

UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT LECTURE 2: CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES

The discussion of hegemony in the previous lecture might seem to have taken us some distance from uneven and combined development, but in fact they constitute a necessary basis for understanding the full implications for those societies – the vast majority – which have been subject to it. In concrete terms, the concept of uneven and combined development should help us explain why – to pick two wildly different examples – former peasants from the Staritski *uezd* in Tver' province could become the driving force behind the factory committee of the Baltic shipyard in Petrograd, *and* why former black sharecroppers from Clarksdale in the Mississippi Delta could create the electric blues in the South Side of Chicago.

The Persistence of Uneven and Combined Development

Can we still discern the process of uneven and combined development in contemporary capitalism? A common theme on the left since the late 1980s in particular, more or less coincident with the consolidation of neoliberalism, has been the elimination of the non-synchronous or, in terms of this chapter, the evening-out of unevenness and the stabilisation of combination. It is the theorists of postmodernism, however, who have been most insistent in claiming that the contradictions of capitalist modernity have been overcome. Fredric Jameson, perhaps the most influential of these figures, claims that everything associated with 'pre-modernity' had 'finally been swept away without a trace':

Everything is now organized and planned; nature has been triumphantly blotted out, along with peasants, petit-bourgeois commerce, handicraft, feudal aristocracies and imperial bureaucracies. Ours is a more homogeneously modernized condition: we no longer are encumbered with the embarrassment of non-simultaneities and non-synchronicities. Everything has reached the same hour on the great clock of development or rationalization (at least from the perspective of 'the West').

As is quite often the case with Jameson, it is unclear whether the quoted passage expresses his own view or is simply intended to reflect a widely-held belief, which it certainly does: but in either case, does the belief correspond to reality?

The End of Pre-capitalist Survivals?

One response to such claims might be to argue that uneven and combined development still persists, but that the mechanisms by which it produces its effects is no longer the same as in Trotsky's lifetime, precisely because there are no longer any pre-capitalist survivals with which capitalist modernity can combine. In fact, although uneven and combined development can involve what used to be called 'the articulation of modes of production' – and actually did so in, for example, pre-revolutionary Russia and pre-Independence India, it need not. Trotsky himself certainly thought that uneven and combined development was possible in societies where capitalist laws of motion were already dominant, as he thought they were in China by the late 1920s. Regardless of intellectual pedigree, however, it is true that the combination of different phases of capitalist development can produce entirely new social consequences. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri discovers such a process in Latin America, in passages which echo Trotsky's remarks about the effect of English or French capital being transplanted onto the steppes of the Donets Basin. 'From the perspective of stages of

development’, they write, ‘one might think that through the contemporary export of industrial production, an auto factory built by Ford in Brazil in the 1990s might be comparable to a Ford factory in Detroit in the 1930s because both instances of production belong to the same industrial stage.’ According to these authors such a thought would however be mistaken:

...the two factories are radically different in terms of technology and productive passages. When fixed capital is exported, it is exported generally at its highest level of productivity. The Ford factory in 1990s Brazil, then, would not be built with the technology of the Ford factory of 1930s Detroit, but would be based on the most advanced productive computer and information technologies available. The technological infrastructure of the factory would locate it squarely within the information economy.

But does uneven and combined development today *only* involve the transplantation of the newest technologies into those areas which had never experienced the older versions, or does it still involve the impact of capitalist modernisation on peasants and rural dwellers? The latter scenario does rather depend on the continued existence of a peasant class to be impacted upon, which several leading Marxists thinkers have suggested is no longer the case. In the final volume of his history of the ‘short’ twentieth century, for example, Eric Hobsbawm identified the most significant social change to have taken place in its second half, the one which broke decisively with the entire previous history of humanity, as ‘the death of the peasantry’. But if, as Hobsbawm also says, peasants are still ‘flooding’ out of villages then this implies that reports of their death as a class have been greatly exaggerated.

There is a degree of telescoping involved here. The decline of the peasantry as a proportion of the global population is undeniable, though it has been slower and more varied than expected – indeed, it is possible that peasants still constitute the largest global class. The majority of the world industrial working class – 79% in 2010 – are now based in the Global South, but this does not mean that the majority of people there are industrial workers; by 2010 only 23.1% were. In this respect, proletarianization in the Global South presents a paradoxical picture and one which does not simply repeat earlier patterns. Furthermore, while proletarianization is an ongoing process it is not always simply a case of abandoning the farm and entering the factory in a once-and-for-all break. The move from peasant to worker involves people retaining links, moving back and forth between rural and urban areas, with a correspondingly complex development of class consciousness. The process is also spatially uneven: in some regions the ‘new enclosures’ and other processes associated with the emergence of the neo-liberal trade and food regimes push small and middling peasants and their offspring off the land and into the cities (though not necessarily into factory work), while in others a degree of ‘re-peasantisation’ in the form of partial reliance on small-holdings for subsistence/income by urban workers still continues in the formal and informal sectors. These types of complexities in the capital/labour relation, rather than smooth transitions from formal to real subsumption, or straight binary oppositions between capital and labour are of course exactly what uneven and combined development would lead us to expect.

‘Dual economy’, ‘Hybridity’, ‘Syncretism’

Even if we reject the excessive claims for the untrammelled dominance of capitalist modernity, there are still alternative concepts to uneven and combined development which tend to be deployed rather more frequently in contemporary discussions of the relationship between multiple socio-economic forms.

One of these concepts is ‘dual economy’, which assumes the existence of two separate economic and social domains in colonial and semi-colonial societies – one organised

according to the principles of Western corporate capitalism and the other representing a relatively stagnant subsistence or peasant economy. The society, and especially its economy, is conceptualized as divided into a 'traditional' and a 'modern' way of life. The problem in this case is the lack of attention to the interactions between the two sectors, and the assumption that they are self-contained. As I said yesterday about China during the 1920s, even in areas subject to uneven and combined development, these absolute separations *do* exist. An example of dualism being invoked to describe a specific situation can be found in the October 2003 announcement by HSBC that it was moving 4,000 call centre and back office jobs from Britain to the Indian state of Hyderabad. The story gave the media an opportunity to recycle the most banal clichés in the repertoire of travel journalism, including the classic, 'India: Land of Contrasts'. The contrasts are scarcely picturesque: 'The biggest difference between HSBC's smart Babukhan Chambers and the British centres it is usurping is the grinding poverty that surrounds Babukhan – limbless beggars and families in tents', wrote one *Guardian* journalist. These disparities pre-existed the decisions by British financial institutions like HSBC, Prudential and TSB/Lloyds to transfer part of their telecommunications operations offshore. Indeed, the only reason why these companies were prepared to do so is because India already had a relatively highly-skilled and – by British standards – lowly-paid workforce either already accustomed to the modern office environment or in the process of being trained to enter it. Behind these developments lies the software export industry, which has been the fastest growing sector in the Indian economy since 1991 – not coincidentally the year in which a deeply indebted Indian state sought loans from, the conditions of which were the opening up of the economy to both native and foreign private capital. We have already seen how uneven and combined development has been assimilated to quite different theories, from positions of both support and opposition; a similar misidentification can be seen here with respect to dual systems theory. The divisions are of course never absolute and the situations where it breaks down are exactly where the concept of uneven and combined development might be more usefully applied.

Many commentators recognise that there are not unsurmountable barriers between the different temporalities of Indian social life, but regard this too as a problem because it produces 'hybridity' Jeremy Seabrook is typical here: 'The loss of jobs to rich countries is small compared to the cultural hybridisation of hundreds of thousands of young Indians'. Anthony D'Costa similarly sees the divisions between 'hybridised' Indians and their compatriots as 'inherently destabilising' of Indian society. There are a number of issues here. Hybridity is an ongoing process which predates not only Western colonialism, but even the earlier division of Europe, then the rest of the world into 'West' and 'East'. The notion that there once existed a pure, unsullied, non-hybrid Indian people – or indeed any other – has been rightly criticised by Edward Said:

If you know in advance that the African or Iranian or Chinese or Jewish or German experience is fundamentally integral, coherent, separate, and therefore comprehensible only to Africans, Iranians, Chinese, Jews or Germans, you first of all posit an essential something which, I believe, is both historically created and the result of interpretation – namely the existence of Africanness, Jewishness or Germanness, or for that matter Orientalism and Occidentalism. And second, you are likely as a consequence to defend the essence or experience itself rather than promote full knowledge of it and its entanglements and dependencies on other knowledges.

Part of the problem here is the very notion of a monolithic 'West'. National cultures are never homogenous; above all, as Lenin insisted, they are divided on class lines. In other words, while there may be no such thing as a proletarian culture, the proletariat does *have* a culture, which is not identical to that of the bourgeoisie, even though it exists in the context of capitalist society and the dominant bourgeois ideology. Consequently: 'we take *from each*

national culture *only* its democratic and socialist elements; we take them *only* and *absolutely* in opposition to the bourgeois culture and bourgeois nationalism of *each* nation.' What Lenin is thinking of by 'proletarian culture' is internal trade union democracy, or the libraries established by the German Social Democratic party and by the miners of the Rhondda Valley in south Wales for the self-education of working class people. The object of the socialist movement is not to preserve the 'proletarian' aspects of that culture but to create an international culture drawn from all these cases.

Black workers in South Africa before the fall of apartheid, for example, were heavily influenced by the best aspects of British working class organisation. In 1983 the Federation of South African Trade Unions produced a 72-page pamphlet called *The Shop Steward*, which included an account of the British shop steward movement from the First World War to Ford plants in Britain in the 1960s. Working class movements do not only learn from the experience of the working class, but from those aspects of the dominant culture which the bourgeoisie has subsequently betrayed. South Africa also gives us an example of this. Early in 2001 a teacher's committee in Johannesburg advised the provincial education department that several of Shakespeare's plays should be removed from school reading lists. In the ensuing controversy it became apparent the extent to which these works had been part of the cultural formation of leading activists in the anti-apartheid struggle, particularly *Julius Caesar*, in which they identified with the conspirators against tyranny. In 1944 the first manifesto of the Youth League of the ANC, in which Nelson Mandela played his first political role, concluded with the passage from the play that begins: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars.' Later, when many of the same activists were imprisoned on Robben Island, they would recite passages from the same text and others which were open to radical interpretation. When Sonny Verkatrathnam secretly circulated his copy of the *Complete Works* asking his fellow-prisoners to autograph their favourite passages, Mandela chose the speech which begins: 'Cowards die many times before their deaths.' And in this respect they were resuming a tradition which had started nearly 200 years before in Britain, when thousands of voteless, propertyless workers met in their reading-groups in the 1820s to discuss republican ideas and discover the significance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, uniting themselves by taking back the meaning of the dominant culture from custodians who had failed to live up to them.

In this context concerns over the supposed cultural homogenisation resultant on 'Westernisation' – which Naomi Klein summarised in 2000 as 'the idea of everyone eating at Burger King, wearing Nike shoes and watching Backstreet Boys videos' – is to fixate on the superficial. As Klein herself recounts of the workers she met in the Special Enterprise Zones of Global South:

The organisers in the Cavite zone often dress for work in ersatz Disney or Tommy T-shirted – cheap knockoffs from the local market. How do they reconcile the contradiction between their clothes and their anger at the multinationals? They told me they had never really thought about it like that: politics in Cavite is about fighting for concrete improvements in worker's lives – not about what name happens to be on a t-shirt you happen to have on your back.

The arrival of the new is any case not necessarily experienced as an alien intrusion by people who in most respects adhere to longer-established forms of social and economic life. Electronic media and communications technologies are perhaps the contemporary bearers of capitalist modernity in the way that the railway and the telegram were in the mid-nineteenth century, and like their predecessors, they can also play a role in social organisation. They have a contradictory impact and it is important not to elide media content and technological form: the former will indeed contain an ideological charge – although it is not clear to me

why unfamiliarity should necessarily lead to greater susceptibility – but the latter can be put to multiple uses, with quite different political implications – think of the mobile phone, for example. Technology does not, however, only impact on individuals, but can also be incorporated into forms of social interaction. In Sipsongpanna, the southwestern border region of Yunnan in China, the hills have been levelled to make way for new roads, power lines have replaced the canopy of the rain forest, and new migrants from the coast are building cities in place of villages. The Buddhist religion practised by the Tai population has been repressed since 1953, but has recently experienced a revival as monks operating across the national borders of Thailand, Laos, Burma and China have attempted to revive the classical Tai, though today they carry it not on palm leaves but on floppy disks, videos and CDs. This example displays what I earlier called ‘adaptation’ in the face of capitalist modernity. I will discuss the modernity of political Islamism below, but it has to be seen as a similar response. The familiarity of adherents with the latest means of destruction creates an ironic situation whereby the techniques and institutions on which Al-Qa'eda depends are the gifts of the new global institutions and in which it relies on new communications media

Finally, and more positively, communications technologies have also played an important role in facilitating working-class movements. The spread of strikes in China was not only due to the increasing volatility of new workers, but because strikes are much more visible. Just about every factory worker, especially in Guangdong, has a cheap smartphone and can post news about their strike and the response of management and the local government to it on social media and have that information circulate within a matter of minutes. This enhanced visibility has also encouraged more workers to take strike action. They see workers from other factories or workplaces that are in exactly the same position as them taking strike action and they think ‘we can do this too’.

The other dominant alternative to uneven and combined development is ‘syncretism’, which registers the thorough mingling and mixing of historically separate social and cultural traits. In such a perspective, historically discrete elements merge into a syncretic mixture whose different strands eventually become so tightly woven that they are quite difficult to separate out. The difficulty here is that adherents of syncretism fail to recognise the tensions which these mergers produce. Some syncretist positions converge with positions which are nominally informed by the concept of uneven and combined development. Mike Davis, for example, argues that Dubai and China have this in common: ‘Starting from feudalism and peasant Maoism, respectively, both have arrived at the stage of hypercapitalism through what Trotsky called “the dialectic of uneven and combined development”.’ What this suggests, however, is that uneven and combined development is a process with an end point at which the specific tensions associated with it are overcome – although obviously not those characteristic of capitalism in general: ‘In the cases of Dubai and China, all the arduous intermediate stages of commercial evolution have been telescoped or short circuited to embrace the “perfected” synthesis of shopping, entertainment, and architectural spectacle on the most pharaonic scale.’ A different case for syncretism has been put by leading former-neoliberal-turned-dissident-conservative, John Gray, for whom non-Western societies are free to adapt aspects of Western capitalism to create entirely new formations through what he calls ‘selective borrowing’ – a concept close to what I called ‘debased adaptation’ in Lecture 1, and which carries the same risks for the ruling-classes involved. These have been pointed out by a very different conservative thinker, although one who is similarly sceptical about the prospects for neoliberalism, Edward Luttwak, who has highlighted ‘the perils of incomplete imitation’, whereby developing world ruling classes ‘have been importing a dangerously unstable version of American turbo-capitalism, because the formula is incomplete’. What is missing? On the one hand, the legal regulation to control what he calls ‘the overpowering strength of big business’ and on the other the internal humility by the

winner and acceptance of the essential justice of their personal situation by the losers from the system.

It is however possible to consider 'incomplete adaptation' in more concrete and explicitly Marxist terms, in relation to growth in specific sectors of the economy, where expansion may be at quite a different level from the rest. Beverley Silver has focussed on the impact of working-class organisation in such situations of sectional growth:

Strong new working class movements had been created as a combined result of the spatial fixes pursued by multinational capital and the import substitution industrialisation efforts of modernising states. In some cases, like Brazil's automobile workers; labour militancy was rooted in the newly expanding mass production consumer durable industries. In other cases, like the rise of *Solidarnosc* in Poland's shipyards, militancy was centred in gigantic establishments providing capital goods. In still others, like Iran's oil workers, labour militancy was centred on critical natural resource export industries.

As we have already seen, Silver is not the only Marxist to effectively recapitulate elements of uneven and combined development without being aware of the concept, or least of its relevance.

New Developments in Urbanism and Ideology

The preceding section indicates some of the enduring characteristics of uneven and combined development; but given that it necessarily involves the unexpected outcomes of drawing together different forms, within a system as dynamic as capitalism, it would be unusual if new combinations did not arise. Two of these are particularly significant.

Mega-Cities

I have stressed throughout this chapter how urbanisation – whether in Lahore or Los Angeles – has played an equivalent role to industrialisation and, in some cases, has been even more significant in generating uneven and combined development. This remains the case but, in the Global South at least, it has taken on new forms. The number of cities with populations of over one million rose from 86 in 1950 to 400 in 2004 and these are expected to account for all future population growth from 2020, until the anticipated peak is reached with a global population of 10 billion in 2050, of which 95 per cent will live in urban areas in the developing world. What kind of urban areas are these?

At one extreme they simply involve adding new streets and buildings of modern design and composed of modern materials onto an older base, as in Thailand. At the other extreme, it involves constructing entirely new cities in previously uninhabited rural or even desert conditions, as in China. What is perhaps even more startling than the appearance of these monuments to Chinese expansion is their tendency to expand to the point of convergence: the Pearl River Delta was still a rural agricultural area as late as 1973; it now consists of 9 cities, the total population of which is 42 million people. These are already merging, as it were, organically, but the Chinese state plans to consolidate them into one gigantic megacity by 2030, by which point the population should have risen to 80 million. Between these two extremes lie two other, perhaps more typical developments. One is where the boundaries between the cities and their surrounding hinterlands begin to dissolve, along with their distinction from each other. The other is where cities expand in ways which are genuinely urban, creating peripheral slums quite unlike those which arose during the original process of industrialisation in the West.

Quite often, the cities of the global south display elements from all four of the ‘ideal types’ outlined here, which are rarely incarnated in completely pristine form. What they all have in common is that many inhabitants of the new slums can increasingly be characterised as ‘informal workers’, now over a one billion strong and two-fifths of the population of the developing world. Here in Sao Paulo, we have no need to imagine the sense of frustration and loss experienced by former peasant transplanted into a city that endlessly denies them what it promises

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that the mass of the population live lives of quiescent desperation in the absence of an immediate catalyst. The middle-class hatred and fear of these populations is palpable. During the 1990s in Egypt, for example: ‘Commentators warned that the inhabitants of the *‘ashwa’iyat* [i.e. ‘random’ or ‘haphazard’] were not urban and *hadari* (‘civilized’) but rather rural *fellaheen* – something that didn’t belong in the city and was poisoning its lifeblood.’ As Jack Shenker notes, two decades later, on the eve of the revolution of 2011, the inhabitants of the informal settlements were not simply occupying the wrong space, *but living in the wrong time*: ‘These people, went the narrative, are not our flesh and blood; they are not even of our time. ... One investigation into the *‘ashwa’iyat* uncovered ‘carts dating from the time of Methuselah’. These smug moderns were right to be fearful. Co-existence with Methuselian modes of transportation would indeed represent an extreme form of uneven and combined development, far beyond even the polarities fused prior to Russia in 1917: but the impacts are quite similar. Shenker rightly points out that, despite the media focus on Tahir Square, the roots of the revolution of 2011 lay elsewhere: ‘The start of the revolution was...not truly in the city, but in the non-city – those ever-expanding pools of state abandonment which, for so many decades, had been seeping through the metropolis even as those at the top gazed stubbornly out at sand.’

Although defeated, the Egyptian revolution has been the most important of the contemporary social explosions. It was not, however, alone in having its roots in the new urban peripheries. As Colin Mooers points out about Latin America: ‘Urban neighbourhoods under popular control in Caracas, Santiago, Lima, Buenos Aires and La Paz mobilized around issues of housing, water rights and food distribution; and the recuperation of closed factories was pivotal in bringing down traditional governments committed to neoliberalism and paving the way for the ascendancy of Left governments.’ In at least one important case, that of El Alto in Bolivia, an entire city has been the site of new forms of social organisation. In one sense El Alto is an overspill of La Paz, for which it provides much of the workforce and, crucially, through which three of the four supply-routes pass. El Alto is both relatively new – as a city it has only really existed since the Second World War – and also growing exponentially, with inhabitants mostly consisting of those driven from their former occupations or locations. In a way, the population of El Alto is a classic ‘combined’ group, consisting of former peasants forced off their land, former tin miners made redundant following the ‘rationalization’ of the industry, and former inhabitants of La Paz who can no longer afford to stay there. It has also the largest indigenous population of any city in Bolivia.

Sian Lazar has made an important study of the city, conducted around 2003, the year in which the explosion of struggle in El Alto ultimately compelled President Sanchez de Lozada to resign. In her work, Lazar notes that, for both peasants in the surrounding area and urban workers in the informal sector: ‘Their household model of production allows for fluidity of associational life, but has also allowed them to form alliances and organisations based on territorial location; the street where they sell, the village or region where they live and farm, and, with the addition of the *vecino* organisational structures in the cities, their zone.’ This does not mean that more traditional forms of association have been completely overtaken: ‘Trade unions are flourishing in the informal economy of El Alto and form a crucial part of the structure of civic organisation that is parallel to the state and shapes multi-tiered citizenship in the city.’ The emergence of these complex interactions between forms of

organisation based on both place of residence and place of work leads Lazar to conclude that ‘the working class in Bolivia is reconstituting itself as a political subject, albeit not in its traditional forms’. These forms may not resemble those which emerged in Petrograd in 1905 or 1917, but why should this be surprising? We should remember that in Russia too there were peasant soviets – inevitably based in communities – and in the armed services, in addition to those in workplaces. In the fusions of the archaic and the contemporary the latter component at least is always subject to change, although as El Alto demonstrates this has not lessened the resulting potential for social explosiveness.

However, as I have emphasised throughout this lecture, it would be wrong to imagine the consequences of contemporary uneven and combined development always tend towards revolutionary or at least left-wing conclusions. The rapid transformation of cities has a dark side exemplified, perhaps, by the rise of urban gendered violence in India. In the Indian case, the recent explosion of sexual violence against women is partly produced by a tension between the contradictory demands of Hindu nationalism for male libidinal restraint and the new temptations and frustrations attendant on new forms of city life. In other areas, however, it is religion itself which has been reshaped by uneven and combined development. Religion represents a consolation or defence against the intrusion of capitalist modernity, but religion is also communicated and celebrated using the techniques and technologies that capitalist modernity has provided. Elsewhere it has formed an alternative to a left politics. Davis has gone as far as to say that in the mega-cities, ‘Marx has yielded the historical stage to Mohammed and the Holy Ghost’. As a general argument this is too pessimistic. What is involved is not simply an unchallenged revival of religious belief, but a *contest* between radical left and populist religious responses to capitalist modernity. As we have seen, in Latin America it is the former which has tended to dominate, in Central Africa, it is the latter. The situation in the Middle East is more mixed, although – as the unfolding catastrophe in Syria reminds us – it has to date had no happier an outcome.

Political Islam

I noted in Lecture 1 that uneven and combined development tended to produce three possible responses in the Muslim world: (1) in which Islam incorporated sufficient elements of capitalist modernity to maintain organisational structures and modes of social interaction, even if this meant inventing novel traditions which allowed it to function in a changed social context (‘renewal’); (2) in which former adherents simply abandoned their beliefs in order to embrace new revolutionary doctrines associated with capitalist modernity (‘adoption’); and (3) which in sense faces in both directions, where new forms of collective organisation such as trade unions were deployed to defend both material conditions *and* forms of religious observance (‘adaptation’). This position is, in a sense, the most important, as it represents an unstable situation which ultimately leads to the alternatives represented by either (1) or (2). It is the main terrain of the contest to which I have referred. It is however important to understand that outcome (2) today has *two* possible variants: revolutionary socialism or radical Islam. These alternatives were brought into opposition for the first in the Iranian Revolution of 1978-9.

Tim McDaniel has drawn parallels between the Russian and Iranian Revolutions. He compares the Russian and Iranian working classes *before* the overthrow of their respective autocracies, but contrasts the roles which they played *during* these revolutions, to the detriment of the latter. There are two points to be made here. First, it is not clear that the role of the Iranian working class was less than that of the Russian in the revolutionary process, given that the former – although even smaller as a proportion of the population – was decisive in breaking the regime and even, in the Shoras, threw up forms of organisation

which are clearly of the same type as the soviets or factory councils. Second, without reducing the entire difference in outcome to the ‘absence of revolutionary leadership’ beloved of Leninist cliché, it is simply unhistorical to ignore the role of the Bolsheviks and particularly, the distinct political programme which they were able to offer workers, which was at least partly responsible for consolidating class consciousness and providing strategic leadership, the absence of which was telling in Iran.

There is, however, one aspect of McDaniel’s argument which points towards a central issue of state forms, in particular the fundamental distinction between the state in pre-capitalist Russia and the state in capitalist Iran, whatever formal similarities there may have been between the respective titles held by Nicholas Romanov and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. This distinction was carried over into the outcomes. Theda Skocpol writes that, ‘the central phalanx of the clergy fused its authority and activities with the state itself’ and claims that this was not “a return to tradition” in Iran, but rather a strikingly innovative contemporary departure, in which Khomeini and his associates took upon themselves a vanguard, state-building and state-controlling role analogous to that of the Jacobins in revolutionary France and the Communists in revolutionary Russia and China’. Whatever the other differences between the latter three revolutions, in each case the state was overthrown; in the case of Iran, it was only the regime. Consequently, and despite the Western fixation on the supposed singularity of Islamist ideology, the regime of the mullahs inherited the pre-existing state rather than creating its own. If the Islamic Republic resembles the state of the Pahlavi dynasty in its rentier essence, it also has a wider set of affinities with other capitalist states, as Fred Halliday points out:

If one looks at the subsequent history of the Iranian revolution, not as a scriptural but as pragmatic, political one, with ideology used to justify the mundane and universal goal of keeping state power, then much becomes clear. The mullahs have seized and kept control through the mechanisms found elsewhere – mobilization for war, discretionary use of welfare, repression of political opponents, demagogy about foreign threats and conspiracies abroad.

Halliday is right to emphasise the constraining effects on ideology of attempting to successfully manage a capitalist nation-state of any size, but in his understandable desire to resist Islamophobic hysteria, he perhaps underplays the impact the Iranian and other Islamic regimes on social and personal behaviour. Ankie Hoogvelt highlights the real dividing line in relation to state intervention: ‘The Islamisation of officially secular and moderate regimes targets personal law and penal law, leaving intact the existing economic formation and political model inherited from previous regimes.’

The constraints mentioned above apply to regimes, but not to Islamists who have no prospect of achieving state power. Political Islam as a form of adaptation is quite different from the defence of tradition involved in renewal. This dissimilarity has been obscured by the fact that any group of Muslims who happen to be opposed to Western interests tend to be described as ‘Islamic radicals’, no matter how conservative they may be. The Taliban may have allowed Al Qaeda to use Afghanistan as a base, but that did not mean the two organisations were similar in any way other than their shared religious designation: the former was deeply traditional in its desire to return established forms of village organisation; the latter profoundly radical in its ambition to create a regime which had not previously existed on earth. In neither case is ‘religion’ an autonomous force. On the contrary, the motivations of radicals in particular are formed by their material circumstances, including a lack of graduate employment, decent housing, social mobility and food.

Indeed, Olivier Roy has argued that in the French context, Islamism ‘is not the revolt of Islam or that of Muslims, but a specific problem concerning two categories of teenagers –

mostly immigrants, but also native French citizens. The question is not the radicalization of Islam, but the Islamization of radicalism'. Roy's question – why does radicalization take this particular form among certain groups – is one that needs to be asked, not only of France or the West more generally, but of the heartlands of the Muslim world itself. Part of the answer lies with the modernizing secular nationalist regimes, which not only failed to materially provide for the majority of their populations, but usually took the form murderous dictatorships which were – as in the case of Syria – prepared to kill countless people and destroy unquantifiable amounts of property in order to preserve themselves in power. Those lucky enough to escape the attentions of the Assad regime might of course then find themselves victim of the latest incarnations of capitalist modernity in the form of US drone missiles. It is not entirely surprising that those on the receiving end of either or both might be driven to identify their own, quite different, version of what it means to be modern.

The starting point for understanding Islamism in the mirror of uneven and combined development has therefore to be that is not a traditional rejection of modernity. By this I do not simply mean that Islamists inhabit contemporary culture, although this is how a certain school of conservative thought tends to conceive their relation to modernity, offering, at its most superficial, scenarios such as the one imagined here by Samuel Huntington: 'Somewhere in the Middle East a half-dozen young men could well be dressed in jeans, drinking Coke, listening to rap, and, between their bows to Mecca, putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner.' If, as we have already seen, the techniques and technologies of Islamic radicalism are quintessentially modern; the ideology, and the forms of consciousness to which it corresponds are, as we should by now come to expect, far more 'combined'. ISIS, which has of course long surpassed Al Qaeda as the incarnation of the Islamist threat, illustrates the ways in which the archaic and the contemporary can fuse under present conditions.

To conclude this part of my discussion, it might be useful to stand back from ISIS, the horrors associated with it and the controversies to which it has given rise, and turn to an earlier example of the emergence of modern Islamism. This was centred in the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan, and was not dominated by young men with automatic weapons. We are fortunate to have Carole McAllister's case study of this process, as she explicitly treats it as an example of uneven and combined development. McAllister argues that the Islamic revival or *dakwah* in Malaysia 'is primarily a reaction against both the economic stress and dislocation and cultural deracination brought by capitalist development; it is in large part an attempt to define a personal and a political alternative'. As in many other, more famous cases, it is essentially modern rather than a retreat to tradition: 'Although such resistance might in one sense be interpreted as a return to the past or a strengthening of tradition, it is eminently clear that this wave of Islamic militancy – and the *reassertion* but also *reinterpretation* of traditional Malay Islam it promotes – is a contemporary phenomenon, arising from people's current problems and needs.' But McAllister also draws attention to the contradictions which this reinterpretation involves, not least for the women who were so central to the *dakwah* movement:

At the same time, immersion in the revival serves to divert attention away from social to primarily religious matters and essentially blunts their critical awareness of economic and political realities; this occurs in spite of the collective choice of so many young women to embrace fundamentalist Islam represents at least an unconsciousness [sic] resistance to the hegemony of capitalist culture. For a minority of Negeri Sembilan devotees, the *dakwah* movement, however, has a radically different effect. It actually helps them focus and articulate their growing criticism of their country's course of dependent capitalist development and its impact on their own lives. For these female adherents, conscious resistance and protest are part of their commitment to Islamic revival, even though such commitment is often characterised by a denial of their matrilinear traditions and thus their pre-existing rights and freedoms as women.

The fact that adherents of radical Islam desire a complete transformation of society does not mean that even the successful achievement of state power would necessarily lead to that outcome. Those who do not consciously seek to overthrow capitalism, those who do not even recognize it as the real force shaping the conditions to which they are opposed, will always end up accepting capitalist imperatives, if only because these seem to be natural, God-given processes beyond human intervention. Unlike ISIS, the dakwah movement was not shaped by the catastrophic impact of Western military intervention, but by the type of industrial and urban intrusions which we have now traced for over the two hundred years or so; but it raises the same issue as the emergence of ISIS: the need for an alternative and socialist form of modernity.

China: Where All Roads Meet

My argument so far has been that uneven and combined development is not only a universal phenomenon under conditions of capitalist modernity, but an ongoing one which will only cease when the last peasant has been pushed or pulled off their land into wage labour and city life. Nuclear holocaust, environmental collapse or even the socialist revolution are likely to have occurred long before humanity ever reaches that point: it is a process which will never conclude while capitalism subsists. In this final chapter, I conclude my discussion by returning to a country which has appeared at several points in the discussion so far, and which is currently experiencing uneven and combined development in its most intense form.

China was the first country outside of Russia for which Trotsky argued that a strategy of permanent revolution was possible. As in the Russian case, this was because the process of uneven and combined development had produced – among other things – a working class which was small relative to the overall population, but possessed of an exceptional degree of revolutionary militancy. Even the dramatic changes which occurred in China during the first three decades of the Twentieth century have, however, been overshadowed by the contemporary impact of uneven and combined development, which resumed late in 1978, when the party-state began to reinsert China into the world economy.

China in the Neoliberal World Order

The subsequent transformation of China has been interpreted in several different ways. For some bourgeois commentators, such as Ian Bremmer, it represents perhaps the most advanced form of a transition *to* what he calls state capitalism, which he defines as ‘not the reemergence of socialist central planning in a twentieth-century package’ but rather ‘a form of bureaucratically engineered capitalism particular to each government that practices it’ and one ‘in which the state dominates markets primarily for political gain’. Most commentators, however, have taken quite the opposite view. David Harvey, for example, sees the Chinese reforms as a key component of the global neoliberal turn. I agree that China is currently part of the neoliberal world order, but this was scarcely the intention of the Party leadership when it initiated the reform programme, which preceded not only the consolidation of neoliberalism, but the elections of Thatcher and Reagan which signalled, in their respective ‘isms’, its initial forms. The individual components of the neoliberal order were first assembled into a coherent package in the UK and USA, in both vanguard neoliberal form during the premiership of Margaret Thatcher and social neoliberal form during that of Tony Blair. These forms were the most advanced, but precisely for that reason were not necessarily the most typical of the phenomenon, nor did they necessarily reveal the future pattern of

development elsewhere in the world, since neoliberalism has reinforced rather than undermined the inherent unevenness of capitalism. But the era of neoliberalism, like the era of state capitalism (in the Marxist rather than Bremmerian sense) which preceded it, contains a spectrum of different positions, some more extreme than others.

In fact, as Bob Jessop has pointed out, neoliberalism has always been characterised by spatial differentiation in which several varieties operated simultaneously. His typology involves four geographically demarcated moments, each reflecting the structured inequality of the global capitalist system. Two of these forms can be found in the developed capitalisms of the West. The first involved *neoliberal regime shifts*, above all in the English-speaking world, where the institutional characteristics of the Great Boom – Social or Liberal Democracy in politics, Keynesianism in economic management, and Fordism in industrial organisation – were replaced during the dominance of parties belonging to the New Right. The second involved *neoliberal policy adjustments*, for example in the Scandinavian and Rhenish countries, where partial adaptations to neoliberalism were made while retaining some elements from the former period. The third involve *neoliberal system transformation* in the former Stalinist states of Russia and Easter Europe, and to a lesser extent in South-East Asia, where the existing state capitalist economies (although Jessop prefers the terms ‘state socialist’) were transformed with varying degrees of abruptness into particularly extreme versions of the Western multinational capitalist model. The fourth involves *neoliberal structural adjustment programmes* in the Global South, which are essentially an aspect of contemporary imperialism as exercised by Western-dominated transnational institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In a sense, the Chinese experience is closest to the second type, even though as a state and a society it had more in common with it those which experienced the third. As this suggests, the initial adoption of market solutions was slower and more cautious than appears in retrospect. However, it is important not to ‘bend the stick’ too far in response to an exaggerated accounts of the extent of the immediate post-1978 transformation. What one can say is that while neoliberalism led to deindustrialisation in large parts of the West, it led in China to previously unimaginable levels of industrialisation, to which we now turn.

Three Aspects of Uneven and Combined Development in Contemporary China

Almost anything one says about China is out of date before it appears in print, but it is possible to discern continuities with earlier manifestations of uneven and combined development. Here, I want to briefly discuss three: the instabilities caused by migrant flows into the cities; the actuality of working-class resistance and self-organisation; and the capacities of the state to ‘contain’ these instabilities.

Internal Migration

As in the aftermath of the First World War, there is currently a massive influx of workers into the cities, but now on a much greater scale. Many of these cities did not pre-exist the migration but, as we saw in Part 4, are being constructed solely for the purposes of containing new factories and distributions hubs. Previously, the household registration or *hukou* system was designed to limit rural-to-urban migration as part of the process by which the growth of cities was curtailed. Is it too much to assume that at some unconscious level Mao understood that the growth of the cities would threaten precisely the kind of social upheaval that might endanger the Party’s rule?

There have, however, been changes since 1991 in particular in both the composition of the migrant population and the relationship new migrants have to their point of origin. The three great areas of neoliberal industrialisation are the Pearl River delta, the Yangtze River delta and what might be called the Beijing-Tianjin corridor. The three major routes to proletarianization in China are from the farming countryside, out of collapsing state companies in the cities, and through the dissolution of former village enterprises. The new workforce has certainly been formed from these three groups, but these had different relationships to the working class. The second group, employees in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), were surely already ‘proletarians’ in their former jobs, unless one subscribes to the curious view that wage labourers employed by the state do not count as ‘workers’. In fact, their fate resembles that of workers in the privatised industries in the West, although workers in SOEs had better social protections and employment guarantees until they were dismantled in the 1980s and 1990s. The third group, workers in the rural township and village enterprises (TVES) which both supported the rural infrastructure and subcontracted to the SOEs, occupied a more ambivalent position. These were of course located in the farming countryside, but their employees occupied a transitional position, being former peasants nominally protected by the obligations of local government. However, as many SOEs were dismantled and the survivors looked for cheaper subcontractors, the TVES themselves went into crisis, shedding the majority of workers who were subject to what Marx called “real” subsumption of labour. Finally, the first group, the peasantry proper, have undergone the classic process of proletarianization, with rural displacement to the cities involving vast number, perhaps 120 billion between 1980 and 2007 – the largest migration in world history.

In the 1920s, migrants intended to move on a permanent basis, but this was not necessarily so in the 1980s and 1990s. Their city wages were meagre but still higher than their rural incomes. For young women, factory work and urban life also brought a new sense of freedom. But the household registration system and their own rural roots meant that the first-generation migrant workers have been predisposed to eventually returning to their villages. This ‘dual’ identity was possible because the state maintains a landholding system that allows members of a family to work in urban industry while retaining links to the small holding. One factor which helped slacken the tensions which would otherwise have built up uncontrollably in the cities was therefore the link many workers continued to have with the countryside, both as a place of refuge in periods of unemployment or non-payment of wages, and as a source of subsistence through farming. By contrast, the second generation of migrant workers, who were mainly born in the 1980s and 1990s, and who might amount to as many as 58% of the total, have weaker links to the countryside. This does not mean, however, that they have completely ceased to identify themselves as peasants or inhabitants of their rural hometowns, it is more that these migrant workers are living in a societal limbo seeing themselves as neither urban nor rural; their urban residency and youthful aspirations clash with social and institutional barriers to permanent settlement.

There is of course a gendered aspect to the situation in which migrants find themselves. Julia Chuang’s fieldwork among women migrants working in the export-processing zones suggests that they are far more likely than men to return to their villages of origin, in part because of pressure from female family members. The pressures are not simply about upholding traditions, but are a means of dealing with a practical issue: the effective absence – after nearly 70 years of ‘communism’ – of a welfare state in the countryside and the consequent reliance on women to provide or at least pay for support.

What kind of situation do the migrants face in the workplaces that await them in the cities? Ching Kwan Lee argues that what prevails across the board are forms of ‘disorganised despotism’ involving ‘workers’ institutional dependence on management for livelihood, managerial power to impose coercive modes of labour control, and workers’ collective

apprehension of such control as violations of their interests and rights', and that 'varying degrees' of such despotism can be found 'across industrial firms of different ownership types' on a contingent basis: 'For example, the generally long working hours and more intensive labour processes in private firms than in state firms are due more to the volume and nature of orders they respectively receive, not due to any difference in management's institutional power and its imperative to impose discipline in these two types of firm.' Additionally, migrant workers, who are referred to as 'peasant workers' (*nongmingong*) in Chinese, tend to be looked down on as uneducated and generally lacking in culture by urban resident workers, and naturally are resentful of this condescension: clearly, this is a barrier to class unity. The official union federation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), only proclaimed that it had a responsibility to 'represent' migrant workers in 2003. Given that the ACFTU is primarily an instrument of state and management control, this is something of a mixed blessing, but is at least partly a response to the reality of migrant worker militancy.

Worker Resistance

The fact that migrant workers tend to be employed in the private sector and are consequently subjected to the harsher conditions prevailing there, together with the declining availability of the countryside as a means of escape, however temporary, may have contributed to their being more militant than workers in the older state-owned sector, where closures and lay-offs have tended to be the central problems. The relative difference in degrees of militancy is not necessarily reflected in the explanatory framework within which Chinese workers seek to understand their own situation. If anything, those still employed by the state indict their oppressors within framework of class and class struggle, turning official ideology against their employers and the state. Migrant workers, however, tend to express their opposition in different terms, grounded more in terms of denial of human dignity, loss of personal autonomy, and dishonesty, not in terms of exploitation. This is not as surprising as it might seem. Marxism was available to newly radicalized workers in the 1920s as a new and unsullied doctrine, filtered through the Bolshevik experience, which helped them make sense of their own exploitation and oppression; but, as in Stalinist Russia itself, where the ideology of the bureaucratic ruling class has supposedly been 'Marxism-Leninism' for nearly 70 years, it cannot play the same role. At best, workers in the state sector can draw attention to the inconsistencies of neoliberal 'socialism', while those in the private sector, for whom Maoist rhetoric has been less significant, express their opposition through a form of moral economy. Much therefore depends on whether a genuine Marxism capable of explaining the trajectory of 'Marxist' China becomes available to large numbers of Chinese workers. If it ever does, it should find as ready an audience as in the 1920s. The absence of what might be termed formal or institutionalised class struggle through worker's parties, free trade unions, or legal social movements has not precluded the existence of class struggle, as has been so clearly demonstrated by rapidly growing industrial struggle and a staggering increase in Chinese workers turning to existing legal mechanisms to seek redress.

The level of 'mass incidents' increased after 2003 and particularly after 2008, as Chinese workers and peasants responded to the downturn and the introduction of the new Labour Contract Law and Labour Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law with an acceleration of struggle. Contrary to the impression that the lack of formal freedoms precludes any changes from above precipitated by struggle from below, Chinese workers, through their quasi-legal and illegal actions, usually without formal organisation, had forced a nervous ruling class to concede major legal changes which have had a real impact and, at a local state level, forced a turn from a sole reliance on repression to a more mixed approach involving both repression

and conciliation. The implementation of new labour laws led to a huge increase in disputes submitted to official labour dispute mechanisms and to the courts. At the same time far from damping down militant labour struggle these concessions seem to have encouraged them as instanced by the rise in labour protests. Ironically it seems that information on the new legislation has acted as catalyst for struggle especially as employers have tried to circumvent the new laws.

The actions taken involve more than strikes (whose status is currently in a legal limbo in China), but also blockades of streets, demos and sit-ins. The pressure from below has had an impact just as it did during rapid periods of industrialisation and urbanisation in other states. The level of struggle is all the more extraordinary given that it is expressed outside of official trade union structures, although the ACFTU may now be becoming more responsive to workers' demands at a local level. The most spectacular recent example has been the March-April 2014 strike at footwear manufacturer Yue Yuen in Dongguan over non-payment of social security contributions, perhaps the biggest to date in the Chinese private sector. It climaxed in production being completely shut down across three factories for 11 days, with around 30,000 workers or about 80% of the workforce on strike and 10,000 of them taking part in street protests and demonstrations. In the end, the strike was only ended by the intervention of Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security ordering the company to pay up.

State Transformations

In the face of facts like these, Mike Davis is surely correct to say: 'Two hundred million Chinese factory workers, miners and construction labourers are the most dangerous class in the planet.' What the outcome also suggests, however, is that the state has developed the adaptability to absorb or 'contain' the effects of uneven and combined development, just as earlier capitalist states had done. Ironically – given the persistence of Western leftist fantasies about the socialist nature of the regime – one reason for this ability is that it continues to perform what has historically been one of the main functions of the capitalist state, but one which has been weakened in the West by both decades of neoliberalism and more recently by experiments in right-wing populism: representing and managing the interests of national capital as a whole. Why the CCP? Slavoj Žižek writes that, 'arguably the reason why (ex-) Communists are re-emerging as the most efficient managers of capitalism: their historical enmity towards the bourgeoisie as a class fits perfectly with the progress of contemporary capitalism towards a managerial system without the bourgeoisie'. There is an element of truth in this, but even so, the adaptability of the state involved a fundamental shift in power *inside* the ruling class following the neoliberal turn, leading to a reconfiguration of the *form* of the state in a way that has unleashed the powers of capitalism. One aspect of this has been the devolution of power to the metropolitan and prefectural levels, giving local governments the ability to annex territory and existing urban areas, and to raise revenue through local taxes and rents.

Why then has China's polity not liberalised in line with the neoliberalisation of its economy? The obvious answer is that there is no necessary connection between capitalism – certainly not the neoliberal variant – and democracy. In China the intermediate middle classes are not yet demanding reform, let alone overthrow of the state, but continue to support it, albeit with criticisms of specific actions and policy settings. Above all they fear an insurgent working class getting 'out of control'. If this is one central problem facing the Chinese party-state then the other is precisely whether the devolution of power to individual capitalists and bureaucrats has begun to undermine its ability to perform its role as central authority for the system as a whole. In one sense President Xi Jinping's current campaign against corruption is

an attempt to force actors to perform their roles with an eye to the overall interests of national capital rather than their particular section of it, and behave accordingly. These problems are made more urgent by a slowing economy. These ‘problems’ are, surely, a sign of hope for the future of the exploited and oppressed in China: the possibility of their self-emancipation.

Conclusion

In a sense this brings us back to our starting point, for the situation does resemble that of Russia with which I began this book – not because a bourgeois revolution is still to be accomplished, but because fundamental social change can only come at the hands of the working class. Our end, however, is not entirely in our beginning. Paul Mason has written that: ‘Shenzhen’s workers are to global capitalism what Manchester’s workers were 200 years ago.’ Mason’s desire to establish the continuities within the global history of the working class is commendable, but there are limits to the parallels which can be drawn. The Marxist science-fiction author, Kim Stanley Robinson, has one of his characters say that ‘historical analogy is the last refuge of people who can’t grasp the current situation’. That seems to be appropriate here. The Mancunian workers who marched to Saint Peter’s Fields in 1819 and the Glaswegian workers who struck for the vote the following year had available to them neither socialism as a goal nor Marxism as a theory. It is a great, if bleak historical irony that, after the material and ideological devastation wrought by Stalinism, the same is true for most workers today, and not only in China. There are therefore no analogies entirely adequate to describe our current situation and we should therefore not expect to find strategic or organisational models ready-made for use. What we *can* predict from our experience until now is that uneven and combined development will continue to play a role in throwing up revolutionary conjunctures, the outcomes of which, as always, cannot be predicted in advance.