

**ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**Sociology 3623: Capitalism and Modern Culture
Fall 2018**

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-11:20, MMH 201

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:00 or by appointment

Course Description:

This course aims to increase our understanding of the origins of capitalist accumulation. We do this through a critical understanding of what capitalism is, and how traditional theories of capitalism have often overlooked the colonial context of accumulation by dispossession. This latter will be the central frame of our window onto capitalism and its impact on modern culture. As we will see, our worldview is considerably affected by capitalist relations of appropriation, subordination and dispossession towards nature and towards others.

Though the course will take seriously a variety of different intellectual positions, its approach to the topic is informed primarily by Critical Theory. The course's main objective will be to increase students' awareness of the historical origins and cultural foundations of the current economic system. We often think of capitalism as inevitable, and that its laws are natural ones, based on human nature. But our exploration of the origins of capitalism will question how systems of appropriation and dispossession were, especially in colonial contexts, especially violent and arbitrary. Moreover, the exploitation of wage labour in the West emerged on the basis of new household economies that marked much sharper differentiations between the work of people identified as women and those identified as men. The latter were pulled out of the household economy and more fully into an individualistic, urban work of industrial production, while the former were left to deal with the sacred, non-market tasks of care work. This separation also facilitated processes of accumulation and exploitation to which we are heir.

The class's objective is to provide us with a broader knowledge of the origins of capitalism and the modern culture of consumption, and the household. It will also provide us with critical tools to rethink the "disenchantment of the world" as Weber put it, drawing on our critical capacities for care.

Evaluations

Class attendance and participation: 10%

In-class presentation: 10%

In-class presentations will take place on Thursday, and should be short, 5-10 minute recapitulations of the main argument of the reading (to remind us of what was in the text), followed by questions to lead discussion (3 to 5). Questions, for example, might relate to topics of debate. They might draw out issues concerning concepts or theories, or they may relate course material to present events, or other events elsewhere.

Reflection assignments, 4 at 5% per assignment: 20%

Assignments should be at least 500 words in length and focus on the main argument of a week's reading. The assignments are due on Thursdays and must relate to the reading for that week. There will be no make-up assignments for students who fail to submit assignments for four separate weeks. If you wish to submit additional assignments, I will take your 4 best.

Reflection on service labour, 10%, due October 2nd,

This assignment is based on your personal reflection with labour, and will be handed out in class on September 11th. You will be asked to write 2-3 pages (500-750 words) on your experience as a service worker, and how this labour affects your life.

Mid-term test: 20%, October 23rd

Final take home exam (distributed December 5th, due December 12th): 30%

Course Material

Eric Williams. 1994 [1944]. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Sidney Mintz. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin.

Maria Mies. 1986. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books.

Additional readings available on moodle.

Readings:

Week 1: Accumulation by Dispossession, I (September 6)

Marx, Karl. 1976 [1867]. *Capital*, chs. 26-27, pp. 873-895.

Optional: Ch. 28, pp. 896-904.

Week 2: Accumulation by Dispossession, II (Sept 11 and 13)

Marx, chs 31 and 33, pp. 914-926; 931-940. Optional, ch. 30.

Bear Nicholas, Andrea. 2016. "The Role of Canadian Artists in the Dispossession and Displacement of the Maliseet, 1790s-1850s." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49(2): 25-51. **Optional**, pp. 51-86. [This article contains a large number of full page pictures]

George MacMartin's Big Canoe Trip. 2013. *CBC Ideas*, 55 minutes:
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/george-macmartin-s-big-canoe-trip-1.2913267>

These first two weeks will allow us to familiarize ourselves with Marx's concept of accumulation by dispossession, which he argues is the 'primitive' or original form of accumulation of capital. Particular attention will be paid to the Canadian context, notably the colonization of the Wolastoq River, beginning in the late 1760s, but especially after 1784.

Week 3: Economy and Society (September 18 and 20)

Polanyi, Karl. 1944. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 from *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Polity, pp. 43-76.

We will pay particular attention to Polanyi's concept of embeddedness: prior to capitalist society, the production of material needs was embedded in moral horizons of significance that constrained the actions of individuals. Polanyi traces the separation of production from moral horizons to the Enclosures, but as we will see later in the course, their origin is in the slave plantations of the New World.

Week 4: Slavery and Capitalism, I (September 25 and 27)

Eric Williams, chs. 2, 3 and 4, pp. 30-97.
Optional: ch 1, pp. 3-29.

This week, we will explore Eric Williams' main thesis about the origins of capitalism in slavery in the Caribbean sugar plantations. Williams discusses the origins of European capitalism in the Caribbean plantations. Rather than capitalism being a self-generating process, drawing on European cultural or economic dynamics, Williams shows how slavery was integral to European accumulation as capitalism was about to get started.

Chapter 1 provides a historical overview of slavery by Europeans in the Americas. If you are unfamiliar with this history, or if you are curious about it, you may find that chapter of interest.

Week 5: Slavery and Capitalism, II (October 2 and 4)

Eric Williams, chs 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10, pp. 98-107; 126-177.
Optional, chs 6, 11, 12 and 13, pp. 108-125; 178-212.

Of principle importance in the second half of the book are the arguments Williams makes about the connections between the plantation economy in the Caribbean and the commercial interests of the industrial classes of Europe and Britain.

Week 6: Sugar, Consumption and Accumulation (October 9 and 11)

Sidney Mintze, chs. 1, 2, and 3, pp. 3-18; 46-73; 108-131.

Sidney Mintze looks at the history of sugar production and consumption, from the Caribbean plantation to the changing diets of the European working classes

Week 7: Power and Coloniality in Daily Life: Food (October 16 and 18)

Mintze, chs. 4 and 5, pp. 151-214.

This week we will focus particular attention on the relations between changing diets and changing work conditions.

Week 8: Exam (October 23)

Week 8: Film relevant to the course (**optional**, October 24) *Trick or Treaty*, a film about the Listuguj standoff in June 1981, 84 minutes, by Alanis Obomsawin (1987). The film will be shown on campus 4-6PM in the Kinsella Auditorium. The film is also available online for free at the National Film Board. Other films by Alanis Obomsawin include *Kanehsatake*, about the events of the Oka crisis.

Week 8: Patriarchy and Accumulation (October 25)

Federici, Sylvia. 2004. "The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women: Constructing Difference in the Transition to Capitalism." *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, pp. 61-115.

Federici has a sharply materialist interpretation of gender and the cultures of gender relations that have emerged in the West. See if you can identify taken-for granted assumptions of gender roles that persist from the Roman Church's medieval power grab at the expense of women, women's knowledge, and women's bodies.

Week 9: Accumulation through Housewifization (October 30, November 1)

Maria Mies, ch. 3, pp. 74-111.

We will look at Mies's thesis of 'Housewifization'.

Week 10: Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale (November 13 and 15)

Maria Mies, chs 4 and 7, pp. 112-144; 205-235.

Readings focus on the condition of women in a global economy, and the degree of exploitation and dispossession that occurs as economies are 'developed'. We will have a guest lecture on November 15th.

Week 11: Epistemological Critiques of Eurocentric Modernity (November 20 and 22)

Bhabra, Gurminder. 2014. "Postcolonial and Decolonial Reconstructions." *Connected Sociologies*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 117-139.

Quijano, Aníbal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality." *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3): 168-178.

This week we will discuss the critiques of Eurocentric knowledge, which has helped to construct both capitalist epistemologies, and our sociological understandings of them. Modernity, rationalization and capitalist development occurred in colonial and imperial contexts, but they also had effects on our cultural viewpoints and interpretations of modern life, and how we assign meaning to our positions in a global society. This week identifies some of the key ideas that shape a globally unequal experience of the "modern."

Weeks 12: Contemporary Colonial Extractivism: Resettlement and Gender Relations on the Ecuadorian Oil Frontier (November 27 and 29)

Cielo, Cristina and Nancy Carrión Sarzosa. 2018. "Transformed Territories of Gendered Care Work in Ecuador's Petroleum Circuit." *Conservation and Society* 16(1): 8-20.

Cielo, Cristina, Lisset Coba and Ivette Vallejo. 2016. "Women, nature, and development in sites of Ecuador's petroleum circuit." *Economic Anthropology* 3: 119-132.

Lyall, Angus. 2017. "Voluntary resettlement in land grab contexts: examining consent on the Ecuadorian oil frontier." *Urban Geography*, 38(7): 958-973.

This week, we pick up Cristina Cielo's concept of territories of care, and look at how care has been repositioned on the frontier of capitalist development in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The development of the Yasuní oil field in the Amazon basin is supported by private transnational oil firms as well as the Ecuadorian government (both under Rafael Correa and Lenín Moreno). The Yasuní project is occurring in territory where indigenous populations previously had limited contact with or dependence on the global division of labour. Their integration into this global division of labour, achieved through the appropriation of their territory, has far reaching cultural effects that reposition individuals relative to one another, and relative to nature.

Week 13: Conclusion to the Course: Territories of Care and Neglect in Capitalist Fredericton (December 5)

This week's lecture will conclude the course. Using insights gathered from a consideration of the process of development in the Yasuní basin, we return to the urban economy of our own city and observe relations with people and with nature that contemporary processes of accumulation and extraction in the city help to bring about.

