

**Space, Place and Capitalism:**  
**Themes in Historical-Geographical Materialism**  
**(Geography 5375; Environmental Studies 5473; Sociology course number TBD)**  
**York University, Fall 2013**  
**Instructor: Raju J Das**

**Class time: Mondays 2.30-5.30 pm.**  
**Class location: Vari Hall 1020**

**Office hours: Monday: 1-2pm;**  
**and Thursday: 11.30-12.30pm**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The course is a very basic introduction to some important aspects of Marxism as an organic whole which reflects the totality (i.e. the capitalist society) it studies. Its dominant focus is on political economy as laid out in *Capital I* (and its relation to the state and class struggle as well as to the environment and space). However, it is not a course on *Capital I* only, although it occupies the first half of the course and informs the discussions in the second half.

*Capital I* will be read in a very specific way, that is, in the spirit in which its author had written it: to primarily promote a scientific and critical understanding of capitalism (including its material conditions-sufferings). The primary aim is, therefore, not to draw or to support philosophical conclusions or to critique/elaborate ideas about ideas about society, although discussions will be held throughout the Term on the Marxist philosophical insights, including those in *Capital I*; one week will be specifically devoted to such discussions as well.[\[1\]](#)

A premise of the course is that *Capital I* is primarily a text in the (dialectical) science of capitalism, and not an exercise in the flight of philosophical imaginations, although a ‘symptomatic’ reading of the text will reveal numerous underlying philosophical assumptions. There is a (contradiction-ridden) world out there independent of the (philosophical, etc.) ways we understand it. *This* world (and ideas about this world) urgently cry out for a scientific (=explanatory) critique, which is necessary for – and which is a necessary part of -- the struggle to completely transcend this world. We will seek to understand capitalism both at an abstract level but also more concretely as a global system with its internally-related, unevenly developing, parts/regions. We will think about the similarities and differences between the capitalism of Marx’s times and contemporary capitalism.

The course is in the tradition of the Marxism of Marx-Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky (**‘MELLT’**) and their genuine legacy -- which is simultaneously critical (both of the world and of ideas about the world), revolutionary, materialist, dialectical, *and* international (as opposed to nationalistic or narrowly/exclusively focused on advanced or poorer regions of the world). At the heart of the seminar is this assumption: that class relations operating at multiple spatial scales, and most importantly, globally, are the most significant cause of major problems and therefore must be completely abolished internationally through organized concentrated emancipatory self-action of the working masses so that they can decisively address these problems. The course encourages students to reflect on whether the world and its component parts are dominantly capitalist (in terms of labour process) and whether global capitalism can accommodate material comfort and culture for the majority, democratic practices, and ecological sustainability.

The seminar will deal with both classical and contemporary literature on Marxism.[\[2\]](#) Its approach is thoroughly inter-disciplinary, the kind of treatment of Marxist science of capitalism that journals such as *Science&Society* (Guilford, New York) have upheld. It will deal with areas that Marx shed much light on and those he largely failed to.

One particular area of relative silence in Marx's work is the 'geographical imagination'. Marx's political economy was more or less an aspatial agenda. He also did not always make explicit capitalism's ecological aspects, although numerous ecological ideas are embedded in his works. Historical materialism after Marx has also been largely aspatial, although such classical figures as Lenin (on imperialism), Luxemburg ('non-capitalist spaces'), and Trotsky (uneven and combined development) had brilliant spatial insights. Therefore, a geographical reading of Marx and later Marxists is necessary: there is a need for a special form of historical materialism, i.e. historical-geographical materialism, as Harvey calls it. The literature that speaks to issues of space, place, scale and environment (especially, Harvey's work) will be employed.[\[3\]](#)

The course as a whole has two parts. Part 1 deals with some of the main themes of Marx's *Capital vol. 1*. These concepts would be spatialized and refined through a reading of the post-Marx literature within geography and other disciplines, where necessary. These include:

- **buying-and-selling (without 'cheating')**: the commodity, value, and (commodity) fetishism (as an aspect of Marx's theory of ideology); fair trade as a market-driven social justice
- **labouring-surrendering**: labour, labour power (as a commodity), labour process, (diverse methods of) exploitation of labour, and (spaces of) labour control and surveillance
- **innovating-upsetting**: technology and large-scale industry; their impacts on society, including on women and children
- **accumulating-destroying**: capitalist accumulation ('accumulation by exploitation') and its impacts: concentration-centralization in the distribution of property; the expansion of the reserve army of labour, and immiserization; crises of accumulation
- **dispossessing-differentiating**: primitive accumulation and its contemporary form under neoliberalism (i.e. 'accumulation by dispossession'); pre-capitalist relations.[\[4\]](#)

In Part 2, we will discuss the concepts that Marx did not deal with explicitly or in much detail in *Capital Vol 1* (or indeed elsewhere). On many of these topics, among other things, selected writings of Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky will be discussed. These topics are:

- **space and place – 1 (producing-dominating space)**: (urban) geographical dynamics of capitalism, and production of places and spaces under capitalism; (new) imperialism and indefinite war
- **space and place – 2 (combining-under-developing space)**: combined and uneven development at multiple scales; development/under-development of the periphery
- **the state**: the capitalist state and its territorial-capitalist logic; the state in the capitalist periphery
- **nature and the body**: nature and the body as means and strategies of accumulation
- **class-capitalism/gender/race**: placing 'articulations' between class/capitalism, and gender and race; (geography of) class struggle
- **Marxist philosophy**: dialectically thinking about the world as a historical-geographical materialist

The course – including reading most significant parts of *Capital volume 1* -- has the following major learning outcomes:

- a. to learn Marx's views on some of the essential aspects of capitalism and to see capitalism as a material-dialectical relation-process with its progressive and problematic features;
- b. to spatialize Marx's views, and to think theoretically about the world that is geographically scaled and differentiated;
- c. to ecologize Marx and Marxism: to see that the world is environmentally constituted and that there is a constant contradiction-ridden interaction between the social-physical environment and human beings (including their material activity and consciousness);
- d. to reflect on Marx's views in relation to other writers since Marx where possible, including those influenced by post-structuralism and feminist and anti-racist thought;
- e. to understand capitalism as a global system and to familiarize oneself with Marxist ideas of scholars from (and/or working on) *both* more developed and less developed countries, and thus to learn to view Marxist political economy as a 'pluralist', 'global' discourse with multiple spatial origins and to engage in an international (non-Eurocentric) reading of these ideas (i.e. to see how these ideas promote an understanding of the organically connected world with its poorer and richer countries/regions); and
- f. to recognize that the economic/material is a political and cultural/discursive process, seen both spatially and otherwise, but that the economic cannot be collapsed into either of these.

### **WHAT THE COURSE IS NOT AND WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN IT?**

As emphasized earlier, this is **not** a course in economics as it is taught in economics department or as it is usually understood, nor is it a course on the history of ideas in economics and social theory. It is a course on **Marxism**, including *political* economy, that is, the discourse on the ways in which the economic and the political (as well as the cultural/discursive) are dialectically connected. An advanced (=college level) knowledge of economics or mathematics is **not** necessary. One also does not need formal training in geography or environmental studies either to take this course. Everyone with an interest in understanding the capitalist *system* and the way in which it affects us (in positive and adverse ways) may be interested in this course.

As far as Geography students are concerned, this course, a key component of the suite of critical human geography courses, will be an important foundational course for economic, cultural, environmental and political geographers who need to know about Marx and Marxists. Given that the course aims to provide an understanding of basic political economic ideas on imperialism, the global periphery, ecological issues and the like, it will also be useful for the growing numbers of students at York and other Toronto-based universities interested in development and environment issues who are in Geography as well as Environmental Studies, Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology and Development or International/Area Studies programs.

The course will also have a *broader* appeal to students at York (and beyond) outside of Geography who are interested in theoretically thinking about important geographical concepts such as space, place, scale, and nature in the tradition of material political economy. This course will help graduate students in Geography and those in allied disciplines (e.g. sociology, political science, anthropology, etc.), who wish to develop what David Harvey calls 'geographical imagination', to be able to argue their own theoretical positions with non-geographers better, whether they want to be historical-geographical materialists or postmodern urban landscape analysts or neo-classical location specialists. If you would like to sharpen your conceptual tools against Marx and Marxism, this course may also be for you! A critic must know her enemy well! Indeed, many criticisms of political economy within Geography and allied disciplines are often based on a totally inadequate understanding of the materialist political economy discourse. You can sample this discourse in these journals which supply

a part of the reading material for the course: *Capital and Class*, *Science and Society*, *New Left Review*, *Monthly Review*, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, *Historical Materialism*, *Socialist Register*, *Human Geography: A New Radical Journal*, and (sometimes) *Antipode*.<sup>[5]</sup> There are also several online sites, including [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org), [www.socialistproject.ca](http://www.socialistproject.ca), www.radicalnotes.com, and www.links.org.au. [There is no implication that all these online sites are 'equally Marxist'!].

### **READINGS:**

1. Marx, K. 1977. *Capital* Vol 1, *Vintage*, New York (it is available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/cw/volume35/index.htm>)
2. You will read a few articles and/or book chapters every week. These readings will be emailed to you every week.

### **ASSESSMENTS AND COURSE ORGANIZATION:**

Students will be evaluated on the basis of the following requirements (it is possible to make some changes in these through a democratic discussion in the first class meeting).

- a) Class participation and weekly reflections papers ( $10\% + 10\% = 20\%$ ):

Students must actively participate in the weekly discussions. They will be expected to discuss the readings every week, ask and answer questions. Each participant is expected to have enough material with her/him to speak for about 5 minutes every week.

In addition, I will expect each student to bring to class a typed paragraph of approximately 400 words noting down her/his thoughts on the readings (a few points to summarize the main points in the readings and a few questions). I will randomly select 2-3 submissions per student for grading.

- b) Essay 1 ('the Marx essay'): (40% of the grade): You will be provided a number of concepts from Marx around which you will write a 4000-word essay. In this essay you are expected to:

- a) provide Marx's definition of each concept and point out the essential aspects of each concept (following a format like this: what is x, what is x caused/conditioned/governed by and what x tends to be responsible for or lead to?),
- b) elaborate at least a few of these essential aspects, including by providing quotes from Marx,
- c) present brief comments on Marx, in the light of the weekly non-Marx Marxist readings,
- d) discuss the ways in which the concepts are inter-connected to produce a 'discursive whole' reflecting the capitalist system,
- e) attach an appendix of 15 questions which you would ask workers, in an interview, to find out about their views on how capitalism works and how they experience capitalism. These questions must be derived from *Capital 1* and connected to the concepts you discuss.

You may imagine that you are doing a dictionary of key *Capital vol 1* concepts for an educated intelligent audience (e.g. advanced sections of the class conscious working class eager to understand Marx). You must cite the Marx readings sent to you by email every week. If you write a few paragraphs every week about the concepts as we discuss them over the first five weeks, these can form the raw material for your short essay. The Marx essay (a hardcopy) is due on **October 30**. There is a **lateness** penalty (5%/week).

c) Essay 2 (the ‘post-Marx’ essay): (40% of the grade): Students will show that in order to adequately understand the topic of their choice, one must have a thorough knowledge of Marx’s and Marxist ideas (i.e. historical materialist ideas which are broadly rooted in and/or consistent with Marx’s approach to capitalism in *Capital vol 1*). The essay requirements are the following:

- a. The essay is a critical review of the Marxist literature on a research area.
- b. The topic of the essay must be from the weekly list of topics from week 6 onwards (e.g. contemporary Marxist state theory; capitalism and the body; class/race/gender).
- c. Your review of the topic will briefly say why the topic is theoretically important; and it will identify and discuss a limited number of aspects (say, 3-4) of the topic.
- d. You must make your *own* intellectual stance on the literature clear. You must also draw intellectual (and political conclusions, where possible), of your review: what implications does the current state of research on a given topic and your own thoughts have for further research (and political action).
- e. An excellent essay would relate the discussion to ideas of Marx in *Capital vol 1* (topics discussed in the first 5 weeks of discussion).
- f. The essay will be based on at least 10 articles/chapters of standard length (=approximately 6000 words). You are expected to read items under ‘Further readings’ (which will be made available later), in addition to other readings which you will locate on your own from the Marxist journals (many of which are cited above). Approximately 6 items will be from the ‘Further reading’ list.
- g. From the standpoint of equity, the paper will be 5000 words for Ph. D. students and 4000 words for MA students.
- h. The essay (in a hardcopy format) is due on **December 20, 2012**. There is a **lateness** penalty (5%/week).

#### **GRADING SCHEME**

A+:	over 90%	B:	70-74.9
A:	85-89.9	C:	60-69.9
A-:	80-84.9	F:<	60%
B+:	75-79.9		

**PLEASE NOTE THAT: THIS COURSE IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR AUDIT AND THAT I WILL NOT SIGN THE ‘DROP THE COURSE FORM’ AFTER THE OFFICIAL DEADLINE.**

#### **TOPICS AND READINGS**

#### **Week 1: (Spaces of) Commodity, Commodification, and Commodity Fetishism**

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##### **Required Readings:**

Marx, K. *Capital Vol 1*: Chapter 1 ('The Commodity')  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/cw/volume35/index.htm>

Harvey, D. 1990. 'Between space and time – reflections on the geographical imagination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80:3, 418-434 [you will read only pp. 422-423]

Gavin, F. 2007. 'Fair trade coffee and commodity fetishism: the limits of market-driven social justice', *Historical materialism*, 15:4, 79-104

**Week 2: History and Geography of Commodification and capitalist accumulation:  
Primitive accumulation/accumulation by dispossession (a little detour...)**

**Required Readings:**

Marx, K. *Capital* vol 1. Chapters 26, 27 and 28 (on 'primitive accumulation'). Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/cw/volume35/index.htm>

Harvey, D. 2006. 'Neo-liberalism as creative destruction', *Geografiska Annaler series B-human geography* 88B:2:145-158 [also in: *Annals of the American academy of political and social science* 610: 22-44 **[you may only read the section, 'Neoliberalism as creative destruction']**

Moyo, S. and Yeros, P. 2011. 'Rethinking the theory of primitive accumulation: Imperialism and the new scramble for land and natural resources' available at: [http://www.iippe.org/wiki/images/e/ee/CONF\\_2011\\_Paris\\_Yeros.pdf](http://www.iippe.org/wiki/images/e/ee/CONF_2011_Paris_Yeros.pdf)

Luxemburg, L. 2003. *The accumulation of Capital*; selected pages from section III (The historical conditions of accumulation)

**Week 3: Labouring body (labour power) as a (peculiar) commodity; labour process, and Marx's theory of exploitation**

**Readings:**

Marx, K. *Capital* vol 1. Chapters: 4 ('General formula for capital'), 5 ('Contradictions in the general formula'), 6 ('The sale and purchase of labour power') and ch. 7 (labour process)  
Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/cw/volume35/index.htm>

Vogel, L. 2000. 'Domestic labour revisited', *Science and society*, 64:2, 151-170

**Week 4: Multiple methods of exploitation (and control) of labour: The working day and cooperation as well as the capitalist character of technology and industrialization**

**Readings:**

Marx, K. *Capital* volume 1: Chapters 10 ('The working day), 13 ('Co-operation'), 14-15 (on capitalist industrialization including manufacture and large-scale industry)

Smith, T. 1997. 'The neoclassical and Marxian theories of technology', *Historical materialism*, 1:1, 113-133. **(esp section B).**

Tinker, T. 2002. 'Spectres of Marx and Braverman in the twilight of postmodernist labour process research', *Work, employment and society*, 16:2, p. 251-281

Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books, New York, pp. 195-228 **(selected pages)**

## **Week 5: Dynamics of Capitalist Accumulation and its Effects on the Working class; Crisis**

### **Readings:**

Marx, K. *Capital* vol. 1: Chs. 23-25 (on simple and expanded reproduction; transformation of surplus value into capital; the general law of capitalist accumulation); and, Chs. 19-21 (on wages).

Marx, K. *Capital Vol 3.* Part 3. selected pages

Harvey, D. 2011. 'Crises, Geographic Disruptions and the Uneven Development of Political Responses', *Economic Geography*, 87:1, 1-22

Das, R. 2012. 'Is *Capital I* sufficient for Marx's General theory of accumulation?'

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## **Week 6: Spatiality of capitalism (production of space, and imperialism)**

### **Readings:**

Harvey, D. 2001. *Spaces of Capital*, Routledge, New York (pp. 312-316 and pp. 237-266)

Harvey, D. 2010. 'The Geography of it all', in his *Enigma of Capital*, Profile Books, London

Harvey, D. 2006. 'Notes towards A theory of uneven geographical development'

Lenin, V. 1939. *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* (chs 7-8) [Marxist archive]

Anderson, K. 2010. *Marx at the margins*, The University of Chicago Press, pp 237-243

Harvey, D. 2007. 'In what ways is 'The New Imperialism' really new?', *Historical materialism*, 15:3, 57-70.

Das, R. 2009. 'Capital and space', Nigel Thrift and Rob Kitchin eds. *Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Elsevier [Read this if you are not already familiar with Harvey's writings]

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## **Week 7: Spatiality of Capitalism: The 'other' end of the system: Inside the spaces of peripheral capitalism**

### **Readings:**

Peet, R. and Hartwick, E. 2009. *Theories of Development*, Guilford Press, New York (Ch. 5 -- a basic introduction to Marxist ideas on development). (**You may read only:** 143; 154-161; 166-186)

Das, R. 2011. 'Reconceptualizing Capitalism: Forms of subsumption of labour, class struggle and uneven development', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 44(2) (**only** read 178-188; 195-198).

Patnaik, P. 1995. *Whatever happened to Imperialism*, Tulika, Delhi, pp 12-58.

Trotsky, L. 1996. *The Third International after Lenin*, Pathfinder, New York. (selected pages) as well as *Results and Prospects* (pp. 251-256).

### **Week 8: Environment/Nature, the body, and capitalism**

#### **Readings:**

Harvey, D. 1996. *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*, Blackwell, Oxford (Chapter 8 entitled 'The dialectics of social and environmental change': **you may read only 190-204**)

Foster, J. 1999. 'Marx's theory of metabolic rift: Classical foundations for environmental sociology', *American journal of sociology*, 105:2, 366-405. [read esp: 378-390]

Benton, T. 1996. *The Greening of Marxism*, The Guilford Press, New York, pp. 197-221; 229-234

Burkett, P. 1999. *Marx and nature*, St. Martin's press, New York, pp. 107-143

Fracchia, J. 2008. 'The Capitalist Labour-Process and the Body in Pain: The Corporeal Depths of Marx's Concept of Immiseration', *Historical Materialism*, 16:4, 35-66.

### **Week 9: Capitalism and 'its' state: the state territoriality vs the capitalist territoriality**

#### **Readings:**

Lenin, V. *The state and revolution*, Progress, Moscow. Chapter 1. available at : <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm>

Das, R. 2006. 'Marxist theories of the state' in Steve Pressman (ed.) *Alternative theories of the state*, Palgrave, New York. [attachment to be provided]

Cox, K. 1990. 'Territorial Structures of the State – some conceptual Issues, *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 81:4, 251-266

Trotsky, L. *Revolution Betrayed* [selected pages].

Wood, E. 2006. 'Logics of power: a conversation with David Harvey', *Historical materialism*, 14:4, 9-35 [skip the section on primitive accumulation on pp.18-23]

### **Week 10: Class (struggle)/race/gender**

#### **Readings:**

Marx, K. Engels, F. and Lenin, V. On class, race and women [extracts]

Das, R. 2012. 'From labour geography to class geography: reasserting the Marxist theory of class', *Human Geography: A New Radical Journal*, 5(1), 19-35.

Giminez, M. 2005. 'Capitalism and the oppression of women: Marx revisited', *Science & Society* 69:1, p. 11-32

Callinicos, A. 1993. *Race and Class*, Bookmarks, London. (selected pages)

North, D. 1998. *Marxism and the trade unions*, Mehring.

Luxemburg, R. 2004. 'Women's suffrage and class struggle'; and 'Proletarian women', in *Rosa Luxemburg Reader* ed by Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson

## **Week 11: Historical Materialist Social Theory and Dialectical philosophy**

### **Readings:**

Marx, K., and Engels, F. On social theory and philosophy.

Lenin, V. and Trotsky, L. Selected Philosophical writings.

Harvey, D. 1996. 'Dialectics' In his *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*, 46-68.

Ollman, B. 2003. *Dance of the dialectic*, University of Illinois Press. (attachments to be provided)

Collier, A. 2004. 'Marx and Philosophy' (chapter 8) from his *Marx*, Oneworld, Oxford. (a very-easy-to-read introduction to Marx's philosophy).

Das, R. 2012. 'On the matter of internal relations: A Comradely critique of Ollman and Sayers'.

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[1] This will be done in the belief that scientific labour presupposes adequate philosophical raw material both in the critical realist and dialectical-materialist traditions.

[2] Marx's theoretical ideas in *Capital* are broadly relevant to the understanding of many general mechanisms of capitalism which have not changed since Marx's times. However, to deepen (i.e. fruitfully extend) Marx's theoretical analysis of capitalism's general mechanisms and to shed light on the aspects of society and on the method of knowing it which he did not have a chance to adequately clarify, one has to employ recent developments within Marxism to which various disciplines have contributed.

[3] This literature will help us understand, among other things, not only *political economy of geography* (how political economic processes influence geographical aspects of society) but also *geography of political economy* (how geographical processes influence political economy).

[4] These topics raise numerous foundational questions about life and society: why do human relations increasingly lack depth?; why are most of us treated like things?; how do people lose control over the conditions of their lives and become commodity-like?; why does buying and selling (to make more money) appear to be in our natural instinct?; how is our language to describe the world changing according dynamics of fetishism?; what happens when people have nothing but the power of their body and mind to sell?; why do we have to work under someone-else' control?; why do we have to

make someone else rich as a way of satisfying our very basic needs?; why has work become uninteresting and alienating?; how are we and our planet impacted by rapid technological changes and large-scale industrialization controlled by the profit-motive?; why do millions live in poverty when there is so much wealth in the world and when a few people and a few areas bask in an unimaginable level of affluence?, why do we have to waste our productive energy in fighting for every little thing we need?; and so on.

[5]Note that geographical discourse on capitalism, as Harvey rightly suggests, is not necessarily produced within the institutional framework of the discipline of Geography, including disciplinary journals and geography departments, and the selection of the texts for the course is guided by this premise.