King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1177/0038038516661267](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516661267)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pradella, L. (2017). Marx and the Global South: Connecting History and Value Theory. *Sociology*, 51(1), 146-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516661267>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Marx and the global South: connecting history and value theory

Abstract: This article interrogates Marx's critique of political economy in the context of the global South and southern epistemologies. It first traces the contradictory roots of a non-Eurocentric conception of history within Adam Smith. Recovering Marx's silenced sociologies of colonialism in his writings and notebooks, it then shows that Marx incorporated colonialism and imperialism into his analysis of accumulation. The antagonism between wage-labour and capital needs to be understood as a global tendency, encompassing a hierarchy of forms of exploitation and oppression. Marx's support for the Taiping revolution (1850–64) played a crucial, albeit often ignored, role in his theorisation. It allowed him to recognise the living potential for anti-colonial struggles and international solidarities, thus breaking with Eurocentric accounts of history. The article concludes that it is crucial to sociology's global futures that it reconnects with the critique of political economy, and actively learns from the anti-imperialist South.

Keywords: China, colonialism, connected histories, historical sociology, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, southern epistemologies, value theory

Author Details:

Lucia Pradella
Department of European & International Studies
King's College London
22 Kingsway, Virginia Woolf Building
London WC2B 6LE
United Kingdom
lucia.pradella@kcl.ac.uk

Introduction

The emergence at the centre of world politics of peoples that were for centuries subjected to Western colonialism is an ongoing transformation whose significance can hardly be overestimated. In the wake of the anti-colonial movement and decolonisation, scholars from the global South challenged 'traditional' divisions of the social sciences as resulting from and reinforcing colonial fault lines (Amselle, 1990; van der Linden, 2008; Wolf, 1995). Given colonialism's deep entrenchment in

the power structures of the global political economy, however, the ‘abyssal global lines’ dividing metropolitan and peripheral societies keep on reproducing themselves (Santos, 2014b). Struggles for social justice in the South have thus been accompanied by a proliferation of studies calling for recognition of the knowledge produced in the South and a re-making of the social sciences as such (e.g., Connell, 2007; Keim et al., 2014). In order for this project not to result in a pluralisation of voices that leaves Eurocentric frameworks intact, it is crucial – as this Special Issue seeks – to rethink sociology’s pasts in ways that account for the inter-connectedness of global development (Bhambra, 2007b). As Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s (2014b) proposal of epistemologies of the South highlights, this endeavour crucially depends on the construction and validation of knowledge in the struggles of social groups against injustice and oppression.

The present article argues that Marx’s critique of political economy is relevant for this task. This argument may sound provocative, if not groundless. Many postcolonial scholars, in fact, read Marx as a supporter of European colonialism (see Chaturvedi, 2010; Hobson, 2013). While Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Spivak (1991) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008) also identified emancipatory elements in Marx’s critique of political economy, Marxist historical sociologists like the late Giovanni Arrighi and Andre Gunder Frank were more dismissive. In *Reorient* Frank (1998: 9) portrays Marx as a complicit supporter of Western imperialism similar to scholars like Max Weber or Oswald Spengler. In *Adam Smith in Beijing* (2007) Arrighi draws on Adam Smith rather than Marx to interpret the challenges posed by China’s re-emergence at the centre of the world economy. Frank’s and Arrighi’s intellectual trajectories themselves manifest a deeper inability of Marxist historical sociology theoretically to respond to the rise of postcolonial studies and global history. Although world-systems theories and theories of uneven and combined development (U&CD) pay attention (to various degrees) to colonialism and imperialism, in fact, they have not incorporated them into their own theoretical foundations. Scholars in these traditions share the same assumption as postcolonial thinkers that Marx’s critique of political economy is restricted to Britain as a self-enclosed society separated from its colonial reality. This autocentric framework opens a gulf between the theory of capitalist development and its actual historical shape, underpinning unilinear understandings of history. Within this framework, Marx can hardly avoid the charge of Eurocentrism.

These interpretations of Marx, however, hardly relate to his articles and notebooks on colonialism and non-Western societies. While most of these articles have been available at least since 1959, the historical-critical edition of Marx and Engels's writings (the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, 1975 –) has brought to light his notebooks of excerpts, showing that his analysis of colonialism was broader and more continuously developed than previously believed (Anderson, 2010; Pradella, 2014). Yet postcolonial and even Marxist debates still show little interest in this rich material. This silence itself speaks volumes. It manifests the deeply entrenched assumption that colonialism is extrinsic to Marx's theory of capital and, more generally, that classical sociology and political economy conceptualised the 'social' with reference only to the metropolitan core. Tracing sociology's roots in the stadial theory of history, Gurinder K. Bhambra (2007: 37) argues that colonial encounters were not specifically addressed by theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, although they provided them with data in many cases. According to Steven Seidman (1996) classical sociologists did not incorporate the dynamics of empire into their basic categories, modes of explanation and narratives. For John Hobson, 'the vast majority of politico-economic thought from 1760 onwards has effectively advanced provincial or parochial normative visions that defend or promote or even celebrate Europe and/or the West as the highest or ideal normative referent in the world political economy' (2013: 1025).

This article argues that, on the contrary, colonialism is internal not only to Marx's but also to Smith's theorisations of capitalism. I advance this argument proceeding as follows. After discussing the consensus interpretation of Marx in the next section, I investigate the common roots of classical sociology and political economy within the Scottish Enlightenment. I show that Smith's elaboration of the labour theory of value allowed him to understand accumulation as a global process, including colonialism and imperialism as constitutive. This theory thus laid the premises for conceptualising historical inter-connectedness, contradicting the assumptions of the stadial theory Smith himself elaborated: a theory that was closely linked to Smith's free trade doctrine and the interests of the British bourgeoisie at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Interestingly – as I discuss in the following section – Marx's notebooks and writings from the mid-1840s onwards address these contradictions of Smith's system, anticipating in some ways contemporary studies of global and connected

histories. But it was the Taping revolution (1850–64) that represented a real turning point in Marx's elaboration. Though they are much less debated than his problematic articles on India¹, in his writings on China Marx for the first time supported popular struggles in Asia against colonial domination. Marx's 'learning from the South' – using Santos's words (2014b) – led him radically to break with bourgeois conceptions of capitalism and world history. His critique of capital as an imperialism system – I maintain in the following section – is crucially informed by this recognition of the inter-connectedness of different modes of social transformation.

Marx in and beyond Eurocentrism

The convergence between the critiques of Marx as a Eurocentric thinker raised by postcolonial and Marxist scholars is rooted in a shared interpretation of his critique of political economy. It is commonly assumed that Marx thought of capital 'in the image of a unity that arises in one part of the world at a particular period and then develops globally over historical time' (Chakrabarty, 2008: 47). Autocentric (methodologically nationalist) and Eurocentric models are closely intertwined. Conceptualising society as coinciding with the state and the national territory, in fact, obfuscates the constitutive role of colonialism and imperialism, and leads to a naturalisation of the international inequalities resulting from capitalist development. This grounds unilinear understandings of history according to which each people has to go through the same stages in order to reach development. In this model, the world is seen through European lens and the agency of non-European peoples is downplayed or silenced, up to the point of supporting Western colonialism and imperialism (Blaut, 1993: 15–16). Questioning the idea of societies as closed entities is thus crucial to rethinking the conceptual underpinnings of modern history (Washbrook, 1997: 417).

It is yet remarkable that, within this consensus interpretation, while Marx cannot escape the charge of Eurocentrism, he nevertheless partially transcends it. In Spivak's view (1999: 99), for example, Marx never developed a theoretical grasp of the matter of imperialism; his value theory would be restricted to Britain and yield results in the interests of Britain, but would also allow comprehension of colonialism and the new international division of labour under neoliberalism. For Chakrabarty (2008: 47), Marx's writings 'constitute one of the founding moments in the history of anti-

imperial thought', an inextricable reference for postcolonial studies. Chakrabarty does not criticise Marx for, in his view, locating capitalism's origins in Europe, but because the universal categories he elaborated in the light of the European model end up erasing historical difference (2008: 48). Dependency and world-systems theorists do not offer substantially alternative interpretations. For Frank (1978), Ruy Mauro Marini (1976) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1985), Marx focused on the core of the system leaving out of account external relations, as if capitalism were understandable in a core isolated from the world. Marx – Samir Amin argues – did not believe in the actual coincidence of his autocentric model and its actual 'object' but still maintained that capitalist expansion would 'homogenise global society on the basis of a generalised social polarisation [...] similar from one country to the next' (1989: 121; 1973: 73–75).

The failure of world-systems theory to overcome this model is the reason why, despite its crucial contribution to understanding global inter-connectedness, it did not elaborate a proper *theory* of the capitalist world-system (Dussel and Yanez, 1990: 69). In a way that is only apparently paradoxical, an autocentric framework informs both 'internalist' and 'externalist' interpretations of the origins of capitalism (Hilton, 1976; see Bhambra, 2007: 142). This is most obviously true of Robert Brenner (1977). His exclusive focus on class conflicts in the English countryside has been criticised for occluding the role played by the merchant class both in proto-industrialisation in England and plantation slavery in the New World (Callinicos, 1995: 133). Brenner overlooked that the expansion of world trade and colonisation was not confined to market relations, but underpinned the expansion of class-based commodity production (Blaut, 1991: 371). The interlinkages between trade, colonialism, and global class relations, however, remain untheorized also in world-systems theory. Wallerstein (1987), for example, still identified Europe as the origin of his world system (Bhambra, 2011: 673) and understood the expansion of this Europe-centred world-system in terms of market relations. In *Reorient* Frank (1998: 5) questioned this framework for downplaying the centrality of Asia before 1800 (see Pomeranz, 2000), not for being autocentric. His reconstruction of modern global economic history is thus rather descriptive and disperses into multiplicity.

Theories of uneven and combined development (U&CD) proceed on a similar assumption that imperialism is a later stage of capitalist development, 'something that

occurs as a consequence of capitalism's imperative for economic expansion' (Bhambra, 2011: 676). It is widely believed that only in the early decades of the twentieth century did Marxist debates on imperialism and U&CD address the question of the 'international' (Rosenberg, 2006; Callinicos, 2009). For some scholars, Marx did not just fail to grasp the uneven and combined character of capitalist development, he even believed in the pacifying consequences of universal inter-dependence (Teschke, 2011: 1091). Retaining an autocentric framework, these accounts are unable radically to break with unilinearity. Engaging with Bhambra (2011) and Hobson (2011), Anievas and Nisancioglu criticise Brenner for 'obliterating the histories of colonialism, slavery and imperialism' that Marx included in his own analysis of 'primitive accumulation' (2013: 84). Yet they fail to explain how these histories are incorporated into the theory of U&CD, and how the latter relates to Marx's reconstruction of 'primitive accumulation'. Historical analysis adds evidence of the interconnectedness of global development rather than underpinning an alternative theoretical perspective. References to 'multilinearity' and 'interconnectedness' are thus nothing but the counterpart of a presupposed unilinear framework.

Conflicting Sociologies of the Scottish Enlightenment

Tracing the common roots of classical sociology and political economy in the stadial theory of history shows that this autocentric framework only partially informed these disciplines at their inception. The stadial theory of history emerged in France and Britain at the dawn of the industrial revolution and of the revolutionary movements that shook not only Europe but the Atlantic world as a whole (Knight, 2000). Four historical stages based on different modes of subsistence were distinguished: hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce (Meek, 1976: 127–8). Within this materialist framework, society emerged as an object of study unto itself. The study of society spanned from commercial societies in Europe to non-Western societies and an emerging global society. Given its pre-disciplinary, holistic ambition, the four stages theory 'aimed to provide theories of social development as a whole' (Rosenberg, 2006: 308). This historical approach informed the then emerging classical political economy (Meek, 1976: 119–221), and classical political economy, in its turn, contributed to the study of society, pushing historical research forward.

Nowhere is this relationship more evident than within Adam Smith. His original and influential *Lectures on Jurisprudence* were probably delivered several years before the first stadial theories of history were published in Scotland (Meek, 1976). Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) builds on this work: combining historical and deductive methods, it starts with abstract categories such as value, labour and exchange and then seeks to ascend to a more concrete level of analysis. Crucially, value, labour and exchange are relational concepts, which imply the existence of a plurality of societiesⁱⁱ. Smith, therefore, did not adopt an autocentric framework in developing the labour theory of value. On the contrary, he presupposed a model in which nation-state and the world of commerce coincide. He thus conflated the state and a global, rather than a national, society (Smith, 1961, I: 523). This allowed him to theorise the global dimension of capitalist society as a totality encompassing different imperial states and the colonies.

Smith went as far as arguing that capital consists of unpaid labour, thus contradicting the underlying optimism of his own system. Echoing Adam Ferguson, he described the negative effects of the division of labour on the workers, and admitted that overproduction in the internal market requires an expansion of the foreign market, and colonial trade raises the rate of profit (Smith, 1961, II: 128–9). Capitalism thus seemed to favour one class against another, and the more competitive nation against the less. Antagonism and state violence appeared to be intrinsic to the capitalist system, which reproduced in new form the colonial system Smith set to criticise. Crucially, this conflictual view highlighted the inter-linkages between developments in Europe and in the rest of the world. In Book IV, Chapter VII, 'Of Colonies', for example, Smith analyses 'the general advantages which Europe, considered as one great country, has derived from the discovery and colonization of America', both in terms of 'enjoyments' and 'augmentation of its industry' (1961, II: 92). Smith deems 'the discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope [...] the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind' (1961, II: 125), as they united the most distant part of the world and made them interdependent. Not only did Smith describe the role of the colonial and protectionist systems in the development of English manufacture, he also argued that 'the owners of the great mercantile capitals are necessarily the leaders and conductors of the whole industry of every nation' (1961, II: 113).

In this light, interactions between and specificities of geographically coexisting societies could be identified. It is thus not surprising that Smith developed possibly the first political economy analysis of societies in Asian countries like China and India (Krader, 1975: 119). He recognised the strength of Asian manufactures, arguing that ‘in manufacturing and industry, China and Indostan, through inferior, seem not to be much inferior to any part of Europe’ (1961, I: 206; see Washbrook, 1997: 418). Although he deemed the Chinese economy to be stationary, he believed that it was stationary at a high level of development, to the point of declaring that ‘China is a much richer country than any part of Europe’ (1961, I: 189). This analysis pushed the historicization of capitalism to a limit point – a limit Smith himself could not cross. Despite debates on his presumed anti-imperialism (for a discussion, see Hobson, 2013: 1036), it is irrefutable that Smith was a supporter of the colonial enterprise. In the *Wealth of Nations* he tried to respond to the crisis of the First British Empire – also due to the mounting rebellion in the North American colonies – by proposing a ‘new project of empire’ expanding in the populous and fertile countries of Asia (1961, II: 484)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Smith’s support for British capitalism and colonialism helps explain why he did not develop his value theory consistently. At the beginning of the *Wealth of Nations* the division of labour is said to contribute to ‘general plenty’, which ‘diffuses itself through all the different ranks of the society’ (1961, I: 18). The language of class and international antagonisms thus gives way to the language of individuals and the free market. The violence of accumulation is at the same time enhanced by and concealed under the veil of the self-regulating market. For Smith, the interactions between self-interested producers and consumers leads to a general equilibrium between supply and demand that makes market and colonial expansion unnecessary. It is this equilibrium model that grounds the view of a self-enclosed national economy, leading to a shift from an approach centred on labour to one centred on the nation. The tension between these two approaches helps explain why Smith’s cosmopolitanism underpins both a rudimentary theory of imperialism and its opposite, a theory of the self-regulating market.

In the light of the latter theory, Smith argued that the advantages colonialism brought to Europe were relative rather than absolute (i.e., less than the advantages free trade would have brought, see Hobson, 2013: 1036), and conceptualised the emergence of

capitalism in Europe within an autocentric framework. The world market appeared to be a sum of potentially equal and independent nations, which could all prosper in a system of perfect competition. European commercial society thus seemed to be coexisting peacefully with other societies and indicating the *telos* of their development. Capitalist relations were presented as natural laws of society as such, against which pre-capitalist societies were measured: the level of division of labour, commercial exchange and capital accumulation were elevated to normative principles (Marx, 1973: 87; Meeks, 1976: 154). In typically colonialist fashion, the inequalities existing nationally and internationally were naturalized, and attributed to the intrinsic characteristics of individuals and entire peoples (Santos, 2014a: 68). Smith thus came to treat Amerindian society as the primitive stage of development, and from there drew a developmental line culminating with Europe (Hobson, 2013). This narrative, which is essentially the ‘narrative of capital’, ‘turns the violence of mercantile trade, war, genocide, conquest and colonialism into a story of universal progress, development, modernisation and freedom.’ (Chatterjee, 1993: 235).

China Digressions?

Marx’s notebooks show that he was aware of the contradictions of Smith’s system from the beginning of his economic studies, which also included the main works of world history of his time. Marx paid close attention to the relationship between capitalism and colonialism. In continuity with ‘mercantilist’ economists, he viewed European societies as colonial systems, including formal and informal colonies, and situated the industrial revolution in Britain within a global context. It is no exaggeration to argue that his account of the centrality of Atlantic slavery in the construction of capitalist modernity anticipates contemporary studies of global and connected histories (e.g., Shilliam, 2009; Subrahmanyam 1997: 748; Washbrook, 1997; Williams, 1964).

Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic

category of the greatest importance (Marx, 1976a: 167).

Marx investigated the role of the Triangular Trade in financing the European commercial presence in the Indian Ocean between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, when protective measures were crucial to defending British manufactures from Asian competition (e.g., Marx, 1979c: 148–56; 1976d: 921–22)^{iv}. Marx did not only consider the importance of Indian and Chinese markets to the development of capitalism in Europe. He also paid great attention to the international consequences of the industrial revolution, tracing the social effects of de-industrialisation from America to Africa the Middle East to Asia (Marx, 1983: 99, 318, 326–7, 477).

While before the industrial revolution British colonial and market expansion in India, however destructive, ‘did not go deeper than its surface’ – Marx argued (1979b: 126) – competition from British large-scale industry broke down ‘the entire framework of Indian society’. After 1833 the extension of the Asiatic markets was enforced by the ‘destruction of the human race’ (Marx, 1976d: 587). In China, the Indian-grown opium illegally exported by the East Indian Company had such destructive effects on the population that for a British observer of the time the slave trade was merciful in comparison (Marx, 1980a: 13–14). As a consequence of opium imports, in 1830 China’s balance of trade shifted for the first time in favour of Great Britain; liberalised in 1833, this illicit trade yearly fed ‘the British treasury at the expense of human life and morality’ (Marx, 1986: 234), laying the conditions for the ‘First Opium War’ (1839–42) (Fenby, 2008: xxxi).

Marx’s *New York Tribune* articles denounce the colonialist nature of British free trade and the ‘flagrant self-contradiction of the Christianity-canting and civilisation-mongering British Government’ (Marx, 1980a: 19; 1980c: 509). The robbery and domination exercised with parliamentary support, the explicit violation of treaties, the falsification of documents, plots, enslavement of the press: these were, for Marx, the liberal methods used by Britain to expand its markets and avert crises of overproduction. The colonial world, in his eyes, was a privileged vantage point from which to analyse capitalist society. ‘The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked’ (1979d: 222). The social devastation in countries like India and China was the *organic* result of the process of capital concentration on a world scale (1979d: 222). The ‘universal

brotherhood’ proffered by the free traders was nothing but ‘cosmopolitan exploitation’: not just a class but an entire nation could grow rich at the expense of another (Marx, 1976b: 464–5).

Marx, however, initially deemed the opening and subjugation of China to be probable, although he retained the hope that a victorious social revolution in Europe could lead to the emancipation of mankind (Marx and Engels, 1976). In January 1850, the tone changed. In the same *Neue Rheinische Zeitung Review* in which Marx and Engels discuss the discovery of the Californian gold mines and prophesy that the centre of gravity of world commerce would shift towards the Pacific Ocean, they refer to Gutzlaff’s communications on the threat of social revolution in China, and imagined European reactionaries fleeing revolution to find written on the Great Wall ‘*République chinoise: Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*’ (1978: 267).

During the First Opium War, Chinese resistance was characterised by traditional military practices and did not spread among the population; the Manchu dynasty was rather keen to end the war quickly in order to avoid an explosion of internal discontent. But China’s defeat and the unequal treaties that followed determined a growth of pauperism and emigration, galvanizing the existing social discontent and hatred of the foreigners. A system of contract labour migration developed which was commonly referred to as ‘the sale of pigs’. The trafficking of ‘coolies’ – workers in conditions of slavery or semi-slavery, often recruited by fraudulent means – grew in parallel with Asia’s integration into the world market^v and responded to the West Indian planters’ vital need to solve the labour shortages that followed the emancipation of the slaves (Campbell, 2005: 7; Williams, 1964: 28–9). In his articles Marx denounces the ‘wrongs inflicted “even unto death” upon misguided and bonded emigrants sold to worse than Slavery on the coast of Peru and into Cuban bondage’ (1986: 235).

After the First Opium War ‘the opium animated instead of stupefying’: attacks on foreigners proliferated, leading to a state of ‘chronic rebellion’ that lasted for at least ten years and sparked the ‘formidable revolution’ of the Taiping (1979a: 93). The insurgents aimed to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and proclaim the ‘Celestial Kingdom of Great Peace’ with its capital at the ancient imperial city of Nanking. They gathered thousands of peasants ready to fight and extended their control over central China, where they partitioned the land and established a system of

communitarian life. The Taiping revolution took on, ideally, a communist character as the insurgents demanded the abolition of private property. Marx greeted the revolution with favour.

It may seem a very strange, and very paradoxical assertion that the next uprising of the people of Europe, and their next movement for republican freedom and economy of government, may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire, – the very opposite of Europe – than on any other political cause that now exists [...] (Marx, 1979a: 93).

If the necessity of opening up new markets was the driving force of the British opium trade and the First Opium War, the Taiping revolution provoked a contraction of European markets; alongside the agricultural crisis in Western Europe, it thus enhanced the factors of crisis in Europe. The Chinese revolution, for Marx, could ‘throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis’ (1979a: 98). Its effects were going to be felt also in India, whose economy depended for full one seventh of its revenues on the sale of opium to the Chinese.

In 1856, having won its war of aggression in Persia, Great Britain, along with France, brought war back to China (1856–8). But here they encountered such a level of popular opposition that made it impossible to repeat the triumph of the First Opium War. The mass of the people now took an active role in the struggle against the British, especially in the southern provinces. In addition, Britain had to divert its troops towards India to repress the Sepoys’ uprising started in February 1857. The ‘great Asiatic nations’ were now manifesting their discontent of colonial rule.

The very coolies emigrating to foreign countries rise in mutiny, and as if by concert, on board every emigrant ship, and fight for its possession, and, rather than surrender, go down to the bottom with it, or perish in its flames. Even out of China, the Chinese colonists, the most submissive and meek of subjects hitherto, conspire and suddenly rise in nightly insurrection, as at Sarawak; or, as at Singapore, are held down by main force and vigilance only. The piratical policy of the British Government

has caused this universal outbreak of all Chinese against all foreigners, and marked it as a war of extermination (Engels, 1986: 281).

Marx foresaw that the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin made a return to hostilities inevitable, as actually happened one year later (Third Opium War, 1859–60). But this time Chinese reaction was severe: both the army and the economy were exerting considerable resistance. While Chinese exports increased, imports of Western commodities were stationary. This was partially due to the chronic state of social unrest in the country (Marx, 1980b: 32) and the opium-trade developing inversely to the import of Western industrial commodities. But regardless of these factors, for Marx the causes of the resistance of Chinese production were structural. Unlike in India, the British had failed to conquer the country and seize state power, and were thus unable to overturn the basis of its economy: the union between domestic industry and agriculture. Because of its high productivity levels, domestic industry managed to keep prices low and guarantee the rural population comfortable living conditions (Marx, 1981: 452). Marx thus thought it extremely unlikely, even after the Third Opium War, that the British would be able to supplant Chinese manufacturing production or conquer the country (1980d: 539).

Capital's permanent history of violence

What stands between Marx's and Engels's apparent celebration of bourgeois 'civilisation' in the much quoted passages of the *Manifesto* (1976: 488) and their enthusiastic support for the Taiping revolution in the less known 1850 *Neue Rheinische Zeitung Review*? 1848–1850 was marked by revolutionary defeat in Europe and anti-colonial upheaval in Asia. Scrambling Eurocentric understandings of revolution, the Taiping revolution manifested the collective agency of non-Western people, pushing Marx further to develop his understanding of crisis, and to ground his critique of capitalism and colonialism in the actual struggles not only of metropolitan workers but also of the colonised.

China was not a digression. In the last part of *Capital* Volume 1, on the so-called primitive accumulation, Marx seeks to overcome the separation of history and theory. Uncovering capital's permanent history of violence, he presents the fundamental role played by the state in capital accumulation, organically linking processes of state- and

empire-building. Anticipating John Brewer's (1989) insights into the centralised and global nature of the English state system, Marx presented the latter's role both in the class conflict in the English countryside and in supporting the concentration of world money (in the form of merchant and usurer's capital) later invested in large-scale industry. Colonialism, slavery and plunder were crucial to the latter process, and were not confined to a 'pre-history' of capital. Marx deemed the Opium Wars to be a chief link in the centennial commercial war of the European nations, taking place with 'the globe as its battlefield' (Marx, 1976d: 915).

Although Marx focuses on how these processes of world money concentration contributed to the genesis of the industrial capitalist, he does not interpret them as confined to the level of the market, but as transformative of global production relations. The different moments of 'primitive accumulation' presented at the end of Volume 1 are not externally related but foundational moments of a global process of accumulation. Almost unnoticed in the literature is that Marx developed his theory of money in the early 1850s, and only through his understanding of world money – a function excluded by the classical economists – did he incorporate 'primitive accumulation' into his *concept* of capital (Pradella, 2014). Marx does not start from a self-enclosed society (either national or a Europe-centred world system) when he investigates the origins of capital, but argues that its first form of appearance is world money: world money that becomes capital through the exploitation of living labour (1976d: 247). Crucially, the process of world money concentration presupposes pre-existing relations of production, making forms of unfree and peasant labour integral to the emergence of capitalism. Supposedly extra-economic forms of value extraction, such as plunder and pillaging, and commercial and usurious forms of exploitation have a permanent role in capital accumulation.

In order to analyse capital reproduction 'in its integrity, free from all disturbing subsidiary circumstances', Marx treats the world of commerce as one nation (1976d: 727). Rather than analysing an autocentric model, Marx posits a coincidence between the nation-state and the world of commerce, presupposing a globalised system, as Smith had already done before him. Given Marx's critical approach, however, this abstraction explicitly reflects the tendency of the capital of the dominant states to expand worldwide, and expresses the ultimate *limit* of capitalist development: the full, worldwide imposition of the new mode of production. For Marx, its antagonisms

force capital continuously to expand its field of action, and this is achieved by having permanent recourse to methods of ‘primitive accumulation’. But even if we abstract from these methods, competitive accumulation produces uneven and combined development as it tends to concentrate high value added production and capital in the system’s most competitive centres, determining a forced specialisation of dependent countries in low-value added sectors, repatriating profits extracted in these countries, and leading to forms of unequal exchange between nations with different productivity levels (see Pradella, 2014).

Marx’s attention to the global class dimension of internal and international moments of ‘primitive accumulation’ allowed him to conceptualise the intrinsic connection between these moments, undermining the separation between ‘internalist’ and ‘externalist’ interpretations of the origin of capitalism. For Marx, the West did not forge ‘its characteristic commitment to modernity before overseas domination’, but rather through it (Prakash, 1999: 12). Since capital is inherently global, its universalisation is not understood in diffusionist terms as the expansion of the new mode of production from a centre towards the periphery (Blaut, 1993). Rather than distorting ‘the significance of other forms of labour that were predominant at the time Marx was writing’ (Bhambra, 2011), Marx conceptualised the antagonism between wage-labour and capital as a global tendency, encompassing and reproducing relations of colonial and imperialist exploitation and oppression. In its worldwide expansion, capitalism integrates and reproduces forms of exploitation different from the wage-labour relation, such as un-free or peasant labour (Banaji, 2010)^{vi}. These forms are not understood only in synchronic terms as functional to the reproduction of capitalism (see Shilliam, 2009: 83); Marx’s articles on China show that accumulation constantly generates a hierarchy of forms of labour exploitation within the highly integrated British colonial system. That’s why Marx argues that the properly capitalist labour market is a ‘traffic in human flesh’, a new form of slave trade (1976d: 378-9).

By incorporating ‘primitive accumulation’ into his theory of capital, Marx conceptualised colonialism and imperialism as constitutive elements of the development of capitalism. But Marx took another step forward with regard to contemporary theories of U&CD, and identified the general laws of ‘inter-societal interaction’ in capitalist society, starting with the absolute, general law of capitalist development: the law of impoverishment of the working class. By looking at Britain

as an imperialist system, by conceptualising the process of capital accumulation on a global scale, Marx grasped the inter-linkages between workers' labour and living conditions internationally. He could thus also conceptualise the inter-connectedness of different modes of social transformation. His articles on China contradict the view, which Hobson (2011) attributes to him, that the British 'alone can set the East on the path of capitalist development.' On the contrary, Marx predicts that the British would not conquer China, and sees anti-colonial resistance as a condition both for the re-emergence of China in the world economy, and the reciprocal reinforcement of social and labour movements worldwide. This potential for anti-colonial struggles and international solidarity discloses the possibility of cooperation as opposed to the unilinear logic of capitalist development, and thus breaks with Eurocentric conceptions of history.

Conclusion

Colonisation is a subject that 'ought to be studied in detail, to see what the bourgeois makes of himself and of the worker when he can model the world according to his own image without any interference' (Marx, 1976d: 916). In *Capital* Marx affirms once again the centrality of the South for unveiling the 'secret' of capital accumulation. My article uses Marx's and Smith's analyses of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism as a lens through which to interrogate sociology's global pasts. I first show that Smith incorporated the dynamics of empire into his basic categories. His work – a cornerstone of classical sociology and political economy – has to be understood within the overall ideological construct of capitalism: a construct loaded with contradictions, which always proceeded amid contestations and resistance. Elaborated at the dawn of the Atlantic revolutions, Smith's value theory laid the conditions for understanding the inter-connectedness of global development and global history. But this theory clashed with his naturalisation of capitalism, which underpinned an autocentric framework increasingly disconnected from the colonial violence of modernity and the struggles of the colonised.

Marx's notebooks show that he paid attention to the relationship between capitalism, colonialism and world history from the very beginning of his economic studies. It was in his articles on China, however, that he recognised for the first time the agency of

peoples in the South – he was among the first European intellectuals who supported the struggles of the colonised. Marx's learning from the South made a difference in his understanding of global development and global history. Not only did Marx become aware of the strength of the Asian economies, he also denied the inevitability of colonialism in China. Looking at China's living tradition of peasants' revolts, he saw the seeds for a national revolution that could spark and link up with a social revolution in Europe. Colonised peoples thus appeared as subjects not only of their own history but also, crucially, of world politics. This was the first step in a process of increasing attention on Marx's part towards the forms of resistance and knowledge elaborated in the South (see Anderson, 2010; Pradella, 2014; Krader, 1975).

Confronting these forms of practice and knowledge was crucial to Marx further elaborating the labour theory of value, and developing a framework that accounts for the inter-connectedness of global development and transformative practices. Marx's critique of political economy in *Capital* includes colonialism and imperialism as constitutive of capitalist uneven and combined development, and simultaneously identifies the general laws of this development. Capital appears as a globalising system that encompasses different forms of exploitation and oppression, and depends on a diverse but still unitary global working class in the making. Unveiling capital's roots in this global working class manifests the potential for international solidarity existing within the modern world, disclosing a civilizational alternative that breaks with Eurocentric accounts of history.

This interpretation contradicts the widespread assumption that the 'social' was originally conceptualised with reference to the metropolitan core in isolation from the colonies. My article traces the history of an alternative sociological current that counter-poses to the logic and narratives of capital those of exploited and oppressed social groups, and can thus contribute to the self-understanding of an increasingly unified but unequal global society. This reconstruction of sociology's global pasts points to the importance of reconnecting sociology and the critique of political economy in the context of southern epistemologies. Overcoming the separation between theory and history, in fact, is not only a matter of progression of knowledge, but, as Santos argues (2014b), is linked to an emancipatory project beyond capitalism borne out of the living experiences and struggles of oppressed social groups. It is in this connection of emancipatory theory and practice that lies the possibility of

sociology's global futures. As Edward Said once argued (1988: viii), the experience of the subalterns can become the source of an integrative knowledge that articulates resistance to the enormity of the common domination.

Acknowledgments

I thank Gurminder Bhambra and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, as well as the two anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments.

ⁱ I discuss in detail the content of these articles and Marx's concept of Asiatic mode of production in Pradella 2010, 2014, 2015.

ⁱⁱ For Marx (1973: 103), exchange originally appeared 'in the connection of the different communities with one another, not in the relations between the different members of a single community.'

ⁱⁱⁱ This was actually happening at the time: bolstered by its colonial exploitation of America, Britain's expansion in Asia took on a territorial basis after the conquest of Bengal in 1757 (Hobsbawm, 1968).

^{iv} See also, Bhambra, 2007: 136–7; Frank, 1998; Hobson, 2015: 245; Washbrook, 1997.

^v For Marx India was 'a country which exports more labour than any other in the world, with the exception perhaps of China and England [...]' (1976d: 446, note 11).

^{vi} 'While the cotton industry introduced child-slavery into England, in the United States it gave the impulse for the transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage-labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal.' (Marx, 1976d: 925).

References

- Amin S (1973) *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. Sussex: The Harvester Press.
- Amin S (1989) *Eurocentrism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Amselle JL (1990) *Logiques métisses: Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs*. Paris: Payot.
- Anderson KB (2010) *Marx at the Margins*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anievas A and Nisancioglu K (2013) What's at stake in the transition debate? Rethinking the origins of capitalism and the 'Rise of the West'. *Millennium* 42(1): 78–102.
- Banaji J (2010) *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Bhambra GK (2007a) *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bhambra GK (2007b) Sociology and Postcolonialism: Another 'Missing' Revolution? *Sociology* 41(5): 871–884.
- Bhambra GK (2011) Talking among themselves? Weberian and Marxist historical sociologies as dialogues without others. *Millennium* 39(3): 667–81.
- Blaut JM (1991) Robert Brenner in the tunnel of time. *Antipode* 26(4): 351–74.

-
- Blaut JM (1993) *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*. London: The Guilford Press.
- Brenner R (1977) The origins of capitalist development: A critique of neo-Smithian Marxism. *New Left Review* (I)104: 25–92.
- Brewer J (1989) *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Callinicos A (1995) *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Callinicos A (2009) *Imperialism and the Global Political Economy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Callinicos A and Rosenberg J (2008) Uneven and combined development: the social-relational substratum of 'the International'? *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21(1): 77–112.
- Campbell G (2005) *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia*. Oxon CA and New York: Routledge.
- Chatterjee P (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Chaturvedi V (ed.) (2010) *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London: Verso.
- Connell R (2007) *Southern Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dussel E and Yanez A (1990) Marx's Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63 and the 'concept' of dependency. *Latin American Perspectives* 17(2): 62–101.
- Engels F (1986) Persia — China (June 5, 1857). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 15*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 278–83.
- Fenby J (2008) *The Penguin History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power, 1850–2008*. London: Allen Lane.
- Frank AG (1978) *Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Frank AG (1998) *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hilton R (ed.) (1976) *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*. London: NLB.
- Hobsbawm EJ (1968) *Industry and Empire*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Hobson JM (2011) What's at stake in the neo-Trotskyist debate? Towards a non-Eurocentric historical sociology of uneven and combined development. *Millennium* 40(1): 147–66.
- Hobson JM (2013) Part 1—Revealing the Eurocentric foundations of IPE: A critical historiography of the discipline from the classical to the modern era. *Review of International Political Economy* 20(5): 1024–54.
- Hobson JM (2015) The Eastern origins of the rise of the West and the 'return of Asia'. *East Asia* 32: 239–55.

-
- Keim W, Çelik E, Ersche C et al. (2014) *Global Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Knight FW (2000) The Haitian Revolution. *American Historical Review* 105(1): 103–16.
- Krader L (1975) *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Marini RM (1973) *Dialéctica de la dependencia*. Mexico DF: Ediciones Era.
- Marx K (1983) Exzerpte und Notizen. September 1846 bis Dezember 1847. In K Marx and F Engels, *Gesamtausgabe, Fourth Section, Vol. 6*. Berlin: Dietz.
- Marx K (1976a [1847]) *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 6*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 105–212.
- Marx K (1976b [1848]) Speech on the question of free trade. In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 6*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 450–65.
- Marx K and Engels F (1976 [1848]) Manifesto of the communist party. In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 6*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 477–519.
- Marx K and Engels F (1978) Review, January-February 1850. In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 10*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 257–70.
- Marx K (1979a) Revolution in China and in Europe (June 14, 1853). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 12*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 93–100.
- Marx K (1979b) The British rule in India (June 25, 1853). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 12*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 125–33.
- Marx K (1979c) The East Indian Company: its history and results (July 11, 1853). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 12*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 148–156.
- Marx K (1979d) The future results of British rule in India (July 22, 1853). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 12*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 217–22.
- Marx K (1986) English atrocities in China (April 10, 1857). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 15*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 232–235.
- Marx K (1980a) History of the Opium Trade (September 20 and 25, 1858). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 16*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 13–20.
- Marx K (1980b) The Anglo-Chinese Treaty (October 5, 1858). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 16*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 28–32.
- Marx K (1980c) The New Chinese War (September 27, October 1, 10 and 18, 1859). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 16*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 508–24.
- Marx K (1980d) Trade with China (December 3, 1859). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 16*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 536–39.
- Marx K (1984) Chinese Affairs (July 7, 1862). In: K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 19*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 216–8.
- Marx K (1973 [1857–8]) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

-
- Marx K (1976d [1867–90]) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Marx K (1981 [1894]) *Capital, Volume 3*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Meek R (1976) *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pomeranz K (2000) *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pradella L (2010) Beijing between Smith and Marx. *Historical Materialism* 18(1): 88–109.
- Pradella L (2014) *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pradella L (2016) Postcolonial studies and the making of the world working class. *Critical Sociology*. February 29, doi: 10.1177/0896920516628307
- Prakash G (1999) *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenberg J (2006) Why Is there no international historical sociology? *European Journal of International Relations* 12(3): 307–40.
- Said EW (1978) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Said EW (1988) Foreword. In: Guha and GC Spivak (eds.) *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Santos BS (2014a) *Conversations in Postcolonial Thought* (edited by KP Sian). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 63–80.
- Santos BS (2014b) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Seidman S (1996) Empire and knowledge: More troubles, new opportunities for sociology. *Contemporary Sociology* 25(3): 313–16.
- Shilliam R (2009) The Atlantic as a Vector of Uneven and Combined Development. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22(1): 69–88.
- Smith A (1961 [1776]) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. London: Methuen.
- Spivak GC (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Subrahmanyam S (1997) Connected histories: Notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia. *Modern Asian Studies* 31(3): 735–762
- Teschke B (2011) Advances and impasses in Fred Halliday's international historical sociology: A critical appraisal. *International Affairs* 87(5): 1087–1106.
- van der Linden M (2008) *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labour History*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Wallerstein I (1985) Marx and underdevelopment. In: S Resnick and R Wolff (eds.) *Rethinking Marxism: Struggles in Marxist Theory*. New York: Autonomedia.

Wallerstein I (1987) World-Systems analysis. In: A Giddens and JH Turner (eds) *Social Theory Today*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 309–24.

Washbrook DA (1997) From comparative sociology to global history: Britain and India in the pre-history of modernity. *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40(4): 410–43.

Williams E (1964) *Capitalism and Slavery*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Wolf ER (1995) *Europe and the Peoples without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Biography

Lucia Pradella is a Lecturer in International Political Economy at King's College London. Her research focuses on imperialism, Eurocentrism, and alternatives to neoliberalism and the global economic crisis. She is the author of *Globalisation and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings* (Routledge, 2014) and of *L'Attualità del Capitale: Accumulazione e impoverimento nel capitalismo globale* (Il Poligrafo, 2010). She co-edited *Polarizing Development: Alternatives to Neoliberalism and the Crisis* (Pluto, 2014).