

## **The Kolkata Workshop: Methodological Considerations from India**

*Samata Biswas*

Place: Emerald Bower Campus of Rabindra Bharati University (RBU), Kolkata

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Participants: Professors Paula Banerjee (Sanskrit College & University, Kolkata), Pradip Kumar Bose (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata), Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty (Rabindra Bharati University (RBU), Kolkata), Anup Dhar (Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University, Delhi), and Mary E. John (Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi). Their observations were supplemented by comments from Professor Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury (Rabindra Bharati University) Professor Ranabir Samaddar (Distinguished Chair, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (MCRG), Kolkata), Professor Bankim Chandra Mandal, (Rabindra Bharati University), as well as faculty members, and students from other universities and their collaborators.



*The banner of the event at Rabindra Bharati University*

*In what follows we attempt to give both an overview of individual discussants' presentations as well as locate their presentations within some of the shared concerns and trajectories they raise (written in the third person). Also included are the comments of the Moderator, as well as the questions raised from the floor during the interactive session following the roundtable. The format of this report, therefore, is not a linear and chronological summary, but instead is grouped thematically.*

## Introduction

This roundtable—organized twenty-five years after the publication of the English-language edition of the collection of essays by Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class (RNC)*<sup>1</sup>—turned out to be a continuation of the discussions in and around India, about the issues the book raised, which had begun almost as soon as it was published. Paula Banerjee recounted how she had procured some photocopied essays from the volume in the early years of the 1990s and how they had helped her focus her thinking about race at the time. Ranabir Samaddar recalled the loan of these photocopies from Banerjee, which he said helped him to share the relevant research with his colleagues at Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), in Kolkata, where in 1995–96, his colleagues at MAKIAS (including Anita Sengupta, now Director of MCRG) hosted a series of study classes based on *RNC*. This helped sharpen their understanding of the relatively fresh new take on race and nation, and Balibar and Wallerstein’s attempt to think through and deal with class from their respective angles. Mary E. John was at Hyderabad (a southern Indian city) when the book was published, and she recalled that she and her husband had also acquired a copy in about the first half of the 1990s. This roundtable, then, ended up becoming a historically informed dialogue from several locations across India; predictably also one that sought to enquire about the role of the insights generated in discussing specific Indian concerns and questions.



*Prof. Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Vice Chancellor, RBU, delivering his inaugural remarks*

## The Moderator

**Ranabir Samaddar** performed the task of the Moderator. In his initial remarks, he located Balibar and Wallerstein’s book, particularly Balibar’s writings, within a long tradition of Althusserianism, just as Louis Althusser himself had had conversations with Marx and Hegel (while commenting upon Marx’s

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<sup>1</sup>All in-text page references relate to the 1991 English edition of *RNC*: Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans (of Balibar), Chris Turner. London and New York: Verso, 1991.

Hegelian underpinnings) in several of his works. For example, in the chapter titled “Contradiction and Over determination” in *For Marx*,<sup>2</sup> Althusser proposes a break between the young Hegelian Marx and the later mature Marx, while he was also probably acquainting himself at that time with Mao’s writings on contradiction. Similarly, Samaddar contended, in *RNC* Balibar can also be viewed in terms of his relationship with Althusserian analysis, something he had already shown signs of breaking away from. One can in this respect be mindful of the volume *The Althusserian Legacy*.<sup>3</sup> This book, *RNC*, however, while it reaffirms Balibar’s roots in Althusserian analysis, shows at the same time a kind of delicacy and skill on the part of Balibar that adds much to the analysis and goes beyond the Althusserian framework.



*Prof. Ranabir Samaddar of MCRG making his initial comments as the moderator*

**Comment of the discussant, a preamble:** “In an altered world marked by increasing labour migration, which is giving birth to new kinds of xenophobia, how can we revisit the major arguments that the book presents to its readers, and how can we revisit the question of class keeping in mind new identities, new over determinations?”—**Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury**

**Preamble from the moderator:** In his opening remarks to the roundtable discussion, Basu Ray Chaudhury commented precisely on the issue of how we can relate contemporary research to the central themes of *RNC*. He asked—especially in an altered world, marked by increasing labour migration, which is giving birth to new kinds of xenophobia—how can the major arguments of *RNC* be revisited, and how can we go back to the question of class, bearing in mind new identities, new over determinations?

**Moderator:** The discussion was set to begin, the context was already in place—that of *RNC*’s long association with Indian academia, its relevance to contemporary society, and Balibar’s ideological position in a long tradition of Marx’s interlocutors. The first person to make a detailed presentation of his reading of *RNC*, and rightly so, because his analysis was structural—addressing the stylistic element, the

<sup>2</sup>Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*. Paris, Francois Maspero, 1965; *For Marx*, trans Ben Brewster. London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Sprinker, *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker. London and New York: Verso, 1993.

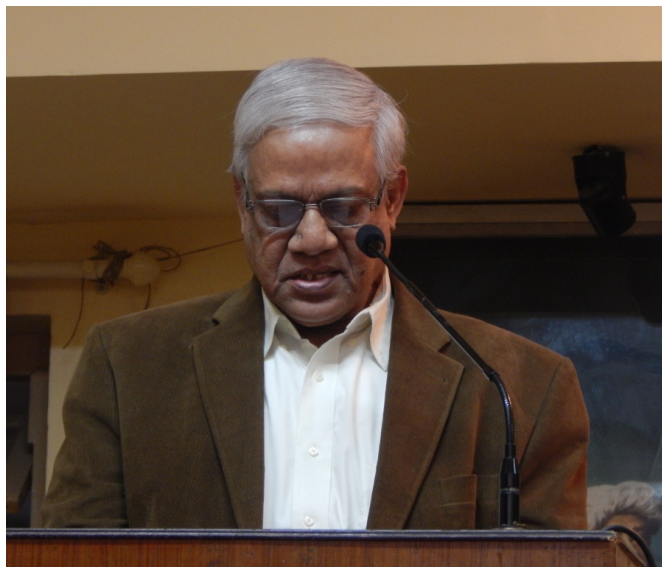
theoretical underpinnings, the structural divisions, and the location of the text within contemporary research—was Pradip Kumar Bose.<sup>4</sup>

**Pradip Kumar Bose** commented that what with Balibar’s reputation as a “classical” Marxist and Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis (which rejects the concept of the mode of production) together they have produced an important collection of essays on two ideologies that are undeniably central to contemporary capitalism in Europe and elsewhere: nationalism and racism. The work represents a debate of sorts where specific themes are addressed in thirteen chapters by the two authors. Balibar is influenced by the “open” postmodernist—perhaps anarchist—project, which explicates the micro-inscription of subjects in the world–power relation, where the very subjects become the principle of their own subjection. Wallerstein is committed to a structuralist agenda, of delimiting determining factors of the world-system, which produces determined oppressive relationships.

Neither author believes in the old simplicity that these ideologies are superficial bourgeois creations that function to subvert proletarian class consciousness. Both argue that racism and nationalism are deeply embedded in the social relations of contemporary capitalism, and that their points of disagreement as well as agreement are challenging and illuminating. The subtitle of the book is crucial: it indicates that the ever-shifting identities of individuals are continuously at stake both in society and in this book. How and why do national-, class-, sexual-, and racial identifications come into people’s minds as meaningful definitions of one’s self and of others? In particular, how should Marxism—with its particular concern with class, class struggle, and class consciousness—understand the ambiguous, endlessly changing, and multiple identifications/identities of the social actors to whom Marxists direct their arguments and visions of a better world? To these questions, the book provides no answers but instead it offers a fascinating, rich, and diverse set of non-mechanical, old and new Marxist insights, better described as reflections, questionings, and brilliant bits of analysis, which will be indispensable for constructing the answers rather than offering answers in themselves.

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<sup>4</sup>Pradip Kumar Bose is a former Professor of Sociology at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences (CSSS), Kolkata. He received his PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and has also worked at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, and at the Centre for Social Studies, Surat. His areas of interest include caste–class relations, refugees and the diasporas, research methodology, sociological theory, and the philosophy of social science. Among Pradip Kumar Bose’s publications are *Classes in a Rural Society: A Sociological Study of Some Bengal Villages* (1984), *Classes and Class Relations among the Tribals of Bengal* (1985), and *Research Methodology: A Trend Report* (1995).



*Prof. Pradip Kumar Bose of CSSS, Kolkata*

**Comment of the discussant:** “How and why do national, class, sexual, and racial identifications come into people’s minds as meaningful definitions of one’s self and others? In particular, how should Marxism, with its particular concern with class, class struggle, and class consciousness understand the ambiguous, endlessly changing, and multiple identifications/identities of the social actors to whom Marxists direct their arguments and visions of a better world?”—**Pradip Kumar Bose**

**Commentary:** Pradip Kumar Bose commented that reflecting postmodern ways of thinking within Marxism, both Balibar and Wallerstein stress that identities are never to be thought of as givens; they are always meanings, constructed and disseminated by people under particular social conditions. Race, nation, and class are, then, constructs to be understood as both subjective and objective—subjective, in the sense of being among the terms in which individuals define themselves as subjects, and objective, because particular conditions in society combine to make these the terms for individual self-definition. Subjective self-definitions always have social effects and in this sense subjective identities are themselves conditions, for they are objective as well as subjective.

Nationalism is theorized by Wallerstein in this book in a manner that recalls the British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner (1925–95). In *Nations and Nationalism*,<sup>5</sup>Gellner argued that nationalism is rooted in the division of labour brought about by industrialization. For Wallerstein, the meritocratic principles have a limited application, since the drive for the maximization of profit invokes a tendency to pay some people less than their merits command. Racism and sexism organize and legitimate these discriminations; thus racism and sexism are essential supplements that stem from the fact that industrial growth is subject to the dictates of capital accumulation. Wallerstein’s main contribution to understanding contemporary racism and sexism lies in his claim that both phenomena counter the universalism inherent in the global capitalist economy, and, therefore, would appear to work at cross-purposes to modern capitalism. Yet, as he suggests, both ideologies have the effect of sustaining the

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<sup>5</sup>Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

system by providing the ground for reduced wages for substantial segments of the population, thereby enhancing capitalist accumulation.

On the other hand, Balibar's perspective on the relationship between race, nation, and class owes much to both Michel Foucault and Althusser. Balibar argues that the necessary relationship of the triad is not external to the ideologies of race, nation, class, but a by-product of nationalism's internal contradictions and dynamics, resulting in the formation and reproduction of bourgeois political domination. There may be some critics who will happily see here a return of the Hegel that Balibar's guru Louis Althusser had chased away from Marxism. In fact Balibar indicates—even if a bit too elliptically—that although nationalism represents an ideological force that has its own history and conceptual field, it also articulates within the mechanism of state practices, such as in the control of populations, or in the moulding of the workforce with specific skills and habits. It is in relation to these practices that nationalism's internal relation to racism and sexism should be further investigated, and, for this task, Balibar's essays provide some valuable guidelines.

In the book, Balibar then moves on to a concern with immigration, and the impact of immigrants upon societies. Unfortunately, he makes only the slightest headway on the topic. And yet, Pradip Kumar Bose believes, it is precisely on this matter that both Balibar and Wallerstein could have made—and perhaps should have made—their most singular contributions. For it is precisely the large-scale movement of labourers today, within and between countries, that is fuelling racist ideologies and stimulating the defence of national boundaries through resurgent forms of nationalism. However, as both authors make clear, the futures of both capitalism and Marxism depend in significant ways on how people variously understand and intervene in the complex overdeterminations of their shifting identities.

**Moderator:** Two points from Pradip Kumar Bose were carried forward in the discussion that follows: first is the question of how much of contemporary studies of nationalism and racism need to draw on Foucault. Iman Mitra (of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Patna) raised a similar question at the end of the roundtable when the floor was opened up for discussion and questions. He wondered, to what extent the study of race, nation, and class was directed and compelled by the study of populations? To this question Ranabir Samaddar and Pradip Kumar Bose had two very different responses. Bose held that the meaning and government of populations totally transform the nature of politics and society, abolishing the normative parts of the citizen and instead concentrating only on the descriptive parts; and while Marxism's focus is on practice, populations depoliticize the realm of politics. Samaddar disagreed with this view, however, arguing that governmental operations recreate race, and it is something that has to be borne in mind when studying race in its modern avatars. Samaddar also added at a later time, that Foucault describes the Second World War as a battle between races; and that from this it can be understood that Foucault's shadow looms large over *RNC*, especially in its discussion around race.

Currently working on a co-edited volume, *Women in the Worlds of Labour: Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Perspectives*, the presentation of Mary E. John<sup>6</sup> sought to locate her in the discussions that

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<sup>6</sup>Mary E. John is Senior Fellow and Professor at the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi, India. She was Director of the Centre (2006–12) and prior to that the Deputy Director of the Women's Studies Programme at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has been writing and speaking extensively on women, gender, and feminist issues for three decades. Her publications include *Gender Issues in the Contemporary Indian Context* (1995), *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories* (1996), *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (co-ed., 1998), *Contested Transformations:*

the *RNC* engenders, as well as finding out how the book addresses contemporary and specific Indian realities.

**Commentary:** The early 1990s was characterized by the palpable crisis of Marxism as the “master narrative” of the era, a narrative that had informed Mary John’s generation as one that was being exposed to the manifold ways of social transformation across the globe. In Mary John’s individual case, it was also marked by the growing significance of feminism which, given her prior location as a graduate student in the United States (1985–91), was deeply intertwined and challenged by the politics of race and ethnicity during those years. In India during the early 1990s in cities like Hyderabad, people were also confronting issues of communalism and the re-emergence of caste (in places and situations thought of as casteless).

Given the thrust of her research since the beginning, Mary John picked up first on the few scattered remarks in *RNC* under the heading “Sexism” (what we would now call patriarchy or gender inequality). She considered this the most incomplete if not unsatisfactory section of the book, including Wallerstein’s short piece on household structures and women’s unpaid work.

Within the classic Marxist two-class structure of capitalist vs worker it is the complex location of the worker/proletarian that, as Balibar points out, has enjoyed both theoretical and political primacy. (In fact he shows how in Marx’s critical discussion in *Capital*, Volume 1, the capitalist does not even have an initial presence, other than as the bearer of capital.) Given this imbalance, the most interesting aspects around class-related issues, for John, are found in Wallerstein’s essays on the bourgeoisie, including the possible relevance to the issues India faces today. In Chapter 9 in particular, Wallerstein’s observations about the different kinds of bourgeois classes, but more especially his very engaging description of the “topsy-turvy world” of capitalism (p. 148) were insightful, especially the account of how capitalists do not want to be bourgeois but rather want to be aristocrats! There is the all-too-brief discussion of meritocracy and education in creating the necessary distinctions between the new middle classes (salaried bourgeoisie) and the working classes (p. 150). And, as Mary John observed, Wallerstein’s rather optimistic observations regarding the intrinsic instability of meritocracy in maintaining class distinctions, compared to older notions of status, would benefit from parallels in the Indian context given the enormous ideological primacy being achieved by the idea of merit in the Indian educational system, discussions on reservations, and the centrality of education, more broadly in the reproduction of India’s new middle classes.

For both Balibar and Wallerstein, the critical purpose of their re-descriptions of class has, obviously, to do with how they bring in racism. Balibar’s profoundly anti-essentialist methodology is one that repeatedly emphasizes contexts and histories for thinking simultaneously about the co-production of class and racism—from fifteenth-century Spanish imperialism in America, the genocide of indigenous races, to arguments that capitalism in France now needs the immigrant racial “Other”, in an expanding capitalist system, in the mode of differential racism. As Wallerstein puts it, “racism is the magic formula that reconciles these [i.e. capital’s] objectives” (p. 33). In his preface to *RNC*, Balibar describes racism in the modern world as an “institutionalisation of the hierarchies involved in the world-wide division of labour” (p. 6); in other words, what we have here is “class racism”, or perhaps capitalist racism, where there is no

question of class and race existing as two separable structures but rather only the possibility of describing one with the other. From a contemporary perspective such a co-description does not, therefore, take the form of the problematic of intersectionality (much discussed these days). Rather, it is the key term “ambiguity” (in the volume’s subtitle) that is put to the greatest use in these discussions.

The third comment Mary John makes has to do with what she sees as a certain weakness in *RNC* when it comes to describing capitalism, capitalist crisis, and proletarianization. Neither Wallerstein nor Balibar seems to see or foresee an intrinsic limit in the production of the worker under capitalism (even when descriptions are offered of the fact that large parts of the so-called periphery are performing non-wage labour, or in the descriptions of women’s non-waged work in the household/self-employment/subsistence, including that of caring for children and/or the elderly). Instead, the authors’ attention is almost entirely focused on the difficult and contradictory position of this worker’s economic–class location and political location, whether in Marx’s own writings or in history, and the driving force of the proletariat in transforming capitalism. KalyanSanyal’s book and Mary John’s recent essay<sup>7</sup> problematize this situation. In the twenty-first century and in economies like India’s, given the path of jobless growth that India has taken and its place in the world-system, one has to contend more centrally with processes of exclusion from the capital–labour relation as intrinsic to its contemporary dynamic. Sanyal has offered one kind of description of this process, whereby large populations are outside capital but within capitalism, and the government takes the necessary role in preventing such a situation from spiralling out of control through schemes that claim to address an alleviate poverty.<sup>8</sup>



*Prof. Mary E John of CWDS, Delhi*

**Moderator:** Fairly predictably, the follow-up discussion picked up on the questions of communalism and caste, while trying to understand the applicability of the book’s formulations to the historically and

<sup>7</sup>Mary E. John, “The Woman Question: Reflections on Feminism and Marxism”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 52, no. 50 (2017) <<http://www.epw.in/journal/2017/50/special-articles/woman-question.html>>, last accessed 4 February 2018.

<sup>8</sup>KalyanSanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality & Post-Colonial Capitalism*. London and New Delhi: Routledge, 2007, 2014.



geographically different realities at hand, and opened up the question of generalizations. AnupDhar<sup>9</sup> was the next speaker in the roundtable.

**Commentary:** *RNC* inaugurated the Althusserian question of overdetermination (these days designated at times as intersectionality theory) of class and race and also of nationalism. It drew attention to questions of racism and sexism—questions that had not been central for people like AnupDhar, having grown up and been educated in the Bengali “radical Marxist” milieu, where questions around gender were “bourgeois”, those about caste were “pre-bourgeois” and a feudal remnant, where turning to caste was a turning away from the progressivist *telos*, and class was seen as the primary contradiction. His presentation closely followed the line of Mary E. John’s before him, in that he located the question of what *RNC* may offer in terms of an understanding of our contemporary reality, although for Dhar, the answer belongs in “methodology” rather than in “content”.

For Anup Dhar, *RNC* managed to go beyond the class-essentialist horizon, to open up the mutual constitutivity of class, race, gender, and nation and the need for a rigorous overdetermined analytic. It also alerted him to the fact that economic, political, cultural, and natural processes needed to be thought in terms of their over determination, where one brings the other into being or existence. Economism, culturalism, psychologism—these were all facets of the same problematic: the metaphysics of presence. The economic should also not be reduced or limited to capitalism. Base-superstructure models were thus rendered suspect. The historical materialist hypothesis, which was marked by “the violent consequences of imposing the most fragile part of Marx, the predictive Eurocentric scenario, upon large parts of the globe not historically centred in Europe”,<sup>10</sup> needed to be re-thought. The movement—feudal to capitalist, theological to secular, and medieval to modernity, monarchy to nation-state—was more complex than at first thought. Lateral interconnections between what historical materialism had presented as complete historical breaks—“the contrast between the [purportedly] narrow-minded medieval vision of our antiquated traditional roots and the liberal, open spirit of the modern world”—may not be so sharp; there were a thousand intersecting plateaus to contend with in Marx.

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<sup>9</sup>Anup Dhar is a Professor in the School of Human Studies, and Director of the Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University (AUD), Delhi, India. His co-authored books include *Dislocation and Resettlement in Development: From Third World to World of the Third* (2009), and *The Indian Economy in Transition: Globalization, Capitalism and Development* (2015). Co-edited books include *Breaking the Silo: Integrated Science Education in India* (2017), *Psychoanalysis in Indian Terroir* (forthcoming, 2018), and *Clinic, Culture, Critique: Psychoanalysis and the Beyond* (forthcoming, 2018). Dhar is a member of the editorial board of *Rethinking Marxism* (<http://rethinkingmarxism.org/>) (2016–19).

<sup>10</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 27.



*Prof. Anup Dhar, AUD, New Delhi*

For instance, in Marx's suggestion in the chapter on "Precious Metal and the Rate of Exchange" in *Capital*, Volume 3: "The monetary system is essentially Catholic, the credit system essentially Protestant" came alive in a rather different light;<sup>11</sup> in the same volume of *Capital*, attention was also directed at Chapter 52, titled "Classes", which brings Marx's work and reflections on classes, or on this question of those reflections—when he asks: "what makes classes"—to a seeming halt; the Manuscript breaks off at this point. Why? Why does the manuscript break off? Is it because class cannot be defined in itself? Is it because as one tries to answer the question: What makes classes, one sees that race makes classes ("race is the modality in which class is 'lived'";<sup>12</sup> "the overall crisis of post-war society was evident in inner-city decay, poverty, unemployment, bad housing, and problems in the education system [...] This crisis was often 'lived through a sense of race'",<sup>13</sup> classes make race ("the dreams of racism actually have their origins in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nation"<sup>14</sup>); hence there is no such thing as a pure class or race relationship. Is there, then, a metonymic slide from one enunciatory subject-position to another, the slide marked by ambivalence and that "there is no 'ideal type' of classes (proletariat and bourgeoisie) but processes of proletarianization and embourgeoisement"? (*RNC* p.11)

This is the question *RNC* manages to inaugurate, not just in "Western Marxism" but also in India: "what is the specificity of contemporary racism [including the "tenacity of prejudice" and "phantasies organizing race"]? / "How can it be related to class division within capitalism and to the contradictions of the nation-state?" / And, conversely, "in what respects does the phenomenon of racism lead us to rethink the articulation of nationalism and the class struggle?" / "Why [was it that] capitalist and socialist formations took the form of nations?" and then Balibar pushes the envelope even further: "racism always presupposes sexism". The interpenetration of ideologies of race and nation was noted by Foucault in 1980

<sup>11</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 3. New York: International Publishers, 1991/1894, p. 727. <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-III.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup>Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance", in UNESCO (ed.), *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*. Paris: UNESCO, 1980, pp. 305–45, here p. 340.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 1991, p. 149.

as part of his analysis of sexuality. There, he argued that nineteenth-century European bourgeoisies attempted to control sexuality in order to properly manage nations: such control and management were also directed at racially purifying the national population, threatened as it was by racial degeneration and contamination from within—and without;<sup>15</sup> as also by the “outsider” within, that is, Jews and homosexuals. Rabindranath Tagore calls this “outsider-inside”, the gravel in the shoe.

**Comment of the discussant:** “In India, however, it becomes a question of methodology and not content; this book does not illuminate the content of the Indian experience; it offers a methodology as to how one can go about making sense of the content of our experience”—**Anup Dhar**

**Moderator:** This is also because one cannot translate race to caste; the connection between race and class and the connection between caste and class could, however, be apposite in terms of the eternalist nature of labour forms in which that the racial “Other” and the caste “Other” has to take part. (Certain labouring practices historically accrue to the racial or the caste “Other” making it impossible for the racial or the caste “Other” to escape the chains of such labour forms. This is not merely a question of what Marx calls wage-slavery; it is a question of being bonded to a labour form). While the labourer Marx talks about can notionally move from one labour-form to another, albeit not escaping exploitation, the labourer B. R. Ambedkar foregrounds cannot exit the labour form into which s/he has been born. Marx’s focus is on the labour process while Ambedkar’s focus is on the lived experience of the labourer, tied eternally to a labour form. The distinction Ambedkar marks between (surplus) labour and the (bonded) labourer could be useful to race-theorists as well.<sup>16</sup>

The book takes us to the threshold of two fundamental supplements to the question of surplus appropriation:

**Supplement I:** Jacques Lacan foregrounds the abduction and theft of the slave’s “know-how” (not just “surplus labour”, as suggested by Marx), through the manoeuvres of the “Master” in Plato’s dialogues; what we call episteme is premised on the extraction of the essence of the know-how embedded in the everyday praxis of the craftsmen, the serfs, women working in the household. Theoretical knowledge, or what Aristotle calls *theoria* in its historical function, is this extraction of the slave’s know-how and everyday praxis, in order to obtain its transmutation into the “Master’s Discourse”.<sup>17</sup>

**Supplement II:** In the same seminar, Lacan so foregrounds the aspect of the disavowal of the slave’s enjoyment/*jouissance* in Marx. One, hence, needs to supplement surplus value/labour (the class question) with surplus *jouissance*—the slave’s secret *jouissance* in the “community/race/might”, and both with the abducted slave’s know-how that resides in the “Master’s Discourse”—hence the need for Dalit/feminist/black epistemology. Do the workings of (i) the three (albeit related) understandings of surplus and (ii) the eternally bonded nature of Dalit labour contribute to the thinking of the overdetermined interface of race–caste, gender and class?

<sup>15</sup>Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995.

<sup>16</sup>Bhimrao Ramji (Babasaheb) Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, 3 vols. New Delhi: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 1987/2014.

<sup>17</sup>Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

*RNC* also takes us beyond thinking about universalism as a concept or an ideal—one that is diametrically opposed to particularist identities. It argues: universalism and racism-sexism are not thesis and antithesis awaiting synthesis. They are rather an inseparable pair containing reflexes, both of domination (domination of “universal humanism” as of also “particularized racism”) and of liberation (liberation through the marking of sexual or racial difference). We are also alerted to the fusion of the two historical narratives capable of acting as metaphors of each other: on the one hand, the narrative of the formation of nations at the expense of the lost unity of Christian Europe and, on the other, that of the conflict between national independence and the internationalization of capitalist economic relations/the class struggle. This is why the Jew, as an internally excluded element common to all nations, but also, negatively, by virtue of the theological hatred to which she is subject, as witness to the love that is supposed to unite the Christian peoples, may, in the imaginary, be identified with the cosmopolitanism of capital, which threatens the national independence of every country, while at the same time reactivating the trace of lost unity.

Nationalism is also always caught between universality and particularity: it is universalist because it upholds the notion of uniform citizenship as a human right, while, on the other hand, it is particularist, because it always also focuses on a specific nation (Rabindranath Tagore, however, was critical of both conceptions of nation).

B. R. Ambedkar, through an invocation of Nagarjuna’s concept of *sunyata*, in *Buddha and his Dhamma*, frames the problematic of the universal and the particular differently, relating it radically/politically. *Sunyata* is not presented by Ambedkar as “emptiness” but as “dependent origination” and “an emergent contingent”; *sunyata*, hence, is the ground for “anti-eternalism” and, by default, the possibility of transformation. Building on Ambedkar’s radical rereading of *sunyata* as anti-eternalism and anti-eternalism as, in turn, ground for transformation—transformation of the caste-ridden social, one can argue for the political. The book *RNC* also creates the ground for a dependent origination and an emergent contingent presence of race, class, gender. Ambedkar’s anti-eternalism could be a supplement to Balibar and Wallerstein’s critique of racism–sexism.

**Commentary:** Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty<sup>18</sup> was the next speaker. Chakraborty spoke about the relationship between racism and nationalism and the impossibility of articulating racism within a universalist framework. Undeniably there is a narrow gap between nationalism and racism; it is also true that nationalism comes in different varieties: Hitler’s nationalism is significantly different from Gandhi’s. Nonetheless, as historical phenomena, nationalism easily lapses into racism (nationalist movements produce dictatorships).

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<sup>18</sup>Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty is Professor of Philosophy at RabindraBharati University, Kolkata. His areas of interest are the Philosophy of Language and Environmental ethics. He is author of *Pursuit of Meaning* (2004), *In Defence of the Intrinsic Value of Nature* (2004), and *Perspectives on Radhakrishnan*(2007). He was also the editor of *Language, Thought and Reality* (2010) and *Empiricism and the Two Dogmas* (2006).



*Prof. Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty, Department of Philosophy, RBU*

It is worth discovering the psychology working behind nationalist and racist dispositions: Chakraborty chose to focus on what Balibar calls “Theoretical” or “Doctrinal” racism. Both the internal racism (directed against the minority) and external racism (xenophobia) work on the construction of the “Other”. It should also be noted that there is a distinction between auto-referential (thinking of oneself as belonging to a superior race) and hetero-referential (the victim belonging to an inferior race). If “Racism is a social relation, not the mere ravings of racist subjects” (p. 41) as Balibar rightly holds, then it is incumbent on all of us to decipher the phenomenology of interpreting the “Other” in a society. Interpretation involves translating the thoughts of the “Other” into one’s own vocabulary, and this resists the existence of radically different conceptual schemes.

Identity is another important element in the racist vocabulary and this identity is constructed out of one’s encounter with the “Other”. One’s identity includes interiorizing the “Other” and it also implies interpreting the “Other”. This explains why racism includes both elitism and universalism, the two apparently conflicting tendencies (think of the slogan “Turn the entire world into Aryan people”). In the racist vocabulary “rationality”, “culture”, and “tradition” are important elements, these are ideas which racism cashes in on in order to glorify the past in an attempt to recreate the past in the present temporal mode. A careful analysis of the different connotations of these racist vocabularies implies that we cannot afford a radical failure in understanding the “Other”. Shareability in a large area of beliefs is inescapable. Racist exclusivity collapses. Racism doesn’t make sense, because it is always torn between the two poles of radical exclusivity and shareability.

**Moderator:** Following Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty’s exploration of how racist ideas are formed, the final speaker at the roundtable, Paula Banerjee,<sup>19</sup> made her presentation. Like the speaker before her, but

<sup>19</sup>The present Vice Chancellor of the Sanskrit College & University, Kolkata, and former honorary director of MCRG, Paula Banerjee is an expert on Indo-American relations, and studied in Cincinnati, Ohio. As part of her current work on borders and women, she has authored numerous papers on women in conflict situations in northeast India. She is a full-time faculty member in the Department of South & South East Asian Studies, University of Calcutta. She is author of *When Ambitions Clash* (2003) and *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond* (2010). Among others she was co-editor of *Women in Indian Borderlands* (2011) and *The State of Being Stateless in India: An Account of South Asia* (2015). Paula Banerjee is the recipient of a number of international

in a quite different vein, Banerjee presented the phenomenon of the persistent presence of race in racism, and the impossibility of reducing biologicility (in the case of race) to a mere set of discourses and ideologies.



*Prof. Paula Banerjee, Vice Chancellor, The Sanskrit College and University*

**Commentary:** *RNC* is the result of a series of dialogues between Balibar and Wallerstein that took place in the late 1980s at the Foundation Maison des Sciences de l'homme (FMSH) in Paris. In *RNC* both authors concern themselves with the resurgence of racism and nationalism in Europe that was becoming ever more visible as the Cold War was coming to an end. Banerjee pointed out how critics of the volume, such as Robert Miles have called it an important collection of essays on two ideologies undeniably central to contemporary capitalism in Europe and elsewhere—nationalism and racism<sup>20</sup>. She also pointed to other critics, such as Anthony M. Orum<sup>21</sup>, who found the book disappointing and wrote that it “simply does not live up to the reputation of the two authors”; and argued that the liveliest part of the book is Balibar’s concerns with immigrants although, even here, “he makes the slightest headway on the topic”.

At the time of its publication the book received mixed reviews, because it was generally held that the authors had made suppositions that either were too radical or did not push their arguments far enough. Before moving on in this light, Banerjee saw it as essential to look at what issues the two authors concerned themselves with, and how they situated these within the larger context of global capitalism. Wallerstein’s main concerns are largely with a capitalist economy that generates both an overriding universalism on the one hand and hierarchically ordered sets of racism and sexism on the other and that counter the universalism of the capitalist economy. Interestingly Wallerstein concludes, both capitalism and racism work towards sustaining the system by reducing wages for substantial segments of the

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fellowships including the Advanced Taft Fellowship (1991–93), the WISCOMP Fellow of Peace Award (2001), and the Distinguished Fulbright SIR Award, and also a Visiting Professorship to State University of New York (SUNY) at Oswego, New York.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Miles, review: *Race, Nation, Class. International Affairs* . Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 1992). Pp526-527.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony M. Orum, Review: *Race, Nation, Class. Social Forces*. Vol. 72, No. 2 (Dec. 1993) pp- 578-580.

population, thereby clearly portraying the nexus between race and capital in the market-driven economy, which nationalism often promotes.

As to his version of emancipatory politics, Wallerstein seems to have charted paths out of this conundrum so that he can rescue the Marxist agenda of class polarization, which will lead to the emancipation of the working class.

Balibar's analysis is more subtle, ambiguous, and more profoundly impactful on radical social thought according to Paula Banerjee. Balibar reminds his reader that racism, nationalism, and ethnicity all result from fictive origins and, therefore, are matters of construction. As Paula Banerjee points out, both authors consciously situate themselves within the genre of "Western Marxism" and both desire a dialogue that is truly international, especially in an age when transnational communication is an everyday affair. However, she sees it as ironic that in the preface itself, which is written by Balibar, the limitation of their dialogue becomes apparent when Balibar confesses that the difference between him and his co-author is that Wallerstein "is too 'American' and I too French". (p. 10).

As one of the central concerns of *RNC* is race and racism, the authors try to analyse the characteristics of contemporary racism. Balibar in particular contends that contemporary racism is merely a continuation of the xenophobic history of Europe. The fact that racism in the twentieth century is different is portrayed by the fact that people talk about the "sudden aggravation" or the "rise" of racism. Although Balibar is sceptical about forgetting the past histories of racism, he contends that the present variety of racism is a form of "racism without race" as it is not biologically driven. Balibar critiques Wallerstein's argument that racism is an articulation of class relations, but even Balibar's articulations about racism do not push the critique any further. He agrees that what makes racism exceptional today is the kind of violence that is associated with it, but his articulations are not emancipatory for the subjects of racism. In fact, he speaks of popular racism, or working-class racism, but does not critique the role of capital, or the entire framework of resource-politics behind the growth of racism within working-class politics. This return to racist- or working-class politics is a forced and conscious one; one where Balibar discusses how the native becomes marked as a foreigner as the result of this politics. Simultaneously he speaks about racism without race, but his own contentions point to the fallacies of his argument: without the overwhelming presence of race, what justifies this continuum of racially different citizens becoming permanent exceptions to citizenship? It is race that denotes who will be the subjects and objects of racism.

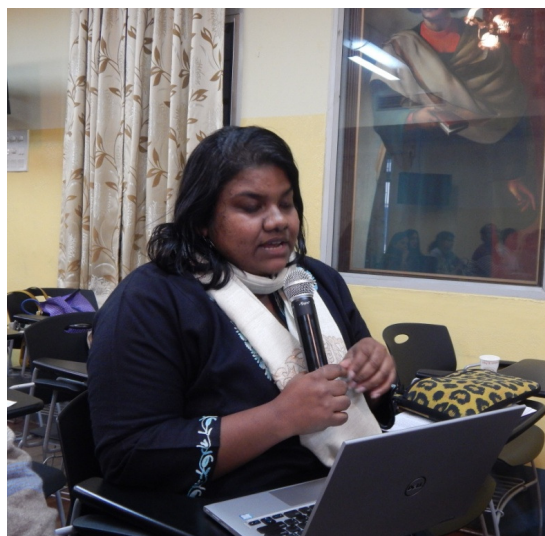
**Moderator:** Banerjee's contention is that the resurgence of race was what made racism so potent in contemporary Europe. The recent resurgence of "boat people" and their reception in fortress Europe is ample proof of the presence of the race in racism today. She shared the contention of both Anthony Orum of the University of Illinois as well as Pradip Kumar Bose, both of whom argue that a major concern of *RNC* should have been the impact of immigration, as it is precisely the large-scale movement of labourers today, within and between countries that is fuelling racist ideologies. It is the presence of immigrants that brings one to realize how intrinsically race is connected to nationalism in our contemporary times. The authors could have pointed to this as a universal phenomenon but they did not do so. Also, although Balibar and Wallerstein discuss violence they do not call it barbarism or genocide, thereby sanitizing the kind of violence that is perpetrated against people of colour in Europe. It is race that distinguishes the Bosnian refugee situation from the Syrian refugee situation; and further evidence that the authors have been unable to push their arguments far enough is proven in by the Saint-Denis riots. Here the rioters were French citizens, yet time and again they were reduced to the status of permanent exceptions. Also

the authors were unable to consider the immigrants as agents of a transformative history, thereby alienating them for a second time.

The limitation of *RNC* is that the dialogue was unable to further the emancipatory politics of either the immigrants or the working class, and neither could it challenge race in either the nation or in racism. Both sociologist and philosopher were able to sow the seeds of brilliant ideas, but they abandoned their own saplings. This, sadly enough, is what makes their arguments less political than in fact they are. Their arguments can definitely be considered methodological breakthroughs, but the politics behind their arguments are not pushed to their conclusions.

At this point of discussion, Ranabir Samaddar reminded the audience that in *The Spectre of Comparisons*, Benedict Anderson attempted to understand why thousands of millions of people willingly sacrificed themselves in the name of the nation.<sup>22</sup> Samaddar also raised the question as to how it was that the anti-colonialists were able to think of racism as nationalism (that is to say, the battle of the conquered race against the conqueror race), and the answer to that question has been only addressed half-way, namely that nationalism was born by flattening out many racial identities. In Anderson's work on nationalisms outside Europe, many such instances of the paradox can be seen. After this short interjection by Samaddar, the roundtable was opened up for further discussion and comment from the floor.

**From the floor:** Ishita Dey, of Ambedkar University, Delhi, asked the discussants to comment on the notion of "peoplehood" as it emerges from *RNC*. Dey drew the audience's attention to the centrality of works such as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson's *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*,<sup>23</sup> which are able to help with the ambiguities inherent in some of the concepts raised by *RNC*. She also asked the panellists to comment on the role played by non-waged labour and the effect that has on migrant bodies.



*Dr. Ishita Dey, AUD, Delhi*

<sup>22</sup>Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. London and New York: Verso, 1998.

<sup>23</sup>Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.



**From the floor:** Debabrata Das from the Department of English, RBU, raised another question about a subject's ability to choose her identity—given the overdetermination of identities—in the context of Fadia Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma*.<sup>24</sup>



*Dr. Debabrata Das, Department of English, RBU*

**From the floor:** Hitendra Patel of the Department of History, RBU, asked the panellists to elaborate on the ideological tensions within Marxism, and also to explain the need to locate the book in the context of the collapse of the USSR. Patel also commended AnupDhar's reference to B. R. Ambedkar to elicit understanding of *RNC*.



*Dr. Hitendra Patel, Department of History, RBU*

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<sup>24</sup>Fadia Faqir, *My Name is Salma*. London: Doubleday, 2007; US edition titled *The Cry of the Dove*. New York: Grove Press, Black Cat, 2007.

**A question from the panel:** Taking his cue from Patel's question, Ranabir Samaddar asked if it were possible that if race could not be translated into caste could caste be brought any closer to our understanding of race?

**From the floor:** Samita Sen of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, had another question for the panel: "When we say race, nation, and class are we inserting through nation, history too? To some extent class encapsulates history as well, but nation brings it forth more forcefully".



*Prof. Samita Sen, School of Women's Studies, JU*

**A question from the panel:** To this, Iman Mitra added the rejoinder as to why one would omit race as a historical category.

**Reply from the panel:** Anup Dhar was first among the panellists to respond to the floor. He commented on the repeated invocation of a supplement in *RNC*; there are a number of lines where both authors are suggesting that racism is a supplement to nationalism, an excess of nationalism, but not to the exclusion of nationalism. And in response to Sen's question, Dhar argued for the book's tensions between its concepts, in which sense another question—a question within the one already being broached in terms of the two Marxes—surfaced, that of the historical Marx and the conceptual Marx.

Anup Dhar continued, saying that studying the historical dynamics of capital formation, Marx conceptually arrives at the concept of capital being rethought in Russia, Portugal, Algeria, and in parts of Latin America. Thus, Marx has a complex dialectic of class as concept and class processes as historical enunciation. Our question, then, is: what is to be done with the non-capitalist class problem: where labour power is not a commodity, the means of production is not a commodity, and where the final product also doesn't take the commodity form—how do we then understand class? This is often the case in India where there are many caste-based occupations.

Dhar ended by commenting that the relationship between race, gender, class, and nation, is a complex question of over determination and contradiction, which cannot be reduced to the argument of the last-

instance (contrary to what many social scientists and activists seek to do). A relevant discussion in this regard would be B. R. Ambedkar's chapter on Marx.<sup>25</sup>

**Reply from the panel:** Mary E. John, like Dhar, picked up on the questions pertaining to race and caste. She also responded to Paula Banerjee's comments about the irreducibility of biology where caste is concerned. She commented that when Balibar thinks racism, he seems to be thinking Spanish conquistadors and immigrants arriving in France, but Ambedkar's notion of castes creating many nations, is a useful insight to keep in mind when thinking of Balibar's conflation of race with nation. In the case of the white subject, the unmarked category of whiteness must be thought through in order to complicate our understanding of race.

**Reply from the panel:** Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty also came back on his presentation regarding racist discourse and the inherent unsustainability of it. He commented that recent developments in cognitive psychology are useful for an understanding of Balibar, since racist discourse must account for interpreting the "Other", and therefore oneself, through language.

**Reply from the panel:** Paula Banerjee made the final remark. She stated that in order for the book to be more political it needed to be more historical. Thus, while the principle of over determination was repeatedly deployed to chart the way through the transformation in the three fields (race, nation, and class), the historical category of the human being remained unexplored. For example, labour was never gendered, and race was never biologized.

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<sup>25</sup>Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, 1987/2014, pp. xx.