

# La teoría marxista en la geografía ambiental

## Semestre 2018-2: La dialéctica materialista

### *Introducción al curso*

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## Points to mention

### ¿Qué es el marxismo?

- Difficult question to answer for two reasons:
  1. “Marxism” was not used in Marx’s lifetime, and Marx’s writings do not indicate he was promoting a “world view,” rather
    - (a) a critique of political economy from the standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat
    - (b) a materialist conception of history (Fetscher, 1992)
  2. In the dialectical approach, concepts “are not to be encapsulated in rigid definitions, but rather developed in their process of historical or logical formation” (Engels, 1991, p. 103) — not to say that no definitions are allowed, but that they are necessary provisional and relational
- Marxism is not a religion or a dogma
  - That said, some currents calling themselves “Marxist” are rejected as such on the basis of their rejection of basic tenets of Marxist theory (e.g., Stalinism)
  - Parties are generally formed around a set of principles or political program they consider consistent with Marxist theory

### El marxismo y el socialismo

- Marxism is frequently, and correctly, associated with socialism and communism. Although the modern socialist movement is generally considered to have originated in the publication of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Marx and Engels (Marx and Engels, 1978), socialism predates this by centuries. Marx and Engels re-conceptualized socialism as the outcome of the working class’s struggle to overthrow capitalism, with its specific form determined by historical development and the workers who construct it rather than specified entirely in advance.
- Marx used communism to describe both the revolutionary movement of the working class in capitalist society (socialism was also frequently used by Marx and others in this context) and as the form of society that the working class was struggling to bring about

- Lenin distinguished between socialism and communism by proposing that the former corresponds to the first phase of post-capitalist society suggested by Marx (1978) as a transitional phase from capitalism to communism characterized by:
  - Private ownership of the means of production abolished
  - Workers replace the ruling class and establish a workers state under the dictatorship of the proletariat to guard against a resurgence of the bourgeoisie
  - Bourgeois ideologies and practices continue to influence social thought
  - Income calculated according to labor performed rather than need, but no longer derived from property ownership
  - Access to the means of subsistence still mediated by exchange
- Communism, in turn, would correspond to what Marx referred to as a higher stage of communism, characterized by:
  - Elimination of classes and division of labor both necessary preconditions
  - Abolition of private property and human self-alienation
  - Each produces according to ability and receives according to need
  - The state, no longer necessary, withers away
- Marx and Engels did not necessarily consider socialism nor communism as ends in themselves, but the conditions under which humanity can achieve its emancipation from need and transcend its alienation.

### **El marxismo y el socialismo “realmente existente”**

- Substantial debate over the response to countries (e.g., Soviet Union, China, Cuba) that identify themselves or are frequently described as “socialist” exists. At a fundamental level, such claims can be evaluated by asking whether such countries indicate movement towards communism, which tends to yield four groups of responses (Sweezy, 1992):
  - Nominally socialist countries are genuinely socialist and moving towards communism in a manner consistent with Marxist theory
  - Nominally socialist countries are genuinely socialist, but progress towards communism has been impeded by the rise of a bureaucracy
  - Nominally socialist countries, if they were ever genuinely socialist, have regressed to capitalism (dominant Marxist interpretation; Arnove et al., 2003)
  - Nominally socialist countries have developed into new types of class-exploitative societies that are neither capitalist nor socialist
- Most Marxists hold that provision of services by the state, state ownership or control over the means of production and central planning do not constitute socialism, or even a move towards socialism, especially when the tax burden of supporting them is primarily extracted from the wages of the working class.

## El marxismo y el capitalismo

- As a historical phase, capitalism consists of complex social formations and involves economic, social, and political behavior and attributes of different groups that do not necessarily break into two simple classes (capitalist and worker) (Harvey, 2006, clave: Harvey2006);
- As a mode of production, capitalism has a more theoretical and formal designation of two basic classes (Marx [1991] ends volume three of *Capital* with a discussion of the three basic classes in capitalist society: worker, capitalist, landowner) and wage labor-capital as the defining relation, in addition to other general attributes variously considered (Desai, 1992):
  1. Production for exchange rather than use by numerous producers
  2. Market where labor-power is bought and sold
  3. Predominant mediation of exchange by the money commodity
  4. Control of the labor-process by the capitalist or its managerial agent
  5. Competition between capitals
- Mode of production (Harvey, 2006, clave: Harvey2006)
  - Technical — methods and techniques used in the production of a particular type of use-value (e.g., mode of production of cotton)
  - Abstract — abstract representation of a reasonably narrowly defined set of relationships (e.g., capitalist mode of production, characteristic form of the labor-process under the class relations of capitalism (including production of surplus-value) presuming production of commodities for exchange)
  - Holistic/comparative — whole gamut of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption relations as well as institutional, juridical, and administrative arrangements, political organizations and state apparatus, ideology and characteristic forms of social (class) reproduction

## La dialéctica materialista

- Materialism: what exists is, or is dependent upon, matter (Bhaskar, 1992)
  - But not reducible to matter, contra mechanical materialism
  - Dialectical aspect vis-à-vis materialism posits matter and ideas in oppositional unity, with primacy of the former
- Historical materialism
  - Society rooted in relations of production and contradiction between these and forces of production (Harris, 1992) and mental conceptions of the world (Harvey, 2006) — i.e., how humans come together and develop methods to meet their needs, primacy of material needs over ideas, but contradictions between these (Shaw, 1992)
  - Dialectical, materialist and historical approach to society; explanatory as well as descriptive
  - Class struggle as the historical fulcrum of social change and revolution between modes of production
    - \* Definition of what constitutes class struggle, however, extends beyond the workplace and includes struggles over housing, education, health care, and numerous other issues
    - \* Under capitalism, the working class is the only class with both the interest and the capacity to overthrow the capital system and move society to socialism

- “Materialist dialectic” frequently used in place of “dialectical materialism” to distinguish the former from Stalinist doctrine (but see Clark and York, 2005, clave: Clark2005a)
  - Fundamental terms of dialectical approach: totality, change, contradiction and mediation (Rees, 1998)
  - Three laws of dialectic useful reminder of forms in which dialectical contradictions sometimes work themselves out, but *not the only means of dialectical development*, even in the Hegelian system:
    1. Unity of opposites
    2. Transformation of quantity into quality
    3. Negation of the negation (transformative sublation)
  - Two key points of intense debate in Marxist theory:
    1. Relationship between Marxian and Hegelian dialectic (Rees covers this thoroughly)
    2. Scientific status of Marxism vs. Marxist “world view” and the status of dialectics in the nature (Rees briefly addresses this)

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