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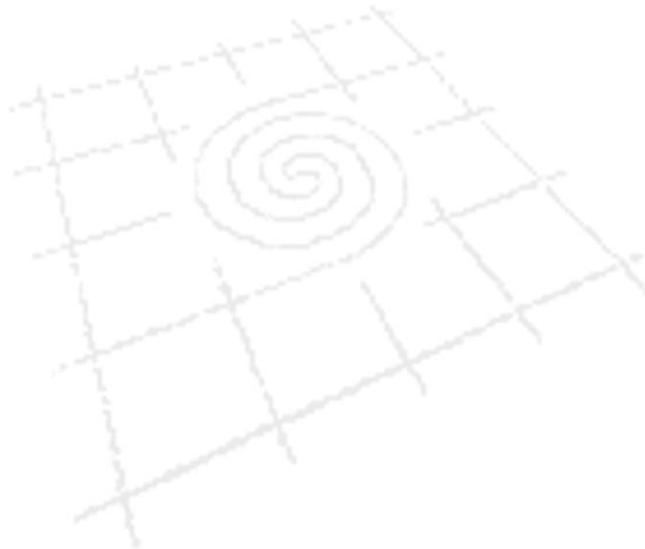
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Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

## **Marx on Ireland: the dialectics of colonialism**

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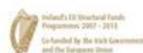


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# Marx on Ireland: the dialectics of colonialism

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## Abstract

In surveying a document that Marx wrote for a speech on Ireland (November 1867) a dialectical analysis of colonialism is revealed and it appears to be a multifaceted process which penetrated into all aspects of Irish society. Not only is the economy thwarted by this colonial process but also the other processes that make up this societal organic totality. In metabolising with these social (and natural) processes colonialism, according to Marx, created 'abominable conditions of existence' for the colonised. The overriding determinant of this continually evolving process of colonisation was the presence of a landlord caste who were not only the dominant faction in the British colonising regime but they also dominated the other diverse strategies which emerged from the other factions of the colonising regime. The concrete consequence of landlord dominated colonialism was that the rental form was the main driver of accumulation rather than capital as in the capitalist mode of production. Accordingly, we have an empirical example of colonialism without capitalism in this Irish social formation even though Ireland was colonised by capitalist Britain.

## Key words

Marx, dialectical method of enquiry, organic totality, mediated processes, abominable conditions of subversion, colonial process and Ireland.

The MEGA (Marx – Engels Gesamtausgabe) (publication of the entire archive writings of Marx and Engels) is revolutionising our understanding of Marx’s dialectical methodology and thereby our perception of the workings of the real world. In opening a window onto Marx’s conceptualisation procedures we finally gain an insight into how Hegel’s work influenced Marx’s development of his dialectical analysis<sup>1</sup>. The more we uncover the ‘inner workings’ of his dialectical technique, the more assuredly we can move the dialectic beyond Marx and develop it ourselves as an analytical tool. Such a tool can not only revolutionise our understanding of our contemporary world but would also allow us to revolutionise that world.

This article attempts to embrace the same emancipatory spirit of the MEGA project and accordingly to release Marx’s writings on Ireland from its perceived empirical straitjacket<sup>2</sup> to reveal not only a dynamic dialectical framework but also a colonial dialectic which determined the Irish organic totality. Accordingly my task is as much

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<sup>1</sup> Levine 2002, p.48

<sup>2</sup> According to Stephen Howe – ‘Marx and Engels did write extensively on Ireland, though mainly in private letters and in their journalism. Those writings have attracted a vast body of subsequent commentary, but despite some rather pious claims by later Irish Marxists, they do not amount to a comprehensive treatment of the Anglo-Irish question, or its placement in some general theory of imperialism’ (Howe, p.246).

about excavating the underlying conceptual structure as it is about reproducing what Marx stated about colonised Ireland.

In a previous work<sup>3</sup> I suggested that Marx's (and Engels) perception of colonial Ireland was not to see it as an unchanging condition of existence but an ever-evolving process of domination. This process of colonialism was constantly passing through phases of evolution and its political structure was made up of a number of distinct factions, which were at times competing with each other for dominance within the structure of the colonising regime. Here I want to move the analysis on by proposing that Marx attempted to comprehend this organic totality of a colonised Ireland dialectically, a feat which I will attempt to 'unearth' here. There is more to this conceptual endeavour of Marx than just the application of a dialectical framework. The actual empirical object of investigation was outside the confines of his original problematic of the capitalist mode of production and beyond the empirical boundaries of Britain. Recently, Anderson<sup>4</sup> has suggested that the mature Marx was not only working on 'margins' of capitalism, - in the sense of those margins being non-western societies - but also that his problematic had moved from a

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<sup>3</sup> Slater and McDonough, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Anderson 2010

near total exclusive economic object of enquiry as conceptualised in the mode of production to a much less reductionist totality, that included a wide range of non-economic aspects:

Marx's mature social theory revolved around a concept of totality that not only offered considerable scope for particularity and difference but also on occasion made those particulars – race, ethnicity, or nationality - determinants for the totality. Such was the case when he held that an Irish national revolution might be the “lever” that would help to overthrow capitalism in Britain<sup>5</sup>.

Ireland then was one of these non-reductionist totalities that Marx engaged with in his ‘mature social theory’ - those that were at the margins of capitalism. And being at the margin meant not only being ‘non-western’ but also non-capitalist and as was often the case in the nineteenth century, as being colonised as well! In Marx's opinion Ireland certainly fitted into these latter categories. Ireland was a totality that was determined not only by Anderson's ‘particulars of race, ethnicity and nationalism’ but also by being non-capitalist and colonised. But as we are going to uncover, every totality has a

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson, 2010, p.244

predominant determinant which 'shapes' the overall structure of the totality and the 'particulars' within. In Marx's understanding of Ireland, it is colonialism that is the 'general illumination which bathes all the other colours'<sup>6</sup>. But, if this is so, a crucial question still remains to be answered: How does capitalism operate in or penetrate into a totality dominated by colonialism? David Norman Smith in his discussion of Marx's later writings on ethnology suggests that:

Capitalism, as Marx had always argued, is an essentially dynamic system, which grows at the expense of the non-capitalist world. The ultimate tendency of this "metabolism" with the outside world is to break down the barriers that keep capital at bay<sup>7</sup>.

But as I hope to prove the determining 'barrier' that kept capital at bay in the Irish case was colonialism. And if this is so the answer to Smith's following on question becomes crucial to our understanding not only of colonialism but also of capitalism itself, but especially 'capitalism' at the margin:

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, 1973, p.107

<sup>7</sup> Smith, 2002 p.82

‘So what, then does capital encounter in its outward spiral?’<sup>8</sup>.

### **The ‘subverted’ conditions of colonial Irish society and Marx’s method of investigation of them**

Marx introduced this new Irish ‘problematic’ in a short article published in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1853, entitled ‘The Indian Question – Irish Tenant Right’. Within, Marx summarised the extent of English rule in Ireland in the following:

England has subverted the conditions of Irish society. At first it confiscated the land then it suppressed the industry by ‘Parliamentary enactments’, and lastly, it broke the active energy<sup>9</sup> by armed force. And thus England created those abominable ‘conditions of society’ which enable a small caste of rapacious lordlings to dictate to the Irish people the terms on which they shall be allowed to hold the land and live upon it<sup>10</sup>.

In summarising these ‘abominable’ conditions of subversion, Marx, I propose, was in fact highlighting the essential characteristics of the

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, 2002 p.82

<sup>9</sup> By including the concept of the ‘active energy’ of Irish society, Marx is constructing his framework to allow for the possibility of Irish masses mobilising and resisting these colonial impositions and thereby incorporating active agency within the dialectical relationship between the colonised and the colonising.

<sup>10</sup> Marx, 1971, p. 61

British colonial misrule. What we can take from this succinct synopsis of his understanding of Ireland in the 1850s is that to explicate these colonial 'conditions of Irish society (including its economy)', we need to be able to assess the degree of subversion operating throughout the entire structure of the Irish social formation. Even within the above brief quotation, we get a sense that Marx's object of enquiry is not just confined to a mode of production as it was in his major opus, *Capital*, but includes other societal levels beyond the economic. These levels include not only the economic ('industry'), but also the political ('Parliamentary enactments'), the repressive state apparatus ('armed force'(s)), the legal system ('dictate ... terms'), and civil society ('the active energy' of 'the Irish people'). Marx is essentially concerned with analysing as he stated in the opening line of the quotation 'the conditions of a society', which are apparently made up of a number of levels. It is an 'organic totality' which in fact is a dynamic society colonised! But this new theoretical object is not only multi-layered, it is also in a constant state of flux as indicated by the sequence of events created by the use of 'At first ... then ... and lastly'. And if it is moving, it is a process, in which its diverse moments enfold themselves into a mediated totality. Marx in the

following captures the necessary sense of movement involved in a totality which is an organic system/process:

This organic system itself, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements to itself, or creating out of it the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality<sup>11</sup>.

And in 'subordinating all elements to itself' an organic totality becomes an 'internal law-governed structure'<sup>12</sup>, in which one essential structure (process) becomes dominant:

In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours, and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Marx, 1973, p.278

<sup>12</sup> Ilyenkov, 1982 p.84

<sup>13</sup> Marx, 1973, p.107

To discover this 'hue/pull' tendency it is necessary to go beneath the surface of this organic totality to uncover the mediating relationship between the inner forces of the 'ether/gravity' and the other structures that make up the rest of the totality. We also have to be cognizant of the fact that in the dialectical framework we cannot grasp an organic totality by description. Marx actually suggests that there are two necessary conceptual trajectories to follow in order to analyse an organic totality:

The presentation of the whole ... as a rich totality of many determinations and relations is done by firstly discovering through analysis a small number of determinant abstract, general relations ... As soon as these individual moments had been more or less firmly established and abstracted, there began economic systems. Then begins the second 'path', [where] 'the abstract determination leads towards a reproduction of the concrete – the concrete is concrete because it is the concentrations of many determinations, hence the unity

of the diverse. It is ‘the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is [the] only way.’<sup>14</sup>.

What we take from these complex analytical and methodological assertions is that there appear to be two diametrically opposing trajectories involved in conceptualising an ‘organic totality’. The ‘initial ascent from the concrete to the abstract’<sup>15</sup> is about uncovering ‘a small number of determinant general relations’ (Marx, above quotation) and thus explicating ‘the inner connexion’<sup>16</sup> of the totality. And this ‘inner connexion’ of ‘a small number of determinant general relations’ is not a thing-like structural core but a process<sup>17</sup>, which is an ‘active middle’. Marx in his discussion of how capital is the determinant of modern landed property locates capital as the ‘active middle’ (process) between ground rent and wage labour:

The inner construction of modern society, or, capital in the totality of its relations, is therefore posited in the economic relations of modern landed property, which appears as a **process**; ground rent – capital – wage labour (the form of the

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<sup>14</sup> Marx, 1973 p.100/101

<sup>15</sup> Sayer, 1979 p.96

<sup>16</sup> Marx, *Capital*, German edition, p.28

<sup>17</sup> Marx stated in his preface to his German edition of *Capital*: ‘....the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing’ (Marx, 1867, p. )

circle can be put the another way; as wage-labour – capital – ground rent; but capital must always appear as the **active middle**<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added).

What Marx is suggesting here is that not only is the relationship between modern rent, capital and wage-labour a process which forms a circle with capital as its core but also this capital-core is itself a process because it is not just a middle but an ‘active middle’. As a consequence, the initial trajectory of Marx’s conceptualisation of the organic totality is not only to uncover these ‘internal relations’<sup>19</sup> but to explicate them as mediating processes, which has a determining active middle process. Thus, is revealed the internal law-governed active middle, which we now have identified as the essential moving process of the totality. The trajectory of conceptualising is now reversed and ‘then begins the second “path”<sup>20</sup> of rising from the abstract to the concrete’<sup>21</sup>. This final path has being described by Marx as his method of exposition (presentation) where the ‘active

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<sup>18</sup> Marx, 1973 p.276. What is interesting about Marx’s formulation here is the possibility that there may be many entry points in conceptualising an organic totality but only one active middle process.

<sup>19</sup> Ollman 1993

<sup>20</sup> Marx, 1973, p.100

<sup>21</sup> Marx, 1973,p.101

middle' <sup>22</sup>of the totality is a process in which this 'abstract determinations leads to a reproduction of the concrete'<sup>23</sup>.

Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law stated that Marx 'did not see a thing singly, in itself and for itself, separate from its surroundings; he saw a highly complicated world in continual motion'<sup>24</sup>. This ontological view of the concrete world is supported by Marx's own words from 1842 in which he refers to 'the contents of the world' as an 'unorganised mass of the whole' with a 'fluid essence of the content'<sup>25</sup>. Ilyenkov argued that Marx perceived any individual entity as essentially a moment within a process:

That means that any individual object, thing, phenomenon, or fact is given a certain concrete form of its existence by the concrete process in the movement of which it happens to be involved; any individual object owes any concrete form of existence to the concrete historically established system of

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<sup>22</sup> Marx, 1973, p.276

<sup>23</sup> Marx, 1973, p.101

<sup>24</sup> Paul Lafargue, in *Reminiscences of Marx and Engels*, Moscow, p. 78, quoted from Ollman, *Alienation*, footnote 24, p.280

<sup>25</sup> Marx, 1975 p. 233

things within which it emerged and of which it forms a part,  
rather than to itself, its own self-contained individual nature<sup>26</sup>.

The implication of this ontological perspective is that in order to interpret reality we cannot remain at the surface/appearance level of a totality. Rather we must enter the inner 'workings' of that totality.

For Marx, empirical data as expressed in:

... empirical correlations as needing to be explained and for him to explain them meant above all to unearth the *mechanisms* through which they are brought about, and behind them their *conditions*.<sup>27</sup> (author's emphasis)

And this search for the 'mechanisms' and 'conditions' entails the uncovering of the 'inner essential determination' of these empirical entities<sup>28</sup>.

In pursuit of the 'inner essential determination', Marx developed his dialectical form of investigation/enquiry. With regard to his method of enquiry Kosik has suggested that Marx's framework involved three stages:

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<sup>26</sup> Ilyenkov, 1982 p. 118

<sup>27</sup> Sayers, 1979 p.114

<sup>28</sup> Starosta, 2008 p. 301

1. Appropriating the material in detail, mastering it to the last historically accessible detail.
2. Analysing its different forms of development.
3. Tracing out their internal connections, i.e. determining the unity of different forms in the development of the material.<sup>29</sup>

The first two stages as indicated by Kosik are concerned with the empirical appropriation of data and locating the apparent correlation between them. The final stage is about 'unearthing' the 'very complicated mass of interconnected processes of development mutually interacting and altering forms of their manifestation. As Marx unfolds these empirical processes as internally connected, their subsequent enfolding suggests that the last process presented engulfs the previous ones and they all form 'moments' of an enlarging 'spiral' type entity, shaped like an ever 'expanding curve' *rather* than a 'simple circle'<sup>30</sup>. Their internal moving interaction implies mutual conditionality, where development assumes a form of a spiral:

This dialectics of all real development ... in which the condition becomes conditioned, the cause its effect, the universal

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<sup>29</sup> Kosik 1976 p.15

<sup>30</sup> Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Notebook, 2, p.266

becomes the particular, is the characteristic feature of internal interaction through which actual development assumes the form of a circle or, to be more precise of a spiral which extends the scope of its motion all the time, with each new turn<sup>31</sup>.

Ilyenkov therefore suggests that in his method of enquiry Marx descends from the concrete to the abstract in search of the essential active middle process. This descent is achieved by dissolving concrete entities as they appear on the surface of society into moments of processes that unfold from each other and thus create not only an internal network of relationships but also one that is in a state of flux<sup>32</sup>. This general process of unfolding develops into a spiral hierarchy of internally related processes as the emerging processes unfold and encompass all the previous unfolded processes. Therefore, although, the overall movement in this method of enquiry is one from the concrete empirical entities towards the more abstract internally related processes, those abstract processes resurface now and again to incorporate new empirical moments.

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<sup>31</sup> Ilyenkov 1982 p. 115

<sup>32</sup> Marx in discussing the dialectical understanding of concrete reality stated that 'every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence;...' (Marx, 1873, French Preface to Capital)

In order to grasp this moving complexity in Marx's method of exposition (presentation), which logically comes after the method of enquiry has been completed, it is crucial to be aware of how the structure of the object/totality determines the logic of his presentation – dialectically. But it is vital to note that Marx had a differing type of dialectical analysis with regard to his method of final exposition of an 'organic totality' from his initial method of enquiry. This difference is explicitly stated in the following from the German edition of *Capital*:

Of course the method of presentation must differ from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction<sup>33</sup>.

In the following account, I hope to demonstrate that Marx initially applied his enquiry methodology in his discussion of colonised Ireland. We have in our possession two published works in which

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<sup>33</sup> Marx, 1867, *Capital*, German edition, p.28

Marx attempts to engage in unravelling the colonial conditions which Britain imposed upon Ireland. These two pieces were originally handwritten in manuscript form - notes on an undelivered speech (26<sup>th</sup> November 1867) (6 printed pages) and a delivered speech (16<sup>th</sup> December 1867) (14 printed pages). Although, these works are short and much of the assertions are in note form, it should not be forgotten that the documents were not just intended for self-clarification but were composed to be presented to an audience. In this context, Marx must be seen to be attempting to give a consistent and coherent account of this particular subject matter. I believe the coherence of the speech documents is achieved by his use of an underlying conceptual apparatus which determine Marx's methods of enquiry and exposition and the difference between them. And it is the method of enquiry which is embedded in the undelivered speech of the 26<sup>th</sup> November that I want to expose here. The explication of the conceptual apparatus of the delivered speech of 16<sup>th</sup> December will have to wait for another occasion.

In addition, we have a copy of a report of Marx's December speech written by Eccarius, a council member of the International, who took

notes in order to prepare them for publication, but they were never published<sup>34</sup>.

As I am attempting to explicate Marx's theoretical framework from the undelivered speech document here, I believe it is necessary to follow the logic of his argument as it unfolds, especially since it is dialectically constructed. Therefore, most of my work is concerned with interpreting what Marx is saying. However, beyond the appearance of the empirical arguments there is an essential abstract conceptual process which is determining the architectonic structure of the arguments. And in order to highlight this 'hidden' conceptual movement it is necessary to break off from our interpreting endeavours to discuss in detail the underlying and unfolding theoretical apparatus. The manuscript of the undelivered speech *Notes of 26<sup>th</sup> November 1867*, is now titled *Notes for an undelivered speech on Ireland*.

### **The Undelivered Speech of the 26<sup>th</sup> November 1867**

Marx divides up his Notes under a number of subheadings, which are: *Exordium*. The Execution (2x paragraphs), *The Question*,

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<sup>34</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p. 436

What is Fenianism? (1x sentence – ‘What is Fenianism?’), *The Land Question*. (3x pages), *The English People*. (1/2 page) and finally *The Remedy*. (2x sentences). The first subheading he entitled *1.Exordium. The Execution*, where Marx refers to the recent execution of three Fenians, - Larkin, Allen and O’Brien, as ‘Political Executions’ and this has subsequently politicised the struggle despite the British establishment’s attempt to continue to criminalise the Fenians and their activities:

Since our last meeting the object of our discussion, Fenianism, has entered a new phase. It is baptized in blood by the English Government. [...] They (political executions at Manchester) open a new period in the struggle between Ireland and England. The whole Parliament and liberal press responsible. Gladstone. Reason: to keep up the hypocrisy that this was no political, but a criminal affair<sup>35</sup>.

Section 2 on Fenianism is blank without any written comments, which supports Marx’s earlier comment that this manuscript was an unfinished outline of a speech. However, Section 3: the Land

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<sup>35</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.120

Question makes up the bulk of the manuscript and is subdivided under the following subheadings:

***‘Decrease in Population, Increase of Livestock from 1855 to 1866, Emigration, How the Process Work, Process of Consolidation and the Change of Character of the English Rule in Ireland’<sup>36</sup>.***

In the first subsection entitled the *Decrease of Population*, Marx presents a statistical table which revealed that in the 25 year period, from 1841 to 1866, the population had decreased by 2,650,693<sup>37</sup>. And even in the last eleven years of this period, - 1855 to 1866, the population decreased by 1,032,694<sup>38</sup>. In the following subsections, - *Increase of livestock from 1855 to 1866* and *Emigration*, Marx statistically demonstrated that the continuing decline of the Irish rural population was diametrically contrasted with an increase in livestock:

In the same period from 1855 to 1866 the number of livestock...[had a]...total increase of live-stock: 996,877, about

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<sup>36</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 pp121-123

<sup>37</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.121

<sup>38</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.121

one million. Thus 1,032,694 Irish men have been displaced by about one million cattle, pigs, and sheep<sup>39</sup>.

And in correlating these 'movements of population and agricultural produce'<sup>40</sup> within this particular time Marx is suggesting that they are connected to each other through a third empirical trend of emigration, as he answers the question, concerning population loss:

'What has become of them? The *emigration list* answers. *From 1<sup>st</sup> May 1851 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1866:1,730.189.*' (Marx,p.121).

The now revealed relationship between these three concrete movements of human and livestock populations and emigration is that these are now posited as moments in a mediated process. And they are subsequently enfolded by two other concrete processes of farm consolidation and the conversion of tillage to pasture:

The process has been brought about and is still functioning upon an always enlarging scale by the *throwing together or consolidation* of farms (eviction) and the simultaneous conversion of tillage to pasture.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.121

<sup>40</sup> Marx 1976 p. 859

<sup>41</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.121

Having identified the enfolding connection between these empirical processes within Irish social formation, Marx is locating the dominant specific historical trends of this period. Moreover, he is initially establishing the empirical dimensions of the organic totality to be analysed.

Marx in a following subsection title sets about uncovering:

*'How the Process works'*

The subtitle implies that the mediated process of land consolidation and the increase in pasture is itself being superseded by as yet an unnamed process which apparently dominates the previously identified processes. We can begin to detect that Marx is unravelling a totalising ensemble of enfolding processes, which are simultaneously constructing an ever-evolving hierarchy of processual levels in a spiral-shaped movement. Marx begins his unravelling of this unnamed process by returning to the empirical areas of population movements and soil productivity. This time he attempts to assess the qualitative decline in the well being of the majority of the population and the concomitant decline in the productivity of the Irish soil, which can be summarised in the following:

(a).The People: Deterioration in the overall well-being of the 'mass of the people' (near famine conditions and a decline in real wages).

(b).The Land: Deterioration in the soil fertility and its average output (dramatic decline in cereals, especially wheat where Ireland has moved from being an exporter to being an importer)<sup>42</sup>.

So with a massive exodus of people through continuing emigration, the remaining population and their conditions of production experienced a deterioration of their conditions of existence. This is in stark contrast to what certain ideologues were contemporaneously advocating for the continuing necessity of more emigration. Marx in an earlier piece of writing (1853) challenged the misconceived optimism of this position:

Like the world in general, we are assured, that Ireland in particular is becoming a paradise for the labourer, in consequence of famine and exodus. Why then, if wages really are so high in Ireland, is it that Irish labourers are flocking in such masses over to England to settle permanently on this side

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<sup>42</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.122

of the 'pond', while they formerly used to return after every harvest?<sup>43</sup>

And with regard to the determination of the apparent loss of soil fertility, Marx again locates the importance of farm consolidation but this time with regard to the subsequent elimination of the cottier class through emigration:

Since the exodus, the land has been underfed and overworked, partly by the injudicious consolidation of farms, and partly because under corn-acre the farmer in a great measure trusted to his labourers to manure the land for them<sup>44</sup>.

What Marx is referring to here is that the nutrients of the soil that are lost in agricultural production, especially in the production of commodities, are not replaced by nature itself<sup>45</sup>. They have to be

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<sup>43</sup> , Marx and Engels 1971 p.66.

<sup>44</sup> Marx and Engels p.122

<sup>45</sup> Recently John Bellamy Foster has identified this formulation of Marx as the metabolic rift. Marx even used it in the context of colonial Ireland:

[I]t must not be forgotten that for a century and a half, England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil (Marx 1976 p.860).

The metabolic rift also appears under a form of primitive communism known as the Rundale system in nineteenth century Ireland (Slater and Flaherty, 2008).

physically put back into the soil in order to restore the 'natural' fertility through various types of manuring processes. The cottiers and the small tenants replaced the 'lost' soil constituents by manuring the land, but with their exodus this necessary process of fertilisation stopped. Consequently the Irish soil was deprived of its ability to sustain its productive fertility. However, the qualitative deterioration of the land and its immediate toilers is then subsequently contrasted with the increasing financial returns of profit and rent. This is apparently the dominant real contradiction of the post-famine period, - where the soil and its toilers were being 'sacrificed' (expropriated of their respective productive powers) for increased money returns:

Rent and profits may increase, although the produce of the soil decreases. The total produce may diminish, but that part of it, which is converted into surplus produce, falling to landlord and greater farmers, instead of the labourer<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> This clearing of the smallest farm holdings included the cottiers and their tenurial agreement with the tenants of conacre, - 'cornacre'. The Pre-Famine cottiers rented small plots of land (size varied from half a rood to two acres) from the tenant-farmer, which the cottier generally paid for in labour, - labour days. These plots were used to grow potatoes, which feed the cottier and his family. But part of the agreement between the tenant and the cottier was that the cottier would 'fertilise' the plot, generally with manure or seaweed.

<sup>46</sup> Marx and Engels p.122/3

In *Capital*, vol.1 Marx explains how this real contradiction of this post famine period came about:

The reason for this will easily be understood. On the one hand, with the throwing together of the smallholdings, and the change from arable to pasture land a larger part of the total product was transformed into a surplus product. The surplus product increased although there was a decrease in the total product of which the surplus product formed only a fraction. On the other hand, the monetary value of this surplus product increased still more rapidly than its actual quantity, owing to the rise in the price of meat, wool, etc., on the English market<sup>47</sup>.

The financial returns on this type of agricultural production 'falls' to the landlords and 'greater farmers' because a large proportion of the direct producers are expelled from the immediate production process through emigration. This allows more of the product of production to be given over to the surplus product. Those that remain are more intensively expropriated of their surplus labour through increases in rent returns and profit taking. The apparent contradictory relationship between the increasing financial returns from production and the loss

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<sup>47</sup> Marx 1976 p.860

of soil fertility was intensified by the loss of the potential restorers of that fertility, - the cottiers and small tenants through emigration:

‘So result: gradual expulsion of the natives, gradual deterioration and exhaustion of the source of life, the soil’<sup>48</sup>.

Marx continues:

*‘Process of Consolidation.* This process has only begun; it is going on in rapid strides’<sup>49</sup>.

Here again Marx returns to the empirical level in which statistics on consolidation reveal not only an increase in farm sizes but they also allow him to project forward these empirical trends of consolidation to predict that if the rate of consolidation is going to continue in its present propensity and reach the English level then more ‘expulsion of the natives’ will be needed:

‘Thus to be cleared off 2,847,220, if we number only the farmers and their families’<sup>50</sup>.

The ‘clearing off’ of this supposed surplus population of agriculturalists is a systematic process:

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<sup>48</sup> Marx and Engels p.123

<sup>49</sup> Marx and Engels p.123

<sup>50</sup> Marx and Engels p123

This system [is a] natural offspring of the famine of 1846, accelerated by the abolition of the Corn Laws, the rise in the price of meat and wool, now systematic<sup>51</sup>.

This new process has very divergent moments in its formation as a systematic process. These moments include not only a natural occurrence (The Famine) but also economic (price rises) and political (Repeal of the Corn Laws) aspects<sup>52</sup>. In conceptualising it as systematic, Marx is proposing that it was not just an immediate reaction to the famine conditions but, having come into existence by that event, it became a structural part of the Irish social formation, as he states in the following from *Capital*:

Finally, it is a systematic process, which does not simply make a passing gap in the population, but sucks out of it every year more people than are replaced by births, so that the absolute level of the population falls year by year (footnote – Between

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<sup>51</sup> Marx and Engels p.123

<sup>52</sup> The Repeal of the Corn Laws was to be assessed by Marx as the 'chief factor' in his delivered speech document. Kinealy suggests that it was a conscious and deliberate decision by the British Parliament to sacrifice the Irish poor in order to provide cheap food for the British industrial workers (Kinealy, p 54.) And according to Marx this was the normal orientation of the Westminster Government to Ireland as 'the management of merely local concerns of Ireland,... was altogether immaterial to Great Britain' (Marx and Engels 1978 p.177).

1851 and 1874, the total number of emigrants amounted to 2,325,922<sup>53</sup>.

And finally Marx identifies this crucial determining process:

*'Clearing the estate of Ireland...'*

It is significant that Marx used the concept of the 'estate' in naming the process of land clearance in that it not only 'equates' Ireland with being essentially an extended landed estate and simultaneously emphasises that it is an industrial wasteland having already been de-industrialised by an earlier phases of colonial oppression. Marx continues the sentence by highlighting the consequence of this 'clearing the estate of Ireland' – 'transforming it into an English agricultural district, minus its resident lords and their retainers, separated from England by a board water ditch'<sup>54</sup>.

As the Act of Union was the 'annihilation of the Irish Legislature'<sup>55</sup> the process of estate clearances is the annihilation of Irish civil society and reducing it into being 'only an agricultural district of England, marked off by a wide channel from the country to which it yields corn,

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<sup>53</sup> Marx 1976 p.107

<sup>54</sup> Marx and Engels p.123

<sup>55</sup> Marx and Engels 1978 p.224

wool, cattle, industrial and military recruits'<sup>56</sup>. In a letter to Engels (30<sup>th</sup> November, 1867) Marx observes:

*'Clearing the estate of Ireland! Is now the one purpose of English rule in Ireland'*<sup>57</sup>.

The following and final section unravels the 'overriding moment' of the colonising process within this particular organic totality of post-Famine Ireland.

### **Unfolding the colonial process**

The title of this section '*Change of Character of English Rule in Ireland*' is extremely significant in that it asserts that 'English Rule in Ireland' is itself engaged in an evolutionary movement over time - in fact - as a process. Marx proceeds in his explication of this colonial process by looking initially at the contemporary situation and then moving on to examine how that process unfolded over time. Its style of exposition in dense note form needs a lot of elaboration in order to make sense of Marx's ideas here. The post-Famine manifestation of this colonial process is captured in the following two lines:

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<sup>56</sup> Marx, 1976 p.105

<sup>57</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.148

'State only a tool of the landlords. *Evictions* also employed as a means of political punishment. (Lord Abercorn. England, *Gaels in the Highland of Scotland*<sup>58</sup>.

The immediate 'character of English Rule in Ireland' within this post-Famine period is dramatically revealed in the opening statement; which I have underlined. This provocative assertion makes the link between the dominant overall process of 'Clearing the estate of Ireland' and the political institutions of the state and thereby with the colonial process. But crucially, it is not the obvious institutions of the colonial state that are determining this strategy, of clearance. Rather it is the work of the landlords with the support of the state apparatus. These state institutions included the legal system, the local police force and the army when necessary<sup>59</sup>. And the crucial colonial 'moment' of Irish landlordism in the context of consolidating estate holdings was its ability to use the ultimate form of coercion – eviction; described by Marx 'as a means of political punishment'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.123

<sup>59</sup> As Marx said in 1853 'Legislature, magistracy and armed force, are all of them the offspring of improper conditions of society, preventing those arrangements among men which would make useless the compulsory intervention of a third supreme power' (Marx, 1853, p.61)

<sup>60</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.123

It is not possible at this stage to ascertain what concrete instances Marx is referring to here. But there are numerous examples even after the Famine of 'political' evictions. For example in 1852, a landlord in Mayo evicted 15 tenants because of their failure to follow his voting instructions<sup>61</sup>. What is significant about this type of eviction is that it can legally exist in the Irish social formation. Essentially the Irish peasantry had no legal right to defend themselves against such an unfair imposition of 'abominable' conditions. Next Marx mentions Lord Abercorn without putting him into a context, but if we refer to his letter to Engels on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1867 we can gain an insight into why:

The Irish Viceroy, Lord Abercorn, 'cleared' his estate in the last few weeks by forcibly evicting thousands of people. Among them were prosperous tenants whose improvements and investments were thus confiscated!<sup>62</sup>.

The Abercorn reference is followed by the word 'England'. Marx in his discussion of primitive accumulation stated how 'in England the conversion of arable land into pasture since the decade prior to the

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<sup>60</sup> Tim O'Neill, 2000, 'Famine Evictions' in Carla King (eds) *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland*, p.53

<sup>62</sup>Marx and Engels 1971 p.143/144

middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the *enclosures of the commons*, the throwing together of small farms. This is still proceeding'<sup>63</sup>. *Gaels in the Highland Scotland'* is Marx obviously referring to the Highland clearances in Scotland. These short note-like points are subsequently followed by a presentation of the historical development of English rule in Ireland:

Former English policy: displacing the Irish by English (Elizabeth), roundheads (Cromwell). Since Anne, 18<sup>th</sup> – century politico-economical character only again in the protectionist measures of England against her own colony making *religion* a proprietary title. After the *Union* the system of rack-renting and middlemen, but left the Irish, however ground to the dust, holder of their native soil. Present system, quiet business-like extinction, and government only instrument of landlords (and usurers)<sup>64</sup>.

With regard to the unfolding of empirical categories here there is a definite change in the style of the presentation. Marx obviously switches to a more chronological approach, which deals with a long

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<sup>63</sup> Marx, 1857-61, Collected works, vol. 28, p.258

<sup>64</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.123/4

sweep of Irish history, running from the twelfth century to mid-nineteenth century, within which he appears to locate seven phases in the evolution of the 'character of the English rule in Ireland'. The watersheds of these phases are generally indicated by the name on the throne (or Cromwell) or by an event (which was generally catastrophic to Ireland), followed by a brief description of the characteristic traits 'of the English rule in Ireland', i.e., 'displacing the Irish by English', 'protectionist measures', 'religion as a proprietary title', 'rackrenting and middlemen system' and finally 'the present system of extinction'<sup>65</sup>. This type of historical presentation establishes not only a sense of continuity of purpose in the English governance of Ireland but it also locates the 'abstract' process of colonising as the 'internal' and dominating process of these identified historical periods, although there are differences in the modus operandi as suggested in the specific historical categories of the strategies adopted.

The concept of the 'politico-economical character' used by Marx in this paragraph may be significant in his methodological exploration of colonialism, in that it appears to attempt to combine the political regime with its strategy of subjugating the Irish economy/civil society,

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<sup>65</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.123

to its own desired aims. Accordingly, it is an abstract general concept (abstract universal) of colonialism, while its specific concrete manifestation within a particular historical period of English rule of Ireland, eg. 'protectionist measures', 'rackrenting and middlemen' appear to take on the forms of the concrete universal within each phase of colonial domination. In a letter to Engels (30<sup>th</sup> November, 1867) Marx actually identified a change of form of the politico-economical character of the post-Famine period '...since 1846 the economic content and therefore also the political domination in Ireland has entered an entirely new phase, ...'<sup>66</sup>.

The diverse range of colonising strategies and their resultant subverted conditions of existence within Irish society can include cultural, ethnic, religious, racial, military and of course economic dimensions. Within each phase of colonisation these strategies were present but only one of them tended to dominate not only the others but also the Irish social formation as a whole. Accordingly, clearing the estate of Ireland emerges as 'active middle' of the colonial process in this particular historical phase of the Post-famine development. This 'active centre' of clearing the land can be

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<sup>66</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.147

contrasted with the preceding phase of colonialism, 1800-1846, where the 'rackrenting and middlemen' system was the dominant process of the Irish organic totality. This system 'left the Irish ,.. ground to dust, holder of their native soil'<sup>67</sup>.

Because of repeated bouts of colonial de-industrialisation the Irish peasantry had no alternative livelihood open to them but to live on the land as agriculturalists but this had dire consequences for them, as Marx suggests in the following:

Land became the great object of pursuit. The people had now before them the choice between the occupation of land, *at any rent, or starvation. System of rack-renting*<sup>68</sup>.

Therefore the land of Ireland was not just a monopoly of ownership by the colonisers, but it also possessed a monopoly of access to a livelihood for the vast majority of the colonised. Marx in naming this Irish rental form as 'rackrenting' in the context of Pre-Famine Ireland, emphasises the extreme extractive nature of this particular rental regime. And in the following he outlines the reasons why capital was

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<sup>67</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.123/4

<sup>68</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.132

not invested in agricultural improvements under this 'rackrenting' system:

On the one side you have a small class of land monopolists, on the other, a very large class of tenants with very petty fortunes, which they have no chance to invest in different ways, no other field of production opening to them, except the soil. They are, therefore, forced to become tenants-at-will. Being once tenants-at-will, they naturally run the risk of losing their revenue, provided they do not invest their small capital. Investing it, in order to secure their revenue, they run the risk of losing their capital, also <sup>69</sup>.

And being tenants at will – at the will of the landlord – there was no stated termination date to this type of tenurial agreement so that the tenant could not wilfully 'run out' the fertility of the soil because he expected to hold onto the land<sup>70</sup>. But this perpetual rolling over of this agreement was extremely advantageous to the landlords because it

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<sup>69</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.59/60

<sup>70</sup> As Richey stated:

'The wilful running out of the land so injurious to the owner frequently occurred in the case of tenants for fixed terms, but did not so often arise in the case of yearly tenants who expected to hold on to their farms'(p'45).

allowed them the legal right to intervene in this unwritten tenurial relationship whenever they chose to do so. At the same time it did not protect the tenant from rent increases or even eviction. The consequence of this form of tenure was to create an inherent insecurity of landholding which had the propensity to rob tenants of their investments in their respective holdings:

... most of whom hold a temporary lease concluded for one year – have merely enabled the landowner to demand a higher rent on the expiration of the existing lease. Thus the tenant either loses the farm, if he does not wish to renew the lease under less favourable conditions, and with the farm he loses the capital he has invested in the improvements, or he is compelled to pay the landlord, in addition to the original rent, interest on the improvements made by his (tenant's) capital<sup>71</sup>.

This tenurial insecurity was the pivotal moment in the rackrenting process in that by shortening the lease or eliminating it altogether – 'tenants at will' - it provided the landlord with the potential opportunity to intervene at will to either demand an increased rent or evict the tenant. This insecurity manifested itself also in a financial form. Those

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<sup>71</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.77

that were able to accumulate money, as if accumulated behind the back of the rent relationship, invested it not only outside of agriculture but also outside of the country, in the metropolitan core. In the Pre-Famine period when 'rackrenting' dominated the economy, intermediary landlords known as middlemen engaged in such colonial 'induced' investments:

Middlemen accumulated fortunes that they *would* not invest in the improvement of the land, and they *could* not, under the system which prostrated manufactures, invest in machinery, etc. All their accumulations were sent therefore to England for investment<sup>72</sup>.

All these highlighted moments of the social processes operating in Irish agriculture in this particular colonial social formation, significantly demonstrate the absence of the capitalist mode of production:

[T]he capitalist mode of production itself does not exist, the tenant himself is not an industrial capitalist, and his manner of

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<sup>72</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.131

farming is not a capitalist one. This is how it is in Ireland, for example. Here the tenant is generally a small peasant.<sup>73</sup>

Marx then articulates those moments that 'subvert' the productive conditions of the Irish peasantry and these revolve around how the specific rental form disrupts the 'normal' (capitalist) circulation of capital within the production process:

What he pays the landowner for his lease often absorbs not only a portion of his profit, i.e. his own surplus labour, which he has a right to as owner of his own instruments of labour, but also a portion of the normal wage, which he would receive for the same amount of labour under other conditions. The landowner, moreover, who does nothing at all here to improve the soil, expropriates from him the small capital, which he incorporates into the soil for the most part by his own labour, just as a usurer would do in similar conditions. Only the usurer would at least risk his own capital in the operation<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Marx, 1981, p.763/4

<sup>74</sup> Marx, 1981 p.763/4

What we apparently have in the Irish social formation is, according to Marx's analysis of it, colonialism without the capitalist mode of production!

The next phase located in this historical exposition is the post-Famine period, where Marx returns to the particular 'politico-economical character', asserting the significance of:

'Present system, quiet business-like extinction, and the government only the instrument of the landlords (and usurers)<sup>75</sup>(emphasis added)'.

The newly added concepts to the ones in the initial formulation at the beginning of the paragraph are the 'quiet business-like extinction' and the 'usurers' added within brackets. In the latter concept Marx is probably referring to how the Encumbered Estates Court 'turned a mass of previously enriched middlemen into landlords'<sup>76</sup>. The 'quiet business-like extinction' relates to how the Irish landlords were the

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<sup>75</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.124

<sup>76</sup> Marx in a letter (April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1870) to Engels stated 'that the Encumbered Estates proceedings have put a mass of *small usurers* in place of the turned out flotten landlords' (Marx, p.296) And in his reply the following day, Engels identified the number of estate transfers and the religion and ethnic characteristics of these usurers:

'Land sold since the Encumbered Estates Court amounts according to my notes to as much as 1/5 of the total, the buyers were indeed largely usurers, speculators, etc, *mainly Irish Catholics*. (Marx and Engels 1971 p.297)

instigators of this type of forced emigration (through eviction or assisted emigration) and they were applying this strategy of 'extinction' on their own individual landed estates. Consequently, the manifestation of this colonial strategy of 'Clearing the estate of Ireland' was realising itself not only at the local level, within the confines of the immediate landed estates, but also across most of the landed estates in Ireland<sup>77</sup>. Behind these apparent discrete actions of expulsion, however there was a collective landlord plan to exterminate the native Irish lower classes as Marx revealed in the late 1850s:

The landlords of Ireland are confederated for a fiendish war of extermination against the cott(i)ers; or as they call it, they combine for the economical experiment of clearing the land of useless mouths. The small native tenants are disposed of with no more ado than vermin is by the housemaid<sup>78</sup>.

These Irish landlords were 'quietly' going about their 'business' of extinction without supposedly the formal consent of the British State,

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<sup>77</sup> Marx was aware that there was a need to 'aggregate' the individual actions of the landlords in order to discover the systematic approach to the extinction of the Irish peasantry:

'The *clearing of estates* only shows, as a *systematic process* applied to whole counties, what occurred everywhere in detail,...' (Marx, CW, vol. 28, p. 258).

<sup>78</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.90

nevertheless, they were using the local apparatuses of that state to carry out their 'war of extermination'. This was especially true with regard to the necessary legal and physical force requirements in the process of eviction, - the ejection process. In supporting the process of ejection, the state provided both legal and physical protection for the landlord's crowbar brigade. In this respect the colonising British state, especially those apparatuses which maintained social order in the midst of civil turmoil, were being hijacked by these Irish landlords to support their eviction procedures on the ground. In referring to this post-Famine colonial strategy of 'Clearing of the estate of Ireland', Marx stated in a letter to Engels (30<sup>th</sup> November, 1867) that 'The *stupid* English government in London knows nothing of course itself of this immense change since 1846'<sup>79</sup>. A dramatic point in the unravelling of the colonial process has been reached. The most obvious agent of colonisation, - the British Government in London - was unaware of what another faction of the colonising regime was actually enacting on the Irish landed estates, - the landlords and their strategy to extinguish the small tenantry and the cottiers.

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<sup>79</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.148

So the end point of Marx's first conceptual path has been reached, - the 'essential determining structure' (process), in this phase of colonialism, - 'Clearing the estate of Ireland'. Marx now needs to explicate in detail its specific social form. But, in this document Marx does not engage in this process of exploration, rather, he leaves it to his later work which he presented in his delivered 'Fenian' speech of the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1867.

### **Marx's conceptual movement of his undelivered speech document**

As we have discovered there is an obvious sense of conceptual movement inherent in Marx's work here. He begins by examining the specific historical categories on human and livestock population movements by locating an apparent statistical relationship between them and a third factor, - emigration. In establishing a mediated relationship between these three concrete entities Marx revealed that they formed a process and these concrete entities were thus subsumed under that process as its essential 'moments'. This initial process was then subsequently enfolded by another empirical process, - 'farm consolidation – the switch from tillage to pasture'. These metabolised processes were in turn engulfed by the

emergence of a rental process which appears to be the dominant economic contradiction of this post-Famine period. The increase in the financial returns on profit and rent took place in a context that there was a fall in the population of agriculturalists and simultaneously a decline in the 'produce of the soil'.

The misery of the labourers and the soil (as manifested in its depletion) is contrasted by the increasing returns on profit taking and rent. These empirical trends are thus linked to each other as the concrete forms of revenue acquisition was determined by the landlords extracting a 'surplus' from the direct producers (the tenantry) and their essential condition of production – the soil. In a strictly mode of production analysis where the problematic is generally confined to the economic, this grinding extractive process would probably be the overall dominant relationship, and thereby 'predominates over the rest' of the relationships to become the 'active middle' process. But Marx does not stop at this point of his conceptual pathway he pushes on to unearth a process that will ultimately become the real 'active middle' process of this Irish organic totality – the colonial process of 'Clearing the Estate of Ireland'.

**Marx's conceptual levels along the 'pathway' to the colonial active middle.**

Population decrease – livestock increase – emigration



Farm consolidation – increase in pasture



Deterioration in conditions of production – increase in financial returns



Famine – Repeal of the Corn Laws – rise in the price of meat and wool, entitled

'Clearing the Estate of Ireland'.



Colonial State dominated by the 'clearing' landlords

In moving through these processes sequentially Marx finally arrives at what he called the 'systematic' process, where the Repeal of the Corn Laws instigated a 'systematic process' which involved

Westminster passing a parliamentary act which in turn devastated the Irish agricultural economy by collapsing the prices for Irish grain. It was at this point that Marx was able to reveal the essential 'active middle' process of this entire concrete totality, - 'Clearing the estate of Ireland' - and subsequently declared it to be 'the one purpose of English rule in Ireland'. Marx appears to have switched from a more synchronic type of analysis to a more diachronic form as he investigates the emergence of this final phase of 'English rule in Ireland' - 'clearing the estate of Ireland'. Thus this post-Famine form is itself an evolutionary phase of the British colonising process.

As Marx 'descended' from the concrete to the abstract he arrived at the essential social process of the Irish social formation in its post-Famine phase which was declared to have a specific colonial form to it. Marx therefore has completed his initial path of enquiry and we would presume that he would now turn his attention to the second path of exposition and attempt to retrace his conceptual steps and ascend from the abstract to the concrete. But on this occasion as we have discovered he did not set out on the second conceptual pathway, - his method of exposition. This failure to continue and move from the abstract to the concrete may be explained by his

declared illness when a ‘fever that lasted a fortnight and passed only two days’<sup>80</sup> before he was scheduled to give the paper on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1867.

It is important to highlight that Marx is not describing the features of colonialism in the post-Famine period. He is in fact tracing out the ‘inner connections’ of this organic totality and the precise trajectory of his conceptual movement is determined by how these ‘inner connections’ are structured internally in this particular organic totality. We have discovered that Marx in his investigation of this period unravelled a totalising ensemble of enfolding processes, beginning with ‘population loss – emigration – livestock increase’ process at the immediate concrete level to the ‘clearing of the estate of Ireland’ at the ‘abstract’ centre of this particular totality. To arrive at this point Marx moved through a number of mediating processes. Therefore, Banaji is right, Marx’s conceptual movement ‘is not a straight-line process’:

One returns to the concrete at expanded levels of the total curve, reconstructing the surface of society in stages, as a

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<sup>80</sup> Marx and Engels 1971 p.146

structure of several dimensions. And this implies ...we find a continuous oscillation between essence and appearance<sup>81</sup>.

The latter tendency was obvious in Marx's work here as he constantly kept referring back to statistics, which identified empirical trends manifesting themselves at the concrete surface level before he uncovered how they were actually mediated moments of underlying processes. The inherent oscillation between appearance and essence and an unfolding of internally mediated processes determines that we perceive the overall structure of this organic totality as 'expanding curve or spiral-movement composed of specific cycles of abstraction (of processes). Each cycle of abstraction, and thus the curve as a whole, begins and ends with ...the realm of appearances, ...<sup>82</sup>.

There is another vital determination of the spiral structure to the organic totality and that has to do with understanding movement within an organic totality and specifically between processes. When Marx initially unfolds these processes, they have a tendency to appear to be mere circles, forming an internal unity and whose

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<sup>81</sup> Banaji, 1979 p.40

<sup>82</sup> Banaji, 1979 p.27

elements are mutually conditioning, 'in which the condition becomes conditioned, the cause becomes the effect, the universal becomes the particular, is a characteristic feature of internal interaction through which actual development assumes the form of a circle'<sup>83</sup>. But this is an illusion created by the process of abstraction as the real concrete 'is the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse'<sup>84</sup> - a unity of diverse processes! Therefore, mediating processes smash open the inherent tendencies of an individual process to be self- conditioning and thus retaining a circular form. Marx's initial process of 'the population loss – emigration – livestock increase' process forms a such-like circle of self conditioning. But this process was subsequently engulfed by another process, - 'the consolidation of farms and the switch from tillage to livestock', - which not only merged the two processes but they subsequently began to expand 'upon an always enlarging scale...'<sup>85</sup>. Marx has conceptualised this type of expanding movement as a change in form from a circular to a spiral form:

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<sup>83</sup> Ilyenkov, 1982 p.115

<sup>84</sup> Marx, 1973 p. 101

<sup>85</sup> Marx and Engels p.121

‘...the gradual propagation of capital by reproduction passing it from a circular into a spiral form...’<sup>86</sup>.

And since the essence of an organic totality is movement as mutual interaction takes place between different moments, these mediating processes will always form an ever-enlarging and expanding spiral curve in its inner configuration. Therefore, the essential inner determination of an organic totality will be the active middle process like the valorisation process in capitalism. This is also true with regard to what we have uncovered in the post-Famine phase that ‘Clearing the estate of Ireland’ is an active middle process of this colonised totality.

## **Conclusions**

In Wacquant’s critical review of Marx’s heuristic models - it was his organic totality model that was ‘more specific, concrete and processual’<sup>87</sup> than the other models used by Marx. And from our explication of Marx’s conceptual framework on Irish colonialism, we uncovered that Marx was using this particular heuristic model. Therefore, if Anderson and Smith are right about Marx’s intellectual

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<sup>86</sup> Marx, 1976, p.780

<sup>87</sup>Wacquant 1985 p.35

endeavours in his later years (they both suggest that Marx was attempting to 'extend his dialectical analysis' into non-capitalistic social formations, - replicating the real movement of capitalism into these regions), the question arises what type of societal entity was there to be conquered. What I want to suggest from our conceptual odyssey into Marx's dialectical understanding of the Irish situation is that what was waiting for capitalism at the 'margins' were other organic totalities, with their necessary spirals of intermeshing processes and each and every one of these 'non-western' totalities having its own specific 'active middle' process. Smith grasps the essential and potentially correct trajectory of conceptualisation in his question, - 'So what, then does capital encounter in its outward spiral?'<sup>88</sup> The answer is, - other spirals – of mediating processes that form non-capitalistic organic totalities. Since processes metabolise with each other depending on the essential structures of the processes interacting, the mediated relationships that emerge between the organic totalities of capitalism and non-capitalistic modes of production will not be a one to one correspondence as is the way with linear cause and effect frameworks. What is more likely

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<sup>88</sup> Smith 2002 p. 82

to occur is that there will be many differing points of interaction and on many differing levels of determination, although one form of determination will be dominant in the overall process of mediation as is the way with all organic totalities.

In the Irish case, as we have discovered, the indigenous organic totality was dominated by British colonialism, where the normal conditions of a society were transformed into 'abominable' conditions. This process of subversion was imposed on Irish society, as Marx stated in his opening quotation of this article, in order 'to enable a small caste of rapacious lordlings to dictate to the Irish people the terms on which they shall be allowed to hold the land and live upon it'<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, capitalism is, to paraphrase Smith, being 'barred' by how a particular form of commodity production which had 'metabolised' with an Irish organic totality where colonial landlordism dominated. Marx repeatedly stated that 'All that the English government succeeded in doing was to plant an aristocracy in Ireland'<sup>90</sup>. And as a consequence of this imposed landlordism, it is the rental relationship which was the main driver of accumulation rather

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<sup>89</sup>Marx and Engels 1971, p.61

<sup>90</sup>Eccarius report in Marx and Engels 1971 p.

than capital as in the capitalist mode of production<sup>91</sup>. This in itself is a consequence of the particular colonial configuration of the Irish organic totality that made commodity production unable to become 'completed' in its capitalist form. Marx in his Preface to the German edition of *Capital* brilliantly captures this contradictory relationship between fully developed capitalist production and its 'incompleted' form:

In all other spheres, we, like all the rest of Continental Western Europe, suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development. Alongside the modern evils, a whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead<sup>92</sup>.

Therefore, commodity producers 'at the margins', who produce under non-capitalist conditions of production suffer from both the 'living ... [and] the dead, in the sense that they have to live with market

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<sup>91</sup> Slater and McDonough 1994.

<sup>92</sup> Marx, 1867, Preface to the German edition of *Capital*, vol.1.

competition from capitalist commodity producers and simultaneously produce those commodities without the more developed capitalist forces of production. These non-existent conditions of production are therefore 'dead' to these 'petty' commodity producers. In the Irish colonial case, Marx in his discussion of the Irish peasantry outlined the precariousness of such a relationship between the non-capitalist Irish peasant producer and capitalism:

They are, one after the other, and with a degree of force unknown before, crushed by the competition of an agriculture managed by capital, and therefore they continually furnish new recruits to the class of wage-labourers.<sup>93</sup>

However, it needs to be stated that, although they are generally 'crushed' by foreign capitalist competition, they do not join the ranks of the Irish industrial wage-labourers because their respective industrial enterprises have already being 'cleared' from the Irish landscape in previous crushing bouts of colonial oppression. As a consequence the 'ejected' Irish peasantry become proletariats in foreign locations. And therefore they are not only cleared from their landed estates they are also cleared from their homeland!

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<sup>93</sup> Marx, 1976 p.

Accordingly, as we have discovered that colonialism, is a multi-faceted process which has an innate ability to manifest itself throughout a societal organic totality on many levels and within differing and diverse forms. Its omnipotent presence and its constantly changing forms 'bath' all in its hue to such an extent that its existence belies direct empirical observation and subsequent description; it is only when we attempt to perceive it through the prism of a dialectical framework that its presence becomes obvious. In holding Marx's 'Undelivered' speech document up to the mirror of dialectics the apparent concrete empirical data presented in its statistical and factual forms melt away to reveal an underlying ensemble of constantly moving internal processes. These levels penetrate each other, - the concrete entities end up as moments within abstract processes and the internal processes are the determination of concrete reality. Both the concrete and the abstract forms interact to become an organic totality. This therefore is a totally different perspective on Marx's understanding of colonialism than for example economic dependency theory which is closer to the 'old' Marx of Capital than the 'new' Marx of the archives.

In conclusion what Marx has left us with is not just a damning expose of British colonial domination of Ireland but also, and much more importantly, a conceptual methodology that allows us to continue this endeavour beyond what he did within this undelivered speech document of November 1867. Peter Hudis is right when he stated that with regard to Marx's work on colonialism we 'still have much to learn from the *method* and *approach* that Marx employed in his studies on colonialism'<sup>94</sup>. This is particularly true of Marx's writings on colonial Ireland.

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<sup>94</sup> Hudis, 2004 p.58

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