

FIFTH CRITICAL STUDIES CONFERENCE
“Accumulation under Post-Colonial Capitalism”
Kolkata, 21-23 August 2014 (Thursday-Saturday)

A. Brief note on the conference structure

1. The Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (commonly known as the Calcutta Research Group or CRG) has organised in the past four Critical Studies Conferences in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011 respectively on the themes of “What is Autonomy?”, “Other Spheres of Justice”, “Empires, States, and Migration”, and “Logistics, Development, and Democracy”. The programme of critical studies conference (usually held biennially) is designed to promote critical thinking and investigations into significant themes of our time, particularly in countries like India, and develop a community of critical thinkers and activists trans-nationally. The results of the conferences are at times published as articles, books, e-sites, debates on blogs, and added to archives of critical thinking. However, there is no compulsion to follow up a conference with a volume. The idea is to promote critical thinking and exchange of arguments, rationales and experiences. At times, participants take the initiative to bring out a cohesive set of papers in the form of a book or an issue of a journal. They are also free to follow up their respective contributions in their respective locations and in ways they feel appropriate. Famous books, such as, *Autonomy – Beyond Kant and Hermeneutics* or *Borders of Justice*, have been products of such exchange of ideas. The journal *Refugee Watch* published an entire issue on the basis of such deliberations. Attendance of students, young scholars, and activists is a major feature of the programme.
2. Each conference is structured around several thematic panel discussions, a distinguished lecture, key notes, and book discussion, marking out in the process new frontiers of thinking and possible new approaches on a particular issue. Participants from various parts of India, South Asia, and from outside the region of South Asia contribute to the discussion in the conference. In the past philosophers such as Étienne Balibar and historians such as David Ludden gave distinguished lectures on such occasions. These conferences are organised by CRG in formal and informal collaborations with universities and research groups. There is an advisory body to guide the conference. Some members in the advisory body contribute to consultations online as they are located in institutions outside India. Participants have to register. Some events such as the distinguished lecture are open to all. A core number of 30-35 people involve themselves intensely in a conference, whereas local participants may vary. The network of scholars and activists CRG represents forms the backbone of the conference. The conference also strengthens the network and gives birth to new ideas and programmes. The details of the past four critical studies conferences are to be found on the CRG website: www.mcrg.ac.in
3. As the subject of the fifth Critical Studies Conference, CRG proposes the theme of “Accumulation in Post-colonial Capitalism”. It will be held from 21 August to 23 August, 2014 (Thursday-Saturday).

B. The concept and the theme of the fifth conference

4. It is important to situate the question of accumulation in the current context of capitalism and the social and political struggles against it globally. This context is marked primarily by what can be generally called the “post-colonial condition”, which means among others, the retarded nature of agriculture, the persistence of the peasantry, debt-burden, massive immigration, resource crisis, national backwardness of countries, primitive forms of accumulation, unbalanced urbanisation, overwhelming presence of informal sector, continuing nature of global crisis in the food market, etc.
5. The most important thing about the “post-colonial condition” is that this phrase cannot be understood without reference to contemporary forms of accumulation. The phrase “post-colonial condition” essentially is not a cultural expression, but a profound feature of contemporary accumulation process. It helps us to understand what is at stake in the formulation of the concept of post-colonial capitalism. The issue of accumulation is at the heart of the question of post-colonial capitalism.
6. The nature of accumulation has come under scrutiny in the contemporary times. The combination of the high, including the most virtual, form of accumulation and the primitive form is a feature of the contemporary dynamics of accumulation. Till now the discussion on these has not focussed on the links between the two; instead, discussions have gone on along separate lines. The debates on the primitive form have focussed on land grab, resource extraction, extraordinary forms of labour control, new fiscal-political instruments of dispossession, conquest, war, modes of slave labour, etc., and the significance of all these for contemporary capitalism. On the other hand, a different set of studies has focussed on new financial modes of accumulation, trading in money and currencies, sovereign funds, new monetary operations of banks and other institutions, and financial reforms. The question is: Is there a link (and a causal one) between the two? And if so, does the “post-colonial condition” have a bearing on the relation?
7. Related to this is another issue that requires attention. There is a need to probe the great question of resources today. On the one hand, there is the reality of each and every kind of resource being turned into fodder for accumulation and therefore to be always extracted (such as land, minerals, environment, bio-capacity, money) from some source; on the other hand, precisely because the resource in question is not be replenished but to be extracted only, the condition reflects the fundamental salience of the colonial mode, and thus of the global nature of the post-colonial predicament. It is in the light of the significance of the question of extraction, that we must renew our studies of issues like land, cities, etc., and the phenomenon of accumulation through resource transfer.
8. Migrant labour happens to be another element of the contemporary process of accumulation. While there lately have been studies on migrant labour and what is known as the “immigration debate”, only few of these have noted the connection between large-scale dispossession and migration (including forced migration), and the new forms of accumulation. Here, too, with the issue of the colonial and post-colonial origins of the massive phenomenon of today’s immigrant labour, we have to probe deeply into the relation between the accumulation process under post-colonial capitalism and the labour

question in its transit form. We have to ask: What is the precise significance of transit labour today? Linked to this is the unexamined phenomenon of reorganisation of spaces of accumulation, the emergence of new zones of accumulation (such as the free-trade zones in many countries) and new corridors of capital and labour. There is a need to investigate the dual phenomena of transit labour and the reorganisation of spaces of accumulation today.

9. The theme of reorganisation of spaces of accumulation should remind us of the old accumulation debates. There is ground to revisit the conditions of transit labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when current labour control strategies were put in place. Yet, even more important today is the question of boundary-setting and boundary-crossing exercises and practices in the contemporary accumulation processes. The production of surplus value itself involves the crossing of several boundaries. And in this context, the particular issue of circulation (of goods, information, capital, money, and labour) that creates and crosses several boundaries (of countries, processes, forms, markets, spheres, etc.) makes the question of borders and boundaries in the accumulation process significant. A perusal of the implications of the boundary theme in the accumulation process in post-colonial capitalism will tell us as to why we shall need historical investigations into the theme and the lessons to be drawn.
10. All these indicate the political stakes in analysing contemporary forms of accumulation. There are many questions that spring from the post-colonial roots of the current accumulation process. We may ask: Is the national question over? In what way neo-liberalism is linked to the survival of post-colonial realities? How are the labour rights struggles conducted today? What is the nature of changes in the rights regime given the reality of contemporary accumulation process? How do we factor in the post-colonial fault lines in the accumulation process, such as race, caste, gender, and region? Therefore, how is the “radical social” reconstituted today? And, finally, what are the implications of all these inquiries for a new idea of popular politics and democracy?
11. These questions, themes, and issues remind us of the old accumulation debates, in which Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, and others participated a century ago. The conference will be an occasion to revisit the classic studies. Below we give some of the sub-themes that may be covered in this conference.
12. **Sub-themes:**
 - Post-colonial capitalism: global problematic and global significance
 - Rosa Luxemburg and the contemporary accumulation debate
 - Return of primitive accumulation in various forms to current history of capital and society
 - The dual question of accumulation and resource in the history of post-colonial capitalism and accumulation in the form of resource transfer
 - Finance, trade, logistics, and reorganisation of spaces and the contemporary dynamics of accumulation
 - City as the site of resource extraction
 - New towns and new forms of accumulation
 - Migrant labour as the key to accumulation in post-colonial capitalism
 - Boundary setting and boundary crossing in the accumulation process

- Contemporary forms of accumulation, political consequences, and resistance
13. The CRG invites papers on any of the sub-themes from interested scholars and activists. **Those who are interested are requested to send long abstracts (approximately 800-1,000 words) of their papers by April 30, 2014.** Full papers of the abstracts that are selected would have to be submitted by July 15, 2014, so that the papers can be pre-circulated amongst all the participants.
 14. The long abstracts will have to be sent to Atig Ghosh (atig@mcrg.ac.in; atigghosh@gmail.com) & Madhurilata Basu (madhurilata@mcrg.ac.in). Interested participants are requested, if possible, to get in touch immediately.
 15. In all matters of shortlisting and selection, the decision of the Organizing Committee will be final.
-