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Theorising transit labour in informal mineral extraction processes

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Between the plough and the pick there is a range of labour forms, all marked by what is known as ‘informal’ conditions—that is, informal terms of work, informal agreements, informal labour processes, informal nature of the job performed, informal nature of relations between those who work, as well as between those who work and those who own capital, and at times even the informal nature of the supply chain including the front and back ends. Yet, we have to note at the outset that there are several instances where informal and formal conditions were woven into one another in the structure of industrial processes.¹ This variety is not accidental. The division of the economy into formal and informal sectors—based on the assumption that in certain sectors labour would be highly formalised while in others it would be to the contrary—has an epistemological problem involved in it. There is also a historical confusion in considering as eternal this binary division of work conditions and work organisations as formal and informal. Throughout the history of capitalism, work conditions and work organisations have been a mix of the two. Yet, contemporary capitalism utilises the cheap labour, and makes

1 On the work condition in the tannery industry in Tangra, Kolkata, see Samaddar and Dutta (1997).

use of the global supply chains, as never before. I argue that three changes are signified by the extensive presence of informal labour conditions in the economy as a whole—at global, national and sectoral scales—and in mining in particular. Seen from this perspective, informal, artisanal and small-scale mining becomes more easily legible.

The three changes point to a reconsideration of surplus value accumulation as outlined by Marx. First, it seems as though capital is ordaining the informal conditions of labour in almost all spheres of economy, including the so-called formal sphere. Second, these informal conditions are dominant in productive sectors that can be described broadly as ‘extraction’. The extraction could be primarily of nature and natural resources, known as ‘nature’s capital’, but in this particular instance it is known as mineral resource extraction. Third, labour deployed in the domain of extraction will be mostly mobile, migrant labour, moving from one place to another. It may be thus termed as labour in transit, transit labour or migrant labour; in other words, labour transiting from one site to another, and one form to another, resulting in multiplication of the forms of labour.² The phenomenon of transit labour constitutes one of the prominent dimensions of the functioning of the economy under neoliberal policies.

These three changes are interlinked. From opening up new areas for mining to building new towns, extraction seems to be the hallmark of the expansion of the neoliberal economic policies. Essentially, they constitute the background to a return to primitive accumulation in the contemporary times. Yet, this is not the age of primitive capitalism, because on one hand, organised, large-scale, centralised production systems are devouring small- and medium-scale producers, while on the other, cheap labour is being utilised extensively in decentralised and informal production processes. Seen from this perspective, the unique growth of informal

2 Samita Sen (2012: 4) defines transit labour as follows: ‘How do we conceptualise “transit labour”? I would suggest that we see this at the intersection of two major conceptual grids characterising the understanding of labour in the present: first, transitional forms of labour, which are inextricably related to transitions in mode of production, involving change in forms of labour arrangements, shifts in, creation or closures of labour markets, and in types and structures of labour deployment; and, second, transitory labour, which may be considered in chronological/empirical frame to denote changing and shifting patterns of employment or, in a more particularised sense, may address questions of labour mobility, both physical and structural.’

Mouleshri Vyas (2012: 10) pointed out three features of the concept: migration as a continuing phenomenon; sectoral profile of labour demand and supply; and labour flexibility and the inbuilt problem of city and labour.

extractive industries that contribute to primitive accumulation no longer appears to be an insoluble paradox. However, there is a need to investigate what causes this return to what we know as ‘nature’, as the site of renewal of capital. What does it do to the labour form and reproduction of labour power? Also, how does this return become a condition for neoliberal economic growth?

Unstable division between formal and informal

In this context, a set of investigations may be proposed. First, how does the neoliberal economy revolving around the development of infrastructure and cities become a site of extraction, an extractive zone impacting on all other productive processes? Second, to the extent it becomes so, what is the role transit labour plays in this metamorphosis of the economy from being a site of industrial production and liberal citizenship to one of extraction and disenfranchised migrant labour? That is to say, what does it mean in terms of organisation of production, its capillary forms, and the multiplication of labour processes? These two questions are important because, taken together, they have a strategic stake in our understanding of global capitalism in the neoliberal milieu today.

To repeat, transit labour stands at the crossroads of the trends referred to above—namely, extraction and new spaces of extraction, development of infrastructure, informal labour conditions, multiplication of the forms of labour and the politics all these give shape to—and in turn these trends are shaped by politics. This chapter will attempt to explore some of these trends that are concealed in the figure of transit labour.

Extraction I: The dust bowls of Bellary and other mining sites

Bellary mines are situated near the ruins of Vijayanagara, the former capital of the Vijayanagara Empire that flourished during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries in Karnataka, India. The international boom in demand for iron ore made India the third largest exporter of iron ore in the world; a third of these exports came from Bellary. The rush for iron ore is evident from the estimate, by the mining and geology department, that the Bellary region alone exported 15 million tonnes of high-quality

iron ore worth US\$67 million overseas, mainly to China. At the same time, the international price of iron-ore rose from US\$17 per tonne in 2000–01 to its peak of US\$75 per tonne in 2005–06. The demand from the Indian steel producers also grew, pulling export figures, which earlier made up 75 per cent of the total production, down to 60 per cent. The iron ore began to be supplied in greater volume to the Indian market, where steel-producing giant industries—Arcelor Mittal, Posco, Tata Steel and Jindal—consumed the ore in their plants. In 2008, steel prices doubled, surpassing US\$700 per tonne. In view of the abnormal rise in demand for iron the world over, several countries banned or regulated exports in order to keep domestic prices at reasonable levels.³ In response, the mining of iron ore became widespread in Bellary, symbolising the surge in demand for iron ore and the accompanying shift to privatisation and open-market economy in India.

Meanwhile, agrarian stagnation forced the landless agricultural labourers and marginal peasantry to look for other means of wage earnings. Migrant labour ‘floated from mining plot to mining plot searching for sustenance in an informal system of contract labour in the mining triangle’ (Bulgarelli 2014a). By 2005, the hectic scramble for iron ore led to social and ecological chaos in the area (*Deccan Herald* 2011). Most mining operations were undertaken by small mining companies, often operating without a licence, which did not follow any environmental or social regulations.⁴ Local landlords supplied labourers to the contractors, who extracted commissions from the wages paid to the labourers. There was no direct transaction between the mine owners and the labourers, and this system of sub-contracting freed the actual employers of all responsibilities towards the labourer (Dey et al. 2013). The number of daily wage labourers rose above 70,000, of which half were children under the age of 14 and around 20,000 women (Bulgarelli 2014b). The working conditions of the workers were highly exploitative and the living condition was insanitary. Mining dust was rampant (Menon 2015). All these factors affected mine workers, several of whom developed serious and chronic illnesses.

3 On the China-led global demand for iron and steel, the general commodity boom in the last 10 years and the subsequent decline, see the report by Miller and Samuel (2016: B1), which stated: ‘Between 2012 and 2014, for example, Phoenix-based Freeport-McMoran Inc., the biggest US mining company paid out \$4.7 billion in dividends, according to securities filings.’

4 Taken from a collection of reports from the website dedicated to the mining scam: bellary0.hpaga.co.in/reddy-bros_1024057.html (accessed on 12 October 2015; the site is no longer accessible).

The recent history of the resurgence of this kind of mushrooming growth of decentralised and informal mining is important to understand the phenomenon of transit labour. This resurgence has been evident in various mineral-rich states of India during the last decade. They involved encroachment of forest areas, underpayment of government royalties and violation of the land and forest rights of the indigenous people. They also unleashed violent protests, and the ruthless suppression of the protests by the state was evidence of the co-mingling of political and mining interests.⁵

Extraction II: Migrant workers in the coal mines of Meghalaya

Migrant labour, including from Nepal, makes coal mining in the ecologically sensitive Jaintia Hills located in the northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya possible. The hills are pockmarked with holes. Money lies at the bottom of steep, sheer holes dug 100–180 feet deep into the ground. Sudden rain, a tipped cart, a falling rock—just about anything can mean death in the hostile pits of the Jaintia Hills. Some estimate that a staggering 70,000 children from Nepal, Bangladesh, Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand work in these private mines. Typically, a labour camp shelters 25 miners. Mining is rewarding, for while a driver may not earn more than INR5,000, mining can fetch around INR8,000–10,000 a month.⁶

Around 100,000 metric tonnes of coal, worth around INR500 million, is extracted from the Jaintia mines every day, and the government receives a royalty of INR290 per tonne; the mine owners sell it for INR4,200 per tonne. Life is temporary in every way in the rat mines of Meghalaya. The government does not think that any special action is necessary in this situation. As one report quoted the Deputy Chief Minister Bindo Lanong (Majumdar 2010):

5 The UN Special Rapporteur's report on the human rights of the migrants distributed by the General Assembly on 3 April 2014 noted the risks of particular groups of migrant workers, and reminded us of the situation described here (United Nations 2014).

6 This section draws from a report in *Tehelka Magazine*, by Kunal Majumdar (3 July 2010). Figures and citations have been taken from this report. In *Let me Speak*, Domitila Barrios (1978) describes the work of women miners known as the 'rock pile women', who were mostly widows of miners who died in the Bolivian mines or were killed in massacres. These women miners worked on the artificial hills of rocks that had been thrown from the pits, which thus had some mixture of ore and stone. The women had to break the rocks and separate the two (Barrios 1978: 104–6).

Jaintia Hills mines are completely obsolete and environmentally hazardous ... Since I took up the responsibility of mines a year back, we have been drafting a policy to take care of these important issues ... Prohibiting may not be necessary to include in the mining policy, but we will consider. Why I say it is not necessary is because it is already there in the Central labour legislation, which does not allow children below 18, especially small boys, to work ... It is for the Department of Labour to take action. They should impose the labour laws, knowing that these little kids are employed there. We will take up this matter.

Meghalaya as a Sixth Schedule State has three autonomous district councils, which, by law, have the sole authority to lease and licence mines (Lahiri-Dutt 2016). Traditional institutions openly flout mining norms, and land is let out at will to private operators. Most mine owners procure gelatine sticks and detonators on the black market from licensed contractors. Accidents often go unreported. The government collects royalties from mine operators and even issues them receipts.

Extraction III: Sand and other materials

Sand is formed as sediments are brought by a river and get deposited downstream. In tropical, monsoon-fed India, the process is repeated every rainy season, when new sand is deposited on the riverbed. Himalayan rivers carry enormous quantities of sand, the deposits of which force the rivers to change their courses frequently. The removal of sand from the river is a necessity to keep the riverbed intact, so that the carrying capacity of the river is maintained.

However, unplanned sand removal, or indeed sand mining, has flourished throughout India in response to the construction boom. Construction needs have relegated environmental concerns to the bottom of the priority list. Sand mining involves money, and large profits are to be made on little capital investment. Rampant sand mining has baffled the government, encouraging it to produce detailed guidelines on sustainable sand mining in response, to monitor the rivers and to increase the penalty against illegal miners.⁷ However, it has been unable to control sand mining (*Ei Shomoi* 2015).

⁷ See the discussion on IHRO@yahoogroups.com, 15–17 September 2015. See also Aggarwal (2015), and Government of India (2015). See for details of the state of sand mining, Ministry of Environment and Forests (2013).

In this context, we may recall how Marx, while discussing primitive accumulation, repeatedly invoked the association of blood with intense exploitation of labour.⁸ Observers, when discussing mutation in rural labour forms, do not bring into their analysis questions of accumulation and assume that savagery in the mutation of labour form is a matter of the past. Living labour in the post-colonial context is marked by increasingly informal conditions of work. Marx's formulation on primitive accumulation refers to conditions of life when it has been reduced to the minimum, so that capital can emerge. In the post-colonial situation today, labour migrates from work to work, and the peasant becomes a semi-worker, then a full worker, only to return to till his/her small parcel of land or work in others' fields when industrial, semi-industrial, semi-manufacturing or extractive jobs become scarce. In this context, it is important to note that the footloose post-colonial labour is also a consequence of international investment chains in countries of the Global South in overwhelmingly export-oriented production systems. Wages are often low, the work force is markedly female and the labour supervision rules are strict and marked with violence. Primitive accumulation involves the process of separation of labourers from the means of production so that they become free wage labourers for the purpose of capitalist exploitation. This is not a natural development, but the result of violent confrontations. This process not only speaks of a past (the process of initial transition from the precapitalist to the capitalist mode of production), it continues to this day on a great scale in the post-colonial world. The human factor is always present in production, and capitalist accumulation must depend on the continuous separation of the labourer from the means of production. In informal mining, accumulation is transition (transiting the borders of production and circulation), while primitive accumulation is the specific mark of this transition, reminding us that the transition from say feudalism to capitalism did not happen as a natural process. We cannot take transition for granted merely because history happened that way. The 'extra-economic' factors are always present within the economic, and only in this way can an adequate understanding of capitalism become possible. Capital accumulation begins in this contradictory mode—economic, but violent. A post-colonial critique of the capitalist accumulation process requires treating primitive accumulation not as a process of the

8 Marx (1990: 875); however, we have no way of knowing if Marx had thought of such possibilities also, though we know he wrote of the prices of native scalps. Also see page 920, where Marx invoked the association of blood with formation of capital 11 times in Part VIII of *Capital*, where he discussed the issue of primitive accumulation.

past, but as something happening today. It also means that capital has to circumvent the dividing line between its own prehistory and history of its present. Human sacrifice in the interest of accumulation should not astonish us if we recall Federici (2004), who recently argued that primitive accumulation must incorporate the disciplining of women through a campaign of terror in the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The medieval woman gradually became domesticated, her labour mystified, making it pivotal for her husband to be put to work by capital. In Federici's words:

The most important historical question ... is how to account for the execution of hundreds of thousands of 'witches' at the beginning of the modern era, and how to explain why the rise of capitalism was coeval with a war against women. (ibid.: 14)

It will therefore be important to ask how global (or national) mining capital benefits from the reification of labour, through the division of the latter between formal and informal, organised and unorganised, rural and urban, industrial and artisanal, legal and illegal, male and female, and licit and illicit (thus mining, quarrying, extracting, digging, ploughing, threshing, loading, carrying and finally dying, in ways other than what we think to be normal), because the final goal is always accumulation of capital.

Labour in artisanal and small-scale mining in India

The report on artisanal and small-scale mining in India (Chakravorty 2001: 68–70) noted the transient element in the making of an informal miner:

On an average, the piece-rated workers, with long experience in any particular type of job, have the highest weekly income although it fluctuates considerably from season to season and is dependent upon availability of ores and minerals ... In those mining areas, where the migrant labourers coming from different districts or even States live side by side in the '*huttings*' changes occur in socio-cultural practices, religious customs and behavior patterns. Both the tribal and non-tribal workers reciprocate with each other in this aspect.

However, the report has very little to say on how transit labour becomes the most critical element in the economy of informal (small-scale, artisanal) mining. Yet, migration is the crucial factor in artisanal and small-scale mining. Peasant households supply the kind of migrant labour (frequently in the form of family labour) that contributes to accumulation. Without taking migration into consideration, it would be difficult to understand how peasant labour enters the capitalist dynamics of accumulation. To the same extent, without migration the transient forms of labour cannot emerge. And once again to the same extent, only transient forms of labour make possible the kind of exploitation that exists in informal and artisanal mining. Yet, the reification of political economy leads us to a discussion of variegated peasant labour, leaving out the salience of transit labour, particularly in the age of neoliberal capitalism when, besides machines producing machine, money is also producing money—a process requiring an endless process of extraction of all kinds of conceivable resources. With transit labour, the capitalist can now imagine everything as a resource to be extracted, processed and sold in the market, each stage in this process producing profit for the capitalist. The reification of labour is thus not astonishing.

Transit labour comprises the backbone of the informal sector of Indian economy. The Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics, working as part of the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised/ Informal Sector, estimated in 2007 that the contribution of the informal sector to the net domestic product was 48 per cent. The informal sector was estimated to constitute about 55 per cent of the total gross domestic product. This included agriculture, mining, construction, trade, transport and storage, real estate, renting, business services and hotels and restaurants (Raveendran 2006).

According to a comprehensive report on the unorganised workers, about 60 per cent of migrants join the unorganised workforce (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUIS) 2007: 94). This has been an established trend since colonial times (Sen 2004), and has continued in the post-colonial times (Mazumdar et al. 2013). The NCEUIS report at the same time commented that the figures could be misleading and the extent of migration for unorganised work may be much more. According to the 2001 Census, the total migrant population in the country was 315 million (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2005). Both the Census and the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data indicate that the rate of migration has increased. NCEUIS observed:

This [migration] could be reflective of the impact of structural changes on availability of employment opportunities ... [which have] led to greater mobility of workers, a welcome fact, if it arises out of choice and not sheer economic compulsion. (NCEUIS 2007: 95)

However, as we know, the very idea of ‘choice’ has little meaning for the Indian poor. According to one study, 56.7 per cent of total male migration for work in 2001 was interstate, and male migration for work was 37.6 per cent of the total male migration (Mukherji 2013: 204, Table 10.11). The report also added, ‘If all low grade occupational groups of migrants are added up, then it comprises as high as 60 per cent low grade workers among males, and 65 per cent among females (of all durations)’ (ibid.: 212).⁹ Further, NCEUIS noted:

Temporary or short duration migrants need special attention because they face instability in employment and are extremely poor. They are engaged in agricultural sector, seasonal industries or in the urban sector as casual labourers or self-employed. By all accounts, the numbers of such migrants is much larger than that estimated in the official sources. The NCRL [1991] estimated the number of seasonal migrants at 10 million in rural areas alone. Such migrants work in agriculture, plantations, brick kilns, quarries, construction sites and fish processing. Some estimates suggest that the total number of seasonal migrants in India could be in the range of 30 million.¹⁰ (NCEUIS 2007: 97)

Methodologically, a crucial way to understand the phenomenon of transit labour would be to weave the empirical realities of migrant labour into the empirical realities of unorganised sectors. The *Second National Commission on Labour Report* (Ministry of Labour 2002) noted that the rate of accidents in the Indian mining industry was very high when compared with similar situations in other countries (Dharmalingam 1995; Dewan 2005).

9 The *India Labour Report* prepared by TeamLease and IIJT (2009: 48) states: ‘Unorganized sector male wage employment is primarily in manufacturing, construction, trading and transport. For women, trading and transport can be replaced by domestic services. Depending on how we count, the total is around 70 million. These figures are from 2004–05. They must have increased since then and it is a considerable number. Hence, one should ask the question: How do these workers find out jobs are available and decide on temporary or permanent migration? The answer is simple. Barring limited instances of job offers at factory gates, there are only two channels: informal (family, caste, community) networks and labour contractors. This kind of information dissemination cannot be efficient, apart from commissions, exploitative or otherwise, paid to agents. Other than such disintermediation and information dissemination being inefficient, there can be no question of skill formation if recruitment is through such informal channels.’

10 See also Srivastava (2005) and NCEUIS (2007: 95–6), paragraphs 6.5 and 6.8. Sharma and Das (2009: 38) suggest that there will be greater growth of plantation industry in small sectors (small growers), drawing more employment there as compared to the larger sectors.

The category of self-employed workers (as distinct and perhaps counterposed to migrant workers) needs to be analysed rigorously. However, that is beyond the scope of this chapter at present. In a way, the self-employed is the most readily available labour, part of the light infantry. The only difference is that while transit labour is most readily available on sites of extraction, for the self-employed the labour process in some cases may be different. In any case, we do witness an intense extraction of labour power of the body in the case of the self-employed. One can say that the complementary worlds of the self-employed and migrant labour mirror in the capitalist universe the complementary relation of the peasant households and the labour involved in informal mining and quarrying (Siddiqui and Lahiri-Dutt 2015: 27–32). For a more nuanced study on the same theme, where she argues for a combination of the insights from labour studies with peasant studies, see Lahiri-Dutt (2014). See also, Lahiri-Dutt et al. (2014: 119), where the authors write, scolding analysts:

In studying rural livelihoods, much has been written on the mobility of rural labour from one region to another, from rural to urban settings. Comparatively less scholarly attention has been directed towards inter sectoral movement as a livelihood choice, and even less attention has been paid by scholars of South East [and South] Asia to the mineral dependency of rural sedentary or shifting farmers and nomadic herders.

The examples in this chapter bring to light the importance of adopting a cross-sectoral view of rural mobility, with the hope of continuing further research on mineral-based rural livelihoods. The misinformed synonymy of informality with illegality affirms the absolute and contested ownership of mineral resources by the colonial state and, more recently, by corporatised mineral enterprises.

Theorising transit labour

We should be in a better position now to summarise our arguments as to why the concept of transit labour is important: it is because of the linkages between extraction, infrastructure and labour. Indeed, the concept of transit labour will help us assess the problematic of who joins the working class today. To clear any possible misunderstanding, this is not a study on informal, small-scale artisanal mining; it is also not a study on the workers employed in the informal sectors.

Migration is crucial as a theme to the problematic of the neoliberal economy today, and sectoral mobility constitutes the core of the present dynamics of primitive accumulation, which is the other site of financialisation of the economy. Migration directs us not only to the supply chain of a commodity, but draws our attention specifically to labour power as a commodity. The working class evolves; it is not a solid, homogenous crust of material to be preserved in a museum (Schmidt 2014). Many of the formal features of capitalism, such as formal free wage agreements, may not be enough to understand neoliberal capitalism, which is marked by an enormously heterogeneous and complex composition. One of the effective routes to understand this heterogeneity is to see how gender, caste, race, age, territory, occupational holds and skill act as fault lines. These fault lines point out not only the borders and boundaries of capital/labour, but also how migration of labour acts as the *deus ex machina* of modern capitalism to cross those borders.¹¹

We can neither argue that the peasant mode of production remains resilient, nor can we predict its demise in the wake of capitalism. Whether peasant society exists, whether peasant labour is actually multifarious labour is beside the point—and after a point, meaningless. Such debate unnecessarily valorises a sociological category and ignores the central question under capitalism—namely, what happens to *labour*? It is that enquiry in which we must be involved today.

11 Thomas Nail has argued in his recent book, *The Figure of the Migrant* (2015), for a more historical approach to migration that will tell us of its varying structures and connections, and its importance to capitalism. It is interesting to note that Saskia Sassen recognises the role of migration in the evolution of the global city, specifically mentioning the role of immigration as a 'major process through which a new transnational political economy and trans-local household strategies are being constituted. It is one largely embedded in major cities insofar as these concentrate most immigrants, certainly in the developed world, whether in the United States, Japan, or Western Europe. It is, in my reading, one of the constitutive processes of globalization today, even though not recognized or represented as such in mainstream accounts of the global economy' (Sassen 2005: 39). However, she does not link this to the much broader phenomenon of migration (including within a country and therefore perhaps excluded from the globalisation process) and accumulation.

On the other hand, Mouleshri Vyas (2012: 12) writes, 'The interlocking of migration, sectoral labour requirements and employment opportunities, and governance and policy framework, create a web-like situation for informal labour—one where it is in flux, where there is constant negotiation and claim-making through both formal and informal mechanisms, resulting in some segments of labour always being in transit on an everyday basis in cities in various parts of the world. In those where poverty, inequality and the informal economy are in evidence, the dynamic takes place in a specific physical direction as well.'

In India, the discussion of the peasant mode of production was subsumed in the academic debate around the general question of mode of production (see Patnaik 1991; also Patnaik and Moyo 2011), and took place in the wake of the peasant struggles in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. And as happens with academic debates, while peasant struggles in the old form slowly gave way to other forms of struggles, the academic debates hovered over dead or dying issues. In part, our obsession with the transition question was responsible for this, and Marxist analysis was kept confined to issues of two transitions: from feudalism to capitalism, and transition from the division of labour under artisanal production to factory-based organisation of labour (Custers 2015). That they could coexist and that a new capitalist reality could incorporate artisanal arrangements into a global economy was not considered. We are now in a time when capitalism is marked by what can be called a *production complex* consisting of the artisanal, manufacturing, large-scale factory organisation and technologically automated production chains.

To conclude, the concept of transit labour is delinked here from the concept of transition, and this chapter, in focusing on the concept, asks the readers to conceptualise transit labour as a process distinct from labour in situ.¹² The concept forces our attention to the process of circulation (as opposed to production) because it compels us to study the transient forms of labour occasioned and caused by borders and internal structural boundaries of capital. Migration sits at the heart of the concept of transit labour. Yet this notion will not be fully understandable and analysable unless we take into account the organic relation between migration and the persistence of the unorganised form of work in capitalism. This is the reason why this chapter focuses on the extractive sites of production in modern capitalism, because the extractive sites bring the phenomena

12 Byasdeb Dasgupta, commenting on the concept of transit labour wrote, 'an attempt to understand the very process of labour in transit as opposed to the traditional process of labour in situ in production processes and to unfold in its term the very transition of economy and society as it is taking shape against the backdrop of a globalised reality construed by the dictate of global capital. The question of transition is perhaps a never-ending process of evolution and negation and a journey which goes on and on in any social plane ... Representing labour in transit in terms of class processes we can say the work performed by transit workers fall in two categories—Fundamental Class Process and Subsumed Class Process categories ... Labour in transit is much more disaggregated, decentred ... We would like to portray labour in transit as footloose labour in the true sense of the term. It is from nowhere to nowhere the journey, the mobility, the transition is shaping the live-forms and livelihood risks of these men and women. The real transition at the micro level—in our rendition which class as well as need-based transition—should be understood in the broader perspective of resistance to global capital and the current waves of globalisation' (2012: 24–5).

of migration, financialisation, accumulation and the commodity chain together. Labour is the ultimate commodity chain, and presents the most inscrutable supply chain of a commodity. Transit labour represents this truth. Marx (1962: 92) wrote, scoffing at those who ignored the particularities of circulation:

The general forms of the movement P ... P is the form of reproduction and unlike M ... M, does not indicate the self-expansion of value as the object of the process. This form makes it therefore so much easier for classical Political Economy to ignore the definite capitalistic form of the process of production and depict production as such as the purpose of the process, namely that as much as possible must be produced and as cheaply as possible, and that the product must be exchanged for the greatest variety of other products, partly for the renewal of production (M-C), partly for consumption (m-c).

It is then possible to overlook the peculiarities of money and money-capital, for M and m appear here as transient media of circulation. The entire process seems simple and natural, i.e., possesses the naturalness of a shallow rationalism.

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