

Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism. By Harry Harootunian. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) Pp. 292. Hardcover, \$35.00

Harry Harootunian's recent book is a persuasive attempt to recuperate complexity in the narratives of capitalism as a socio-historical formation. In this attempt to "reinvest the historical text with the figure of contingency and the unanticipated appearance of conjunctural or aleatory moments" (8-9), Harootunian undertakes a thorough exegesis of Marx's writings and that of several other thinkers who engage with his insights (especially in the context of Marxism's "eastward/southward migration"). In the process, he suggests re-reading Marx and certain Marxian scholarship in ways that render historical narratives of capitalist modernity much more robust and differentiated than what a naïve reading of *Capital* would normally suggest.

Harootunian begins with a critique of "Western Marxism," which is preoccupied with a form of "matured capitalism" where the subjugation of social life to capitalist commodity relations is assumed to be both absolute and complete. This is a problematic starting point for Harootunian. The presumptuous commitment to a "realized" unique configuration obscures the complexity and depth of pre-capitalist social formations and the possibilities for different combinations of social forms in the accumulation process. By doing so, it erases for him the "historical" itself as the subject of inquiry (5-20). In recuperating theory for historical analysis, Harootunian returns to Marx, showing how his method in *Capital* is foremost geared towards an attempt to grasp the abstract logic of capital as a totality. The task of Marx's substantive theory, then, lies in "grasping the nature of the temporal dominant ushering in the new, modern era everywhere" (24). In Harootunian's terms, Marx's methodological procedure at its core understands capitalism as a new mode of organizing social production whose rhythm of repetition and expanded reproduction tends to render time "homogeneous", i. e., abstracted from historical relations and practices that constitute the social interpretations of temporality (21-25, 224-225). For Marx, capitalism thus attempts to erase its own prehistory emerging from the interaction and overlapping of multiple temporalities. Consequently, its historical presuppositions can only be accessed through its present.

This, as Harootunian notes, necessarily generates a social formation whose history is told from its own viewpoint, "as a *given* totality retrojecting its interior moments in the past" (25). In other words, the past as seen from capitalism's present flattens the uneven temporalities and conjunctural contingencies of history and generates a virtual, predetermined narrative in terms of the abstract logic of capital. Harootunian's key intervention lies in identifying how Marx conceptualized the relationship between such logic, and the history that exceeds such logic's own viewpoint, to generate a dynamic account of capitalism and its complex trajectories. He locates this primarily in Marx's category of "formal subsumption."

The book is centered around explicating how formal subsumption supplies the possibility of recuperating a theoretical history of capitalism that is attentive to the uneven processes of its development and accumulation, both in Marx and in a select group of Marxist thinkers outside western Europe from the early twentieth century till the present. Harootunian reads formal subsumption as a temporal category whose form indicates the "protean capacity" of

capital's abstract logic to combine and use its pasts in the service of the accumulation process. This process constructs simultaneously a history that actively conceals the generation and perpetuation of uneven temporalities in every present (26-72). Such an abstraction operates by displacing the historical associations of capital through its logical identity, dissociating therefore its originating moments from its representations. As a temporal category unbound by a specific time and place, formal subsumption allows for the tracing of these moments as capital shifts through and combines its various historic temporal forms. Consequently, the historical-logical inversion noticed by Marx in capital's self-narration, dissociating its rhythm of repetition and circulation from its moments of historical origin in violence and traumatic separation (from means of subsistence), is rendered visible through antagonistic contestations that rupture its constructed presents. Such a reading allows Harootunian to posit the perpetuation of primitive accumulation from the varied pasts of capitalist appropriation to every possible present via a notion of formal subsumption that is sensitive to the very form of capital's self-representation in history.

Harootunian deploys this key maneuver by revisiting a wide range of discussions and debates, involving Lenin, Luxemburg, Mariategui and interwar Japanese Marxists in the early part of the twentieth century to Claude Meillassoux, Jairus Banaji and Dipesh Chakrabarty, among others. He highlights how each of them, either explicitly or implicitly, draws their peculiar uses of such an understanding of formal subsumption in narrating the history of capitalist development. How this is done in each provides for an immensely invigorating read that cannot unfortunately be discussed here in any detail. Nevertheless, a range of important, related observations can be highlighted without the risk of oversimplifying. First, we observe in these discussions the multiplicity of labor forms through which surplus value generation and accumulation can take place in capitalism. The coeval existence of such multiplicity indicates how capital's abstract logic is mutually interdependent on different temporalities and posits real subsumption as the logical "becoming" of capital that presupposes its historical "being."

Second, we notice clearly how the calculative accounting that makes time homogeneous in capital's self-representations of its own history can nevertheless be traced to conflicts and contestations in the constitution of its various forms amidst the interactions of social classes in their specific, historical-spatial configurations. Third, there is a strong undercurrent in each that dislodges the sense of linear or "empty" homogeneous temporality and the abstraction of history achieved via forms constituted by capital's abstract logic, including foremost the nation-state form. In other words, such forms are themselves considered the legitimate subjects of analytic contestation and historical inquiry. And finally, there is the persistent relationship between formal subsumption and primitive accumulation that allows for emphasizing the inherent unevenness of capitalist development.

Such a relationship plays a central conceptual role for Harootunian. It posits how the history of violence birthing modernity and the complicity of diverse historical actors in structuring its changing forms operate fundamentally alongside a temporal dominant. Recognizing this can only be the first step in resuscitating historical time's constitutive multiplicity, and thus prevent the foreclosure of historical narrative at the hands of pre-determined abstractions. Despite the sophistication of his argument, Harootunian does at times

appear to simplify “formal subsumption” to an uncontested mechanism rather than representing a dynamic process conjoining historical particularities to the universalizing facets of modernity. This, however, does not diminish the significance of his contribution in explaining why the recurrent impulses of global/world history derive from important scholarly lineages situated within the antagonisms of capitalist modernity. Recuperating these lineages for historical analysis today can provide invaluable conceptual tools in an age where the end of the “historical” continues to survive the “End of History” itself. Students of both history and social theory can therefore benefit tremendously from this masterful attempt of a seasoned scholar to bring theory and history together.

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