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Colonial World of Postcolonial Historians: Reification, Theoreticism, and the Neoliberal Reinvention of Tribal Identity in India¹

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jas**Bhabani Shankar Nayak** 

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Abstract

This article develops a critical analysis of the colonial world of the postcolonial historians whose works inadvertently contribute to the process of reconstituting the colonial construction of tribal identities in neoliberal India. The monolithic and colonial construction of tribal identities in postcolonial India reinforces and preserves tribal identities along the lines of the colonial methods of identity formation based on territorialization. The article highlights the problematic features of the territorialization and deterritorialization of tribal identities and their reconstitution. Territorial-based identity formation is now being used and sustained by the neoliberal political and economic ruling and non-ruling elites in order to exploit tribal communities. The existence of upper-caste and class-based Hindu social order is concomitant with a social hierarchy based on the exploitation of tribal communities in India. This article locates the colonial and neoliberal capitalist logic of identity formation that serves elites, and helps to advance the neoliberal political-economic project of the Hindu right. A postmodern logic of identity formation facilitates the expansion of the neoliberal capitalist economy with the process of Hinduization. It contributes to identity formations that divide the people on territorial grounds. The article is divided into four parts. The first outlines the philosophical basis of identity formation and its links with neoliberalism; the second deals with identity formation based on territory; part three documents the debates on tribal identity formation in postcolonial India; and the final part elucidates the capitalist logic inherent in territorial-based identity formations.

Keywords

Postcolonial, identity, tribal, India, Hinduization

Introduction

Much has been written on questions of ‘identity’ and processes of identity formation. Debates on the subject span Marxist, feminist, colonialist, anti-colonialist, postcolonial, ethnic and race

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studies, structural, poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and queer theories. Such debates have been influenced by the social, cultural, political and economic understandings of anthropologists, historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists and development professionals for decades. Employing different disciplinary languages, theoretical and ideological narratives produced by such scholars have conceptualized tribal ‘identity’ or ‘identities’ within their particular objective or subjective material and non-material conditions. The theoreticism of identity formation needs to engage with material and non-material conditions that shape ideas and consciousness on the question of identity. Thus, any analysis on the question of identity or identities is always socially and historically contingent. The outlook depends on the understanding and consciousness about the powers that control the material conditions, and thus determine the nature of both the objective and subjective conceptualization of identities (Mohanty, 1993).

In the present day, colonial and neocolonial lineages of neoliberalism, in alliance with the Hindu right wing (Nayak, 2018a), are reconstituting tribal identities through the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Social theorists Deleuze and Guattari argued that the modern state functions to advance capitalist logics, and that modern societies are defined by concomitant processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. ‘What they deterritorialize with one hand, they reterritorialize with the other’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 257). These processes create ‘neoterritorialities’, like tribal identities, that ‘are often artificial, residual, archaic; but they are archaisms and having a perfectly current function, our modern way of “imbricating,” of sectioning off’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 257). They note that ‘the fascist State . . . has been without doubt capitalism’s most fantastic attempt at economic and political reterritorialization’, and, arguably, we see resonances of this in the contemporary Indian political context (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000: 258).

Such a project, aimed at forging neoterritorialities, has expanded in India with the growth of Hindu right-wing politics under the leadership of Narendra Modi (Nayak, 2018a). The call for ‘One Nation, One Election’ (ONOE) is another attempt to facilitate the centralization of state power to advance the alliances between Hindutva and capitalist forces (Nayak, 2018a; Singh, 2005, 2015). In terms of the identity question in India, ‘Hindi (language), Hindu (religion) and Hindustan (territory)’ are integral to the narrative that Narendra Modi’s government espouses in the process of dismantling the organic and multicultural diversity of contemporary India. This process of disembedding, embedding and re-embedding identities corresponds with the aligning of global capital with Hindu right-wing politics led by Modi. This reconstitution of identities is transforming the way social relations are mediated, facilitating the advance of capitalism in India.

In the case of tribal communities, identities vary based on one’s area of residence, language, culture, religion, and other social and economic practices. In regard to tribal questions, there is seemingly no end to the identity debate, as each person carries his/her individual identity, and at the same time he/she shares a community identity with others.² Identity is neither natural nor static; it is a social, cultural and political relation that is often constructed to serve the interest of the ruling and dominant class, caste and other social and cultural groups.

It is important to move beyond the essentialist foundations of identity politics (Mohanty, 2011) and the postmodernist critiques based on experiential foundationalism in analogous terms (Mohanty, 1993: 44). It is important to understand the idea of the historical construction of identities revealing the ruling class’s manipulation and its divisive ideas on identity formation. The permeation of the capitalist logics in identity formation can be found in the works of Dalton (1872) and Damodaran (2006a, 2006b).³ These works require a critical interrogation of their conceptualization of tribal identity, which is based on a territoriality that carries a colonial legacy that serves contemporary global capitalist interests, as well as the interests of the Indian political, social, economic and cultural elites.

This article addresses two major questions. First, what determinations lead all indigenous populations in India to consider themselves as ‘Adivasi’? Second, what is the nature of interactions between these Adivasi groups, often living in different and often distant territories? If they consider themselves to be ‘Adivasi’, irrespective of their territorial differences, then the idea of identity formation based on territory is highly questionable. Furthermore, if these tribal identities are imposed constructions, rather than endogenous phenomena, the relations between different tribal identities are susceptible to manipulation and exploitation by those who help to consolidate these identities.

This article argues that it is possible to understand tribal identity in terms that Appadurai (1990), not dissimilar to Deleuze and Guattari (2000), has referred to as ‘deterritorialization’. It claims that tribal identity based on territory reflects a postmodern logic of late colonial empire, and that it serves the interests of national elites and a transnational capitalist class. These forces are behind the contemporary capitalist revivalism in politics, economics and culture, which imbues academic research as well. Territorial identity diminishes the tribal cosmology, and the wider meanings attached to their identities and the dynamic processes involved in identity formation. The territorialization and deterritorialization of tribal identity is an inevitable part of economic globalization, which changes cultural identities. It also determines the nature of labour movements, spreading the ideas about territorial identity to regionalize labour within the periphery to make it inexpensive, compliant and sluggish. In the process, it helps both to mobilize capital and to accumulate further as the cycle of deterritorialization and reterritorialization continues under the neoliberal Modi regime with the marketization of Hindutva politics in India (Chacko, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand how neoliberalism is associated with the processes of contemporary identity formation.

Neoliberalism and identity

Identity formation in the context of neoliberalism derives from three distinct but interrelated processes: personal self-reflection, individual choice and social assignation (Davis, 2009). Neoliberalism reshapes the first two components of identity formation, and creates an illusory socialization, with the ideals of so-called freedom and individual autonomy used to advance free market economics (Wrenn, 2012). Neoliberalism designates and positively sanctions individual identities that further the penetration of, and reinforce the logic of, the market. Individuals and their financial abilities to access products in the market defines their identities. If individuals fail to conform to market logics, and thus fail financially, their identities are framed in negative terms such as ‘loser’, ‘trailer trash’, ‘ghetto’ and ‘welfare queen’ (George, 2006 as cited in Wrenn, 2012).

Such commodity-market and consumption-based identities are a defining characteristic of contemporary neoliberal identity formation. O’Neill (1998) refers to these as purchased identities, which dismantle both individual and group identities to reshape society into a form which advances the capitalist socio-economic order. The relatively new economic and social order of neoliberal capitalism creates individual identities that are based on ideas of autonomous selfhood and individualized responsibilities. Wrenn describes a neoliberal identity as one which is ‘isolating, disconnected from any larger community, and as such leaves the individual alienated’ (Wrenn, 2014: 507). This alienated and lonely individual identity is central to the growth of a capitalist society, preserving a desire for mass-produced commodities to alleviate the lack that such identities generate. Therefore, it is important to understand the philosophical foundation of the construction and destruction of individual identities based on its compatibility with neoliberal capitalism.

The idea of identity

Individual identities vary from each other based on personal characteristics and uniqueness. But individuals are also members of social, cultural, political and economic groups based on their shared similarities with others. These group identities are also different from each other. It brings the idea of identity to the centre stage of the debate. Identity is a mark that distinguishes an individual or a community from their closest relatives. However, identity is not a fixed term that can be applied universally (Butler, 1990: 7); rather, it is a complex construction produced and reproduced in different forms in the different contexts of gender, race, class, sexuality, education and culture (Gauntlett, 2002: 13). Identities are based on a combination of acts (Sedgwick, 1990) that often takes the form of hierarchical social categories (Butler, 1990), culture (Kellner, 1995, 2003), history, difference, representation, social institutions, and stories that define and shape the self through recursive and self-reflexive processes. In short, identity is the product of a 'relational ethic [and] a discursive effect of the social . . . constituted through identifications' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000: 83).

The philosophical basis of the notion of identity is still a matter of debate. As Sen points out, when we shift from 'the notion of being identical to oneself to that of sharing an identity with others of a particular group (which is the form the idea of social identity very often takes), the complexity increases further' (2006: xii). There are divergent foci in the study of identity – specifically, individual identity (one's own self), community identity (sharing one's own self with others), and the idea of identity as the product of one's time and place. These are three different ways of looking at identity formation that can be studied separately.

Identity as a reflection of one's own self

The concept of identity as a reflection of one's own self as an individual depends on one's birth, sex, and other social, political, cultural and economic determinants such as class, race, region, religion, gender and nationality. These determinants play a vital role in the shaping of one's identity, which also changes over time as a result of one's experience, belief and activities (O'Neill and Toye, 1998: xv). Poststructuralist and postmodern theorists, however, consider such an analysis to be too simplistic. They argue that self-identity is not unitary, but is 'composed of a set of multiple and contradictory subjectivities or subject positions' (Sarup, 1996: 34).⁴ By denouncing the meta-narrative (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001) of 'self' identity formation, postmodern theorists not only reject the universal notions of rationality and totality, but also emphasize plurality over singularity and difference over homogeneity (Best and Kellner, 1991). They suggest that self-identity has become a mere reflection and representation of one's self.

Through the processes of conceptualizing individual identities, the world and our existence becomes a fragmentation of the whole, and it is decentred into atomized lives. As Ernesto Laclau puts it, 'the psychoanalytic category of identification' explicitly asserts that there is 'a lack at the root of any identity; one needs to identify with someone because there is an originary and insurmountable lack of identity' (cited in Alcoff, 2000a: 320). The more one expresses an insistence on identity, the more one is evidently suffering from such lack. Freud argued that the effort to overcome the unavoidable disunity of the self through a collective identification or group solidarity may itself be the sign of a pathological condition, one caused by 'the inability of the ego to regain autonomy following the loss of an object of desire' (Steinberg as cited in Alcoff, 2000b: 320).

The desire to overcome lack through identity formation is not free from material conditions. Physical appearance, for example, is crucial, as 'our "visible" and acknowledged identit[ies] affects our relations in the world, which in turn affects our interior life, that is, our lived experience or

subjectivity' (Alcoff, 2006: 92). So too, individuals' access to particular schools, colleges and universities depends on their ability to pay tuition fees. These educational institutions, in turn, do far more than simply disseminating knowledge; they indelibly shape one's professional and personal identity.

Identity as a sharing of one's self with others

The sharing of one's sense of self with others creates certain forms of identity or identities based on time (when), place (where) and processes (how). The construction of identity based on the question of 'when, where, [and] how am I?' (Minh-Ha, 1992: 157) takes us to a different milieu. The question of identity formation based on 'when' queries the role of time specificities, and 'where' delves into the role of place or geographical territory. 'How' questions the processes of identity formation, which include three things: time, place and people, which can also be defined as one's environment (natural, social, economic, political and cultural).

Therefore, identity formation and the categorization of identities that define gender, race and class differences are historically situated (McLaren, 1995), hierarchically produced (Butler, 1990), culturally constructed (Kellner, 1995), relationally formed (Butler, 1990; Currie, 1998) and narratively practised (Currie, 1998; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Anthropologists including Unnithan-Kumar (1997) argue that such identities are sustained by communities. Such theorizations of identity formation, however, need to be scrutinized based on their particular contexts, which are determined by time, place, environment and other social, political, economic and cultural processes. As Keen expresses:

Theories can therefore be judged by their assumptions to some extent, if one has an intelligent taxonomy of assumptions. A theory may well draw power from 'unrealistic' assumptions if those assumptions assert, rightly, that some factors are unimportant in determining the phenomenon under investigation. But it will be hobbled if those assumptions specify the domain of the theory, and the real-world phenomena are outside that domain. (2002: 153)

Thus, it is necessary to understand the interplay of real-world phenomena that are the products of land and environment, and their contribution to the formation of individual and community identity or identities.

Land, environment and identity formations

The territorialization of land and the environment has determined identity formation during and since the colonial regime in India. Historically, territorialization of identity based on land and environment is a method by which the colonial and postcolonial states have tried to discipline landscapes (Guha, 1990, 1999; Scott, 1998; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999). It was further accelerated through the process of mapping, surveys, settlements, categorization of people in census reports, and land classifications. Such classifications create an 'internal territorialization' that works as a 'strategy to control the resources' by dividing people, land and environment into economic and political zones. In the process, it rearranges people and establishes the norms for using land and other resources (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995; Peluso and Vandergeest, 2001).

Contemporary developmental interventions are the product of such territorialization of land and people in India. In these processes, communities 'are refracted, reworked and sometimes subverted in particular localities . . . particular intervention articulate with deeper histories of government attempts to regulate and discipline landscapes and livelihoods' (Moore, 2000: 655). Historically,

this process of demarcating land, people and environments started as a part of modern state formation. At present, it is being used as a strategy to control natural resources in the name of national development, and to divide people based on territorial identities to control and thwart working-class unity, irrespective of their social, cultural and religious differences.

Such divisions help regional elites to govern and continue their hegemony over the people by impeding challenges to their position as compradors of capital in a larger sense. Such subjective conditions, however, are overlooked in the historicization of the territoriality of tribal identity, such as in the work of Damodaran. Her conceptualization of tribal identity based on territory is reductionist, as it diminishes the indigenous cosmological relationship of tribals with their land to a document of tribal land rights. Tribal identity, however, forms out of their interaction with their physical environment, which provides a base upon which to assert their natural indigenous identity. Such a collectivist identity is a significant and communal natural right of tribals over natural resources. But the colonial historical legacy of the Cambridge School historians such as Damodaran and romantic anthropologists such as Verrier Elwin (1964) has tried to assert the uniqueness of tribal identity based on territoriality. It continues to advance arguments for the formation of a multicultural society which is on the verge of collapse due to various economic and political factors promoted by neoliberal Hindutva. The neoliberal Hindutva further dismantles the group identities of tribals and their communal right over resources.

The idealization of tribal identity by anthropologists, and its further construction by historians, fails to consider tribal multiculturalism. They cherish a romanticized picture of the individualized territorial tribal cultural identity. Thus, there is a difference between the essence of identity for a multicultural society and the necessity to assert identity to preserve an idealization. This fantasized image of territorial identity, and the attendant notions of its ecological sustainability, has led to the fictionalized depiction and construction of tribal identity as ‘ecologically noble savages’ (Redford, 1991). As Guha (1989) suggest, it is but a construction of western environmentalists. Gupta takes the argument further by saying that ‘the effectiveness of “indigenous” identity depends on its *recognition* by hegemonic discourses of imperialist nostalgia, where poor and marginal people are romanticized at the same time that their way of life is destroyed’ (1998: 18).

Tribal cosmology and their ideas on identity

Tribal identity is inalienable from the physical environment, and the interactions with the latter that are necessary for sustaining life and livelihood. This material interaction with the physical environment, which includes working the land for life and livelihood, creates indigenous cosmological relationships and underpins the wider meaning system attached to them. To quote Raymond Williams in this context: ‘We have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out’ (1980: 83). This materiality of the tribals’ interaction with nature forms the basis for their cultural, communitarian and individual identity, which cannot be narrowed down to the territorial construction of identity. Such a cosmological construction of identity is not ‘under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past’ (Marx, 1963 [1852]: 15). Following a Marxian logic of identity formation, Tania Li argues that ‘a group’s self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed’. She adds: ‘it is rather, a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle’ (Li, 2000: 150).

The present debate on tribal identity ignores historical factors in the creation and generational diffusion of tribal identity, and the subjective and objective engagements attached to such a

process. The whole discourse of tribal identity based on indigeneity is, in large part, a product of a transnational alliance of national governments, international organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and anthropologists (see Conklin and Graham 1995), intended to create an identity of ‘self’ in contrast to ‘the other’. This process was started during colonial rule, sustained during the anti-colonial national struggle, and engrained during the postcolonial successive governments.

Tribal identity in postcolonial India

The notion of tribal identity in postcolonial India consolidates, normalizes and institutionalizes the colonial paradigm of identity formation based on territory and region. The institutionalization of territorial identity during India’s postcolonial era is a product of its domestic politics, providing ground to the regional political formations that play a vital role in national politics. This process has reinforced and rationalized the idea of identity formation based on region and territory that has been advanced further by a neoliberal model of development policy, which is opposed to the idea of a unitary national polity. Generating political disengagements and disenchantments are part of a conscious neoliberal agenda, which dislocates power into different territorial locations in the name of decentralization and public participation (Nayak, 2018a). Such neoliberal political processes influence the economy to a great degree in a nation state in which citizens form identities based on their designation as consumers.

Thus, the success or failure of the democratic polity depends on the economy and market as designed by neoliberal elites. The development of such a paradigm of alliances between the economy and polity, the institutionalization of regional politics through the federal polity, and a unitary economic policy have contributed to the growth of regional disparities in development. These disparities have in turn strengthened identity formation based on region and territory.

Hinduization, territorialization and the changing notion of tribal identity in India

The Hindu religion or Hinduism may appear diverse, but it shows strong tendencies towards an arbitrary and authoritarian outlook in its unstructured theology. It is indeed diverse in its practice, as it gives space to different cults of thoughts, beliefs and spiritual traditions to prevail within its unstructured philosophy, which ostensibly provides greater freedom to individuals to follow and practise their faith and beliefs in their own way.⁵ Hinduism is, however, arbitrary in its philosophical principles and goals.

As an illustration, we can take *The Bhagavad Gita*⁶ (God’s Song), in which the cardinal philosophical principles and goal of Hindu religion is based on the doctrine of *Karma*⁷ (duty), which is centred around *Dharma* (religion or righteousness), which can provide *Artha* (wealth/power/fame) and be achieved through *Bhakti* (devotion). These four steps can provide the basis for *Gyana/Vidya* (knowledge) for the realization of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, which can lead towards *Punarjanma* (reincarnation). But the final goal is *Moksa* (deliverance or salvation) or *Nirvana* (freedom from the cyclic process of birth and rebirth). This is the state where the human body/life unites/reunites with the supreme soul – the universal god. The final goal can be achieved by following the steps of *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Dharma*.⁸

The first four principles constitute the path of desire and the last three principles are the path towards renunciation. One can practise and follow any spiritual cult, belief and tradition in the Hindu religion, as there is diversity in means, but the goal and its framework are arbitrary and autocratic. This philosophy has influenced and justified the prominence of economic thinking and development planning in India during the neoliberal regime established during the 1991 economic

reforms. Any attempt to question the neoliberal economic and development policy is considered as anti-development, and economic growth is framed as the path to salvation for India. Like the theory of *Karma*, neoliberal development thinkers frame the issues of inequality, poverty, marginalization and underdevelopment as products of state failure, the inefficiency of the state and market failure. As in Hindu theology, the advocates of the neoliberal market talk about the solution of these problems as very much long-term goals, just as Hinduism frames *Nirvana/Moksa*; there is no time limit to achieve it (Nayak, 2018b).

The relationship between Hinduism and the capitalist system runs counter to the traditional Weberian theorization, which has been criticized on several accounts (Gellner, 1982; Nayak, 2018a). Still, Weber's argument contributes to our understanding of contemporary capitalism in India and its relationship with the Hindu religion. Modernization theorists take Weber's (1958) argument further, and consider Hinduism as a 'major stumbling block for modernisation' in India (Sinha, 1974: 519).⁹ In the Weberian sense, modernization entails the rationalization of the capitalist order by the removal of capitalist vices from the system. Such arguments by modernization theorists, following the Weberian legacy, can be challenged on the ground that Hinduism provides a philosophical and ideological foundation, as well as social and spiritual legitimacy, to the neoliberal market. It rationalizes capitalistic virtues to promote the growth of capitalism in Indian society and co-opts the tenets of resistance movements within its project. This process is facilitated by the Hindu right-wing forces that derive their social legitimacy and philosophical justification from the Hindu religion (Nayak, 2018a, 2018b).

The postcolonial development planning is also influenced by India's diverse culture, which, some argue, provides an important site of resistance to monolithic neoliberal economic policies (Cameron and Ndhlovu, 2001: 61–72). Cameron and Ndhlovu (2001) have taken the example of the culture that derives from Hinduism or the Hindu religion to identify the intellectual and philosophical legacy of resistance to neoliberal policies of liberalization and globalization.¹⁰ There is no doubt that the Hindu religion has an immense influence on economic thought, economic policy and development planning in India (Kapp, 1963).

The basic fallacies in the argument put forth by Cameron and Ndhlovu (2001) lie within the contradictory and often confusing projects within the Hindu religion that help the neoliberal economy to grow within the contemporary Indian economic landscape. With the influence of neoliberal economic ideas, there has been a decline of state and government, which has in turn given rise to Hindu right-wing forces that derive their political legitimacy and philosophical justification from the Hindu religion. The neoliberal project has formed an alliance with Hindu right-wing forces to spread its ideas and the capitalist market, and this alliance has strongly influenced Indian economic planning in recent times. However, the development planning and tribal development policies followed a top-down approach and did not engage with the diverse indigenous cultures.

Politically speaking, the nationalization of north-Indian Hindu traditions was an interactive process in which both colonialists and Hindutva nationalists contributed to the formation of an indigenous (Hindu) cultural and political identity. The resulting cultural and political identity of Hindu nationalists has given a political platform to the Hindu right-wing forces in postcolonial Indian politics. The cultural logic of Hindu right-wing politics derives its strength from three idioms: (a) the political culture of British colonialism; (b) the pre-colonial classical Hindu tradition; and (c) the interaction between that tradition and British colonial ideology, which produced this third idiom of a nationalist modernist tradition during 19th-century colonial India (Dalmia, 1999). These three idioms provide the basis for the narrow, nationalistic politics of Hindu right-wing forces that have influenced the development planning and economic policy of postcolonial India. Such a political, economic and cultural transformation in India attempts to integrate tribal cultural identities within a broader Hindu culture as outlined by the Hindutva right wing forces (Nayak, 2018a).

There have been many attempts to study the relationship between the Hindu right and neo-liberalism. The work of Deshpande (2000: 211) reveals that there is a contradictory, as well as complementary, relationship between Hindutva and the neoliberal economy, which highlights the fact that the relationship between the two is far from one-dimensional. In her work, Desai (2016) locates an uneasy interaction between the neoliberalized economy, fascism and Hindu right-wing politics, although she affirms that Hindu right-wing forces are pursuing agendas of neoliberal development. These contradictions and collaborations between Hindu right-wing politics and the neoliberal economy are a part of the larger philosophy of neoliberalism.¹¹ The dominant class and their capitalist ideologues are trying to integrate the people into the market, and are attempting likewise to mould their identities accordingly, and to convince them that it is in their own interest to temper resistance to a free market economy under neoliberalism (Petras and Henry, 2001: 8). In this process, the integrative and absorbing role played by religion (Geertz, 1965) provides an ideological veil to the pursuit of such a goal, while right-wing forces take the free market logic further.¹²

In India, the Hindu religion and its right-wing forces provide a base to uphold and pursue the economic interests of the neoliberal market and of the capitalist class, and to mould identities accordingly. The neoliberal philosophy is based on the idea of an open market that creates poverty, generates marginalization, and increases the size of an impoverished class within the population (Nayak, 2018a).

Resonant with this view, several non-Marxist scholars follow the Marxian tradition while making a critique of open market systems or free market capitalism, and argue that the cultural, religious or ideological ethics that sustain such a system are the root cause of economic injustices and underdevelopment (Korten, 1995; Meek, 1989). Recent works by Mirowski (2013, 2018) and Nunn (2019), for example, provide a critical outlook on the conceptualization of neoliberalism. Mirowski (2013, 2018) argues that the neoliberal thought collective reshaped the very terrain of knowledge production has successfully engrained its market doctrines in the cultural unconscious. The relationship between neoliberalism and Hinduism can be conceptualized from Weber's (1963) comparative analysis of world religions, helping to understand their impact on social and economic development and the origin of modern capitalist societies.

Similar Weberian legacies continue to dominate the discourse on religion and economic development in the works of many researchers.¹³ It is not the starting point, but a demarcating point, to understand the relationship between a religion and a capitalist economy in contemporary times.

Gradually, the interaction between religion and the economy in India has created institutionalized forms of religious activities with economic motives. Religions in general serve as instruments of mass domestication; through their regulatory mechanisms they wield control over the lives and labour of individuals and communities. The regulatory mechanisms imposed by religion help in disciplining members of the labour force, such discipline being a requirement for the sustenance of capitalism and its system (Grossman, 2006). As Borkenau has it, 'The construction of norms for the regulation of social life and individual behaviour is a compelling need of capitalism, so long as it wishes to proclaim itself as a universal form of social life' (Borkenau, 1971: 96, as cited in Grossman, 2006: 201). In India, Hindus constitute 85% of the population, and thus the Hindu religion provides a significant base with which to control the labour power of the masses (Nayak, 2018b).

Over time, religious organizations and their institutions continue to exist in one form or another, and they influence development policies and economics in general by institutionalizing their right to own property and to run educational and health institutions,¹⁴ serving as non-familial, non-royal, non-political social organizations beyond the state (Little, 1978). This has given rise to the idea that non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations¹⁵ affiliated with religious

organizations with neoliberal ideologies. The organizations carry forward welfare work among the people and create social base for these organizations with religious and economic motivation. Such work, and the social structures it creates, sustains poverty, inequality and exploitation. These organizations work as an assuaging agency to pacify resistance movements against the predicaments created by the capitalist market system. Meanwhile, with the help of such organizations, capitalist market systems are promoted with talk about 'participation, empowerment and democratisation' and about them as 'empowering' communities. This language is the part of the new 'theology of development', which has its roots in religion (Henkel and Stirrat, 2002: 177). It provides the cultural, philosophical and ideological justification for the new development orthodoxy carried out by NGOs and which is sponsored by both state and non-state actors. In the new development orthodoxy, 'control is exercised in such a way that participants appear to be controlling themselves; individuals attest to their conversion; sinners admit their faults before they see the light' (Henkel and Stirrat, 2002: 178). Such behaviour is seen in the religious revivalist tradition followed by advocates of neoliberal economic development, in which such advocates admit their failures and mistakes publicly.¹⁶

Growth of NGOs and their impact on social development and identity formation

The growth of NGOs and the advance of the developmental process during the new economic reform period in India has led to the decline of the state's legitimacy over its citizens, which has created a gap between the people and the state.¹⁷ It has also led to the rise of resistance movements to claim rights for the citizenship. The gap created by the minimized role of the state is covered by the actions of NGOs and CSOs (Fisher, 1995, 1997) in the processes of globalization, which attenuates resistance movements. It has been argued that this new informal institutional trend, created through the growth of NGOs in the development process, has led to increased volatility in culturally plural societies (Appadurai, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1994). In politics, it has increased the interdependence between political actors and the globalization of capitalism and power (Fisher, 1997: 440). This interdependence has led to the formation of a three-way 'troika' relationship between NGOs, the state, and world capitalism (Kothari, 1986).

However, many scholars see the growth of NGOs as having great potential in alleviating rural poverty (Brown and Korten, 1989; Korten, 1990), and in creating a global civil society (Peterson, 1992; Sanyal, 1994). In this discourse, NGOs enable and empower people through social movements, which can contribute to an alternative development discourse, which questions the dominant development paradigm and documents its flaws (Escobar, 1992, 1995; Patkar, 1995). In short, the overall impact of NGOs on development is difficult to locate due to the heterogeneous nature and scope of NGO activities (Fisher, 1997). Similarly, it is difficult to generalize all NGOs as part of the development framework, as they are sponsored variously by the state, national, multinational and transnational capitalist and non-capitalist interests. Thus, the debate on the growth of NGOs and the nature of their activities and interactions with state, society and global capitalism is so diverse that it is difficult to allow a single approach to define the troika relationship between them. It is clear, however, that in some contexts NGOs and CSOs function as the ideological state apparatuses of capitalism (Althusser, 1971), creating a foundation of conservative social and economic order that is concomitant with capitalism. As stated above, in the Indian context the conservative social order is a Hindutva social order based on a Hindu caste society (Nayak, 2018b).

NGOs have become the favoured institutional set-up for development agencies both globally and nationally (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). The use of NGOs enables the de-politicization of

development, which in turn reinforces problems that are structural and political (Ferguson, 1997). Development anthropologists (Henkel and Stirrat, 2002; Stirrat, 2000) locate such processes as a by-product of a new development orthodoxy that talks about 'participation, empowerment and democratisation'. Such language is a facet of the new theology of NGO-led territorial development, which takes place with the help of local elites and government agents (Hirschman, 1987; Sanyal, 1994). The growth of NGOs, CSOs and the depoliticization of development have created a culture of consultancy reinforcing the existing power relations and inequalities within society (Henkel and Stirrat, 2002; Stirrat, 2000). Thus, NGOs prefer to maintain the territorial status quo in the social, economic and political structure rather than to change it (Fowler, 1993; Ndegwa, 1996; Starn, 1995).

Many consider third-sector-led development as a form of colonization of the masses with the help of local elites, government agents, international agencies and donors (Fisher, 1995; Jhamtani, 1992; Reilly, 1992), encompassing local and national boundaries (Kothari, 1993). In the Indian context, Karat (1988) considers NGOs with foreign collaborators as anti-nationalist agents of capitalism that promote western political and cultural values. This is possible due to the patron-client relationship between NGOs and their donors (Mehta, 1996). There is a difference between the rhetoric of NGOs and reality (Baviskar, 1995), and notions that the proponents of NGOs are doing good and are unencumbered and untainted by the politics of government or the greed of the market, as outlined in the work of Zivetz (1991), are fanciful. The process of economic reforms has accelerated such a development discourse, and has applied it to all Indian states with the help of the Indian federal polity and its centralized financial federal structure as prescribed by the Constitution.¹⁸

The politics of co-option and dominance

The reinforcement or reinvention of identity is a source for the politics of co-option and dominance. The ability to give a meaning to the identity of a person or a community, and to sustain, revive, reinvent and reinforce that identity, confers tremendous power. The ideological process of identity formulation provides a base for ruling and non-ruling elites to sustain their power over the people. In the words of Mann, 'you have ideological power if you "monopolize a claim to meaning", "monopolize norms", and "monopolize aesthetic/ritual practices"' (1986: 22).

A monopoly over one's community or individual identity creates an ideological power that allows one to control people by inculcating certain values and norms of behaving in their personal and public life. The practice of these values and norms over a long span of time creates tradition. Thus, traditions are invented to preserve norms and values in individual and community life, and to regulate behaviour in the society (Hobsbawm, 1983, 1996). Such traditions take different forms and manifest themselves in the linguistic, cultural, social, economic, political and religious lives of the individual and of the community. The manifestations of identity based on these categories are extensions of different forms of power intended to control the people.

In India, the values and norms of tradition are in a process of transition. The identities based on traditional categories are disintegrating due to a variety of reasons (i.e. globalization, industrialization, war, natural calamities, economic crisis, etc.), creating an opportunity for territorial identity to be used as a means to uphold the power to control and dominate. In the process of territorial identity formation, the elites from marginal groups are co-opted within the territorialized power structure. This process of co-option works as a hegemonizing power over marginalized groups. This can be seen in the microcosm of social life when individuals from a marginalized group, such as the tribals of India, rise above the social structure in which they were born, and become tacit agents for the territorialized power structure. As Ong has

observed, the anthropological articulations of the global and the local often construe ‘the global as political, economic and the local as cultural’ (Ong, 1999: 4).¹⁹

Focusing on the cultural sphere alone, however, does not help us to understand the material conditions, social structures, economic and political paradigms that decide the nature of identity formation and change.

Globalization and tribal identity: Territorialization of labour and the deterritorialization of capital

Identity formation is an inevitable part of contemporary capitalist globalization. The process of globalization actively involves the construction, destruction and reconstruction of individual and community identities to promote the smooth movement of capital. As Benyon and Hudson put it:

Not all capitals are equally mobile, and not all working people are equally immobile, but in general capital is more mobile than labor. Locations that, for capital, are a (temporary) space for profitable production, are for workers and their families and friends, places in which to live; places in which they have considerable individual and collective cultural investment; places to which they are often deeply attached. (1993: 182)

If an individual or community identity suits the process of the globalization of capital, then agents of globalization try to protect that identity. If an individual or community identity creates an obstacle in any form, then agents of globalization try to reconstruct those identities concomitant with their objective of free movement of capital and market. The deterritorialization of capital is an inevitable process of capitalist globalization in its drive to accumulate more profit, but which requires fixing labour within a territory.²⁰

The deterritorialization and subsequent mobilization of corporate capital puts labourers in a disadvantaged position. This process gives rise to a new mode of production, which Burawoy calls ‘hegemonic despotism’; he goes on to suggest that corporate capital mobility has created a situation in which the:

tyranny of the overseer over individual workers has been replaced by the tyranny of capital mobility over the collective worker . . . the fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, transfer of operations and plant disinvestment. (1985: 150)

Under such conditions, capital decides the mobility of labour. The impact of such a process is characterized as the ‘erosion of locality’ by geographers and ethnographers (Benyon and Hudson, 1993; Peck, 1996; Storper and Walker, 1989). The erosion of locality takes place in the case of capital, whereas for labourers, their identity remains tethered within the territorial boundary that produces the territorial identity of the people belonging to the place.

A critique of deterritorialization is thus not a lament for an imputed golden age of close-knit communities – what Rosaldo has called ‘imperialist nostalgia’ (1985). An attempt has been made here to study the way globalization is influencing the construction of tribal identity based on territory. In the popular imagination, the effects of globalization on tribal identity in India are most often gauged by the loss of tribal identity and the disintegration of tribal communitarian culture, which is certainly occurring in their everyday lives (Nayak, 2018a). There has been less attention paid to the question of how the processes of globalization are reinforcing tribal identity based on locality and region. Such processes promote a territorial identity for tribals in India, which restores a colonial construction of tribal identity that divides tribal unity based on different regions. This process was part of the colonial legacy, where a large tribal population was kept

out of the mainstream in order to weaken the anti-colonial national struggle for freedom. Dalton's (1872) classic study reaffirms the way tribal identity based on territory was constructed by the colonial British rulers. Its legacy continues in the processes of globalization in India, which construes tribal identity based on territoriality (Bert, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2019).

Neither deterritorialization, localization, nor territorialization of tribal identities is unambiguously good or bad for tribals. These identity formulations provide a means for global capitalism to manage cheap labourers by way of territorial identity. This process creates territorial networks (Portes and Landolt, 1996; Schulman and Anderson, 1999) and degrees of connectedness which can entrench inequalities and reproduce existing power relations based on hierarchy and exploitation.

There are two problems attached to the identity of the working class, irrespective of gender, race, region, religion, nation, caste and tribe. The first is that of the independent creation of identity through perception of one's own self or by the other. This process can lead to either denial of self-identity by the imposition of an identity by others, or to creation of a self-atomized identity in which individual alienation is at its peak. The second is that of acquiring or inheriting an identity from the social, cultural, political and economic life in the society. In the process of acquiring an identity from the existing system, we inherit the culture of unequal power relations and the exploitative structures of the bourgeois and feudal societies, which are based on authority, collaboration and subordination.

Thus, the idea of identity becomes problematic in the neoliberal processes of identity formation and becomes detrimental to working-class interests, while the territorialization of identity accentuates the problem of working classes. These are 21st-century dilemmas that can perhaps best be understood as dilemmas of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Although workers of previous eras had to construct shared understandings and solidarity out of sometimes fractious communities, under neoliberal production regimes, workers must often create community itself before they start to construct solidarity. It is not just the greater mobility of corporations that has changed, but the ways whereby firms associate with the places where they do business: the reduction of multi-stranded relationships with a specific place to single-stranded economic relationships in space (Harvey, 1989).

Market expansion, crisis and the disintegration of the communal identity

Neoliberalism attempts to divide and police the individual identity of the self and the identity of the other based on community. It has created tension between community and the individual, incorporating the individual self as a consumer, while framing the community as an obstacle to consumer gratification and the satisfaction of the desires of the self. This process promotes the idea of the individual self-identity and the community identity as contradictory to each other. This leads to the disintegration of the communal identity as a part of the neoliberal philosophy of market expansion.

The neoliberal market cannot expand without creating boundaries between different autonomous individual identities, both in terms of individual and community identity. The division between individual and community identity has a social, cultural and political logic, apart from its economic logic. The Hindutva cultural, social and political logic of identity is essential to sustain the exclusiveness for hierarchy and exploitation. 'Much of what has been written about identity during this period seeks to de-legitimate, and in some cases eliminate, the concept itself by revealing its ontological, epistemological, and political limitations' (Moya, 2000: 2). Thus, it is important to understand the philosophical basis of identity to grasp its historical formations and social constructions, even within the disintegration of shared identity and the growth of individual identity based on the narrow logic of consumption and consumerism.

Sustaining the exclusiveness for inequality and exploitation of tribals

The ideas surrounding tribal identity and its construction, sustenance, and the method of its assertion is a process that creates exclusiveness based on essentialist claims. The arguments around such a conceptualization can be demolished at any point of time, because of the functional and objective conditions created by the same idea of essence, driven by the interests of capital and the state. Thus, the essentialist claim of exclusiveness of tribal identity is not only fragile, but also by design promotes the exploitation and vulnerability of tribal communities. The exclusiveness of tribal identity reduces their unique identities for the sake of democratic representation. Such arguments are advanced to claim a share from the state-led development processes through constitutional provisions of affirmative action. They reduce the idea of an egalitarian approach to citizenship and affirmative action. This presents a benevolent view of India as a modern nation state, and tribals are continued to be treated as 'subjects'. Such a charitable view of citizenship and the notion of tribal development through limited constitutional provision is demeaning of tribal identities.

The framework within which the exclusiveness of tribal identity works in India is changing as per the requirements of the mainstream elites, and this has led to ethnic conflicts in different parts of rural and urban India. The violence of recent days has its root in some form of identity assertion, dominance, or denial. The assertions of identity and dominance by certain groups derive their strength from regional and religious forces. It depends on their share in the population, which gives rise to the idea of minority and majority identity. The recent violence in Mumbai, based on the opposition of the native Maharashtrian 'self' to the non-Maharashtrians from Bihar and UP (North Indians) 'other', is one example of many. The violent uprisings in Northeast India, Tamilnadu, the Telengana area and Andhra Pradesh have their cultural and economic roots based on either dominance or denial of identity in one form or the other.

Conclusion

The social, cultural and environmental realities of tribal lives and communities are extremely complex and defy clear categorization. Thus, construction of tribal identities based on territory is not only reductionist in its approach, but also negates the very idea of 'identity' itself. The territorialization of tribal identity formation helps elites to continue the politics of marginalization by creating different territorial identities among tribals. It is a divisive idea to territorialize tribal identity, which in turn territorializes the crisis in the tribal society. This crisis is treated as inherent in tribal society, disregarding the contribution from external forces such as the state, the market and mainstream culture. Furthermore, the territorial construction of tribal identity was a colonial project intended to keep tribals isolated from the mainstream nationalist movement and to weaken the movement against colonial rule. Such a trend continues to exist in postcolonial India to weaken resistance to neoliberalism.

Another issue with the conceptualization of the colonial construction of tribal identity is that it is a reductionist idea that negates the tribal identities of the pre-colonial period. With the argument that territorial tribal identity is a colonial construction, historians such as Damodaran inadvertently justify the contribution of colonialism in that it gave a sense of self and identity to tribals. This is not only historically wrong, but is also a colonial idea in itself. Dalton's colonial legacy is continued in the works of postcolonial historians such as Damodaran (2006a, 2006b), and is reflected in the postcolonial development planning for tribals in India, which ensures that they continue to suffer from marginalization, exploitation and inequality through the politics of co-option and domination. This historiographical construction creates a threat to tribal identities.

Thus, the process of emancipation and preservation of tribal identity and the development of their society, culture and economy needs the deterritorialization of tribal identities. Such a process has the potential to maintain tribal unity in diversity, and to help tribals to stand up to face and challenge the exploitation and inequality inherited, perpetuated and sustained by the internal and external elites. The mining-led industrialization, NGO, and civil society-led rural and tribal development and the Hinduization of tribals by the Hindu right-wing forces have changed the social, economic, cultural and political landscape of the tribals in India. Their identities are changing in their everyday life due to territorialization and deterritorialization led by neoliberal Hindutva forces.

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Notes

1. This paper contributes to ongoing debates on tribal identities in India. In particular, it is a response to the work of Prof. Vinita Damodaran, especially her two articles on the inadvertent construction of tribal identity (2006a, b). The work of Prof. Damodaran is not the result of an individual researcher's intent to historicize tribal identity based on land and territory, but an extension of the Oxbridge school of thought that constructs history to justify many aspects of colonial rule in postcolonial contexts. (For a detailed critique on the Oxbridge school of thought in the making of postcolonial history, see Dirks, 2006; Black, 2019.)
2. Each individual carries different and often contradictory identities. Some identities are ascribed by others and some are claimed by individuals themselves. One can take or reject these identities at any point of time. While making such an argument, there is no intention to undermine the process of plurality in identity formation. This paper neither argues for the homogeneous nature of individual/group identity, nor considers identity formations as unproblematic. Thereby it acknowledges the multiplicity of identity and processes involved in its formation, making its approach indeterminist and nonconformist.
3. The Cambridge school of history and its historians of colonialism and imperialism have been implicated in efforts to justify empire and try to erase the scandals, corruptions and exploitations of the British Empire in India. Similarly, the Oxford school of history tries to maintain its neutrality by providing an economic, cost benefit analysis of empire and its colonial rule in India (see Dirks, 2006). There are some exceptions, but most of the history coming out of both the schools has followed a legacy of justifying, admiring and whitewashing colonial misdeeds. The arguments of Prof. Damodaran (2006a, b), for example, have followed the ideological lineages of the Cambridge school, which continue to follow the historiography on tribal identity based on regions and which uphold the legacy of Dalton (1872).
4. Theoreticism around subjectivities or subjective positions are determined by the material conditions, which are necessary to understand both the subjective and objective conditions of the world that shapes our ideas and consciousness because of the fact that 'metaphysics often disguises itself as rejection of metaphysics' (Putnam, 1995: xxxii). In this context, the poststructural and postmodern understandings of identity formation provide the base for a metaphysical understanding of objectivity and subjectivity that arguably is nothing but ideas and consciousness in denial, and which ignores the determinants of power that reinforce identities. Thus, the conceptualization of identity is only possible through the objective analysis of the material conditions that shape subjectivities.
5. In the Hindu religion, there are 330m gods and goddesses registered in different religious scripts. The mythically unregistered number of gods and goddesses is growing every day in India, which reflects the diverse religious practices in the Hindu religion (see Fuller, 1992; Mehta, 1996; Radhakrishnan, 2004).

6. *The Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most important religious texts in the Hindu religion, where the protagonists are from higher caste (warriors) and the ruling class as well (Johnson, 1994). Thus, Johnson considers it as a non-Brahminical text in the Hindu religion and that it espouses more egalitarian values (Johnson, 1994: x), a point which can be contested. It is not necessary to be a member of the Brahmin caste to speak the language of Brahmins. Brahminism is an ideology of hegemony and hierarchical social order that seeks to control the social and economic activities of the masses. It can be used by any members of the Hindu caste system as per their social and economic status. In the context of *The Bhagavad Gita*, the ruling class and higher caste warriors were speaking the language of Brahmins to continue their hegemonic control over the masses by preaching a theory that asks the masses to follow authority without questioning its power and legitimacy.
7. The theory of *Karma* preaches about the consequences of one's own duty. No one can avoid the process of *Karma* based on *Dharma*. If you do good work, then the results will be good, and for bad work there will be negative results. So one's sufferings are the product of one's work and there is nothing external to one's suffering. The problems of inequality and exploitation are the product of this cosmic causation: *Karma* and *Dharma*. The logic of this infallible causation cannot be questioned. Any attempt to question is considered as *Bidharma* (irreligious and evil), and the goal of *Nirvana/Moksa* cannot be achieved. Good *Karma* provides the base for the incarnate's life.
8. Based on these ideas, the Hindu religion justifies and maintains hegemony over the social order defined by a caste structure.
9. Kapp (1963) made a similar argument in the context of the Hindu religion and its impact on the social and economic development in India. Myrdal (1968) and Mandelbaum (1970) explained India's economic backwardness in relation to Hinduism. In the context of globalization, Huntington's (1996) thesis assumed that the progress of globalization would be severely constrained by religious barriers including Hinduism, whereas Fukuyama (1992) argues that globalization processes have the potential to homogenize all civilizations under western modernity. But in reality, it is not western modernity, but consumer culture fostered by the global market that hegemonizes the world by forming alliances with religions. In India it has been abetted by the Hindu religion.
10. There is an artificial demarcation to differentiate Hindu religion from Hinduism. The debate concludes that 'Hindu' is a religion whereas 'Hinduism' is a way of life. (For details on this debate, see Sen, 2005.)
11. The philosophy of neoliberalism requires contradictions and collaborations for restructuring the system, which facilitates the implementation of neoliberal policies within national, regional and local conditions (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 351). It is central to the continuation of neoliberalism itself (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 375). Such an objective of neoliberal philosophy is only possible through aligning itself with religion, race, culture and ethnic politics (Appadurai, 2000; Jacobs, 1996), which helps embed neoliberal values in societies. The process of embeddedness creates a totality of culture, or cultural hegemony, in the society. In India, neoliberalism uses the Hindu religion and culture and majoritarianism as tools to pursue such an agenda (Nayak, 2018a, 2018b).
12. After all, the reproduction of capitalist economic relations needs ideological and political support (Peet, 1997; Sayer, 1997). The right-wing forces of the world's four main religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism) are interested in consolidating their bases for political power to boost their economic interests to serve the interests of the elites (Saldanha, 2003).
13. For example, see Bellah, 1957; Berger, 1986; Caplan, 1991; Clegg and Redding, 1990; Fogel, 2001; Martin, 1990; Novak, 1993; Redding, 1990.
14. Berman (1983) has studied the legal history of NGOs/CSOs and their religious affiliation.
15. The development anthropologists consider NGOs/CSOs as 'non-governmental sectors of development industry' (Stirrat, 1996; Ferguson, 1997: 8), which creates a 'culture of consultancy' (Stirrat, 2000) and work as 'cultural consultants' (Henkel and Stirrat, 2002: 169) in the field of development. Nayak (2018a) defined them as 'salary seeking social servants' who find NGOs/CSOs in tribal or rural development as a sector of employment to earn their livelihood and pursue their cultural hegemony in the rural and tribal areas of India. NGOs have achieved many things, but the structures of power that control and determine the resource allocation for development at different levels (locally, nationally and globally) have

remained unchanged (Nyamugasira (1998: 297). Thus, the structures of inequality and exploitation that emanate from these levels have continued to exist in our contemporary development discourse.

16. See for example the World Bank's acknowledgement of its mistakes (Bretton Woods Update, No. 18, August 2000).
17. For a detailed discussion on the declining of state legitimacy during the period of globalization, see Lash and Urry, 1994: 281.
18. See Parts XI, XII and XIII of Indian Constitution to understand financial federalism.
19. Ong seeks an approach to understanding 'people's everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts' (Ong, 1999: 5).
20. McKay (2001) has described the process by which electronics firms in the Philippines use kin-based labour recruitment strategies to ensure a docile labour force within a territory, taking the advantage of cheap labour. Langille (1996) says metaphorically that 'capital has slipped the moorings of the nation state, but labor has not' (cited in Collins, 2002: 151).

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