Mahdi Amel's Colonial Mode of Production and Politics in the Last Instance

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses Lebanese Marxist philosopher Mahdi Amel's formulation of the concept of "colonial mode of production" as a differential mode from capitalism that is linked to it through "structural causality." Amel theorized the colonial mode of production as a singular mode that was seen to be specific to some social formations like Lebanon, Algeria, and Egypt. The article draws out the Althusserian influences in Amel's theoretical work and explains the contours of his main argument to show how the colonial mode of production was employed as a critique of national liberation movements in the 1970s. In his theoretical works, Amel also provides a substantive critique of structuralism by arguing for a notion of political practice as the determinant of social struggle in the last instance.

There should be nothing scandalous about the proposition that the Marxism required by Third World countries will have different emphases from the one that speaks to already receding socialism, let alone to the "advanced" countries of multinational capitalism.

—Fredric Jameson[1]

Mahdi Amel (1936–87), Marxist philosopher and member of the Lebanese Communist Party, was occupied in his theoretical works with the question of structure, modes of production, and social transformation in previously colonized societies.[2] Amel was the foundational theorist for the Lebanese Left during the twentieth century and had far-reaching influence in the

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1. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso 1990), 11.

2. Amel joined the party in 1968–69 upon his return from Algeria and Lyon before that. He was lecturer in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Lebanese University until 1987. The only coherent and reliable biography of Amel available has been recently written and published by his wife Evelyn Hamdan, titled *L'homme aux Sandales de Feu* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 2018). The biography is important not only for the biographical details but also for describing the broad range of Amel's intellectual sources and influences.

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Arabic-speaking world, from the Middle East to North Africa. During the 1960s and 1970s, up until the breakout of the Lebanese civil war, Amel worked to construct the concept of a "colonial mode of production" (CMP) to specify the contours of Marxian analysis for radicalizing the national liberation struggle against the unfolding dynamic of a sectarian civil war. The concept of CMP is not unique to Amel; it was developed independently in the early 1970s by the Indian Marxist Jairus Banaji.[3]

As we will see, the distinctive feature of Amel's account of the CMP is his claim that it indexes a contradiction in the unity of the global capitalist mode of production itself. Amel argued that previously colonized nations (such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Algeria) are sites of a fundamental contradiction or *tanaqud* in global capitalist dynamics, a contradiction that expresses itself in the particular form of nationalism that emerges in these postcolonial societies. Amel's concept of CMP had direct implications for communist political praxis during the Lebanese civil war and remains the dominant analytic term for the Lebanese Communist Party and other leftist organizations in the Middle East and North Africa.

According to Amel, there was no possibility in the 1960s and 1970s for claiming a postcolonial or even decolonial position without overcoming the CMP specific to nations like Lebanon, Egypt, and Algeria through political practice. Identifying the internal and local counterrevolutionary ideologies within national liberation movements was the key task for Amel, a position that led directly to his assassination. He was fatally shot in Beirut in May 1987 shortly after delivering a public speech titled "Fi al-thaqafa w al-thawra" (On Culture and Revolution) in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. In this speech, Amel claimed, in direct opposition to then burgeoning arguments, that the idea of an Islamic mode of production was reactionary and that the task of the radical intellectual should be to interrogate culture's relationship to revolution rather than to assert culture's predominance as a form of communal partisanship. In Amel's words, "The intellectual is either a revolutionary, or nothing."[4] The task of critique was to identify the "regressive forces of history" and "to think against tyranny and oppression."[5] This labor of critique would be the constant struggle between speech and death: "The intellectual [critic] speaks the language of silence, the language of the repressed."[6]

3. Jairus Banaji, "For a Theory of Colonial Modes of Production," *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 52 (1972): 2498–502.

4. Mahdi Amel, "Fi al-thaqafa w al-thawra," a recorded public speech given in Tripoli during a conference for the Communist Party in 1987. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

In the wake of Amel's assassination, the end of the Lebanese civil war coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the post-1990 retreat of Marxian politics. There has since been a proliferation of scholarship on leftist melancholia, within which Amel's oeuvre has been placed.[7] Amel has also been approached with an eye to his position as a peripheral intellectual in relation to other metropolitan figures such as Edward Said, of whose book *Orientalism* Amel was vociferously critical already in 1978.[8] The aim of my engagement with Amel's work here is to return to his theoretical formulations beyond the "center and periphery" standpoint of intellectual history and to provide an introduction to his fundamental concepts while emphasizing the crucial and overlooked intersection between Amel's thought and Althusserian structuralism, the key formative influence for Amel's approach. Although there have been a number of studies that point to Althusserian influences in Latin American Marxism, particularly Bruno Bosteel's important contributions, there has been no engagement with this theoretical intersection in the Arabic-speaking world.[9] I first present Amel's general theoretical and conceptual formation and then explore in detail his concept of CMP.

CMP: FROM BANAJI TO AMEL AND ALTHUSSER

Amel studied philosophy in France between 1956 and 1963, eventually obtaining a PhD from the University of Lyon in 1967 under the direction of Henri Maldiney.[10] He lived in Algeria from 1963 to 1967, when he returned to Beirut. Amel's abiding theoretical preoccupation was the relationship between history and structure or, stated otherwise, the relationship between historical materialism and structuralism. His doctoral thesis titled "Praxis et project: Essai sur la constitution de l'histoire" was supervised by Henry Maldiney, Roger Arnaldez, and François Dagognet in 1967. Amel referred to his doctoral thesis as the site where he first formulated his "axiomatic concept" of the CMP.[11] In seeking to formalize a theory of history that would be at once

7. Fadi A. Bardawil, *When All This Revolution Melts into Air: The Disenchantment of Levantine Marxist Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University mimeo, 2010).

8. Samer Frangieh, "Theorizing from the Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi Amel," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44 (2012): 465–82.

9. See, for instance, Bruno Bosteel, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (New York: Verso, 2012).

10. Henri Maldiney (1912–2013) is the author of *Regard parole espace* (1973), *Aîtres de la langue et demeures de la pensée* (1975), *Art et existence* (1985), *L'art, l'éclair de l'être* (1993), and *Ouvrir le rien, l'art nu* (2000). It is also worth noting that Gilles Deleuze was also lecturing at the same university. Based on research in his library archive, it is clear that Amel had read Deleuze's work as well as the early Badiou and others.

11. Mahdi Amel, *Muqadimat Nadthariya l-dirasat athar al-fikr al-ishtirakiy fi harakat al-taharrur al-watanniy* [Theoretical prolegomenon on the role of Socialist thought in national liberation movements] (1972; Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1990), 9. It should be noted that this volume was reprinted six times up until

"scientific" and "materialist" (*ilmiya w madiya*), contra positivist and historicist accounts of history, Amel positioned himself both against Hegelian idealism, which he understood as a teleological unfolding of modes of production, and against an Althusserian structuralism that, he argued, only provided a theory of the reproduction of a mode of production rather than of its transformation.[12]

However, despite his aversion to what he deemed to be a reifying structuralism, Amel, like Althusser, remained preoccupied with the mode of production as the fundamental category for analyzing social structure and its different temporalities. He maintained, as we will see, a strict allegiance to an Althusserian understanding of social formations and sought to specify the "colonial mode of production" as a singular mode that expressed the fundamental contradiction of global capitalism.[13] Amel employs in his analysis an Althusserian understanding of structure through his articulation of the concepts of (1) mode of production (*namat intaj*), (2) structural causality (*al-bunyawiya al-sababiya*), and (3) conjuncture (*al-bunya al-tarkibiya*). We have already mentioned that the concept of CMP was also posited by Jairus Banaji around the same time as Amel, only to be later retracted.[14] Theories of alternative modes of production emerged from the particular concerns within midcentury dependency debates around periphery and center with regard to the "agrarian question" and in the context of anticolonial struggles and the questions of transition and periodization in capitalist societies. Banaji construes the question of a mode of production in relation to the difference between forms of "deployment of labor" and forms of "exploitation of labor" and argues that there series of different configurations of capital that are indifferent to the forms of deployment of labor.[15] That is, for Banaji free labor cannot be an essential moment of the expansion of capital.[16] This brings forth the crucial question of the state and the law as that which permeates relations of production and does not stand independently outside them.

Banaji's theoretical formation, influenced by Trotsky and Sartre, differs from that of Amel. Although he too is occupied with the question of what determines a mode of production, Banaji is concerned with the relation between form (mode of production) and its historical concretion. Rather than answer the question of

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1990. Amel describes the CMP as an axiomatic concept in 1972 in *Muqadimat*. However, in the thesis itself he describes the colonial mode as a provisional concept.

12. Ibid., 10–11.

13. Ibid., 12.

14. Banaji, "For a Theory of Colonial Modes."

15. Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation*, Historical Materialism Book Series, vol. 25 (London: Brill, 2010), 5.

16. Ibid.

form through logical abstractions, Banaji's analysis of modes of production seeks to identify modes as "historical characterizations of whole epochs."[17] Banaji argues for determining a mode of production beyond the abstraction of labor power and the opposition between free and unfree labor as analytic categories pertaining strictly to the economic sphere. This is why Trotsky's analysis of the peculiarities of Russia's historical development is highly pertinent for Banaji: a historical materialist account cannot proceed from abstractions such as "Asiatic mode of production," "Asiatic despotism," or "feudal remnants." The latter assumes that a mode of production is determined by a form of exploitation, which is not arrived at through concrete historical analysis.[18] Consequently, for Banaji, labor processes cannot be understood in purely economic terms; yet this is precisely what figures like Althusser seek to do.[19] Labor processes are moments of a totality determined by legal and political practices in both the first and last instances: "Relations of production are simply not reducible to forms of exploitation, *both* because modes of production embrace a wider range of relationships than those in their immediate process of production *and* because the deployment of labour, the organisation and control of the labour-process, 'correlates' with historical relations of production in complex ways."[20]

Thus, Banaji argues against any divisions between base and superstructure in identifying a mode of production: "There are no prelegal forms of production."[21] He also rejects the strict division maintained between modes of production as successive stages in teleological accounts of history. Capitalism, in Banaji's account, is a grand synthesis of global historical developments that reach back to the thirteenth century. The aim of historical materialism, so to speak, would be the injection of content into Marx's formal analysis. Notwithstanding these basic theoretical differences between Banaji and Amel, whose systematic analysis lies beyond the scope of this article, it is important to point out that they share at least two fundamental concerns: the problem of the periodization of capitalism and the question of what defines a mode of production beyond strictly economic categories (such as wage relations, free/unfree labor). Banaji provides a very detailed engagement with premodern social formations in the Indian subcontinent and the Mediterranean and argues for the need to theorize the period from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries outside Europe. He also suggests that historical materialism requires a multifaceted theory of the exploitation of labor required for the production of surplus value.

17. Ibid., 1.
18. Ibid., 40.
19. Ibid., 15.
20. Ibid., 41; emphasis added.
21. Ibid., 42.

Amel, by way of contrast, is occupied with the mode of production in postcolonial states that he sees as having a historically specific logic and temporality requiring its own theorization. Despite these differences, both Banaji and Amel are concerned with formulating a historical materialism able to take account of colonial contexts and having a global reach beyond what they see as the crude empiricist trend in developmentalist accounts proposed by figures like Samir Amin and Hamza Alavi. However, unlike Banaji, Amel does not critically rethink the CMP as a formal and abstract determination. Although Banaji argues after the 1970s that this concept is just a metaphysical abstraction, Amel continues to the very end (before his assassination) to try and address the question of periodization while maintaining the concept of a CMP. His ultimate claim would be that the colonial mode reproduces, in a process of eternal repetition, conditions of dependency ad infinitum. This reproduction of a colonial mode relies primarily on ideology, against which a revolution in thought would be necessary.

Thinking in proximity to Banaji but proceeding from a different theoretical formation, Amel is primarily concerned with the ideological state apparatus. However, Amel's aim is to reformulate Marx's Asiatic mode as a CMP that is co-extant with global capitalism through a relationship of "structural causality" (*sababiya bunyawiya*), that is, a structural determination that is not reducible to economic dependency. Banaji was not among Amel's direct theoretical influences and it does not appear that he was aware of his arguments, despite both men theorizing at approximately the same time. Rather, Amel's primary influence is Althusser, with whom he shares more fundamental theoretical ground than any other thinker.

THEORY AND IDEOLOGY

For Amel as for Althusser, Marx's immense theoretical revolution is his transformation of the notion of causality from linear, empirical, and teleological to one that is structural to analyze the capitalist mode of production. Capital disappears into its attributes and properties; it is metonymical, immanent, and finally absent, never present at once except in the specific combination of all its effects (like Spinoza's God).[22] Thus, in this account the mode of production appears to be the crucial category of analysis, as the mode of appearance of an absent cause, the knowledge of which can only be formulated through an epistemological break with everyday experience (i.e., by means of a rational effort that breaks with the spontaneous interests of life). All ideology, whether moral, political, or religious, must be driven out to obtain the concept of a mode of production determined by structural causality.

22. See Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 89–128.

Building on this approach, Amel argues for a new concept of theory, *al-nadthari*, in Arabic—as revolutionary and as praxis—through the reformulation of the relation between subject and object, *al-fard w al-mawduʿ*, as well as between thought, *al-fikr*, and reality, *waqiʿ*. Dismissing the myth of *homo psychologicus* and *homo economicus*, Amel specifies thought as ideological, in contradistinction to theory as a "structure of thought," *bunya fikriya*, that is determined by history and social structure: "The sociohistorical determinants of a structure of thought are ideological; there is no immediate correspondence between thought and reality that is not mediated by ideology."[23] For Amel, thought in society does not arise from intersubjective relations but is always already determined by structure and constituted around the nodal antagonism of class struggle. That is, there is no neutral or objective knowledge about society that is not implicated in the class struggle.[24] This argument is crucial for Amel's engagement with the problem of sectarianism in Lebanon: sectarianism is not the result of individual beliefs and prejudices but an ideological formation that determines all political relations in Lebanese society and one that is necessary for the reproduction of the CMP.

Based on his structural understanding of causality, Amel sees theoretical practice as a mode of production of knowledge and as the site for the inauguration of science, *al fikr al-ʿilmi*, directed against ideology. The task of theoretical practice consists in the production of concepts that have been "absented" and that work *in* and *by* their absence. This means that theoretical practice for Amel is not about invention, a complete revolution in an old theory, but about the immanent organization of concepts in a system. A theoretical mode of production destroys the distance or relation between theory and practice and replaces it with production. Theory is not the result of historical and social praxis but a field of production of knowledge, that is, of the production of a concept of the history of knowledge. There is no space here to go into the problems that arise from Amel's Althusserian understanding of the theoretical, but we simply note that from this division between thinking and ideology a twofold understanding of the Real emerges: with thinking there is a real appropriation of the Real of social relations whereas with ideology there exists an appropriation of false images of the Real.[25]

This distinction between ideology and thinking is fundamental for Amel, who at once adopts and employs most of Althusser's pivotal formulations (structural

23. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 26.

24. Amel elaborates on this in *Theory and Political Practice: An Investigation into the Causes of Civil War in Lebanon* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1979), 14–17.

25. Amel was very interested in debates around the epistemology of science; this question requires further exploration elsewhere.

causality, the combinatory mode of structure or *verbindung*), while also maintaining a distance—a very close one—from Althusser's structuralism. Amel's main concern is with the moment of rupture or transition from capitalist relations. This is combined with his adoption of Althusser's unevenness principle, which leads to the formulation of the concept of a differential mode of production, which is the CMP.

THE CONCEPT OF CMP

In 1971, Amel argued that "Marxism required a Kantian revolution in thought which could counterpose itself against a Hegelian Idealism."[26] He posited that such a turn was necessary if colonial society was to produce a knowledge of itself through immanent critique, or *naqd*.[27] Crucially, he saw the "formation of a concept" (*mafhum nadthariy*) of a CMP as necessary to think the determination of elements in a structure constituting the mode of production is specific to colonized societies but not identical with the capitalist mode of production as such.[28] He based his account of the CMP on Althusser's understanding of a mode of production as a specific combinatory formation, a *verbindung* (*nadthariyat al-tamazuj*), in which the elements of a structure have a specific determination that is premised on a nonempirical, nonmechanistic, and nonidealistic understanding of causality.

In *Theoretical Prolegomenon on the Role of Socialist Thought in Nationalist Liberation Movements* (1972), Amel's formative text lays down the fundamental tools of his Marxian analytics, which he was committed to qualifying from his own specific sociohistorical context. *Theoretical Prolegomenon* was published in one volume along with two subsequent texts, *On Contradiction* and *The Colonial Mode of Production* (1972). A sequel titled *On the Periodization of History* based on an incomplete manuscript was published posthumously (2001). This trilogy of texts constitutes Amel's fundamental theoretical contribution to Marxist thought in Arabic and remained the ground of his critical method for his entire corpus until his assassination in 1987.

Amel formulates the CMP as a theoretical concept, *mafhum nadthariy*, in accordance with his understanding of Marxist theory as the continuous production of concepts required to organize and grasp the disparate forms of appearance assumed by capitalist processes, thereby revealing their inner contradiction and critically undermining their positive appearance. Following dialectical materialism, Amel identifies the fundamental contradiction of all modes of production and the "guiding

26. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 10.
27. Ibid., 173.
28. Ibid.

thread" of Marxist materialism as that between the relations and forces of production. He also qualifies the fundamental contradiction of the CMP as being one between relations and forces of production, at once adopting Althusser's theory of multiple modes of production and at the same time maintaining a distance from structuralism.

The concept of the CMP for Amel distinguishes itself from that of traditional Marxism through its specific historical logic. Amel defines this logic as an "impeded history," *tarikh mu'aq*, and he argues that the overcoming of the CMP requires an adequate understanding of the specificity of class struggle in this social formation: "The periodization of history was not simply the result of movement of modes of production, but was the result of the tempo and movement of class struggle."[29] Influenced by Poulantzas, Amel understands class struggle as the driving force of history and as the final determinant of the political struggle in the social formation. The class struggle is, as Amel maintained, the "sur-determinant akin to the unconscious," a formulation that strikes against Althusser's concept of overdetermination by the economical in the last instance.[30] Amel wants to maintain a distance from structuralism because of its inability to understand anything but the "temporality of reproduction."[31] He argues that structuralism risks falling into bourgeois ideology because it understands the temporality of a social formation as being always one of reproduction whereas the task of Marxist theory is primarily the theorization of the "temporality of rupture or transformation," *zaman al-tahawul*, or the overcoming of capitalist relations.[32] The process of theorizing the moment of transformation of structure necessitated for Amel an understanding of the specific nature of class struggle in particular political contexts. The concept of a CMP is meant to describe specific states like Lebanon, Algeria, and Egypt and, thus, is not based on a political-economic analysis of these societies but formulated as a theoretical analytic of modes of production.

Basing his concept of the CMP on the Althusserian understanding of the mode of production as a structural unity of contradiction, of relations and forces of production, Amel proposes a number of particular and differential traits that are meant to distinguish the CMP from capitalism proper: (1) the CMP has a looping temporality or "an impeded history" in which precapitalist forms of identification such as religion and sect are eternalized; (2) the CMP has a "non-consolidated class

29. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul al-Tarikh* (On the Periodization of History), 79.

30. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 187.

31. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 31. This is also discussed at length in the *Theoretical Prolegomenon*. In these two books Amel attempts to synchronize Poulantzas's and Althusser's understanding of class struggle.

32. Ibid.

structure" because colonization "represses rather than expands the forces of production"; and (3) the CMP is ultimately characterized by perpetual crisis.[33]

Given that Amel makes these assertions based on an understanding of a mode of production as a unity of contradiction between relations and forces of production, it will be necessary to engage with Amel's reading of Althusser to assess the adequacy of the CMP. For Amel, the logic of antagonism and not structure is only capable of understanding the inner relationship between a social structure and the class struggle. The "failures of Althusser, Godelier, and others lies in their inability to discern the political contradiction."[34] Thus, he argues that they reveal the class struggle only *within* structure rather than understand it as a force that can transform structure. This point is evidently beholden to Poulantzas's understanding of the nature of social classes as not emanating from pure economic interests. Classes, for Poulantzas, are entirely understood as effects of other economic, political, and ideological structures expressed through conflicting practices that lead to dissolution and fusion of social groups together.[35] Following Poulantzas, Amel argued that it was the political contradiction that had to unify these disparate groups and overdetermine the social struggle in the last instance. In fact, Amel's analysis of the CMP and its "non-differentiated class structure" is formulated in direct response to Poulantzas's warning to communist parties in the 1970s to not ally themselves with a so-called national bourgeoisie.[36] Prior to Amel, Althusser himself had proposed the possibility of the existence of multiple modes of production in France, despite the dominance of the capitalist one.[37]

In these terms, the social formation is dominated by the capitalist relations of production, which are in turn understood as relations of exploitation that are not understood in terms of the deployment of labor in the wage relation. Therefore, the CMP as a mode of production specific to colonized societies is *not* understood by Amel as an epoch of the economic development of a society but as a specific social form of production with a corresponding class formation. His focus on class relations is meant to counter the deduction of capital from the wage relation, or the confusion of social relations of production with those of exploitation.

33. Ibid., 6, 229–30, 412.

34. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 49.

35. Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, trans. Timothy O'Hagan (London: Verso, 1975).

36. The insistence of qualifying the CMP as a mode of production is not alien to the anthropological Marxism being written at the time with figures like Claude Meillasoux. See Claude Meillasoux, "From Reproduction to Production," *Economy and Society* 1, no. 1 (1972): 93–105.

37. Louis Althusser, "What Is a Mode of Production?" in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), 18–47.

STRUCTURAL CAUSALITY AND THE CMP

Amel proposes that the CMP as a differential mode is constituted through a relationship of "structural causality," *al-sababiya al-bunyawiya*.[38] Colonized nations are bound to global capitalism via this relation of structural causality. Althusser had put forth this concept in contradistinction to linear and mechanistic causality: economic phenomena cannot be understood as causes of structures but can only be understood by constructing a concept of structure that produces them. Althusser borrowed this concept from Jacques-Alain Miller's account of metonymic causality in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* to draw a thick topology of structure by which its very existence is evident in its effects: structure as such is nothing outside its effects.[39] Ultimately, for Althusser, this redefinition of causality is aimed at ridding Marxism of the empiricist opposition between phenomenon and essence. Structural causality is also formulated as anti-historicist for it relies not on a succession of events but on the specific combinatory relations put into play and determining a mode of production. This combination of elements is not a historical result but an appearance of structure in a specific manner: the presence of a complete whole at once.

Given this characterization of structural causality, a number of questions can be raised with regard to Amel's employment of it: Why does he need to differentiate the CMP as a differential structure if he already accepts structural causality as the determining factor of a mode of production? Further, what are the specific elements of the CMP that allow for identifying a differential mode of production if we already accept that the mode of production is only evident in its effects and that this relation is historically specific to capitalism itself? Ultimately, how can a concept of structural causality make way for a conception of multiple modes of production if its fundamental trait is one of the immanence of the cause (capital) in its effects? Read in this vein, Amel's formulation invites this confusion precisely because he interjects into the sequence of causality a singularity for the CMP—a singularity that he argues arises from the contingency of colonization for certain societies.

Amel adopts the concept of structural causality for the CMP in tandem with arguing for the specificity of the combination that characterizes this mode of production. This formulation would mean that the moment of "conjuncture" for the formation of structure would have been colonialism itself: the fact that capitalism in Lebanon, Algeria, and Egypt consolidates as a mode of production through

38. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 416.

39. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Action of the Structure," in *Concept and Form*: *Volume 1*, ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (London: Verso, 2010), 91–103; refer to Vittorio Morfino, "The Concept of Structural Causality in Althusser," *Crisis and Critique* 2, no. 2 (2016): 87–107.

colonization and is reproduced through the sectarian state apparatus institutionalized through colonization.

This being said, Amel does not conceptualize the CMP in spatial terms: the CMP is not a "colonized space" but is characterized primarily by its specific temporality, which is that of an impeded history. Amel proposes that the CMP is a contingency turned into necessity because of its specific historical dynamic of "eternal repetition of essence" in colonial societies. This encounter or conjunction creates different rhythms; it is neither continuous nor discontinuous with the past and it introduces a new temporality into the social whole. This is why the question of the historical or history became the central concern of Amel's formulation of the CMP. The question that haunts his writings between 1967 and 1974 is how capital was able to efface its own historical emergence in colonized societies through instituting a specific temporality for the CMP. Thus, he is concerned with understanding the process of capital's "differential totalization" through colonization. He argues that "structural causality" between colonized nations and imperialist ones explains false appearances such as "regression and underdevelopment," and this structural relation is based on differentiation and not identification: "The colonial mode of production, although part of the capitalist mode of production, differs from it structurally."[40] The CMP is a singular entity that has its own internal coherence and laws of development. Within the sphere of global capitalism, Amel argues, it is necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production on a larger scale. In other words, the CMP is not necessitated by the internal contradictions between relations of production and forces of production within the particular societies from which it emerged prior to capitalist expansion, but it is necessary for global capitalism itself. The CMP is not simply a result of the unity of internal contradiction but a contradiction in the unity of the global capitalist mode of production itself. Focusing on the social relations of production, Amel seeks to inject class struggle into the social structure because it produces multiple temporalities and allows for the possibility of a history that is not the sum total of relations of production. He argues that this could only be realized by asserting politics over economic determination in the last instance.

IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

To lay the theoretical grounds for the concept of CMP, Amel begins by (1) specifying the role of thought in society through proposing an understanding of subjectivity and objectivity as socially mediated and irreducible to individual subject versus

40. Amel, *Muqadimat*, preface.

society, (2) arguing for the primacy of ideology critique as the task for revolutionary thought, and (3) adumbrating a theory of structure that works through Althusser's understanding of society as a structurally determined formation while also questioning what Amel sees as the shortcomings of Althusser's account of structural breaks and of revolutionary transformation in particular.

Refusing to accept what he calls "ideological categories, absurdities, and petit-bourgeois illusions" such as "Arab thought," "Arab Marxism," "Arab science," and "Islamic mode of production," Amel insists on specifying Marxist analysis from the particular context and ideological struggle within which he is writing and thinking.[41] Further, he perceives structuralism as specific to the social context of France in the 1960s, describing it as the "unique character of the renewal of Marxist-Leninism in a specific social structure, and in a unique frame of knowledge production."[42] However, he maintains that the specificity of the CMP within which Marxist-Leninism has to be activated necessitates a different trajectory: "The process through which we must produce our thought cannot happen within the field of modern epistemology, i.e., as a process of thought related to theoretical work in the natural and mathematical sciences. This is not an impossibility in principle, but is a truth in practice, and is related to the specific movement of the class struggle in our own societies."[43] Thus, he proposes that "scientific thought" in the context of colonial societies should first and foremost specify and analyze the colonial social structure in light of the historical struggle against imperialism.[44] For Amel, it is only with overcoming the CMP that the production of scientific knowledge in the natural and mathematical sciences becomes possible. Overcoming the CMP can in no way be articulated in terms of a return to precapitalist forms of existence, be they communal, religious, or familial. Rather, it has to recognize these very "remnants" of capitalist subsumption as ideological elements that are directly opposed to the realization of communism in these societies.

In a 1973 essay titled "Difference and Universalism in Marxist Leninism," Amel argues that the colonial social formation determines the trajectory of development of Marxist thought and the possibilities of social transformation, in a way different from the French context. The particular nature of the ideological struggle within which Marxism in France flourished influenced by structuralism and French epistemology—as redefined by figures like Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Canguilhem, Bachelard, Koyré, and others—allowed for the evolution of Marxist thought through

41. Amel, *Fi al-thaqafa w al-thawra*.
42. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 49.
43. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 187.
44. Ibid., 188.

the production of knowledge in other fields, including linguistics, psychoanalysis, and the natural sciences, by considering either the very history of these sciences or the formation of concepts. Indeed, Amel argues that structuralism itself found its conditions of possibility in the nature of the class struggle, its strong "centripetal force," in France in the 1960s. "The renewal of Marxist concepts such as the epistemic break, the structural leaps, and overdetermination were all made possible by a re-reading of Marx and Freud through Althusser, Lacan, and the philosophy of science (Bachelard, Canguilhem, etc)."[45] Amel argues that "in the specific context of colonial modes of production and not as a matter of principle, Marxist thought has no possibility of making the natural and biological sciences the resource of its conceptual formation and renewal, but it is only in political practice, in the revolutionizing of the relations of production through the communist party, that liberation from imperialism could be possible."[46] This overcoming of imperialism could only be attained through the struggle against "[the] pre-modern, pre-capitalist, and ignorant ideological strains within which the colonial bourgeoisie is imbricated. . . . The colonial bourgeoisie is an apparition in all its activity; its ideologies are always medievalist, returning to the past Middle Ages in an attempt to memorialize its class, or as a form of class remembrance of what it had been. It returns to past forms out of the fear of its immanent death that appears as the face of destiny as it outlines the horizon of its class's historical existence (*sayrura*)."[47]

This is why in 1974 and at the brink of the breakout of the Lebanese civil war in the midst of the rise of sectarian politics, Amel argues for the necessity of recognizing capital's universal global force as the primary and sole premise for formulating a universalist emancipatory politics against the tides of historical time (*kawniya laysat min al-tarikh mu*ʿ *ta*).[48] "The deeper the contradictions and struggle—within the universal movement of capital, which has overdetermined social and political history—between the revolutionary powers, in every nation and on a global scale, and the counter-revolutionary forces, the more we witness the rapid fungus like growth of certain concepts in the soil of bourgeois ideology. Concepts like 'authenticity' and 'particularism' [*asala* and *khususiya*] replace all others in a reactionary attack on revolutionary thought."[49] Amel continues, "At times it was the identification with Arab particularism, then with the crisis of the Arab bourgeoisie, the particularism became an 'Islamic' one that is ironically forgiving in its negation

45. Ibid., 185.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., 192.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.

of the history of struggle against Ottoman despotism. At times it is 'Maronite' or 'Shiite' or 'Druze' identities that are determined by sectarian ideology. For some, particularism is defined as 'Coptic' and for others 'Mediterranean.' Particular identities like these are fluid, they enlarge and contract yet remain inherently opposed to universal reason: that is their uniting principle."[50]

For Amel, these "national particularities" function as "manifestations of metaphysical essences that fuse form and content despite any concrete changes. Their historical becoming, present, past and future, is nothing but the appearance of an eternal essence."[51] Consequently, he argues that negating the existence of universal capitalism is ultimately the refutation of reason as the only really existing universal negation of capitalism. The negation of the existence of global capitalism for Amel ultimately "only leads to the incoherence of reason [*tahafut al-ʿaql*] and its dissolution into national entities that remain self-identical and enclosed within their own narrow particularities."[52] For Amel, "national particularism is nothing but mythology, its function is to negate history and the anxious revolutionary thrust that it carries. With it history becomes illusory, a cycle of repetition that represses the birth of the new and aborts its becoming."[53]

It is important to note that already in 1978 Amel writes a potent critical response to Edward Said's *Orientalism* titled "Is Reason for the West and the Heart for the East?" In it he claims that Said's Foucauldian method rids the so-called East of the very elements it requires for the emancipation from capitalism, these being reason and rationality.[54] Amel views Said's hermeneutic method as an ideology of the "nationalist bourgeoisie," arguing that whereas this "nationalist bourgeoisie" remains an anomalous "sub-product" (*sous-produit*) in the West, its role in obscuring class struggle within colonial societies is a historical one. The national bourgeoisie, whom Amel sees Said as representing, ultimately sustains itself through a particularist identity politics. The problem with particularism, Amel argues, is that

> it comes to have its own absolute and eternal reason, the path of the self to the future becomes identical to its path from the present to the past, its sole model. This logic allows for example that Europe has its particular European science and reason and Japan its Japanese science and reason; the same goes for China, Russia, Italy and other nations. Every national entity according to this logic has its own particular science, knowledge, and reason and is a

50. Ibid., 1–6.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Refer to Fadi Bardawil and Samer Frangieh's discussion of this; see nn. 7 and 8.

> prisoner of its particular identity. Universal science and reason are left to God alone who creates "what ye do not know."[55]

Amel thereby refuses the logic that dictates "that if the Arab and Islamic mind where to become Marxist then Marxism must become Arab and Islamic, or that physics and chemistry would also have to become Arab and Islamic if that mind wishes to engage with science."[56] He sees the task of Marxist thought as consisting in the critique of the obscurantist ideology of particularism, which if left uninterrupted will perpetually repeat itself because "it appears as an eternal essence that cannot be tainted by material forces," an essence that "subdues history through the perpetual repetition of its content as form."[57]

Capitalist expansion had succeeded in putting into play a perpetual repetition of particular essences or particular identities. Yet for Amel it has done so only by "creating an epistemic break whereby historical progression became based on *impeding* the repetition of essence."[58] It is this very impediment that allows for the historical constancy of particularism (*al-istimrariya al-tarikhiya lil khususiya*). The ludicrousness proper to the repetitive structure of these "impeded essences" consists in having the ability to "foreclose the potentialities of time."[59] According to Amel, "the time of authenticity is realized by the return of the present to the past and the past becomes the sole model for the future."[60] The task of revolutionary politics ultimately must consist in rupturing this repetitive structure for the purpose of exiting

55. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 5–6. In the early 1970s, Amel positioned his theoretical and political project in direct opposition to dependency theorists, economistic Marxism, Arab nationalist politics, and a rising strain of "bourgeois islamified intellectuals"—as he called them—in the wake of the Iranian revolution. During the Lebanese civil war and the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, Amel wrote a series of articles between 1980 and 1986 critiquing a number of contemporary intellectuals. These have been compiled in a volume titled "The Critique of Everyday Reason." This remains an untranslated volume but it contains public articles Amel wrote in response to various other thinkers (Heideggarians, deconstructionists, literary authors, Arab nationalists, liberals, and Muslim intellectuals) such as Adonis, Mounir Shafiq, Hazem Saghieh, Hassan al-Diqa, Elias Khoury, and Moussa Wehbe. Amel in the collected articles that make up this volume publicly critiqued what he called "the Islamified bourgeoisie" with a specific focus on the responses to the Iranian revolution and the beginnings of the attack on Marxist thought in the Arab world based on the claim that the specificity of Arab societies was rooted in Islam. Hence, religion was posited as the driving force of history rather than class struggle. This specific discussion deserves much attention for in it Amel argues that "political Islam" articulated by figures like Mounir Shafiq and others shared the same grounds with liberalism, both as bourgeois politics. It is also not coincidental that Amel's assassination comes after the last public lecture he gave, which is also included in the volume, titled "On the Non-existence of an Islamic Mode of Production."

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid; emphasis added.

59. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 263.

60. Ibid.

the deadlock of the cyclical time of authenticity and tradition. This cyclical temporality of authenticity and tradition, Amel argues, shares the structure of myth, whereby essence, the original content, is separated from the concrete present and turned into its form. Thus, particularist politics are presented as content-less forms in Amel's analysis.[61] The problem in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, and other nations undergoing national liberation struggles is that the struggle within national limits is reduced to a struggle against the "impediments in the face of the repetition of essence."[62]

If in the 1970s Amel already warned against the burgeoning particularist politics of identity (of authenticity and tradition), it is evident that the threat of these politics has not waned but become ever more present. In light of this, the requisite task appears to be the necessity of overcoming the fetishizing of these residual elements that are only possible from within the sphere of capitalism itself. In other words, those elements falsely perceived as elements of resistance may indeed be the strongest impediments for laying the groundwork for a historical theory of subjectivity that ought to exceed national particularities and practices.

THE "TEMPORALITY OF REGRESSION"

The central trait that points to the singularity of the colonial mode is that it "is premised on its own conditions of impossibility."[63] It is not a "regressive stage of evolution of the capitalist mode of production, but is the very instantiation of the impossibility of evolution of the capitalist mode of production into capitalism itself."[64] For Amel, the CMP represents the very inability of capitalism to self-totalize despite its thrust toward totalization. The CMP is "a structural formation that is created by the onset of imperialist capital that carries within the folds of its historical structure the impediments for the full consolidation of capitalist relations."[65] Amel thereby analogically posits colonial nations as the working class of the world: the class that would lead the global struggle against capital.

He also argues that the struggle for overcoming capital is not to be found in the synchronic function of structure, that of reproduction, but in the other temporalities of structure. As such, the historicity of a mode of production, according to Amel, is established through the interrelation of three different temporalities of

61. This is surely reflective of the core processes of commodification in capital that systematically generate content-less forms, a link that Amel did not address in these terms.

62. Ibid.

63. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 347.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

structure: the time of formation (*zaman al-takawun*), the time of historical progression or reproduction (*zaman al-tatawur*), and the time of its transformation (*zaman al-tahwil*).[66] Amel maintains that these different temporalities are nonsequential but interwoven: they are the necessary, concrete interrelated forms of historical time in capitalism. Sequential or linear history is ideological because it confuses the time of formation with that of reproduction: "The history of the formation of capitalist social relations is not the history of capitalism itself: the history of capital is the very reproduction of its relations of production."[67] Thus, even if capitalism is seen to have originated in feudal relations (although the question of historical origin is precisely not the question to be asked here), its constitution as a social relation is a radical rupture with feudal social structure precisely because of the logic of reproduction of relations of production. In other words, the circle is only a circle once it is complete: as in traditional dialectical materialism, the difference is qualitative rather than quantitative. Once capitalism is set in motion, it retroactively forges a linear progressive understanding of history that delimits the potentials for conceiving of communism as a radical rupture with existing social formations. Following Althusser, Amel uses the critique of sequential history to posit a theory of multiple modes of production: "History undergoes periodization through the movement of modes of production within it; however, this movement is not one of progression or sequence. There is no linearity in historical time because of the simultaneous interrelations between contemporaneous yet different modes of production and their respective temporalities."[68] If historical time is determined by the temporalities of modes of production, then Amel argues that a "materialist history [*al-haraka al-tarikhiya al-madiya*] is different because it is determined by the movement of social formations rather than of modes of production."[69]

The question that arises here is, What would this materialist history be mediated by? Time itself or absolute time? By maintaining that a "materialist history" is the ongoing movement of social formations rather than of modes of production, Amel refuses to delimit universal history to the totalization of the total time of the human that is specific to capitalism. It appears that he is positing two histories against each other: an abstract historical time, which is the temporality of the mode of production, and a more "concrete" historical time, which he characterizes as a "materialist history" driven by class struggle.[70] Although this distinction between two histories

66. Ibid., 38.
67. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 38–40.
68. Ibid., 65.
69. Ibid.
70. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 265.

is important for thinking about overcoming capitalist relations, it could be objected that Amel's understanding of history does not take into account the relationship between time and value.[71] Ultimately, if capitalist history does indeed introduce multiple temporalities and a "multiversum" of times of modes of production, how can a concept of communism that is universal, of the kind to which Amel is committed, be possible? How can we even think that the category of history from whence historical consciousness itself is instilled by capitalist subsumption? Further, does the overcoming of capital require a theory of history or a theory of subjectivity? Amel's response is limited to the conjecture that revolutionary politics in the right conjuncture would somehow terminate the "structural mutation" and break out from the "quantification of history."[72] For Amel, political practice is the final determinant in the last instance and it is a political practice that ought to be grounded in a universality that recognizes contradiction within the particular context in which it is practiced. Here we cannot but ask whether the questions that Amel raises about historical time can be answered within an analytical framework that begins from multiple modes of production as a fundamental category for the analysis of global capitalist dynamics. It appears that the Althusserian understanding of a mode of production—which Amel sought to critique—that perceives relations of production as relations of exploitation misses a crucial analytic point: capitalism is not simply about the expansion of surplus value, but it is also about the generalized expansion of capital itself. That is not to say, however, that capital is a subject of history but rather that as a social relation it comes to mediate forms of subjectivity and objectivity in determinate ways. Amel's argument about the multiplicity of temporalities of structure, which he posits against Althusser, gestures in the direction of understanding capital as a global dynamic but remains beholden to the Althusserian prioritization of the category of a mode of production.

THE NONDIFFERENTIATION OF CLASSES AND THE FANTASY OF A "MIDDLE CLASS"

By now it should be clear that Amel is arguing that the colonial mode emerges from an aleatory foundation because it is not a historical result and does not necessarily efface its own historical origins. Amel proposed that "colonization for our societies played the role of the bourgeois revolution in France in its ability to shift society from the feudal to the capitalist mode."[73] Although it is untenable that the shift

71. See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

72. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 450.

73. Ibid., 265.

from feudalism to capitalism was indeed driven by a bourgeois class, the bourgeoisie does form by force and violence only in capitalism. Although maintaining that the bourgeoisie is a phenomenon specific to Europe, Amel proposes that it was colonization that played the role of the bourgeoisie for colonized societies. He maintains that the CMP formed only through the brute force of colonization as a relational structure with a distinct form of class struggle characterized by the "non-differentiation of classes."[74] This "non-differentiation of classes" is characterized by the nondemarcation of the class struggle in the CMP as one between two antagonistic classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Ultimately, Amel's claim is that no "revolutionary" bourgeois class forms in the CMP.[75] However, Amel argues that there is no such thing as a remainder of feudal class or semifeudal class relations in the CMP because it is impossible to maintain feudal relations of production under capitalism. Thus, he dismisses the concept of feudal remnants in colonized nations as entirely false because it confuses social relations or relations of production with relations of exploitation. The CMP is neither feudal nor fully capitalist and it represses rather than develops the productive forces. Amel thus understand the CMP as being organized around a constitutive imbalance between productive forces and relations of production. This takes into account the reproduction of social relations at the level of circulation only through ideology critique. Ultimately, Amel makes the basic claim that colonization exploits but does not develop. Amel even extends this claim to the very nature of classes in the CMP, arguing that they do not differentiate themselves antagonistically because of this hindered expansion of productive forces.

The "colonial bourgeoisie" is thereby understood as somehow being composed of multiple classes that can substitute for each other: the petite bourgeoisie, the landowning farmers, and the mercantile, industrial, and agrarian bourgeoisie.[76] This characterization leads Amel to reject the idea that industrial capital is the catalyst for transforming the colonial bourgeoisie into a national bourgeoisie. In fact, he refutes the myth of the national bourgeoisie for the CMP despite adhering to it in the case of Europe: "The colonial form pertains to structure before class; in other words, the class belongs to the colonial form because it already belongs to the social structure. This already is not a relation of causality but expresses the fact that a social class is determined by the relations of production in a structure as a whole."[77] This idea leads Amel to theorize the "middle class" in the CMP as a "replacement class"

74. Ibid., 230.
75. Ibid., 288.
76. Ibid., 288–93.
77. Ibid., 291.

(*istibdal tabaqi*) for the colonial bourgeoisie, which only acquires power as a nationalist class. This replacement of one class by the other in the CMP is caused by the nonconsolidated or nondifferentiated class structure. The "middle class" is doomed to the reproduction of the CMP: it replaces the colonial bourgeoisie as a dominant class and replaces the working class's inability to dominate in the CMP. The "middle class" does not carry within it the possibilities of a new mode of production.[78]

This conclusion leads Amel to argue that the structural restrictions on the CMP or the factors that do not allow for its transformation into an expansive imperialist mode are also the conditions for its propagation. Ultimately for Amel, the "national bourgeoisie" is a "fantasy that has material grounds, because it is a class fantasy, or an ideology of class consciousness."[79] It is the ideology of the so-called middle class in the CMP. This middle class is characterized by Amel as a petite bourgeois class that has a central function in the CMP. The "working class," however, is released from precapitalist ties in the CMP but does not enter the workforce as a proletarian class and does not become a reserve workforce for industrialization. It is turned rather into a surplus population, into the mass of the unemployed.[80] This class structure together with the unity of various capitalist interests (financial, industrial, and agrarian) is for Amel the very site of capitalist accumulation in the CMP.[81] Amel here argues that accumulation (*al-tarakum al-ra'smali*), by working differentially in the CMP, is the force that drives both it and capital: hence, accumulation functions as "a structural function and not a quantitative one."[82] It is primary and not original accumulation.

IMPEDED HISTORY AND THE LIMITS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION

Writing in the 1970s, Amel insists that independence from colonization and the subsequent rule of nationalist movements in Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon cannot be equivalent to the overcoming of capitalist relations. He proposes that the "non-differentiation of classes" follows from the shift of political power from the colonial bourgeoisie to the petite bourgeoisie, or the so-called middle class, without any transformation in the mode of production: "The principle contradiction cannot be falsely understood as a national one: between the colonized and the colonizer in light of the continuing presence of the colonial bourgeoisie and its class alliances."[83] Amel contends that the depiction of struggle between "the third world" and "the

78. Ibid., 293.
79. Ibid., 303.
80. Ibid., 357.
81. Ibid., 296.
82. Ibid.
83. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 80.

first" or "the developing world" and "the developed world" is an example of "opportunist politics."[84] The real struggle lies in understanding the relationship between the political contradiction and the economic one, or what Amel calls "the periodization of class struggle." Thus, he argues that in the CMP there is no such thing as resolving an internal contradiction through national liberation without overcoming capitalist relations.

The fundamental problematic of the CMP for Amel is that it functions by repression whereas capitalism in the West functions by expansion and seldom requires precapitalist social relations. The CMP's "impeded history" is realized in Lebanon's sectarian nation-state structure, which resulted from capital's recreation of surviving precapitalist residues or forms of identification as political relations. Amel analyzes sectarianism as an ideological state apparatus that functions as a "political relation" necessary for the CMP within the Lebanese state. Thus, the CMP is a specific structural formation, a differential formation related to the specificity of the nonrevolutionary nature of the "colonial bourgeois class."[85] Although based on perceiving the European bourgeoisie as counter-feudal and, hence, revolutionary in nature, this analysis denies the need for a national bourgeoisie to overcome capital. The CMP as such is mirrored in the traits of the colonial bourgeoisie: structurally dependent on the imperialist bourgeoisie, internally incoherent, and structurally deconstructed. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the formation of a national bourgeoisie is necessary; rather, Amel insists on arguing against this developmentalist logic. There is no linear developmental path for the CMP to become "properly" capitalist; overcoming the CMP would have to mean overcoming capitalism itself. This cannot be done without the "reproduction of universalist Marxist thought from a particular position. . . . By fighting against our own colonial society, we must try to produce its knowledge for it; in other words, we must produce the knowledge necessary for its revolutionary transformation."[86] This knowledge or concept formation must first and foremost reckon with the "repressive" rather than "liberating" force of colonization on colonized societies.

Amel does not predicate his argument on the premise of class dependency between a local bourgeoisie and a capitalist one; for him, the dependency is always located structurally: it is a structural causality driven by the law of uneven development in capitalism. This being said, it does not seem to be the case anywhere that the capitalist bourgeoisie was indeed an antifeudalist protagonist, as it is often made to be. Further, Amel adopts the premise with regard to the historical origins

84. Ibid.
85. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 263.
86. Ibid.

of capitalism itself, as he assumes that capitalism arose necessarily from internal contradictions within the feudal order in Europe (i.e., the contradictions between the relations of production and forces of production). But the European origins of capitalism cannot be simply assumed as its historical origin (in the place of conjuncture and structural causality) because this argument reproduces precisely the problematic of periodization that Amel worked hard to subvert for the CMP.[87]

Amel identified the subject of history as the working class represented by its Marxist-Leninist party: it is a working class that has to wage the struggle internally to a field of national contradictions. The role of the "working class philosophy," he argued, is to discern the specific class contradiction pertaining to the historical phase of a social formation.[88] For example, Amel argued, the role of "Islam" shifts in different moments: "In Algeria and during colonial domination, Islam had a very different role from the one it plays now in the moment of 'political independence.' At one moment it is anti-colonial and revolutionary and in the other it is conservative and reactionary."[89] The same argument can be made for nationalism (*qawmiya*) in the post-independence era, where it can no longer be considered politically progressive without binding it to a "revolutionary and socially transformative politics."[90] Thus, for Amel it is the class struggle that acts as an overdetermination in the social structure; it is the Real that punctures the order of reality with a subterranean force that can only be recognized from a "scientific historical materialist position."[91]

THE PERIODIZATION OF HISTORY

Amel's main object of critique is Althusser's theory of history as a "process without a subject."[92] This conception of history appears to Amel as the main obstacle in the way of revolutionary politics. Thus, he proposes to shift the problematic of structural reproduction to consider what he called the "temporalities of a mode of production." He argues that the periodization of history is the result of the appearance of a shift *within* one mode of production between the three possible temporalities. Amel bases this theory of multiple temporalities and multiple modes of production placed in a combinatory formation on the claim that "the movement of history, in

87. Notwithstanding is Marx's own theorization of primitive accumulation as exceeding any strict periodization but as being a point of passage or transition in which valorization is initiated by a violent separation of producers from the means of production and by which social production becomes a relation between values. Jason Read, "Primitive Accumulation: The Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism," http://www.after1968.org/app/webroot/uploads/read-accumulation.pdf, 47.

88. Amel, *Fi Tamarahul*, 65.

89. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 228.

90. Ibid., 173.

91. This definition Amel employs constantly to define Marxian analysis.

92. See Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: New Left, 1976), 99.

its materiality, is the movement of social formations and not of modes of production."[93] The separation that Amel proposes (to which he argues structuralism is blind) between a mode of production (within which relations of production are the material basis for the periodization of history) and a social formation is meant to expand structure to include both modes of production and social formations. The very political instability that is the effect of class substitutions (petite bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie for colonial bourgeoisie), Amel maintains, is the very source of stability of the CMP.

Amel also rejects Althusser's assertion that multiple temporalities correspond to different structures in one social formation: the political, economic, and ideological. Amel argues that multiple temporalities should not be discerned from *within* one of these aforementioned "structures" (e.g., the assertion that within the ideological structure there are different histories for art, philosophy, and religion).[94] However, it is this very argument that Althusser makes that could provide support for Amel's theory of temporality. In the specific section that Amel refers to Althusser is qualifying the Marxian departure from a Hegelian understanding of history as "the model of a continuous and homogenous time which takes the place of immediate existence."[95] Althusser's argument in the particular passage that Amel refers to is that Marx introduces a multiplicity of temporalities into the historical whole, "peculiar histories punctuated with particular rhythms" and corresponding to modes of production:

> We can argue from the specific structure of the Marxist whole that it is no longer possible to think the process of development of the different levels of the whole *in the same historical time*. Each of these different 'levels' does not have the same type of historical existence. On the contrary we have to assign to each level *a peculiar time*, relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the 'times' of the other levels. We can and must say: for each mode of production there is a peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way by the development of the productive forces; the relations of production have their peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way; the political structure has its own history . . . ; philosophy its own time and history . . . ; aesthetic productions have their

93. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 64.

94. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 64–79. Amel dedicated a whole chapter to the critique of Althusser's arguments in *Reading Capital* around the existence of different historical temporalities in the social whole (history of philosophy, history of art, etc.).

95. Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 570.

> own time and history . . . ; scientific formations have their own time and history, etc. Each of these peculiar histories is punctuated with peculiar rhythms and can only be known on condition that we have defined the *concept* of the specificity of its historical temporality and its punctuations (continuous development, revolutions, breaks, etc.).[96]

Althusser goes on to argue that these histories have a "relative autonomy" that in no way makes them independent of the whole; indeed, he maintains that they are differential and dependent on the whole. There is no such thing as an independent history "in vacuo."[97] Accepting the necessity and possibility of these different histories has to be related "to the concept of their difference" and to the relations of dependence that establish the articulation of the whole and its levels.[98] This is a very important point for Althusser, because the aim in critiquing empiricist historiography or the immediate acceptance of periodization as visible and measurable times is traversed by an invisible and subterranean history: all points to which Amel had himself adhered. Althusser is essentially arguing that Marx had to construct a concept of time or that time, the time of economic production, is essentially constructed in its concept by Marx, as a time of times: "The concept of this time must be constructed out of the reality of the different rhythms which punctuate the different operations of production, circulation, and distribution."[99] The argument being made here is that in the capitalist mode of production the concept of time does not correspond to the "everyday practices of ideological time."[100] Althusser's point is that the understanding of history can only happen "*in* abstraction" as a construction of the concept of the history of an object. In other words, the concept of history is not historical; it relates not to observable phenomena but to "the concept of the history of the mode of production considered."[101] This argument could have provided the strongest possible support for Amel's formulation of the "impeded history" characteristic of the CMP. Thus, it is perplexing that Amel would read Althusser's understanding of temporality as reification.[102]

Amel's critique of Althusser's reading as "reification" (*tandid*) of the temporality of levels appears to miss the latter's focus on history as a concept that has to be constructed for a Marxian critique. The counterargument that Amel proposes here reads Althusser's theorization of the "possibility and necessity" of different histories

96. Ibid., 570–71.
97. Ibid., 572.
98. Ibid., 573.
99. Ibid., 574–75.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 66–68.

as one beholden to the composition of levels in a social whole. Amel understands Althusser as providing a theory of history that is grounded in the reproduction of relations of production rather than offering a critique of reproduction. In contradistinction to Althusser, Amel argues that the appearance of these different levels is necessary and possible only in the "temporality of reproduction" (*zaman al-tajadud*) "as effects of the movement of class struggle (and consequently the movement of the temporality of political contradiction) in its centrifugal form."[103] This "centrifugal form" of class struggle (*al-shakl al-intibadhi*) characterizes the temporality of reproduction for Amel, whereas the centripetal form of class struggle (*al-shakl al-insihari*) consolidates the political contradiction as the over-determining principle.[104] In other words, for Amel, the subterranean force of the class struggle undercuts the appearance of levels in the whole of the social formation, and the different temporalities of social structure appear as independent because of the specific movement of class struggle at a specific moment. Further, the movement of class struggle can only be recognized by refusing to read the political contradiction as one level among others in the social whole. The appearance of the social whole that Amel argues Althusser presents, as a whole of dependent and different levels, ideological, aesthetic, political, religious, is nothing but a false appearance of the only true contradiction, that being the political one. Thus, in Amel's view, Althusser's structuralism levels and thereby diffuses the essential form of class struggle that is the "centripetal force of political contradiction."[105]

However, Amel contends that the political is not independent of the economic. Rather it is their interrelation that mirrors the form of class struggle at a specific moment for a social formation: "The problematic of the periodization of history is the problematic of the relationship between the principle economic contradiction and the principle of economic contradiction; hence, it is the problem of the relation between overdetermination and domination in the uneven development of social structure."[106] Amel's arguments against Althusser are formulated with the sole aim of justifying a type of class struggle specific to the CMP. However, his critiques are hard to justify because he consistently resorts to key structuralist concepts to qualify the CMP: structural causality, conjuncture, mode of production, and social formation.[107]

103. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 39.

104. Amel, *Fi Tamarhul*, 69.

105. Ibid.

106. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 10.

107. "Social formation" understood as a structure that exceeds the economic determination of the mode of production is Althusser's own term.

CONCLUSION: THE CMP AS ABSTRACT PARTICULARITY

Amel's analysis ultimately leads him to reject the principles of Marx's critique of political economy. In the 1968 appendix to *The Colonial Mode of Production*, Amel reads Marx's argument about capitalist subsumption as teleological: "The colonial mode of production in Marx's view is a pre-capitalist mode that must necessarily become capitalist" in its integration into the global economy.[108] Arguing that Marx read the colonial relation from the position of imperialism, Amel wants to show that it is only by overcoming colonization that overcoming capitalism would be possible and that indeed the colonial mode could not become identical to the capitalist one: "The problem that Marx addresses can be posed as such: How can the effect of capitalist production on the colonized nation's production be concretely determined? . . . While the question I raise can be posed as such: what is the historically determinate form of the 'capitalization' (*rasmala*) of production in colonized nations? Does the colonial mode of production identify structurally and historically with the capitalist mode through this process of 'capitalization'?"[109] Amel's answer is that capitalist subsumption somehow transforms the mode of production of colonized nations into a colonial mode rather than a capitalist mode proper.[110] But this would mean that Amel is arguing that subsumption in Marxian terms does not really occur in the CMP and that labor is not valued by socially determined labor in colonized nations. Amel's argument about the impeded history of the CMP and the eternalization of precapitalist relations is ultimately an argument about what Marx called the relations of supremacy and subordination created by relations of production instilled by capital. It is a question pertaining to formal and real subsumption.

In fact, Amel's argument is wholly predicated on his outright dismissal of Marx's method in his *Critique of Political Economy* (in its 1967 French edition): that the mode of production relies on the separation of spheres, of production, circulation, and distribution.[111] Responding to Marx's formulation, Amel proposed that the CMP was premised not on the revolutionizing of the means and relations of production but on their repression, which places them in conditions of eternal dependency. The CMP not only has an impeded history but also is dependent and cannot exist as an independent mode of production: "It is as though the possibility of existence of this mode of production is precisely what does not allow it to exist as mode of

108. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 390.

109. Ibid., 400.

110. Ibid.

111. Karl Marx, *Fondements de la critique de l'économie politique (ébauche de 1857–1858)*, trans. Roger Dangeville (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1967), 26–27.

production, the very possibility of its existence is conditioned by its impossible existence."[112] The historical conditions that allow for the CMP render it singular, "lacking the fundamental constitutive traits of a mode of production in its classical sense, it primarily lacks an independence both in structure and historical development."[113] Thus, "the colonial mode of production is in perpetual crisis from the very outset, stunted from within the structure of its social formation because of its ties with imperialism."[114] It remains unclear how this is different from the capitalist mode of production itself: it is not only in the colonies that capital has to restrict the full realization of forces of production.

It is essential here that we recall Marx's formulation: "Human anatomy contains the key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can only be understood only after the higher development is known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient etc. . . . one can understand tribute, tithe, etc., if one is acquainted with ground rent. But one must not identify them. Further, since bourgeois society is itself only a contradictory form of development, relations derived from earlier forms will often be found within it only in an entirely stunted form, or even travestied."[115]

Moreover, Marx had already proposed in the *Grundrisse* that despite its intrinsic developmental dynamic, capital cannot overcome itself.[116] In other words and to restate the critique proposed here of the adequacy of the CMP as a singularity: the contradiction in capital is not to be located in the class struggle but in the structuring elements of capitalist society. Contradiction does not reside between forces and relations of production (whether in the colonies or elsewhere) but resides within the very production process itself: in value itself as the form of abstract domination and in the fundamental social form of capitalism that is the commodity itself. Ultimately, Amel's inscription of the class struggle into structuralism, on the one hand, proposes that abstract domination results from class exploitation, one that is globally structured around capitalist nations exploiting colonial ones through an impeded structure, and on the other hand, it renders political action in colonial nations impotent precisely because of the "non-differentiation of classes." His analysis leads us to these conclusions: we cannot deduce the class antagonism via a class-based analysis, yet it has to be assumed both as the fundamental contradiction in capital and as that which is generated from the dynamic between relations and

112. Amel, *Muqadimat*, 433.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 38.
116. Ibid.

forces of production. The colonial mode is a concept posited against all other attempts to characterize colonized nations: the South, the third world, developing world. However, if indeed the CMP can only be understood as an abstract particularity and cannot be grasped concretely, then it clearly does not promise the possibility for the determinate negation of capital. Determinate negation (*al-naqḍ*) for Amel is the crucial element of the materialist dialectic that is necessary for overcoming capitalism.[117]

Ultimately, the horizon of political struggle in the CMP since the 1970s remains limited to the struggle for national liberation and not the liberation from the capitalist mode of production as such. Given the context of capital's shift to post-Fordism and neoliberalism since the 1970s, it is no longer self-evident that social struggles fought within the boundaries of the nation in an era of non-state-centered capitalist development can provide the conditions for overcoming capitalism. Rather, it has become increasingly clear that nation-bound social struggles are limited to the reproduction of the antinomy of liberalism and fascism and unable to properly expand into anti-capitalist struggles. If Amel had survived the Lebanese civil war, he would have surely continued his committed theoretical work in a direction that insisted upon thinking against the ideologies of the national liberation movement. Ironically, it is this very antagonism that ultimately led to his assassination.

117. Amel translated critique as *naqḍ*, versus criticism, and criticality, *naqd*. *Naqḍ* for Amel is etymologically linked to contradiction, *tanaquḍ*, to cuts and breaks from within.