative outlook to include into the picture some elements of reciprocity and mutual obligations.

While slavery offers much less opportunity for an implicit or explicit denial of human degradation for the benefit of a minority, its prevalence in history with an integral relationship to exploitation is still underestimated in certain instances. The publicly controversial and much criticized work of Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman on American slavery, *The Time on the Cross,* in which the authors set out to demonstrate the positive aspects of slavery for the slaves themselves using the tools of modern cliometrics, is exemplary in this respect: though any attempt to estimate the intentionality of the authors would bound to remain speculative, the implications of their work is unsettling in the best-case scenario as it carries an implicit element of redemption for slavery. In other cases whereby the structurally exploitative character of slavery is at times overlooked, one finds an increasing emphasis on the heterogeneity of the slaves and the diversity and the particularity of their personal experiences, leading to a reluctance to use a single term to refer to these people. Although we find valuable insight into the lives of these people in this line of history-writing, the reality of exploitation as well as its economic and structural character behind the polished surface may be blurred at times once we come to believe on the basis of specific individuals and particular examples that the situation of these people was indeed diverse and in a certain number of instances was *not* actually *that* bad. Slaves indeed constituted a widely heterogeneous group and lumping them together under the same category would be,

from a sociological point of view, crude and simplistic. But from the point of view of economic exploitation, such diversity does not change the fact that a slave was a chattel and an *intrumentum vocale,* as referred to by the famous Latin writer Varro who kindly places this group of people two levels above a mute (*mutum*) vehicle and one level above a semi-articulate (*semi-vocale*) ox in the chapter devoted to agriculture of his *De Re Rustica.* A slave was "both a producer of objects (often in the form of commodities) as well as an object himself (often, again, in fact a commodity)."[452] He was a *res mobilis,* a movable property, as "no distinction was made between his person and his labor."[453] This is the perfect reflection of economic exploitation on the terrain of social perception.

On the other hand, one point of divergence between Marxist and non-Marxist scholarship, namely the employment by the former of the concept of mode of production to explain the ancient societies where slavery predominated, constitutes a point of heated controversy which is coupled by the fact that there is no established consensus even among the Marxist historians themselves as to the character of the mode of production, slave or otherwise, that came to define antiquity. While the numerical and structural preponderance of slaves is a matter to be settled on empirical grounds, the theoretical preferences of historians lurk behind how evidence is interpreted as the same material can be read in a variety of ways.[454] This is why theory matters: while biased reading of

[452] Robert A. Padgug, "Problems in the Theory of Slavery and Slave Society," *Science & Society* 40, no. 1 (1976): 4.

[453] Yvon Thebert, "The Slave," in *The Romans, ed.* Andrea Giardina (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 138-139.

[454] MacMullen's revisionist reading of the empirical evidence to question the prevalence of slavery in the late Roman Empire, and Samson's response on the basis of his different reading of the same evidence is interesting and informative in this respect: Ramsay MacMullen, "Late Roman Slavery," *Historia:*

evidence with a mind to confirm "facts" to the established frameworks is sinful, a claim to be beyond *all* the ideologies can only be naïve.[455] In the majority of cases, what is substituted in place of uncanny concepts such as class or mode of production? Status and social stratification in the Weberian fashion emerge as the winning candidates of the 1960s and 1970s. Are these, however, neutral, reliable and perfectly scientific concepts in contrast to the allegedly smothering orthodoxy of Marxist history-writing on antiquity? Furthermore, since the 1970s and 1980s, there has been "a challenge to the notion that slavery was the pre-eminent system of economic exploitation throughout the Roman period."[456] While it was beneficial in initiating a discussion on the existence of self-subsistent peasantry, hired as well as different forms of bonded labor in the society and the significance of this variety for the economic system as a whole, one corollary to this view was the aforementioned trend characterized by the disproportional emphasis on heterogeneity and the related rejection of the totalizing categories that does not make justice to diversity. Can this trend turn out to be the long-awaited salvation of the concrete, *real* history from the tyranny of foul and vile theory as well as ideological contamination? Or maybe it would be more fruitful if we would point to the social, political and historical context behind each and every emerging historical school and try to uncouple what is new, insightful and really valuable from the whole package they

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Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 36, no. 3 (1987): 359-382; R. Samson, "Rural Slavery, Inscriptions, Archaeology and Marx: A Response to Ramsay Macmullen's 'Late Roman Slavery'," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 38, no. 1 (1989): 99-110.

[455] E. H. Carr's comment that "to denounce *ideologies* in general is to *set up* an *ideology* of *one's own" is telling in this respect.*

[456] Cam Grey, "Slavery in the Late Roman World," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery Vol. I: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 483.

come with. Slaves obviously had families, identities and certain *mentalites* and they were indeed internally stratified: without a proper appreciation of this fact, a history textbook on this group of people would be incomplete. But should this necessarily amount to a wholesale rejection of any structural element in their definition and analysis? I do not think so. This issue becomes particularly visible in the establishment of the real extent and meaning of slavery, on the one hand, and the choice of definition in the form of a slave society or a slave mode of production, on the other hand. Theoretical frameworks, therefore, are of crucial importance: different questions require different frameworks, the problem of exploitation needs its own level of analysis. We will not find this in anything less than relations of production and the resultant class antagonism.

For the Marxist history-writing, the dramatic collapse of the ancient world raises the crucial question of the nature of the slave mode of production and its demise as a result of the internal contradictions of this system. In this literature, therefore, the end of antiquity and the eventual emergence of feudalism is translated into the vocabulary of development, structural crisis and transformation. Accordingly, the establishment of the nature and the dynamics of the mode of production that characterized Ancient Greece and Rome emerges as the first problem to be solved before proceeding to the transition itself.

As the replacement of slavery by serfdom (or not) is considered to be the main proxy of transition in both Marxist and non-Marxist historiography, a good amount of discussion has taken place whether late Rome was characterized by slavery or serfdom, whether these two forms of exploitation had coexisted in antiquity and whether slavery continued to be the predominant form of exploitation in the period we usually designate

as the Early Middle Ages. Here, the relationship between modes of production and forms of exploitation of labor emerges as the major theme that encompasses all the existing debates on the characterization of the ancient economy: the transition from slavery to serfdom, in other words, emerges as the main proxy that signifies the structural transformation these geographies witnessed from the late antiquity into the Early Middle Ages. In this respect, the discussions on the existence of serfdom in the form of Helots in Sparta, bonded labor in the Near East or *coloni* in the Roman Principate as well as the continuance of slavery into 1000 AD emerge as the most crucial points of controversy as to the character of these modes of production and the real significance of a transition. If serfdom and slavery coexisted side by side in the ancient mode, does this necessarily mean that antiquity was characterized by two modes of production?[457] Or if we keep finding slavery here and there during the course of the Early Medieval period, does this necessarily refute the definition of the feudal mode of production on the basis of serfdom?[458] The same argument can be extended to the sporadic existence of hired labor from the time of the ancient Greece onwards: Are we to theorize about an embryonic capitalism in these instances? All in all, these questions come together in the notion of transition as a change in the form of exploitation.

At this point, the question of the proper use of the concepts of class and mode of production to analyze antiquity comes into the picture. The work of the *Gramsci*

[457] This is what Wickham initially claimed: Chris Wickham, "The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism," *Past & Present*, no. 103 (1984): 3-36.

[458] George Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974); Pierre Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), digitally printed version.

Institute, for example, represents a specific attitude to the characterization of the ancient economy in its preoccupation with "the structural characteristics of the slave mode of production" and the secondary importance given to class struggle, "compared to traditional Marxist perspectives."[459] Giardina summarizes the main themes of the discussions conducted by *the Institute:*

> . . . the relationship . . . between use value and exchange value in the ancient economy and, hence, its degree of 'primitivism' or modernity; the degree of pervasiveness of the slave mode of production and the extent to which it could be said to have characterized the whole economy of ancient Rome; and finally the concept of mode of production itself, with the connected issue of continuity versus discontinuity.[460]

In contrast to the more structuralist orientation of the *Institute*, G. E. M. de Ste Croix, a leading Marxist historian of the ancient world, heavily relied on class struggle as the central explanatory concept in his 1981 work, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests,* famous for the author's "dramatization of Greek and Roman history seen in the light of social conflict, and a concomitant lack of interest in its morphological aspects." In this context, a serious problem that also haunts the Marxist studies on feudalism and transition to capitalism becomes visible: "While morphological analysis runs the risk of giving an excessively static picture of society, the concept of class struggle does not seem wholly adequate … to explain morphologies and transitional processes."[461] This, in turn, requires some engagement with the concept of mode of production and reflection on the nature of historical change.

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[459] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography", 23.

[460] Ibid., 25-26.

[461] Ibid., 24.

While the definition and the analysis of the mode of production that characterized antiquity constituted the first axis of the debates on the decline of the ancient world and the emergence of feudalism, the second one revolved around the use of the concepts of crisis and transition to explain the transformations the ancient world experienced. M. I. Finley, a non-Marxist expert on ancient history, suggests that the concept of crisis remains "inadequate when applied to the long-term process that led to the decline of slavery"; so, he raises the fundamental question of "the relationship between the time factor and a fundamental concept of historical change" -namely, crisis- on the one hand, and questioned "the usefulness (or, rather, the admissibility) of applying to pre-capitalist processes concepts employed by modern political economy to explain the transformations of capitalist economies", on the other hand.[462] Giardina, in turn, identifies two different meanings that can be assigned to the concept of crisis: Firstly, it may refer to the "decline of a mode of production"; secondly, it can signify "a phase marked by a prevalently regressive trend." In the first case, it is used to address the demise of the slave mode of production which is argued by some scholars to have characterized the ancient economy; in the second case, the concept denotes "the general economic and social crisis of Italy, or the crisis of the third century AD" and hence, gains a character much more restricted in terms of temporality.[463] The first problem is, therefore, this "arbitrary" use of the concept of crisis and the conflation of these different meanings as the source of much confusion in the literature. The general tendency since the 1970s and 1980s, however, seems to be a wholesale "rejection of the concepts of

[462] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography", 26.

[463] Ibid., 27.

mode of production and crisis"[464], which has eventually led to an understanding of the "essential continuity of Roman history in the Imperial period … extending well into the Middle Ages."[465] In this context, the third-century crisis turns into a "marginal, fleeting episode" and as such, it does not essentially challenge the accepted continuity within the different phases of the Roman history. This understanding can be seen as a part of the "distrust of generalizing perspectives" which in many instances "can take on an anti-Marxist character": this is also symptomatic of the post-modernist academic environment of the period.[466]

This general rejection of the concept of crisis is coupled by confusion about another crucial concept -transition- as the arbitrary and ambiguous use of the former is further aggravated by the negative connotation assigned to it in the form of a phase of "continuity" disrupted by decline: against this, "transition" is at times offered as a "neutral" concept. Interestingly, however, it is at other times "arbitrarily rejected on the grounds that it is intrinsically teleological."[467] This argument of teleology raised against the use of the concept of transition can also be found in the debates on the decline of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism. In contrast, however, it is the concept of "roots" -or origins- widely embraced by those critics of the concepts of crisis and transition, that carries the the real guilt of teleology.[468] Nevertheless, one must mention

[464] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography, 28.

[465] Ibid., 27.

[466] Ibid., 28

[467] Ibid., 29-30.

[468] Ibid., 31.

"a paradoxical state of things" in the sense that Marxism, which is infamous as "a highly periodizing approach", fails short of explaining the complexity of the ancient world compared to the "prevalently historical and political" periodization schemes of the traditional history-writing. On the other hand, the periodization of the Roman history on the basis of the changing political structure of the Roman state or its transformation from a city-state into an overseas empire through military conquest and geographical expansion, should not mean that historical change in the ancient world amounts to "a simple succession of dominating powers or changes in political systems." On the contrary, this dizzying stream of political successions "were based in radical changes in social and economic organization." In this context, slavery turns out to be a crucial proxy of the deeper transformations taking place in the society since "the scope of such overwhelming changes is reflected in the place accorded to the slave."[469] On the other hand, as Giardina comments, the concept of the "ancient mode of production" seems to be inadequate as this model falls short of comprehending the complexity of the historical phen."[470] Therefore, "the survival of Marxism in contemporary ancient historiography appears to be entrusted to some crucial nodes in the debate on historical change and periodization."[471] The question of the transition to feudalism, therefore, encapsulates these notions of development and historical transformation on the basis of the theme of temporality.

[469] Thebert, "The Slave," 145.

[470] Giardina, "Marxism and Historiography," 24-25.

[471] Ibid., 31.

3.2 Ancient economy: Modes of production and forms of exploitation

The character of the economy in the Ancient Greece and Rome has been subject to much controversy. As the question of the emergence of feudalism is directly related to this, a clarification of the subject is urgently called for. In general, three main lines of argument regarding the nature of economic and social structures of these societies can be identified. Firstly, the legacy of the "modernist" approach, which emerged for the first time in the so-called "*oikos* controversy" over the extent of exchange in ancient Greece and the applicability of the concepts and categories of modern economics to the analysis of the ancient economy[472], is marked by an emphasis on the existence and prevalence of commercial and financial operations in antiquity and comes out with a thesis that can approximately be defined as "Ancient Capitalism."[473] Secondly, the view that emphasizes the predominance of peasant producers and subsistence production in ancient Greece and Rome frames the contours of these societies in the form of a "peasant economy" or "peasant society", while internal divisions are allowed for.[474] Lastly, the concept of a slave mode of production posits that slavery was the main form of exploitation that structurally shaped antiquity, though there are divergences of opinion regarding the extent of this model.[475]

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[472] Mohammad Nafissi, "Class, Embeddedness, and the Modernity of Ancient Athens," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 380-385.

[473] Ibid., 388.

[474] Ellen Wood is the Marxist example of this view. See Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece," *History Workshop*, no. 11 (1981): 3-22; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy (*London; New York: Verso, 1989).

[475] For different variations of this approach see: Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism (*London: NLB, 1974); Perry Anderson, "Class Struggle in the Ancient World," *History Workshop*, no. 16 (1983): 57-73; de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle*; Wickham, "The Other Transition".

3.2.1 Trade, industry and *Ancient Capitalism*

A debate over the extent and the character of trade shaped the mainstream approach to the analysis of ancient economy for a long time as the question was formulated in the form of an opposition between a "free-market economy" and a "state-planned" commerce while the former was associated with the periods of prosperity and growth for the Roman Empire. With the increasing prominence of the so-called "primitivist" approach to economic sociology in the 1960s, "the question was reformulated as one of redistribution and gift-exchange versus market trade."[476] Another solution to the problem of trade was developed by Keith Hopkins who came out with a "taxes and trade model" through which the author set out to delineate the effect of the demands of the state on the transition from a system of taxation in kind to taxation in money, which in turn stimulated growth of market and gradually integrated the self-subsisting peasantry into relations of exchange, in the end leading to a system of inter-regional trade in a structure of center and province.[477] Lately, Moses Finley, though he accepted the existence of commerce and markets in antiquity, tried "to challenge the ability of modern market-centered economics and, more generally, of established capitalist common-sense notions to explain the economic performance of Graeco-Roman civilization", using mostly Weberian tools of analysis.[478]

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[476] Peter F. Bang, "Trade and Empire: In Search of Organizing Concepts for the Roman Economy," *Past & Present* 195, no. 1 (2007): 4-5.

[477] Keith Hopkins, "Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.-A.D. 400)," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 101-125.

[478] Bang, "Trade and Empire," 7.

For a long time, therefore, the main concern of the economic history-writing on antiquity was to develop an explanation as to the nature, extent and significance of trade in the ancient world. This heated debate was in large part due to "the central position market trade occupies in our understanding of the contemporary world". In contrast to our modern view of free trade, however, "the institutional context of market formation in the empire" was crucial since in antiquity, as Bang underlines, "the development of trade was shaped by very different societal preconditions." Accordingly, "state formation and market development" should be seen as "interrelated processes rather than contradictory phenomena."[479] This is why the previous opposition between the two was bound to remain "anachronistic."[480] On the other hand, we know that "commerce and industry", though they were not non-existent in antiquity, played only a "minor role" in the overall economic system which was mainly dominated by agriculture.[481] Therefore, no theory of an "Ancient Capitalism" is possible to develop on the basis of the mere existence of market phenomena.

On the other hand, a quite arbitrary and liberal use of some of the concepts of class contributed to the confusion regarding the economy of antiquity as "it has been a standard practice among ancient historians to refer to the governing classes of several Greek cities in the Archaic and Classical periods . . . as 'commercial aristocracies' or 'industrial and merchant classes'." Interestingly, this mistaken conceptualization was not only adopted by the so-called "modernizing" historians that tended to project the tenets

[479] Bang, "Trade and Empire", 4.

[480] Ibid., 14.

[481] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle,* 126-128.

of the modern economy to the past, but it also leaked into the vocabulary used by the Weberian and Marxist ones as well.[482] Such arbitrary use of the concept can also be found in Banaji's study on the workforce composition in the large Byzantine estates of the 4th to the 7th century and his conclusion that "wage-employment" characterized this system as "the 'tenants' recruited by large landowners were free peasants."[483] Here, the 6th century Byzantine estates are compared to the 19th century Agrarian Capitalism of Egypt on the basis of the shared existence of "cash-crops, irrigation, the formation of large properties, and the concentration of workers in dispersed settlements controlled by the estates" in both systems: In the Byzantine estates, therefore, Banaji sees "a curious prefiguration of something intrinsically modern."[484] In certain respects, Banaji's contention is grounded in his equation of free labor with an "economically efficient process of capitalist growth": Accordingly, in Brass' words, "it is because he follows this neoclassical economic logic that Banaji takes issue both with Weber about systemic decline in the ancient world, the emergence of tenancy, and the non-existence of plantations, and with de Ste. Croix over the categorization of the workforce as unfree."[485]

The perfect (and most absurd) formulation of the thesis of "Ancient Capitalism", however, was developed from Weber's work. This is defined as a "political" as against "rational" market capitalism and is explained on the basis of "exploitation of the

[482] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle,* 41.

[483] Banaji, *Theory as History*, 156-8.

[484] Ibid., 177.

[485] Tom Brass, "Late Antiquity as Early Capitalism?," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 32, no. 1 (2005): 120.

opportunities for profit arising from the exercise of political power", though in many instances some "market capitalism" accompanies it as well.[486] In a sense, this conceptualization can be sen as the ultimate result of the use of a-historical and static concepts to explain historically specific phenomena.

3.2.2 Peasants, slaves and unfree labor: Subsistence production and exploitation in Ancient Athens

While the existence and the importance of slavery in antiquity has been acknowledged by the Marxist scholars as an established norm, its extent and significance for the ancient economy in general has failed to find a consensus. As Anderson underlines, in the Marxist circles,

> opinion has divided into two camps: those who argue that slavery was constitutive of the nature of Ancient civilization, and point to the structural scale of slave ownership at its peak periods, and those who deny that slavery was central to it, on the grounds that independent or dependent small producers were in general more numerous overall than slaves ... A common feature of the second position is a tendency to reduce the slave condition to an essentially cultural or juridical phenomenon athwart economic division - closer to a Weberian 'status' than a Marxist class.[487]

In the case of Athens, the first camp is examplified by G. E. M. de Ste. Croix who had developed an analysis on the basis of the concepts of class and exploitation while the second is represented by Ellen Wood who had focused on the alleged class antagonism between the poorer and the richer segments of the Athenian citizen body, which is largely constituted by self-subsisting peasants.[488]

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[486] John R. Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism: Max Weber and the Sociological Foundations of Roman Civilization* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

[487] Anderson, "Class Struggle," 62.

[488] de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle*; Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece"; Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave.*

3.2.2.1 Peasant economy and subsistence production

Wood's main aim is the rehabilitation of the image of the ancient Athens as a democratic system based on a self-subsisting peasantry. Accordingly, she starts her analysis by delineating how the imagery regarding the political culture of antiquity changed from the 18th into the 19th century whereby the image of Athens as a democratic ideal gained an increasingly conservative outlook characterized by an emphasis on the dichotomy between the slave-owner and the slave on which the whole ancient civilization seems to have rested. The turning of Athens into the epitome of a society composed of "idle" citizens and toiling slaves, therefore, was underwritten by "a contempt for and fear of the 'mob' " by the 19th century intellectuals who brought out the idea that the great historical example of democracy and rule of the people could only be established through the tyranny of a group of citizens over the conquered *barbarians*. With this change of opinion, the revolutionaries of the period lost one of their beloved symbols of democracy.[489] Then, Wood criticizes how this view of antiquity, with its emphasis on slavery as the constitutive element of the Athenian democracy, was adopted wholeheartedly by the Marxists in their characterization of the ancient economy as she draws the main contours of the argument:

> . . . traditional Marxist image of Athenian society as a society which lived on the labour of slaves; whose class structure was unusually transparent because of the clear division, explicitly defined in law, between appropriating citizens and producing slaves, so that the relationship of exploitation stood out in stark relief; where the state unambiguously represented 'an association against a subjected producing class'; and where slavery inhibited technological progress, in particular by making labour in general degrading and contemptible.[490]

[489] Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece," 4-5.
[490] Ibid., 7.

In passing, Wood refers to Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* in which the concept of a slave mode of production was given "the most unambiguous form" of the "myth" of idle citizenry and comments on the impact of this work on the Marxist accounts of ancient economy underlining that "if Engels' argument was modified in later versions to accommodate revised information about the numbers of slaves and the role of free producers in Athens, the essentials of his argument survived."[491] Here, Wood's main criticism is that this view of a slave mode of production "fails to take sufficient account of free labour and its role in shaping society". On the other hand, she criticizes the disproportional weight given to the "social division of labour between citizens (or free men generally) and slaves" with unjust neglect to the "class oppositions within the citizen body."[492] Accordingly, Wood develops the idea of a peasant-economy on the basis of the numerical prepondarence of self-subsisting peasant families in a system where the real class contradiction can be located between the poorer and the richer citizens; by extension, we have a system of democracy based on the prominent figure of the "peasant-citizen".[493] On the basis of this idea is that the concept of slave mode of production assumes "transparent social relations", which were non-existent at the time.[494] In contrast, however, as Wood underlines:

> . . . in pre-capitalist societies which still rely on 'extra-economic' modes of surplus-extraction -by means of direct legal, political, or military coercion- the political struggles of the poor, even poor proprietors, may represent resistance to economic exploitation. In this sense, the conflicts between democrats and oligarchs in Athens cannot be fully understood without reference to class

[491] Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece," 7.

[492] Ibid., 8.

[493] Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave.*

[494] Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece," 10.

oppositions within the citizen body.[495]

First and foremost, in certain respects, this approach resembles to the concept of a Chayanovian "peasant society" or "peasant economy". Although it is true that peasantry constituted "a majority of the population in vast areas of the ancient world, and for long periods in many places were responsible for a major share of total production"[496] and should be a part of class analysis, nevertheless, it is a concept way too broad as it is applicable to a wide variety of periods and geographies and hence, lacks the historical specificity needed for a proper analysis of specific economic systems.[497]

On the other hand, while the idea of "the homogeneity of the citizen body over against slaves" is untenable, as there were important lines of separation between the different segments of the citizen body of Athens, "efforts, like Wood's, to collapse the distinction between free laborers and slaves" remain to be also problematic, as they fail to locate the real source of exploitation of labor, which constitutes the central organizing concept of de Ste. Croix's analysis.[498] Since Wood's separation between the richer and the poorer citizens as the main form of class relationship in antiquity carries some Weberian undertones as well, I would like to say a few words on the use of concepts such as "status groups" and "social differentiation" before proceeding further.

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[495] Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece," 10.

[496] de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 98.

[497] Ibid., 208-209.

[498] David Konstan, "Slavery and Class Analysis in the Ancient World. A Review Article: The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World by G. E. M. de Ste. Croix," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 4 (1986): 758.

3.2.2.2 Status and social stratification

Weberian approach to the ancient economy, which finds its best example in Moses Finley's work, has been the dominant trend in the ancient historiography for a long time. This popularity, on the other hand, is explicable on the basis of Weber's own interest in ancient history as well as employment of his concepts by later historians to analyze the ancient societies. In de Ste. Croix's own words: "Under Weber's powerful influence above all, it has become an accepted practice on the part of sociologists to concern themselves with what is usually referred to as the 'social stratification' of human societies."[499] This usage, however, comes with certain problems.

First and foremost, Weber's concepts of class and status groups are bound to remain "static" as these entities "are not necessarily (like Marx's classes) in any organic relationship with one another; and consequently they are not dynamic in character but merely lie side by side, so to speak, like numbers in a row", in contrast to Marx's relational notion of class. These are descriptive, therefore, rather than analytical categories[500] and hence, they fall short of explaining society "in a historical perspective, as a developing organism."[501]

On the other hand, Weber's concept of class does not constitute an economic category, but rather it is based on the notion of status: this is, however, a rather problematical view. While the contribution of the "legal position" to class experience through the former's effect on "the type and degree of exploitation practiced or suffered"

[499] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 85.

[500] Ibid., 93.

[501] Ibid., 90.

is surely indisputable[502], it is not, by itself, capable of explaining the reality of exploitation. de Ste. Croix, therefore, does *not* advocate for an approach that categorizes the ancient societies on the basis of slavery and freedom as if it was a matter of "difference of status, between slaves and free men", but on the basis of exploitation of labor and the resultant "difference of class, between slaves and their owners" and this is the crux of the issue for the establishment of the class character of ancient societies.[503] This is why, for example, "it would ... be absurd to speak of a 'class struggle' between Senators and Equites in the Late Roman Republic" as "political contest" does not automatically amount to class struggle as long as the parties can be located in the same class relation to the process of production. The same holds true for the citizens of Athens as well: As long as there is no relationship of economic exploitation between the poorer and the upper segments of the citizenry, a class analysis on the basis of the classification of the citizens according to their wealth and prominence remains ill-placed, even though it is true that their interests were different in many instances and caused frequent dissent in the city. Class relations and exploitation in the capitalist society can be illustrating in this sense as the existence of smaller and bigger capitalists and their diverging interests does not change the fact that they belong to the same class as long as the concept of class is defined on the basis of relations of exploitation in the process of production. de Ste. Croix's critique, therefore, is directed against the use of status as the central explanatory category, not its use as a supplement to analyze the divisions within the

[502] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 43-44.

[503] Ibid., p40.

classes.[504] The latter, however, can be constructed only on the basis of the former.

3.2.2.3 Class and exploitation

de Ste. Croix's work provides a comprehensive and cogent account of Ancient Greece, Hellenic world and Ancient Rome through the framework of "material structures of oppression and exploitation which laid the historical basis for successive forms of state and society in Antiquity."[505] First and foremost, the author heavily relies on Marx's concepts of class and class struggle as he finds them to be of central importance for historical analysis in contrast to concepts such as status and social stratification.[506] Accordingly, he underlines that "class as a general concept ... is essentially a relationship" and as such, it is integrally related to the concept of relations of production. For de Ste. Croix, "class ... is the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure". Exploitation, on the other hand, refers to "the appropriation of part of the product of the labour of others."[507] Therefore, as he underlines:

> A class (a particular class) is a group of persons in a community identified by their position in the whole system of social production, defined above all according to their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production (that is to say, the means and labour of production) and to other classes.[508]

[504] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 65.

[505] Anderson, "Class Struggle," 61.

[506] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 28-29.

[507] Ibid., 43.

[508] Ibid.

Accordingly, a class society emerges "when the conditions of production, such as they are at any given time, are controlled by a particular group."[509] This point is crucial to understand the class character of the ancient societies. In contrast to the opposition between the poorer and the richer segments of the Athenian citizens, as Konstan underlines, "exploitation is not a matter of individual abuse, even if this is commonplace. Thieves do not, in this sense of the term, exploit their victims. That is, thieves and their victims do not constitute classes under normal circumstances. Mere predatory relations are not exploitative as such."[510] Exploitation is, first and foremost, an economic category.

Here, it should be underlined that de Ste. Croix's structural understanding of class is of crucial importance as different classes are "defined in terms of their relationship to the means and the labour of production and to each other."[511] As Anderson underlines, "against the grain of most Marxist historical writing of the 60's and 70's, de Ste. Croix insists that class should not be primarily defined as a subjective 'happening', whose essential criteria are therefore cultural consciousness or political autonomy." In de Ste. Croix's view, "classes . . . are primarily objective formations, defined by social relationships of exploitation, that secure the extraction of surplus labour from the immediate producers."[512] Therefore, the difference between the concepts of *class-for-itself* and *class-in-itself* becomes meaningful only in relation to the

[509] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 32-33.

[510] Konstan, "Slavery and Class Analysis", 756-757.

[511] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 32-33

[512] Anderson, "Class Struggle," 61.

formation of class consciousness and collective action: it does not, however, affect the constitution of classes themselves, which are based on a structural relationship to the social relations of production.[513] Accordingly, "it is the precise form of exploitation which is the distinguishing feature of each form of society": here, the importance of the concept of class is that it constitutes "the way in which exploitation is reflected in a social structure."[514] In a similar way, by class struggle, de Ste. Croix refers to "the fundamental relationship between classes . . . involving essentially exploitation, or resistance to it." As such, the concept refers to the structural contradiction in the society: absence of open confrontation or revolt does not erode the validity of the concept of class struggle.[515] This is why, as de Ste. Croix nicely puts, "to adopt the very common conception of class struggle which refuses to regard it as such unless it includes class consciousness and active political conflict (as some Marxists do) is to water it down to the point where it virtually disappears in many situations."[516]

3.2.2.4 Slavery in Ancient Athens

In terms of numerical preponderance, we know that the self-subsisting peasantry constituted the majority of the population and produced most of the total surplus in the ancient Athens. The question is, therefore, how to explain the class structure and exploitation in antiquity in the face of this fact. Does this prevalence of peasants make

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[513] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 60. For an example of the view that tries to deduce the existence of classes from collective class action and political consciousness in antiquity, see: M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction* (London: Batsford Academic and Education Ltd, 1977).

[514] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 51.

[515] Ibid., 44.

[516] Ibid., 57.

the Athenian community a peasant society? On the other hand, how are we to understand the fact of slavery in relation to exploitation? And what is the significance of this phenomenon for the characterization of the ancient economy as a whole?[517]

Blackledge comments that "while Engels seems to have been mistaken in his belief that the mass of agricultural production was carried out by slaves, later Marxists have developed a much more subtle and sophisticated model of the position and function of slavery in classical antiquity."[518] This reconsideration is largely grounded in the conceptualization of the relationship between a mode of production and the form of exploitation determining of it. Here, de Ste. Croix's argument is crucial:

> . . . the most significant distinguishing feature of each social formation, each 'mode of production' . . . is not so much how the bulk of the labour of production is done, as how the dominant propertied classes, controlling the conditions of production, ensure the extraction of the surplus which makes their own leisured existence possible. That was the view of Marx, which I follow.[519]

On this basis, it becomes clear that Ancient Athens is to be defined as a "slave economy" since "the main way in which the dominant propertied classes of the ancient world derived their surplus, whether or not the greater share in total production, was due to unfree labour."[520] Here, our basic criterion to define a mode of production is the relations of exploitation.

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[517] In the literature, three methods used to estimate the class character of the ancient society can be identified: firstly, "demographic test" focuses on the numerical preponderance; secondly, "location method" looks at the different roles the slaves played in the ancient society; the last view, employed by de Ste. Croix, tries to explain slavery in relations to economic exploitation and social relations of production: Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12-13.

[518] Blackledge, *Reflections,* 104-105.

[519] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 52-53.

[520] Ibid.

So, where is the peasantry, or the citizen body of Athens, to be located in this picture? de Ste. Croix holds a tripartite view of society until the Late Roman Empire as between the exploited and exploiters, he identifies an "intermediate class" comprised of "small free producers, mainly peasants, but also artisans and traders" which "neither exploited the labour of others (outside their own families) to any appreciable extent nor were themselves exploited to any marked degree, but lived not far above subsistence level, producing little surplus beyond what they themselves consumed."[521] To explain this phenomenon, De Ste. Croix refers to two different forms of exploitation:

> The exploitation may be direct and individual, as for example of wage-labourers, slaves, serfs, 'coloni', tenant-farmers or debtors by particular employers, masters, landlords or moneylenders, or it may be indirect and collective, as when taxation, military conscription, forced labour or other services are exacted solely or disproportionately from a particular class or classes (small peasant freeholders, for instance) by a State dominated by a superior class.[522]

In antiquity, in an environment where "hired labour was scarce, largely confined to unskilled or seasonal work, and not at all mobile", cheap and widespread slaves turned out to be the best source of labor for the propertied class. Furthermore, "in a city like Athens . . . just because it was a democracy and the poorer citizens were to some extent protected against the powerful, the very most had to be made out of the classes below the citizens."[523] Although a variety of forms of exploitation coexisted, such as slavery, serfdom and debt-bondage, "in general slavery was the most important form of unfree labour at the highest periods of Greek and Roman civilisation; and the Greeks and Romans themselves always tended to employ the vocabulary of actual slavery when

[521] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle,* 33.

[522] Ibid., p44.

[523] Ibid. 113.

referring to other forms of unfree labour."[524] Accordingly, de Ste. Croix concludes that "the ownership of land and the power to exact unfree labour, largely united in the hands of the same class, together constitute . . . the main keys to the class structure of the ancient Greek communities."[525]

On the other hand, initially, slavery was also closely related to "the constitution of a community of soldier-property owners" in the sense that the development of the city-state as the basic political entity was accompanied by the drawing of a boundary between those who could be enslaved and those who could not: as the enslavement of citizens in their own community was forbidden, foreigners emerged as the main category whose enslavement was allowed.[526] In this context, "slavery increased the surplus in the hands of the propertied class to an extent which could not otherwise have been achieved and was therefore an essential precondition for the magnificent achievements of Classical civilization": This is why slavery lied at the basis of the Athenian democracy as well.[527] In other words, "the slave mode of production was the decisive invention of the Graeco-Roman world, which provided the ultimate basis both for its accomplishments and its eclipse."[528]

The existence of slavery extends to a period long before the emergence of classical civilizations as we find it in the Near East and around the Mediterranean world

[524] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 39.

[525] Ibid, 112.

[526] Thebert, "The Slave," 138.

[527] de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 40.

[528] Anderson, *Passages,* 21-22.

from a very early date onwards. But it never became the dominant form of exploitation of labor at this time: rather, it remained to be "a residual phenomenon that existed on the edges of the main rural workforce." At the same time, as Anderson underlines, slavery "had always been one juridically impure condition -frequently taking the form of debt bondage or penal labour- among other mixed types of servitude, forming merely a very low category in an amorphous continuum of dependence and unfreedom that stretched well up the social scale above it." The original emergence of a proper slave society on the other hand, took place in "the Greek city-states that first rendered slavery absolute in form and dominant in extent, thereby transforming it from an ancillary facility into a systematic mode of production."[529] In classical Greece, therefore, slavery was generalized having been extended to "crafts, industry and agriculture beyond the household scale" while at the same time "its nature correspondingly became absolute."[530] Although this mode of production was not continuous or dominant throughout antiquity, it is evident that "great classical epochs, when the civilization of Antiquity flowered -Greece in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. and Rome from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century A.D.- were those in which slavery was massive and general, amidst other labour systems."[531]

3.2.3 Ancient versus slave mode of production: State, peasantry and plantation slavery at Rome

The slave mode of production that first emerged in the classical Athens gained a new

[529] Anderson, *Passages,* 21-22.

[530] Ibid., 23

[531] Ibid., 21-22.

character and momentum in Rome in the form of plantation slavery. As Anderson underlines:

> The rise of Rome marked a new cycle of urban-imperial expansion, which represented not just a geographical shift in the center of gravity of the Ancient world to Italy, but a socio-economic development of the mode of production which had been pioneered in Greece that rendered possible a far greater and more lasting dynamism than that which had produced the Hellenistic epoch.[532]

In Rome, though it had existed from time immemorial, slave labor started to gain its real significance from the 4th century BC onwards as the decrease in debt-bondage (*nexum*) was accompanied by the increase in the systematic enslavement of war captives, unleashing a process which ended up in a fundamental restructuring of the economy as "agricultural slavery in Italy and, eventually, throughout most of the western empire predominated over all other categories of slave labor in importance for as long as landholding remained the cornerstone of the socio-economic system."[533] This transformation in the social and economic position of the slave found its judicial reflection in the change of the Latin title given to the slave-owner: as the term *erus* turned into *dominus*, it signified a related transformation "from a patriarchal system to a system based on the notion of property."[534]

One of the distinguishing features of the "Graeco-Roman Antiquity" was its city-centered structure. However, "behind this urban culture and polity lay no urban economy in any way commensurate with it": instead, we find the predominance of agriculture

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[532] Anderson, *Passages,* 53.

[533] John Bodel, "Slave Labour and Roman Society," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 311.

[534] Thebert, "The Slave," 152.

compared to the relatively undeveloped level of manufactures and crafts. In this environment, therefore, "wealth was based on agricultural production."[535] On the other hand, there were important structural limits to the slave mode of production from the start as "slave relations of production . . . ultimately tended to paralyze productivity in both agriculture and industry": in this system as a whole, we find little technological development. Here, the major problem was not that slave-labor was "in general less productive than free", but that slavery "set the pace of both, so that no great divergence ever developed between the two, in a common economic space that excluded the application of culture to technique for inventions."[536] On the other hand, geographical expansion in the form of conquest constituted an integral part of the system: in the face of the relative lack of "economic advance", the only option to increase the size of economy turned out to be a "lateral" expansion and this is why the "classical civilization was in consequence inherently colonial in character": As the majority of the slaves were acquired through war, slave supply and conquest were closely related to each other.[537]

The dramatic increase in the extent of enslavement during Rome's expansion period led to a fundamental restructuring of the Italian economy. While slave labor turned into the main repository of labor for the big landowners holding large-scale agricultural estates, smallholding peasantry was gradually replaced by the slave laborers as the former "abandoned their farms either under pressure from land-hungry rich or because they were required to serve in Rome's armies" and as their lands were seized by

[535] Anderson, *Passages,* 19-20.

[536] Ibid., 25-27.

[537] Ibid., 28.

the big, aristocratic landowners, it turned out to be slave labor rather than free labor that came to underwrite the economic system as a whole.[538] At the end of this process, there emerged the *villa* system or the slave mode of production, which referred to a system of production based on:

> . . . intensive production for the market, predominantly with gangs of slaves, of cash crops such as grapes, olives and cereals on landholdings . . . that centered on substantial farm- houses containing oil-presses, wine-presses and storage areas for crops, and at times – 'villa' is an elastic term – elaborate residential quarters for their owners as well. Often owners were absentees managing their estates through slave overseers.[539]

In Rome, therefore, it was in the *latifundia* that slavery found its perfect form. In Athens, though there was extensive reliance on slaves in agricultural production as well, "the meager population" as well as the small size of the city-state with its "coastal and insular in character" could produce proper "slave-tilled farms" only "of very modest size."[540] It was, however, In Rome, that agricultural production based on slave labor gained a completely novel character. As Anderson nicely summarizes:

> It was the Roman Republic which first united large agrarian property with gang-slavery in the countryside on a major scale. The advent of slavery as an organized mode of production inaugurated, as it had in Greece, the classical phase proper of Roman civilization, the apogee of its power and culture. But whereas in Greece it had coincided with the stabilization of small farms and a compact citizen corps, in Rome it was systematized by an urban aristocracy which already enjoyed social and economic dominion over the city. The result was the new rural institution of the extensive slave latifundium. The man-power for the enormous holdings which emerged from the late 3rd century onwards was supplied by the spectacular series of campaigns which won Rome its mastery of the Mediterranean world.[541]

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[538] Keith Bradley, "Slavery in the Roman Republic," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 247-248. Bradley also distinguishes "villa" from the plantation.

[539] Ibid., 248.

[540] Anderson, *Passages*, 59-60.

[541] Ibid., 60.

The systematic and "rational" exploitation of slave labor started around 200 BC and approximaterly continued into the second century AD.[542] In the last two centuries of the Roman Republic, on the other hand, slave labor became increasingly determining for the character of agricultural production. As the reliance on slave labor peaked, the small-holding free peasant proprietor, due to the heavy terms of military service imposed on him and the unlawful grab of his small piece of land by the greedy landowners, shrank in size dramatically.[543] During this period, *ager publicus* expanded but a great part of it was seized by the big, slave-owning landlords as they were the only ones who could pay for those "confiscated land was sold or leased to the first occupier in return for a rent". As this process accelerated, the principle difference between *possesio*, which referred to the right to use, and *dominium*, which denoted a notion of property, became increasingly blurred in practice as the state ceased to extract rent from those big landowners, opening the way to ever-increasing agglomerations of land for them.[544] It is of little wonder, therefore, that it was Rome that "the invention of the concept of 'absolute property' - dominium ex jure Quiritium" took place.[545]

Italy of the late Republican Rome whereby agricultural production on the basis of slave labor reached its peak can be characterized by three main different forms of economic organization: After the "traditional peasant small-holder was relegated to

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[542] Thebert, "The Slave," 150.

[543] A. H. M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World," in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity. Views and Controversies*, ed. Moses I. Finley, 185-199 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1960).
[544] Jules Toutain, *The Economic Life of the Ancient World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), 230.

[545] Anderson, *Passages*, 66.

country areas" and became increasingly marginalized, however, it was two novel forms of economic organization that came to underlie the economic system as a whole. Here, the first one is the system of *latifundium,* which referred to the "immense estates given over to raising livestock or worked by rent-paying peasants, many of them slaves" whereby the production depended on extensive exploitation of labor and a conspicuous lack of investment in technology: This form mainly characterized southern Italy and Sicily. On the other hand, in the central Italy, "lands were also to a great extent monopolized by large landholders, but they were subdivided into *villae*", characterized by the extensive use of slave labor, specialization in certain products and commodity production for profit on the basis of "rational" organization of production. While the villa system constituted "the prevailing agricultural structure" in the Roman Italy of this period, there was a complementary relationship between this system and the *latifundia* as the latter supplied the *villae* with slaves and cereals.[546] In the Roman Italy of the late Republican period, therefore, "slave labor maintained a central role in agricultural production": in other words, it was the main form of economic exploitation since it "played a vital role in accumulating the marketable surpluses that sustained the lifestyles and ambitions of many of the elite" and hence, it directly structured the class basis of the society.[547] Slavery, in this form, continued its presence well into the Principate and though it did not show considerable development after this point, it certainly

[546] Thebert, "The Slave," 145-147. Slave labor was not only used in agricultural production, but also in manufacturing: thanks to the systematic and rational organization of production, products were characterized simplification and standardization.

[547] Neville Morley, "Slavery under the Principate", in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 265.

consolidated its position.[548]

On the other hand, the political structure of Rome differed from that of Athens drastically. As the oligarchic rule continued to be the norm in Rome, there emerged a much more oppressive system. This situation was coupled by the constant state of warfare and compulsory conscription of the peasantry. In the end, the resultant agrarian structure towards the end of the Principate resembled nothing to the small-holding, largely self-subsisting peasantry of Athens. This was mainly because "military service devastated small landowners and led to their decline." This situation, coupled by the increasing problem of debt, resulted in the loss of land for the majority of the peasantry. Accordingly, "the result was that by the end of the 3rd century B.C., the *proletarii* were probably already an absolute majority of citizens."[549]

While the existence of plantation slavery as an extensive form of economic operation is generally acknowledged, whether it was capable of defining ancient Rome, at least from 200 BC to 200 AD, as a slave mode of production is a question yet unresolved among the Marxist scholars. Wickham for example, sets out to refute Croix's characterization of the Late Empire as a "slave economy" and Anderson's related thesis of slave mode of production, disputing the idea that "plantation slavery, the core of the slave mode . . . was very extensive in space and time". In a sense, he sees this form as an "exceptional" case which had "disappeared, probably in many places in the second century, in others by the third." Accordingly, he concludes that "there is no reason to think that the numerous slaves of the late Empire or the period following it … were for

[548] Morley, "Slavery under the Principate," 285.

[549] Anderson, *Passages,* 53-56.

the most part anything other than tenants."[550] Therefore:

> Going back to Marx's concept of an ancient mode within which towns first controlled and later exploited their surrounding countryside through a system of land taxation, Wickham suggests that, while elements of feudalism, alongside elements of slavery, existed in the late empire, the dominant mode of production in this period reverted back to the earlier ancient mode.[551]

3.3 Transition to feudalism and the crisis of the ancient world

On the basis of the different conceptualizations of the mode of production that characterized antiquity, the question of the transition to feudalism comes to the fore. We can identify in the historiography on the transition to feudalism two main lines of explanations on the basis of the theme of structural transformation. In the first case, it is argued that the process of transition was a more or less evolutionary process: as slavery continued its existence until 1000 AD and even beyond in some places, the end of slavery and the emergence of serfdom is argued to have failed to be the main criterion of transformation.[552] Secondly, the existence of a transition in the form of a structural transformation is acknowledged by Anderson, de Ste. Croix, Wickham and Dockes, while the mechanisms of change are identified on completely different grounds: whereas

[550] Chris Wickham, "Marx, Sherlock Holmes and Late Roman Commerce: Società Romana e Impero Tardoantico. III. Le Merci. Gli Insediamenti by A. Giardina,", *The Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988): 188.

[551] Blackledge, *Reflections,* 109.

[552] The existence of slavery throughout the Early Middle Ages became a crucial point of controversy as to the character of the feudal mode of production itself as a debate took place on the so-called "feudal revolution" whereby feudalism goes under a structural transformation after the Carolingian period into the early millennium. The extension of this debate was the character of early feudalism and the existence of slavery in it. See: Dominique Barthelemy and Stephen D. White, "The 'Feudal Revolution'*," Past & Present*, no. 152 (1966): 196-223; Thomas N. Bisson,"The Feudal Revolution," *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 6-42; Thomas N. Bisson, "The 'Feudal Revolution': Reply," *Past & Present*, no. 155 (1997): 208-225; Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism;* Timothy Reuter and Chris Wickham, "The 'Feudal Revolution'," *Past & Present,* no. 155 (1997): 177-208. What is crucial here, on the other hand, is to differentiate ancient from medieval slavery.

a transformation in the dominant form of exploitation and hence, a transition from slavery to serfdom emerges as the main proxy of change, the parties' respective differences in the explanation of the mechanisms of transformation is grounded in how the character of the periods preceding and following the transition is conceptualized.[553]

3.3.1 Collapse and mixture: Transition as catastrophe

Perry Anderson, in his *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, conceptualizes the transition as the result of a crisis in the slave mode of production that originated from the structural contradiction this system of production carries while its collapse and mixture with the Germanic mode led to the birth of feudalism. While the author underlines the "cumulative character of the advent of capitalism", he finds the origins of feudalism in the much more "catastrophic" collapse of the former mode of production.[554]

While Anderson defines a social formation as "a specific combination of different modes of production", slavery turns out to be the dominant form of exploitation in antiquity and marks the whole economic system as slave mode of production.[555] Then, Anderson explains the transformation of this system as the result of the "convergent collapse of two distinct anterior modes of production recombination of whose disintegrated elements released feudal synthesis proper which retained a hybrid character", namely the slave mode of of production of the Roman Empire and the primitive mode of the Germanic tribes both of which were already experiencing a "slow

[553] I will omit the view that denies the concept of transition altogether and argues that the late Rome should be seen as a sui generis system rather than a transitional one: Basically, this view confuses the crisis of the 3rd century and crisis of a mode of production.

[554] Anderson, *Passages,* 18-19.

[555] Ibid., 22.

disintegration and interpenetration in the last centuries of Antiquity."[556]

Anderson's views on the internal limitations of the slave mode of production largely draws from de Ste. Croix, who identifies the end of military conquest and geographical expansion as the main reason behind the end of slavery: since foreign supply constituted the basic source of slaves and the cost of breeding was considerably high, once the Empire reached its frontiers, the limits of the mode of production became simultaneously visible. As slavery became an inefficient mode of exploitation and since landowners were concerned to keep the levels of productivity they were accustomed to stable, there was an increasing recourse to serfdom, which was not unknown in antiquity as a form of exploitation either; accordingly, landlords started to settle their former slaves on small pieces of land. On the other hand, this period witnessed the emergence of the *colonate* which was created by the state on an extensive scale for purposes of assessing and securing taxation and would soon turn into the dominant mode of production.[557] It is important to underline, on the other hand, that de Ste. Croix by no means equates serfdom with feudalism *per se* as he underlines that there is no necessity for a society to become "feudal" for serfdom to exist in it: the mere existence of serfdom, therefore, does not amount to feudal mode of production.[558] Accordingly, the "loose" application of the term to any society in which serfdom exists, such as the Late Roman Empire, is uncalled for.[559] Lastly, de Ste. Croix underlines that it is not in any

[556] Anderson, *Passages,*18-19.

[557] de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 155.

[558] Ibid., 268-9.

[559] Ibid., 269.

way inevitable that a system based on serfdom should arise out of the dissolution of slavery.[560]

Likewise, for Anderson, almost exclusive reliance on military conquest for slave supply, coupled by lack of systematic innovation in technology, are symptomatic that an internal dynamic was absent in this mode of production. Accordingly, one problem with the slave mode was that "unlike the feudal economy which succeeded it, the slave mode of production of Antiquity possessed no natural, internal mechanism of self-reproduction, because its labour-force could never be homeostatically stabilized within the system." Once expansion came to a halt during the Principate, "the commercial slave-trade could not make up for the shortages that resulted, since it had always itself been largely parasitic on military operations for its stocks." Coupled by the fact that slave-breeding was relatively costly compared to the reliance on external sources, the end of expansion resulted in a dramatic increase in the prices of slaves.[561] On the other hand, "unlike either the feudal or capitalist modes of production which were to succeed it, the slave mode of production possessed very little objective impetus for technological advance." Therefore, Anderson concludes that "the boundaries of the Roman agrarian economy were soon reached, and rigidly fixed."[562]

On the other hand, Anderson underlines that "it was in the countryside itself . . . that the final crisis of Antiquity originated; and while the towns stagnated or dwindled, it was in the rural economy that far-reaching changes now occurred, presaging the

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[560] P. Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1982): 10-11.

[561] Anderson, *Passages,* 76-77. The unavailability of slaves was also the central explanation proposed by de Ste. Croix.

[562] Ibid., 78-79.

transition to another mode of production altogether." Those already existing problems with slave supply and the resultant "political and economic derangement of the 3rd century" urgently called for a novel strategy to be employed by the landowners to preserve their wealth and power: therefore, the existing slaves were "widely converted by landowners into dependent *adscription* to the soil" whereby former slave-owners now "increasingly ceased to provide for the upkeep of many of their slaves directly, but established them on small plots to look after themselves, from which they collected the surplus produce." In this process, the social position of the ex-slaves and the former small-holding peasantry and free tenants increasingly began to resemble to each other.[563] In the end, "the result was the emergence and eventual dominance, in most provinces, of the colonus -the dependent peasant tenant, tied to his landlord's estate, and paying him rents either in kind or cash for his plot, or tilling it on a share-cropping basis." As such, "a class of dependent rural producers . . . was formed by the later Empire." On the basis of this new form of exploitation, the power of the landowners almost skyrocketed from the 3rd to the 5th century. Although slavery certainly continued its existence, "with the formation of the colonate, the central thread of the whole economic system now passed elsewhere: it ran essentially along the relationship between the dependent rural producer, the landlord and the State."[564]

While social and financial problems had affected the Eastern parts of the Empire inasmuch as the West, the final blow to the system came in the Western provinces where there was an increasing pressure by the Germanic tribes. The crucial point, however, that

[563]Anderson, *Passages,* 93-94.

[564] Ibid., 94-95.

these invasions were not the main reason for the fall of the Empire *per se,* but rather they played out the final impact on the canvas of an already existing crisis and structural contradiction: The different fates of the Eastern and Western parts can only be understood on the basis of the "whole prior historical development of the two zones of the Roman imperial system."[565] It was in the West that the slave mode of production had reached its ultimate, "purest" form, and hence, "it was . . . logical and predictable that the endogenous contradictions of that mode of production should have worked themselves out to their uttermost conclusion in the West, where they were not buffered or checked by any antecedent or alternative historical forms." This point is crucial to understand the whole process of crisis of the Roman Empire. As Anderson underlines:

> Orthodox discussions nearly always situate its ultimate crisis against much too brief a temporal background; in fact, the roots of the separate fates of the Eastern and Western Mediterranean in the 5th century A.D. descend to the origins of their respective integrations into Roman rule at the outset of Republican expansion.[566]

In the constitution of feudalism, on the other hand, the interaction between the Germanic mode of production with the already dissolving slave economy was crucial. While it was the invaders that gave the final blow to the Empire, simultaneously "Roman pressure accelerated social differentiation and the disintegration of communal modes of production in the German forests."[567] This was coupled by an increasing integration of a number of German chieftains into .the the central Roman state and army.[568] In the end, "it was from their final, cataclysmic collision and fusion that feudalism was ultimately to

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[565] Anderson, *Passages,* 97-98.

[566] Ibid., 97.

[567] Ibid., 108-109.

[568] Ibid., 109-110.

be born."[569]

One crucial problem to be solved in this narrative is the relationship between the end of geographical expansion and the falling rate of the profitability of slavery, which occupies a large space in de Ste. Croix's and Anderson's respective analyses of transition. While the specific causes of the latter is a matter of debate, the decrease in the foreign supply resulting from the halting of military conquest seems to be a certain factor. Therefore, one modification to the overemphasis on the argument of "falling profitability" is a reconsideration of "whether, in precapitalist societies at least, the drive on the part of the ruling classes to reproduce the conditions of direct and indirect domination may not be a more important element in the class struggle than efforts to maximize the rate of exploitation."[570] On the other hand, it is also possible that "the increased exploitation of the poor laboring classes contributed to the decline of slavery, as much as the other way around."[571]

Unfortunately, in a way comparable to the debates on the transition to capitalism where, at times, a disproportional weight is given to class struggle and increase in the rate of exploitation as the main mechanisms behind the dissolution of feudalism, de Ste. Croix's account also overlooks the structural aspects of the slave mode of production and the process of transformation. In relation to the former debate, Anderson comments that:

> . . . the demographic and ecological limits of the feudal mode of production in Western Europe cannot be abstracted from an analysis of its contradictory logic: it was the objective deadlock they imposed on the societies of the 14th century, as forces of production struck against insuperable barriers within existing relations of production, that precipitated the economic disasters of the time, which then set

[569] Anderson, *Passages,* 110-111.

[570] Konstan, "Slavery and Class Analysis," 762.

[571] Ibid., 763.

off the most spectacular episodes of pitched conflict on the land.[572]

In this sense, it could be more fruitful to define military conquest and the resultant supply of slaves from abroad not as external and solely contingent variables, but as internal and structural limits on the slave mode of production. If the highest form of plantation slavery is mainly based on military expansion, by definition, conquest becomes an integral part of this mode of production from the start. In a society where intensive expansion in the form of increase in productivity of labor is limited, extensive growth emerges as the main manifestation of development in the system. Accordingly, just like demographic and geographical factors *can* and *should* be integrated into an economic theory of feudalism, military expansion and the related source of slaves can also be put to use to construct a theory of the slave mode of production.

3.3.2 Coexistence and change of balance : Transition as mutation

The real weight of the slave production in the late Roman period is questioned by Wickham in whose historical sketch the ancient mode of production was followed by a more or less exceptional case of slave mode after the demise of which the previous mode came back, but having gained this time a more exploitative character. In his definition of these modes of production, Wickham draws from Hindess and Hirst who underline that the ancient mode was largely "non-exploitative, and characterized by the control of a city-based citizen body over the immediate countryside; the citizens were private owners, but they co-operated in their control of the public landed wealth of the city". Alongside with the dramatic expansion of Rome, however, "the slave mode began to displace the free-owning peasantry, reaching by the Late Republic its classic form, the

[572] Anderson, "Class Struggle," 68.

plantation slavery". Once the ancient mode came back after this temporary change, it had already "developed into a wholesale taxation network": What Wickham defines as "the ancient mode in its class form" is, therefore, a system of exploitation based on taxation by the state.[573]

Regarding transition, Wickham underlines that feudal mode cannot be considered as a synthesis between the Roman and the Germanic modes since "feudalism was already present in the Roman Empire as a subsidiary economic system long before the Germans came." This antagonistic coexistence of the ancient mode with the feudal one manifested itself in the dual obligation of the peasantry both to the state and to the landlord class while surplus extraction took the form of tax and rent.[574]

Historically, Wickham underlines that the "decline in commodity production" on the basis of slave labor had started "long before the collapse of Roman Empire as a political system." In this respect, it was when the economy became stagnant due to the fall in slave supply that the economic backwardness became visible and "slave owners tried to solve economic problems of late ancient society by settling their slaves on peasant holdings, creating production relations characteristic of feudal society." So, far, the account resembles to that of Anderson and de Ste. Croix. By the crisis of the third century, however, Wickham claims that "self-sufficient serf-worked estates had begun to dominate the social structure of the Empire."[575] Therefore, after the 1st century slave plantations had gradually given way to independent cultivation and rent had increasingly

[573] Wicham, "The Other Transition," 6.

[574] Ibid., 25.

[575] Hilton, "A Comment", 109-117.

replaced tax as the main source of surplus extraction, the feudal mode came to be dominant by the 3rd century.[576] Furthermore, from this time onwards, the Roman nobility was already turning itself into a class of big landlords as "their slave-run latifundia have been transformed into serf-worked estates, servile peasants being partly former slaves and partly depressed free landowners"; the remaining "free peasant communities", on the other hand, were associated with the "relics" of tribal forms of organization.[577] In this historical sketch, by the time the third-century crisis came about and the rise of the *coloni* took start, Rome had already established a system mainly based on exploitation by the state in the form of tax. It was in the change of the balance between tax and rent, which represented different modes of production, that Wickham finds the key to the process of transition to feudalism.[578] What differentiated ancient from feudal mode of production, therefore, was not the specific form of economic exploitation, but the predominant role of state in the constitution of the social relations of production.

In terms of transition, after the slave mode lost its dominant position the late Empire experiencing a "slow crisis", what took place was not a "simple replacement of one mode of production by another"[579], but a shift of balance through which dominant mode became the feudal one.[580] As Wickham underlines that "between one mode and another there is a break", the result is that two modes of production cannot coexist

[576] Wickham, "The Other Transition," 8-9.

[577] Hilton, "A Comment", 112-113.

[578] Wickham, "The Other Transition," 6.

[579] Ibid., 22.

[580] Ibid., 23.

properly due to the distinct internal logics they have and hence "they cannot be mixed": accordingly, as Wickham asserts, when they come into contact, one has to dominate. Accordingly, Late Roman Empire was "dominated" by the feudal mode of production.[581] As this took place long before the barbarian raids increased the contact between these two distinct systems, it was only when the Germanic invaders were mixed with the old Roman nobility that this new feudal type of exploitation was adopted by them.[582]

Here, Wickham is confusing the form of exploitation with the general concept of a mode of production. Even though serfdom coexisted with other forms of "unfree" labor in the late Roman Empire, its gradual maturation into feudalism only through a change of balance fails short of explaining the structural transformation the society went under.

Eventually, Wickham modifies his view and accepts that tax and rent did not actually represent two different modes of production, but that the ancient mode could be seen a variant of the more generic concept of "tributary mode of production" -a term employed by John Haldon and Samir Amin.[583] Now, the analytical usefulness of the concept of tributary mode of production when it is used to encompass all the pre-capitalist modes of production, as done by Amin, is open to question. While it can be seen as an antidote against Eurocentrism whereby Western European feudalism becomes the main criterion against which pre-capitalist non-European socities are judged and the so-called Asiatic mode of production is seen as a more or less autocratic and autarchic

[581] Wickham, "The Other Transition," 8.

[582] Hilton, "A Comment", 112-113.

[583] Haldon, *State;* Amin*, Unequal Development.*

version of the former, the only tangible result of the concept of "tributary mode of production" becomes reversing the order whereby feudalism becomes a weaker variant of the more generic tributary mode.[584] On the other hand, Wickham's original categorization of modes of production on the basis of rent levied by a landlord class as against taxation by the state is rightly criticized by Haldon who underlines that rent and taxation do not necessarily consitute distinct modes of production themselves, but they may also signify the changing balance of power between state and landowners *within* the same mode of production.

Overlooking the prevalence of slavery and its overwhelming role in the production of surplus in antiquity, on the other hand, seems to be absurd in the best case if we remember that a mode of production is not about the way total production is performed in a society, but about how surplus is extracted from the producers and how class relations are structured: It is on the basis of social production that societies essentially differ from one another. On the other hand, the 400-year history of the plantation slavery should compel one to reconsider its characterization as a merely fleeting, exceptional episode, beside the fact that the whole structure of social relations of production depended on the exploitation of slave-labor. Lastly, the reduction of exploitation to the form of rent as against taxation distorts the class character of the states themselves: in the oligarchic Rome, the landowners were obviously the ruling groups and even in the democratic Athens, the slave-owning citizens usually made the best of the situation. The fortunes of the state officials themselves as well as the class

[584] Samir Amin, "Modes of Production, History and Unequal Development," *Science & Society* 49, no. 2 (1985): 194-207; Samir Amin, "The Ancient World-Systems versus the Modern Capitalist World-System," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 14, no. 3 (1991): 349-385; Amin, *Eurocentrism*.

character of the state, in other words, depended on the productive base and the social relations of production. A change of balance from taxation to rent, therefore, is crucial as long as it reflects the transformations taking place in the social relations and the productive capacity of these societies. In this sense, the concept of a slave mode of production seems to be more fruitful for historical analysis as it encapsulates the truth of exploitation better compared to the "ancient mode of production" which remains to be vague and way too general.

3.3.3 "The feudal revolution" and slavery in the Middle Ages

Lately, there has been a debate on the continuance of slavery well into the early and even High Middle Ages and the implications of this fact for the characterization of the medieval economy: The argument here is that if slavery became increasingly inefficient and hence it was necessarily replaced by serfdom, then how are we to explain the considerable existence of slavery in the Middle Ages, which is thought to have passed into feudalism by that time? The ultimate question is how we are to characterize the medieval period: whether Early Middle Ages were feudal and whether there was a qualitative change, a "feudal revolution" around the year 1000 AD which marks the real end of slavery and the transition to feudalism.

In the first place, Duby locates a "feudal transformation" (or a "feudal revolution") around 1000 AD when there took place a systematic transition to serfdom, for the free and the non-free peasantry alike.[585] Here, he underlines that the tendency of the system was towards a "breakdown in public law and order" accompanied by a

[585] Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*.

harhser form of lordship based on castles and warfare.[586] Bonnassie's study on Spain also supports Duby's argument.[587] Later, this vew was taken to the extreme by Bois who contends that the ancient system continued right into 1000 AD and only then left its place to feudalism: in this ultimate formulation, however, it should be underlined that "Bois overemphasizes the idea of continuity, as he exaggerates the similarities between the slave's legal status in the late Roman Empire and that status in the centuries down to the end of the tenth century." Even if this period was characterized by widespread slavery, there is no reason to see them necessarily as a direct continuation from antiquity.[588] This view of a "feudal revolution" in the beginning of the millenium mostly turned into a thesis of essential continuity from antiquity to the High Middle Ages, coupled by a general rejection of any notion of transition whatsoever after the 1980s.[589]

Now, a crucial part of the popularity this argument enjoyed can be found in the existence of slavery in the medieval period, on the one hand, and in the argument against the inefficiency and non-profitability of slavery as the main reason behind its fall, on the other hand. That slavery continued its existence in the Middle Ages, however, does not necessarily refute the thesis that identifies the fall in slave supply as the main reason behind the dissolution of the slave mode of production. First and foremost, the crisis and the following break up of this mode of production had come about around the 1st and the

[586] Bisson, "The Feudal Revolution," 6.

[587] Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism*.

[588] Adriaan Verhulst, "The Decline of Slavery and the Economic Expansion of the Early Middle Ages La mutation de l'an mil: Lournand, village mâconnais de l'Antiquité au féodalisme by G. Bois," *Past & Present*, no. 133 (1991): 196-197.

[589] Bisson, "The Feudal Revolution," 8.

2nd century AD. On the other hand, Bloch comments that "at the time of barbarian invasions and in the early days of their kingdoms, there were still many slaves in all parts of Europe"; and their number was even more than before due to war captivity as barbarians got more and more involved in slave trade, on the one hand, and Romans starting to sell themselves and their children as slaves due to hunger and poverty, on the other hand.[590] Furthermore, Bloch adds that "whereas during the first century, a time of peace and prosperity, Pliny the Younger complained that slave manpower was so rare and while in the third century a slave was quite expensive, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, human merchandise had become abundant again at a reasonable price." This revival of slave acquisition and trade, moreover, continued well into the time of the Carolingian Empire.[591] Does this latter fact, the revival of slavery and slave trade, necessarily refute the first argument that locates the end of this mode of production in the 3rd century AD? Now, the point here is that once the slave mode of production had been dissolved in the first place, the later revival of slave trade could not have much effect to reanimate it by itself. Here, Bloch comments that the only conjuncture that reliance on slave labor, which is an inefficient form of labor exploitation and a risky source of investment for the owner, becomes profitable and sustainable is when supply drastically increases; and this is basically what happened in the peak periods of slave production. Once supply decreased, however, "people turned toward the land-tenure system."[592] Accordingly, "the renewal of the slave trade at the time of the invasions"

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[590] Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages: Selected Essays*. (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: Univerity of California Press, 1975), 1-3.

[591] Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom,* 3.

[592] Ibid., 6.

could not effectively change the pattern already established by now.[593] To sum, the fact that slave trade witnessed a revival and slaves could be found in the Middle Ages, by itself, does not refute the thesis that posits the end of the slave mode of production by the 1st and 2nd century AD.[594]

Then, how did this process unfold? As Bloch underlines, "large landowners, taking advantage of their possession of large expanses, parceled them into little farms whose occupants paid rent in a variety of forms. Among these beneficiaries of these distributions appeared a large number of slaves taken from the central work gangs, each one charged with the responsibility of his own fields." Although the figure of the slave-tenant existed before, this period witnessed it getting more and more common.[595] On the other hand, the slave status of the slave-tenant did not go under an immediate change as "even in the Carolingian period, legislative precedents were forced to mention the distinction between *servus* and other dependents of the manor, such as the *coloni".*[596] Nevertheless, the slave managed to find some piece of autonomy and freedom, even in the face of lord's demand for his labor services.[597] Rather than slaves marching towards freedom, therefore, Bloch comments that we should see the situation as a narrowing of the gap between the free and the unfree, while the former increasingly resembles the

[593] Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom,* 7.

[594] On the other hand, before assigning to slavery a purely contingent and external role, it is important to see it as a constituting part of the slave mode of production as the dynamics that led to conquest and large-scale production by slave labor were the product of one and the same class configuration.

[595] Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom,* 5.

[596] Ibid., 7.

[597] Ibid., 8.

latter.[598] By the 9th century, on the other hand, "as a force of production, slavery did not count any more."[599]

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the Marxist and non-Marxist discussions on the character of the ancient economy and the mechanisms behind the collapse of antiquity. The specific formulation of the latter question in the form of transition, on the other hand, came with the Marxist debates. I have started by underlining the differences between the trade-centered approach with its modernist undertones, the Weberian approach that gives determining role to sociological concepts such as "social stratification" and "status groups", the peasant-centered approach with a (probably unintended) Chayanovian tint, and lastly the Marxist approach with a focus on class structure in reference to relations of exploitation. This first part is, therefore, comprised of different definitions and narratives developed to explain the economy and the society of antiquity: here, my main point of reference has been Ancient Athens as an example of slave mode of production. Then, I have proceeded to delineate the main contours of the slave production, mostly *villa* and *latifundia* based, from the Republican to the Imperial Rome. Lastly, I have proceeded to the debates on the transition to feudalism, which I have categorized under three main headings. Regarding the nature of change, Anderson's view posits a structural transformation after a transitional period, Wickham's explanation carries an evolutionist and gradualist orientation, which finds its better manifestation in the third approach that extends the ancient system to the beginning of the millennium.

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[598] Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom,* 20.

[599] Ibid., 30.

The chronological projection of these different views of transition approximately corresponds to 300, 500 and 1000 AD. Here, the main proxy of change becomes the replacement of slavery by serfdom and in addition to the main axis of the transformation of quantity into quality in the form of a structural change, the question of the relationship between modes of production and forms of exploitation, which had caused a comparable confusion in the debates on the transition to capitalism, comes into the picture.

Now that I have drawn the general contours of the transition debates and pointed out some crucial nodes of comparison between the two, in the following chapter, I will proceed to a more theoretically-oriented discussion of the Marxist concepts of historical development, with reference to these two historical transitions. After this, I will once again return to these debates on transitions and try to problematize them through some conceptual tools historical materialism provides.

CHAPTER 4

COMPARING TRANSITIONS

4.1 Introduction: Capitalism as a mode of production

In the chapters II and III, I presented the major debates on transitions through the framework of the temporality between the dissolution of one mode of production and the emergence of a structurally different one. The question of temporality, in turn, is grounded in how, and whether, transition is conceptualized as a process through which a qualitative transformation took place in the society since "quantitative changes can occur within modes of production, but they do not modify the basic structure"[600]: A distinction, therefore, should be made between the two. Accordingly, the problematic of transition should be understood through the main question of (i) the qualitative transformation of the society in the form of transition from one mode of production into another, in conjunction with those previous quantitative changes that laid the ground for the later structural change. This, in turn, raises the problems of (ii) the definition of a mode of production in general, and (iii) the nature of capitalist, feudal and slave modes of production in particular.

In this context, the definitions given to the concept of mode of production by the different participants of the transition debates directly affect their approach to the problem. The historians discussed so far come into the debate with certain preconceptions about what constitutes a mode of production. In most of the cases,

[600] Mandel, E. Karl Marx. Originally published in John Eatwell, Murray Milgate & Peter Newman (eds.), Marxian economics**,** London (1990), p.1-38. Downloaded with thanks from the Mandel Archive at International Socialist Group. Marked up by Einde O'Callaghan for the Marxists' Internet Archive**.** https://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/19xx/marx/

Marxist scholars come from an intellectual tradition the main object of interest seems to be centered on the problems of the capitalist mode of production. Likewise, it is usually some unanswered questions about the nature of capitalism that direct their attention to the study of pre-capitalist modes of production and transitions. Accordingly, their respective conceptualization of capitalism greatly shapes their approach to these historical problems: in other words, the way they theorize about the concept of mode of production in general and capitalism in particular sheds light on their choice of methodology, vocabulary and resultant analyses regarding the nature and transformation of pre-capitalist modes of production. This relationship between contemporary and historical questions, in turn, has important implications for the problems of modern capitalism, such as economic development, capitalist accumulation or agrarian transitions, the general frameworks of which share a great deal with the more historically-oriented transition debates. Similarly, in order to understand the process of transitions, we should have a clear understanding of how each mode of production is to be conceptualized: here, capitalism has the position of constituting a *model* for such an analysis.

In this context, starting from the most important questions raised in the debates, I will discuss the problem of transition on two main levels. Firstly, (i) the relationship between forces and relations of production and class struggle in reference to the concept of mode of production, (ii) the question of how to define capitalism as a historically specific mode of production, (iii) the separation between the spheres of the "political" and the "economic" in the understanding of historical specificity of capitalism, and (iv) the relationship between forms of exploitation of labor and modes of production and by extension, the centrality of wage-labor and the continuing existence of unfree labor in

capitalism, need to be problematized. Secondly, the question of structural transformation will bring out for the issue of transition to capitalism (v) the concept of primitive accumulation with (vi) the implications of this concept for contemporary capitalism and the nature of capitalist accumulation, which are also related to the points (iii) and (iv). In historical context, (vii) the relationship between qualitative and quantitative change as implied by the concept of primitive accumulation, and (viii) a discussion of the meaning of Merchant, Agrarian and Industrial Capitalism, as specific moments in the process of change, will come into the picture. As for the transition to feudalism, (ix) the debated existence of serfdom within the confines of the slave mode of production, and (x) the continuity of slavery from antiquity well into the Middle Ages, will once again bring out (xi) the question of the relationship between modes of production and forms of exploitation, while the discussion will be concluded with (xii) the question of how to identify the structural transformation in the transition from slave to the feudal mode of production.

4.1.1 Structure of a mode of production: Productive forces, social relations, exploitation of labor and class struggle

One preliminary question about the concept of mode of production can be formulated as the primacy of productive forces, relations of production or class struggle, in determining the character and development of a mode of production, around which a good amount of controversy has taken place among the Marxist scholars. This long-debated problem, on which no consensus seems to have been established yet, found its way into the transition debates as well, implicitly in the form of presuppositions held by the parties as to the concept of mode of production, and explicitly in the form of more methodologically and theoretically oriented discussions: What is the nature of the

concept of mode of production? Can the formulations that implicitly or explicitly compare the relative weight of relations and forces really prove the dominance of either over the other? And in this framework, what is the role of class struggle in historical change?

So far, in the context of the debates on the transition to capitalism, the most visible manifestation of this question can be found in the aforementioned discrepancy between the so-called economic and political Marxism of Bois and Brenner, respectively. Whereas Bois focuses on the structural antagonisms embedded in the system, in the form of a contradiction between the organization of the material basis of production and the dominant form of property-relationship/form of exploitation, which results in a tendency of a falling feudal levy, Brenner's interest mainly lies in the property-relationships, class struggle and forms of exploitation with the contention that in pre-capitalist modes of production, economic and political spheres are merged as surplus-extraction takes place through "extra-economic compulsion."[601] Accordingly, Brenner can be located in a tradition that extends to Dobb and Hilton who also underline the determining role of class struggle in historical development and change.[602] While in

[601] Marx also uses this term in relation to his discussion of the changes in the form of pre-capitalist ground rent: Marx, *Capital 3*, 926.

[602] I am making this categorization with certain reservations, of course. In the Transition Debate, the main primacy question was of internal as against external factors rather than forces vis-a-vis relations of production. In his work, Hilton also underlines that forces or relations get the upper hand at different times and places (Rodney Hilton*, Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History* (London; New York: Verso, 1990), 4-6. On the other hand, both Hilton and Dobb give crucial insight into the organization of production on the basis of small-holding peasant family-household etc. Hilton, especially, underlines that "however crucial in feudal society was the determination of ruling-class incomes through the struggle over rent, this struggle by no means occurred in an unchanging context": Hilton, "Introduction" to *The Brenner Debate,* **7.** In the last analysis, however, the *prime mover* of feudalism is identified as class struggle in the form of struggle over rent and the overall emphasis is on class conflict. See Kaye, *The British Marxist historians.* Brenner, in this respect, can be considered as the ultimate formulation of what Hilton and Dobb had implied in the first place.

the polemic between Bois and Brenner the question at hand seems to be, to a great extent, a matter of analytical adequacy and proper level of theoretical abstraction, the question of the primacy of forces or relations lurk behind the surface. What is problematic in this case, however, is that forces are identified with the *economic* Marxism of Bois and relations are associated with the *political* Marxism of Brenner.[603] This is an important distinction as it is symptomatic of a pretty widespread tendency in Marxist historiography -namely, equating *economic* factors with forces (or objective factors, technology, organization of production, labor process etc.) and *political* factors with relations of production (property relations, surplus-extraction, class struggle, law, contingency etc.). In the case of pre-capitalist modes of production, since surplus is extracted through "extra-economic compulsion" and *economic* and *political* spheres of life are not separated yet, it is concluded that a strictly "economic theory" is impossible to develop for feudalism and the best we can hope for is "an indeterminate", or "soft" kind of theory that puts class struggle into the center.[604] Therefore, the question of primacy is formulated as the relative importance of forces as against relations for the concept of mode of production in general, and as the relative importance of the so-called economic and political factors for pre-capitalist modes of production in particular. In the context of the transition debates, one of the best representations of the first case can be found in the opposition between G. A. Cohen and Brenner regarding the primacy of "logic of production" as against "logic of exploitation" in their respective definition of a

[603] Hilton, "Introduction" to *The Brenner Debate,* **5.**

[604] For the most elaborate formulation of this theoretical position in the context of transition debates, see: Roger S. Gottlieb, "Feudalism and Historical Materialism";Roger S. Gottlieb, "Historical Materialism, Historical Laws and Social Primacy: Further Discussion of the Transition Debate," *Science & Society* 51, no. 2 (1987): 188-199; Amin, "Modes of Production"; Amin, " The Ancient World-Systems versus the Modern Capitalist World-System".

mode of production.[605] The second case, on the other hand, is clearly manifested in the so-called *Historical Materialism Debate* that took place in the journal *Science & Society* in the late 1980s and the early 1990s: here, the transition debates gained a more theoretically oriented character whereby "the debate turned on the role of production in determining epochal change"[606] and by extension, it became increasingly concerned with the distinction between the *economic* and the *political* spheres as historically specific to capitalism and the credibility (or even possibility) of an economic theory of the feudal mode of production.[607]

Not surprisingly, the same discrepancy between the analytical priority given to forces *vis-a-vis* relations of production and class struggle found its reflection in the debates on the end of antiquity and transition to feudalism in the vocabulary of a *technological* or *economic* determinism as against political and social explanation, becoming especially visible in the discussions among the "French Marxist

[605] Katz, "Debating the Dynamics of Feudalism". Cohen, in his technological determinism, goes further than emphasizing the determining role of forces within an economic system and proposes a three-tiered notion of mode of production: productive forces that comprise technology and labor power, economic level that includes relations of production and lastly the political superstructure. On the other hand, the most systematic formulation that gives primacy to relations of production in an Althusserian framework can be found in Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst (*Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*. London; Boston: Routledge and K. Paul, 1977)

[606] Katz, "Debating the Dynamics of Feudalism," 196.

[607] For the second Science & Society debate on the question of transition from feudalism to capitalism, see: Gregor McLennan, "Marxist Theory and Historical Research"; Dimitris Milonakis, "Prelude to the Genesis of Capitalism: The Dynamics of the Feudal Mode of Production,". Science & Society, Vol. 57, No. 4,(1993/1994): 390-419; Dimitris Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History: Structure and Agency in Historical Evolution," *Science & Society* 61, no. 3 (1997): 303-329; Gottlieb, "Feudalism and Historical Materialism"; Gottlieb, "Historical Materialism"; Amin, "Modes of Production"; Samir Amin, "Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism: A Comment," *Science & Society* 54, no.1 (1990): 67-72; Ashok Rudra, "The Transition Debate: Lessons for Third World Marxists," *Science & Society* 51, no. 2 (1987): 170-178; David Laibman, "Modes of Production and Theories of Transition," *Science & Society* 48, no.3 (1984): 257-294*; David* Laibman, "Modes and Transitions: Replies to the Discussion and Further Comments," *Science & Society* 51, no. 2 (1987):179-188; *Sweezy, "Feudalism-to-Capitalism Revisited"*.

Historians".[608] In this literature, therefore, "the Marxist historians can, in practice, be divided into two groups" as well.[609] Here, how the declining role of slavery in the overall economic system of antiquity is analyzed by respective historians is instructive. On the one hand, a so-called *economic determinist* view that assigns primacy to productive forces would explain this process through the framework of a contradiction between the forces and relations of production whereby slave relations would hinder the further development of the former and would be accordingly burst asunder by them: in this framework, a social revolution would be unnecessary as the direction of the transformation would already have been established and in certain respects, irreversible.[610] On the other hand, one option is to include into the picture "social revolution" and through this, to leave some space for contingency in the face of the iron necessity imposed by the forces of production.[611] This view of technological stagnation brought about by slavery at some point through its hindering effect on the development of forces of production, eventually having been replaced by the establishment of the *coloni*, is shared by Marxist as well as non-Marxist historians, and constitutes a point of wide-ranging controversy.[612] The alternative to this, on the other hand, is Dockes' suggestion for an emphasis on class struggle waged by the slaves against their owners as the main driving force behind transformation in a way comparable to Brenner's and the

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[608] Hilton, "Introduction" to *The Brenner Debate*, **9.**

[609] Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism*, 8-9.

[610] Charles Parain, against whom Dockes gets into a lengthy polemic, is a figure exemplary of this so-called "Menshevik" view. Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 154-155; Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism,*10-11.

[611] Dockes calls this the "Stalinist version" of the story. See: Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 157.

[612] Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 156.

British Marxist Historians' class-struggle centered approach.[613]

In this context, therefore, some reflection on the notion of mode of production is needed: What do relations and forces mean for this concept in general? Do they correspond to what is usually designed as economic and political? What does the notion of surplus extraction through extra-economic means imply? Can we think of a purely economic theory of *any* mode of production? Is it correct to build a dichotomy between capitalism and pre-capitalist modes of production on this basis? Let's start with the concept of mode of production.

In his often-quoted *Preface* to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* Marx explains the concept of mode of production:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations ... namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society.[614]

Starting from this basis, therefore, the first point to underline is that men's social existence takes place through a set of social relations: "From the point of view of historical materialism there can be no society without specific relations of production. That would amount to a society without social production."[615] No relations, no

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[613] Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 157.

[614] Marx, K. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Progress Publishers, Moscow. Marx.org 1993 (Preface, 1993), Marxists.org 1999. Transcribed by Tim Delaney, Zodiac; Proofed and corrected by Matthew Carmody, 2009.
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/

[615] Mandel, E. Ten Theses on the Social and Economic Laws Governing the Society Transitional Between Capitalism and Socialism (1973). Originally published in Peter Hennicke (ed.), Probleme des Sozialismus und der Übergangsgesellschaften, Frankfurt/M. 1973. Translated from German by Iain L. Fraser, January 1974. Published in Critique, No.3, Autumn 1974, pp.5-21. Transcribed & marked up by Einde O'Callaghan for the Marxists' Internet Archive.
https://www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/1973/xx/10theses.htm

production; no relations, no economic base; no relations, no society whatsoever: This is the first premise. On the other hand, these relations do not operate in a vacuum, but through certain material possibilities and constraints, which are underwritten by what Marx calls "forces of production". So, the question is whether we can position these two concepts against each other in a relationship of primacy and subordination. Marx comments in an earlier work that:

> Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist. The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with the material productivity, produce also principles, ideas, and categories, in conformity with their social relations . . . The production relations of every society form a whole.[616]

Now, I am quoting this piece on purpose since it is often used as a proof of Marx's so-called technological determinism, understood in the narrowest sense possible (the statement that "the hand-mill gives you the society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist" caused much controversy in this respect).[617] Such reduction, however, severely betrays Marx's nuanced approach to the problem. Here, Marx is only making a general statement on what historical materialism is about -that men reproduce themselves and their own conditions of life within the necessary confines of material possibilities and limits and hence, they are bounded by their natural setting.

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[616] Marx, K. The Poverty of Philosophy. Progress Publishers, 1955. Online Version: mea 1993; Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 1999; Transcribed by Zodiac; Proofed and corrected by Matthew Carmody, 2009. Realize that by "mode of production" Marx is mainly referring to the immediate labor process. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/

[617] This should not be confused with economic determinism as a concept which includes forces as well as relations of production. Technological determinism, on the other hand, assigns a primary and determining role to development of productive forces as an independent variable to shape all human history and aspires to capture this process through a simple, crude formula.

Now, it is true that these limits should not be overlooked as easily as "it is improbable that a socio-economic formation which rests on, say, a level of technology which requires steam-engines, could occur *before* one which does not."[618] To this, we can add that "social structures have in general tended to be replace by more advanced ones."[619] On the other hand, this statement should not be taken at its face value, as an indicator of a unilateral relationship. For one thing, Marx repeatedly underlines the capacity of men to transform nature, as we can see in his comment that "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" whereby men are assigned a strong transformative and creative role as well: Accordingly, nature becomes social and historical once human encounter takes place. Likewise, the term "historical materialism" is quite telling of Marx's specific understanding of materialism which is intrinsically historical and social at the same time. Technology, therefore, cannot be abstracted from the setting in which it operates as we know that technological development itself is historically and socially conditioned[620]: Likewise, it should be remembered that "Marx always describes conditions of production in a perspective which combines technology in the strict sense and organization, that is, the institutional framework in which production is performed."[621] On the other hand, this comment on hand-mills and steam-mills holds an

[618] Hobsbawm, "Introduction" to *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, 20.

[619] Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History", 317.

[620] Arif Dirlik, "Review: Technological Determinism and the Materialist Conception of History: A Critical Review of Two Recent Studies," *Modern China* 7, no. 4 (1981): 496. Furthermore, Dirlik adds that labor power cannot be included in the productive forces of of society on the level of general theory, as done by Cohen, as labor power becomes differentiated from "laboring" as such only with the development of capitalist mode of production: Ibid., 492-493.

[621] G. Duménil and D. Foley, "*Marx's Analysis of Capitalist Production*", in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* (London, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). http://www.jourdan.ens.fr/levy/dfo2008a.htm

important truth as to the notion of historical materialism that one must be wary of missing while trying to escape from the simplistic, crude technological determinism the aforementioned interpretation suggests, usually associated with different versions of Stalinism from the late 1930s onwards -namely, the simple lesson that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."[622] With all these reservations, therefore, the organization of production and the related form of exploitation of labor are integral part of the mode of production at hand as they constitute the ground on which economic and political structure of the society takes shape. As Marx explains:

> The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude, as this grows directly out of production itself and reacts back on it in turn as a determinant. On this is based the entire configuration of the economic community arising from the actual relations of production, and hence also its specific political form. It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers - a relationship whose particular form naturally corresponds always to a certain level of development of the type and manner of labour, and hence to its social productive power - in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the specific form of state in each case. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same in its major conditions - from displaying endless variations and gradations in its appearance.[623]

Now, one of the central questions that the transition debates revolve around is the relationship between the concept of mode of production in relation to the form of exploitation of labor/surplus-extraction. In Dobb's formulation, a mode of production is defined on the basis of the *typical* form of surplus-extraction/exploitation in a society: accordingly, capitalism comes to be equated with wage-labor and feudalism with

[622] Marx, K. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.

[623] Marx, *Capital 3,* 927.

serfdom. In the Transition Debate, Takahashi elaborates on this view as he underlines that, in general, it is "the social existence-form of labor power" that gives to a mode of production its specific character and hence transition signifies a change in this form of labor power.[624] Accordingly, the transition from feudalism to capitalism takes the form of a transition from serfdom to free wage-labor while transition to feudalism emerges as the replacement of slavery by serfdom. For the latter, especially, this is a crucial question since a good amount of debate has taken place around the existence of serfdom in antiquity and continuance of slavery into the Middle Ages, leading to an overall state of confusion about when one mode of production ends and the other begins.

This view rightly underlines that a specific form of exploitation/surplus extraction is inded an integral part of a mode of production as the form of exploitation constitutes not only the main axis around which relations of production are constructed, but also the basic component of the labor process itself in the technical sense of the word.[625] Just as free wage-labor is the source of surplus value in capitalism, serfdom and slavery constitute the general forms in which extraction of surplus takes place in feudal and slave modes of production: the configuration of class relations and state structures in capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, accordingly, depend on these different forms. In this sense, there is a structural relationship between the social existence-form of labor and the mode of production on which the former puts its stamp. Accordingly, transition from serfdom to wage-labor/from slavery to serfdom as a change in the generalized form of exploitation *can* signify a related transition in modes of production.

[624] Takahashi, "A Contribution", 71-72.

[625] Dobb, "Reply", 57.

At the same time, however, a direct equation between modes of production and forms of exploitation in a formulaic manner should be approached with some reservations. Such a view to be cautious against would be one in which

> relations of production are conceived as equivalent to forms of exploitation in the immediate process of production. Modes of production . . . are defined by the direct relationship between exploiter and exploited at the level of the enterprise. The supersession of one mode of production by another is thus reduced to the process whereby one economic form of exploitation is replaced by another more technically efficient form.[626]

Now, this is a rather problematic conception: Wholesale reduction of a mode of production to the form of exploitation is untenable since "Marx's conception of the relations of production is much broader" and his contention that "every mode of production is characterized by a 'specific economic form' through which surplus labor is appropriated" does not mean that the mere existence of a form of exploitation will automatically reveal to the researcher the nature of the mode of production at hand.[627] This is a crucial point to underline as such "conflation" of the concepts of mode of production and forms of exploitation seems to be pretty prevalent in the Marxist literature at large.[628] An example of this can be found in the debates on the transition to feudalism: since the replacement of slavery by serfdom is considered to be the main proxy of transformation here, the continuing existence of the former into the realm of what we usually designate as feudalism leads to a perplexity and astonishment on the side of historians as to the character of these respective modes of production.

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[626] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe*, 20. This is also the root cause of the view that finds coexistence of modes of production where different forms of exploitation are found together: Ibid., 20-21.

[627] Ibid., 21-22.

[628] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 2.

One reason for such confusion is that Marx had used the term "Produktionweise" interchangeably to refer to *labor-process* in the technical sense of the term as well as *mode of production,* the latter having "a broader and more specifically historical meaning."[629] Because Marx's conceptualization of mode of production comprised "forms of domination and control of labor bound up with a wider set of class-relations expressive of them and of the social functions implied in them"[630], a distinction should be made between "relations of production" and "historically dominant forms of exploitation or forms of labor."[631] Accordingly, it can be concluded that "the historical forms of exploitation of labor . . . cannot be assimilated to the actual deployment of labor, as if these were interchangeable levels of theory."[632] Likewise, it is not the existence of wage-labor *per se*, but "the broader complex of social relations which are distinctively capitalist" that puts on the element of wage-labor the stamp of capitalism.[633]

On the other hand, what Marx has to say in *Grundrisse* is of great importance regarding the relationship between forces and relations of production:

> Before distribution can be the distribution of products, it is: (1) the distribution of the instruments of production, and (2), which is a further specification of the same relation, the distribution of the members of the society among the different kinds of production. (Subsumption of the individuals under specific relations of production.) The distribution of products is evidently only a result of this

[629] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 50-52.

[630] Ibid., 1.

[631] Ibid., 4.

[632] Ibid., 4-5. This would amount to "formal abstractionism", in Banaji's own words: Ibid., 52-53.

[633] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe*, 21-22. Now, this may look like circular reasoning: wage-labor becomes capitalist only if it is located in capitalist relations of production and capitalist social relations become *capitalist* on the basis of generalized wage-labor. I will return to this issue in the following section.

> distribution, which is comprised within the process of production itself and determines the structure of production. To examine production while disregarding this internal distribution within it is obviously an empty abstraction; while conversely, the distribution of products follows by itself from this distribution which forms an original moment of production.[634]

Here, the crucial point is that Marx considers "the production process as indissolubly social and material, production of both material products and social relations": Accordingly, as Mooers comments, "the relationship between forces and relations of production is an internally determined one" which constitutes "a *contradictory unity*", and this is why these two cannot be separated.[635] Stating the obvious, therefore, the economic structure of a society is not exclusively confined to the immediate labor process or technology (or forces and relations for that matter): On the contrary, it comprises a whole set of social relations in conjunction with forces of production as the relations of a given epoch are structurally embedded in the productive forces and *vice versa,* and this is why "the social relations of production (i.e. social organization in its broadest sense) and the material forces of production to whose level they correspond, cannot be divorced."[636]

So far, on a conceptual level, we have a picture in which forces and relations constitute a contradictory unity. How does, then, change come about? And what is the role of class struggle, as the famous driving force of all history, in this process? On historical change, Marx states that:

> At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework

[634] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 96.

[635] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe***,** 18-19.

[636] Hobsbawm, "Introduction" to *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, 17.

> of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.[637]

Therefore, it is a discrepancy between the forces and the relations of production that leads to a change in the mode of production since relations of production, as they exist, at some point turn into "fetters" before the further development of productive forces. Here, we find two major implications concerning productive forces. First and foremost, they provide the setting in which relations of production and their transformation operate as "social change, social revolutions and counter-revolutions are ... occurring within determined material constraints. The level of development of the productive forces ... limits the possibilities of institutional change."[638] Accordingly, as Marx underlines, "no social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society."[639] This much is self-evident. At the same time, however, we see the implicit assumption that, historically, there is a long-term tendency for forces of production to develop whereby "the content of history in its most general form" is defined as "progress", which Marx sees as "something objectively definable and at the same time pointing to what is desirable."[640] Does this contradict what has been said

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[637] Marx, K. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

[638] Mandel, E. *Karl Marx*.

[639] Marx, K. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.*

[640] Hobsbawm, "Introduction" to *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, 12. Marx's concern with forces of production, therefore, not only underlines his understanding of historical materialism, but also his specific view of history as *progress* with a tint of the Englightenment thinking.

before regarding the relationship between forces and relations of production? The level of theoretical abstraction is crucial here. To start with, as Hobsbawm explains in relation to the *Preface* and the *Formen*:

> Marx is here concerned to establish the general mechanism of all social change: the formation of social relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of the material forces of production; the periodic development of conflicts between the forces and relations of production; the 'epochs of social revolution' in which the relations once again adjust themselves to the level of the forces. This general analysis does not imply any statement about specific historical periods, forces and relations of productions whatever.[641]

First and foremost, development of productive forces is to be seen as a general, *longue duree* historical tendency which obviously "takes place in the context of a specific social structure" and hence, mediated by it: Accordingly, a particular social structure cannot create "some universal tendency", but rather, "different sorts of tendencies" are shaped by "the prevailing social structure."[642] And this is why, as Milonakis argues, on the more general level of historical materialism,

> . . . social structures cannot enjoy primacy over productive forces in explaining social evolution. What production relations do explain is the form (path) and pace of the development of productive forces, which can (and do) vary dramatically among different socio-economic systems ... But they cannot explain the fact of this development.[643]

On the other hand, once we start thinking about a specific mode of production, rather than trying to find the "general laws of historical development", the primacy question regarding forces and relations becomes "irrelevant" since it can only be valid in relation to the latter, not to the analysis of any specific mode of production, for that matter: On

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[641] Hobsbawm, "Introduction" to *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations,* 11.

[642] Milonakis, " The Dynamics of History", 308-309.

[643] Ibid., 309-310.

the level of historically specific modes of production, therefore, the primacy question is meaningless as the two cannot be separated. In such specific instances, "far from being the sole *determinant* of social change . . . productive forces are seen simply as *setting a limit* to the possible variation of the production relations while also *exerting pressures* on them to change." Accordingly, the level of their development "creates the *necessary conditions* for a new more advanced social structure to emerge" while it "cannot on its own provide the sufficient conditions for such a change to be effected."[644]

Accordingly, technological improvement can hardly be seen as an independent variable which will in no time transform the social relations it finds at hand: otherwise, it would be possible to compute the nature of any social system solely on the basis of the technique of production, which constitutes only one aspect of labor process. Therefore, it cannot be taken as an all-potent, trans-historical locomotive which will set historical change in motion by itself. Even though a historically long-term tendency for productive forces to develop can be identified in the history of mankind from a *broad* perspective, such a tendency acts itself out in specific instances and exists only as a function of the social and historical settings in which it operates as "people's interaction with nature does not take place in a social vacuum, but is always conditioned by and filtered through the prevailing social structure."[645] Accordingly, development of productive forces cannot be seen as an omnipotent trans-historical drive, and hence it cannot, by itself, explain the specific courses taken by history.[646]

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[644] Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History", 316-317.

[645] Ibid., 316.

[646] This should not be confused with the specific character of technological development in capitalist mode of production -here, technological development is endogenous to the mode of production.

On the other hand, if we focus on class struggle *per se* as the sole element of dynamism, we can detect the biggest handicap of Brenner's "over-exploitation thesis" - namely, its failure to provide an adequate explanation for the previous development and expansion phase of the Western European feudalism in its confinement to "the class-power framework" with unjust neglect to "the structural contradictions of, and the limits to further expansion imposed by, this social system".[647] Brenner's approach roughly corresponds to that of Dockes in ancient history as both lack a positive theory of development and a structural analysis of rise and demise of social systems. This overarching emphasis on the role of class conflict as *the* prime mover of historical change, in the last analysis, amounts

> . . . to confuse one of the ways in which the dynamic is transmitted to society's productive capacity, with the dynamic itself . . . specific features of each MP that are responsible for its dynamism become obscured behind the all-embracing and all-purpose concept of class struggle. It is obvious that the answer to this question must be sought in the nature of the class structure itself.[648]

This is why "the outcomes of class conflict can influence the direction of development of productive forces and of the mode of production in general, as well as the pace of development of productive forces but not the type (form) of this development which is determined by the social structure."[649] On the other hand, it is important to locate class struggle in historically specific conjunctures since the "role of class conflict becomes

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[647] Milonakis, "Prelude to the Genesis of Capitalism", 411.

[648] Ibid., 396. Another problem related to the analysis of a mode of production on the basis of class struggle is that since all hitherto existing history is about class struggle, in Marx's own words, then it is already self-evident that feudal mode of production is supposed to be based on class struggle as well: in other words, if everything is about class struggle, then nothing is properly explained by a mere reference to it.

[649] Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History", 319.

pivotal during periods of crisis" while the preconditions for a transformation is provided "by the intensified contradiction between the structural determinants of the mode of production" beforehand.[650]

Now, the first task is to utilize this general scheme of mode of production to explain how the contradiction between its two constituting elements, forces and relations, lead to revolutions in specific historical contexts, and the second task is to identify the role of class struggle/class contradiction in such processes. So far, we saw two opposing views that gives the primacy either to relations or to forces of production: at some points, the discussion has gained heavily theological undertones as the parties were trying to utilize an analytical tool designed to explain the general course of historical development with the agenda of analyzing development and change in specific modes of production.[651] The way out of this confusion, accordingly, seemed to be finding an intermediate position between the two, in a step away from the "voluntarism" of the class struggle school and by infusing the "mechanic causality" of the view that assigns primacy to forces, with a "dialectic" one -so, replacing the class struggle and "over exploitation thesis" as well as the theory of technological determinism with an analysis that focuses on the "internal structural contradictions" of each mode of production, which was missing in the former account to a large extent. Accordingly, the solution proposed itself in the form of a focus on the "interaction between productive forces and relations", without making either side privileged: In this process, class

[650] Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History", 319.

[651] A similar tendency to reductionism can also be detected in the primacy question regarding the relationship structure and agency as "bourgeois ideology is replete with one-sided distortions that come from causal interpretations" due to its failure to carry on the "dialectical tension" in Marx's thought and work: Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, 121.

conflict emerges as the intermediate link, or the mediator, between the two.[652] In this scheme, "social evolution can only continue because the relationship between PF and PR is never static."[653]

Now that we have a more nuanced scheme, the question can be asked: How do these constituent elements, in their "dialectical interplay", interact with each other in generating change in specific historical contexts? So far, Milonakis' proposition, in its address to the structural contradictions of the system that manifest themselves in the fashion of a "zigzag dialectic" between forces and relations which in turn gives birth to a cycle of development and crisis to be erupted in a qualitative change of the system, once "further expansion of productive capacity is obstructed", seems to be the most sensible explanation.[654] Especially, his acknowledgement of a *longue duree* historical tendency for productive forces to develop, which is accompanied by a warning against the conflation of different levels of analysis -of a general theory of history and historically specific modes of production- deserves its merit. However, we should keep in mind that, as long as a specific mode of production is conceptualized solely through this scheme, it is likely to fail to transcend the problems it encountered in the first place. The problem with this interpretation is that it tries to infuse the static scheme at hand with dynamism,

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[652] Milonakis, "Prelude to the Genesis of Capitalism 416. Here, FMP stands for feudal mode of production. Milonakis' articles propose an answer to the polemic between Laibman and Gottlieb in the course of the Historical Materialism Debate on the primacy question in which the former was a strict follower of Cohen and the latter was calling for a "soft theory" based on indeterminacy and a loose interaction between base and superstructure. The implications of this debate for the question of the separation between the so-called "economic" and "political" spheres in capitalist mode of production and the possibility of an "economic" theory for pre-capitalist modes of production will be discussed in the following section.

[653] John Hoffman, "The Dialectic of Abstraction and Concentration in Historical Materialism*," Science & Society* 49, no. (1985/1986): 460. PF stands for productive forces and PR for production relations.

[654] Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History", 318.

but the fact that dynamism is tried to be *infused* from the outside means that the scheme at hand is not really animated at all. The point is that this general scheme of the contradiction between forces and relations of production, as such, does not lend itself easily for an understanding of how any specific mode of production really works, how it really reproduces itself, though it constitutes the necessary starting point for such an analysis. In the case of capitalism, to give an example, we know that the system is based on a contradiction between forces and relations of production in a society based on class antagonism. But how does the process of the reproduction of the system come about? Would the explanation of the "dialectical interplay" be adequate to understand how capitalism works, or did Marx give us something more than this? If the scheme of forces-relations-class struggle could adequately explain how a specific mode of production really works, in the form of reproduction, expansion, contraction/development and demise, Marx would not need to write *Capital* in which he sets out to analyze the capitalist mode of production starting from its simplest element - commodity.

The question is, therefore, to identify how a mode of production behaves and reproduces itself: here, "the particular relationship assumed historically by the forces and relations of production is what constitutes the economic 'laws of motion' of a given mode of production" and this is where dynamism and movement can be found.[655] Each mode has specific laws, so for feudalism as well as slave mode of production, we need a "political economy . . . parallel to Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of

[655] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe,* 23.

production."[656] And this is why "the character of any definite type of production relations is . . . impossible to determine until these laws of motion are themselves determined."[657] Marx's analysis of capitalism, in this respect, can provide a model on the basis of which a theory for specific pre-capitalist modes of production can be developed.

In the following section, I will focus on how capitalism is to be conceptualized in order to make sense of the transition and try to specify what differentiates it from the previous modes of production. This, in turn, will have important implications for the conceptualization of the pre-capitalist modes of production in general.

4.1.2 Capitalist mode of production

I have mentioned above how the different definitions of capitalism by the participants of the transition debates have shaped their respective views of the nature of modes of production and their transformation. Regarding this, three main axes to approach the problem can be identified: (i) The first aspect revolves around the relative importance given to free wage-labor as against accumulation of capital in the definition of capitalism; (ii) the second line of demarcation is centered on the identification of the so-called economic and political spheres in capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production; (iii) and the third aspect can be found in the role of free and unfree labor in capitalism. The first point is crucial since the definition of capitalism directly determines the definition of feudalism and the transition, and the second and third points are important for the implications they have regarding the theorization of feudal and slave modes of production as well as the concept of primitive accumulation in relation to the

[656] Milonakis, "The Dynamics of History", 320.

[657] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 60.

former. So, let's start with the first one.

In the debates on the transition to capitalism, we saw that two elements integral to the capitalist mode of production come to the fore as markers of its emergence. In the first case, the formation of a labor market based on free wage-labor is emphasized by the theories that focus on the transformations that took place in the relations and forces of production whereas in the second case accumulation of capital is singled out by the Merchant Capitalism and world-system schools.

One potential danger with the first case is that, as mentioned above, the concept of mode of production may be reduced to forms of exploitation as structural change is considered to have come with a change in this form. On the other hand, there may be found in these debates problems regarding the conceptualization of the temporality of the transitions as the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism is at times confused. Three questions related to the capitalist mode of production arise from this: Firstly, to what extent and in what ways does historical emergence of wage-labor correspond to the development of capitalist relations; secondly, what is the relationship between capitalist mode of production and the so-called pre-capitalist forms of exploitation/unfree labor; thirdly, what is the relationship between wage-labor and pre-capitalist modes of production?

First and foremost, because wage labor, as a general form, can be found in different modes of production, albeit "sporadically", its mere presence does not equal to the birth of capitalism *per se*.[658] On the other hand, the same reservation holds true for

[658] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 465.

capital as well. Since capital has an "antediluvian existence"[659], it is a short step from this acknowledgement of its historical existence to a perception of history in the form of an undifferentiated accumulation of capital.[660] Although its accumulation and concentration was indeed necessary for capitalism to emerge in the first place, capital, in its pre-capitalist forms of merchant's and usurer's capital, cannot be seen as an independent, all-powerful variable behind the historical development in general and the emergence of capitalism in particular. Again, it is only in the context of capitalist mode of production that capital becomes specifically *productive capital* and takes hold of production. Regarding capital, therefore, two questions can be raised: How does capital take hold of production; and in what ways does its character change in this process?

The ultimate questions regarding wage-labor and capital, therefore, can be formulated in the following way: What differentiates specifically capitalist free-wage labor and capital from their pre-capitalist forms? How do they contribute to the structure of the capitalist mode of production and in what ways are they structured by capitalism in turn? What Marx has to say in *Grundrisse* on economic categories and level of theoretical abstraction is enlightening in this respect and deserves to be quoted at length. Firstly, Marx underlines that:

> . . . even the most abstract categories, despite their validity -precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.[661]

Abstract categories such as labor and capital, therefore, become meaningful for the

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[659] Marx, *Capital 3,* 728.

[660]Such is the case with A. G. Frank, to give an example.

[661] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 105.

analysis of capitalism only when their historical specificity is established. On the other hand, as Marx comments:

> Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc . . . Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this is to be taken only with a grain of salt. They can contain them in a developed, or stunted, or caricatured form etc., but always with an essential difference.[662]

It is not, therefore, the existence of wage-labor or capital *per se* or even the intensity and generality they gain in capitalism that becomes determining for the character of this mode of production; tracing their genealogy right into the dawn of history will not disclose their historical specificity pertaining to capitalism. Here, what is crucial is the way they are combined, the way they subsume each other. Accordingly, what is forgotten in many instances by the theoreticians of the transition is the fact that wage-labor and capital should be seen not as separate factors, legible in their own boundaries, but as *relational* concepts that contain and determine each other. This explains the specific relationship between these two elements in the capitalist mode of production. As Ollman elaborates:

> Marx's unusual approach to studying history is rooted in his acceptance of the Hegelian philosophy of internal relations … each of the elements that come into Marx's analysis includes as aspects of what it is all those other elements with which it interacts and without which it could neither appear nor function as it does. In this way, labor and capital . . . in virtue of their close interaction, are conceived of as aspects of each other . . . the process of their becoming is as much a part of what they are as the qualities associated with how they appear and function at this moment.[663]

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[662] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 105-106.

[663] Ollman*, Dance of the Dialectic,* 116.

First and foremost, capitalist mode of production is based on generalized commodity production for exchange on the market for acquisiton of profit.[664] The ever-present imperative of profit-seeking on the level of individual capitalist finds its expression on the level of society as a whole in the form of an endless pursuit of accumulation. Accordingly, accumulation of capital is located at the heart of the capitalist system in relation to the imperative of profit-seeking "as capitalists are *compelled* to act in that way as a result of competition."[665] On the other hand, "Marx defines capital as "*value* . . . participating in a dynamic process of self-expansion" and hence, "capital is not value as such, but value in movement."[666] Accordingly, we know that *capital* in pre-capitalist modes of production mainly relied on the "transfer of value" whereas in capitalist mode of production it takes direct hold of production and "represents a constant increase in value."[667] So, how does such systematic self-expansion through the process of production come about in the capitalist mode of production?

The crux of the issue, as Marx underlines, is that "capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things."[668] It does not

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[664] Marx starts his analysis with commodity. This is neither an arbitrary choice nor an assignment to commodity of all the powers of constituting capitalism: "Given Marx's method of progressive articulation, it cannot be said that the "commodity" causes capitalism, or money, or the fetishism of commodities, or exchange: all of these categories are bound up with the commodity, and their meanings are explored as Marx explores the meaning of commodities; but the relation is not one of cause-and-effect but rather of inter-connected categories". Stillman, P. G (2005). *The Myth of Marx's Economic Determinism"*. https://www.marxists.org/subject/marxmyths/peter-stillman/article.htm

[665] Mandel, E. *Karl Marx.*

[666] Foley and Duménil, "Marx's Analysis".

[667] Mandel, E. *Karl Marx*

[668] Marx, *Capital 3*, 932. In a footnote in the same page: "A negro is a negro. In certain relations he

constitute, therefore, a socially neutral process of accumulation of wealth, assets etc., but points to a whole set of social relations. Here, the crucial point is that "the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They only become capital under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker." Likewise, Marx adds that "property in money, means of subsistence, machines and other means of production does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if the essential complement to these things is missing: the wage-laborer."[669] Accordingly, the crucial point about capital accumulation is that "the ties of the material means of production to labour, value, commodity, et cetera, are interiorized as parts of what capital is."[670] Conversely, it is not the existence of wage-labor *per se*, but "the class relation between capital and free labor which is the precondition for the appearance of the specific economic form which obtains between capital and wage-labor in the capitalist enterprise."[671] Here, labor power emerges as "a commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption, therefore, is itself an embodiment of labour, and, consequently, a creation of value."[672] Therefore, capitalist mode of production is marked by the turning of wage-labor into specifically "capital-positing, capital-creating

becomes a slave: A mule is a machine for spinning cotton. Only in certain relations does it become capital. Outside these circumstances, it is no more capital than gold is intrinsically money, or sugar is the price of sugar ... Capital is a social relation of production. It is a historical relation of production".

[669] Marx, *Capital 3*, 932.

[670] *Ollman,* Dance of the Dialectic*, 69.*

[671] Mooers, *The making of bourgeois Europe,* 21-22.

[672] Marx, *Capital 1,* 270.

labor."[673] Accordingly:

> The compulsion for capital to grow, the irresistible urge for capital accumulation, realizes itself above all through a constant drive for the increase of the production of surplus-value. Capital accumulation is nothing but surplus-value capitalization, the transformation of part of the new surplus-value into additional capital. There is no other source of additional capital than additional surplus-value produced in the process of production.[674]

Therefore, capitalist exploitation is the specific social relationship between the capitalist and the wage-laborer, between capital and wage-labor. Wage-labor becomes meaningful for the identification of capitalism only in its relation to capital as self-expanding, self-reproducing value. Otherwise, it would be possible to identify emergence of capitalism wherever and whenever wage-labor is found. This also holds true for capital. Capitalism marks the subordination of circulation to production: the profit of capital is no more based on buying cheap and selling dear, hoarding, interest etc, but now it depends on the creation of value itself -it is *self-expanding* in this sense. Capitalist accumulation becomes meaningful only in this context: "surplus-value arises from capital" while at the same time "capital arises from surplus-value". Accumulation is, therefore, "the employment of surplus-value as capital, or its reconversion into capital."[675] This is so because "wage-labor has been both a precondition and result of capital (and vice-versa) throughout the long history of their relationship."[676]

Accordingly, the main aspects of capitalist mode of production can be summarized in the following way:

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[673] Banaji, *Theory as History,* 54-55.

[674] Mandel, E. *Karl Marx.*

[675] Marx, *Capital 1,* 725.

[676] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 117-118.

(i) Wage labor requires that laborer is divorced from his means of production. He has to sell his labor-power to survive. This results in the creation of a labor market. With the reward of his labor-power, his wage, he buys the necessities of life. Accordingly, market mediation is vital for the laborer: At first, market is supplementary (for both buying things and selling his surplus produce); soon, it becomes "compulsory" -hence the emergence of "market dependence".[677] The transformation of the former self-sufficient producer into a part-time and then a full-time wage-worker is accompanied by his increasing and eventually absolute dependence on market. The end result is the creation of a home market, for commodities as well as labor, which has by now turned into a commodity as well.

(ii) The main motivation of capital is to reproduce itself on an expanded scale through accumulation. This is achieved through the appropriation of the surplus value created by the uncompensated part of the labor-power of the worker. This denotes the specific character of the capitalist form of exploitation. On the other hand, this is the main reason behind the endogenous character of technological development in capitalism on the basis of competition.[678]

(iii) Capitalism is characterized by generalized commodity production. Accordingly, capitalism is defined by a structural separation between the spheres of production and exchange, between use and exchange values. Value is created in the process of production and realized in the sphere of exchange.[679] As the ultimate

[677] *Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence".*

[678] Foley and Duménil, *"Marx's Analysis".*

[679] Fine and Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital,* 110.

crystallization of the capitalist relations, as the carrier of this structural separation, commodity, combining use and exchange-value in its body, constitutes the starting point for Marx's analysis of capitalist mode of production.

(iv) Class struggle in capitalism denotes both the structural contradiction between capital and labor, and the real, practical act of confrontation between the two classes of society. These can be seen as the two extremes on a scale.

Now, the question is how the system reproduces itself on the basis of this specific configuration. This is not only about an ever-growing set of forces the development of which is limited by the existing relations: rather, it is about how a mode of production behaves in long and short terms, how the contradiction between forces and relations manifests itself in reality. How capitalism reproduces and expands itself, on the other hand, necessitates the identification of its law of development: here, the point is not to find a mono-causal explanation that summarizes a whole epoch in a single sentence, but to understand how a system behaves, in action, in dynamism, in the form tendencies, counter-tendencies and historical trajectories. Theory of reproduction is, therefore, a theory of crisis: one cannot be considered without the other. Crisis is inherent and necessary to capitalism: this is not because the canon says that the continuous development of productive forces should eventually burst the frozen relations asunder, but because the system creates its own limits while it reproduces itself. Accordingly, due to the logic/law of development of capitalism, the reproduction and the undermining of the system go hand in hand. Accordingly:

> Capitalism, for Marx, is not a self-sustaining mechanism with timeless natural laws . . . On the contrary, capitalism must be analyzed as a social form in "fluid movement" by means of a dialectical method which takes into account "its

transient nature no less than its momentary existence".[680]

Therefore, analytically and historically, the scheme of forces-relations and the law of development are inseparable. Here, the crucial point is the identification of how such a structural contradiction at the heart of a specific mode of production compels it to behave in specific ways, through specific patterns, and how such behavior tends to undermine the system from which it originates in the first place. On the other hand, such *laws* do not descend from heaven to make a graceful enterance to the stage and put their stamp on modes of production to infuse them with an *essence*: rather, they constitute theoretical representations, on a high level of abstraction, of the real, historically produced relations between real people engaging in real activities in real natural and social settings.[681] In other words:

> . . . the laws of motion - rules of reproduction - of different forms of social labour are rooted in specific social-property relations - relations between human beings and between humans and nature as mediated by objects and instruments of production . . . Put another way, the macro-dynamics of different modes of production cannot be comprehended outside of the specific structures of the social relations of production and labour process.[682]

Accordingly, it is the historically specific relationship between wage-labor and capital that denotes the class contradiction between capitalists and workers. Capital turns into *productive capital* only when the social relationship between capitalist and wage-laborer comes into existence; in other words, it starts to take hold on production only when relationship of production becomes based on the exploitation of wage labor by capital.

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[680] Hoffman, "The Dialectic of Abstraction and Concentration", 454.

[681] The neglect of this aspect of the "law of motion" of capitalism made Banaji to assign to accumulation of capital a determining and central role, at the expense of wage-labor.

[682] Charlie Post, "Capitalism, Laws of Motion and Social Relations of Production*," Historical Materialism* 23, no. 4 (2013): 79.

Therefore, it is not the origins of wage-labor and capital *per se,* but their qualitative transformation in relation to each other that should be identified. Historically, capitalism is a mode of production based on the systematic commodity production for exchange on the market where owners of means of production (i.e., capitalists) buy the labor-power of those who possess no means of production of their own and have to sell their labor-power as a commodity in the market in order to survive (i.e., free wage-workers), and appropriate the surplus-value produced by the unpaid labor of the producers. In this context, labor-power should already have turned into a commodity for capitalism to be what it is.[683] Accordingly, from a social standpoint:

> For the conversion of his money into capital . . . the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realisation of his labour-power.[684]

This, on the other hand, requires that "the expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil" should have already taken place as this process, historically, "forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production."[685] As the historical precondition for the capitalist mode of production to emerge in the first place, "the separation of free labor from the objective conditions of its realization -from the means and material of labor" is crucial.[686] This, in turn, brings us to the issue of primitive accumulation. Before proceeding further, however, two related issues, the so-called separation of the "economic" and the "political" in capitalism, on the one hand, and the "extra-economic"

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[683] Marx, *Capital 1,* 270-272.

[684] Ibid., 272-273.

[685] Marx, *Capital 3,* 934.

[686] Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863.*

character of surplus-extraction in pre-capitalist modes of production, on the other hand, should be addressed since these have crucial implications for the concept of primitive accumulation as well as the nature of exploitation in feudal and slave modes of production. Recently, a debate has taken place whether primitive accumulation should be seen as an integral part of the capitalist mode of production operating today as a part of capitalist accumulation, or whether it belongs to the pre-history of capitalist mode of production. This debate is, to a large extent, based on the existence of unfree labor and their increasing proletarianization in capitalism, on the one hand, and how capitalist crisis is conceptualized, on the other hand. Accordingly, the first aspect of the problem depends on the comparison of capitalism with pre-capitalist modes of production.

4.1.3 Contrasting capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production

Let's start with the view that in pre-capitalist modes of production, surplus-extraction takes place through extra-economic coercion. This is grounded in an understanding that capitalist exploitation is based on purely economic means as the spheres of the political and the economic become separated for the first time in human history in this mode of production, in contrast to the pre-capitalist modes of production where these two were not yet differentiated. This is a view adopted by historians from a wide-array of theoretical schools, such as Brenner, Anderson, Takahashi and Amin, to give a few examples. Here, the basic contention is that pre-capitalist modes of production are characterized by the “transparency of economic relations” in contrast to capitalism where relations of exploitation becomes “opaque”. This means that “the generalization of market relations” in the capitalist mode of production results in “the emergence of a particular domain of social life having its own autonomy”. Accordingly, capitalism becomes historically distinct as the “domain of the economy” starts to be “ruled for the

first time by economic laws imposed as objective laws."[687] In contrast, because the reality of exploitation is "transparently obvious" in pre-capitalist modes of production, it has to be constituted by extra-economic coercion.[688] Accordingly, in feudalism, when producer is not yet separated from means of production and labor has not turned into a commodity yet, "appropriation of surplus labor by feudal lords takes place directly, by extra-economic coercion without the meditation of the economic laws of commodity exchange."[689] The coercive nature of surplus extraction becomes even more visible in the case of slavery as the slave has the dual character of being both the producer of commodities and a commodity himself. Ste De. Croix, for example, adopts this vocabulary as well: Even though he differentiates between slavery, serfdom and debt-bondage in antiquity and pays due attention to the specificity of each form of exploitation, ultimately, he contends, they all share the quality of being coercive/unfree and it is as such that they are counterpoised against free wage-labor, the absence of which makes it necessary for the "propertied class" to rely on the extra-economic forms of exploitation.

To sum, the argument is that, in the meaning of the word, what is designated as the *economic* and the *political* was intertwined in the pre-capitalist era, and this is manifested in the extra-economic character of exploitation. Here, the separation between the spheres of economy and politics on the one hand, and the association of pre-capitalist modes of production with extra-economic coercion on the other hand, mark the

[687] Amin, "Modes of Production", 196.

[688] *Amin, Unequal Development, 25.*

[689] Takahashi, "A Contribution", 71-72.

"qualitative distinction … between the societies of capitalism, dominated by economics (the law of value), and previous societies, dominated by the political and ideological."[690] Here, capitalist mode of production becomes the point of reference against which all other historical epochs are to be judged: the point of distinction is not the historical specificity of capitalism vis-a-vis feudal or slave modes of production, but capitalism as against *all* previous modes of production.[691] Taken to the extreme, it can be concluded that Marx had no "general theory of history", but he only "insisted on specificity and the contrast between pre-capitalist societies and capitalism."[692]

A corollary to this notion is that an "economic" theory, in a way similar to Marx's theory of capitalist mode of production, is not possible to develop for the feudal and the slave mode of production, since economic and political were merged at this point. Many scholars think that what enabled Marx to develop an economic theory of capitalism was the historical distinctiveness of this mode of production.[693] Accordingly, it is argued that Marx's theory of capitalism, due to its abstraction from all non-economic phenomena, cannot be taken as a model for theories of pre-capitalist societies, and hence. "it is a mistake to try to find an economic core within feudal society" in a manner similar to "Marx's theory of competitive capitalism": these objections obviously hold true for

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[690] Amin, "The Ancient World-Systems", 352.

[691] In contrast to the 5-stage understanding of historical development, for example, Amin proposes three stages -communitarian, tributary and capitalist: Amin, "Modes of Production", 203. Amin adds that "all advanced societies from 300 BC to 1500 AD are … of a profoundly similar nature". Amin. "The Ancient World-Systems", 350. Here, lumping together everything under the rubric of tributary mode of production does nothing other than accentuating the aforementioned separation between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production on the basis of the respective role of economy and politics in their constitution. Its analytical merits, however, is open to debate

[692] Amin, "Modes of Production", 202.

[693] Ibid; Gottlieb, "Feudalism and Historical Materialism"; Gottlieb, "Historical Materialism".

slavery as well.[694] At times, "economic" is associated with forces and "political" with relations of production and since it is hold that surplus-extraction was politically constituted before capitalism, a loose set of relations of production or class struggle should become the determining elements in the analysis as a "soft" kind of theory based on contingency, indeterminacy and synthesis is called for.[695] In all these cases, therefore, what the so-called separation between economic and political as well as the notion of extra-economic really signify need closer attention as this view of the extra-economic coercion prevalent in pre-capitalist societies as against the purely economic compulsion exerted by capitalism has important implications for the existence of unfree labor in capitalism and the question of primitive accumulation as an ongoing, contemporary phenomenon. In this section, I will focus on the so-called divorce between economy and politics in capitalism and the issue of extra-economic coercion in pre-capitalist modes of production. The contemporary implications of the issue of unfree labor and primitive accumulation will be discussed in the following section.

4.1.3.1 The divorce between the *economic* and the *political* in Capitalism

While there is an important element of truth in the assertion that economic and political are divorced in capitalist mode of production, it is all too easy to jump into the conclusion that this is a real, absolute separation perfectly corresponding to the reality and representing a sharp and definite break with the past. Here, the method employed by Marx in his analysis of capitalism is of crucial importance as manifested in his use of

[694] Gottlieb, "Feudalism and Historical Materialism", 1.

[695] Ibid., 4.

abstraction as well as "the centrality of fetishism to the analysis of Capital."[696] Here,

> In appearance, political is abstracted from the economic: in reality, the state concentrates society just as classes concentrates the apparently free-floating individual . . . process of abstraction under capitalism makes it possible to see what does not even arise as a problem in pre-capitalist society -the relationship between state and economy, the individual and society. But this process of abstraction also mystifies the problem by making it appear that a tangible separation between the two realms has occurred.[697]

And by the same token:

> . . . not only is the abstraction of the individual from society a compelling illusion of commodity fetishism: so too . . . is the abstraction of state from society, the political from the economic. It is true that under capitalism a separation of the individual from society, the public from private, politics from economics appears in formal terms -as phenomena, but what is the underlying social reality which these phenomenal forms conceal? Unless we pose this question, the fetishistic character of the abstraction process escapes us and we simply embrace capitalist (and indeed embryonically mystifying pre-capitalist) appearances on their own terms.[698]

Therefore, Marx's method should be taken into consideration along with the content of his work. Accordingly, it would be off the point to think that there is a perfect correspondence between the reality and the theoretical representation of capitalism as "taking the process of abstraction for granted means missing the fetishistic character of capitalist relations."[699]

On the other hand, the argument that capitalism works perfectly fine when left to itself is related to the myth of free market which works to conceal the social and historical reality behind this seemingly autonomous character of the economy.

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[696] Hoffman, "The Dialectic of Abstraction", 453.

[697] Ibid.

[698] Ibid., 452.

[699] Ibid., 454.

Accordingly, economy and politics should not be seen as absolute and mutually exclusive categories, but as different aspects of a mode of production. Without state intervention, capitalist economy functions with its own rules, tendencies and counter-tendencies: but this does not mean that there is an absolute separation or contradiction between the two. On the contrary, "capitalism can only develop by involving the state more and more openly in economic development: crises can only be postponed by eroding the logic of the market. In order to maintain the differentiation of the public and the private . . . the state has to be increasingly involved."[700] The formal separation between economy and politics, on the other hand, does not mean that capitalist state loses its class character. The establishment of the legal and institutional frameworks needed for capitalist economy to function is not a once-and-for-all event confined to the formation period of this mode of production, but needs to be reproduced on a constant basis -the simplest example of this can probably be found the struggles between the workers and capitalists around the trade union rights and the passive or active participation of the state in these processes.[701] What is at stake, after all, is the whole fate of capitalist society here. In the face of a dispossessed working-class, "without the state and its appurtenances, the police, the courts, the army, and so on, it would be impossible to reproduce the capitalist relations of production."[702]

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[700] Hoffman, "The Dialectic of Abstraction", 457-458.

[701] The simplistic conceptualization of the state as the direct class tool of a ruling clique, on the other hand, needs to be abandoned. State and law can be employed by the working class and used against the exploiters inasmuch as the reverse is true: political balance and specific mechanisms of representation are crucial here. The point about the class character of the state, on the other hand, is that it lays the ground for the working of capitalist economy. A state can be liberal, fascist or social-democrat and still remain as a capitalist state: the basic principles needed for capitalism to function never become points of discussion. That all these political forms are capitalist, on the other hand, obviously does not mean that they are all equally preferable.

[702] Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation*, 31.

Lastly, the concepts of base and superstructure, or forces and relations of production, constitute a mode of production only in their totality, not in abstraction from some of its constituting elements.[703] Accordingly, the concept of mode of production does not denote something exclusively "economic" -rather, it is "a social phenomenon". By the same token, capitalism is not an "economic" system *per se*.[704] The term "political economy" should be telling enough, both as a reference to the nature of capitalist mode of production and to the theoretical methods to be employed to analyze it: economy is, by definition, political and *vice versa.* Accordingly, it cannot be stressed enough "how entirely wrong it is to think of historical materialism as an *economic* (or for that matter a *sociological*) interpretation of history."[705] On the contrary, Marx's "critique of political economy was, among other things, intended to reveal the political face of the economy which had been obscured by classical political economists."[706] This is an important lesson to keep in mind in the face of the increasing prominence of the "desocialisation and dehistoricisation" of economics from the early 20th century onwards: while it has been challenged on a number of grounds, this legacy of the neo-classical economics still

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[703] This does not mean that all the elements are equal in importance or that there is no hierarchy between them, obviously.

[704] Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism,* 25.

[705] Hobsbawm, "Introduction" to Pre-capitalist Economic Formations, 17. Such categorization is related to the specialization of the branches of academic knowledge in the 20th century and the self-righteous obsession of scholars from different fields to identify an economist, a sociologist, a historian, a political theoretician etc. in Marx (Marx the economist as against Marx the philosopher, for example, as it takes the form of young vs mature Marx) in order to exclude what is distasteful to one's preferences: the end product is a domesticated, rehabilitated, perfectly academic version of Marx. A review of categories taken for granted, therefore, becomes useful in many instances.

[706] Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism*, 20. Although she has a nuanced understanding of this question of the separation of economic and political in capitalism, Wood fails to transcend the dichotomy between the economic coercion pertaining to capitalism and extra-economic coercion pertaining to pre-capitalist modes of production.

shapes our perception today.[707]

4.1.3.2 Extra-economic coercion in pre-capitalist modes of production

A corollary to the notion of the divorce of the economic and the political in capitalism is the contrasting characterization of exploitation in these respective societies. What does it mean that surplus is extracted through "extra-economic" means in pre-capitalist modes of production in contrast to the economic coercion of the capitalist system? In answering this question, rather than considering "extra-economic" merely as a signifier of the absolute dominance of politics over economy before capitalism, it would be more fruitful to examine the relationship between the specific forms of exploitation/surplus-extraction and the related process of production. Let's start with the case for feudalism.

Marx underlines that feudal relations of exploitation are constituted by extra-economic means as he focuses on the specific relationship between the character of surplus-extraction and the organization of production in these societies in the following way:

> It is clear, too, that in all forms where the actual worker himself remains the 'possessor' of the means of production and the conditions of labour needed for the production of his own means of subsistence, the property relationship must appear at the same time as a direct relationship of domination and servitude, and the direct producer therefore as an unfree person . . . The direct producer in this case is by our assumption in possession of his own means of production, the objective conditions of labour needed for the realization of his labour and the production of his means of subsistence; he pursues his agriculture independently, as well as the rural-domestic industry associated with it . . . Under these conditions, the surplus labour for the nominal landowner can only be extorted from them by extra-economic compulsion, whatever the form this might assume . . . Relations of personal dependence are therefore necessary, in other words personal unfreedom, to whatever degree, and being chained to the land as its accessory -bondage in the true sense.[708]

[707] Milonakis and Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics*, 1-2.

[708] Marx, *Capital 3,* 926-927.

On the other hand, there is an opposing view that likens feudal relations to the purely "economic" exploitation of capitalism. From the view point of production and exploitation, in capitalism, wage-laborer has to get into capitalist relations of exploitation in order not to starve: as he is dispossessed, he cannot subsist himself. In feudalism, in a similar way, the peasant has to pay a rent to the landlord if he wants to keep his land and his means of production: his instinct of survival also compels him to play by the rule. Accordingly, Hindess and Hirst claim that since landlords had the power to expel serfs from their lands when they did not fulfill their obligations, feudalism was not based on extra-economic coercion but rather on economic relations of tenancy between peasant producers and landlords. Accordingly, "politico-legal compulsion" becomes a redundant category and the relationship between the peasant and the landlord is considered to be based on the separation between the producer and the means of production, just like in the case of capitalism. And this is why, as Hindess and Hirst claim, serfdom is not an integral part of feudalism, which now comes to resemble to a mere form of tenancy.[709] This argument constitutes the opposite of the view that underlines for the extra-economic character of exploitation in pre-capitalist modes of production: the question, therefore, revolves around how surplus-extraction takes place and how the corresponding legal reality is conceptualized.

To start with, it should be underlined that the unfree status of the producer was not merely a legal title that can be relegated to the distant and misty land of law but it was an immediate and integral part of the reality of social relations of production on

[709] Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, 221-259.

which the whole system depended. This took the form of a double claim to land as ownership belonged to the landlord and possession to the peasantry.[710] Accordingly, one should be careful not to project the exclusive private property-holding that is historically specific to capitalism to the older forms of ownership and use rights. Therefore, it is in the relationship between production and exploitation that the relationship of personal dependence becomes meaningful as the "basis of rent extraction is given by the feudal ownership of land and the peasants' legal separation from it, whereas the mechanism for reuniting the two is given by custom and tradition" and this is why "the means for extraction of rent, given the effective possession by the peasants, takes a politico-legal form". Here, the point is that "feudal relation is neither purely economic nor purely political. Rather, it is a mixture of economic, customary and political elements."[711] Therefore, the so-called "political" side of exploitation in feudalism, contrary to what Hindess and Hirst argue, is not irrelevant to the feudal economy: rather, it is a constituting part of this mode of production.

Nevertheless, the notion of "extra-economic" should not be seen as the determining factor in the constitution of feudal relations of exploitation, but rather as an expression of the specific relationship between the producer and the landlord from the standpoint of production -as the specific form surplus-extraction takes. In capitalism, laborers do not own their means of production and have to sell their labor-power to those who own them in order to survive. Here, the crucial point is that labor-power creates value in the production process. Wage-laborer gives to the capitalist his labor-power as a

[710] Milonakis, "Prelude to the Genesis of Capitalism", 393.

[711] Ibid., 395.

commodity to be used to produce more commodities, no matter what the realization of this value requires exchange in the market. Surplus-extraction/exploitation in capitalism, as it contributes to creation of value, therefore, takes place in this very process of production. Technically, without exploitation, it is not possible for the laborer to produce surplus-value. To this extent, exploitation is economic. In feudalism, on the other hand, the peasant is in effective possession of his means of production and organizes production independently to a large extent. Landlord, therefore, does not intervene between him and the land during the process of production, but allows him to proceed as he wishes: here, what is produced above subsistence needs constitutes the surplus and the peasant gives to the landlord a certain portion of this surplus only after the process of production is completed. Feudal rent, therefore, takes the form of some amount of crystallized labor of the peasant producer as exploitation comes only after the process of production itself and there is no need for the landlord to participate in the organization of production.

Extra-economic coercion in the case of feudalism, therefore, is based on the fact that peasant and landlord do not come against each other in the process of production, but only afterwards as "there was no preliminary bargain as in the case of the capitalist wage laborer relationship"[712]: Exploitation comes after production. Therefore, "such coercion is only extra-economic in the narrow sense of existing outside the sphere of commodity exchange".[713] The existence of the landlord does not affect the organization of production as both free peasant and serf rely on more or less the same methods of

[712] Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 5.

[713] Foweraker, J (1981). *The Struggle for Land: A Political Economy of the Pioneer Frontier in Brazil from 1930 to the Present Day*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.203

production. The historical background is crucial to make sense of this picture. The medieval European peasant communities had an existence much older than the aristocratic families as far as the earlier history of feudalism is concerned, and the arrival of the latter with a claim to domination did not go unchallenged by the peasantry[714]: These lands did not merely turn into the private property of the landlords, but often emerged as loci of contestation with a multiplicity of claims to them. Most importantly, landlords needed those peasant producers who had an ancient relationship to the land they cultivated to keep staying and producing there, and they needed this in order to exploit them. It is not, therefore, a matter of mere tenancy or negotiation over a contract between the peasant producer and the landholder: we have a qualitatively different relationship here. Here, exploitation/appropriation of surplus becomes something imposed upon the enserfed peasant, rather than being an integral part of the process of production. This is why we call feudal exploitation extra-economic and with this form, a whole package of coercive methods comes forth.[715]

Then, what about slavery, in which exploitation takes the ultimate form of "unfreedom" as the whole process of economic operation is based on coercion? First and

[714] Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 5.

[715] On the other hand, the concept of a tributary mode of production, encompassing everything between primitive- communal and capitalist society, was used by Amin to refer to the extra-economic character of exploitation in pre-capitalist modes of production. Its analytical usefulness, however, is questionable in certain respects. Beside the false conception it carries regarding the main difference between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production on the basis of economic as against extra-economic extraction of surplus, this dividing line does not make justice to the complexity of historical development on the one hand, and it fetishizes capitalism as the only system with particularities that deserves specific treatment on the other hand. The real significance of the concept of mode of production is that it underwrites the historically specific relationship between the forces and relations of production on the basis of specific class structures, and the concept of tributary mode melts down all the structural differences between a variety of social systems in one and the same pot of surplus extraction through "coercive" means. The problem of the universality of a slave mode of production and whether it is a necessary step in the evolutionary ladder of human societies before feudalism, on the other hand, is an ill-placed question from the start: There is no necessity of stages in a predetermined order in historical development.

foremost, a slave is a commodity: in contrast to the wage-laborer whose labor-power is commodified only for a temporary period of time, the whole body of the slave becomes a commodity over which the owner has the complete authority. Just like the wage-laborer produces his subsistence needs in addition to a surplus to be appropriated by the owners of the means of production which he does not have, the slave produces his subsistence needs in addition to a surplus as well. Then, what does the slave-owner do with the slave after his whole person is commodified? He uses this commodity, the slave, to produce more commodities: in capitalism, on the other hand, it was only the labor-power of the worker purchased by the capitalist in the first place that was used for commodity-production. In both cases, therefore, economic exploitation takes place through the process of production: as the slave is not in possession of the means of production in any way, he does not have the slightest degree of autonomy, compared to the serf. In a paradoxical way, therefore, the resemblance of free wage-laborer to the slave is much more pronounced, in relation to the production process, than to the serf, who is "freer" and hence closer to the wage-laborer, one would be inclined to think. On the other hand, not only in the very beginning of this system of economic exploitation, but also through its whole course, we find the brutal act of coercion whereas the capitalist has no private power over the person of the individual workers.

Then, the question is, whether slavery is based on extra-economic coercion? The answer is positive, I think: obviously, the whole social system is based on coercion. This "extra-economic" component, on the other hand, does not preclude a proper theory of the slave mode of production: on the contrary, the commodity character of the slave makes it even easier to develop such a theory, compared to the case for serfdom. One objection against this could be related to the central role of war and military conquest in

the supply of slaves (slave trade was largely dependent on war captivity as well): Does not this fact alone show us the "extra-economic", political side of the social relations of production and exploitation? Yes and no. First and foremost, when we think about the concept of the slave mode of production, we are referring not to the widespread existence of slaves (the existence of domestic slaves, for example, does not amount to slave mode of production *per se)* but to a specific set of social relations of production: The slave mode of production is what it is only when the structurally dominant form of exploitation takes the form of slavery. This, on the other hand, emerges on the basis of some level (and this is a rather low level) of the development of productive forces. Therefore, the concept of slave mode of production refers to a society characterized by the class antagonism between slaves and slave-owners on the basis of a relationship of economic exploitation, i.e., extraction of surplus. In this sense, there is a qualitative difference between a society with slaves (slaves used for conspicuous consumption, for example) and a slave mode of production; here, what these two share in common, on the other hand, is the source of the slaves themselves. Slavery, therefore, has an extra-economic origin based on coercion: a slave in the slave mode of production, on the other hand, has a specific relation to the relations and forces of production and hence, his social existence is explicable beyond the political character of his origins. On the other hand, there is no reason that such seemingly "extra-economic" factors cannot be integrated into the economic theories of modes of production -theories that set out to explain the processes of exploitation- as a mode of production is by definition a concept that comprises both economic and non-economic.

It is not, therefore, the absolute divorce of the economic and the political spheres in capitalism, and their utter coexistence in feudalism and slavery, but the way

exploitation takes place vis-a-vis organization of production that renders the concept of "extra-economic" meaningful.[716] It is in this very difference between modes of exploitation in relation to organization of production that the whole social edifice is grounded: free wage-laborer of capitalism, the serf of feudalism and the slave of antiquity. And it is on this basis of production that the legal structure of these societies develop: this last one is crucial as well, but one should be careful not to turn it into a frozen, absolute category. Of course, this does not mean that all forms of labor are based on coercion and hence they are essentially the same and legal freedom is meaningless; or that all forms of labor can be seen merely as less free versions of a basic, idealized form of free wage-labor form[717] -or conversely, freer versions of an "archetypal" slave-labor. On the contrary, the forms of surplus-extraction are qualitatively different when considered in the context of the modes of production they come to operate within. The point here, however, is that "the concept of extra-economic coercion simply says that coercion exercised in non-capitalist modes is not capitalist."[718]

For the purposes of analysis, what are the implications of this discussion on the separation between economy and politics, and the nature of extra-economic surplus-extraction? For one thing, the conclusion that pre-capitalist modes of production cannot be analyzed due to the dominance of political, ideological and contingent factors does

[716] Otherwise, we would fall prey to the equation of capitalism with economic man, rationality, calculation and feudalism with hierarchy, religion, chivalry, whimsical aristocrat etc. The point is not that these notions have no place in these modes of production, but that they have no independent existence of their own, and as such, they are incapable of explaining the setting in which they operate. Accordingly, they should not be reified.

[717] To some extent, this is the case with Banaji. For a critique, see: Tom Brass, "Why Unfree Labour is Not 'So-Called': The Fictions of Jairus Banaji," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 31, no. 1 (2003): 101-136.

[718] Foweraker, *"Struggle",* 203.

not hold true. In a discussion of how to incorporate behaviors less rational and more restricted than the modern, capitalist ones into an economic theory, Kula underlines that "restrictions on freedom of choice between theoretically known alternatives are present in all systems."[719] Accordingly:

> . . . choices among economic options are always being made in all socio-economic formations. In no system, however, are these choices ever made in so-called absolute freedom. In other words, the choices are never determined by considerations exclusively related to economic calculations. Rather, the choices are always socially determined. They are recurrent choices which display certain regularities, and on the basis of which dependent relationships can be established - it thus becomes possible to construct a theory.[720]

Therefore, it is the long-term patterns and dynamics that should be the central concern in theorization: The non-economic, allegedly non-rational choices of the medieval serf *can* be integrated into a theory of the feudal mode of production once their reproduction gain a repetitive pattern and as such, start to shape the way life and production are organized. In a similar way, once extra-economic factors such as conquest, politics and custom gain a repetitive pattern and turn into structurally constituting elements of modes of production, it becomes possible to build an "economic" theory without excluding them. In Kula's own words:

> An indispensable precondition for constructing a theory of social phenomena is he social determination of human behavior which ensures that human behavior will manifest itself as a mass phenomenon, that it will be oriented in a single direction within the limits established by the social structure (within the boundaries of the individual social stratum), and that it will reoccur within specific limits of time and place whenever specific conditions recur. This takes place in all societies. For every society, therefore, we can construct a theory that is more or less broad ranging, more or less articulated.[721]

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[719] Wittold Kula, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System. Towards a model of the Polish Economy 1500-1800* (London: NLB; Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1976): 168.

[720] Ibid., 169.

[721] Ibid., 175.

The point is, therefore, while capitalist and pre-capitalist systems are qualitatively different, if we do not see them antipodes of each other in the form of economy as against politics, there is no need that a so-called economic analysis of feudalism similar to capitalism should not be possible -though the level of theoretical abstraction should be different for the simple reason that they *are* different systems. As Marx comments, "the extra-economic origin of property merely means the historic origin of the bourgeois economy, of the forms of production to which the categories of political economy give theoretical or ideal expression."[722] Accordingly:

> . . . to claim that pre-bourgeois history and each phase of it, has its own economy . . . and an economic base of its movement, is at bottom merely to state the tautology that human life has always rested on some kind of production -social production- whose relations are precisely what we call economic relations.[723]

4.2 Transition to capitalism: Transformation of quantity into quality (1)

4.2.1 Primitive accumulation and transition

One upshot of the association of capitalism with economic and pre-capitalist modes of production with extra-economic coercion can be found in the controversy over the existence of unfree labor in present-day capitalism. This debate has important implications regarding the nature of capitalist accumulation and by extension, for the political action to take for the emancipation of labor. These issues converge around the concept of primitive accumulation. As Brass underlines, "where primitive accumulation is concerned, the theoretical problem lies in a frequent conflation of two distinct situations: between primitive accumulation as *creating the conditions* for capitalist

[722] Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63.*
[723] Ibid.

accumulation proper, and its *actually being a form* of capital accumulation."[724]

4.2.1.1 Contemporary primitive accumulation: Unfree labor and crisis

The centrality of free wage-labor in capitalism led to the view that the existence of unfree labor, such as debt-bondage, at the heart of the 20th century capitalism, is to be explained not only as a remnant of feudalism, but also as an indicator of the coexistence of capitalism and feudalism, which often took the form of "semi-feudalism". The Indian mode of production debate of the 1960s and the 1970s is exemplary in this respect: here, the basic problem was the seemingly enigmatic existence of bonded forms of labor, especially in the countryside, in a period that was thought to be characterized by wage-labor. Since the concept of mode of production was reduced to the form of exploitation, capitalism came to be literally equated with free wage-labor. From this point, two conclusions were drawn: Firstly, the slow development and the relatively marginal position of free wage-labor denoted the absence of capitalist development in the Indian countryside; secondly, the remnants of allegedly feudal forms of exploitation in the form of unfree labor implied that India was still to be characterized on the basis of a feudal or semi-feudal mode of production. Accordingly, the whole debate seems to have taken around this axis -whether India was capitalist, feudal or semi-feudal while the central proxy was free and unfree labor. It was argued that due to the colonial context and the role imperialism, India presented a mixture of feudalism and capitalism in the form of a dual economy or articulation of different modes of production. This understanding had immense political implications. Since transition to capitalism was not achieved yet, the first point in the political agenda was the abolishment of the feudal remnants in coalition

[724] Brass, *Labor Regime Change*, 158.

with the progressive segments of the Indian bourgeoisie and a move for the full establishment of capitalism and a democratic parliamentary system -a leap into the modernity, in other words.[725] While this was the dominant view at the time in the leftist circles, it did not go unchallenged by an opposition which "held that the presence of unfree labour notwithstanding, capitalism was already present, and thus any transition would have to be to socialism."[726]

The debates on underdevelopment in Latin America are comparable to the Indian debate: in this case, however, the dominant paradigm became that of the *dependistas*. Here, Frank criticizes the view that defines the Latin American agriculture as feudal and explains its backwardness on this basis, proposing a full introduction of capitalism into agriculture as the only remedy to this lack of development. Instead, Frank sets out to demonstrate that "the causes and explanation of the agricultural crisis must be sought not in feudalism, but in capitalism itself" as Latin America is to be located within the broader context of modern world capitalism. The polemical tone of this view is directed against modernization theorists as well as some Marxists, such as Laclau, who point to the central importance of historically specific social relations in those "underdeveloped" countries, beyond their location in the global capitalist economy.[727] In the world-system theory, therefore, unfree labor finds a place for itself in the periphery and is incorporated into the theory of capitalism as such.

These debates can be seen as different interpretations of the "proletarianization

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[725] Thorner, "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism?"

[726] Tom Brass, "Jairus Banaji's Mode of Production: Eviscerating Marxism, Essentialising Capitalism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 42, no. 4 (2012): 707.

[727] Frank, *Capitalism and underdevelopment*, 221.

thesis" which anticipates the necessary conversion of all unfree forms of labor, which are defined as pre-capitalist remnants, into free wage-labor in conjunction with the development of capitalism. In the semi-feudalism thesis, the existing forms of unfree labor is considered to be doomed once the establishment of capitalism is properly completed, marking the final separation of the producer from means of production and the creation of a dispossessed proletariat. Unfree labor, in this framework, is still considered to be an anomaly which should be transcended with continuous proletarianization, which now comes to denote primitive accumulation.[728]

While it is true that wage-labor is an integral part of capitalist mode of production, we still witness the existence of unfree forms of labor. The question is, therefore, how to make sense of this phenomenon at the heart of modern capitalism. Here, the semi-feudalism thesis is obviously inadequate. The proletarianization thesis, on the other hand, misses the point as it considers the existence of unfree labor as a case of incomplete transition to capitalism which still awaits primitive accumulation to come, sweep the self-subsisting producer aside and separate him from his means of production.[729] There are two problems with this position: Firstly, market-dependence can be created without a corresponding creation of free wage-labor as agrarian transitions do not follow one identical path; secondly, the fact that capitalism relies on generalized free wage-labor does not categorically exclude the existence of unfree labor and justifies even less labelling it as "pre-capitalist".

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[728] Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism*, 33.

[729] "... that unfree labor is simply a pre-capitalist relation, and where encountered currently is wrongly labelled evidence for proletarianization. That is, the creation or reproduction by the 'new' imperialism of a worker that is free": Brass*, Labor Regime Change,* 148.

Against the aforementioned assignment of unfree labor to the pre-history of capitalism, we see the emergence of the recognition that "unfree labour can go hand in hand with capitalism, and that it can be initiated and sustained by capital itself in order to accumulate surplus value."[730] Then, is there no difference between free and unfree labor? Is that adjective merely a legal mystification?[731] On the contrary: the difference between the two has a concrete, real existence. Here, Brass suggests that the creation of unfree labor (or "deproletarizanization") may be seen as an integral part of capitalism since it emerges as a strategic tool of labor discipline used in the class struggle against the proletariat. Therefore, it can be seen as part of the strategies of capitalist accumulation: here, freedom is not a fixed concept in legal sense, but it emerges as a dynamic locus of contestation.[732] In certain respects, therefore, it may be comparable to the existence of an industrial reserve army of labor, for the downward effect it exercises on wages. Accordingly, the acquisiton of the status of "free" signifies the movement from class-in-itself to class-for-itself: It is not an end in itself, but it is indeed preferable to unfree labor since it is historically progressive, just like bourgeois democracy *is*

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[730] I. Guerin, "Bonded Labour, Agrarian Changes and Capitalism: Emerging Patterns in South India," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 3 (2013): 405–423.

[731] *"...no contract is free because economic coercion is pervasive under capitalism": Theory as History,* 133.

[732] For the recent debates on the nature and place of unfree labor in modern capitalism, see: Surinder Jodhka, "Unfree Labour and "Postmodern Myths": Towards a Critical Examination," *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 4 (2004): 463-473; Jens Lerche, "A Global Alliance against Forced Labour? Unfree Labour, Neo-liberal Globalization and the International Labour Organization," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 7, no. 4 (2007): 425–52; J. Mohan Rao, "Freedom, equality, property and Bentham: The debate over unfree labour," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, no. 1 (1999): 97-127 ; Ravi S. Srivastava, "Bonded Labour in India: Its Incidence and Pattern" (2005) Working Paper Declaration/WP/43 Geneva: ILO; Amit Bhaduri, "A Study in Agricultural Backwardness under Semi-Feudalism," *The Economic Journal* 83, no. 329 (1973): 120–37. For a recent debate on Banaji's use of the concepts of free and unfree labor, see: *Campling, " Debating Modes of Production and Forms of Exploitation"; Post, "Capitalism, Laws of Motion and Social Relations of Production";* Guerin, "Bonded Labour, Agrarian Changes and Capitalism".

progressive in certain instances. However, Brass claims that "capitalism actively converts self-owning labour into unfree labour" beyond using it "passively" for profit.[733] Therefore, he sees it as the preferred form of labor by the capital.[734] Some qualification is needed here as it is important not to see this as an absolute tendency, but it should be considered "in conjunction with labour relations in general, neo-liberal globalization and country-specific conditions."[735] Unfree labor, therefore, belongs to the realm of capitalist mode of production and can be counted amongst the strategies of capitalist accumulation: it is not, however, a *sine non qua* for its survival.

At this point, I would like to point out an interesting point of convergence between the semi-feudalism and the proletarianization theses. In the former case, modes of production were associated with exploitation of labor, and because capitalism was synonymous with free labor, bonded labor came to signify feudalism and semi-feudalism. In the latter case, the continuing existence of unfree labor is recognized and is still explained on the basis of a long-awaited arrival of primitive accumulation while the character of capitalism is completely transformed: now, we have a capitalism that does not simply rely on methods of economic coercion and the play of market forces, but one that has taken a "predatory" form[736], the discovery of which was accompanied by the epiphany that capitalism was not exclusively based on market forces and economic coercion, but that it had always combined economic and extra-economic elements. The

[733] Rao, "Freedom, equality, property and Bentham", 113.

[734] Guerin, "Bonded Labour, Agrarian Changes and Capitalism".

[735] Lerche, "A Global Alliance against Forced Labour?," 426.

[736] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 144.

use of the concept of primitive accumulation in relation to modern capitalism, therefore, basically expresses this newly-arrived awareness.[737] Accordingly, it is the recognition that "social relations of production generally confined to a concept of primitive accumulation interpreted simply as the pre-history of capitalism are in fact present also in capitalism proper."[738]

One problem with this "notion of capitalism-as-predation", as developed by Harvey, is that it "rests on the idea that primitive acccumulation corresponds mainly to a process of asset-stripping, or profitability that entails neither productivity nor investment."[739] This emphasis on "predation" as against "production", however, "overlooks the fact that a shift from free to unfree production relations is undertaken by capital in order to lower costs and increase profitablility in the labor process it already owns or controls, or indeed acquires."[740] Therefore, "it is unfree labour – not primitive accumulation" that we should see "as a contemporary phenomenon."[741] In the end, as Brass concludes, "because his focus is on dispossession, an act he appplies mainly to petty commodity producers but fails to extend to owners/sellers of labor-power (mistakenly described as a proletariat), Harvey's analysis licenses a form of anti-capitalist struggle no longer based on class."[742]

This brings us to the second aspect of the problem: Here, primitive accumulation

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[737] See Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism*.

[738] Brass, "Unfree labour as primitive accumulation?", 29-30.

[739] Brass, *Labor Regime,* 150.

[740] Ibid., 149.

[741] Ibid., p.30.

[742] Ibid., 152-153.

turns into an integral part of capitalist accumulation and emerges as a tool used to cope with crises of over-accumulation, taking the modern form of "accumulation by dispossession". Modern capitalism, therefore, tries to transcend its economic problems through non-economic means. This view, which certainly does not correspond to Marx's own analysis of primitive accumulation, recently seems to be very much in vogue.[743] Without going into a detailed discussion of this issue, as it greatly exceeds the confines of my thesis, I would like to underline two points. Firstly, though Harvey rejects Rosa Luxemburg's underconsumption theory of crisis, her analysis of imperialism continues to exert an important influence on him. The underconsumption theory implied that capitalist crisis is to be transcended through brutal exploitation of "non-capitalist territories" which "must be kept ... in a non-capitalist state", if capitalism is to survive; for David Harvey, on the other hand, overaccumulation crises are to be transcended, or at least postponed, "by creating new venues of investment" through the conversion of non-capitalist sectors of economy and segments of society into capitalist ones -this usually takes the form of privatization, enclosure of commons and financialization, in a

[743] For a selection from the recent, prolific studies on contemporary primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, privatization of commons and land grab, see: Brown, T. C (2009). The Time of Globalization: Rethinking Primitive Accumulation, Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society, 21:4, 571-584; De Angelis, M (2001). Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital's "enclosures". The Commoner N.2; Zarembka, P (2002). Primitive Accumulation in Marxism, Historical or Trans-historical Separation from Means of Production? The Commoner, March 2002; Hall, D (2013) Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession and the Global Land Grab, Third World Quarterly, 34:9, 1582-1604; Mezzadra, S (2011) The Topicality of Prehistory: A New Reading of Marx's Analysis of "So-called Primitive Accumulation", Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society, 23:3, 302-321; Bonefeld, W (2011). Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: Notes on Social Constitution and Expropriation. Science & Society, Vol. 75, No. 3, pp. 379–399; Perelman, M (2007) Primitive Accumulation from Feudalism to Neoliberalism, Capitalism Nature Socialism, 18:2, 44-61; Read, J (2002) Primitive Accumulation: The Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism, Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society, 14:2, 24-49

context we usually define as neo-liberalism.[744] Beyond denoting some strategies of capital to deal with crises, however, the central idea here is that "capitalism must perpetually have something outside of itself in order to stabilize itself."[745] Accordingly, Harvey underlines that "the general thrust of any capitalistic logic of power is not that territories should be held back from capitalist development, but that they should be continuously opened up."[746] This "opening up", therefore, what Harvey refers to as a modern form of primitive accumulation. For the purposes of my thesis, I would like to underline that methods of capitalist accumulation, which entails economic inasmuch as non-economic means, should not be confused with primitive accumulation only by the virtue that the latter relied on extra-economic coercion. In this sense, I find that the concept of primitive accumulation will be much more useful if it is confined to the pre-history of capitalism and this is the meaning with which I will be using this concept throughout the following section. As for the question of capitalist accumulation and "spatial fixes", on the other hand, Harvey's analysis should work the best if considered to be denoting a set of strategies of capitalist accumulation, rather than in an absolute sense, as the essence of the capitalist mode of production.

4.2.1.2 Primitive accumulation as the pre-history of capitalism

The contemporary connotation of the concept of primitive accumulation, therefore, underlies a general notion of transition -or more correctly, transitions- to capitalism: Until the smallest cell of the world becomes capitalist, primitive accumulation is bound

[744] Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 138.

[745] Ibid., 140.

[746] Ibid., 138-139.

to proceed. Marx, however, in his analysis of the "so-called primitive accumulaton", uses the term to refer to the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England as the classic case: as such, it belongs to the pre-history of capitalism -i.e. the original emergence of this system in a specific time and place without any precedent.[747] The question is, therefore, how to make sense of the concept of primitive accumulation. Here, the first point to underline is that "capitalism arose in a 'spontaneous' fashion - i.e. independent of a previously existing capitalism somewhere else in the world - only once in the history of mankind" and the importance of the concept of primitive accumulation is that it refers to this world-historical happening.[748] In this respect, the later development of capitalism around the globe cannot be explained on the basis of the concept of primitive accumulation for the simple reason that capitalism had already come into existence and later transitions did not take place in a spontaneous fashion. There still remains the possibility that simultaneous and independent transitions around the globe could have been possible without the compounding effect of an external capitalism, but the historical fact remains that it was England that made the first move and the remaining parts of the globe emulated and/or became integrated into this novel system in the end: Counterfactual thinking is not really helpful here as we cannot abstract from the impact of this first, original emergence of capitalism and this is why the analysis of this original transition should be different from the analysis of the later ones, though the former can still serve as a model for the following cases. On the other hand, this view of the transition makes it possible to transcend the controversy over the

[747] Nevertheless, Marx adds that there is no necessity for later transitions to follow this one and the same path: English example is "classic" as the original emergence of capitalism.

[748] Kula, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System*, 13-14.

question of whether later transitions should necessarily follow the classic English example or they are likely to take a wide variety of shapes due to their historical specificities and the timing of their transitions -the so-called question of the exceptionalism of the English path in the development of capitalism.

Accordingly, I consider the notion of primitive accumulation to be denoting the original emergence of capitalism in the world history, and hence belonging to the pre-history of capitalist mode of production. Historically, therefore, primitive accumulation refers to the process whereby the preconditions of the capitalist mode of production became culminated in a structural change which took the form of transformation of quantity into quality. Quantitative changes that emerged before the capitalist mode of production as its preconditions, therefore, should be separated from the emergence of capitalism as the result of a qualitative transformation in the form of a transition: Primitive accumulation encapsulates this whole process and, I think, this is the real significance of the concept: On the one hand, "it is the particular ways in which the disintegration of feudalism occurs that is of prime interest to Marx, for it is here that he uncovers the preconditions of capitalism."[749] On the other hand, Marx differentiates between the preconditions of capitalism and the rules of its reproduction as he underlines that:

> . . . capital has therefore itself posited, and posited in accordance with its immanent essence, the conditions which form its point of departure in production - [then] the condition that the capitalist, in order to posit himself as capital, must bring values into circulation which he created with his own labour - or by some other means, excepting only already available, previous wage labour - belongs among the antediluvian conditions of capital, belongs to its historic presuppositions, which, precisely as such historic presuppositions, are past and gone, and hence belong to the history of its formation, but in no way to its contemporary history, i.e. not to the real system of the mode of production ruled

749 Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 120.

by it.[750]

Accordingly, the methods of primitive accumulation and the "historic presuppositions" of the capitalist mode of production should not be confused with the strategies employed by this mode of production to cope with crises or the later transitions to capitalism around the globe:

> The developments in feudalism that made the new turn toward capitalism possible were themselves, of course, internally related aspects of that mode of production, but they had no place or role in what came after . . . They were necessary for the creation of capitalism, but there is no need for capitalism, once under way, to reproduce them.[751]

The question is, therefore, to identify what belongs to the pre-history of capitalism and which elements mark the emergence of the capitalism proper. This is not about identifying a clear-cut demarcation line between the two. It is about separating the preconditions from the elements integral and necessary to capitalism. The confusion between the dissolution of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism, as well as the historical equation of capitalist mode of production with capital and wage-labor *as such*, are both symptomatic of a failure regarding the way change is conceptualized since the "preconditions" of capitalism are mistaken for capitalism itself and the qualitative difference between their constituent elements is lost from sight. Therefore, it should be remembered that:

> Marx makes an important distinction between preconditions that are themselves wholly results, albeit earlier forms of their own results now functioning as preconditions, and preconditions that have at least some features that come from previous social formations. It is the difference between what capitalism required to develop as compared to what it required to emerge in the first place … Once in place, even minimally so, the capitalist mode of production accumulates wealth through its own distinctive means, reproducing in this way one of its

[750] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 459.

[751] Ollman*, Dance of the Dialectic,* 119-120.

major preconditions.[752]

To sum: By primitive accumulation, I refer to the creation and culmination of all the preconditions of the capitalist mode of production before its emergence on the basis of a novel form of social organization and the related logic of production. In this sense, it refers to the pre-history of capitalism. Accordingly, the concept of primitive accumulation includes both the quantitative changes that took place before the development of capitalism and the final qualitative change that represented a structural transformation. In this sense, it is an analytical rather than a strictly historical concept. Its significance for the emergence of capitalism, however, comes in the shape of the qualitative transformation it signifies in the end. Accordingly, elements such as capital accumulation, colonialism, banking, sporadic existence of wage-labor etc. belong to this pre-history as they constitute the quantitative changes in the process: the transformation of the social relations and forces of production, on the other hand, signifies the qualitative change that the system goes through, as the quantitative elements necessary for the emergence of capitalism in the first place gain a new character only after this structural change takes place -capital turns into productive capital, finance gets increasingly integrated to industry etc.

The notion of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, on the other hand, is a more historically-oriented concept, as it encompasses the process starting from the final crisis and the dissolution of feudalism to the emergence of capitalism itself. In this sense, it refers to a situation of structural instability and its final resolution in the emergence of a novel system of production. For the purposes of this thesis, I focus on the process of

[752] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 119.

qualitative transformation rather than the culmination of quantitative changes since it is in the point of structural change that primitive accumulation and transition intersect. Then, how are we to identify that moment of structural/qualitative transformation?

4.2.2 Merchant, Agrarian and Industrial Capitalism

The question of primitive accumulation denotes the historical process through which a structural change came about. Here, both the quantitative changes that acted themselves out as preconditions of the capitalist mode of production and the qualitative transformation of the society should be addressed. Through a reconceptualization of the temporality of transformation, it could be possible to make sense of the wide-array of *capitalisms* -Merchant, Agrarian and Industrial- each identified to be the moment of the original development of capitalism by different theoretical schools. The question, therefore, is to identify which one belongs to the realm of primitive accumulation, which one corresponds to the transitional period from feudalism to capitalism and which one marks the emergence of the capitalism proper. Here, we have two proxies: Firstly, the notion of primitive accumulation should be useful to distinguish Industrial and Agrarian capitalism from the so-called Merchant capitalism; secondly, what Marx calls formal and real subsumption of labor in relation to the creation of absolute and relative surplus value, should be helpful to differentiate between Industrial and Agrarian Capitalism.[753]

4.2.2.1 Merchant Capitalism

My main question regarding the so-called Merchant Capitalism is whether it can be defined as an immature form of capitalism or whether it would be more appropriate to assign to it a place in the process of primitive accumulation. The effect of trade and

[753] Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-8163*.

capital on the feudal mode of production, as well as their relationship to capitalism, therefore, should be addressed.

To repeat the argument so far, notwithstanding that "trade always has, to a greater or lesser degree, a solvent effect on the pre-existing organizations of production, which in all their various forms are principally oriented to use-value"[754], its deteriorating effect is still a function of the old mode of production it finds at hand.[755] While capital has an "antediluvian" existence in the form of merchant's and usurer's capital, its transformation into productive capital comes about only under specific historical conditions which "are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities."[756] On the contrary, productive capital "can spring into life, only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence meets in the market with the free labourer selling his labour-power."[757] Accordingly, it is the historical context and social property relations that is determining whether capital will go under a qualitative change in its nature. Capital becomes productive capital only when it begins to expand itself not through price differences, but on the basis of systematic production of surplus-value through the unpaid labor-power of wage-laborer: Accordingly, capital becomes *capitalist* only when it takes hold of production, i.e. when a class of landless proletariat emerges. Historically, therefore, the so-called Merchant Capitalism can be categorized as one of the

> . . . hybrid forms, in which although surplus labour is not extorted by direct compulsion from the producer, the producer has not yet become formally

[754] Marx, *Capital 3*, 449-450.

[755] Ibid., 449-450.

[756] Marx, *Capital 1*, 274.

[757] Ibid.

> subordinate to capital. In these forms, capital has not yet acquired a direct control over the labour process. Alongside the independent producers, who carry on their handicrafts or their agriculture in the inherited, traditional way, there steps the usurer or merchant with his usurer's capital or merchant's capital, which feeds on them like a parasite. The predominance of this form of exploitation in a society excludes the capitalist mode of production, although it may form the transition to capitalism, as in the later Middle Ages.[758]

Merchant Capitalism, therefore, should be seen as a form "transitional to capitalist mode of production", rather than constituting a qualitatively novel one.[759] In this sense, it belongs to the pre-history of capitalism, i.e. to the realm primitive accumulation. In order for capital to effect a structural transformation, it should come into contact with free wage-labor which should have gained by that time not a sporadic, but a structurally produced existence: Until this interaction takes place, however, capital is bound to have a parasitic character. It finds, therefore, its transformation into industrial capital only with the decline of serfdom and the expropriation of the peasantry from the soil.[760] Furthermore, Marx underlines that this process of expropriation was exacerbated by

> . . . the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize tile dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.[761]

Accordingly, accumulation of capital, trade and colonialism all find their place as factors contributing to the emergence of capitalism, but they do so as preconditions of this mode of production: as such, they belong to the process of primitive accumulation, and hence,

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[758] Marx, *Capital 1*, 645.

[759] Marx, Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863

[760] Marx, *Capital 1*, 915.

[761] Ibid.

to the pre-history of capitalism. Here, my aim is not to downplay the importance of colonialism or trade in the transition to capitalism: I just want to underline that, no matter how crucial they were, by themselves, they could bring no qualitative transformation. This becomes especially visible in Marx's assignment of "the different moments of primitive accumulation" to "Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in more or less chronological order": The crucial point here is that "these different moments are systematically combined together at the end of the·seventeenth century in England."[762] This last moment, frankly, is nothing other than the transformation of quantity into quality.

The so-called Merchant Capitalism, therefore, is not *capitalism* in the meaning of the word, but it belongs to the period of primitive accumulation. Marx explains that "such forms are to be found in social formations which precede the bourgeois mode of production; on the other hand they constantly reproduce themselves within the latter and are in part reproduced by the latter itself."[763] Therefore, its existence, by itself, does not amount to capitalist mode of production since it signifies no qualitative break, but only a gradual expansion of capital accumulation and exchange relations: Here, the main point is that "any attempt to theorize forms of capitalism not based on specifically capitalist social-property relations ultimately fails to account for the fundamental limits on trade and production in even the most commercialized pre-capitalist societies."[764] The use of the concept of "Merchant Capitalism", therefore, is not only erroneous, but it also

[762] Marx, *Capital 1*, 915-6.

[763] Marx, Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863.

[764] Post, "Capitalism, Laws of Motion and Social Relations of Production", 85-86.

"represents a step backwards for historical materialism."[765] To repeat the point, colonialism, accumulation and trade are all moments of primitive accumulation -crucial for the development of capitalism; but in themselves, they do not signify the emergence of capitalism.

In the previous section, I had defined capitalism on the basis of the relationship between capital and wage-labor, between which, as Marx underlines, there is "no natural basis, neither is its social basis one that is common to all historical periods. It is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older forms of social production".[766] Historically, primitive accumulation, as depicted by Marx in the context of England, was culminated in the creation of a triad of rural class configuration -of landlords, capitalist tenant-farmers and rural wage-workers- which owe their existence to the dispossession of the formerly self-subsisting peasantry through a series of Enclosures initiated by the feudal landlords and supported by the state. Therefore, it was "not accumulation at all, but rather the conversion of the pre-capitalist means of production into capital and the consequent establishment of the capital-labour relation" that marked this whole process.[767] In other words:

> . . . capital, for Marx, is not simply the material means of production used to produce wealth, which is how it is abstracted in the work of most economists. Rather, it includes the early stages in the development of these particular means of production, or "primitive accumulation".[768]

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[765] Post, "Capitalism, Laws of Motion and Social Relations of Production", 88.

[766] Marx, *Capital 1*, 273.

[767] Akram-Lodhi and Kay, "Surveying the agrarian question (part 1)," 181.

[768] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 65.

As Marx elaborates:

> The conditions and presuppositions of the becoming, of the arising, of capital presupposeprecisely that it is not yet in being but merely in becoming; they therefore disappear as realcapital arises, capital which itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the conditions for itsrealization . . . Therefore, the conditions . . . which express the becoming of capital, do not fall into the sphere of that mode of production for which capital serves as the presupposition; as thehistoric preludes of its becoming, they lie behind it, just as the processes by means of which the earth made the transition from a liquid sea of fire and vapour to its present form now lie beyond its life as finished earth. That is, individual capitals can continue to arise e.g. by means of hoarding. But the hoard is transformed into capital only by means of the exploitation of labour.[769]

This is why accumulation of capital, in itself, fails to identify the emergence of the capitalist mode of production: it is rather the historical emergence of wage-labor in a specific relation to capital that marks the emergence of a completely novel logic of production. For this to take place, however, a deep-rooted change in the class configuration was required; in other words, the dissolution of serfdom and the expropriation of the former self-subsisting peasantry turning into a class of landless, propertyless wage-workers who have nothing but their labor-power to sell. Does *this* transformation, in itself, mark the emergence of capitalism?

4.2.2.2 Agrarian Capitalism and formal subsumption of labor

This brings us the issue of Agrarian Capitalism and whether it satisfies the criteria to be the initial form of the capitalist mode of production. Here, the first point concerns the relationship between the dissolution of serfdom and the emergence of capitalism: Accordingly, the conceptualization of temporality is crucial. Those scholars who focus on the English experience as the classic case of transition to capitalism disagree on the main factor behind this process. The initiative is given either to peasant differentiation

[769] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 460.

with an evolutionary view or the sudden change brought about by the Enclosures. Marx, on the other hand, assigns the origins of the wage-laborer and the modern landlords to the Enclosure movement and the expropriation of the peasantry, and the slow evolution of capitalists to the pre-capitalist peasant differentiation. In a sense, these two accounts historically complement each other as they *both* belong to the pre-history of capitalism and lay the ground for its emergence as such. For our purposes of identifying a structural transformation, on the other hand, differentiation fails to fulfill the criterion here: though it was necessary for the dissolution of feudalism, by itself, it does not point to a qualitative change in the system. The Enclosure movement, on the other hand, works better in this respect as it marks a qualitative turning point. From the viewpoint of transition, therefore, the question is whether the form of agrarian production for market on the basis of landlords, tenant farmers and wage-workers, resultant of the Enclosures, represents the transformation of quantity into quality, i.e. whether we can talk about an "Agrarian Capitalism" as the initial form of capitalist mode of production, rather than as a form transitional to capitalism.

To start with, for capitalist relations to emerge in the first place, (i) capital should take hold of production and (ii) a class of propertyless wage-laborers should be created. The latter, in turn, requires the expropriation of the former self-subsisting peasantry from the land and the means of production. We find these conditions in Agrarian Capitalism as it comprises a set of class relations based on the triad of landlord, the "capitalist" tenant farmer and propertyless rural wage-laborer: Motives of profit-maximization and accumulation also seem to be in place. So, does Agrarian Capitalism belong to the realm of primitive accumulation -the pre-history of capitalism- or does it represent the initial form of capitalist mode of production?

Wood argues that "the specific precondition of capitalism is a transformation of social property relations that generates capitalist 'laws of motion'." The question is, therefore, how such a transformation in class relations was able to beget a novel logic of production, as *the* point where capitalism emerges as a proper mode of production? What are those capitalist "laws of motion"? Wood defines them as "competition, profit-maximization, and accumulation".[770] In this case, the law of motion emerges as a new mode of behavior imposed upon the capitalist class by "market compulsion". What is market compulsion? It is an arena of exchange which becomes "compulsory" once people can no longer subsist themselves, but has to go through the market, to buy commodities and/or to sell their labor-power, in order to survive.[771] If we go one step further back, this concepts refers to the dispossession of peasantry and/or increasing integration of formerly self-sufficient producer into the relations of exchange: Does the emergence of a novel configuration of rural class relations, accompanied by a new logic of production, suffice to mark the emergence of the capitalism proper?

Here, the relationship between class relations and logic of production should be examined in relation to the technique of production. Accordingly, Marx's differentiation between formal and real subsumption of labor in the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863* should be useful to understand the specific character of Agrarian Capitalism *vis-a-vis* Industrial Capitalism. Basically, Marx defines both formal and real subsumption of labor as forms that belong to capitalist production: The difference between the two is that the former requires a capital-relation with wage-labor, and the latter requires a

[770] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism,* 36-37.

[771] Wood, *"The Question of Market Dependence"*.

transformation in the very organization of production/labor process. In this sense, they correspond to the production of absolute and relative surplus-value delineated by Marx in *Capital I* while in the *Manuscripts* their description gains a more historically-oriented character.

By formal subsumption of labour under capital, Marx refers to the creation of absolute surplus-value which is "distinguished only *formally* from other modes of production, in which the actual producers provide a surplus produce, a surplus value". Here, the propertyless free wage-laborer sells his labor-power to the capitalist who is in possession of the means of production: The crucial point here, therefore, is the emergence of wage-labor and capital as relational concepts. Here, relations of bondage such as slavery and serfdom, independence in the form of self-subsisting peasant production, and the guild-type relationships are all replaced by the "the relation of domination and subordination" between capital and wage-labor. However, "the labour process continues exactly as it did before -from the technological point of view- only as a labour process now *subordinated* to capital." To give an example, "agriculture remains the same, although the day laborer has replaced the serf; similarly with the handicraft system, when it makes the transition from the guild-like to the capitalist mode of production."[772]

In this context, we can view Agrarian Capitalism as an example of the formal subsumption of labor under capital: as such, it does not belong to the pre-history of capitalism in the way "Merchant Capitalism" does, since it already represents a qualitative break with the previous set of social relations. Accordingly, it can be seen as

[772] Marx, K. Economic Manuscripts of 1861-8163.

either an immature, early form of capitalism, or the ultimate point reached by the transitional period in the shape of the culmination of the previous quantitative changes in a transformation.

The question is, on the other hand, whether it was possible for this system to sustain itself without the revolutionary transformations in the technology and organization of production or whether it was a fleeting, reversible period. Regarding these questions, I think that the Industrial Revolution was necessary for this system to gain a self-sustaining, ever-expanding character (its proper law of development, in a sense). Nevertheless, the fact that the necessary transformation in the social relations of production came about with what we define as "Agrarian Capitalism", paving the way for the later emergence of the Industrial Revolution, still remains to be contemplated.

4.2.2.3 Industrial Capitalism and real subsumption of labor

Industrial Capitalism, therefore, marks the real subsumption of labor to capital. With the real subsumption, "there is change not only in the formal relation but in the labour process itself." It is at this point that capitalism "first appears as a mode of production *sui generis.*" In turn, as Marx elaborates, "this change in the material shape forms the basis for the development of the capital-relation, whose adequate shape therefore only corresponds to a particular level of development of the material forces of production."[773] Here, it is important to underline that:

> The social and technical conditions of production and their historical transformation are central to Marx's analysis of capitalist production. The term 'technology' is convenient but somewhat misleading. Marx always describes conditions of production in a perspective which combines technology in the strict sense and organization, that is, the institutional framework in which production is performed; the notion of social relations cannot be neglected in this

[773] Marx, K. Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863.

context.[774]

Accordingly, the significance of the "technological" change is the revolutionary effect it had on the rules of the game for the capitalist production in general and understandable only within the social and historical context it is located. With the Industrial Revolution, commodity production that centered on small workshops and manufactures went through a qualitative transformation marked by the development of the factory system. First and foremost, this change refers to the generalization of the capitalist mode of production to all branches and sectors of the economy as the commodification of factors of production has been completed now. This is coupled by the obtainment of a social character by the ownership of the means of production as "the *common, simultaneous* use of the conditions of production leads to a fall in their *relative value,* even though there is an increase in the absolute amount of value they represent", and hence an accompanying "fall in the labour time needed to produce an increased quantity of means of subsistence." Paradoxically, such coordinated, social production shows that "individual's ownership of the conditions of production appears as not only unnecessary but incompatible with this production on a large scale" and hence, it lays the ground for the transformation of this system based on social production and private ownership. Therefore, as Marx emphasizes, "with the real subsumption of labour under capital, a complete revolution takes place in the mode of production itself, in the productivity of labour, and in the relation -within production- between the capitalist and the worker, as also in the social relation between them."[775]

[774] Duménil and Foley, "Marx's Analysis of Capitalist Production".

[775] Marx, Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863.

Marx refers to "three cardinal facts about capitalist production": Firstly, "the concentration of the means of production in a few hands"; secondly, "the organization of labour itself as social labour: through cooperation, division of labour and the association of labour with natural science"; and thirdly, "establishment of the world market."[776] These conditions come together properly only when Industrial Revolution takes place. Accordingly, Industrial Capitalism is not merely a more intense form of an earlier version of capitalism. In this sense, it could be more fruitful to define the development of "Agrarian Capitalism" as the final moment of the transition from feudalism to capitalism where a qualitative transformation in the relations of production takes place and the groundwork of capitalism is furnished. On the other hand, it is Industrial Capitalism that turns out to be the realization of the potentialities the former, incomplete form had suggested in the first place.

4.3 Transition to feudalism: Transformation of quantity into quality (2)

The question of the temporality of transformation becomes even more emphasized in the debates on the transition to feudalism whereby the establishment of the relationship between the end of the slave system and the emergence of feudalism constitutes the central axis around which the discussion revolves: Here, the main proxy is the replacement of slavery by serfdom. In the literature, three main views on the chronology of the transition can be identified. The first view argues that slavery/slave mode of production had already ended by the 3rd century crisis, around the 1st and 2nd century AD, and was acceleratingly replaced by serfdom from this time onwards: here, the late

[776] Marx, *Capital 3*, 375.

Empire is depicted to be either feudal or being increasingly characterized by serfdom.[777] The second view combines the end of slavery by the 3rd century crisis with the Germanic invasions in the following centuries, leading to the birth of a novel mode of production from approximately 5th century onwards, feudalism, in the form of a mixture.[778] Lastly, a more recent trend in the Marxist historiography points to the continuing existence of slavery well-into 1000 AD and locates the beginning of feudalism around this time.[779] Here, this divergence of opinion is not only a matter of chronology, but it can also be seen as a manifestation of how change is conceptualized: If "serfdom" as a form of exploitation emerged from the 3rd century onwards, does this necessarily mean that the society became gradually feudalized through a mutation? Or even slavery continued its existence well into the early Middle Ages, does this imply that there was a direct link between the High Middle Ages and antiquity? Here, the ultimate question is how we are to link the demise of the slave mode of production to the emergence of the feudal one in the form of a structural transformation.

4.3.1 Feudalism and links to the ancient world

One crucial lesson to be learnt from the debates on the transition to capitalism is the importance of the notion of "reading history backwards" in distinguishing between what is historically crucial and what is insignificant in the constitution of a mode of production. This can be done by firstly establishing the basic structural characteristics of the mode of production that replaced the older one; then, locating its defining elements

[777] Wickham, "The Other Transition".

[778] Anderson, *Passages.*

[779] This argumentation mainly started with Duby and was developed by Bonnassie.

in the previous periods in much simpler, almost embryonic forms; and lastly, identifying the specific combination of these simple elements to constitute a novel mode of production the origins of which are under investigation. In this way, it is not only possible to distinguish the preconditions of a system from its essential constituents integral to its reproduction, but also to locate the point where the previous quantitative changes result in a qualitative transformation in the system. Although I would like to avoid from pushing the analogy too far, I think that the notion of the transformation of quantity into quality, and even a case of "primitive accumulation" similar to what was originally used by Marx in reference to the transition to capitalism, might be useful to differentiate the preconditions of the western European feudalism from its essential components -the transition to feudalism, in other words.

In the previous debate, I have suggested that capitalism is to be defined on the basis of the relationship between capital and wage-labor: for this equation to be realized, on the other hand, it is necessary for wage-laborers to systematically contribute to the production of surplus beyond merely constituting the numerical majority of the population -the system, in other words, should be based on the systematic exploitation of wage-labor. Since the emergence of a class of wage-laborers to be exploited by the capital accumulated thus far only came about with the Enclosures, I have singled out the expropriation of the peasantry and the following establishment of a new rural class configuration in the English countryside as the marker of a structural tranformation.[780] From this basis on, it became possible to evaluate what different "capitalisms" signified from the vantage point of a structural transformation in the social system. To this end,

[780] This does not necessarily amount to the "exceptionalism of the English path" as Marx refers to a similar trend in the Italian countryside as well, while this one was later reversed for a variety of reasons.

the use of the concept of "primitive accumulation" in a way to encompass the creation and cumulation of all the preconditions of the capitalist mode of production, leading in turn to a qualitative transformation, in contrast to the more historically-oriented notion of transition signifying the crisis and the decline of the a mode of production and its replacement by a new one, became of great utility. Now, the question is whether we can follow a similar procedure to make sense of the controversy over the chronology of the transition to feudalism as there is a considerable divergence of opinion on when to locate the beginning of the feudal mode of production -300, 500 or 1000 AD. Let's start with a tentative definition of feudalism in order to decide what elements we should be looking for in the previous mode of production that will later contribute to the formation of a novel one, and in what way and at which point in time we can identify a structural transformation.

In broad outline, we can start with the general definition of feudalism formulated by March Bloch. A feudal society is characterized by:

> A subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement (i.e. the fief) instead of a salary, which was out of the question; the supremacy of a class of specialized warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority -leading inevitably to disorder; and, in the midst of all this, the survival of other forms of association, family and State . . . such then seem to be the fundamental features of European feudalism.[781]

If we look at the organization of the economy and relations of exploitation, on the other hand, feudalism can be defined as a mode of production characterized by "a special type of landed property which was directly linked with the exercise of lordship over the basic

[781] Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society II: Social Classes and Political Organization* (London: Routledge, 2005) (Taylor & Francis e-Library), 167.

producers of society, the peasants" as well as "a special type of class of basic producers with a special connection with the land -which remained, however, the property of the ruling class of feudal lords."[782] Accordingly, feudal mode of production is a system mainly based on agricultural production by the peasantry on a piece of land the ownership of which belongs to the landlords who demand not only a certain amount of rent but also some obligations from the peasant producers as part of a "settlement" imposed on the latter.[783]

On the other hand, "the traditional organization for the appropriation of feudal rent is the feudal estate- the manor."[784] As Kosminsky underlines, "the manor interests the Marxist historians only as the concrete form in which the productive relations of the feudal period (feudal property and the forms of exploitation flowing from it) are usually embodied."[785] In other words, while it is true that "jurisdictional control backed by armed force" had been as crucial as "landownership" behind the domination by the landlords over the peasant masses, still "it was within the physical context of the estates, composed of a varying number of manors or lordships, that lords and peasants met."[786] Manor, therefore, the physical manifestation of feudal relations of exploitation.

Although the nature of lordship displayed considerable change over time, becoming hereditary from the mid-11th century onwards, turning into what Duby calls

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[782] Kosminsky, *Studies,* vi.

[783] This definition is not strictly based on labor services.

[784] Kosminsky, *Studies, vii.*

[785] Ibid., viii.

[786] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 40.

"banal lordship" and then into the so-called "bastard feudalism", it is important to underline that "the seigneurie or manor . . . in varying forms, persisted" during the course of which "it embodied the organising principle of the whole society" and as such, it provided a strong element of continuity in terms of economic organization and exploitation of labor.[787]

Then, the question is to what extent this was a "pure" system of production.[788] In general, it is important to emphasize that "any moment in history contains elements of both the past and the future, and that the study of any particular moment sheds some light on both preceding and subsequent developments."[789] This point is crucial to understand the continuing existence of slavery well into the Middle Ages as "the predominance of the feudal mode of production -as in the case of all other modes of production- was never 'absolute'": this is also why even in the 13th century, Kosminsky refers to "some survivals of pre-feudal relations."[790] Accordingly, serfdom, though it constituted the main form of exploitation on which the system depended, was by no means the one and only form of exploitation within the broader framework of feudalism -and there is no reason for it to be so either. As Hilton underlines, while the serfs of the 12th century constituted a homogeneous group to a large extent, they were still "of diverse origins, and these were not entirely obliterated by the simplifying pressures of the post-Carolingian processes of historical evolution."[791] The existence of slavery into

[787] Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 157-158.

[788] Anderson, *Passages*, 154.

[789] Kosminsky, *Studies,* ix.

[790] Ibid., vi-vii.

[791] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free, 55.*

the Medieval period, therefore, was not an anomaly.

Accordingly, we can tentatively define feudalism on the basis of the relationship of exploitation between serfs and landlords, and predominantly small-scale production by the peasant family on the basis of manor as the organizing principle of production and main locus of exploitation.[792] In order to distinguish ordinary forms of tenancy from serfdom, on the other hand, the bonded status of the producer is crucial as "the main purpose of these various rules of dependence was to ensure that peasant families were kept on the holdings, and to guarantee for the lord the payment of rent and the performance of services."[793] As such, bondage created the conditions for a safe source of labor, which was conspicuously absent in the slave mode of production where slave supply depended on military conquest and geographical expansion.[794] Now, the question is to identify at which point the predominant relationship of exploitation moved from slavery to serfdom.

4.3.2 From slavery to serfdom: Late Rome and the Early Middle Ages as a transitional phase

Now, the question is whether the demise of the slave mode of production by the 3rd century amounted to an instant transition to feudalism that had been marked by the rise of the *coloni*, or whether we can identify a transitional period starting from the crisis and

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[792] On the other hand, Takahashi suggests that a theory of feudalism should follow not a historical but a logical order: in this prescription, the analysis should start from the virgate, extending to community and then to the manor: Takahashi, "A Contribution to the Discussion", 73. For my purposes for now, however, manor provides a useful ground since it encompasses both the technical organization of production and the reality of exploitation in its body as it can be seen as a specifically feudal institution whereas virgate and community are more general ones.

[793] Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* 60.

[794] Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom,* 5.

decline of the slave mode of production until the proper emergence of feudalism in the form of a qualitative transformation -in the form of a period of structural instability, in other words. This, on the other hand, raises the question of whether the medieval period was characterized by a single system that exhibited a continuity over 1000 years, or whether we can identify some internal changes within the system itself. Again, the question is when to locate the beginning of serfdom after the demise of the previous mode of production.

To start with, Bloch distinguishes between two feudal ages. The first one, which witnessed a contraction in population, communications and commerce, extended from about the end of the Carolingian Empire to the mid-11th century, whereas the second feudal age was a period of revival in trade, demography and agricultural production from the 11th to the 13th century.[795] Accordingly, "very clear signs indicate that after the ninth century slavery was far from holding a place in European society comparable to that which it previously had held."[796] Likewise, Dockes identifies two forms of feudalism whereby the first one is characterized by the "prevalence of serfdom and manorial system" while the second is based on the "emergence of a free peasantry . . . from which labor was extracted chiefly by way of banal seigniory, or monopolies and feudal dues associated with political and judicial power, which often emerged in the wake of commutation of such old servitudes as corvees and natural rents."[797] So, when are we to locate the beginning of feudalism? On this issue, Dockes underlines that:

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[795] Marc Bloch. *Feudal Society I: The Growth of Ties of Dependence.* London; New York: Routledge, 2004 (Taylor & Francis e-Library), 60-71.

[796] Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom,* 3.

[797] Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 152.

> . . . toward the end of the late empire the main lineaments of what is generally called landed seigniory (or the manorial system) were in place. The master lived, as the lord of the domain, with his peasant tenants, bound to the soil, his chained slaves, and his domiciled slaves. The villa, which in all periods had striven for self-sufficiency, purchasing as little as possible outside, now sold almost nothing on markets that had been drastically curtailed.[798]

Accordingly, while its origins can be located in the Republican and Imperial periods, "the villa, the key site of exploitation, withstood the collapse by changing or by disintegrating in order to be born again in a new form" while "the colonate became current as a relation of production over a wide area." This was accompanied by a long-term trend towards the "the domiciling of slaves, a process that began in the third century, had begun to accelerate, reaching significant proportions by Merovingian times."[799] Production by serf labor in the manor, therefore, had already been established by the late empire whereas "the fundamental cell of the new society" turned out to be "the Merovingian villa, as it emerged in the century following the troubled fifth, and as it developed throughout the early Middle Ages up to the time of Charlemagne's attempt to found a new empire."[800] On the other hand, Dockes refers to "a crisis of serfdom, and the corvee, a crisis of what might be called the first feudal mode of production"[801] as the end of the Carolingian state was accompanied by a decline in "the manorial system and serfdom in its "classic" form" which had represented the first feudal mode of production, whereas the "the tenth century witnessed the rise of a new feudal order."[802]

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[798] Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 84.

[799] Ibid., 84-85.

[800] Ibid., 90.

[801] Ibid., 102-3.

[802] Ibid., 105.

According to Dockes, therefore, serfdom had emerged by the early Middle Ages whereas feudalism found its perfect form at around the 11th century. By that time, "the manorial system, heir to the villa system, was in large part replaced . . . by political, judicial and economic forms of seigniory."[803]

Although certain points in the Dockes' account is indeed debatable (such as the economic nature and implications of the change from manorialism to seigneurie or the relationship between *corvee* and serfdom), it is important for establishing a relationship between the early Middle Ages and the late antiquity, without assuming a direct relationship between the two. In reference to this theme, while several "ends" of slavery can be identified, "for the ancient historian, associated with the rise of the colonate system, and another for the medievalist, associated with the domiciling (casement) of slaves"[804], a question should be raised as to the structural difference between these various forms: Is the 9th century "end" of slavery perfectly comparable to its decline in the 1st and 2nd century AD, in the form of the collapse of a mode of production?

In antiquity, it was the slave mode of production that the whole ancient system relied on, while this was already changing by the late Empire and the early Middle Ages. Although the political end of the Roman Empire and the collapse of the slave mode of production do not have to correspond perfectly in terms of chronology, still the repercussions of the transformations in the economic and social system were felt at the level of the state in the form of the 3rd and the 5th century crises. In this context, it could be more fruitful to define the emergence of the *coloni* not as an inevitable march towards

[803] Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 152.

[804] Ibid., 77.

the establishment of the feudal mode of production, but as a step in a transitional period during the course of which a novel form of exploitation become increasingly merged with the older one, while it is only after with the collapse of the empire and the decline in the central authority that the peasantry as well as bonded rural producers increasingly turned into the tenants of the landlords. Although it had not reached its perfect form by that time, the period around the 5th century, in line with Anderson, seems to be a good date to locate the beginnings of a structural change signifying a transformation of quantity into quality, laying the ground for the later development of feudalism; the forms of serfdom and manor, on the other hand, can be seen as the legacy of the Empire - kind of a “primitive accumulation”, so-to-speak.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis initially started as part of an effort to reach a personal clarification regarding the problematique of the transition to capitalism. It was not only historical, but also theoretical and contemporary implications of this topic that had attracted my interest in the first place: On the one hand, the debates on this transition presented a historical entry point into the more theoretically oriented question of the nature of historical change; on the other hand, many parallels could be drawn between this historically specific problem and a number of issues related to the working of contemporary capitalism, giving to the study a practical dimension. During the course of my research, with the realization that the theme of "transition" could not be understood within the historical boundaries of one particular change in a mode of production, but that it should be located within the broader framework of the themes of historical periodization and structural transformation, it became compulsory on my part to include into the study another case of what can approximately be called a world-historical transformation -namely, transition to feudalism.

The initial impulse that had shaped this inquiry, on the other hand, came from the formulation of these transitions through the framework of structural crisis: Here, the apparent parallels between the "laws of development" pertaining to capitalism and the "prime mover" of pre-capitalist societies, on the one hand, and an understanding of transition in the result of a structural contradiction leading to the demise of one system and the emergence of the other and the formulation of the issue of capitalist crisis on a comparable basis of structural instability, on the other hand, turned out to be the major

lines that lent the debates on transitions a feeling of contemporaneity.

Throughout this study, by transition to capitalism, I have referred to the original development of this mode of production as a historically specific system. Since England, as the home-country of the Industrial Revolution, has played the pioneering role in the development of capitalism, the geographical focus of this thesis turned out to be the Western Europe as it was in the end of the crisis of the Western European feudalism in general and its English counterpart in particular that we find the ground being laid for the transition to capitalism. In turn, by transition to feudalism, I have referred to the demise of the Graeco-Roman antiquity, in conjunction with the changes taking place in the Western European landscape, leading to the emergence of a new mode of production. Accordingly, this thesis has focused on the European, and mainly western European experiences of transformation. On the other hand, due to the specific formulation of the question, it was the Marxist debates that constituted the main point of reference for the discussion. Accordingly, this thesis is based on a close reading of predominantly Marxist, secondary literature on the problematique of transition.

Throughout the thesis, I have had three major organizing principles. Firstly, the notion of *reading history backwards* turned out to be a crucial tool not only to understand Marx's own analysis of the pre-capitalist modes of production in relation to the emergence of capitalism, but also to identify the moment of transformation through the lenses of the completed act: in order to understand when and how transition from one mode to another mode of production took place, we should know what essentially characterizes the latter. Secondly, and in relation to the first point, the notion of the *transformation of quantity into quality* made it possible to differentiate between the gradual accumulation of the preconditions required for the constitution of a new mode of

production and the structural, qualitative transformation that marks the transition itself. Lastly, the initial question that gave birth to this thesis -whether these transformations could be explained on the basis of a structural contradiction in these modes of production in a way comparable to the recurrent capitalist crises- opened a portal to a general discussion of the concept of mode of production, making it possible to move beyond the primacy debates and into a more dynamic and dialectical understanding of social change.

In the second chapter, I have focused on the debates on the transition to capitalism, which are predominantly Marxist in orientation due to the formulation of the question at hand. I organized the presentation of the chapter on the basis of the temporality of transition, which has also a reflection on geographical plane. Here, the first main school focuses on England as the country where Industrial Revolution initially took place, and extends this to the transformations in the rural landscape of the 16th century and even before. On this basis, one approach focuses on the internal transformations of the English feudalism and the associated peasant differentiation and petty-commodity production whereas the other one gives to the Enclosures and the expropriation of the peasantry a central place regarding the transformation of the relations of production in the countryside. Of these two narratives, the second one comes forward for its problematization of the issue on the basis a structural transformation whereas the first one is necessary to understand the structural contradictions of feudalism itself. In this sense, these two narratives complete each other. The second main category focuses on feudalism as a European-wide phenomenon. For Bois, it is the uneven and combined development of feudalism that explains the distinctive development and demise of the English feudalism, which constitutes the weakest line in

this more general system whereby the internal contradictions of the feudal mode of production could only manifest themselves on this non-solid ground. Anderson, on the other hand, extends his analysis back to antiquity during the course of which the notion of structural transformation is to some extent lost from sight while a good sense of continuity - the formation and accumulation of the presuppositions of capitalism- is retained. Lastly, the schools that focus on trade, merchant capitalism and world-system theory all give analytical primacy to circulation rather than production. Sweezy assigns to the extension of trade and development of cities a transformative role ignoring that their ultimate effect depends on the existing mode of production they come to affect. Likewise, the thesis of Merchant Capitalism lacks the sense of historical discontinuity and rupture -of structural transformation- as it gives primacy to an undifferentiated accumulation of capital. Lastly, the world-system school, since it focuses on the global trade system in modern capitalism raised the opinion that capitalism should have emerged as a global phenomenon from the start, conflating the emergence of a mode of production with its most developed form. On the other hand, since it visualizes the whole human history in the forms of world-systems that follow each other, it has a tendency towards an evolutionary view rather than a structural transformation. Notwithstanding their geographical connotations, therefore, I was mainly concerned to present these debates through the main axis of temporality -between preconditions and results, between qualitative and quantitative changes.

In the third chapter, I have focused on the debates on the transition to feudalism. While the formulation of the problem in the form of a “transition” is specific to Marxism, the extensive literature on antiquity has necessitated me to start the discussion with some references to the non-Marxist studies on the ancient economy. Firstly, I have

referred to trade and market-centered models which can be categorized under the rubric of "modernist" approaches whereby the preconceptions hold as to the character of the modern economy had an immense effect on the conceptualization of the ancient one. Secondly, the Weberian approaches with their categories of *status groups* and *social differentiation* are discussed as the analytical adequacy of these categories is compared to that of "class". Then, I have focused on specifically Marxist approaches to the ancient economy. Here, the first line of demarcation emerges in relation to the class character of the Ancient Athens whereby Wood envisions a society characterized by peasant production, in conjunction with a class antagonism located mainly between the poorer and the richer citizens: in this analysis, the relationship between economic exploitation and production process, as well as the crucial difference between free men and slave, is lost from sight. In contrast, de Ste. Croix emphasizes the determining role of the relations of exploitation between the slaves and the slave-owners in the social configuration of the Athenian and Roman society by pointing to the fact that the greater part of surplus appropriated by the slave-owners was created by the slave labor. In terms of transition, on the other hand, the debates centered on the late Roman Empire: Here, the problem has revolved around the characterization of the Roman economy -whether it was a slave or an ancient mode of production- and the following transformation of the system in the form of a transition from slavery to serfdom. Here, Anderson refers to the internal limits of the slave mode of production, in the form of an absence of technological innovation, coupled by an extensive reliance on foreign slave supply, leading to the crisis and the demise of the system by about the 3rd century once the geographical limits of the Empire were reached: from the 5th century onwards, increasing interaction between the moribund Germanic mode of production and the

transformed system of the Roman Empire, resulted in the emergence of feudalism in the form of a mixture. For Dockes, on the other hand, it is the active class struggle between the slaves and the slave-owners that fundamentally contributed to the changes in the system. Lastly, Wickham defines antiquity on the basis of an ancient mode of production in which plantation slavery occupies only a marginal place: In this narrative, serfdom which was already existing from the ancient Greece onwards gains an increasingly prominent character, as signified by a transition from tax to rent, represented two different modes of production for Wickham. Beyond the main controversy over the character of the late Roman Empire, the crucial difference between these approaches, again, is the conceptualization of the temporality of transition, in the form of a change from slavery to serfdom, and the relative weight given to the notion of a qualitative transformation.

In terms of temporality, my argument is that, an organic link should be established between the dissolution of one mode of production, conceptualized on the basis of its own internal dynamics, and the emergence of the other: in other words, the relationship between these two moments should be established with reference to the concept of the transformation of quantity into quality, in the form of a structural change. This way, the previous changes -the presuppositions- that paved the way for the emergence of a novel mode can be distinguished from the structural transformation of the system, in the form of a culmination of the previous quantitative changes in a qualitative transformation: it is a matter of establishing a dialectical sense of historical change, in a sense. A transitional period, on the other hand, refers to the historical process whereby the internal contradictions and final crisis of a mode of production leads to the development of another one: as such, it refers to a period of structural

unstability.

In the fourth chapter, I have employed this conceptualization of temporality to examine the transition to capitalism and to feudalism. Firstly, I have raised more theoretically oriented questions such as the definition of a mode of production and the nature of historical transformation. Here, I have argued that a mode of production should be conceptualized not only on the basis of a dialectical understanding of its different elements, but also with reference to the structural limits it encounters as it reproduces itself. Then, I have proceeded to a definition of capitalism. Firstly, capitalism provides a model of a mode of production, which may give crucial insight into the proper analysis of other modes. Secondly, for the discussion on the transition to capitalism, though the identification of the internal transformations feudalism went through is of vital importance for the analysis, an initial definition of the capitalist mode of production in contrast to feudalism and the establishment of the point of disjuncture between the two should be the first move to understand transition. In this context, I have underlined the crucial importance of the relationship between wage-labor and capital in the definition of capitalism and hence suggested that the point where these elements emerge in structurally different forms should point to the development of capitalism: since this required the widespread commodification of labor-power, historically, the dispossession of the previously self-sufficient peasantry became of greatest importance. Secondly, I have referred to the discussions on "extra-economic" coercion and the separation of the "economic" and the "political" in capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production as crucial points for the proper theorization of these economies. Then, by focusing on the concepts of primitive accumulation and transition, I have developed a tentative argument regarding the transition to capitalism whereby the organizing line is the notion of

transformation of quantity into quality: the employment of this same concept to to analyze the transition to feudalism gave some insight into this problem as well.

Lastly, a recourse to the question of structural crisis comes to the fore again. Here, my argument is that, while identification of a law of development is crucial to understand how a mode of production works, this should be done not on the basis of a scheme of the contradiction between forces and relations of production mediated by class struggle, but on the basis of an analysis comparable to Marx's theorization of capitalism. In this respect, it would be more fruitful to see the notion of structural crisis as the manifestation of structural instabilities of modes of production rather than in the form of a downward line that necessarily leads to the demise of the system by itself. The establishment of the specific laws of development as part of general economic theories of pre-capitalist modes of production, on the other hand, should be the direction for further study.

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