



Contradictions and crisis in the world of work in the present conjuncture: Informality, precarity and the pandemic

Surbhi Kesar, Snehashish Bhattacharya, Lopamudra Banerjee

Working paper

No. 253

October 2022

The SOAS Department of Economics Working Paper Series is published electronically by SOAS University of London.

ISSN 1753 – 5816

This and other papers can be downloaded free of charge from:

SOAS Department of Economics Working Paper Series at
<http://www.soas.ac.uk/economics/research/workingpapers/>

Research Papers in Economics (RePEc) electronic library at
<https://ideas.repec.org/s/soa/wpaper.html>

Suggested citation

Kesar, Surbhi, Snehashish Bhattacharya, and Lopamudra Banerjee (2022), “Contradictions and crisis in the world of work in the present conjuncture: Informality, precarity and the pandemic”, SOAS Department of Economics Working Paper No. 253, London: SOAS University of London.

An abridged version of this article, titled ‘Contradictions and Crisis in the World of Work: Informality, Precarity and the Pandemic’, has been published in the Forum 2022 issue of *Development and Change* (doi.org/10.1111/dech.12733).

Department of Economics
SOAS University of London
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK
Phone: + 44 (0)20 7898 4730
Fax: 020 7898 4759
E-mail: economics@soas.ac.uk
<http://www.soas.ac.uk/economics/>

© Copyright is held by the author(s) of each working paper.

Contradictions and crisis in the world of work in the present conjuncture: Informality, precarity and the pandemic

Surbhi Kesar¹

Snehashish Bhattacharya²

Lopamudra Banerjee³

Abstract

The severe economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global working population can be interpreted as both a fallout from, and a violent assertion of, a larger crisis in the world of work. While this crisis has been attributed to the pre-existing conditions of widespread informality and precarity in the domain of remunerative work, we dig deeper to read these conditions and the crisis tendencies as articulations of certain key contradictions that define the world of work in the present conjuncture of global capitalism. From an overdeterminist conjunctural perspective, we see the crisis as a moment of accumulation and condensation of multiple complex contradictions across different levels of society. We highlight three specific contradictions: that between capital and labour in the 'interior' space of capital, that between capital and its 'outside', and those emerging from 'dispersion' of the circuit of capital to its 'outside'. The 'outside' is the economic space that exists within the capitalist social formation but represents the domain of unwaged work carried out in the processes of non-capitalist commodity production and distribution, both within and outside the space of the household. We argue that the expanded reproduction of capital has sharpened this triage of contradictions in the present conjuncture in specific ways in the global South and the global North through continuous informalization of work, exclusion of masses of population from the 'interior' domain of capital, and insistent dispersion of the circuit of capital to its 'outside' through various forms of 'non-standard' labour processes and work arrangements. We provide some illustrations of how these processes have registered and contributed to the crisis situation in the times of the pandemic.

Keywords: contradictions, crisis, informality, world of work, pandemic.

¹ Department of Economics, SOAS University of London. Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK. Tel: +44 207 898 4218. Email: sk156@soas.ac.uk

² Faculty of Economics, South Asian University. Chanakyapuri, New Delhi, 110021
Email: snehashish@econ.sau.ac.in k

³ Society Culture and Thought, Bennington College, Vermont.
Email: lbanerjee@bennington.edu

All authors have contributed equally to this work.

1 Introduction

The expression 'crisis' is often called into use in popular discourse and scholarly imaginations in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. One reason for this invocation is the violent nature of sufferings, with losses in life, health, and wellbeing that we have witnessed in this period. Along with this humanitarian crisis, the pandemic has also engendered arrestive economic distress with massive loss of jobs and severe endangerment of livelihoods. We have also seen a sharp rise in conditions of informality and precarity, and heightened insecurity in work relations. Many scholars have interpreted these latter conditions as signs of crisis in the prevailing world of work. It is argued that the intense strain generated in the Covid moment may have triggered potentially irretrievable changes in workplace, on workforce, and for the old and established order of work relations and labour arrangements. In our work, we look at these conditions of informality and processes of informalization that have been made inescapably conspicuous by the pandemic, and make our specific intervention by reading them as intense articulations of certain complex contradictions that define the present conjuncture of global capitalism. We reflect on the nature of these contradictions and what they reveal about capitalism in the current conjuncture, and think about the historical processes through which they have emerged and accumulated, ultimately registering in the Covid-moment as signifiers of crisis.

We start our discussions with a conception of crisis we find compelling. We derive this idea through a particular reading of an approach to 'conjunctural analysis' proposed by Stuart Hall and others, side-by-side with the Althusserian overdeterminist framework of Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff. This 'overdeterminist conjunctural' perspective allows us to make sense of the present conjuncture and how various complex contradictions accumulate and coalesce in an overdetermined manner across different levels of society at the crisis moment. 'Crisis' appears to us as a complex moment – that is to say the moment when what Raymond Williams (1977: 121) had called "the complex interrelationships between movements and tendencies" within a social formation, are condensed.

Influenced by this theorization, we present in this essay a certain understanding of the crisis in the world of work registering in the Covid-moment. We

posit that the widespread conditions of informality, precarity and casualization that currently mark the lives of global working populations are indicators (and reflections) of a larger crisis of contemporary capitalism. In the backdrop of these conditions, the economic crisis of the pandemic has played out. We argue that the emergence and evolution of conditions of informality are related, in specific and partial ways, to a particular set of overdetermined contradictions, and the heterogeneous space of the informal economy allows us to study the concrete expressions of these contradictions.¹ Drawing from the strand of scholarship on post-colonial capitalist development that has developed following Kalyan Sanyal (2007), and from the Marxist-feminist literature on capitalist social reproduction, we identify these contradictions as: (a) that between capital and labour in the ‘interior’ space of capital; (b) that between the domain of capital and its ‘outside’; and (c) that emerging from dispersion of the circuit of capital to its ‘outside’. The ‘outside’ is the space of “extra-capitalist pattern of social and economic existence under capitalism” (Shanin, 1986), and is the domain of unwaged work carried out within the household or in the processes of non-capitalist commodity production and distribution. This space subsists exterior to the domain of capital (albeit *within* the capitalist social formation), but side-by-side with it, in a relationship of mutual constitutivity. We develop this conceptual notion later in this essay. The ensemble of contradictions we identify above corresponds to disparate and analytically distinct production and labour processes in the informal economy in the present-day world of work. While the contradictions between capital and wage-labour is well-recognized in the literature, in our discussions, we foreground the overdetermined contradiction between capital and its ‘outside’ that is not made visible in the standard literature on Covid crisis or even in works linking the crisis to the informal economy.

We argue that the various conditions of informality that we witness in the current world of work emerged out of these overdetermined contradictions and their negotiations in global capitalism’s present conjuncture, albeit in specific ways in the global North and the South. Capital’s continuous drive for accumulation and expanded reproduction has sharpened these contradictions over time, with the

¹ The informal economy, statistically speaking, comprises of (a) owner and unpaid family workers working in informal household (own-account) enterprises involved in petty commodity production (referred above as informal, non-capitalist enterprises), (b) owners of small and micro informal enterprises employing wage labour, but also often performing labour themselves alongside wage workers, and (c) informal wage workers, i.e., those without formal or regular job contracts, in both formal and informal (‘micro’) capitalist enterprises.

intensification of informalization and precarization, exclusion from domains of capitalist production and growth, and dispersion of the circuit of capital to its 'outside' through various 'non-standard' labour processes and work arrangements. Thus, the very success of the processes of capitalist growth has undermined and subverted the conditions that enable these processes to continue, and has endogenously created conditions for systemic crises, like the Great Recession of 2008. A lack of resolution of the underlying conditions of crisis resulted in an extended period of 'interregnum'. We see the Covid-19 pandemic as a moment in this interregnum. The extant conditions of informality and precarity played a major role in shaping the crisis experiences of workers across the world during the pandemic; and, the pandemic, in turn, may lead to further accentuation of these conditions manifesting as 'morbid symptoms' without a long-run resolution of the crises tendencies.

To develop this line of arguments, we proceed in the following manner. We begin by presenting the critical scholarship theorizing crisis within which we locate our intervention. We, then, briefly lay out the factual context of our discussions on informality and crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the following section, we present our key conceptual arguments by theoretically unpacking the overdetermined contradictions between capital and its 'outside', and relate how these contradictions shape the conditions of informality. Next, we read the various shifts and changes in the post-1970s conjuncture of global capitalism in light of these contradictions and their negotiations, which have gradually embedded the conditions of informality in the world of work in the global North and the global South in specific ways. Finally, we provide some illustrations on how these processes have registered and contributed to the crisis situation in the times of the pandemic.

2. Conjunctures, overdetermination, and crisis

As we join the discussions on 'crisis' in the times of pandemic, we find the dual notions of 'conjuncture' and 'overdetermination' help us in our search for a meaning of this, and, for that matter, any historical moment. In this section, we present a purposive reading of the literature that makes these twin concepts available to us. Our reading would provide us with a framework to think about the complex contradictions ingrained in the world of work at the present moment of

global capitalism. In what follows, we, first, describe an approach towards understanding conjunctures that we find compelling, and read it in terms of the framework of overdetermination. We, then, explore how the approach makes room for the analytical concept of crisis.

Hall et al. (1978) remind us history is a conjuncture of numerous tendencies arising in time at various levels (including economic, political and cultural) of society, and each historical moment bears within itself the remnants of all the other moments that preceded it and the traces of what is to follow. The tendencies give the moment a specific and distinctive shape and engrave it with specific social contradictions, none of which can be scaled down as an effect of any other. But a conjuncture is not merely an assemblage of scattered contradictions. There is a “complex mutual effectivity” of the contradictions that define the moment (Resnick and Wolff, 2006: 44). This mutual conditioning of contradictions gives rise to a distinct form of social causality of phenomena and social formations. The causality is not about tracing back an observed effect to an initial set of essential conditions or about projecting forward in time an inevitable outcome following an “if ... then” schema.¹ What we have, instead, is an expansion of a cause-and-effect consecution to the more encompassing notion of mutual constitutivity or overdetermination (Resnick and Wolff, 1987; 2006).

As we hold together these dual notions of conjuncture and constitutivity in our mind and look at a concrete moment in history, a social phenomenon or entity starts appearing to us as the site constituted by the interaction of a constellation of mutually-constituting social processes and containing within itself different and conflicting qualities, influences, directions of all those other social processes that constitute it. History, then, comes into view as a play of overdetermining contradictions; and, society, as a totality, is seen to be perpetually in a state of motion, pushed and pulled in interminably diverse ways by these complex contradictions. In the same move, we start realizing that each reading of the moment is unavoidably partial, open-ended and but one glimpse of the entirety of a social totality. To proceed, nevertheless, with a coherent social analysis of the moment,

¹ In Balibar's (1996: 115) articulation, for example, “[i]n a given conjuncture the explanation of historical phenomena, above all the emergence of new social form, is in the last analysis never reducible to a single or uniform causality. It is always manifested in the complementarity of different modes.

one can start with a particular aspect of this totality, which, for us, is the situation of a worker within the social process of labour at the present conjuncture of global capitalism.

Periodization of the conjuncture, however, is not about the specific length of a time in months and years over which a historic phase lasts; nor is it to do with any specific change of regime that ring a closing bell for a phase, although these factors may bring their own effects.² Periodization, instead, is based on the development of an array of social contradictions into some critical destabilizing situation for a society (Callari and Ruccio, 1996). The specific ensembles of contradictions, however, may differ across different socially constructed spaces, including the global North or the global South. With the accumulation and condensation of complex contradictions at various jaggedly tamped levels of society, including the levels of economy, politics and culture, a moment may be produced when many things simultaneously appear to be broken, exhausted or deeply incongruous in a social formation. It may look as if the structure of society has expended the “capacity to hold together a viable [‘normal’] way of life” (Hall et al., 1978: 254) and “[e]very effort to patch up one outbreak only leads to others” (Fraser, 2021). In Althusser’s words, this is a situation when “a vast accumulation of ‘contradictions’ come into play in the same court .. [and] ‘group themselves’ into a ruptural unity” (1969: 23; parenthesis in original). From an overdeterminist perspective of conjunctures, we can see this situation as a crisis within the social formation.

There is, however, an inherent indeterminacy, even uncertainty, about a crisis situation. This indeterminacy arises, in part, from the different ‘temporalities’ (Althusser and Balibar, 1977) of the contradictions, which evolve at different paces at different levels of a society. This unevenness in their progression adds another dimension to the complexity, or thickness, of the moment. In the presence of this unevenness, we cannot predict in advance the point of coalescence or that of unravelling of the crisis tendencies. Furthermore, these points may be different for the global North and the South, given the particularities of the constellations, inflections and temporalities of the contradictions internal to these spaces.

As a social phenomenon, a crisis is thus neither random nor exogenous. It has histories and specificities. This history, however, is not about deeper

² See the discussions in Hall and Massey (2010).

entrenchments of past trends or sounder destabilization of archaic intransigencies. Rather, crises originate in complex contradictions and are mitigated through the interrelationships of tensions, antagonisms, movements and forces. Given this complexity, crisis, as a moment in history, is all at once overdetermined and underdetermined. It is an overdetermined in the sense that, as a social entity, it is “inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal conditions of existence, and even from the instances it governs ... [the entity is thus] determining but also determined in one and the same movement” (Althusser, 1969: 101; parenthesis in original). It is also an underdetermined entity particularly in terms of its resolution or outcomes (Clarke, 2010).

The imagination of crisis we present above leads us to three important points. First, we become aware that the conjuncture of mutually constitutive contradictions that assemble in a crisis moment and the ‘deeper’ structural long *durée* tendencies that bring us to this concrete historical moment exist as aspects of one another. In short, structure and conjuncture synchronically constitute each other (Sotiris, 2014).³ Second, crisis tendencies evolve not in predetermined teleological ways or in neat sequential patterns; nor do they unfurl in uniform ways spatially or temporally. Caught in a “swirl of interacting influences” (Resnick and Wolff, 2006, p. 52), they build up, as Hall and Massey (2010) imagine, according to their own temporalities, as driven by their own complex contradictions. Third, resolution of a crisis is uncertain. An assemblage of contradictions, no matter how acute, does not by itself provides a sufficient condition for a prevailing social order to be pushed to a tipping-point. While the possibilities of a ‘rupture’ are animated in a crisis moment, the accumulated contradictions are insufficient on their own “simple direct power” (Althusser, 1969: 22) to bring about some radical transition in the social formation. Other contingent conditions are needed to make the moment “active”. In absence of

³ Balibar (1996) puts this point pithily when he writes: “the reality of the structure is nothing but the unpredictable succession of conjunctures; conversely, the conjuncture is merely determined as a certain disposition of the structures” (p. 115). This ‘disposition’ of changeability arises from the immanent complexity of social reality, which, in turn, arise from the unevenness of the different mutually-constituting but temporally-differing specific social contradictions that constellate at that specific historic moment. From this conjunctural viewpoint, social structure appears to be available to all possible “aleatory occurrences,” and the concrete historicity of the structure seems to be an “opening without finality or necessity” (Negri, 1996, p. 62) or open to “possible bifurcations” (Balibar, 1996, 114).

other deciding conditions, a crisis may remain unresolved.⁴ Whether a crisis would be a transitional moment or whether the waning social order will keep on slogging with a great variety of dysfunctions cannot be known presumptively by social actors participating in the social processes of change while living through the moment of crisis. Crises, thus, appear to us as what Negri calls “historical acts of assertion” that can only be “determined après coup (after the fact)” (Negri, 1996: 62; parenthesis in original). Without contingent conditions - especially, political movements and ideological formation - a state of crisis may linger on without resolution, with conditions of sufferings, insecurities and vulnerabilities festering a social formation (Fraser, 2021; Hall, 2011; Sotiris, 2014). In such a state of ‘interregnum’, when “the old is dying and the new cannot be born”, writes Gramsci, “a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci, 1971: 276) in the social order.

With this understanding of crisis as a complex historical moment, we turn our attention to our main subject – how to read some of the complex contradictions overdetermining the social processes in the world of work in the current conjuncture that have coalesced during the present crisis-ridden times.

3. Pandemic and the conditions of informality

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the public measures imposed to contain it, pushed the global economy into a severe economic crisis in 2020. Overall, the world economy registered a contraction of about 3.3 per cent, with about 95 million people being pushed into extreme poverty relative to the pre-pandemic level (IMF, 2021). The average income of the poorest 40 per cent of the global population declined by 40 per cent in the period 2019-2021, while that of the richest 40 per cent fell by 0.5 per cent, thus worsening global inequality (Hill et al, 2021). The impact in the world of work has been intense and far-reaching. About 255 million full-time jobs were lost

⁴ We may, then, ask: what resolves this indeterminacy? For Althusser, any transformative potentials of a crisis can only be activated through political practices and movements (Sotiris, 2014). Other scholars have called upon Gramsci's idea of ‘war of position’ to describe such practices and movements as “struggle across multiple fronts” through counter-hegemonic political mobilization is possible in complex societies (Inch and Shephard, 2020: 62; also see Hall (2002)). These processes, however, entail lengthy and intense political-cultural work, through which the current conditions of exploitation and oppression are exposed and the alternatives to the present order are articulated. Through these political and cultural processes, the possibilities of the present are directed and connected into a project for the future. The success or failure of these actions is, however, legible only in retrospect (Fraser, 2021; Hall, 2011).

in 2020, and until the third quarter of 2021, there were 137 million fewer jobs than the pre-pandemic levels (IMF, 2021). The global employment-to-population ratio declined in the period, with the fall being steeper for lower-wage workers (ILO, 2021a). The losses in employment and earnings were particularly pronounced for informal workers; and, for poorer countries with low coverage of social security nets, this translated into widespread hunger and higher incidences of indebtedness (Abraham et al., 2021; CCSA, 2021; CSE, 2021; ILO, 2021a; IMF, 2021; Jain et al., 2021; Kesar et al., 2021; UNCTAD, 2020). By the last quarter of 2021, while the working hours in high- and upper-middle-income countries tended to recover, the lower-, middle, and low-income countries continued to suffer large losses, thus increasing the divergence between countries (ILO, 2021a). The recovery trends in employment and earnings, however, remain fragile and diverging even in richer countries, with young people (especially young women) and informal workers continuing to face greater employment deficits (ibid).

Conditions of informality exacerbated the economic distress that the pandemic wrought. Extreme global poverty increased by almost 10 per cent between 2019 and 2021, and a major contributing factor behind this was the deprivation and destitution that the working poor in the global informal economy experienced in the period (UN, 2021). Of the 2 billion workers engaged in informal work (accounting for 61.2 per cent of the world's employed population) at the onset of the pandemic, an estimated 59 per cent fell into poverty during the first month of the Covid-19 crisis, thus more than doubling the number of informal workers who lived below the poverty line pre-pandemic (ILO, 2020). Survey data also shows that a staggering 70 per cent of informal workers in the world earned no income during the lockdown, with only 41 per cent receiving cash grant aid and 42 per cent receiving food assistance from their government (The Guardian, 2021). As informal workers enjoy neither non-wage benefits nor contractual rights through their jobs, in the absence of institutional buffers and social protections, the odds of their recovery from poverty also remain very low. Together with deepening poverty, inequality has also increased during the pandemic (IMF, 2021). There are early indications that this rise is sharper in those regions of the world where the informal economy contributes majorly to the national GDP (ibid.).

A vast majority of global workers, who had lost jobs during the pandemic and were displaced from formal and informal wage-employment, are now entering unwaged informal work arrangements, mostly in the form of self-employment, for economic survival (ILO, 2022a). A survey of 11 countries across the world shows that the likelihood of job loss due to the pandemic for informal waged workers has been three times higher than that for formal employees and 1.6 times higher than that for the self-employed. This dynamics, it is argued, has led to a shift towards self-employment in the Covid-moment (ILO, 2021a). An estimated additional 23 million workers across the world have now entered the informal economy, and are operating their own petty enterprises, or are engaged independently in a profession or trade, without hiring any employees (ILO, 2022a). In Latin America, for example, between 60 and 80 per cent of the jobs recovered until the third quarter of 2021 had been in conditions of informality (ILO, 2022b). In sub-Saharan Africa and Eurasia similar patterns are being observed (Bamu et al, 2022). While these trends have often been interpreted as signs of economic 'recovery' in the domain of work, they indicate an alarming condition of survival with greater insecurity and distress for a vast segment of the global working population.

The pandemic may also have furthered certain trends of informalization of formal wage employment structures that have been unfolding in the world of work over the past decades. We see acceleration in processes of casualization in work arrangements. Initial evidence suggests that the number of temporary workers as a proportion of total global working population has increased sharply in the post-Covid moment, and so has the proportion of gig workers working in the platform economy (ILO, 2022a). New forms of flexibilization regarding where and how work is performed has come about with the rise in remote and hybrid work in sectors where work is technologically mediated. Simultaneously, we see new measures for monitoring work and tracking workers by employers. Other structural changes are also being observed since the pandemic, which may lead to further worsening of conditions for the informal working populations in the Global South, and may even cause a burgeoning of their numbers. There is, for example, a rising trend of reshoring of work in Europe and in the US, which is aimed at lowering the downside risks of globally dispersed manufacturing supply chains (EXPO-STU, 2021; ILO, 2022a; ISM, 2020). This trend may alter the earlier trends of offshoring of production,

and, together with rising automation, may lead to further squeezing of the formal economy in both the developing and the developed world. The workers displaced thereby may be pushed into the informal economy as a survival strategy in the post-pandemic world.

The empirical facts collated above suggest two intertwining ideas: first, informality significantly shaped the crisis experiences of global working populations in the Covid-moment; and second, conditions of informality may have become more entrenched in the moment. At one level, these dynamics in the world of work are unsurprising, given the wide prevalence of informality and precarity even during pre-Covid times (Balde et al, 2020; Kesar et al, 2021; Stevano, 2021).¹ Most economies in the global South have always seen a high persistence of informality, which is often characterised by lack of proper job contracts, adequate earnings, and decent working conditions (Chen and Carré, 2020). These features have also been on the rise in the economies of the global North over the past few decades. Further, there has been a sharp increase in casualization and informalization of labour even in the formal sector - an economic space that has traditionally been seen as a site for secure employment relations - both in global North and South. It is illustrative that, for example, about 83 per cent of all wage workers in India were informally employed as of 2015 (CSE, 2018), with a fast rise in informal labour within the formal sector during the high growth period of the 2000s. Even in the context of the global North, for example in the United States, one finds about a third of the total workforce participating in gig work as of 2017 (BLS, 2017) - a feature that is of more recent provenance - where much of the labour process lacks the traditional traits of formal employment relations. Thus, in these conditions, any major shock to the economic landscape is only expected to bring about large-scale instabilities that lead to an accentuation of the pre-existing conditions of economic vulnerabilities afflicting vast sections of populations under global capitalism. This has been an oft-cited reason in the literature to explain the impact of the Covid crisis in the world of work.

We concur with the position that an examination of the Covid crisis in the world of work should recognize the central role played by the widespread conditions

¹ By conservative estimates, globally, about 51 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce and 61 per cent of the total workforce was informally employed as of 2016 (ILO, 2018). In terms of regions, about 86 per cent of total employment in Africa, 68 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 69 per cent in the Arab States, 50 per cent in the Americas, and about 25 per cent in Europe and Central Asia had been informal in nature (ibid.).

of informality. However, this represents only a surface level understanding of the issue. If we dig deeper and ask what this tells us about the capitalist social formation and possibilities of crisis in it, we need to interrogate the very idea of informality. This investigation brings to focus an ensemble of complex contradictions noted earlier, which have partly, but importantly, contributed to the emergence of the crisis situation. We argue that these contradictions, often underplayed or overlooked in critical analyses, have overdetermined different social processes to accentuate conditions of informality that have generated the crisis situation in the world of work. In what follows, we develop this conceptual argument.

4. Contradictions in the world of work

Capitalism as an economic formation constitute of *both* the internal sphere of capital, comprising the capitalist appropriative class process (i.e., the process of production and appropriation of surplus value), as well as the 'outside' or exterior of capital, encompassing myriad non-capitalist economic processes (Resnick and Wolff, 1987; 2006; Sanyal, 2007). The capitalist process of self-expansion of value through commodity production is based on exploitation of wage labour.¹ The non-capitalist processes of production include both commodity and non-commodity production under processes that are marked by an absence of capital-wage labour relation, of which the former includes production processes involving self-exploitation of labour, as in petty commodity production (PCP), while the latter includes non-market unwaged care work performed within the household for social reproduction.

The non-capitalist processes may be subsumed under and incorporated in various ways within the circuit of capital, or maybe *afunctional* to the process of capitalist accumulation.² These capitalist and non-capitalist economic processes

¹ The capitalist process of production and appropriation of surplus value through exploitation of wage labour is referred to as appropriative or 'fundamental' class process, and distribution of surplus value to various claimants (e.g., financiers, merchants, landlords, the state, etc.) who provide conditions of existence for the capitalist appropriative class process is referred to as the distributive or 'subsumed' class process (Resnick and Wolff, 1987; 2006)

² The circuit of capitalist commodity production can be depicted as: $M-C-C'-M'$, where $M' > M$. A capitalist needs the initial M to purchase commodities (C), including labour power, raw materials, and means of production. In the production process, a productive consumption of the commodities leads to production of new commodities that are of higher values (C'). These commodities are then sold in the market for an amount M' that is higher than the initial M . In the production process, the exploitation of labour power produces surplus (S), which manifests as a difference between M' and M . This surplus, appropriated by the capitalist, is used to secure the conditions of existence of the capitalist

exist in a relation of mutual constitutivity and contradiction to form the economic totality under capitalism, where the conditions of existence for the capitalist class process dominantly prevail (ibid.). The capitalist social formation is, thus, intrinsically fractured and heterogeneous. It is fundamentally structured by the contradictions between capital and labour within its 'interior' sphere, as well as the contradictions between capital and its 'outside'. Capital seeks to reproduce its conditions of existence within this field of antagonisms by managing these contradictions through coercions and negotiations, and by actively constructing ideologies and cultural practices that normalise the existing conditions. The contradictions and their overdeterminations take distinctive forms at distinct moments in the historical trajectory of capitalism and steer capital's long arc over time.

These contradictions - and their negotiations - work in conjunction to shape the world of work, often through intensification of conditions of informality in specific ways in global North and global South, which have been reinforced during the Covid moment. Concretely, the set of contradictions identified earlier - that between capital and labour within the 'interior' sphere of capital, between capital and its 'outside', and those emanating from dispersion of capital to its 'outside' (Sanyal, 2007) - are manifested in terms of the following analytically distinct processes: (i) a process of inclusion within the 'internal' sphere of capital, but under conditions of increasing precarity and distress via *informalization* of waged work; (ii) a process of *exclusion*, leading to a reproduction of non-capitalist informal economic spaces (like PCP) 'outside' the sphere of capital; and (iii) a process of *dispersion* of the circuit of capital to its 'outside' through distinct forms of market-based relations, such as subcontracting, gig work, platform economy, etc. Informalization of waged work is a global phenomenon in the current juncture of capitalism, while the processes of exclusion are more prominent and permeant in the global South. The processes of dispersion also have distinct inflections for global North and South. While the phenomenon of informalization is emphasised and explicated in much of the literature, the mechanisms of the latter two processes remain under-examined.

In the following, we theoretically unpack the contradictions between capital and its 'outside' and explicate how they get reflected in the world of work and contribute to generating the crisis-ridden moment. We first elaborate on the process

enterprise for its reproduction and possible expansion through accumulation.

of exclusion by drawing from a critical strand of literature on postcolonial capitalism, and then consider the process of dispersion of capital by engaging with the Marxist-feminist scholarship on the process of capitalist social reproduction. In light of this literature, we foreground the 'outside' of capital as an intrinsic part of capitalism that coexists with the 'internal' sphere of capital in relations of contradictions and antagonisms, but as part of a 'structured unity' (Althusser, 1969). In doing so, we highlight the salience of *unwaged work* and *household*, and the antagonisms and contradictions that overlay, shape and structure their relation with the process of capital accumulation and expanded reproduction. The household, here, is an analytical category denoting an economic space 'outside' the immediate sphere of capital where unwaged work is performed, within or outside the domain of market.

4.1 Contradictions between the domain of capital and its 'outside'

A recent strand of scholarship on postcolonial capitalism that has emerged following the work of Kalyan Sanyal (2007) has foregrounded an intrinsic contradiction between the domains of capital and non-capital, both implicated within the commodity economy (Bhattacharya and Kesar, 2020; Chatterjee, 2011; Sanyal and Bhattacharya, 2009). This literature characterises the process of capitalist growth and expanded reproduction in the post-colonies as inherently exclusionary in nature by highlighting that the thrust of capitalist accumulation continually subverts the domain of PCP and dispossesses petty producers and traders, without fully absorbing them within the capitalist segment as wage-workers. Much of this dispossessed population is rendered redundant - or surplus - for capitalist accumulation, and is excluded from the 'internal' sphere of capital. In other words, the process of primitive accumulation, which dispossesses pre-capitalist producers and is expected to transform them into wage labour in the expanding capitalist segment, remains incomplete; rather than being the pre-history of capitalism that initiates 'capital-relations' (Marx, 1977 [1867]), it continues as an ever-ongoing process. The surplus population, then, is forced to reproduce its conditions of livelihood in the non-capitalist segments of the informal economy mostly through unwaged work of petty production and exchange, thereby continually reproducing an 'outside' of capital within the heart of postcolonial capitalism. This vast 'outside'

perpetually remains in an antagonistic relation of contradiction with the domain of capital and its expanded reproduction, while being refigured and reconstituted all the time. The non-capitalist segment, instead of being a pre-capitalist remnant, is, therefore, an outfall of the internal logic of capitalist accumulation and expanded reproduction itself.

The non-capitalist sites have an independent economic logic of existence derived from the consumption needs of this surplus population. They are organised mainly along the logic of provisioning, of sustaining and reproducing basic livelihood conditions of the excluded population. Their persistence is not premised on satisfying the requirements or 'needs' of capital and is largely afunctional to the process of capital accumulation. , In contrast, the domain of capital is marked by the logic of self-expansion and accumulation that relentlessly threatens and encroaches upon the non-capitalist spaces.

Vast segments of the informal economy in the global South can be classified as such a non-capitalist 'outside', comprising mainly family-based household enterprises engaged in petty production, trade, and services. These household enterprises, where economic activities are mainly organised through self-exploitation and through unwaged work of family members, are marked by an absence of capital-wage labour relations. The enterprises are often not integrated into the circuit of capitalist production - or subsumed under the accumulation logic of capitalist enterprises - via subcontracting linkages, gig work, platform economy, etc. (Bhattacharya and Kesar, 2020; Li, 2010). In much of the standard literature, persistence of these segments is either seen as an outcome of economic stagnancy, or a failure of the growth process to transform these segments along capitalist lines; or they are seen to be already governed by capitalist logic and as integrated within the capitalist space. Moving away from these standard postulations, we argue that the persistence of these segments attests to the inherent contradictions between the domains of capital and non-capital in contemporary global capitalism. They provide livelihoods to the bulk of the workforce in the postcolonial economies even in periods of high growth and despite the syphoning off of their resources to the capitalist segments (Bhaduri, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2016). This bears out clearly, for example, in the context of India, where, over a sustained period of high economic growth propelled mainly by the capitalist segment of the economy, the non-capitalist

household enterprises have continued to economically reproduce themselves at precariously low levels, and have prominently acted as a sink for the surplus population (Bhattacharya and Kesar, 2020; Kesar and Bhattacharya, 2019).

As noted earlier, the dynamics of these enterprises are embedded in the economic logic of the household, without any strict separation between the production or exchange space of the enterprise and the consumption space of the household running the enterprise. As a result, the requirements for economic survival of the household may trump the enterprise dynamics, and the enterprises may continue to operate even if they are unable to produce and retain a net positive surplus, as long as they generate enough to sustain the consumption needs of the household. The economic reproduction of the non-capitalist household enterprises may be sustained even by compressing the consumption levels in the absence of alternative livelihood opportunities, especially during times of economic crisis. These dynamics allow these enterprises to act as a sink for the surplus population, as evinced by the expansion of non-capitalist self-employment globally and the simultaneous worsening situation of the informal working population we observed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The process of capitalist development is, therefore, predicated on an ingrained antagonism between the domains of capital and non-capital within the capitalist social formation, along with an immanent contradiction between capital and wage labour within the domain of capital. If the vast surplus population, excluded from the space of capitalist wagework, is unable to reproduce its livelihood conditions and means of economic survival in the non-capitalist economic sphere, the hegemonic norms of capitalist development get undermined leading to political instability, upheavals, and crisis, and jeopardising the process of capitalist accumulation. The non-capitalist economic spaces thus provide a political condition of existence for the domain of capital by absorbing and sustaining the surplus populations (Chatterjee, 2011; Sanyal, 2007). In this sense, “[c]apital and its outside mutually constitute each other, that is literally bring each other into existence” (Sanyal and Bhattacharya, 2009: 37), while being “perpetually locked in a relation of contradiction” (Sanyal, 2007: 39). The very success of this process of capitalist accumulation tends to continually destabilise the reproduction of the non-capitalist

spaces and, in turn, capitalist accumulation itself, thereby contributing to generating conditions of systemic crises.

There exist significant spaces of non-capitalist production and distribution even in the economies of the global North, particularly various forms of self-employment, though these spaces do not necessarily represent an outfall of the process of exclusion that is characteristic of the postcolonial economies of the global South (Gibson-Graham et al, 2000; Portes et al, 1989). We will explore the persistence of these spaces in the current conjuncture and their relation with the impact of the crises in the Covid-moment in the later sections.

4.2 Contradictions related to dispersion of the circuit of capital to the 'outside'

The contradictory relation between capital and its 'outside' manifests in yet other ways. 'Capital-relations' may disperse beyond the 'interior' of capital and subvert and reconfigure the non-capitalist production processes without formally internalising them and transforming them along the lines of direct capital-wage labour relations (Sanyal, 2007). Under such circumstances, the informal non-capitalist household enterprises, while retaining their form, do not remain strictly 'outside' the domain of capital or separated from the circuit of capitalist production. Much of the literature on informal economy misses the complexity of these processes as an expression of the contradictions between the internal sphere of capital and its 'outside'. To make this visible, we find it useful to draw from certain strands of Marxian scholarship on the process of capitalist social reproduction and the relation between the site of the household and that of capital, and employ it in our specific context.

Arguing against a 'critical separation' between the sphere of capitalist production organised within the realm of market and that of social reproduction in the realm of household, a lineage of Marxist-feminist scholarship sees the former as dependent on the latter for its own reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017). The household is linked to the sphere of capitalist production in important ways, but also remains separated from it, with its distinct dynamics, structure and mode of operation. It is a socially constructed site of work outside the realm of market, where various forms of unwaged work, including that of birthing, caregiving, sustaining and

maintaining households, socialisation of children, building communities, are performed. Thus, the household provides a necessary *economic condition of existence* for capital by performing the unwaged work required for biological and social (re)production of workers and their labour power, and thereby subsidises the process of capitalist production by allowing to keep market wages below the actual value of labour power. However, the continuous drive for capitalist accumulation increasingly directs resources away from the sphere of social reproduction through persistent downward pressure on wages, increased precarization and spread of low-waged informal jobs, reduction in spending on social welfare and care activities, and by drawing women, who traditionally perform household care activities, into relations of wage labour (ibid; Fraser, 2017a). In other words, capital tends to ‘free ride’ on non-commodified resources, nonmarket functions, and unwaged work that exist outside capital’s direct ambit, but continually erodes and depletes the sites that provide these conditions. This extractive relationship, thus, destabilises the very processes of social reproduction that capital relies on, thereby undermining its own conditions of stable reproduction and jeopardising its existence - a process that, to some extent, is reminiscent of Karl Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) thesis on disembeddedness of the economy from the rest of the social sphere in a market society (Streeck, 2016; Fraser, 2017b). The unlimited drive for accumulation in the sphere of capitalist production unmoors it from the sphere of its social reproduction and deepens the antagonisms that may engender a systemic crisis (Fraser, 2017a). These theoretical interventions highlight that at the very core of the capitalist social formation lies a fundamental contradiction between the market sphere of capitalist production and the sphere of social reproduction.

The above theorisation of capital’s relation with the non-market sphere of the household in terms of a process of “separation-cum-dependence-cum-disavowal” (ibid.: 24) provides a productive formulation to understand the dispersion of circuit of capital to informal household enterprises, and to highlight a specific dimension of the ‘inside’-‘outside’ contradiction. Take, for example, the case of subcontracted household enterprises in the informal economy that are linked to capitalist enterprises via subcontracting relations. These household enterprises are, of course, implicated within the commodity economy and market relations unlike when households (or household activities) are seen through the lens of social

reproduction. But production and labour processes carried out by them remain strictly 'separated' from the 'interior' of capital. For any household enterprise, given the overlap between the consumption space of the household and the production space of the enterprise, production is carried out through unwaged labour of family members using the physical site of the household and, often, other non-commodified household resources (including tools and equipment) that keep the cost of production low. Further, these enterprises, in order to ensure their economic survival, have to continuously seek to reduce production costs by avoiding explicit payments for various resources by often operating at the threshold of legality - for example, by 'illegally' occupying public spaces or hooking on to electricity supply - and, thus, by actively 'commonising' these resources (Bhattacharya and Kesar, 2020). Subcontracting parts of (or entire) production processes to such informal household enterprises allows capital to not only access these household production sites to lower costs and increase profitability, but also to access the unwaged labour and 'commonised' resources. This partly explains how the conditions of reproduction and persistence of a segment of the informal economy are generated through a dispersion of the circuit of capital. The increasing 'dependence' of capitalist firms on subcontracting relations - often with informal household enterprises through circuitous chains of inter-linkages across various nodes of the value chain - over the past few decades, to remain competitive and increase profitability, has brought a considerable section of household enterprises within the circuit of capital. But, at the same time, these enterprises are kept outside the internal sphere of capitalist production and labour process - or 'disavowed' by capital - precisely because their usefulness for capital is fulfilled if they remain in the form of household spaces with their specific dynamics.

These household enterprises, on the other hand, depend on the subcontracting relations to gain access to market for their commodities in order to ensure economic survival and reproduction of the household. In the process, subject to the specific nature of the subcontracting relation, they either lose their entire autonomy over production and labour process, with the household workers being transformed into 'disguised' wage labour for capital while remaining spatially separated from the subcontracting capitalist firm - as in the case of 'putting-out'

system.³ Or, they maintain a relative autonomy and control over the production process and sale of final goods without being fully subsumed under the capitalist firm (as often in the case of 'non-putout' subcontracting relations), but the latter may extract a large part of surplus for providing them specific conditions of existence, particularly access to market (Bhattacharya and Kesar, 2020). This process of dispersion of capital through subcontracting therefore is predicated on successful extraction of surplus from locations 'outside' formal boundaries of capital-wage labour relation either through a process that Marx refers to as 'formal subsumption of labour' (as against 'real subsumption') or by controlling access to market for non-capitalist household enterprises.

The fast expanding domains of gig work and platform economy exhibit, in many ways, a similar dynamic between capital and its 'outside', particularly taking the form of 'disguised' wage labour akin to that observed in 'put-out' subcontracted firms. In these domains, individuals may own their means of labour and be connected to their work through relatively advanced technologies, thereby appearing as self-employed, performing unwaged, though remunerative, work. The gig worker is usually projected as a 'partner' in the platform economy - an entrepreneur running their own business enterprises as a petty producer, albeit through the digital assistance and mediation by an aggregator. They also have better access to the market on account of participating in the digital platform. However, the nature of platform-based work is such that control over production and labour process and overall decision-making power rest with the digital aggregator, and the gig workers do not have effective control over their labour power and the surplus they produce, given the structural conditions and logic of operation of the platforms (Tsing, 2009; Woodcock and Graham, 2019). Consequently, they are effectively disguised wage-workers for the capitalist digital aggregator. Their every labouring activity is subjected to constant surveillance - often both by the platform aggregator and the customers - aided by advanced technological tools. This form of surveillance makes the gig workers even more vulnerable, particularly given that they usually do not have access to job security and labour rights of a formal employee.

³ In the putting-out system, usually the subcontracted enterprises receive inputs, designs, technology, etc., from the subcontractors and supply the entire final output back to them in return for a remuneration.

Capital's success in extracting increasingly higher amounts of surplus from these 'outside' spaces (subcontracted household enterprises, domains of gig work, etc.) entails a basic contradiction that may even work to undermine their conditions of existence and economic reproduction. This may, in turn, potentially disrupt the stable reproduction of this dynamic between capital and its 'outside', particularly given the increasingly high dependence of capital on such forms of extractive economic relations.

4.3 Contradictions and crisis of capitalist reproduction

The theoretical approach laid out in this section provides a productive scaffolding to frame the intensifying conditions of informality, upheavals, and crises in the world of work at the present juncture as important expressions of contradictions between capital and its 'outside' - a crucial dimension that is often missed in the prevalent critical narratives on informality and crisis in the Covid moment. Along with these 'inside'-'outside' contradictions, the contradiction between capital and labour within the 'internal' domain of capital has also contributed to intensifying conditions of precarity and distress through increasing informalisation of waged work, as has been widely noted.

Apart from the direct political and economic roles discussed above, the 'outside' space of household also plays another important role by being the domain where specific dispositions towards socialisation are instituted in the labouring body in their disciplining refractions. Specific norms of 'disciplined lives' are reproduced that are necessary to maintain an orderly and compliant workforce imbued with capitalist work ethic. Althusser (1971), for example, argues that the household qua family, along with other cultural spaces, form a part of the 'ideological state apparatus' (ISA), and performs the critical function of reproducing and normalising the ideological foundations of capital's dominance. In other words, the household, being the space where such unwaged work of socialisation is performed, also provides a *cultural condition of existence* for the process of capitalist accumulation. However, as capitalist accumulation continues to redirect resources away from the household sphere, it undermines the household's ability to perform this function, thereby further jeopardising capital's own process of reproduction (Wolff, 2005). In

our context, stable reproduction of the 'outside' space of capital requires a cultural process of 'normalisation' of this space that provides conditions of livelihood for the vast surplus population excluded from the 'interior' of capital. This normalisation requires valorization of a culture of entrepreneurship and risk-taking that this population is *compelled* to adopt in order to derive their livelihood in the informal household enterprises given the precarious and tenuous conditions of their economic reproduction.⁴ A success of the process of capitalist accumulation and expanded reproduction, which undermines the space of the household and its economic possibility of reproduction, then, paradoxically, also undermines the cultural condition of stable reproduction of capital.

In summary, the 'outside' of capital provides, in analytically distinct ways, critical *political, economic, and cultural conditions of existence* for the capitalist economy. The process of capitalist growth reproduces the 'outside' spaces that, along with processes of informalisation within the domain of capital, generates and reinforces conditions of informality within the economy. Contradictorily, however, the very success of capitalist accumulation also tends to undermine some of the conditions of existence of the capitalist growth process itself, which, then, lends to generating conditions of crises in the world of work. The Covid-moment has contributed in specific ways to the coalescence and condensation of these contradictions that have been accumulating in the post-1970s conjuncture, signifying both a success of the process of capitalist reproduction and a reinforcement of crisis tendencies.

5. The Present Conjuncture

The Covid moment has come in the backdrop of the global economic crisis of 2008, and the 'great recession' that it induced particularly in the global North, whose deleterious impacts on lives and livelihoods rippled across the world in specific ways over the past decade. There has been much theoretical and empirical work linking (not necessarily causally) the 2008 crisis to the wide-ranging and far-reaching

⁴ Note the mainstream economic literature on informality that has, over the years, been increasingly veering towards the view that informal economy is not an aberration but a 'normal' feature of the economic landscape in the developing countries, and it represents a site of dynamism and micro-entrepreneurship that can be a seed-bed for grassroot economic growth and a pathway out of poverty (Jutting and de Laiglesia, 2009; Maloney, 2009).

changes in global capitalism that globalisation and rise of neoliberalism ushered in since the late-1970s (Hall, 2011; Resnick and Wolff, 2010). The latter processes were, in turn, effected and catalysed in complex ways by the crisis in and the collapse of the post-World War II dirigiste regime in the 'advanced' capitalist countries. For the economies of the global South, on the other hand, conditions of labour and work for vast majority of the working population have always been precarious even during the dirigiste period; but this perilousness has taken new, often more insidious, forms with the liberalisation and privatisation processes since the onset of globalisation since early-1980s. These changes have shaped and condensed the ensemble of contradictions in the world of work in particular ways in global North and global South, with specific implications for the reproduction of the capitalist social formation. In this section, we point to how these changes and the sharpened contradictions have simultaneously reinforced and subverted capital's ability to secure its conditions of existence in the present conjuncture.

5.1 Informality in the world of work at the current conjuncture

The rising dominance of globalised and financialized capital has intensified the processes of primitive accumulation and exclusion, informalisation of production and labour processes, and dispersion of capital to its 'outside' across the global South, increasing the salience of informal household (often non-capitalist) economic spaces frequently structured on unwaged work. These spaces encompass myriad forms of economic processes and sites, including traditional artisanal and petty agrarian production; newly reproduced non-capitalist economic sites of livelihood generation (e.g., that of PCP) for the surplus population; 'outside' household spaces incorporated within the circuit of capital through various forms of subcontracting and outsourcing relations; and informalised and casualised wage labour relations that are increasingly entangled with and dependent upon household economic spaces.

This signifies a drastic departure from the narrative of economic development *qua* capitalist transition. In the immediate post-war period, the world of work in the 'advanced' capitalist economic formations was largely circumstantiated by the spread and entrenchment of a specific kind of capital-wage labour relation, where remunerative work is performed within the internal sphere of capital. This particular

version of remunerative work was projected as the 'standard', and all other forms of work came to be considered as non-standard, deviant, aberrant, or unproductive. For the 'backward' economies of the global South, spread of such 'standard' employment relations, however limited, were seen to be signs of capitalist development that would eventually characterise the entire world of work once these economies could successfully traverse the path of development via capitalist transformation. This imaginary does not appear to be holding good any longer.

This 'standard' of work, for sure, was never a universal archetype; it always represented a very limited part of the world of work. For one, even in the global North, informal economic spaces marked by an absence of capital-wage labour relations were present during the Fordist period as well (Portes et al, 1989; Tabak and Chrichlow, 2000). Furthermore, unwaged reproductive and affective labour performed within the non-market space of the household across the world, mostly by women, always served a critical function in the social reproduction of capitalism. Still, over this post-war state-regulated welfarist or developmentalist era (for global North and South, respectively), it was possible to project this partial, circumscribed, and spatio-historically specific kind of employment relations as the 'standard'. In fact, the seductive appeal of capitalism in the post-World War II Fordist era in the global North was predicated, in part, on its promised ability to secure better livelihood conditions for all through the spread of such wage labour relations, often characterised by secure, long-term job contracts, regulated labour markets, and remunerative earnings.

By the dawning of the era of globalised and financialized capitalism, this image was no longer steady and focussed. The new conjuncture brought forth by the crisis of the 1970s effected chasmic changes in the world of work, which, in turn, sharpened the entrenched contradictions in the process of capitalist accumulation and reproduction by both strengthening *and* undermining the ability of capital to ensure its economic, political, and cultural conditions of existence. The map of the world of work has been increasingly re-drawn globally since then, with the Fordist work conditions becoming more of a chimaera than a norm. With the onset of globalisation and outsourcing of production to the global South, the 'standard' Fordist wage relations have undergone a breakdown, along with a decline in the bargaining power of workers across the world. New attributes and characteristics of the domain

of remunerative work have emerged globally that entail, among other things: a dilution of formal jobs with secure contracts; monopsonization of labour markets; rise of informal wage employment; wages delinked from increases in productivity; fall in the overall wage share accompanied by a massive rise in economic inequality; persistence and reproduction of unwaged production and labour processes in PCP; emergence and proliferation of self-employment in platform and gig-economy, along with new forms of labour surveillance mediated by advanced technology; increasingly disappearing chances of economic mobility; persistence and entrenchment of strong association between low wage jobs and workers belonging to marginalised identity groups in terms of race, caste, and gender; and, in general, an intensification of precarization of labour, given the lack of legally stipulated working conditions for the informal workers that makes it easier for the employer to increase the rate of exploitation and appropriate surplus more intensively as well as to lay them off effortlessly if required.

The increasingly complex cartography of the world of work and the proliferation of 'non-standard' informal work has led to a situation where it is difficult to chart the coordinates of labour by only focussing on the axes of ownership of means of labour or control over labour power or control over labour process.¹ This complexity has given rise to a certain sense of messiness in the analysis of work and labour in contemporary times. This messiness often gets reflected in the arguments asserting either that the complexities can all be reduced to contradictions between capital and labour within the internal domain of capital, with the capitalist logic of operation pervading and determining the functioning of all economic spheres; or that the contradiction between capital and wage labour is no longer a key defining feature of capitalist economic formations, thereby undermining and delegitimizing the centrality and agency of labour.² For us, on the contrary, this 'messiness' signals

¹ The rising complexity in the world of work and its implication for working individuals can be comprehended and analysed by deploying the notion of 'work situation' as proposed in Banerjee and Bhattacharya (2021). It focuses on the following co-constitutive dimensions of work: class position of the labouring individual in the process of production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labour; whether work is performed within formal or informal institutional circumstances; and the specific nature of work in terms of set of technical tasks and duties performed and the level of technological mediation involved. The set of intersections between these dimensions has undergone pronounced shifts and changes in the current conjuncture with processes of informalization and spread of non-standard work arrangements importantly contributing to the condition of complexity.

multiple faultlines and sites of contradictions within the 'internal' sphere of capital and those between capital and its 'outside'.

5.2 Sharpened contradictions

The escalated conditions of precarity of the household, and its sharpened contradictions with capital, over the past few decades have made the 'outside' space increasingly untenable for economic survival of the surplus population. While the processes of informalization and exclusion reflect the increasing power of capital in shaping the outcomes of 'internal' struggles between capital and labour, they have, simultaneously, aggravated the relation of antagonism in the contradictory dynamics between capital and its 'outside'. We briefly cite a couple of specific illustrations to underscore this point.

For example, the growing agrarian distress across the global South have increasingly forced small and marginal peasant households involved in unwaged work in agricultural petty production to attempt to supplement their meagre, and often falling, incomes by seeking self-employment or informal/casual wage employment in non-agricultural sectors during lean seasons in agriculture or even throughout the year. This has given rise to the phenomenon of circular rural-urban or inter-sectoral migration, or that of 'footloose labour' (Breman, 2003). In other words, the Lewisian surplus labour (Lewis, 1954) is never fully drawn out and incorporated within the interior domain of capital, and the space of petty agrarian household production continues to contribute to its economic reproduction. This space also subsidises the process of capital accumulation by lowering the reproduction cost for labour power, and thereby, allowing to keep money wage low, as wage income is supplemented by food produced by the household for self-consumption as well as by the income generated through petty agricultural production. On the other hand, this has also created new conditions of antagonism. The escalation of large-scale primitive accumulation in the present conjuncture has been destabilising the agrarian petty commodity production economy and undermining the conditions of survival of a vast segment of surplus population and informal wage labour. This has

² Refer, for example, to the 2014 Forum issue of *Development and Change* on 'labour question' and the 2020 special issue on 'precarious and informal work' of *Review of Radical Political Economics* for debates on these competing views.

simultaneously led to heightened tensions between capital and its 'outside' as well as increased resistance from the 'excluded' masses. The successful farmers' movement in India during 2020-21 against the imposition of new agricultural legislations encouraging corporatization of agriculture can be understood in light of these antagonisms and struggles.

To take another example, in the global North, the stagnancy in wages and decline in labour's income share have wrecked the possibilities of sustained increase in household consumption over time, which had been a hallmark that metropolitan capitalism achieved through a combination of factors, including increasing productivity of labour and rising rates of exploitation, and by imposing income deflation on vast segment of global South through relations of imperialism (Patnaik, 2009). While metropolitan capital has been largely successful in augmenting its process of expanded reproduction through globalisation and outsourcing of production to low wage economies, these processes have simultaneously exacerbated conditions of precarity and potentials of social instability. Even as the process of 'Walmartization' has opened up the possibility of importing cheap wage goods to maintain the consumption levels of workers with stagnant or declining income, this has not been sufficient to stall or reverse the intensifying conditions of precarity. This has set a new 'normal' of lower levels of consumption and lower value of labour power (Callari, 2010), together with increasing dependence on unwaged work (including gig work) or informal waged work for economic survival. These shifts have also increasingly undermined the household's ability to effectively play its role in the process of social reproduction, thereby bringing about a general 'crisis of care' (Fraser, 2017a), or its role as a part of the ISA in 'normalising' conditions of capital's hegemony and dominance in the social formation (Wolff, 2005). This has created increasing tension in the site of the household and the rest of the social sphere.

The shifts and changes in the world of work in the global North has important implications. Forms of unwaged work and self-employment, which have always been identifiers for 'underdeveloped dual economies' of the global South, are now being 'normalised' in the economies of the global North as well. This process has led to some scholars characterising the advanced capitalist economies like the United States as emerging 'dual' economies (Temin, 2017), in sharp contrast to the imaginaries of the standard theories of economic development. In this sense, there

has been a ‘Southernization’ of the work regime in the global North (Munck, 2019; Scully 2016; Mosoetsa et al, 2016), even to the extent that ‘non-standard’ employment arrangements and informalization of work regimes are often adopted in the increasingly influential discourse on ‘future of work’ in the global North. While the postcolonial process of planned industrialization during the *dirigiste* period was, in part, based on an imaginary of a *Northernization of the South*, the current conjuncture has ushered in the process of a *Southernization of the North*. Capitalist reproduction historically required a ‘normalisation’ of wage employment or capital-wage labour relations in the world of work, along with a devalorization of other forms of work as anomalous and subordinate to wage employment, through an “intricate process by which participation in labour markets is made ordinary” (Denning, 2010: 83). The present times, however, are marked by an extensive spread of unwaged forms of remunerative work, including those mediated by sophisticated technologies as in the case of platform economies, together with accelerated processes of informalization and casualization of wage labour (ILO, 2016).

5.3 Negotiations and management of contradictions

It is imperative for capital, for its own stability, to manage these ingrained contradictions in the process of accumulation. With the changes in the world of work described above, management and regulation of the complex contradictions require a revalorization and celebration of informality in the labour process, ‘micro-entrepreneurship’ in the domain of non-capitalist self-employment, and, generally speaking, the culture of entrepreneurship and risk-taking behaviour. For example, the dogged perseverance and reproduction of forms of self-employment in petty production and trade in the global South, which were earlier seen as traits of economic ‘backwardness’, came to be increasingly valorized as signs of micro-entrepreneurial dynamism and tenacity, and a potential path to prosperity, for the poor in much of the influential mainstream development literature since the 1970s and ‘80s (De Soto, 1989; Maloney, 2004; Rakowski, 1994). This reflects a process of fracturing of norms in the world of work from a single unifier in terms of ‘standard’ wagework to a privileging of differences in terms of heterogeneous forms of remunerative work arrangements. New norms and new processes of normalisation

are now being tried out to contain the complex contradictions rising in various societal levels at this conjuncture of capitalism. Thus, in a parody of reversal of fortune, certain traits in the social site of labour in the global South that were once written off as abnormalities or pathologies from a Northern perspective, and which were expected to be 'treated' and 'remedied' through processes of capitalist development, are now becoming the 'new normal' in the social site of labour in the global North and an embedded reality in the global South.

The processes of negotiations and management of contradictions have taken different forms at different conjunctures of global capitalism. In the post-World War II era, the roles played by the welfare states in the global North and the development states in the global South in guiding and regulating the process of capitalist growth and development can be seen, in part, as attempts to manage these contradictions, albeit in different forms. In the post-1970s conjuncture of financialized capitalism, however, these regulatory boundaries have been critically subverted, thereby severely undermining the delicate balancing act. The increasing thrusts for expanded global capitalist accumulation and the massive surge in primitive accumulation across the economies of the global South have magnified the contradictions and sharpened the inherent crisis tendencies, and also called for new forms of management. Such management requires the maintenance and re-constitution of the spaces of social reproduction and non-capitalist economic sites that provide livelihood to the dispossessed population, which often entails, paradoxically, a 'reverse' transfer of resources to these sites (Chatterjee, 2011; Sanyal, 2007). It is in this light we can make sense of the spread of myriad poverty alleviation schemes and transfer programmes supported and facilitated by governments, international financial institutions, philanthropic initiatives, and civil society organisations, together with the rise to prominence of the development industry and the non-governmental sector. Such interventions include: attempts towards mainstreaming the idea of basic incomes and conditional cash transfers; provisioning of limited welfare benefits; government-funded job guarantee schemes at minimal wages; public distribution of foodgrains or cooked food at subsidised rates to targeted groups; provisioning of education vouchers or subsidised health insurances; limited microcredit loans in subsidised interest rates to petty producers, traders, and small businesses; etc. Some of these forms of transfers have also become increasingly widespread in the

economies in the global North, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis and during the Covid pandemic (Dwyer et al, 2022; Gentilini et al, 2021). This does not, of course, imply that there is a fundamental global restructuring of capital's nature, or its relation with the rest of the society through a process of re-embedding it within social relations, or even a return to the old forms of welfare state. Rather, it entails a form of neoliberal governmentality that works to negotiate and manage the sharpening contradictions in the wake of capitalist growth, and creates conditions for maintaining capital's hegemony by constructing the consent of the excluded (Sanyal, 2007; Bhattacharya, 2019). All these interventions, often wrested from the state through sustained social movements, are strenuously resisted by capital but are also simultaneously aided and normalised by capitalist institutions, highlighting the contradictory process through which the antagonisms are navigated. These governmentalist practices of managing the social contradictions seem to be getting increasingly institutionalised and made ordinary across the world, rather than being seen as one-off requirements to deal with some extraordinary economic shocks.

The coalescence of the contradictions in the world of work that contributed to the economic crisis of 2008 (Hall, 2011; Resnick and Wolff, 2010) and the breakdown of the post-'70s 'neoliberal consensus' (Grugel and Ruggirozzi, 2012; Sandbrook, 2011), however, did not lead to a moment of rupture. Rather, it initiated a long period of stasis or an 'interregnum' (Streeck, 2016) continuing till the present moment - a period when 'morbid symptoms' materialise in the social body as 'metastasizing cancer' (Fraser, 2021). For example, at the level of politics, new and novel forms of movements and projects are producing new combinations of nationalism, populism, and authoritarianism, which are now unsettling the habits of what was considered to be the 'normal' politics for a long time across the world. These movements are threatening the edifice of global capitalism as we knew it and are unsettling the old-style processes of its reconstruction (Clarke, 2019). Relatedly, the rising precarization and exclusion, and the worsening situation of the household and other non-capitalist spheres of economic reproduction, have increasingly frayed and strained the ability of the present social formation to secure the economic, political, and cultural conditions for its stable reproduction. It appears as if 'the centre cannot hold' any longer and the established norms of governance cannot be reproduced anymore. The crisis of the present moment comes within this continuum.

The pandemic has compressed the complex crisis tendencies and condensed them, without pushing the social formation firmly towards any inevitable moment of rupture. The Covid moment can be seen, in this context, to be reflecting some of the 'morbid symptoms' brought forth by these contradictions.

6. The covid moment

While the crisis materialised in the catalytic presence of Covid-19, its ground was already prepared with progressive sharpening of the overdetermined contradictions gathered within contemporary capitalism. As we posited earlier in the essay, the successful processes of capitalist accumulation drew out and whetted these contradictions, which led, in capillary actions, to certain major churnings in the world of work in the present conjuncture. These conditions, which had led to a compounding of precarization and marginalisation of labour over the past several decades in the global North and South, also shaped the calamitous experiences of the global working populations in the Covid-moment.

Few brief illustrations from the Indian context allow us to see in closer details how an assemblage of overdetermined contradictions - manifesting in the world of work as processes of informalization, exclusion, and dispersion - came together, became condensed and merged in the Covid moment to galvanise the crisis tendencies in the global South. In India, most remunerative work is carried out in the domain of unwaged 'household' non-capitalist PCP and that of informal wage employment, with about 44-45 per cent of the total working population operating in the former and another 44 per cent (constituting 83 per cent of the total wage workers) engaged in the latter (CSE, 2018). These domains have always been marked by intense flux with constant inflows and outflows of people, as, in the absence of permanency in work arrangements, the working population is forced to shift from one arrangement to another in search of livelihood (Kesar, 2020). These involuntary transitions increased sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in 2018-19, depending on the specific types of their occupations and work arrangements (e.g., regular wage labour, casual wage labour, self-employment, etc.), between 20 and 46 per cent of the workforce in the informal economy moved between various work arrangements. In the pandemic year of 2020, however, the

corresponding percentages increased to range between 25 and 65 respectively (CSE, 2021).

A significant fraction of the salaried workers, with relatively more formal and stable work arrangements, also moved to self-employment and to casual waged work after losing their jobs during the Covid-induced economic recession, even as the earning possibilities from these types of work waned during the pandemic. The starkness of this phenomenon becomes easier to comprehend when seen in the context of a pre-pandemic situation. While, in a usual pre-pandemic year, about 80 per cent of salaried workers in India continue in the same employment arrangement, with the rest moving into self-employment or leaving the workforce, in the initial phase of pandemic in 2020, only 38 per cent of permanent salaried and 28 per cent of temporary salaried workers could hold on to their jobs (Abraham and Basole, 2022). Even by the end of 2021, only 48 per cent of permanent salaried workers could retain or come back to the same kind of employment, with the rest continuing in informal work arrangements (mostly men) or left the workforce altogether (mostly women) (ibid.). In contrast, the majority of daily wage workers – an occupational group that experienced more acute job losses in the initial phase of the pandemic and thrust out of the labour market in large numbers – were able to re-enter the market for casual labour by the end of 2021. The pandemic experiences of salaried workers suggest, on one hand, the growing conditions of employment uncertainty even for those with what was earlier considered to be relatively better work arrangement; and, on the other, underscore the rising importance of self-employment as a fall back alternative, and not necessarily a preferred option.

The difference in the nature of work arrangements between the formal/regular and informal/casual wage-workers translated into a sharp demarcation in their respective ability to cope with the crisis. Without access to paid leaves, or provisions for temporary furloughs through job retention schemes (as often available to the formally employed), informal workers bore greater risks of job loss and deprivation (Kesar et al., 2020; Abraham et al., 2021). Similarly, lack of access to health insurance made them more vulnerable to health and economic shocks. A purposive survey of informal workers suggest that while about 80 per cent of the surveyed workers registered a reduction in food intake during the pandemic-induced lockdown, recovery was slow even months after the lockdown was lifted, and many had to cope

with high indebtedness in order to sustain themselves after losing employment (CSE, 2021; Kesar et al., 2021). The average debt for households at the bottom quintile of the income distribution, who are also more likely to be dependent on informal sources of livelihood, stood at 100 per cent of their pre-lockdown income (Totapally et al, 2020). Another recently conducted survey of the urban poor shows that income and food insecurities continue to remain extremely dire even after two years of the initial wave of the pandemic (Raghunathan et al, 2022).

Along with these increased fluxes, the dependence on unwaged work increased noticeably in this period, with self-employment emerging as a key fall-back option in the event of job loss. About a third of all wage workers in India transitioned to self-employment as a coping strategy during the pandemic (CSE, 2021). Far from being a favoured livelihood option, the shift towards self-employment was mainly driven by distress. This fact is made all the more clear when we find that the livelihood conditions of the self-employed had severely worsened during the pandemic. While, in a usual year, self-employment is a more remunerative livelihood option than informal wage employment, during the pandemic, the wage workers in India who lost job and transitioned to self-employment experienced an almost halving of their incomes from the pre-pandemic levels, and earned a remuneration at a level even lower than the pre-pandemic informal wages (ibid.). Overall, the earnings of the entire pool of self-employed workers declined by about 18 per cent on average (as against 7 per cent for casual wage workers) in a single year, and this was the steepest fall for any work arrangement in India during this period (ibid.).

The expansion of the domain of PCP indicates that the non-capitalist 'outside' space of unwaged work has become increasingly central as a 'sink', or holding ground, of the rejects from the 'interior' space of capital at this moment. In this regard, the experience of the migrant workers during the pandemic in India is illustrative. With the Indian agricultural sector being in severe distress over the past few decades, particularly with the onset of market-led economic reforms since the early 1990s, there has been a significant increase in migration to urban areas by members of households engaged in agricultural PCP to work as informal wage labour on short-term, long-term, or circular basis. Due to their meagre wage incomes, these workers often continue to depend on their households for access to staples like rice and wheat that are grown partly for household consumption but also

for sale in the market. During the lockdown in India - one of the largest and strictest in the world (Hale et al., 2020) - a most severely impacted section of the population was the informal migrant wage workers who were suddenly pushed out of employment and found themselves without alternative sources of income in the cities. A purposive survey of more than 11,0000 informal migrant workers in India found that about 72 per cent of surveyed workers did not have enough ration to last them more than two days (Adhikari et al, 2020). These workers were forced to undertake a massive reverse migration to the rural areas to secure basic subsistence, often from marginal agricultural land holdings or rural petty production (ibid.).

This reverse migration from urban to rural regions, however, generated an enormous pressure on the rural PCP that even in 'normal' times was inadequate for supporting the economic reproduction of rural households, and resultantly, there was a stark rise in mass destitution and hunger. The inability to survive on rural PCP, in turn, led to an increased reliance on unskilled informal wagedwork supported by the publicly-funded rural employment guarantee program (MGNREGA) at very low wages. According to official estimates, there was about 43 per cent increase in person-days of work under MGNREGA even in November 2020, several months after the countrywide lockdown in March-April. However, even with this rise, there still remained a huge unmet demand for work. Survey findings suggest that only about 55 per cent of rural respondents who demanded work under MGNREGA were able to access it, while 98 per cent of those who were able to access work reported that the number of work days were insufficient (CSE, 2021).

Together with the rural PCP, there was also an increasing pressure on the limited resource base of the non-agricultural urban PCPs during the pandemic that brought acute levels of immiseration in urban areas. The preconditions of this urban distress had already accumulated over the pre-pandemic period, escalating with the abrupt implementation of demonetisation in 2016 and the revamped Goods and Service Tax (GST) in 2017. A dire outcome of these processes was a weakening condition of the informal economy (Sinha, 2022), which was brought to the edge in the Covid moment, making the ability of this economic space to provide a sufficient condition for economic reproduction for the working population even frailer.

In this context, it is worthwhile to note that one of the most vigorous economic interventions by the Indian state during the pandemic has been an attempt to expand the provisioning of credit to micro-enterprises and petty producers and traders. This goes along with the normalisation and revalorization of the culture of entrepreneurship and risk-taking behaviour in the context of widespread exclusions from the 'interior' of capital. The continual commodification and decommodification of labour for a vast majority of the population are outcomes of the contradictions between capital and labour in the 'interior' space of capital and that between capital and its 'outside', and much of the state interventions signal an attempt at an intricate balancing act to manage these contradictions and to salvage the stability of the capitalist economic formation.

In the global North, the critical churning taking place in the world of work over the past several decades also came to head in the Covid moment. The changing conditions of work in the United States can be studied as one such illustration. The self-employed constitute about 10 per cent of the total adult workforce in the US (Hipple and Hammond, 2016), and this figure has remained relatively consistent since the 1970s. Further, they provide employment to an additional 20 per cent of the total workforce as wage workers, implying that about a third of the US working population are associated in some form with household enterprises (BLS, 2019). The category of self-employment in the context of the US consists of both unincorporated and incorporated enterprises, with the vast majority (about two-third) being unincorporated. However, most of such unincorporated enterprises (about 86 per cent) do not employ any workers outside their family members and operate as family-based household enterprises carrying out petty production, trade, and services. In other words, a significant proportion of the US workforce has been engaged in unwaged work in enterprises that can be considered as sites of non-capitalist appropriative class processes. Even among the incorporated household enterprises, i.e., the sites of small capitalist micro-entrepreneurial activities, 60 per cent operate without any hired workers (Hipple and Hammond, 2016).

While self-employment has traditionally provided a key pathway for social and economic mobility in the US, the proportion of self-employed in the higher strata of income distribution has declined significantly since the 1970s (Colaiacovo et al, 2022). Also, the nature and composition of enterprises run by the self-employed

have undergone significant changes over the past five decades. There have been rapid fluxes for the self-employed workforce, with the rate of entry as well as exit from self-employment rising gradually since late 1990s (Shane, 2016). Furthermore, there was a sharp and steady decline in the number of unincorporated household enterprises and a shift towards larger incorporated enterprises over this period (Hipple and Hammond, 2016), indicating a polarisation within this economic space. In this period of rapid decline in unincorporated household enterprises, there has also been a rise in the number of wage workers employed in the enterprises run by the self-employed (Colaiacono et al, 2022), suggesting few micro-entrepreneurial enterprises have been employing higher numbers of wage workers. Studies suggest that this decline in household enterprises in the times of rising wage employment was not driven by expectation of higher wage income, but rather by a squeeze in profitability that made the enterprises unviable (ibid.). This decline in profitability has often been associated with the process of Walmartization and outsourcing (Goetz and Shrestha, 2009).

The Covid-19 pandemic appeared in the background of these conditions. In the two years since the initial wave of Covid-19, three important movements have been taking place in the realm of self-employment. First, in a reversal of the past trend, there has been an upsurge in the number of unincorporated household enterprises with the total number of such enterprises in October of 2021 almost matching the relatively high pre-financial crisis numbers of October 2007 (FRED, 2022). Second, while in the recessionary period that immediately followed the initial waves of the pandemic there was an abrupt decline (of about 14 per cent) in the number of self-employed, by the second quarter of 2021 this number was restored to the pre-pandemic level of 2019, even as the employment rate of salaried and wage workers lagged behind the corresponding levels. Third, much of this regain in self-employment, however, has been driven by unincorporated household enterprises run without any hired workers. Evidence shows between January and October in 2021, there has been a 56 per cent rise in the number of new unincorporated household enterprises applying for federal tax-identification numbers, but two-third of these new entrants are without any hired workers (US Census Bureau, 2022). Further, the number of wage workers in the existing enterprises has fallen by almost 10 per cent in the period (ibid.). In summary, the pandemic seems to have restored the salience

of unincorporated family-based (often non-capitalist) household enterprises and the unwaged work performed therein, overturning the pre-pandemic patterns set in motion over the past decades.

This decline in wagework is increasingly linked to a larger pattern of job quitting that is being witnessed in the US labour market since 2021 (Kochhar, 2021), a phenomenon that became prominent with the introduction of Covid-19 stimulus payments and increased unemployment benefits. The proportion of workers voluntarily resigning from their paid positions had reached a twenty-year high, and, by February 2022, almost 3 per cent of the entire workforce had moved out of their current employment on their own (BLS, 2022). The voluntary and en masse exit has been highest in accommodation and food services, leisure and hospitality, and retail trade (*ibid.*), which are some of the industries that had seen wage stagnation and worsening working conditions over the decades, with rising precarity in employment arrangements, lower benefits and unstable hours. The quitting rates and the speed of quitting are particularly high for workers at the lower stratum of wage distribution and with casual and temporary work arrangements (Kochhar, 2021). The quitting pattern can be seen in continuum with the K-shaped recovery that the US workforce experienced in 2021. While in 2020 the rate of job loss was highest and most precipitous for low wage establishments and workers at the lowest stratum of wage distribution, their subsequent recovery was also seen to be the slowest and the least among all groups (Dalton et al, 2021). While this pattern was observed for all industries, it was most prominent in the industries mentioned above that witnessed highest quit rates (Clark, 2021). The extant situation of crisis in the world of work within the ‘interior’ domain of capital fed into the pandemic-induced recession, requiring strong intervention by the state to manage the instabilities. The policy measures implemented, however, gave rise to an unforeseen – and unwelcome – outcome for capital as even a modicum of financial support to wage workers made it possible for them to quit work, generating conditions of excess demand in the labour market and some increase in wage rates. These phenomena, though, may not be sustained in the longer term as the monetary support tapers off, along with efforts to contain the wages by raising the rate of unemployment (Ruccio, 2022).

The high quitting rate has put under spotlight the gig/platform economy that has been expanding rapidly over the last three decades, with many arguing that such

non-traditional work designs will emerge as a transformative trend in the world of work. By 2017, an estimated 36 per cent of the US adult working population was engaged in some form of independent work (supplemental, temporary, project- or contract-based work) either as their primary source of income or as a secondary source (Upworkt, 2017).¹ This expansion has taken place in a period that saw large-scale informalization of labour processes and a dispersion of the circuit of capital through specific forms of subcontracting and gig work. Even as the digital platform economy served as a fall-back option for many during the pandemic, a great flux was seen in the 2020-2022 period in this economy as well, with new entrants joining after having lost their regular job or having quit the job voluntarily, and the incumbent gig workers moving out. However, during this period, earnings from the platform economy declined or slowed down for the geographically-tethered app workers engaged in local, service-oriented tasks (e.g., driving, running errands or cleaning houses), and increased for the high-skilled independent contractors engaged in professional and business services, information, and financial activities (Anderson et al, 2021; Greig and Sullivan, 2021). Earlier studies on platform workers have described that even before the pandemic, most workers operated under extremely iniquitous work arrangements (Dube et al, 2018). The situation worsened in the Covid-moment, when many left the platform economy. This bears out other evidence showing that the claim of federal unemployment insurance amongst the US platform workers soared at extremely high rate in 2020-2021 (Greig and Sullivan, 2021). These developments indicate an increased strain in this site of disguised wage work, giving rise to acts of resistance, collective activism, and demands for recognition as wage workers with a semblance of workers rights, which have been partially successful in some cases.

To sum up, the above developments in the world of work reflect the embedded contradictions in the capitalist economic formation registered, condensed and negotiated in multiple ways in the global North and the South in the Covid

¹ This phenomenon is seen in other countries as well. For example, in the United Kingdom, the proportion of self-employed people in the total working population has continuously increased since 2000 and stood at about 15 per cent in 2019 prior to the pandemic (OECD, 2020). In Canada, gig workers, consisting of self-employed freelancers, on-demand online workers and day labourers, are estimated to have increased from about one-in-twenty workers among the total Canadian workforce in 2005 to about one-in-ten by 2016 (Jeon et al, 2019). Similar developments are also seen in the global South. For example, according to some estimates, the number of service providers working on digital platforms in India almost doubled in just two years between 2016 and 2018 (Tiwari et al, 2019).

moment. Efforts towards managing these contradictions to sustain a stable reproduction of the capitalist social order, however, only serves to recreate the antagonisms in new forms, without a clear resolution.

7. Conclusion

The Covid-19 moment has brought to surface a number of tendencies and movements that have been developing for long in the world of work. The deep distress and instability that the global working population experienced in their economic lives during the pandemic can, accordingly, be seen as both an outcome and a violent expression of these larger crisis tendencies that contemporary capitalism fosters. We have proposed in our essay that one cogent way to make sense of these tendencies is in terms of the overdetermined contradictions accumulating and coalescing in the present conjuncture in the world of work. In our discussions, we identify some of the processes through which these contradictions manifest in distinct ways in global North and South as: informalization of work and precarization of labour in the 'interior' domain of capital; sustained processes of exclusion that pushes vast segments of working population out of domains of capitalist growth and accumulation into the 'outside' sphere of non-capitalist commodity production; and the insistent dispersion of the circuit of capital to its 'outside' through 'non-standard' work arrangements such as subcontracting, gig and platform work. Capital's continuous drive for accumulation and expanded reproduction has gradually depleted and destabilised the bases on which it depends for its sustenance. This has undermined the very conditions that allow the processes of capitalist reproduction to continue. Thus, the very success of the processes of capitalist growth undermines the conditions that enable these processes to continue, and endogenously create conditions that may generate a systemic crisis. However, such crises situations are forged, or resolved, only in the presence of specific contingent factors. A lack of resolution of the underlying conditions of these crises may result in an extended period of 'interregnum'. While capital seeks to reproduce its conditions of existence within this field of antagonisms by managing these contradictions through various processes of negotiations, such processes have become increasingly tenuous, without inaugurating a new structure of governance

and stable reproduction of the capitalist social order. The widespread and deepening conditions of precarity and deprivation, made visible and accentuated by the pandemic, appear as 'morbid symptoms' of a long-drawn interregnum.

References

- Abraham, R and A. Basole (January 2022) 'Covid-19 and the Informalisation of India's Salaried Workers', *The India Forum*. <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/covid-19-and-informalisation-india-s-salaried-workers> (accessed April 9, 2022).
- Abraham, R., A. Basole, and S. Kesar (2021) 'Down and Out? The Gendered Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on India's Labour Market', *Economia Politica* 42(1-2): 145-164.
- Adhikari, A., N. Goregaonkar, R. Narayanan, N. Panicker and N. Ramamoorthy (2020) 'Manufactured Maladies: Lives and Livelihoods of Migrant Workers during COVID-19 Lockdown in India', *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 63(4): 969-997.
- Althusser, L. (1969) *For Marx*. London: The Penguin Press.
- Althusser, A. (1971) 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 127-86. London: New Left Books.
- Althusser, L. and E. Balibar (1970) *Reading Capital* (Trans. B. Brewster). London: New Left Books.
- Anderson, M., C. McClain, and M. Faverio (2021) *The State of Gig Work in 2021*, Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/12/08/the-state-of-gig-work-in-2021/> (accessed on April 14, 2022)
- Balibar, E. (1996) 'Structural Causality, Overdetermination, and Antagonism', in A. Callari and D. F. Ruccio (eds), *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, pp. 109-119, Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Bamu, P., L. Alfes, L., R. Mudarikwa and T. Kamwimbi (2022) 'Social Protection for Self-Employed Informal Workers in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Rights-based Assessment of the Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis', *WIEGO Resource Document No 24*. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Informalizing
- Banerjee, L., and S. Bhattacharya (2021) 'Labour and the Pandemic: A Study on Work, Employment, and Work Situation', in R. Bhattacharyya, A. Ghosh

- Dastidar, and S. Sikdar (eds.). *The COVID-19 Pandemic, India and the World: Economic and Social Policy Perspectives*, pp. 376-390, Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Bhaduri, A. (2017) 'A Study in Development by Dispossession', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 42(1): 19–31.
- Bhattacharya, R. (2019) 'Labour beyond the labour market: Interrogating marginality', in N. Jammulamadaka (ed.), *Workers and Margins: Grasping Erasures and Opportunities*, pp. 45-62, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bhattacharya, S., and S. Kesar, S. (2020) 'Precarity and development: Production and labor processes in the informal economy in India', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 52(3), 387-408.
- Bhattacharya, T. (2017) *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press.
- Balde, R., M. Boly, and E.K. Avenyo (2020) 'Labour market effects of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa: An informality lens from Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal', *UNU Merit Working Paper Series #2020-022*. Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT)
- Breman, J. (2003) *The Laboring Poor in India: Patterns of Exploitation, Subordination and Exclusion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2022) *The Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey Summary*. Washington, D.C: US Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf>
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2019) *American Time Use —2018*, Washington, D.C: United States Department of Labor.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2017) *Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangement*, Washington, D.C: United States Department of Labor.
- Callari, A. (2010). '2008 A New Chapter for US Imperialism', *Rethinking Marxism* 22(2): 210-218.
- Callari, A., and D. F. Ruccio (1996) 'Introduction: Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory', in A. Callari and D. F. Ruccio (eds), *Postmodern*

- Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, pp. 51-68, Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Centre of Sustainable Employment (CSE) (2018) *State of Working India 2018*. Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. CSE: Bengaluru.
- Centre of Sustainable Employment (CSE) (2021) *State of Working India 2021: One year of Covid-19*. Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. CSE: Bengaluru.
- Chakrabarti, S. (2016) *Inclusive Growth and Social Change: Formal-Informal-Agrarian Relations in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. (2011) *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chen, M., and F. Carré (2020) *The Informal Economy Revisited Examining the Past, Envisioning the Future*. London: Routledge.
- Clarke, J. (2010) 'Of Crises and Conjunctures: The Problem of the Present', *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34(4): 337–354.
- Clarke, J. (2019) 'A Sense of Loss? Unsettled Attachments in the Current Conjuncture', *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 96(1): 132-146.
- Clark, S. (2021) *K-Shaped Recovery Gives Way to Great Resurgence*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce. <https://www.uschamber.com/small-business/k-shaped-recovery-gives-way-great-resurgence> (accessed on April 14, 2022).
- Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) (2021) *How Covid-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective - Volume III*. CCSA.
- Colaiacovo, I., M.G. Dalton, S.P. Kerr, and W.R Kerr. (2022) 'The Transformation of Self Employment', *Working paper No. w29725*. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Dalton, M., J.A. Groen, M.A. Loewenstein, D.S. Piccone, and A.E. Polivka (2021) 'The K-Shaped Recovery: Examining the diverging fortunes of workers in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic using business and household survey microdata', *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 19(3): 527-550.

- De Soto, H. (1989) *The Other Path: The Informal Revolution*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Denning, M. (2010) 'Wageless life', *New Left Review* 66: 79–97.
- Dube, A., J. Jacobs, S. Naidu, and S. Suri (2020) 'Monopsony in Online Labor Markets', *American Economic Review: Insights* 2(1): 33-46.
- Dwyer, R. J., K. Stewart, and J. Zhao (2022) 'Comparison of Cash Transfer Programs in the Global North and South.' doi:10.31234/osf.io/fa4qy (accessed on February 8, 2022)
- EXPO-STU (2021) 'Post Covid-19 Value Chains: Options for Reshoring Production Back to Europe in a Globalised Economy', *European Parliament's Committee on International Trade*. European Parliament.
- Fraser, N. (2017a) 'Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism', in T. Bhattacharya (ed.) *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, pp. 21-36, London: Pluto Press.
- Fraser, N. (2017b) 'Why Two Karls are Better Than One: Integrating Polanyi and Marx in a Critical Theory of the Current Crisis', *Working Paper der DFG-Kollegforscher_innengruppe Postwachstumsgesellschaften, no. 1/2017*. Kolleg Postwachstum-gesellschaften.
- Fraser, N. (2021) "'Cannibal Capitalism' Is on Our Horizon.' Interview by M. Mosquera, *Jacobin*. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/09/nancy-fraser-cannibal-capitalism-interview> (accessed on 3 November 2021).
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (FRED) *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Level - All Industries Self-Employed, Unincorporated* , FRED Economic Data. <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS12027714> (accessed on April 15, 2022).
- Gentilini, U., M. Almenfi, I. Orton, Ian; P. Dale (2021) 'Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19 : A Real-Time Review of Country Measures', *World Bank, Washington, DC*.
- Gibson-Graham, JK., S. A. Resnick, and R. D. Wolff (eds) (2000) *Class and its Others*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press

- Goetz, S.J. and S.S. Shrestha (2009) 'Explaining self-employment success and failure: Wal-Mart versus Starbucks, or Schumpeter versus Putnam', *Social Science Quarterly* 90(1): 22-38
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Greig, F. and D.M. Sullivan (2021) *The Online Platform Economy Through the Pandemic*, JP Morgan Chase Institute. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3956057 (accessed on April 14, 2022).
- Grugel, J. and P. Riggirozzi (2012) 'Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: Rebuilding and Reclaiming the State after Crisis', *Development and Change* 43: 1-21.
- Hale, T., S. Webster, A. Petherick, T. Phillips, and B. Kira (2020) *Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker*, Blavatnik School of Government and University of Oxford. <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/covid-19-government-response-tracker> (accessed on December 2020).
- Hall, S. (2002 [1987]). 'Gramsci and Us', in J. Martin (ed) *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, pp. 227-238. Routledge.
- Hall, S. (2011) 'The Neo-liberal Revolution', *Cultural Studies* 25(6): 705–728.
- Hall, S., C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke, and B. Roberts (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law'n'Order*. London: Macmillan.
- Hall, S. and D. Massey (2010) 'Interpreting the Crisis', *Soundings* 44: 57–71.
- Harvey, D. (2003) *The New Imperialism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hipple S. F. and L.A. Hammond (March 2016). *Self-Employment In The United States*. US Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Hill, R., Lakner, C., Mahler, D., Narayan, A., and Yonzan, N. (September, 2021). *Poverty, Median Incomes, and Inequality in 2021: A Diverging Recovery*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

- Inch, A. and E. Shepherd, E. (2020) 'Thinking Conjuncturally About Ideology, Housing and English Planning', *Planning Theory*, 19(1), pp. 59-79.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2022a) *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2022b) 2021 Labour Overview (published on 01 February 2022) *ILO: After Two Years of the Pandemic, Labour Market Recovery has been Insufficient in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (October 2021a) *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of Work. Eighth edition Updated estimates and analysis*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2021b) *World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends 2021*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (April 2020) *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work - Third Edition Updated Estimates and Analysis*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2018) *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture Third Edition*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2016) *Non-Standard Employment Around the World: Understanding Challenges, Shaping Prospects*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2021) *World Economic Outlook: Managing Divergent Recoveries*. Washington DC: IMF.
- Institute for Supply Management (ISM) (2020) *COVID-19 Survey: Round 3 Supply Chain Disruptions Continue Globally*. ISM.
- <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/covid-19-survey-round-3-supply-chain-disruptions-continue-globally-301096403.html> (accessed on April 14 2022)
- Jain, R., J. Budlender, R. Zizzamia, and I. Bassier (2020) 'The Labour Market and Poverty Impacts of COVID-19 in South Africa', *Working Paper 264, NIDS-*

- CRAM Paper*. Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Johannesburg: University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch, and University of the Witwatersrand.
- Jeon, S.-H., and Y. Ostrovsky (2019). 'Measuring the Gig Economy in Canada using Administrative Data', *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series No. 437*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada
- Jütting, J. and Laiglesia, J. R. De (2009) *Is Informal Normal? Towards More and Better Jobs in Developing Countries*, OECD Development Centre.
- Kesar, S., and S. Bhattacharya (2020) 'Dualism and structural transformation: The informal manufacturing sector in India', *The European Journal of Development Research* 32(3): 560-586.
- Kesar, S., R. Abraham, R. Lahoti, P. Nath, and A. Basole (2021) 'Pandemic, Informality, and Vulnerability: Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in India', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement* 42(1-2): 145-164.
- Kesar, S. (2020). 'Economic Transition, Dualism, and Informality in India', *Centre for Sustainable Employment Working Paper 31*. Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University.
- Kochhar, R. (2021) *The Self-employed are Back at Work in Pre-COVID-19 Numbers, but their Businesses have Smaller Payrolls*. Pew Research Center.
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/03/the-self-employed-are-back-at-work-in-pre-covid-19-numbers-but-their-businesses-have-smaller-payrolls/> (accessed April 9, 2022)
- Lewis, W. A. (1954) 'Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour', *The Manchester School* 22(2): 139-191.
- Li, T. M. (2010) 'To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations', *Antipode* 41: 66-93.
- Li, T. M. (2017) 'After Development: Surplus Population and the Politics of Entitlement', *Development and Change* 48(6): 1247-1261.

- Maloney, W. F. (1999) 'Does Informality Imply Segmentation in Urban Labor Markets? Evidence from Sectoral Transitions in Mexico', *The World Bank Economic Review* 1(2): 275–302.
- Marx, K. ([1867] 1977) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1. New York: Vintage Books.
- Mosoetsa, S., J. Stillerman, and C. Tilly (2016) 'Precarious Labor, South And North: An Introduction', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 89: 5-19.
- Munck, R. (2020) 'Work and Capitalist Globalization: Beyond Dualist Reason', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 52(3): 371-386.
- Negri, A. (1996) 'Notes on the Evolution of the Thought of the Later Louis Althusser', in A. Callari and D. F. Ruccio (eds), *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, pp. 51-68, Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Nun, J. (2000). 'The End of Work and the "Marginal Mass" Thesis', *Latin American Perspectives* 27(1): 6-32.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022) *Self-employed without Employees (Indicator)*, OECD. doi: 10.1787/5d5d0d63-en (Accessed on 14 March 2022).
- Patnaik, P. (2009) *The Value of Money*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Polanyi, K. (2001) *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Portes, A., M. Castells, and L. A. Benton (eds.) (1989) *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Raghunathan , K, D. Sinha, R. Narayanan (March 2022) 'The worsening hunger problem of India's poor'. *The Indian Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-worsening-hunger-problem-of-indias-poor-7835064/> (accessed on April 14, 2022)
- Rakowski, C. A., (ed) (1994) *Contrapunto: The Informal Sector Debate in Latin America*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Resnick, S., and R. D. Wolff (1987) *Knowledge and Class A Marxian Critique of Political Economy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Resnick, S., and R. D. Wolff (2006) *New Departures in Marxian Theory*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Resnick, S., and R. D. Wolff (2010) 'The Economic Crisis: A Marxian Interpretation', *Rethinking Marxism* 22(2): 170-86.
- Ruccio, D. (2022). 'Inflation and the Case of the Missing Profits'. Blogpost: *Occasional Links and Commentary on Economic, Culture, and Society*. <https://anticap.wordpress.com/2022/04/14/inflation-and-the-case-of-the-missing-profits/> (accessed on April 20, 2022)
- Sandbrook, R. (2011) 'Polanyi and Post-neoliberalism in the Global South: Dilemmas of Re-embedding the Economy', *New Political Economy* 16(4): 415-443.
- Sanyal, K. (2007) *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Sanyal, K., and R. Bhattacharya (2009) 'Beyond the Factory: Globalisation, informalisation of production, and the new locations of Labour', *Economic and Political Weekly* XLIV(22): 35-44.
- Scully, B. (2016) 'Precarity North and South: A Southern Critique of Guy Standing', *Global Labor Journal* 7(2): 160–73.
- Shane, S. (2016) 'The Self-Employment Exit Rate is Rising', *Small Business Trends*. <https://smallbiztrends.com/2016/08/more-leaving-self-employment.html> (accessed on April 10, 2022)
- Shanin, T. (1986). 'Chayanov's Message: Illuminations, Miscomprehensions and the Contemporary Development Theory', in A. V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press. Available at: <https://congress1917.gr/archives/1005> (accessed on April 1, 2022).
- Sinha, D (April, 2022) 'Persistence of Food Insecurity and Malnutrition', *The India Forum*.

<https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/persistence-food-insecurity-malnutrition>
(accessed on April 9, 2022)

Sotiris, P. (2014) 'Rethinking Structure and Conjuncture in Althusser', *Historical Materialism* 22(3-4): 5-51.

Stevano, S., R. Ali, and M. Jamieson (2020) 'Essential for What? A Global Social Reproduction View on the Re-Organisation of Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement* 42(1-2):178-199.

Streeck, W (2016) *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*. New York: Verso.

Tabak, F. and M. A. Crichlow (2000) *Informalization: Process and Structure*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Temin, P. (2017) *The Vanishing Middle Class: Prejudice and Power in a Dual Economy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Totapally, S., P. Sonderegger, P. Rao, and G. Gupta. (2020) *Efficacy of Government Entitlements for Low-Income Families During Covid-19*, Dalberg.

The Guardian (November, 2021). 'The Future of Work: Forging an inclusive economy.' *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/the-future-of-work--forging-an-inclusive-economy/ng-interactive/2021/nov/16/more-than-2-billion-workers-make-up-the-informal-economy> (accessed on 17 April, 2022)

Tiwari, Siddharth, Sharmila Ganesan Ram and Sidharatha Roy (February 2019) 'What Is It Like to Work in a Gig Economy Job', *Times of India*.
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-it-is-like-to-work-in-a-gig-economy-job/articleshow/69371217.cms>.

Tsing, A. (2009). 'Supply Chains and the Human Condition', *Rethinking Marxism* 21(2), 148-176.

United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (2020) *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade and development: transitioning to a new normal*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations (2021). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*. New York: United Nations.

United States Census Bureau (2022) *Business Formation Statistics, March 2022*. Washington, D.C: US Department of Commerce. https://www.census.gov/econ/bfs/pdf/bfs_current.pdf (accessed on April 11, 2022)

Upwork. 2017. *Freelancing in America: 2017*. Freelancers-union Upwork, Edelman Intelligence. <https://assets.freelancersunion.org/media/documents/FreelancingInAmericaReport-2017.pdf> (accessed on April 15, 2022)

Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Wolff, R. D. (2005) 'Ideological State Apparatuses, Consumerism, and U.S. Capitalism: Lessons for the Left', *Rethinking Marxism* 17(2): 223-235.

Woodcock, J., and M. Graham (2019) *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.