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Temporality is more than speed: Theorizing the Desynchronization of Capitalism and Democracy from the Global South

Introduction

At the turn of the 20th century political theorists like Sheldon Wolin and William Connolly captured the contradiction between democracy and capitalism through the lens of social acceleration. In their view, the acceleration of the pace of time galvanized by a modern capitalist system holds perilous effects over legitimate democratic decision-making and interest mediation. Insofar as democratic deliberation is time-consuming and requires long-term commitments, their concern goes, the democratic ethos becomes progressively out of sync with the rhythm of global capitalism. Throughout the last decades, the intensification of inequality and the rise of authoritarian movements have sparked new debates about the contradictions of capitalism and democracy, yet the concern for temporality has run out of steam. In this paper, I argue for the relevance of questions of time and temporality for rethinking this desynchronization, but I do so by challenging the speed/acceleration framework. I focus on the works of René Zavaleta Mercado and Partha Chatterjee, particularly their concepts of ‘motleyness’ and ‘political society’ and I argue that their attention to the simultaneity of multiple historical times, as well as to problems of self-determination and governmentality provide a key vantage point for reanimating the debate around democratic capitalism from the Global South. The paper proceeds as follows: section 1 reconstructs the diagnose of acceleration provided by authors like John Dewey, Sheldon Wolin, and William Connolly and it calls attention to their unstated commitment to a historicist account of time and development. Section 2 introduces contemporary attempts to problematize and pluralize notions of historical time in a way that, I argue, is useful to rethink the link between

democracy and capitalism and to contribute to the ongoing decolonization of the political theory canon. Sections 3 and 4 deal with René Zavaleta's and Partha Chatterjee's contributions respectively. Finally, I close with some remarks about how this theoretical effort could be expanded in further iterations of this project.

1. The paradigm of acceleration

According to some diagnoses of the late-modern experience we currently live in a condition of social acceleration and increasing tensions between democracy and global capitalism. The speed and acceleration of the pace of time is intimately related to the dynamics of a modern capitalist system that extends into essential areas of economic, social, and cultural life (e.g. technical processes of communication and production, rapid change in institutions such as the workplace or the family, etc.).¹ Social and political theorists writing from the Global North have long warned against the perilous effects of the acceleration of time on legitimate democratic decision-making and interest mediation. Insofar as democratic deliberation is time-consuming and requires long-term commitments, their concern goes, it progressively becomes unequivocally out of synch with the temporalities, the rhythm, and the frenetic pace of global capitalism.

Whereas capturing the social experience of time in modern society constitutes an ever-present topic in 19th and 20th century in philosophy and social theory,² I am concerned here with a subset of political theorists –namely John Dewey, Sheldon Wolin, and William Connolly– that have sought to understand the effects of the acceleration of time in between capitalist forces and

¹ Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration. A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

² For recent overviews of time and temporality in Western political thought see Russel West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (New York: Routledge, 2012); David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

democratic institutions. In other words, anxieties around the acceleration of time have brought them to examine the conditions under which democratic ideals of self-determination, collective autonomy, and popular sovereignty could be guaranteed through stable institutional and cultural mechanisms in the face of frenetic capitalist dynamics.

Concerned with the growing political apathy towards democratic institutions and culture in the United States in the 1920s, John Dewey delves into the nature and development of a ‘public’ capable of dealing with the rise of technocratic approaches to political dilemmas.³ For Dewey, the growing industrial and commercial relations backed up by new forms of technology hold significant consequences for the survival of a democratic culture that, in his view, had its origin in old publics or local communities that remained homogeneous or static. In contrast to the slow proceeding of decision-making in those communities, the rising scenario –equally tied to modernization, capitalism, and the industrial revolution– is one where nothing stays put anymore. In his words, “the mania for motion and speed is a symptom of the restless instability of social life, and it operates to intensify the causes from which it springs.”⁴ Here the consolidation of a public becomes problematic amidst shifting and unstable relationships with two critical outcomes. On the one hand, attachments to associations become loose and the multiplication of commodities diverts attention from political life. On the other one, the proliferation of interests creates not the absence of a public, but rather too many publics that cannot be integrated into a whole due to an extreme ramification of detailed, technical issues around which no public can identify or hold itself.

Dewey’s concern for the perilous effect of acceleration on democratic institutions would partially resonate decades later with the theoretical projects of Sheldon Wolin and William

³ John Dewey, “The Eclipse of the Public,” in *The Public and Its Problems*, ed. Melvin L. Rogers (1927; repr., Ohio University Press, 2016), 144–71.

⁴ Dewey, 168.

Connolly. Addressing some diagnoses about the state of political theory after 1989, Wolin argues that the discipline cannot reflect on its shortcomings without acknowledging that there is no single shared “political time” upon which the world is entering. Not only are there multiple culturally constituted different times that undermine the pretension to a single narrative, or a unique identity and conception of politics, but more significantly political theory faces a critical *temporal disjunction*. For Wolin,

Starkly put, political time is out of synch with the temporalities, rhythms, and pace governing economy and culture. Political time, especially in societies with pretensions to democracy, requires an element of leisure, not in the sense of a leisure class (which is the form in which the ancient writers conceived it), but in the sense, say, of a leisurely pace. This is owing to the needs of political action to be preceded by deliberation and deliberation, as its “deliberate” part suggests, takes time because, typically, it occurs in a setting of competing or conflicting but legitimate considerations. Political time is conditioned by the presence of differences and the attempt to negotiate them. The results of negotiations, whether successful or not, preserve time. (...) That political time has a preservative function is not surprising. Since time immemorial political authorities have been charged with preserving bodies, goods, souls, practices, and circumscribed ways of life.⁵

As a way to capture the effects of cultural schema and economic forces on the political, Wolin translates the problem of time and temporality –two concepts he uses interchangeably– into one of pace and speed, much like Dewey. This delimitation sets up the scenario and the tasks of democratic politics writ large: Wolin’s framework turns deliberation into a prerequisite of political action in a way that makes the compromise among legitimate interests the horizon of politics. This not only brackets critical questions regarding the legitimacy of such interests, but it also makes democratic institutions dependent on their capacity to appease conflict among interests. Politics provides stability and duration among competing forces, whereas the economy and culture flatly unravel its grounds. Politics preserves what is otherwise transformed by economic and cultural

⁵ Sheldon Wolin, “What Time Is It?,” *Theory & Event* 1, no. 1 (1997).

phenomena. The diagnose is surprising coming from a theorist more usually associated with forms of political action that exceed or hold an ambiguous relationship with institutionalized norms and rights,⁶ yet I argue that it is symptomatic of an unsubstantiated equation between politics, democracy, and leisure and, more importantly, of a unilinear conception of time and history. For Wolin, the temporalities of both the economy and culture are, contrary to political time, “dictated by innovation, change, and replacement through obsolescence.”⁷ In consequence, time is no longer governed by the political needs of contemplation and deliberation but by those of a rapid turnover. Wolin also imagines a different time where the meaning of culture did not reflect such accelerated dynamic and where it was rather associated with a sense of cultivating and nurturing the sensibility of oneself and others through a long period. In this view, at the turn of the twentieth century democratic theorists need to learn how to keep up with the preserving mission of politics amidst unstable forces, for hastiness or impatience have no place in either theory nor politics.⁸

Reflecting on this mission, William Connolly takes up the acceleration of the pace of time as the constitutive dimension of the late-modern condition, and consequently theorizes a form of political pluralism able to face this challenge.⁹ Similar to Dewey and Wolin, Connolly explains this acceleration as a consequence of “processes of capitalist invention, finance, investment, labor migration, geographic expansion, and intraterritorial colonization”¹⁰, but in order to address its impact on democracy he surveys the constitution of time under modernity as already shaped by a *rift* or a *gap*. In doing so, Connolly tries to escape two conceptions of time identified with

⁶ Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (1994).

⁷ Wolin, “What Time Is It?”

⁸ On this point see Mario Feit, “Democratic Impatience: Martin Luther King, Jr. on Democratic Temporality,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 16, no. 3 (August 2017): 363–86.

⁹ William Connolly, *Neuropolitics. Thinking, Culture, Speed, Theory Out of Bounds* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Connolly, 146.

premodern and modern scenarios. On the one hand, he opposes the ‘ancient’s’ depiction of a cyclical time. On the other one, he rejects the progressive, teleological, and linear conception of time that the “moderns” set against the former. Later on, I will address how in constructing this opposition Connolly unduly reproduces the framework of time that this article will problematize, but for now it suffices to say that this is the background against which he theorizes time, and politics, as forms of *becoming*. In his words:

I embrace the idea of rifts or forks in time that help to constitute it as time. A rift as constitutive of time itself, in which time flows into a future neither fully determined by a discernible past nor fixed by its place in a cycle of eternal return, nor directed by an intrinsic purpose pulling it along. Free time. Or, better, time as becoming, replete with the dangers and possibilities attached to such a world.¹¹

When connecting time, politics, and becoming, Connolly takes preference for a theoretical lens that allows for disruptions and bifurcations against an inherited tradition. The constitutive rift of time is also the bedrock for politics, understood as an “uncertain process by which the new flows or surges into being.” With Nietzsche, he imagines an eternal return turned into an ‘acyclical philosophy of time’, that is, one in which the conjunction of past and present is rendered uncertain and opened to new directions. With Arendt, he warns against comforting images of the past, including those of democratic politics, that are safeguarded from the anxieties of an accelerated world. To understand time and politics as *becoming* is, then, a way to escape dangerous nostalgias and a call to foster novel democratic arrangements in the midst of an unstable world.

It is in this context that, according to Connolly, his disagreement with Wolin arises. Read from the perspective of time as rift, Wolin’s efforts amount to shouting at the world to slow down so that democracy can be protected, it posits democratic localism as an essentialist feature that needs to be recovered and becomes oblivious of its own reactionary character. In other words,

¹¹ Connolly, 143.

Connolly problematizes Wolin's association between speed, uncertainty and democratic loss. First, Connolly is careful not to romanticize democratic localism insofar as it may conceal a homogenous public carrying embedded forms of hierarchy and domination. Second, he underscores how anxieties over democratic loss can very easily turn into forms of resentment projected through new forms of fundamentalism, particularly in nationalist and religious forms, which increase injuries already exacerbated by globalization and are often oblivious of the systemic capitalist sources of democratic loss. In consequence, rather than an attempt to recover localism, Connolly frames a new challenge to "come to terms productively with the ambiguous relations among time, pace, freedom, plurality and democracy",¹² an ethos of democratic pluralism that does not simply celebrate high velocity, nor does it insist on the nostalgias of a slower world, but rather one that aims to support positive connections "among democracy, uneven zones of tempo, and the rift in time without legitimating a pace of life so fast that the promise of democracy becomes translated into fascist becoming machines."¹³

Whereas Dewey, Wolin, and Connolly articulate significant insights about the relationship between democratic institutions, capitalist forces, and the acceleration of time, I argue that these approaches are limited to due embedded assumptions about time. In the case of Dewey, his diagnose is grounded in an understanding of temporality that can only recognize differences between degrees of homogeneity and speed across a somewhat linear depiction of history: from homogeneous/static communities to unraveled, dispersed publics. Wolin, in turn, sets his depiction of the temporal disjuncture between democracy, capitalism, and culture in a way that unreflectively equates any of them with a given sense of time as acceleration or preservation. In other words, Wolin risks essentializing democracy as a local, slow, time-consuming practice of deliberation on

¹² Connolly, 146.

¹³ Connolly, 147.

the one hand, and culture and capitalism as inevitable sources of acceleration that disrupt this scenario. Finally, Connolly opens this relationship to a larger degree of ambiguity, but the project of fostering an ethos of pluralism is inadequate for fleshing out a robust account of time in the midst of such problem. Connolly argues for complicating our ideas of time as dictated by chronology (i.e. considering past, present and future as different times) and introduces his ethos of pluralism based on the concept of time as becoming, a form of creation and auto-poiesis that requires agonistic respect and critical responsiveness to positively reinforce the acceleration of time and democratic struggle.¹⁴ Yet, his approach is premised on a distinction between pre-modern and modern time wherein the former is associated with hierarchy and domination and the latter with freedom, becoming, and experimentalism. His call for creation and auto-poiesis may detach acceleration from the undemocratic character that Dewey and Wolin attribute to it, but it does little for understanding how exactly those forms of temporality coexist or are articulated within society. In order to build on these approaches, I argue for the need to rethink the problem of time and temporality beyond questions of speed, acceleration, or becoming, and lay bare the temporal structure in which democracy and capitalism can coalesce or enter into contradiction. As Aleida Assmann argues, “whoever researches time exclusively in terms of its increased tempo has only slowing down or standstill as possible countermotions.”¹⁵ In contrast, she argues, it is important to conceive of time as a social and cultural problem that is not reduced to a problem of different speeds on a linear timeline but rather as a “qualitative coexistence of different temporalities.”¹⁶ Following this direction, the next section introduces critical approaches, particularly linked to

¹⁴ William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint?* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 156.

¹⁶ Assmann, 156.

postcolonial scenarios, in which such pluralization can be theorized for the purposes of understanding the desynchronization of capitalism and democracy.

2. From linear to plural temporalities

How and why different parts of the globe come under the rule of capitalist relations constitutes an ever-present debate in modern history and social science. This history of global capitalism was once dominated by a narrative of transition from feudalism to capitalism and by the portrayal of modern society as the consequence of the rise of capitalism in Western Europe and its ensuing ‘spread’ into the world. This narrative could appear in different formulations– as in classical political economy or Enlightenment conceptions of progress – and its bedrock is the idea that capitalism emerges out of a political struggle led by an incipient bourgeoisie against the forces of feudalism and monarchy. This struggle, the narrative goes, brings down the constraints represented by feudal control in agriculture and seigniorial despotism, and enables the flourishing of the “natural” inclination to “truck, barter, and exchange”, as Adam Smith put it. Max Weber, for instance, focuses on the distinctiveness of the development of Western capitalism and provides a contrast with a ‘non-Western’ world where a series of factors – including different forms of domination, kinship, and religion– hinder the consolidation of an otherwise “universal capitalist drive.”¹⁷ Once established through a system of nation-states, this drive would require the launch of new avenues for profit, bringing other activities, practices and institutions under the rule of capital.

Nowadays few historians and social scientists would abide by this explanation of global capitalism. The reasons for this abound. The narrative misplaces the role of colonialism and

¹⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood refers to this narrative as the “commercialization model”. On the place of Smith and Weber within it see *The Origin of Capitalism. A Longer View* (1999; repr., Verso, 2017).

slavery in the rise of capitalism, unduly overemphasizes the role of bourgeois and nationalist revolutions in the making of capitalism, sets Western Europe as the final stage in a unilinear process of development wherein other nations need to ‘catch up’, and posits a problematic clear-cut transition from feudalism to capitalism, among other reasons. Trying to capture the different dimensions of these critiques, in *Provincializing Europe* Dipesh Chakrabarty defines the transitional narrative as Historicism, and claims that it represents a structure of global historical time by which modernity and capitalism look “not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it.”¹⁸ Historicism, in Chakrabarty’s view, is a mode of thought that ensures the convergence into a terminal point in capitalist history in spite of apparent, historical difference. Historical time, in this narrative, becomes a measure of cultural distance between the West and the non-West, the former always being more advanced than the latter. For Chakrabarty, historicist narratives are characterized by the language of ‘uneven development’, pre-capitalist ‘survivals’ and ‘remnants’, or ‘backward consciousness’, all of which point back to a juxtaposition between modern, Western countries and backward, non-Western ones. Against this narrative, Chakrabarty claims, only once we accept that historical time is not integral but rather “out of joint with itself” can the task of provincializing Europe be fulfilled.¹⁹

Alongside Chakrabarty’s efforts, the (historicist) notions of time, temporality and progress that underpin the diagnoses of social acceleration of Dewey, Wolin, and Connolly have been widely criticized from multiple directions. Among the perspectives usually grouped under postcolonial or subaltern studies both Ranajit Guha and Edward Said argue that Hegelian

¹⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Second, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7..

¹⁹ Chakrabarty, 16.

philosophies of history and distinctions between the West and the Orient, respectively, are premised on a form of hierarchy in spatial and temporal terms between civilization and barbarism.²⁰ Decolonial theorists like Walter Mignolo and Maria Lugones –and in general scholars associated with the modernity/coloniality research project– consider that colonial and imperial differences across the world emerge under a matrix of power which divides the planet into different temporalities, wherein entire populations subject to colonial power are turned into “backward” stages in the history of the species.²¹ Feminist scholars have reacted against both linear conceptions of time that portray men as bearers of transcendence ultimately projected into the future and cyclical conceptions that trap women into the infinite reproduction of embodiment and nature.²² Finally, queer theorists speak of “chronobiopolitics” precisely as processes wherein the anatomies of populations and individuals are synchronized with larger temporal schemes pertaining to the state and other institutions, which always produce exclusions of those either stuck in the past or lacking a past of their own.²³

Whereas my depiction of these critiques of linear temporality is by no means exhaustive, I want to call attention to two distinctive features. On the one hand, they converge into a critique of Western modernity’s conceptions of progress and development and the temporal structure that allows for multiple forms of exclusion, violence, and normalization. On the other one, they open the door to plural conceptions of time and temporality that serve as new paths to theorize distinctive

²⁰ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, n.d.); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

²¹ María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2005): 78–98; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

²² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 2010); Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time. On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

²³ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds. Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

political problems, as in this case the relationship between capitalism and democracy.²⁴ One should note, however, that the two critical gestures are by no means identical or reducible to one another. In other words, a critique of Eurocentric views of time and progress does not equate to a decolonizing effort of our ways of theorizing, in this case to theorize the contradictions between democracy and capitalism. As Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena have recently argued:

One potent rubric that draws together these various lines of revision is a shared interest in diagnosing the Eurocentric character of the field and offering remedies for its overcoming. This arguably is the most prominent way of articulating what it means to decolonize political theory. This critical move is salutary and compelling, and it has initiated probing discussions of the limitations, blind spots, and exclusions of the purportedly universal theories, categories, and narratives of Western political thought. It has motivated calls for more inclusion and recognition of non-European thought, and generated important political and philosophical debates about how to chart and address the ongoing legacies of empire and racial domination today. At the same time, *we worry that the overriding concern with Eurocentrism is indicative of a problem, a persistent limit of these approaches, namely that they tend to focus on Western political thought as the sole object of critique and analysis.*²⁵

²⁴ It is critical to note that the idea of pluralizing temporalities is by no means only an invention of postcolonial, decolonial, feminist and queer interventions reacting against Western modernity's colonial modes of thinking. Within the archives of Euroatlantic political thought there are also many resources for thinking such pluralization, and my dissertation points precisely to reconstructing and expanding that connection as a way to contribute to efforts around decolonization and global political thought. As Massimiliano Tomba has shown, attempts to theorize plural temporalities can be found in authors such as Reinhart Koselleck, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Karl Marx, all of which contended with the limitations of unilinear depictions of historical time and theorized forms of "layers of strata of time" (Koselleck), "multiverse" (Bloch), "differentials of time" (Benjamin). Tomba's project itself constitutes a way to understand the "co- presence of trajectories not synchronized by the dominant temporality of socially necessary labor time and the nation- state. If the former imposes the rhythm, discipline, and intensity of labor time regulated in the competition between capitals, the latter synchronizes the different local temporalities with the homogeneous time of the juridical- administrative machine of the nation- state." Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality. An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 9. See also Koselleck, Reinhart, *On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Ernst Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory," *Critical Times* 4, no. 3 (2021): 359–88. My emphasis. For Getachew and Mantena the tendency to recenter European political thought is most common in studies of empire and political thought. However, I would argue that it is also exemplary of recent work in critical theory that tries to overcome its imperialist foundations of progress but ends up in vague calls to epistemic humility in benefit of non-European thought.

Following Getachew and Mantena, I want to supplement the abovementioned critique of the paradigm of acceleration with an effort to understand the desynchronization of capitalism and democracy from the Global South as a form of conceptual innovation/reanimation. In doing so, I propose to examine the contributions of René Zavaleta Mercado and Partha Chatterjee as critical efforts to pluralize notions of time and temporality and to expand the boundaries of political thought beyond those set by historicists account. That said, it is not my contention that these approaches constitute form of “non-western” political thought completely unrelated to the canon. Quite the contrary, they are produced in constant dialogue and struggle with those archives. Furthermore, my aim (at this stage) is not to find an overall convergence between the perspectives of Zavaleta and Chatterjee but rather present preliminary research on their distinctive way to capture the contradiction of capitalism and democracy.

3. The ‘motley’ societies of René Zavaleta

In Latin America there is a long tradition of political and social thought that has examined the universal character of capitalism and modernity. Some authors have sought to understand the particular status of modernity in the region and produced explanations of its ‘incomplete’ or ‘peripheral’ character in relation to capitalism.²⁶ Others have refused to reproduce the equivalence

For an example of this trend see Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

²⁶ The language of ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ was famously put forward by dependency theorists in order to criticize modernization theory. For a critical account see Ramon Grosfoguel, “Developmentalism, Modernity and Dependency Theory in Latin America,” in *Nepantla: Views from South*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). For accounts centered on the problem of cultural hybridity and periphery see Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Beatriz Sarlo, *Una Modernidad Periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Vision, 1988).

between modernity and Western European history, examining either the constitutive role of the Americas in modernity or arguing for transmodern cultural dialogue.²⁷ While it would be impossible to synthesize the many dimensions of this debate here, I'm interested in highlighting a trend that connects the problems of modernity and cultural difference with the political and economic transformations in the regio and the simultaneity of multiple historical times. Specifically, I aim to understand the problems and implications of the simultaneity of capitalist and non-capitalist relations in this process. First inaugurated by Peruvian writer José Carlos Mariátegui, this trend connects those authors for whom the 'uniqueness' of the Latin American cases is precisely the coexistence of capitalism with precapitalist– particularly feudalist– and non-capitalist– communal and indigenous– practices and ideas.²⁸ More recently, Anibal Quijano has argued that the aforementioned transitional narrative of global capitalism constitutes a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge that cannot make sense of the experience in the Americas. According to him, this point of view treats reciprocity, slavery, serfdom, and the independent production of commodities as a “historical sequence prior to the commodification of labor force or capital” and “considers them not just different but radically incompatible with the latter”. The problem, Quijano argues, is that “none of them were, in America, solely an extension of the ancient forms, nor were they incompatible with capital. Quite the contrary.”²⁹ Quijano refers to the fact that in the post-

²⁷ Enrique Dussel, “Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation.,” *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 2, no. 1 (2012): 3; Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)*, 1. ed (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005); Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 2000): 215–32.

²⁸ In the case of Peru, Mariátegui argued at the beginning of the 20th century that the country was simultaneously communal, feudal and capitalist according to different geographical patterns. Drawing on a particular interpretation of Marxism and Indigenism he famously claimed that a socialist project in Peru needed to rehabilitate the indigenous communal practices. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971).

²⁹ Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America.”

colonial context many Creole elites left untouched the colonial non-capitalist forms of coerced labor supported in racial and ethnic hierarchies, hence the process of independence did not lead to major social transformations of Latin American societies and reproduced many legacies of the colonial context, a consequence he refers to as the “coloniality of power.”³⁰ In this context, I propose to examine Zavaleta’s historical investigation of the conditions under which capitalist and non-capitalist relations coexist and sometimes clash in Bolivia throughout the 20th century. This section turns to a reconstruction of his works related to the problem at hand through a complex examination of issues of temporality, democracy, and capitalist.

René Zavaleta Mercado (1937-1984) was a Bolivian politician and critical intellectual. His political activity and theory were closely linked to the events that started with the revolution of 1952, which entailed the breakdown of the previous oligarchic state, an agrarian reform, the nationalization of the mining industry and the establishment of a state monopoly over the exports of tin.³¹ In 1964, Zavaleta became part of the revolutionary government as Minister of Mines and Oil but lost this position to the military dictatorship that was established later on the same year. After that, he became progressively critical of the nationalist ideology, affiliated with the Leftist Revolutionary Movement, and turned towards a closer analysis of Marxism while relocating to Mexico as an exile. During the 1970s and 1980s, he studied the activity of trade-unions, workers organizations, peasants, and indigenous communities that brought an end to the military dictatorship in Bolivia.³²

³⁰ Quijano, 539.

³¹ Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880–1952* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); James Malloy and Richard Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia since 1952*, Edición: 1 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971).

³² Because of these events, and following a periodization coined by Luis Tapia, most scholars divide Zavaleta’s *oeuvre* into three successive moments. First, a nationalist period linked to his experience in the MNR that ends up in 1967 with a fierce critique of nationalism in *La formación de la conciencia nacional*. Second, a brief period of orthodox Marxism exemplified by his 1974 book *El poder dual*. Lastly, a final

In this section I explore two dimensions of Zavaleta's work that are related to the establishment of capitalist relations and the formation of democracy in Bolivia. First, I reconstruct Zavaleta's efforts to characterize the uniqueness of the Bolivian case through the concept of motleyness that points to the coexistence of multiple modes of production and temporalities throughout the territory. Second, I trace his understanding of democracy as caught up between issues of self-determination and the legibility of populations by the state and capitalism, a process that I will suggest can be read in tandem with Chatterjee's concept of political society.

The first dimension is grounded in Zavaleta's critique of the application of universal theories to understand all historical and social formations. In his words, "the form of society defines its line of knowledge", hence "[the] claim of a universal grammar applicable to different formations is usually no more than a dogmatization. Each society produces a form of knowledge (and a technique) that refers to itself."³³ Thus, Zavaleta strives to understand the uniqueness of each society without resorting to a pattern of general explanation, aiming to produce a theory out of historical observation. Whereas his work involves a constant dialogue with Marx, Gramsci, Althusser and many other Marxists, after 1975 Zavaleta explicitly reconsiders the degree to which Marxism can inform the struggles of the working classes in Bolivia and explain the failures of the revolutionary state. Among the many concepts that he posits for doing this, *sociedad abigarrada*, translated roughly as heterogeneous or 'motley society', is the one that has reached the most saliency.³⁴ The concept, sometimes wrongfully mistaken for pluralism or multiculturalism, refers

period of heterodox Marxism that culminates with the unfinished *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia*, first published in Mexico in 1986 and his only major book translated into English so far.

³³ René Zavaleta Mercado, "Las Masas En Noviembre (1983)," in *La Autodeterminación de Las Masas. Antología y Presentación de Luis Tapia* (México D.F: Siglo XXI Editores, 2015), 67–75. All translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise indicated.

³⁴ For a review of other concepts (including 'constitutive moment', 'receptivity', 'social optimum', 'social equation', 'indestructibility', among others) and the challenges of translation see Anne Freeland, trans.,

to the coexistence and overlapping of multiple modes of production, historical moments and temporalities within the territory of a nation-state. In this case, Zavaleta underscores the geographical patterns in which capitalist relationships in some parts of the country coexist, without combining, with feudal land-grabbing and communal labour-organization patterns.

If it is said that Bolivia is a motley social formation, it is because the economic epochs (those of common taxonomies) have been superimposed without combining too much, as if feudalism belonged to one culture and capitalism to another, and yet as if they occurred in the same scenario; or as if there was a country in feudalism and another in capitalism, superimposed and not combined.³⁵

As his analysis develops, the motley character of Bolivian society reveals not only the coexistence of multiple modes of production, but also the status of a temporal tension, disjointedness and disarticulation, which redirects his concern towards the forms of unity that are put in place from the point of view of the state. In *El Poder Dual*, Zavaleta describes the Bolivian state as an “apparent” state, that is, a state that lacks the power to unify society and that is characterized by a form of temporal disjunction.³⁶ He describes a duality of power consisting in that “what should have occurred successively occurs instead in a parallel manner, in an abnormal way; it is the qualitative contemporaneity of before and after.”³⁷ Focusing on the events of the Revolution of 1952 and the National Assembly of 1971 he relates the motley character of Bolivian state to an indication of incompleteness and lack of national unification.³⁸ Within the process of state-

“Afterword,” in *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia, 1879-1980*, by René Zavaleta, Elsewhere Texts (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2018), 284–98.

³⁵ Zavaleta, “Las Masas En Noviembre (1983),” 214.

³⁶ On this point see Felipe Lagos, “Thinking with Zavaleta: Projecting Lo Abigarrado onto Neoliberal Globalization,” in *Latin American Marxisms in Context: Past and Present*, ed. Peter Baker et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

³⁷ René Zavaleta Mercado, *El Poder Dual. Problemas de La Teoría Del Estado En América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1977).

³⁸ This popular assembly was established by president Torres Gonzalez in 1970 as a mechanism of alternative popular government by bringing together workers and peasants’ organizations. However, it was dismantled after 10 months due to the weakness of the government in responding to its own radical agenda

building, he argues that “the longer the delay in the formation of national unity, the greater the possibilities for leftovers or hangovers; although they subsist beneath a dominant mode of production, they remain partially isolated.”³⁹ Those ‘leftovers’ are precisely the elements of non-capitalist relations that take place throughout the national territory. Furthermore, Zavaleta also mobilizes this concept for describing a series of multiple temporalities at play within society and that, together, undermine the task of unification:

Here we have true temporal densities mixed not only with each other in the most varied way, but also with the particularism of each region, because here every valley is a homeland, in a compound in which each people dress, sing, eat and produce in a particular way and they all speak different languages and accents and none of them can be called for a moment the universal language of everyone... Community or land production in upper Bolivia, for example, is not only different in its temporal agricultural dimension to the eastern one, because of the number of crops and organizational consequences of soil work, but also to the mining production, which is Already the subordination or formal subsumption in action.⁴⁰

While motleyness impacts the constitution of the state and the lack of unity, it is mostly targeted to describe/analyze/criticize the mode of production and point to the multiplicity of productive forms and temporalities that exist together with the dominant capitalist relations in a form of hierarchical overlapping. For Zavaleta, motleyness refers then to the non-unification of a society, or at least, “to the dissimilar value of the penetration of unity in its sectors.”⁴¹ This lack of unification can develop in different degrees according to different societies, but in an extreme version it represents a form of disconnection or non-articulation between productive factors. In this sense, Zavaleta routinely engages in a comparison between modern, homogeneous societies and motley, heterogeneous ones:

³⁹ Zavaleta Mercado, *El Poder Dual. Problemas de La Teoría Del Estado En América Latina*, 22.

⁴⁰ Zavaleta, “Las Masas En Noviembre (1983),” 214.

⁴¹ René Zavaleta Mercado, “Cuatro Conceptos de La Democracia (1981),” in *La Autodeterminación de Las Masas. Antología y Presentación de Luis Tapia* (México D.F: Siglo XXI Editores, 2015), 121–43.

We consider the premise that capitalist societies are more complex than precapitalist societies to be patently false. It is true that capitalism multiplies social time, but it is not less true that it homogenizes, standardizes society. Ultimately, national classes, the nation itself, vast, relatively uniform social units, are proper to capitalism and, in this sense, any backward society is more heterogeneous and complex than a capitalist society.⁴²

As this passage demonstrates, the language of backwardness and heterogeneity is part of Zavaleta's method for understanding the singular character of Bolivia's social formation, but I argue that the distinction is drawn in order to criticize approaches that take non-capitalist relations as fully organic, homogeneous, harmonious or lacking conflict within themselves. Contrary to historicist frameworks, the "lack of unification" provided by motleyness is not a remnant of a past that will be eventually overcome by hastened capitalist dynamics, it is rather a condition that is theorized in its singular interrelation of capitalism and democracy.

The second key dimension of Zavaleta's work is the political commitment to the emergence and consolidation of a 'national-popular' bloc out of the motley conditions of Bolivian society. Starting from the motley condition of Bolivian society, Zavaleta is interested in demonstrating that, contrary to the orthodox Marxist model that posits the development of social classes in a strict connection, even derivation, from the development of capitalism, these social forces may follow very different trajectories. This is the case for both the bourgeoisie and the workers in Bolivia. Analyzing the episodes leading to the Nationalist Revolution, Zavaleta claims that the old Bolivian 'castes' demonstrate an inability to gather any of the subjective or material conditions of the transformation into a modern bourgeoisie. The reason for this, captured by his concept of 'seigneurial paradox', is that these 'castes' lack bourgeois ideals, and all of their cultural structures

⁴² René Zavaleta Mercado, *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia*, trans. Anne Freeland, Elsewhere Texts (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2018), 43.

are fixed in a pre-capitalist order.⁴³ There is no universal capitalist drive at play here. In consequence, these groups ratify themselves qua dominant classes only by putting the revolution into the service of an oligarchic-seigneurial class. In contrast, Zavaleta argues, the Bolivian working class puts into question the necessary correspondence between the indices of economic performance and the level of political development of the workers. For a class like this, scant economic development has not been a real obstacle in the development *as* class (in itself and for itself), for alongside with the peasants the workers demonstrate an almost general capacity for mobilization and even an attempt to constitute a hegemonic bloc. Here it is crucial to note that the effect of pre-capitalist relations (like those deemed ‘seigneurial’) is to hamper the development of capitalism and this opens the way for a popular bloc accessing the power of the state. From the point of view of capitalist development, motleyness hinders the possibilities of homogenization, but from the perspective of the construction of the nation-state, it provides possibilities for an alternative hegemony. Thus, it is in this double perspective that one must assess the effects of the structural/temporal heterogeneity.

Zavaleta’s concern for the constitution of a national-popular hegemony also entails a particular understanding of democracy. When discussing the contrast of temporality between Andean agriculture, and the epicenter of mining production that eradicates the peasantry in Potosí, Zavaleta underscores how in Bolivia this diversity lacks an integrating element, which hinders the epistemic conditions under which this society can be “known”:

In the midst of such a thing, who could dare to argue that such a heterogeneous aggregation could conclude in the exercise of a uniform quantification of power? In this way there is no doubt that it is not only the lack of reliable statistics that makes empirical analysis difficult in Bolivia, but the lack of conventional unity of the object to be studied.⁴⁴

⁴³ Zavaleta, 9.

⁴⁴ Zavaleta, “Las Masas En Noviembre (1983),” 214.

Zavaleta's examination of the motley shape of Bolivian society in this passage illuminates the role that democracy plays in his works. On the one hand, he argues that democracy – understood in its bourgeois dimension as a method for the aggregation of a political will⁴⁵– requires a series of historical and epistemic conditions that are undermined by the heterogeneous configuration of motley societies. As a method of knowledge, mass democracy stands as a mechanism by which societies become 'legible' and adaptable to capitalism. He argues that "[i]t is clear that the state must adapt in capitalism to a perpetually mobile base, it must also act through methods of reading society, or methods of social knowledge, such as political democracy considered in this sense."⁴⁶ Legibility facilitates the hegemonic organization of society by the state and its instrument is representative democracy, which connects democracy as a method of knowledge to homogeneous societies. The heterogeneous characteristic of the motley prevents the effectiveness of representative democracy as a quantification of political will. In this sense, one of the characteristics of the Bolivian society, in Zavaleta's words, is the difficulties of this process of self-knowledge: the motley character correlates to a poor development of representative democracy. Representation here refers both to the institutional mechanisms of democratic decision-making and to the capacity that power has to represent or expose the nature of society. Hence, Zavaleta contrasts the conception of representative democracy as a form 'knowledge', one that ensures capitalist reproduction by providing a uniform legibility of society, with democracy as the 'self-determination of the masses':

Democracy understood as self-determination of the masses becomes the desideratum of this discourse. The history of the masses is always made against the state... Every state ultimately denies the mass, even if it expresses it or wants to express it... Therefore, we have here a meaning of the democratic issue that stands

⁴⁵ "Democracy as knowledge is a method of the bourgeoisie". Zavaleta Mercado, "Cuatro Conceptos de La Democracia (1981)," 139.

⁴⁶ Zavaleta, *Towards a History of the National-Popular in Bolivia*, 50.

at the antipode of democracy in its gnoseological function. One can say that *democracy for the ruling class* is replaced for *democracy in itself*.⁴⁷

These two different senses in which Zavaleta examines democracy bring some complexity to the continuous comparison between motley and homogeneous societies. Zavaleta doesn't simply regret the lack of unification that would enable representative democracy to work perfectly, he turns motleness as a condition for the "true democratization" of society, for it hinders both the routinization of capitalist development and the social legibility by which the state facilitates this process.

I would argue that the destabilization of the concept of democracy –as both a channel of state power's legibility efforts in tandem with capitalist forces *and* an excess of self-determination linked to the masses– provides a useful framework for rethinking the problem of desynchronization that worries Dewey, Wolin, and Connolly. The critical gesture that places some distance between democracy and their imagined localist, deliberative, partially homogenous, and stable publics places democratic institutions always already in the midst of constant struggle and accommodation. Here the horizon of politics is not simply the administrative treatment of conflict, but rather the constitution of a demos that can potentially stabilize or destabilize the process of legibility that connects state power to capitalist forces. Rather than the frenetic speed of late-modern capitalism and the weakened deliberative capacity of democratic publics, the problem is first and foremost the ways in which attempts questions of self-determination become entangled with those of governmentality. Following Cavoorti's reading of Zavaleta, the point is that "both neoliberal and populist or radical invocations of democracy are bound up with a particular implicit function of the state, which must itself be situated within the history of capitalism and, in particular, the

⁴⁷ Zavaleta Mercado, "Cuatro Conceptos de La Democracia (1981)," 138.

separation between state and civil society.”⁴⁸ Writing about the ‘motley’ condition of Bolivian society characterized by the simultaneity of temporalities and modes of production, Zavaleta provides a vantage point for examining the ways in which mass democracy emerges and plays out in a dynamic that runs counter to the deliberative/acceleration framework. In other words, the conception of motleyhood both destabilizes historicist models of development and provides an alternative mode of theorizing popular mobilization. In doing so, I argue, we can read Zavaleta’s contribution in a similar vein to Partha Chatterjee’s concern for the emergence of ‘political society’, to which I turn now.

4. Partha Chatterjee and the heterogeneous times of postcolonial democracy

I propose to examine Chatterjee’s contribution to a theorization of democracy and capitalism from the Global South as a response to two main questions: what is the time of the nation and what is the time of capital? Both questions are addressed in Chatterjee’s critique of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and in his engagement with the works of Dipesh Chakrabarty, in particular his essay “The Two Histories of Capital”.⁴⁹

Chatterjee indicts Anderson’s depiction of modernity as a universal social space wherein one can find simultaneous and similar experiences of engagement with the development of print capitalism, the nation, and categories of political economy such as wages, prices, markets, etc.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Robert Cavooris, “René Zavaleta and the Contradictions of Democracy,” *Postcolonial Studies* 3 (2019): 3.

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Two Histories of Capital,” in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007), 47–71.

⁵⁰ Partha Chatterjee, “Anderson’s Utopia,” *Diacritics* 29, no. 4 (1999): 128–34. A similar critique is provided in Partha Chatterjee, “The Nation in Heterogeneous Time,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 4 (2001).

But more importantly he critiques Anderson's depiction of a planetary spread of nationalism and a standardized conception of politics grounded in industrial material civilization. To disentangle the narrative that posits a concomitant development among these, Chatterjee argues that such analysis mistakes the utopian time of homogeneous capital for the real time of a heterogeneous social. In other words, he claims that Anderson's analysis is premised on a utopian version of capital, one in which capital meets no resistance to its free movement. In this framework –as in Chakrabarty's critique of historicism– forms of resistance to the development of capitalism are always thought as “coming out of humanity's past, something people should have left behind but somehow haven't.”⁵¹ It is the framework, thus, which turns resistance into backwardness and anachronism, and secures a triad of homogeneous time, capital, and modernity.⁵² This triad, as I have shown before, is precisely what underpins the diagnoses of acceleration wherein the time of capital is thought as unilaterally fast and acting upon weakened democratic institutions that are unable to meet its demands. But as Chatterjee claims, to posit this homogeneous time of capital means to already capitulate against the historicist conceptions of progress. Quite the contrary, he posits, “the real space of modern life is heterotopia. (...)Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. (...) Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian.”⁵³

In order to elucidate the content of heterogeneous time Chatterjee advances two different lines of inquiry. On the one hand, he posits multiple examples in which postcolonial subjects do not run their lives in complete synchronicity with the utopian time of capital, thus they live in the

⁵¹ Chatterjee, “Anderson's Utopia,” 2.

⁵² Chatterjee's debt to Chakrabarty's theorization of History 1 and History 2 is clear here, but I would argue that his notion of heterogeneity overcomes such distinction, his problem is not what histories posit resistance to capital, but rather how a temporal differentiation among those histories impacts the prospects of democracy and political action.

⁵³ Chatterjee, “Anderson's Utopia,” 3.

presence of a dense and heterogenous time. According to him, one can find industrial workers who do not completely internalize the work-discipline of capitalism or who would not touch machines before completing a religious rite; industrial capitalist who postpone business decisions due to waiting for their astrologers, or voters who would set themselves on fire to mourn the loss of their leader, etc.⁵⁴ The point seems to simply ironize the ways in which capitalist relationships coexist with multiple systems of beliefs guiding action, but as Chatterjee makes clear, the point is not simply that these several times coexist but rather that they intersect each other and they transform individuals and groups relationships to both democracy and capitalism.

The second line of inquiry turns the question of temporality into the specific relation of citizens and other actors towards the structures of the nation-state. For Chatterjee the point is not to deny that most modern politics entail a certain engagement with capitalism, state machineries and even science and mathematics. Rather, the key issue is that under mass democracy the notion of self-determination that underpins classical conception of popular sovereignty and civil society is constantly interrupted, displaced, and rearticulated by forms of state action that take the population as its object, in other words, the politics of governmentality. If there is no utopian time of capital that overcomes all resistance through its acceleration, democracy (as in Zavaleta) is caught up between the two processes of self-determination and the government of populations, two forms of temporalized power that need to be theorized in order to understand the interrelation of democracy and capitalism. In this sense, Chatterjee suggests that the opposition between popular sovereignty and governmentality expresses a “new set of contradictions in a capitalist order that now has to maintain class rule under general conditions of mass democracy.”⁵⁵ The politics of

⁵⁴ Chatterjee, 3.

⁵⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society. Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 140.

popular sovereignty must be thought in tandem with those of the managing of populations, for it is in the temporal rift between the two that the governed assert their power.

In *The Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee develops these early insights into a theorization of “popular politics in most of the world” and he makes the case for theorizing the relations between government and populations beyond historicist accounts of the institutions of modern capitalist democracy.⁵⁶ In consequence, to rethink the link between capitalism and democracy beyond the unilinear conception of time posit by the canon of political theory entails a necessary revision of key concepts linked to citizenship and civil society, among others. In an effort to ground his critique of historicist homogeneous time into another conception of the patterns of political mobilization that characterize popular politics, Chatterjee examines the history of popular sovereignty against the backdrop of the modern state and capitalism. As he claims, “[w]hen talking of equality, freedom, property and community in relation to the modern state, we are indeed talking of the political history of capital.”⁵⁷ As the bedrock of legitimacy in modern democratic politics, popular sovereignty is inseparable from ideas of freedom and equality circumscribed to the reproduction of capitalism. Not only is it the case that, as Karl Marx’s concept of ‘primitive accumulation’ had already hinted to, conceptions of equality and freedom run parallel to undermine both absolutist political regimes and pre-capitalist practices that restrict individual mobility, but furthermore they crystallize a form of universalism irrespective of actual forms of power, exclusion, and stratification within civil society (across lines of race, religion, ethnicity, sex, gender, class, etc.). They “liberate” the individual from the constraints of feudalism while at the same time instituting a hiatus between civil society and the state. It is thus within this story,

⁵⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed. Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3.

⁵⁷ Chatterjee, 32.

which is evidently also a chronology, that civic rights of civil society attain full (formal) development within the boundaries of the modern Western state.

In contrast to the lofty language of popular sovereignty that underpins this fraught universalism, Chatterjee mobilizes both the problem of governmentality and the distinctive temporality of postcolonial countries in order to theorize a different rapport between individuals/populations and the institutions of democracy and capitalism. In the context of mass democracies, he claims building on Michel Foucault,⁵⁸ there arise a split between the domain of theory and the domain of policy, the former populated by the citizen, the second one by populations.

“Unlike the concept of the citizen (...) the concept of population is wholly descriptive and empirical: it does not carry a normative burden. Populations are identifiable, classifiable, and describable by empirical or behavioral criteria, and are amenable to statistical techniques such as censuses and sample surveys. Unlike the citizen who carries the ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state, the concept of population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their “policies”—economic policy, administrative policy, law, and even political mobilization.”⁵⁹

The utility of this framework hinges on the possibility to examine alternative patterns of political mobilization that fall “outside of” –or at least exist in tension with – the boundaries of civil society and the procedural mechanisms of democracy. In the examples that Chatterjee provides one finds that populations react to the techniques and strategies of governmentality by efforts to turn empirically formed populations into “moral communities” that aim to exert authority over the state. Yet, the potential of the framework extends beyond the distinction between civil and political society and calls especial attention to alternative histories of the constitution of the state, those akin to postcolonial studies. According to Getachew and Mantena, what Chatterjee

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 201–22.

⁵⁹ Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society. Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*, 14–15.

provides is a form of conceptual innovation that illuminates postcolonial democracies where “universal suffrage and a governmental bureaucracy (where) established prior (or in the absence of) industrialization and a unified, national demos.”⁶⁰ In other words, it is in the dialogue between questions of governmentality, a critique of historicist temporalities, and the experiences of postcolonial democracies that the paradigm of popular sovereignty is both historicized, problematized, and supplemented with political histories that do not share the chronology of modernization, democratization, and industrialization. Moreover, the desynchronization between capitalism and democracy that appears here puts into question the depiction of homogeneous accelerated time of capital and weakened democratic institutions. On the contrary, and similar to Zavaleta’s efforts, it opens democracy as a contested space where forms of domination and self-determination take place in the encounter with capitalist forces, precisely because the patterns of political mobilization described by political society exist in constant dialogue with the laudable language of popular sovereignty.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have developed a critique of the speed/acceleration framework under which theorists like John Dewey, Sheldon Wolin and William Connolly sought to capture the perilous effect of capitalist transformations on democratic procedures. Building on multiple critiques of unilinear/historicist accounts of development and calls for theorizing plural temporalities I reconstructed the concepts of motleyness and political society developed by René Zavaleta and Partha Chatterjee, respectively, and argue that the destabilization of democracy beyond localist, deliberative publics and its relocation into the key issues of the constitution of a

⁶⁰ Getachew and Mantena, “Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory.”

demos and the legibility/administration of populations constitutes a vantage point from which Global South perspectives both question received historicist models and provide alternatives for theorizing patterns of popular mobilization caught up between the state and capitalism. The point is not to claim that these forms of politics emerge in separate ways from those of modern democratic, capitalist politics. What I have tried to show is that the task of political theorists concerned with criticizing and expanding the boundaries of the theoretical canon of democratic capitalism could benefit greatly from a singular attention to the depiction of time and temporality that underpins such diagnoses. Furthermore, by centering ‘motleyness’ and ‘political society,’ rather than simple condemning historicism, I argue that an attention to the pluralization of temporalities opens up a critical space for reanimating the debate around capitalism and democracy. That said, further iterations of this project should call attention to the fact the simultaneity of historical times in Zavaleta and Chatterjee is theorized with different normative implications and grounded in dissimilar histories of colonialism that need to be recentered.

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