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Marxism in Plural Times: Decolonising Subsumption

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Abstract:

This essay aims to reconsider the vexed question of subsumption in Marxist theory. It focuses on the work of two critics who represent opposing views: on the one hand, Harry Harootunian, in his book *Marx after Marx*, addresses the notion of “formal subsumption” in order to critique teleological and unilinear concepts of history. On the other hand, Antonio Negri’s philosophy of time and political praxis stem from a scenario of real subsumption coinciding with the demise of the law of value and leaving no outside of capitalism. However, these contrasting views could be reimagined from a decolonising perspective: rather than closed historical phase, the mechanism of subsumption needs to be seen at the same time as a process of becoming and as a global site of social struggle. The concept of decolonising subsumption proposed in this essay hence suggests to challenge any rigid separation between the worlds of real and of formal subsumption, and an emphasis on their combination in the global logics of the accumulation of capital. Decolonising subsumption is hence a precondition for making a global working class solidarity fighting against the international division of labour.

Keywords: real subsumption; Harry Harootunian; Antonio Negri; Marxism; formal subsumption

In a pivotal essay focusing on the notion of value in the Marxist tradition, George Caffentzis makes a crucial point. Caffentzis notes that any attempt to rethink or dismiss Marx’s analysis of value, based on the idea that the situation of capitalism in the nineteenth century has now radically changed, should be countered by the fact that there are many continuities in the

history of capitalism, especially as regards the mechanism and logics of the accumulation of capital. Caffentzis writes:

Marx was not prophesying about the deep future when he was writing in the *Grundrisse* about production being dominated by machines and their operators becoming mere appendages . . . The moment of real subsumption had already occurred in “modern industry” along with the allied value phenomena: increasing relative surplus value creation, increasing organic composition differentials, and increasing deviation of prices of production from values. These tendencies were common phenomena in the mid-19th century as well as in the beginning of the 21st century. (106)

The tendency to reach a more technologically advanced state of “real subsumption” was already present during Marx’s times, while, on the other hand, twenty-first century capitalism continues to combine with remnants of older economic forms that have not fully disappeared. Caffentzis continues by stating that, in a world totally dominated by capital:

if the branches of high organic composition increase without limit, the rate of profit will fall to zero...unless there are countervailing forces that shift the weight back to . . . formal subsumption. The major countervailing force is the creation of new areas of absolute surplus value creation among populations that are formally out of the capitalist system, either due to their ability to preserve their pre-capitalist subsistence economy in the face of centuries of capitalist threat or due to their ability to recreate some new form of non- capitalist subsistence in post-colonial or post-capitalist settings. (107)

Caffentzis's reflections open up many important questions, especially the vexed issue about the existence of "pre-capitalist subsistence" in a world dominated by capitalism, as well as the passage from formal to real subsumption and the continuing validity of Marx's concept of value-formation through socially necessary labour.

In current Marxist thought, at least two ways of answering these questions can be formulated: on the one hand, one standpoint stresses that capitalism has led to the formation of a world economy and an overarching system, but an unfinished, uneven and diverse one, which does not involve a uniform subjection of life to the logic of accumulation. The revival of the theory of combined and uneven development (Warwick Research Collective 2015), and research such as Massimiliano Tomba's work on the temporality of capitalism (Tomba 2013) and Sandro Mezzadra's concept of "postcolonial capitalism" (Mezzadra 2011b, 151) show that a continuing process of primitive accumulation entails heterogeneous forms of exploitation, which however do not escape the scope and remit of the world market as a *system*. On the other hand, a second position suggests that the global expansion of capitalism has led to a total transformation of labour and the disappearance of any possible geographical or historical vestige not completely overcome by the biopolitical and cognitive aspects of capitalism. This involves the irreversible passage from an industrial to a post-Fordist composition of class, the emergence of immaterial labour as hegemonic figure, and the dominance of what Christian Marazzi has aptly described as "the violence of financial capitalism" (Marazzi 2009). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of "empire" represents an influential way of rethinking the transformations of power and of struggle in a world where no pre-capitalist remnant or outside seems to be possible (Hardt and Negri 2000).

These two perspectives centre on two different ways of formulating Marx's concept of "subsumption" of labour to capital: formal subsumption and real subsumption. They both

offer productive insights. However, theories of primitive accumulation and formal subsumption could risk representing forms that exceed capitalism (feudal, peasant, archaic) as the mere “other” of capital, hence of reintroducing a sort of dualism between capitalism and non-capitalism, which might inadvertently reintroduce a dichotomy between west and east, instead of stressing, as the Warwick Research Collective, Mezzadra and Tomba emphasise, the *combination* of heterogeneous social forms. On the other hand, the scenario of real subsumption, in its post-workerist description, risks cutting itself off from historical situations that inhabit the world economy in a manner radically different from the fully subsumed types of immaterial labour typical of late capitalism.

The aim of this essay is an attempt to reconnect these two views in a way that could decolonise the Marxist concept of subsumption: while starting from the acknowledgement that capitalism is today radically uneven and that it incorporates “other” economic forms, I suggest that by recourse to Negri’s emphasis on political praxis as a conjunction of different temporalities, the discourses on primitive accumulation and formal subsumption can avoid incurring into the dualism of a western vs a non-western world, reinstating, instead, as Massimiliano Tomba remarks, “a concept of formal subsumption that is not based on the specific configuration of European history, but which is instead capable of understanding a multiplicity of forms of wage and non-waged, free, and forced labor” (Tomba 2015, 293). The recognition of a combined effect of formal and real subsumption in the contemporary world should inspire forms of international solidarity and a new form of subjectivity unifying a global working class fighting the international division of labour.

The two main critics addressed in this essay, Harry Harootunian and Antonio Negri, epitomise these two opposing views. In this essay, I will first explore Harry Harootunian’s pivotal work on the matter, *Marx After Marx* (Harootunian 2015). Whilst by no means the only critic to suggest a rethinking of Marxism from the point of view of its heterogeneous

temporal orders, Harootunian engages with the concept of formal subsumption as a way of understanding the global economy in its unevenness, and the possibilities of resistance and antagonism that derive from the specific variations of capital in peripheral locations of the global economy. In the second part, I will connect Harootunian's reflections to the work of Antonio Negri, an author he explicitly distances himself from in the introduction to *Marx After Marx*. Indeed, Negri is today renowned for his concepts of empire and the multitude, a perspective that stems from what Marx called the real subsumption of labour to capital, the demise of the law of value, and the hegemony of immaterial labour.

In spite of their differences, however, Harootunian and Negri can be affiliated in their search for a Marxism of plural times and the production of an antagonist subject radically opposed to any unilinear, stagist or teleological concept of history. Far from reproducing the political and epistemological assumptions of orthodox Western Marxism, Negri's position on the temporal dimension of capitalism offers a productive complement to Harootunian's rethinking of Marxism from the standpoint of formal subsumption. At the same time, Harootunian offers a possible way of decolonising the thought of Antonio Negri and challenging the ideal of real subsumption as accomplished stage of historical capitalism: Harootunian's work could help decolonise Negri's thought, while Negri's ontology could help extend Harootunian's analysis into the making of a global working-class subjectivity. While Harootunian objects to the perspective of immaterial labour by rethinking subsumption as uneven process of becoming and combination of different times, Negri reframes the mechanism of subsumption as clash and struggle of opposing temporalities. Harootunian situates the question of subsumption on an epistemological level, trying to analyse the complex economic realities of the Global South, while Negri frames subsumption on an ontological level, as process of production of subjectivities. An attempt to combine these two perspectives also needs to be seen as a way of connecting the analysis of contemporary

capitalism to the formation of resistant collective subjects. By linking Harootunian and Negri, this essay will hence offer the sketch of a Marxism of plural times able to decolonise the notion of subsumption as precondition for the the constitution of revolutionary subjectivities. I also suggest that we reimagine Negri's concept of the multitude, as authors like Vittorio Morfino (2014) and Sandro Mezzadra have hinted, from the point of view of the heterogeneous combination of real and formal subsumption (Mezzadra 2011, 315). Starting from these debates, the Marxism of plural times proposed in this essay foregrounds the necessity to connect epistemology and ontology: it aims to reformulate a Marxist theory of time able to construct a systemic view while laying the foundation for the making of an international working class subject in the twenty-first century. The combination of the perspectives represented by Harootunian and Negri, both opposed to legacies of the Frankfurt School, can indicate a way of moving beyond a stagist concept of history while not ending up reiterating incommensurable historical differences between "west" and "non-west." While capitalism is the dominant economic system, and Marxism needs to be the way of criticising it and transforming it from the point of view of totality, the global expansion of capitalism should not result in what Graham-Gibson (1996) describe as a "capitalocentric" view. The formation of a world economy, in which capitalism is the hegemonic but by no means the final stage and only mode of production, reproduces unevenness and a multiplication of times and historical trajectories that cannot be subsumed into a linear and univocal pathway. Capitalism incorporates multiple economic and social forms that should not be unproblematically grouped into a concept of "non-capitalist" formation. A perspective such as the one articulated by Antonio Negri can be productively decolonised in the attempt to overcome any dualism of capitalism vs non-capitalist economies. Negri's thought shows, on the contrary, that political praxis is the knot where capitalism ceases to be an unsurmountable ontological reality and different experiences and structures of feeling are

actively combined, even though this active combination of times in political praxis needs to be detached from the ideal of real subsumption as an accomplished stage of late capitalism.

1. Subsumption as Becoming: Reading Harootunian Reading Marx

In his important book *Marx After Marx*, Harry Harootunian engages with the concepts of time and history in a capitalist age by recurring to a central concept in the Marxist tradition, the concept of formal subsumption. This notion, which Marx introduced in the draft of the sixth chapter of the first volume of *Capital* (Marx 1864), contrasts with the complementary concept of real subsumption. It is adopted by Harootunian in order to engage with the development and global expansion of historical capitalism, especially in its postcolonial phase. Going against and beyond the strictures of Western Marxism, Harootunian explores the potentialities of a “deprovincialised Marx” and refines the critical weapons to tackle the violence of capital beyond the “centre.” The concept of formal subsumption plays a vital role in Harootunian’s analysis: it is the key intellectual tool enabling an appropriation of Marxism in the Global South and for defying the idea of capitalism as a complete and unchallengeable ontological being. Formal subsumption, indeed, turns temporal unevenness and the survival of non-capitalist and pre-capitalist formations into a possibility of new beginnings and multiple historical trajectories. In the introduction of the book, Harootunian explains his rationale in vivid terms, by engaging with the narrative diffused by Western Marxism:

This perspective on Marx was in part produced by the so-called Frankfurt School . . . as well as being reinforced in the later work of Antonio Negri and his followers, who have presumed the final completion of the commodity relation everywhere – the putative realisation of “real subsumption” – to reaffirm capitalism’s own self-image in

the pursuit of progress. Both cases share the common ground of this changed perspective that assumes capitalism's final externalisation and naturalisation, where it has subsumed the whole of society. With Frankfurt Marxism, it is the explicit transfer to circulation, whereas in Negri, productive labour is envisioned as intellectual and immaterial. (Harootunian 2015, 2)

This passage shows one of the main critical objectives of Harootunian's book: he aims to go beyond a world view whereby capitalism's law of value has engulfed any aspect of life.

Harootunian attacks the premise of Western Marxism and its "presumption that the commodity relation has been finally achieved everywhere, signalling the final realisation of what Marx called 'real subsumption' and announcing the final completion of capitalism's domination of everyday life" (Harootunian 2015, 1). In the vulgate of Western Marxism, indeed, the starting point for thinking history, politics and society is that capitalism has become, not only the hegemonic economic system dominating worldwide, but also the overarching power invading every aspect of life, including the human body, health, creativity, language, communication, and so on. Everything is commodified and the domination of capital is not merely extensive – that is geographical, territorial – but also intensive: capitalism rules every aspect of everyone's life, from desire and the unconscious to political economy.

From this point of view, which Harootunian identifies with the legacy of the Frankfurt School, there is no escape from the power of capital; the production of value does not happen any more in factories only, but in every space and aspect of life. The scenario of total domination corresponds to what Marx defined as real subsumption. Marx introduced the concepts of "real" and "formal" subsumption in "The Results of the Direct Production Process," a draft of *Capital* which Marx wrote between the summer of 1863 and the summer

of 1864, where he noted that subsumption starts to occur when “the hierarchical structure valid for the mode of production of the guild type disappears, to be replaced by the simple antithesis between the capitalist and the handicraftsman who is set to work for him as a wage labourer . . . production processes with a different social determination are thereby converted into the production process of capital” (Marx 1864, no pag.).

Formal subsumption occurs when capitalism starts to appropriate, incorporate and to direct labour and the production of wealth in society: for example, when autarchic agricultural or artisanal production is replaced by free wage and production for the capitalist, who has appropriated the means of production. When the independent peasant or artisan becomes a waged labourer, working for the capitalist and “freely” selling his or her labour-power, capitalism enters the realm of formal subsumption: all human labour is captured by capitalism. Indeed, formal subsumption means the total appropriation of labour by capitalism and the formation of waged labour. This passage may be seen as a transition from a pre-capitalist, feudalist social structure to capitalism proper: the moment when forms such as usury or merchant capital are supplanted by a new way of determining the production process itself. Capital acquires a “ruling function, the function in which it determines the general form of society” (Marx 1864, no pag.). Scholars both from and outside Europe have, of course, revised this narrative. For example, in a pivotal essay on the concept, Massimiliano Tomba notes:

Formal subsumption should not be understood within the historicist paradigm that portrays formal and real subsumption as historical stages . . . Instead, formal subsumption defines the form in which the capitalist mode of production works. Moreover, it is the form that capital produces by reconfiguring pre-existing

temporalities, such as patriarchal, gender, or racial hierarchies on the one hand, and an entire configuration of property relations on the other. (Tomba 2015 288)

Furthermore, the concept of a “feudal” mode of production anticipating the rise of capitalism has been subject to debate and scrutiny. In India, for example, scholars such as Ashok Rudra (1981) and Utsa Patnaik (1982) have debated the “feudal” dimension of pre-capitalist formations, while S. Charusheela notes that feudalism should not become a catch-phrase for any form of exploitation other than capitalist, but rather be more accurately defined as a type of hegemony “consolidating consent even as it posits hierarchical orders within a society, with the attributes of groups linked to the roles they perform . . . in contrast to the modality of capitalist consent, which masks hierarchy by presenting the social order as formally equal” (442). In his masterpiece, *The Perversion of Capital*, Gary Walker similarly addresses the intense debate on feudalism and capitalism that raged in Japan from the 1920s to the 1950s, a debate that led to reconsider the Marxist theory of transition from a non-European context (Walker 2016).

In Marx’s narrative, formal subsumption already indicates a world in which capitalism is the hegemonic and dominating economic form, to the extent that capitalism affects the whole productive process of society, turning labour into an abstract and formal relationship. As Ernesto Screpanti notes, “the adjective ‘formal’ evokes the way in which, in Hegel’s philosophy, a kind of contract determines a relationship only formally: that is to say, abstracting from its substantial content, from the specific characteristics of the object of exchange, and from the personal identities of the parties” (Screpanti 2017, 527). In Marx’s account, the formal subsumption of capitalism consequently leads to what he describes as real subsumption or the “specifically capitalist mode of production” in which there is a radical shift and a reversal. The shift from formal to real subsumption occurs as a sort of inversion

and a qualitative leap, which is an effect of the social hegemony of capital. Marx continues by describing how, at some point, a “specifically capitalist mode of production arises (technologically as well), on the basis of which, and with which, there also begins a simultaneous development of the relations of production corresponding to the capitalist production process” (Marx 1864, no pag.). The total domination of capitalism leads to a change in the relations of production, which move from individual workers becoming waged labour, to what Marx describes as the birth of socialised labour:

The social productive powers of labour, or the productive powers of directly social, socialised (common) labour, are developed through cooperation, through the division of labour within the workshop, the employment of machinery, and in general through the transformation of the production process . . . The mystification which lies in the capital-relation in general is now much more developed than it was, or could be, in the case of the merely formal subsumption of labour under capital. On the other hand, the historical significance of capitalist production first emerges here in striking fashion (and specifically), precisely through the transformation of the direct production process itself, and the development of the social productive powers of labour. (Marx 1864, no pag.)

Real subsumption does not merely involve turning all workers into salaried labourers working for the capitalist. Real subsumption involves the application of the sciences and technology to optimise the production process, and the birth of the division of labour, which makes individual workers part of a cooperative process under the command of the capital, hence the socialisation of work. Real subsumption involves a shift from individual to socialised worker, extensive application of technology and division of labour in the factory.

But what is most interesting is that real subsumption also entails a shift in the perception of how value is produced. Real subsumption involves a mystification: instead of labour, it is now capital that is believed to produce wealth. Capital appears to generate surplus-value, while the reality of exploitation remains hidden and secret under the rule of appearances. As Marx writes referring to chapter three of *Capital*, “the ‘social character’, etc., of the worker’s labour confronts him . . . as not only alien, but hostile and antagonistic, and as objectified and personified in capital” (Marx 1864, no pag.).

Building on Marx’s analysis, Harootunian challenges the unilinear and teleological view which would oppose formal to real subsumption as two stages in the development of capital: an earlier, more primitive one, consisting of formal subsumption, to be eventually replaced by a “real” or more advanced form. When considering historical capitalism from a global perspective, including formerly colonised societies and the historical function of imperialism as agent for keeping accumulation going, the scenario of a world totally subjected to real subsumption does not seem to correspond to reality. The world economy is dominated by capitalism but other forms combine with it at the peripheries of the world-system, simultaneously external to capitalism and internal to the world market. Harootunian clarifies this point as he further reflects on the aims of his project in an interview on *Marx After Marx*:

What I’m suggesting is that the presumed stagist movement from formal to real subsumption (absolute surplus value to relative surplus value) was another way of representing the difference between the advanced West and the backwardness of underdevelopment, maintaining the trajectory of an earlier and vulgate version of Marxism evolved from the Second and Third Internationals that would explain where societies were located in the historical route to socialism. Yet, on closer examination, it is possible to discern in this evolutionary scheme how the underdeveloped society is

cast into another temporal register to reveal the distance it must travel to reach the true contemporaneity of modern capitalism. It is precisely this stagism that mandates the reproduction or replication of a singular model of development that excludes other, plural possibilities. (Harootunian 2016, no pag.)

Harootunian challenges any determinist vision of history grounded in the transition from formal to real subsumption and, throughout *Marx After Marx*, he offers an extended analysis showing the reality of formal subsumption that characterises societies beyond Europe and North America. Following Rosa Luxemburg, Harootunian remarks that addressing formal subsumption means “beginning with history, and especially one marked by the encounter of older historical productive practices and the inauguration of wage labour and thus the production of continuing unevenness” (Harootunian 2015, 38). Harootunian’s perspective challenges stagism because it shows that the more “advanced” forms of exploitation proper to real subsumption, on-going primitive accumulation, and non-capitalist remnants combine in the world economy: past and present are simultaneously alive rather than sequential steps of historical development. As Jason Read notes, primitive accumulation should not be seen as the passage from one stage to the next, but rather it should be “situated between two types of violence and two types of power, between the feudal forms of servitude that it destroys and the capitalist forms of exploitation that it renders possible. Thus, primitive accumulation would seem to exceed any strict periodization, or division of history into a succession of modes of production (Asiatic, ancient, feudal, capitalist, and communist” (36). Hence, it becomes necessary to think “*at one and the same time*, the complementary coexistence of forms of free labor and unfree labor” (Boutang 2018, 3), or what Mezzadra and Neilson call the “multiplication of labour” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

Adopting formal subsumption as political and epistemological starting point means to stress the historicity of capitalism and those regimes of exploitation that testify to the endurance of primitive accumulation in the twenty-first century. Harootunian's analysis is important because it radically re-historicises capitalism and because it introduces a truly deprovincialised and decolonised concept of Marxism.

From this point of view, Harootunian's work can be aligned with the research of critics such as Anjan Chakrabarti, Stephen Cullenberg and Anup Dhar, who have challenged any Eurocentric view of the development of capitalism alongside the "capitalocentrism" described by Gibson-Graham (1996), a perspective that tends to conflate the world economy with capitalism. As Chakrabarti, Cullenberg and Dhar note, "the overdetermination of capitalocentrism and orientalism produced the dualism of modern capitalism (as normal) and the other as traditional/pre-capitalism—hence abnormal, hence in need of assimilation/annihilation" (291). By questioning the supposed historical necessity of primitive accumulation and the extension of the pathway taken by capitalism in Europe to the Global South, Chakrabarti, Cullenberg and Dhar emphasise the contingency, plurality and violence of the global expansion of capitalism. Such perspective is important because it allows to move away from any mechanistic or teleological assumption about the passage from formal to real subsumption in the peripheries of the world system, while showing that the category of the "Third World" should be critically decomposed into specific pathways taken by capitalism in its expanding spiral of accumulation, moving from a monolithic space of the "Third World" to what Chakrabarti and Dhar describe as a "world of the third" (2010). Most importantly, this perspective allows critics to move from capitalism's being – capitalism as an alienated, unchangeable ontological reality – to capitalism's becoming, a historical process in which change still is and will always be possible. As Harootunian writes:

In the process of subjugating older practices and institutions to capitalism, it was not always the case that it was free from tensions produced by attempts to efface their historical identity and incorporate them. There was always the possibility that practices taken over from prior forms of production would manage, in one way or another, to retain their historical identities . . . This was especially true since the process of combining invariably generated forms of temporal unevenness where older practices appeared alongside newer ones, signifying the difference between what represented the “becoming” from the “being” of capitalism. (Harootunian 2015, 29)

Harootunian’s overall project and his thorough analysis of real and formal subsumption to understand the historicity of capitalism are compelling, but his analysis could be expanded on by tackling one of critical targets referred to, in passing, in the introduction of his book: the work of Antonio Negri. Indeed, Harootunian’s perspective on capitalism’s becoming is inspired by an important voice in current Italian Marxism, Massimiliano Tomba, whose *Marx’s Temporalities* (originally published in Italian as *Strati di Tempo*), radically calls into question some key premises of the tradition of Marxism to which Antonio Negri belongs, that is, Italian workerism and post-workerism, a movement described as a “Marxism of the Grundrisse” (Bellofiore and Tomba 2011). This tradition devoted pivotal debates to the question of subsumption and, most importantly, the passage from industrial to post-Fordist or “immaterial” labour (Lazzarato 1996). As Sergio Bologna shows in his account of this intellectual tradition, workerism and post-workerism emphasised the changing composition of the working class in a world dominated by technology and fully determined by the passage from formal to real subsumption: “Workerist groups developed in an historical period in which there seemed to be no alternative to mass production in capitalist societies, where big companies were able to obtain large economies of scale. The large factory . . . seemed to be

the culmination of a historical process that originated in the rise of industrialism” (Bologna 2014, no pag.). The passage to post-Fordism entailed, for workerist intellectuals, an “anthropological mutation” (Bologna 2014, no pag.) leading from mass worker to knowledge worker, from the factory to biopolitical production. In Carlo Vercellone’s account, the workerist view tends to become a “periodisation in which three principal stages of the capitalist division of labour and of the role of knowledge can be identified”: the stage of formal subsumption or mercantile capital, the stage of real subsumption or industrial capitalism, and the latest stage, cognitive capitalism or the general intellect (Vercellone 2007, 15-16).

In *Marx’s Temporalities*, Massimiliano Tomba expresses some doubts on the shift entailed by the passage to real subsumption, and insists on the combination and hybridisation of cognitive and industrial work, and even non- and pre-capitalist formations in the present.

Tomba, indeed, notes that “high-tech production is not only compatible with brutal forms of exploitation, but is based upon them,” and quoting George Caffentzis (1999), stresses that “the computer requires the sweatshop and the existence of the cyborg is based on the slave,” concluding that this “relation is occluded in the fetishistic representation of capital, which constituted the perspective of the vulgar economy of Marx’s time, of neoclassical economy and of the Negrian variant of postworkerism today” (Tomba 2013, 145). In an essay on primitive accumulation, Sandro Mezzadra also notes some of the potential issues with the workerist tradition: so far as “the specific relation between formal and real subsumption is concerned,” Mezzadra notes, “this became a commonsensical appreciation of how these two concepts were simply indicative of two different ‘epochs’ (when not ‘stages’) of the capitalist mode of production, destined to succeed one another in a linear way” (Mezzadra 2011, 313). The key point, also emphasised by critics like Mezzadra and Tomba, about the necessity to overcome a unilinear, teleological, and Eurocentric Marxism, including the post-workerist

emphasis on real subsumption, remains an important backbone of Harootunian's project. Harootunian's perspective offers a very productive way of understanding global capitalism as an uneven, differential coexistence of different social and historical layers.

The debate on real and formal subsumption, from this point of view, cannot be detached from a compelling question: can socialism become a global reality even if the world economy eschews the scenario of real subsumption and rather shows the persistence of other economic forms combined with the hegemony of capitalism? How can the struggle for socialism be realised in a world determined by unevenness, continuing forms of primitive accumulation, and differing regimes of exploitation? The origins of this problem can be traced back to Marx, especially to the drafts of Marx's reply to a 1881 letter by Russian intellectual Vera Zasulich, where Marx envisioned a pattern of historical development in Russia, which did not follow the one experienced in western Europe (Shanin 1983; Tomba 2015). Chakrabarti, Cullenberg and Dhar also underline the significance of the exchange between Marx and Zasulich, as they note how Marx, departing "from his view of primitive accumulation in the context of England," was able to ask "again how primitive accumulation will take shape in a non-Western setting in general and how it would take shape in Russia in particular. Equally importantly for us, he grapples with the question of whether primitive accumulation is inevitable" (290). Marx's late engagement with the Russian context suggests an alternative view on the question of primitive accumulation and formal subsumption, whereby the historical unevenness of global capitalism reactivates multiple possibilities of social transformation. Marx's response to the Russian question leads, according to Chakrabarti, Cullenberg and Dhar, to reconsidering primitive accumulation as "an ever-changing menu of altered conditions of existence that leads to a gradual and at times quick dismantling of world of the third forms of life. This also reveals that there is no one trajectory of primitive accumulation" (298).

Building on Marx's response to Zasulich, critics like Harootunian alongside Chakrabarti, Cullenberg and Dhar note that, by the 1860s, Marx started to consider the question of the survival of pre-capitalist forms, especially in relation to Russia, where the persistence of the Russian commune prevented the smooth passage to private property seen in Europe. Harootunian notes that Marx's "emphasis on form was precisely the strategy by which Marx sought to articulate the precapitalist formations (including the Asiatic mode of production) and its historic presuppositions as a resource for the present" (Harootunian 2015, 53). Marx also "took into consideration the role played by time, especially the different time of the capitalist present . . . which reflected the form's historically unbound capacity to link up different times" (ibid.). In this scheme, the "most appropriate figure of development was unevenness and the temporal asymmetry and discordance it is capable of producing" (ibid.). While the survival of archaic, pre-capitalist forms, "when self-consciously yoked to capitalism . . . played a role reversal to become the 'frightful foundation for fascist cultural ideology . . .'" Marx may also have understated the political consequences of recognising and mobilising these spectral reminders of temporal unevenness, untimeliness, and arrhythmia in . . . disturbing the homogeneous linearity projected by the nation-state" (Harootunian 2015, 54-55).

Existing peripheral locations not yet subjected to real subsumption could, according to Harootunian, bring with themselves "possibilities for different forms of political community" (Harootunian 2015, 55). In brief, formal subsumption can be seen as "the categorical logic delegated to express the sensible materiality of historical change and the form of intelligibility by which it grasped what might be called the historical," marking "the making of history the moment capitalism encountered old economic practices" (Harootunian 2015, 67). By recognising the historicity of capitalism in its encounter with non-capitalist forms as the site for changing the world, Harootunian denounces "the power of stagism to act as a

political unconscious that posits the ironclad necessity of a completed capitalism as the condition for realising socialism” (Harootunian 2015, 69).

Harootunian’s perspective, from this point of view, seems to be radically opposed to Antonio Negri’s emphasis on real subsumption and immaterial labour. But Harootunian’s considerations lead to raising a central, open-ended question, which plays a central role in Antonio Negri’s reflections too: how can an understanding of the temporality of capitalism turn into the formation of a global revolutionary, anti-capitalist subject? A common element that both critics share, indeed, is their attempt to dismantle the scenario of real subsumption and to reopen the historicity of capitalism. Both critics, in other words, define real subsumption as their common, urgent, critical target: for Harootunian, against and beyond real subsumption lies the recovery of formal subsumption and the mobilisation of archaic forms and non-linear historical paths beyond the historical experience of Europe. For Negri, the struggle against real subsumption also lead to rethinking the question of time in the production of subjects fighting against capital. Combining these perspectives could lead to rethink a decolonised notion of subsumption.

2. Subsumption as Struggle: Reading Negri Reading Marx

A perspective centred on formal subsumption, unlike the perspective of Antonio Negri, relies on the notion of social necessary labour. On the other hand, Negri’s perspective stresses that the history of capitalism involves the demise of socially necessary labour as measure of value production and hence a completed scenario of full subsumption and the emergence of immaterial labour as hegemonic figure. There is sort of irony, however, in the fact that Harootunian’s references to Antonio Negri in *Marx after Marx* tend to align his position with

the tradition of Western Marxism and more specifically the legacy of the Frankfurt School. Indeed, the thought of workerist intellectuals such as Antonio Negri departed very explicitly and radically from the Frankfurt School and the perceived deadlock to which the Frankfurt School's concept of a commodification of everything had led. In a 2009 piece called "Some Reflections on the Use of Dialectics," Antonio Negri goes back to the intellectual milieu that forged his Marxist positions by making explicit references to the Frankfurt School. Negri writes:

Anyone who took part in the discussions on the dialectics developed by so-called Western Marxism during the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s would easily recognise how the roles played in those debates by Lukàcs' *History and Class Consciousness* and the work of the Frankfurt School were complementary . . . The question of alienation traversed the entire theoretical framework: the phenomenology of agency and historicity of existence were all seen as being completely absorbed by a capitalist design of exploitation and domination over life . . . the subsumption of society under capital was definitive. The revolutionaries had nothing to do but wait for the event that reopened history; while the non-revolutionaries simply needed to adapt to their fate. (Negri 2017, 32)

The starting point of Negri's intellectual engagement was a stark critique and a response to what might be called Frankfurt School's perceived quietism, as well as their phenomenological descriptions of life under capitalism as a totally administered society in which no space for resistance or transformation is possible. Interestingly, Negri's politics entails a stance against the all-encompassing, anti-historical and nihilistic vision of the Frankfurt School and of Western Marxism.

In his *Factory of Strategy*, Negri also reflects on the demise of the law of value, not only as an objective feature of the historical development of capitalism, but rather as “the object of destruction” (253) of the working class. Negri’s revival of Marx’s *Grundrisse* in his book on Lenin, indeed, shows how the withering away of exploitation should not be seen merely objectively but rather as a question about the workers’ subjectivity and a task to be accomplished (247): the significance of Negri’s position in this text lies in his constant emphasis on class antagonism as the motor of history, and as a possibility for the production of new subjects and agencies. In the important “fragment on machines” included in *Grundrisse*, indeed, Marx had envisaged possibilities for creating a communist society out of the subsumptive qualities determined by the advancement of technology and its attendant reformulation of a working class subjectivity.

In his reading of the so-called “fragment on machines,” Negri shows how a scenario of real subsumption entails the abolition of socially necessary labour time as measure of value (Negri 1973, 129), while Harootunian’s perspective does not abandon the law of value, even in Harootunian’s insistence on the continuing process of a “formal” kind of subsumption. An attempt to “decolonise” the notion of subsumption would not follow Negri’s dismissal of the law of value here, but it would open up the discourse on value to a non-teleological historicity. Indeed, as Caffentzis notes in an essay on the topic, the discourse on value is not merely analytical and critical, but also potentially revolutionary:

If labor is the ultimate force of value creation (as the Law of Value claims and gives a measure to), then laborers are valuable and creative in themselves. A revolutionary corollary follows: workers are capable of creating noncapitalist “tables of values” and, indeed, an autonomous world beyond capitalism. This

conviction is crucial for the development of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. (Caffentzis 94)

Negri's and Harootunian's differences on this point are substantial, but both emphasise the need to fight the idea of capitalism as an unchallengeable being and re-open the question of subsumption to a clash of militant subjectivities, they both belong, even if from different standpoints, to that tradition of what Vittorio Morfino and Peter Thomas describe as the tradition of "plural temporality" in Marxism (Morfino and Thomas 2017; Thomas 2017). The Italian context of the 1970s provided Negri with a specific historical conjuncture, in which the domination of capitalism over the economy and labour was perceived to be complete, but this did not, by any means, entail the end of history or the historical accomplishment of the logic of real subsumption. Negri's thought, indeed, can be identified with the rise of heterodox and heretical forms of Marxism, which stress the centrality of labour, agency and social creativity against the metaphysical strictures and the political unconscious of Western Marxism. In this context, Negri explains how Italian intellectuals opposed resistance to the "pris de conscience of the subsumption of society under capital," and developed a new critical point, opposed to "the dehumanising dialectics of the capitalist relations of exploitation": against Western Marxism, "a new figure of subjectivity, or, rather, of the production of subjectivity was virtually affirmed . . . and a standpoint of rupture within the placid and painful acceptance of the totalitarian high-handedness of capital" (Negri 2017, 32).

Negri's work should not, as it emerges from these thoughts, be unproblematically subsumed under the category of Western Marxism and more specifically the tradition of Frankfurt Marxism, against which Negri's affirmative ontology is in stark contrast. The debate between a negative and a positive ontology was part of the Italian workerist movement from the start,

and caused a major debate between Negri and another Italian philosopher formerly aligned with the extra-parliamentary Left in Italy, Massimo Cacciari. Cacciari's book *Krisis* (Cacciari 1976), indeed, questioned some of the assumptions of workerist Marxism, and was harshly critiqued in a review by Negri (Negri 1976, see Mandarini 2009 for a reconstruction of the significance of the debate).

As Sandro Mezzadra explains, the current in which Negri's position developed, the workerist movement that started to gain prominence in Italy in the 1960s, formulated a reversal of the Frankfurt School view and stressed the centrality of workers' struggle as the real motor of history. Inspired by Mario Tronti's pivotal 1966 book, *Workers and Capital* (Tronti 2019), workerist thought aimed to give antagonistic forces the primacy in determining the course of history, to which the force of capital could only adapt and respond. As Mezzadra explains, workerism "presented as a 'Copernican revolution' with regard to more traditional currents of Marxism: that is, the idea that it was necessary to reverse the classical relation between capitalistic development and workers' struggles, to identify in workers' struggles the real dynamic element (the 'real mover') of capitalistic development" (Cobarrubias, Casas Cortes, Pickles 2011, 585).

Going back to Negri's position could expand Harootunian's analysis of real and formal subsumption and, more specifically, tackle the problem of the political significance of these controversies. Real subsumption and the passage to cognitive labour was indeed for Negri an occasion to refine and to rethink the weapons of struggle against capital. In *Goodbye Mr Socialism*, Negri states that the "cognitariat" has become "the fundamental force of production that keeps the system functioning": the new hegemonic figure (135, 148). Taking this figure as hegemonic, however, should not result in dismissing other material realities of exploitation and antagonism that exceed the forms of immaterial labour proper to the General Intellect. In an essay posted on the "euronomade" website in 2013, Antonio Negri goes back

to the question of real subsumption, which has played a central role in some of his most important books, including *Insurgencies* (Negri 1999), *Marx Beyond Marx* (Negri 1996), and *Time for Revolution* (Negri 2003). In his 2013 essay, titled “Thoughts Regarding ‘Critical Foresight’ in the Unpublished chapter IV of Marx’s *Capital*, volume 1”, Negri rereads Marx’s thoughts on real and formal subsumption in order to address how under capitalism, “all social relations (obviously those of production, but also those of reproduction and circulation) are transposed onto the terrain of exploitation – in short, *life is subsumed to capital*” (Negri 2017, 45). Negri does not question, in this essay, the fact that capitalism has led to a scenario of total or “real” subsumption, in which all aspects of life are subjected to the logic of accumulation. He notes that this scenario entails the shift from technology being a mediation between the worker and nature, to the worker being “a mediation between the machine (the tool) and nature . . . The instrument is no longer a use value for the worker; the worker becomes use value for capital, of ‘its’ (capital’s) machine (fixed capital)” (Negri 2017, 44). In sum, the transition to real subsumption involves total domination of capital and its technologies, the subjection of every aspect of life to accumulation, and the onset of what Negri calls the biopolitical dimension of capitalism (Negri 2017, 45). From this point of view, the difference between Negri and Harootunian is noticeable: Negri emphasises the demise of the law of value and seems to fall into the kind of stagism denounced by Harootunian. Riccardo Bellofiore and Massimiliano Tomba rightly point out that rather “than following the hegemonic subjects of a presumed tendency, it would be more useful today to start from the bodies and minds incorporated in the monstrous and deadly mechanism of a self-valorisation” (Bellofiore and Tomba 2011). This mechanism of violent synchronisation of heterogeneous temporalities of labour is a process that, Bellofiore and Tomba observe, “without the historicist image of stages, encompasses both relative and absolute surplus value, increasingly combining various forms of surplus labour and labour extraction into the

same productive weave, from high tech to new forms of slavery spreading within a world globalised today by capital” (Bellofiore and Tomba 2011).

Building on these thoughts and important critiques, it could be asked whether there are other aspects of Negri’s thought that could suggest a possibility of setting his thought to work, mindful of the strictures and limits and irrationalist tendencies of his philosophy. If the passage to real subsumption is objective and complete, according to Negri, the re-opening of class struggle leads to dismantling the accomplishment of a complete “stage” of capitalism: while for Harootunian the challenge to real subsumption is epistemological, for Negri this is a task of political ontology and praxis.

If, according to Negri, real subsumption or the total submission of life to capital “is now complete” (Negri 2017, 46), his view could be productively decolonised rather than simply dismissed. By “decolonising” here I mean that it could be repositioned in a wider context in which realities that go beyond the situation in “core” zones such as Europe and North America can be accounted for. Decolonising would also mean to unsettle the hegemonic figure of immaterial labour by re-linking it to an antagonistic scenario of combined unevenness, affiliating the struggle against capitalism and other forms of exploitation to the legacies of anti-colonial liberation. More broadly, the concept of decolonisation involves dismantling what Frantz Fanon, in an influential passage of *Wretched of the Earth*, described as the “Manichaean world” produced by the colonial situation: a world cut in two and divided in two compartments, the coloniser and the colonised, but also a world divided between what Fanon himself described as the “capitalist countries” and the “colonial countries” (Fanon 1963, 38).

If formal and real subsumption reiterate this distinction, decolonising subsumption would entail showing the combination and necessary dependence of these two worlds, challenging any compartmentalised view. Decolonising subsumption hence implies reconnecting the

inside and the outside, the metropolitan and the colonial, showing their interplay in the global remit of the accumulation of capital. A decolonised notion of subsumption would not neglect the dominant role or tendency of some figures of labour in a certain historical period, but would also reconnect the hegemonic figure to non-hegemonic, residual and marginal experiences of resistance to exploitation, showing the dependence of the core on the exploitation at the periphery. If there is a “teleological” dimension in this perspective, this is an open-ended teleology of will subordinated to a non-teleological intellect: the formation of resistant subjectivities needs a unifying factor in the arena of political struggle, without however turning this unity into an ossified and unchallengeable second-nature. Indeed, it is vital to qualify Negri’s perspective on subsumption, and most importantly, what kind of conclusions Negri draws from his theory. While the Frankfurt, post-Lukacsian tradition identified in the commodification or reification of everything a sort of nihilistic and quietist philosophy, Negri takes the full realisation of subsumption as the starting point for thinking the possibilities of action, collective being, solidarity and politics in the contemporary world, not only in Europe and North America, but also in the peripheries of capitalism. Real subsumption is not a “theoretical” or academic matter: this is the ground for political – insurgent, constituent – action in the public sphere, and the mobilisation of collective subjectivities against capital. Negri makes this point very clearly:

When they are taken “dialectically” (in other words, subjected to the historical determinations of class struggle), it will no longer be possible to consider the “reification” of value in machinery or the “alienation” of the worker as closed worlds . . . Capital is, rather, always a relationship of power, and machinery itself (subsumed to social capital) is itself a relationship. This relationship cannot be defined deterministically. It is struggle and conflict, it is a historical assemblage – and hence

open-ended – of victories and defeats: this is where politics lives; and the changes, the effects of the struggle, the (workers' bodies) being “within of beyond” the structures of exploitation, and the measures of this “within or beyond” are variables, dynamics, ontologically defined with the passing of time (Negri 2017, 45-46).

The full socialisation of production under real subsumption is not a closure of history and a mere objective condition of existence. In other words, Negri does not simply assume real subsumption as the ultimate metaphysical horizon which needs to be fully completed before any transition to socialism could ever happen. Rather, real subsumption is for Negri an open terrain of struggle, something that needs to be constantly fought, re-opened, dismantled and deconstructed. Going against real subsumption is not just an epistemological shift, but rather a political action that leads, according to Negri, to unleashing undisclosed and unpredictable potentialities of revolt and collective action.

The crux of the matter here can be summarised by saying that according to Harootunian, only the recognition that capitalism has not reached a totalising form of real subsumption can inspire and guide political action, as the unevenness of the global economy can reveal new anti-capitalist possibilities and sites of resistance. On the contrary, according to Negri, only the fight “within and beyond” real subsumption paves the way for overcoming and dismantling capitalism. In *Commonwealth*, the third volume of their *Empire* trilogy, Michael Hardt and Negri, however, seem to take into account critiques against the assumption of an historical phase in which real subsumption is the one and only social reality worldwide, taking on board Sandro Mezzadra's critique and emphasis on the heterogeneity of labour. As Mezzadra remarks in an interview on his contribution to the workerist tradition of Tronti and Negri, while sharing Negri's “concern with the necessity of providing conceptual definitions of the new nature of contemporary capitalism . . . [Mezzadra] increasingly stressed the

element of heterogeneity of labour regimes and subject positions as constitutive of the present constellation of capital and labour” (Cobarrubias, Casas Cortes, Pickles 2011, 586). The workerist tradition to which Negri belongs, indeed, has tended to simplify the question of real subsumption as an accomplished fact, a point of departure instead of stressing that real subsumption is an open-ended terrain of struggle inhabited by diverse forms of labour, resistance and exploitation. In contrast with this stagist temptation, in a striking passage from *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri engage with the heterogeneity of labour (that is, the survival of pre-capitalist forms of exploitation like slavery in the present), and seem to rethink the question of real subsumption by taking into account the problem of neo-colonialism and capitalism’s uneven development. Hardt and Negri write:

Really subsumed labour is no longer at the border between outside and inside capital but wholly inside. Some of the great twentieth-century theorists of imperialism, such as Rosa Luxemburg, extend Marx’s analysis beyond a single society to analyse imperialism as a process of the formal subsumption of noncapitalist economies under the dominant, capitalist economies. Formal subsumption, in this view, marks the borderline between capital and its outside. The process of globalisation thus involves a general passage from formal to real subsumption . . . Imagining the entire world in the stage of real subsumption, a single capitalist whole, however, might lead easily to those visions of a flat or smooth world without geographical divisions of labour and power. (Hardt and Negri 2009, 230)

As this passage makes clear, Hardt and Negri do not fully renounce the idea that capitalism involves a passage to real subsumption, because there is a tendency in the system to pervade every aspect of life and capital needs to expand in order to survive. However, Hardt and

Negri seem to reconsider the concept of formal subsumption as a sort of borderline between “capital and its outside.” Accordingly, Hardt and Negri extend their reconsideration of the question of subsumption by tackling the question of formal subsumption, by stressing the need to “recognise a reciprocal movement also under way in the process of globalisation, from the real subsumption to the formal, creating not new ‘outsides’ to capital but severe divisions and hierarchies within the capitalist globe” (ibid.). The recognition of formal subsumption as a sort of internal border at the heart of capital does not “however, mark a return to the past: movements toward formal and real subsumption coexist in the globalising capitalist world” (Ibid.). A useful distinction between capitalism and the world economy could suggest that the global dominance of capitalism entails the survival and reproduction of forms such as slavery and bonded labour and pre-capitalist hierarchies, which do not pertain to the scenario of real subsumption and yet are still included in a singular and unique economic system.

Hardt and Negri, however, at the end of this important section from *Commonwealth* reinstate their view, which guides the whole *Empire* trilogy, that notwithstanding these returns to formal subsumption, these provisos do not invalidate their thesis of the emergence of a radically new “imperial formation” (Hardt and Negri 2009, 233) that cannot be fully grasped by recourse to old tools of orthodox Marxism, or outmoded concepts such as the Asiatic mode of production. Even in *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri do not abandon the perspective stressing the unity, novelty, and interrelatedness of both the new global *hegemon*, empire or global capitalism in its new phase, and the unified subject that produces and antagonises it, the multitude. Without neglecting some irreconcilable differences, however, Negri’s and Harootunian’s views may be affiliated in order to decolonise the concept of subsumption: neither a set of stages nor an outside of the global economy, the combination of formal and real subsumption in a world in which capitalism is hegemonic also involves the

making of a global solidarity of labour abolishing any dualism between western and non-western societies, or postcolonial and metropolitan. In particular, even if Negri remarks the necessity to exclude any outside of capitalism, a perspective stressing the combination of formal and real subsumption does not lead to a vision of total alienation and commodification, but to a regimes of conflictual temporalities.

3. Subsumption, Time and Subjectivity

A comparative reading of Harootunian and Negri shows that the mechanism of subsumption needs to be seen at the same time as a process of becoming and as a site of struggle. Rethinking Harootunian's reflections by recourse to a deeper engagement with Antonio Negri's positions, and simultaneously rethinking Negri by addressing Harootunian's important critique of real subsumption, can lead to rethinking the possibility of the struggle against capitalism and the question of capital's temporality. In an earlier writing written in 1982 and published in Italian as "La costituzione del tempo", described as "the high point of the first period of Negri's thought" (Morfino 2018, 77), and now translated as the first part of *Time for Revolution*, Negri offers a close reading of Marx on real subsumption from the point of view of the question of temporality. The key discovery made by Negri in that text is that the concept of real subsumption is inherently contradictory, conflictual and in a way insufficient to address how capitalism manipulates the sense of time. Going back to the question of absolute and relative surplus value, Negri shows that the unilinear concept of a transition from formal to real subsumption needs to be challenged. The onset of real subsumption takes place through forms of struggle, domination and resistance, oppression and subversion, as the history of capitalism needs to be seen as violent history of political and

social conflict. Most importantly, Negri reinterprets time in capitalism as an “antagonism of plural times” (Negri 2003, 54). Real subsumption is, in Negri’s account, a state of crisis and conflict of different times: the constitutive time of capital and the productive times of the multitude. Negri writes that “the world of real subsumption is the world of crisis because it is entirely traversed by the antagonisms of displacement . . . The crisis is *in* circulation, at *every point*, and does not so much concern the *paths* of needs, of commodities and information . . . as the *emergence* of plural, multiversal and mobile times of subjects” (ibid.). Negri does not picture real subsumption as an unchallengeable total reality encompassing all aspects of society everywhere – or a stage to be reached before any possible transition to socialism can take place – but rather as a self-contradicting condition in which multiple times clash, “the antagonism that the plural substantial times of subjects oppose to the analytic of command” (ibid.).

Both Negri and Harootunian stress that capitalism is formed of a multiplicity of plural times, in which subjective, peripheral, proletarian times oppose the logic of subsumption and re-open any unilinear or stagist view to combat and struggle. The main difference lies in the fact that Negri opposes the idea of an “exogenous character of the possible alternative” to capitalism (Negri 2003, 57). Negri writes that “if the logic of displacement and antagonism operates, use-value as resistance and struggle is identifiable within the *endogenous* dimensions of the process” (ibid.). While Harootunian locates a multiple temporalities on the border between capitalism and pre-capitalist formations surviving in the present, Negri locates the plurality of times inside the antagonism generated by capital, and as a way of re-opening it to possibilities of social transformation. In Negri’s perspective, labour determines the constitutive temporality of capital and not vice versa: struggle is primary. Combining Negri and Harootunian would mean, indeed, stressing that the plurality of times that coexist in capitalism is both exogenous and endogenous: internal to the world economy but also

situated as a friction between capitalism and other not fully subsumed forms combining with it. In the same way as industrial and post-industrial capitalism still exist side by side, so pre-capitalist forms combine with capitalism in the present, giving rise to a conflictual political field in which the time of capital is constantly multiplied.

Most importantly, both Harootunian and Negri demonstrate the fundamental fact that *antagonistic, plural times are productive, constitutive of the history of capitalism, and that these times constantly re-open the logic of accumulation to unrealised potentialities of social transformation*. Bringing Harootunian in dialogue with Negri, in this context, could lead to reimagine the very concept of the multitude, as a biopolitical production of subjectivity, into a new kind of assemblage including experiences generated through the history of *formal* as well as *real* subsumption, acknowledging that the fight against capitalism needs to be accompanied by the fight against those pre- or non-capitalist forms of oppression, slavery and bondage that are today hybridised with the most technologically advanced forms of exploitation. The biopolitical, from this point of view, can be reframed into a wider and more inclusive notion of subjectivity. From the point of view of the periphery, the assemblage of singularities that compose the multitude and its exodus cannot exclude those partially or formally subsumed states of friction where the contingency and incompleteness of capitalism emerges within the world economy. Linking Harootunian and Negri means, from this point of view, to suggest that constituting the multitude needs to account for an ontology of plural times traversing the peripheral and central locations of capitalism. In the end, this ontology of plural times would entail a combination of temporalities and subjectivities, but also the constitution of this combination into a recognisable subject in revolt. If Harootunian's critique of real subsumption offers a salutary corrective to any stagist or unilinear view of history, reconnecting Harootunian's emphasis on formal subsumption to Negri's vision of

subsumption as a constant site of struggle can suggest ways of fighting and decolonising the historical analysis of the uneven temporality of capital..

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