

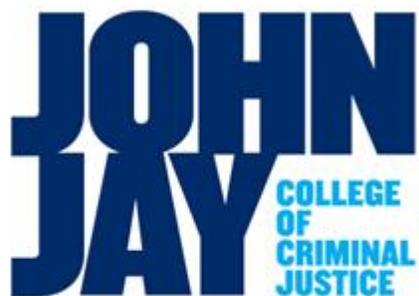
# DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

## Working Paper

Primitive Accumulation

Rajesh Bhattacharya and Ian J. Seda-Irizarry

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### **1. Introduction**

The concept of “primitive accumulation” has had a checkered history within the Marxist tradition. In the writings of Karl Marx, the concept was used to uncover the origin of the capitalist mode of production through historical analysis. Seen as a historical process that gives birth to the capitalist mode of production, the concept had a limited though powerful use in Marxian historiography. For a long while, the concept was confined to transition studies—i.e. studies of transition to the capitalist mode of production in “backward” countries. However, in recent times, the concept has acquired a theoretical status akin to other central categories of Marxian theory in analysis of capitalist economies. The theoretical significance of the concept, already visible in Marx’s writings, was later elaborated upon and developed by a number of Marxists.

For the most part, Western Marxist discourse in the twentieth century did not find any theoretical space for the concept of primitive accumulation in the analysis of advanced capitalist societies that were supposedly built on the firm foundations of constitutionality, property, and rights. It was presumed that primitive accumulation was unfolding in the “underdeveloped” world where the transition to the capitalist mode of production was tearing apart and uprooting communities, common properties, and non-market social institutions through blatant use of force and coercion by the state on behalf of emergent capitalists. While the predatory state was seen as running amok in the rest of the world, such extra-market coercive processes were assumed to be absent in the developed world, where the silent workings of the market system ensured the reproduction of capital and the legal and social institutions reined in the predatory impulses of capital and the state.

However, the dismantlement of the welfare state and its regulatory instruments in the developed world in the last four decades and the increased global competition resulting from successful capitalist transition in other parts of the world, has lifted the veil over capital in its heartland to expose its the predatory and violent face in the developed countries as workers’ rights and social security measures are curtailed, property in means of production are privatized on a large scale, and financialization of the economy leads to systematic wipe-outs of workers’ pension funds and foreclosure of mortgaged houses. At the same time, faster accumulation in parts of the developing world in a reconfigured geography of production has meant dispossession on a scale never seen before. These two developments have led to a rebirth of interest in the concept of “primitive accumulation”. Even though there is a difference in understandings pertaining to the significance of the concept for Marxian political economy, the concept has acquired an enduring significance in the Marxian transition.

## 2. Karl Marx's concept of "Primitive Accumulation"

In February of 1858, while working on the first draft (*Grundrisse*) of what would become his magnum opus, *Capital* (1990), Marx wrote a letter to his friend Ferdinand Lasalle where he expressed that the work he was "concerned with is a *Critique of Economic Categories* or, if you like, a critical exposé of the system of bourgeois economy" (MECW, 270). For Marx, *kritik* did not imply engaging in an absolute rejection of something, but instead it meant an assimilation/appropriation and transcendence of that which was given. In the realm of theory this meant examining the system of categories deployed by bourgeois political economy, pointing to the nature of its abstractions (limits, biases, inconsistencies, etc.) and dialectically utilizing some of those same categories to produce new ones with meanings that diverged radically from the original ones. Understood in this sense, Marx's *critique of political economy*, places both inside and outside the classical political economy tradition—the tradition of Adam Smith and David Ricardo—at the same time. This is the case with Adam Smith's category of "previous accumulation," which Marx refers to in the *Grundrisse* as "original accumulation" (Marx, 1973: 459), and later on in *Capital* as "primitive accumulation" (Marx, 1990: 873).

As Marx made clear in *Capital*, the necessity of accounting for previous accumulation had been acknowledged by classical political economists both for explaining capital as well as for justifying profit. Adam Smith (1937: 48) talked about "previous accumulation of stock" which sets in motion wage labor. Nassau Senior (1965) had provided a justification of profit based on his abstinence theory which also explained the origin of capital. By investing primitive accumulation with a radically new meaning, Marx developed a powerful critique of these "bourgeois" accounts of the emergence of capital-wage labor relation which tried to argue that abstinence, hoarding, and saving were undertaken by the "diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite," a decision that explained their accumulated wealth and property vis a vis the precarious condition of the "lazy rascals" who had "nothing to sell but themselves" (ibid).<sup>1</sup> For Marx this "nursery tale" (ibid: 874) was yet another example of how "bourgeois" history tended to naturalize, eternalize, and legitimize an emerging capitalist society while obscuring the history of class struggles in real historical developments. In this regard it is important to remember that since his early writings Marx had tackled head on "bourgeois" theories and the nature of their theoretical abstractions. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 his critical darts were aimed at the ways in which the concepts of wages, rents, and profits were naturalized into ahistorical categories in an apologetic theoretical scaffold that celebrated the virtues of private property and markets while obscuring the state of dependency and unequal power of those that had nothing but themselves to sell in the market.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx famously ridiculed such ahistorical recountings of the origin and distribution of property and wealth in modern society by comparing the "bourgeois" version of primitive accumulation with the role of the original sin in theology (Marx, 1990: 873).

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx devoted considerable space to the analysis of various types of pre-capitalist property relations in relation to communal modes of production and appropriation to highlight the contrast with production for profit and accumulation (Marx, 1973: 471-479). In the passages on original accumulation, Marx writes eloquently of the condition of labor in capitalist social relations—a condition in which living labor is confronted by past objectified labor as an instrument of domination.<sup>2</sup>

Still, Marx's concept of primitive accumulation is developed more comprehensively in the eighth and final part of volume one of *Capital*, titled “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” where he provides the reader with a mass of material pertaining to the *historical* rise of the capitalist mode of production as the hegemonic socio-economic system in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> This section, consisting of eight chapters, comes after Marx has developed the concept of capital through the construction of abstract theoretical categories (e.g. abstract labour, labor power, surplus value etc.) earlier in the book. His turn to concrete history at this point reflects Marx's awareness of the inevitable challenge of a historical mode of analysis, i.e. one must account for the prehistory of the historicized object of analysis—in this case, capitalist mode of production.

In *Capital*, Marx sought to show how the “so-called primitive accumulation ... is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” and how it created the market for labor power by producing a class of “bird-free” laborers freed from both the bondage of feudal class relations as well as from all property in means of production (Marx, 1990: 874, 896). Marx's focus on the *dispossession/separation* of the direct producers required him to point to the multiple, parallel, and complex processes that came together to shape these instances of expropriation or forced separation—starting from English enclosures to colonization, slavery and overseas plunder and coercive national policies pertaining to wages, taxes, trade and credit.

This complex, prolonged, and tortuous history produces the labor market on one hand and industrial capitalists on the other hand. In showing this, Marx de-naturalizes the history of capital by emphasizing the constitutive role of force and violence. In contrast to the “freedom, equality, property and Bentham” (Marx, 1990: 280) of the markets with rights-bearing and rights-respecting members of the bourgeois society, Marx emphasizes the violent role of expropriative force—of negation and erasure of (other) rights and property (Marx, 1990: 927)—that laid the foundations of a bourgeois society founded on capitalist industrial wealth. In Marx's writings, primitive accumulation is an expansive concept which connects the theoretical concept

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<sup>2</sup> See Marx (1973: 461-462 and 471) for examples of his treatment of this topic.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect much literature has focused on the studies Marx did during the last decade of his life on non-western and pre-capitalist societies, and how this endeavor altered significantly his perspectives on history to the point that he abandoned the unilinear approach to historical change that had tainted many of his earlier works. Important works on this issue are Dussel (1990) and Anderson (2010).

of capital as a social relation--a relation between moneyed people and dispossessed labourers--to the concrete and parallel histories of enrichment of a class of people (capitalists) and the dispossession of another class of people (workers). But the encounter between capitalists and workers was more complex, it required a whole set of interventions to transform and consolidate the encounter as industrial capitalist relation.

The type-form of primitive accumulation was of course the enclosure of agricultural land and expropriation of peasantry from farmland in England, both through private initiatives and state legislations at different points of time between fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. However, while Marx emphasized the centrality of dispossession in the genesis of capitalist social relations, he connected it to diverse events as can be seen in his discussion of how public debt and the fiscal system contributed to the “capitalization of wealth and the expropriation of the masses” (Marx, 1990: 921):

The public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation. As with the stroke of an enchanter’s wand, it endows unproductive money with the power of creation and thus turns it into capital, without forcing it to expose itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from its employment in industry or even in usury ... As the national debt is backed by the revenues of the state, which must cover the annual interest payments, etc., the modern system of taxation was the necessary complement of the system of national loans... Here, however, we are less concerned with the destructive influence it exercises on the situation of the wage-labourer than with the forcible expropriation, resulting from it, of peasants, artisans, in short, of all the constituents of the lower middle-class. (Marx, 1990: 919-921)

In this connection, Marx refers to the role of protectionist trade policies, where “the system of protection was an artificial means of manufacturing manufacturers, or expropriating independent workers, of capitalizing the national means of production and subsistence...” (Marx, 1990: 921). Marx also recognizes the crucial importance of how “[t]he discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous populations 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 the dawn of the era of capitalist production” and why “[t]hese idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation” (Marx, 1990: 915).<sup>4</sup>

Also important in the development of Marx’s argument is his exploration of some of the political and cultural conditions of existence required to develop and sustain the labor market given the resistance of the dispossessed producers. In his examination of the “Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated” he documents how, during the end of the 15th and the whole of the 16th century, legislation against vagabondage was passed and enforced whipping the dispossessed producers into the factory as wage-laborers. For Marx, this and other processes contributed to developing a working class “which by education, tradition, and habit looks upon the requirements of [the capitalist] mode of production as self-evident natural laws” (ibid: 899).

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<sup>4</sup> For classic renditions of the roles that the Americas, Africa, and Asia had in explaining European development, see Galeano (1997), Rodney (1981), Hobson (2004), and Habib (1975)

Along these lines McNally (2012: 49) highlights how other types of legislation would follow so that industrial by-products would not provide “economic resources outside the matrix of the wage-relation” in what used to be recognized as “worker’s customary property-rights.” Perelman (2000) mentions “Game Laws” in Britain that prevented the common people from hunting in the woods and thus securing any means of subsistence.<sup>5</sup> E.P.Thompson (1967) chronicles the cultural interventions in the life of working people to orient them to the new work regime under capitalism—symbolized in the ‘clock’ as the regulator and the measurer of a new concept of work.

In short, the separation of direct producers from independent access to means of production and subsistence is the theoretical core of the concept of primitive accumulation as deployed by Marx; concrete historical processes of such separation are varied and multiple. It is also clear that the separation itself may not automatically produce capitalist mode of production. Hence the ultimate outcome of primitive accumulation will have to be historically investigated in concrete social contexts.

### **3. Contemporary Use of Primitive Accumulation**

The concept of primitive accumulation curiously resurfaced in the context of rapid industrialization in Soviet Russia. Yevgeni Preobrazhensky coined the term primitive socialist accumulation to refer to the processes of financing socialist industrialization in a largely agrarian economy. In general, the use of primitive accumulation was confined to historical accounts of transition to capitalism in developing countries. The contemporary Marxist writings on primitive accumulation has rescued the notion from its marginal position in the Marxian discourse and placed it right at the heart of contemporary analyses of capitalism. These new applications of the concept of primitive accumulation have been used to examine a variety of topics such as present day land-grabs (Basu, 2007; Hall, 2013), gender and reproduction (Federicci, 2004; Werholf, 2000), intellectual property rights (Harvey, 2006, Basu 2008, Perelman, 2002), and financialization and neoliberalism (Harvey, 2003).<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary deployments of the concept have led to the reconceptualization of the concept itself. Throughout *Capital* Marx seems to move back and forth between a teleological view of historical change and a conjunctural understanding that is informed by contingency. In terms of an application of the former, a popular usage of primitive accumulation employs a teleological understanding of historical materialism to posit primitive accumulation as the “becoming of capital,” an initial stage in a historical journey through the various modes of production in which the capitalist mode of production supersedes pre-capitalist ones. The starting point is the encounter between the owners of money and the dispossessed workers where capital, once constituted, reproduces this relationship of dispossession on an expanded scale, driven by the forces of production (Engels, 1987; Kautsky, 1910).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is very important to remember that one of Marx’s earliest newspaper articles, published in five parts in 1842 in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, was related to the “Debates on the Law on the Theft of Wood” that were taking place in the Rhineland.

<sup>6</sup> Given the magnitude of this literature, we cannot review it here. See Bhattacharya (2010) and Hall (2012, 2013) for general reviews of the literature.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the logic and development of the “modes of production” theory in the Marxian theoretical tradition, refer to Olsen (2009).

This particular historicist and reading of the concept of primitive accumulation, which does find support in some parts of the text, like Marx's chapter on "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" (Marx, 1990: 927-928), is an example of the deployment of the Hegelian theoretical scaffold by appealing to the "being-becoming" distinction that explains the constitution of a self-reproducing totality. Primitive accumulation is posited as the historical precondition for the capitalist class relation, and therefore "disappear[s] as real capital arises" (Marx, 1973: 459) given that it can now secure its own conditions of existence from within itself.<sup>8</sup> Thus capital, once arisen, creates new capital through exploitation and accumulation while it overcomes natural constraints on the labour supply through the dynamics of the industrial reserve army which is inescapably tied to the dynamics of the business cycle. The conditions of (expanded) reproduction of capital can now be secured within the capitalist economy. It is otherwise during the "becoming" of capital when capital secured its conditions from outside, i.e. the non-capitalist space.

Both Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin theoretically resurrected the idea in the context of a mature and expanding capitalist mode of production—the necessity of a non-capitalist space for capital to invade, and thereby destroy, in order to secure natural resources, cheap labour, markets for final products, and also for profitable investment of accumulated capital. Luxemburg and Lenin thus connected primitive accumulation to the internal contradictions of a capitalist economy, manifested in the problems of underconsumption and falling rate of profits among others.

David Harvey has taken the Luxemburg theses and stripped it of its teleological implications. Harvey(2003) argues that capital actively "creates" its outside at one point in time and space to destroy at another, when faced with a crisis of overaccumulation. Harvey prefers the term "accumulation by dispossession" to primitive accumulation to emphatically make the point that primitive accumulation is a continuous process and not one that ends with the rise of capitalist mode of production. In line with Harvey, various contemporary Marxist writings use a notion of "primitive accumulation" as an ongoing process that secures conditions of reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. The idea of self-reproducing, self-subsistent capitalist mode of production has to be jettisoned the moment one theorizes "primitive accumulation" as internal to the workings of a capitalist economy. With it also goes the teleology inherent in the being-becoming distinction. We therefore, have a new theoretical problematic inaugurated by contemporary writings of Marxists on primitive accumulation.<sup>9</sup>

In these current approaches the process of *privatization* is seen as one of the most potent tools for primitive accumulation, especially the waves of privatization that have accompanied the last decades of capitalism. This period is said to be characterized by the undermining of the

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Grundrisse* (1973: 459) Marx mentions that "[o]nce developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence," a statement that can be plausibly interpreted to support this conclusion of the independence of capital once it has been fully constituted. Chakrabarty and Cullenberg (2003) refer to this type of logic as the "metaphysics of full presence," where capital does not require a "non-capitalist outside" to reproduce itself.

<sup>9</sup> "The disadvantage of these assumptions [in the traditional understanding of primitive accumulation] is that they relegate accumulation based on predation, fraud, and violence to an 'original state' that is considered no longer relevant or, as with Luxemburg, as being somehow 'outside' of capitalism as a closed system." (Harvey, 2003: 144).

“commons” created by welfare states of richer countries via privatization and commoditization under what is referred to as “neoliberal capitalism” (De Angelis, 2001; Harvey, 2003, 2006) and by the integration of state assets in China and the former Soviet Union into the metabolism of global capital accumulation (Harvey, 2003: 149). Finance is also seen as an instrument of accumulation by dispossession, where financial markets facilitate large-scale redistributions of wealth in favor of global corporate capital.<sup>10</sup>

Further, the “neoliberal” state itself engages in redistributive policies— from lower income to upper income social classes as also from public to private domains—through privatization but also through tax incentives and subsidies to business coupled with a reduction in social expenditure. Internationally, carefully manipulated debt traps (Latin American countries in the 1980s and 1990s) and financial crises (Asian crisis in 1997- 1998) have resulted in transfer of wealth from poorer to richer countries. Crises lead to devaluation of assets, which are subsequently seized by corporate capital. Nation-states and international organizations like World Bank, IMF etc. work in tandem to enable “accumulation of dispossession” through careful management of crises.

Andreasson (2006) points to an expanding sphere of dispossession based on an extension of private property regimes not only by traditional means, but also, and increasingly so, by more sophisticated and novel means like “intellectual property rights”. Boyle (2002) refers to “the enclosure of the intangible commons of the mind” as the “new kind of enclosure movement”.<sup>11</sup>

In an influential intervention, Louis Althusser, in his very last writings, argued that Marx’s chapters on primitive accumulation in *Capital* are exemplary instances of anti-essentialist epistemology that Marx brought to the study of political economy—and that these chapters (along with similar chapters like those on the struggles over the length of the working day) stand outside the *formal* essentialist architecture i.e. outside the “fictitious unity”, of *Capital*. Althusser advances a historical-aleatory reading of capital where the encounter between owners of money and dispossessed was not a fated event and neither is the stability of the encounter rationally ordained.

The elements of the capitalist mode of production were not fated to come together, since they “do not exist in history so that a mode of production may exist, they exist in history in a ‘floating’ state prior to their ‘accumulation’ and ‘combination’, each being the product of its own history, and none being the teleological product of the others or their history” (Althusser, 2006: 198). As opposed to the *necessity* or *inevitability* of the encounter, Althusser emphasizes its contingency:

‘It so happens’ that this encounter took place, and ‘took hold’, which means that it did not come undone as soon as it came about, but *lasted*, and became an accomplished fact, the

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<sup>10</sup> “Stock promotions, ponzi schemes, structured asset destruction through inflation, asset stripping through mergers and acquisitions, the promotion of levels of debt incumbency that reduced whole populations, even in the advanced capitalist countries, to debt peonage, to say nothing of corporate fraud, dispossession of assets (the raiding of pension funds and their decimation by stock and corporate collapses) by credit and stock manipulations – all of these became central features of the capitalist financial system”(Harvey, 2006: 154).

<sup>11</sup> See also Harvey (2006), and Perelman (2002).

accomplished fact of this encounter, inducing stable relationships and a necessity the study of which yields ‘laws’—tendential laws, of course.....What matters about this conception is less the elaboration of laws, hence of an essence, than the *aleatory character of the ‘taking-hold’ of this encounter, which gives rise to an accomplished fact* whose laws it is possible to state” (Althusser, 2006: 197; emphasis in original).

The “encounter” and its stability is contingent and provisional and thus vulnerable to dissolution or transformation. In this sense, primitive accumulation can be thought of as the process that continually reproduces the encounter constitutive of capitalist mode of production, but this reproduction is always contingent, provisional and uncertain. In Althusser’s rendition, primitive accumulation points to the provisional stability and radical uncertainty that is internal to the capitalist mode.<sup>12</sup>

The centrality of primitive accumulation to reproduction of capitalism, as conceptualized variously in contemporary contributions, however, raises the issue of how to distinguish between capitalist accumulation and primitive accumulation. The distinction has traditionally often been drawn on the basis of the salience of economic versus extra-economic, market versus non-market, productive versus appropriative forces. Primitive accumulation has often been identified with the state as the monopoly owner of arbitrary power. Yet, nature, economy, culture and politics may all play a role in primitive accumulation understood as separation of direct producers from means of production. The distinction between capitalist accumulation and primitive accumulation becomes a theoretical problem in itself (Zarembka, 2002; De Angelis, 2001; Bhattacharya, 2010).

#### **4. Primitive Accumulation and the “outside” of capital**

Contemporary conceptualizations of primitive accumulation also point to another theoretical problematic—the logical necessity of an “outside” of capital if primitive accumulation is theorized as constitutive of capitalist mode of production. In the historical rise of industrial capitalism, entire pre-capitalist societies from which capitalism emerged were the “outside” of capital and capital historically grew *out* of it. To talk about primitive accumulation as a continuous process, we must theorize an *enduring* “outside” of capital—not merely that from which capital emerges and leaves behind—but that which marks the limits of capital.

In the Marxian literature we can identify three different notions of the “outside” of capital with slight variations within. First, there is an “outside” that is *historically given*—e.g. traditional, pre-capitalist societies where “attachment” to land still exists, communal rights over means of production and subsistence, artisans and petty producers with their own means of production, peasants working on family farms and so on. Luxemburg’s (2003) theory of underconsumption and Lenin’s (1916) theory of imperialism are classic examples of this particular deployment of the concept of the given outside while Meillassoux’s (1972) and Wolpe’s (1972) contributions lay emphasis on the importance of this outside to cheapen the value of labor power when part of the reproduction costs of labor power are borne by the “outside.”

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<sup>12</sup> See Read (2002; 2003) for a further discussion of the role of the “aleatory” in capital’s development.

Basu (2007, 2008) emphasizes how through primitive accumulation, exclusive control over property rights in markets and over resources of production is achieved by global capital to extract “ground rent” by providing access to such monopolized items. Such extraction of ground rent, preceded by and made possible by primitive accumulation, can leave intact historically given non-capitalist modes of production—e.g. extraction of ground rent by multinational corporations for use of genetically modified seeds by peasants in developing countries.

The second notion of the outside explains it as the result of capital’s own development. This follows the recognition that capital may not be able to secure its conditions of existence internally, especially conditions associated with its stabilization in moments of crisis. Harvey argues that,

“capitalism necessarily and always creates its own ‘other’. The idea that some sort of ‘outside’ is necessary therefore has relevance. But capitalism can either make use of some pre-existing outside.....or *it can actively manufacture it*.....capitalism always requires a fund of assets *outside of itself* if it is to confront and circumvent pressures of overaccumulation. If those assets, such as empty land or new raw material sources, do not lie to hand, *then capitalism must somehow produce them*” (Harvey, 2003:141-143, emphasis added)

Sanyal (2007) argues that while capital may be economically self-subsistent, the political conditions of reproduction of capital--particularly in the postcolonial context—may require it to actively engage in the reproduction of a non-capitalist “outside”. While asserting that primitive accumulation is inescapable for expanded reproduction of capital, Sanyal argues that victims of primitive accumulation—the dispossessed producers—may not be absorbed in capitalist wage-labour relation. Sanyal contrasts the classical narrative of primitive accumulation (“enclosures” followed by “bloody legislations” forcing the dispossessed labourers into factory employment) with the postcolonial context where the dispossessed are turned away from the factory gates. This excluded labor force emerges as a “surplus labor” that has to be dealt with via welfarist policies of the state. The excluded labor force is often reunited with means of production in a petty production economy (creating much of the vast informal economy in developing economies). Thus reproduction of postcolonial capitalism involves two simultaneous and contradictory processes--primitive accumulation, which enables a flow of means of production from the non-capitalist space to the capitalist space, and welfarist governance that necessitates a flow of surplus in the reverse direction re-constituting a non-capitalist space by reuniting excluded labor with means of production. The reconstituted non-capitalist space becomes the target of fresh waves of primitive accumulation.

Finally, the “outside” can also be conceived as the product of *resistance* to capital. In the developed countries, examples of this resistance are welfare state institutions created under public pressure to directly provide use-values to the citizens, “commons” created by communities, sites of self-employed production, legal barriers to exploitation implemented because of militant worker’s movements, etc.<sup>13</sup> In developing countries, commoning as a social

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<sup>13</sup> “The entitlements and rights guaranteed by the post-war welfare state for example, can be understood as the institutionalisation in particular *forms* of social commons. Together with high growth policies, the implementation of full employment policies and the institutionalisation of productivity deals, the welfare state was set to accommodate people's expectations after two world wars, the Soviet revolution, and a growing international union movement. Therefore, the global current neoliberal project, which in various ways targets the social commons

process can be seen even in urban areas as collective encroachment on urban space by squatters and vendors, through rampant piracy of copyrighted products and through moral assertion of rights to livelihoods independent of the regime of private property rights and markets, that force the state to tolerate such demands on grounds of “exception” while upholding property and market as the “norm”.

The theoretical recognition of an “outside” of capital is not unproblematic, given that “[a]nalyzing primitive accumulation requires some conception of where the ‘boundaries’ of capitalist social relations are: of what is ‘inside’ capitalism and what is ‘outside’ it” (Hall, 2012: 1194).

## 5. Conclusion

Separation from the means of production and subsistence provides one of the conditions of existence of one important dimension of the capitalist mode of production: *generalized commodity production*, that is, a situation where the capacity to work itself has become a commodity (labor power) on a large scale and the worker’s subsistence becomes to a great extent market-dependent.<sup>14</sup> This opens the door for understanding Marx’s analysis of abstract labor as socially necessary labor time, where the operation of the market “translates concrete (individual) labor into abstract (social) labor, and it does so via the medium of money” and why “commodity producers experience the law of value—exchange governed by socially necessary labor time—as an external pressure” (McNally, 1993:178-179). In other words, primitive accumulation gives new meaning to how institutions like markets, money, and the division of labor—all of them predating capitalism—however work within capitalism, as parts of a system whose purpose is the self-expansion of value. These are the same institutions whose operations under the capitalist mode of production contribute to obscure the surplus labor extraction and exploitation that sustains capitalist profits. Primitive accumulation therefore can be conceived as serving historical and theoretical functions, functions united dialectically in Marx’s discourse that seeks to understand “the origin of the intertwining between ‘abstract concepts’ and ‘concrete reality’” (Mezzadra, 2011: 305).

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created in the post war period set itself as a modern form of enclosure, dubbed by some as ‘new enclosures’” (DeAngelis, 2001:19).

<sup>14</sup> Wood (2002) underlines how capitalism is about market dependence, and that such dependence might exist in situations where the laborers have direct control or access to means of production (i.e. land). For a contrasting view see Kozel (2006).

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