

Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen

## Marx for the 21st Century

Spring semester 2021, MA elective

Room 2.2.30, Tuesdays 13.00-15.00

Zoom: [REDACTED]  
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### 1. Introduction

Welcome to **Marx for the 21st Century**! In this course, we will take a deep dive into Karl Marx's analyses of capitalism and their contemporary relevance. Since the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, the ideas of Karl Marx have felt present and topical like almost none other from the history of political thought. In this course, we will look at how Marx's thought can be applied to analyse different problems and topics of the twenty-first century, from migration crises to global supply chains and climate change.

### 2. General information

The course will be conducted as seminars, which will convene once a week (Tuesdays at 13:00) for two hours. Until at least 1 April, the seminars will take place on Zoom via the following link:

[REDACTED]

For the first part of the course on Marx's analysis of capitalism, these seminars will mainly take the form of lectures. Between the lectures, you will be expected to complete smaller assignments related to the readings; these are **not** required to pass the course, but completing them will greatly enhance your learning outcome, and I strongly encourage you to do so.

For the second part of the course on Marx's relevance to problems of contemporary social theory, seminars will be conducted mainly as in-class discussions where we will discuss the readings, how they address the problems we are discussing, and attempt to relate them to Marx's analysis of capitalism. You will be expected to participate actively in these discussions and should prepare accordingly. (Working questions and exercises will be provided to further this.)

The final seminar will be conducted as a workshop with student presentations, where you will get a chance to present your work in progress for the final paper and receive both peer and instructor feedback. Again, these presentations are **not** required (though completing the assignments is!), but they are a chance to present your work for peer feedback and I again **strongly** encourage you to take advantage of this.

### 3. Learning objectives

At its most fundamental, this course is about practising how to **use texts from the history of political thought as prisms to discuss and analyse contemporary problems**. The point here is not to be Marxists, but to use Marx in general and *Capital* specifically as an analytical prism. Your main take-away should be an increased ability to do this. Further, through active participation in this course you should get a thorough knowledge of Karl Marx's work and thought, especially his analyses of capitalism, and the relevance of these analyses to problems of contemporary social theory.

In the final assessment (more on which below), you will be graded based on your ability to:

- Read and analyse complex primary texts of political theory
- Identify key concepts and arguments
- Apply said concepts and arguments to contemporary social and political issues
- Interpret and discuss theory-immanent problems

At the more general level, the successful student will exhibit great skills within textual analysis, critical social theory, as well as political theory and intellectual history.

### 4. Evaluation

During the course, you will have to pass **two written assignments**, each of which are marked as **pass/fail**, with a chance to resubmit a failed assignment once. At the end of the course, you will receive your final grade based on those two assignments alone, i.e., not class participation, smaller assignments between classes, etc.

The final grade is based on the 7-point scale.

You are allowed to complete the assignments in groups of up to three people, but I encourage you to write them by yourselves, as this will give us a broader field of topics and perspectives to discuss in the WIP seminar at the end of the semester.

<i>Max length of assignments</i>	
1 student	19,200 characters (8 pages)
2 students	24,000 characters (10 pages)
3 students	28,800 characters (12 pages)

For further details, please see the [curriculum for the political science MA](#) and the [general curriculum for the Faculty of Social Sciences](#).

If you are in the BA programme, the conditions of the exam are the same as for those in the MA curriculum (i.e., portfolio exam).

#### *4.1 Mid-term paper*

Due: **26 March at 23:59** (re-submission: 23 April)

With reference to the course literature, answer one of the following questions:

- (1) Compare and discuss Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy in the section on commodity fetishism with his appropriation of mainstream political economy in the other sections of *Capital*.
- (2) In *Capital*, analyse and contrast the relationship between freedom and domination in the spheres of exchange and production respectively.
- (3) Explain and evaluate the role played by history in Marx's account of capitalism.

#### *4.2 Final paper*

Due: **30 May 2021 at 23:59** (re-submission: 20 June)

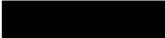
- (1) Based on the topics of contemporary social theory that we have discussed during the course, chose a thesis or problem to explore, to be approved no later than **Tuesday 11 May**.
- (2) On the basis of the course syllabus, and incorporating supplementary literature as needed, explain and evaluate the relevant arguments in relation your chosen thesis or problem.

### 5. Covid-19 and Zoom

Due to the by now near-permanent state of bio-political emergency, the lion's share of this course will likely have to be conducted via Zoom. As per [current university policy](#), this will at least be the

case until 1 April, but I hope that we might be able to meet face to face for the final few sessions of the semester.

I have tried my best to modify the course to be more suitable for online teaching. However, the first part of the course will still mainly take the form of lectures – we have a lot to get through, so I hope that you will bear with me. In order to help facilitate your engagement with the literature and each other for this part of the course, I have added some small assignments between the seminars. They are not mandatory, but I hope that you will find them stimulating.

As already mentioned in several places, we will use the following Zoom link:   


In this weird and suboptimal pandemic-induced virtual learning environment, **the single most important thing is that you feel as comfortable participating as you would have in class.** I therefore suggest that we abide by the following basic rules of Zoom etiquette:

- (1) Mute your microphone when not speaking
- (2) Pay attention when your class mates are speaking
- (3) Use a headset if at all possible
- (4) Change your screen name to your actual name (i.e., not KU username)
- (5) Use the chat function liberally (ask questions, post links and comments, etc.), but please keep it on-topic
- (6) You can also use the chat to ask questions that you might – for whatever reason – not be comfortable asking out loud; I will try to get to them during class, but any that I miss I will answer afterwards in the discussion section on Absalon
- (7) **You do not ever need to turn on your camera** unless you feel comfortable doing so, and if you do choose to have it on, don't think for a minute that you have to be 'camera ready' – come as you are, shaven or not, showered or not, in your PJs or not, with last night's make up smothered all over your face, still hung over, in a tie, in a mess, whatever works for you
- (8) If you do not want to use your camera, please consider uploading a profile photo (does not have to be a picture of you!) so I have something to connect your names with as well as something more interesting than black squares for all of us to look at
- (9) Please respect that not everyone feel comfortable letting others into their private sphere and behave accordingly toward your class mates
- (10) Pets, children, neighbours, roommates, one night stands, etc. are all very welcome in my online class
- (11) If you are a parent and need to take care of your child, please go right the goddamn fuck ahead and do so in whichever way you need ASAP no questions asked
- (12) If you are hungry, eat; if you are thirsty, drink
- (13) Most importantly: **Be considerate and do what you need to do to learn**

These are, of course, only preliminary suggestions. In the first class session, we will go over these and agree on a set of norms in the first coming class session, and if necessary they can of course also be revised during the semester.

## 6. Course structure

In the first part of the course, we will study primary texts by Marx and you will be given a thorough introduction to Marx's analysis of capitalism. We will begin by briefly discussing Marx's early engagement with the economic sphere in the 1840s, and then quickly move on to focus on his most famous work: *Capital*. Here, we will focus on the more general aspects and most central concepts from Marx's analysis of capitalist commodity production, but we will also see how he grounds his analysis of capitalism in a materialist conception of history.

In the second part, we will dive into a series of problems of contemporary social theory, as we continue to investigate themes in Marx's analysis and relate them to the nature of capitalism in the twenty-first century. This second part will be divided into six themes:

1. Logistics and global production
2. Information technology and digital economy
3. Climate and ecology
4. Social reproduction
5. Surplus population and migration
6. Space and urbanity

For each theme, we will either read one or more additional short texts extracts by Marx dealing with the topic at hand, or we will go back to some of the things we read in the first part, and then we will see how modern scholars apply key insights from Marx in their analyses. Through group discussions and the written assignments, we will also work with these themes and problems ourselves.

### 6.1 Detailed structure

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Reading(s)</i>	<i>NB!</i>
INTRODUCTION		
1. Introduction (week 6)	- Raine, "Teaching Marx in a Pandemic" - Heinrich, "Marx: Biography as Politics" - Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms"  [c. 40 pages]	Assignment: Reflect on your expectations for the course; circa 150 words; due <b>Monday 8 Feb 23:59</b> . See Absalon for details.
MARX'S ANALYSIS OF CAPITALISM		
2. Early engagements with economics (week 7)	- Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (1843) - Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill" (1844) - Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy" (1847), ch. 2 - Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto" (1848), chs. 1-2  [123 pages]	

3. <i>Capital</i> (i): The value form and the market  (week 8)	- Marx, <i>Capital</i> , chs. 1-3  [117 pages]	Assignment: Note three difficulties or questions from today's reading; due <b>Monday 22 Feb 23:59</b> . See Absalon for details.
4. <i>Capital</i> (ii): The mode of production 1  (week 9)	- Marx, <i>Capital</i> , chs. 4-8  [66 pages]	Assignment: (1) Identify a central concept, which you will explain, and (2) comment on one other student's explanation; 200-300 words; due <b>Monday 1 March 23:59</b> . See Absalon for details.
5. <i>Capital</i> (iii): The mode of production 2  (week 10)	- Marx, <i>Capital</i> , chs. 10 (sections 1-2), 12-13, 16  [61 pages]	
6. <i>Capital</i> (iv): Accumulation and history  (week 11)	- Marx, <i>Capital</i> , chs. 23, 25 (sections 1-4), 26, 32  [65 pages]	Assignment: Reflect on the relationship between theory and history in today's reading; 500 words; due <b>Monday 15 March 23:59</b> . See Absalon for details.
THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY		
7. Logistics and global production  (week 12)	- Marx, <i>Capital Vol 2</i> , 225-29 - Levinson, <i>The Box</i> , ch. 1 - Chua et al. "Turbulent Circulation" - Danyluk, "Capital's Logistical Fix" - Simpson, "The Annihilation of Time by Space"  [65 pages]	Mid-term paper due <b>Friday 26 March 23:59</b> .
<i>Easter break (week 13)</i>		
8. Climate and ecology (i): Marx's ecology  (week 14)	- Saito, <i>Marx's Ecosocialism</i> , ch. 3 - Foster, <i>Marx's Ecology</i> , ch. 5  [74 pages]	
9. Climate and ecology (ii): Fossil capital  (week 15)	- Malm, <i>Fossil Capital</i> , chs. 13-14 - Huber, <i>Lifeblood</i> , 155-169  [100 pages]	
10. Feedback session  (week 16)	- Two papers  [16-24 pages]	Peer and instructor feedback on mid-term papers.  Assignment: Upload your paper to Absalon by <b>16 April</b> ; read and provide feedback on two other papers. See Absalon for details.
11. Information technology and digital economy	- Marx, <i>Grundrisse</i> , 690-712 - Fuchs, <i>Rereading Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism</i> , chs. 2, 4	Assignment: Watch documentary clip and reflect, due <b>Monday 26 March 23:59</b> . See Absalon for details.

(week 17)	[68 pages]	
12. Social reproduction (week 18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bhattacharya, “How Not to Skip Class”</li> <li>- Vogel, <i>Marxism and the Oppression of Women</i>, chs. 10-11</li> <li>- Ferguson, <i>Women and Work</i>, ch. 8</li> <li>- Fraser, “Crisis of Care?”</li> <li>- Farris, “Femonationalism and the ‘Regular’ Army of Labor”</li> </ul> <p>[114 pages]</p>	
13. Surplus population and migration (week 19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Farris, “From the Jewish Question to the Muslim Question”</li> <li>- Farris, “Social reproduction and racialized surplus populations”</li> <li>- Rajaram, “Refugees as Surplus Population”</li> </ul> <p>[33 pages]</p>	Term paper topic to be approved no later than <b>Tuesday 11 May, 23:59</b> . See Absalon for details.
14. Space and urbanity (week 20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harvey, “The Geography of Class Power”</li> <li>- Harvey, “The Urban Process Under Capitalism”</li> <li>- Ashton &amp; Christophers, “From the Urbanization of Capital to the Capitalization of the Urban”</li> </ul> <p>[72 pages]</p>	
15. WIP workshop (week 21)	N/A	<p>Students present their WIP for peer and instructor feedback. See Absalon for details.</p> <p>Term paper due <b>Sunday 30 May 23:59</b>.</p>

**Total: 998 pages**

## 7. Course literature

### *7.1. Required reading*

- (A) Available on Absalon course page
- (B) Find on REX or otherwise available online (see link)
- (C) Buy or find on course shelf (‘semesterhylde’)

(A) Ashton, Philip and Brett Christophers. “From the Urbanization of Capital to the Capitalization of the Urban”. In Christian Berndt, Jamie Peck and Norma M. Rantzi, eds., *Market/Place. Exploring Spaces of Exchange*, 193-211. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2020.

- (B) Bhattacharya, Tithi. "How Now to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class". In Tithi Bhattacharya, ed. *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, 68-93. London: Pluto Press, 2017. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Chua, Charmaine et al. "Introduction: Turbulent Circulation: Building a Critical Engagement with Logistics". In *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, No. 4 (August 2018): 617-629. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Danyluk, Martin. "Capital's Logistical Fix: Accumulation, Globalization, and the Survival of Capitalism". In *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36, No. 4 (August 2018): 630-647. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Elbe, Ingo. "Between Marx, Marxism and Marxisms. Ways of Reading Marx's Theory". In *Viewpoint Magazine* (online), 21 October 2013. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Farris, Sara R. "Social Reproduction and Racialized Surplus Value". In *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image. Aspects of Marx's Capital Today*, ed. Peter Osborne, Éric Alliez, Eric-John Russell, 121-131. London: CRMEP Books, 2019. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Farris, Sara R. "From the Jewish Question to the Muslim Question". *Constellations* 21, No. 2 (2014): 296-307. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Farris, Sara R. "Femonationalism and the 'Regular' Army of Labor Called Migrant Women". *History of the Present* 2, No. 2 (Fall 2012), 184-199. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Ferguson, Susan. *Women and Work. Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction*. London: Pluto Press, 2020. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Foster, John Bellamy. *Marx's Ecology. Materialism and Nature*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2000. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Fraser, Nancy. "Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism." In Tithi Bhattacharya, ed. *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, 21-36. London: Pluto Press, 2017. [[Link](#)].
- (A/C) Fuchs, Christian. *Rereading Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press, 2019.
- (A) Harvey, David. "The Geography of Class Power". In *Spaces of Capital. Towards a Critical Geography*, 369-393. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.
- (B) Harvey, David. "The Urban Process Under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis". In *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2, No. 1 (March 1978): 101-131. [[Link](#)].
- (B) Heinrich, Michael. "Marx: Biography as Politics", translated by Simon Hajdini. In *Chicago Review* 63, Nos. 3-4 (Spring 2020). [[Link](#)].
- (A) Huber, Matthew T. *Lifeblood. Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*. Minneapolis, MIN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

- (B) Levinson, Marc. *The Box. How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*. Second edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. [\[Link\]](#).
- (C) Malm, Andreas. *Fossil Capital. The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*. London: Verso Books, 2015.
- (A/C) Marx, Karl. "On the Jewish Question". In *Early Writings*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, 211-242. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- (A/C) Marx, Karl. "Excerpts from James Mills's *Elements of Political Economy*". In *Early Writings*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, 259-279. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- (A) Marx, Karl. *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 6, 105-212. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976.
- (C) Marx, Karl. *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books, 1990. Pp. 125-319 (chs. 1-8), 340-353 (ch. 10.), 429-438 (ch. 12), 643-654 (ch. 16), 711-724 (ch. 23), 873-876 (ch. 26).
- (A) Marx, Karl. *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume Two*. Translated by David Fernbach. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- (A/C) Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, translated by Martin Nicolaus. London: Penguin Books, 1993.
- (B) Raine, Barnaby. "Teaching Marx in a Pandemic". *Verso Books* (blog). Verso Books, 22 May, 2020. [\[Link\]](#).
- (B) Rajaram, Prem Kumar. "Refugees as Surplus Population: Race, Migration and Capitalist Value Regimes". In *New Political Economy* 23, No. 5: 627-639. [\[Link\]](#).
- (B) Saito, Kohei. *Marx's Ecosocialism. Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2017. [\[Link\]](#).
- (B) Simpson, Michael. "The Annihilation of Time by Space: Pluri-temporal Strategies of Capitalist Circulation". In *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 2, No. 1 (2019): 110-128. [\[Link\]](#).
- (A) Vogel, Lise. *Marxism and the Oppression of Women. Toward a Unitary Theory*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

## 7.2 Suggested reading

- Anderson, Perry. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso Books, 1979.
- Balibar, Étienne. *The Philosophy of Marx*. Translated by Chris Turner. London: Verso Books, 2007.
- Benaviv, Aaron and John Clegg. "Crisis and Immiseration: Critical Theory Today". In *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, vol. 3, edited by Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane, 1629-1648. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.

- Callinicos, Alex. *Deciphering Capital. Marx's Capital and its Destiny*. London: Bookmarks Publications, 2014.
- Harvey, David. *A Companion to Marx's Capital*. London: Verso Books, 2010.
- Heinrich, Michael. *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx's Capital*. Translated by Alexander Locascio. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2012.
- Heinrich, Michael. *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society. The Life of Marx and the Development of his Work. Volume I: 1818-1841*. Translated by Alexander Locascio. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2019.
- Leopold, David. *The Young Karl Marx. German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Liedman, Sven-Eric. *A World to Win. The Life and Works of Karl Marx*. Translated by Jeffrey N. Skinner. London: Verso Books, 2018.
- Mattick, Paul. *Theory as Critique. Essays on Capital*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Musto, Marcello. "The Writing of *Capital*: Genesis and Structure of Marx's Critique of Political Economy". *Critique* 46, No. 1 (2018), 11-26.
- Musto, Marcello. *Another Marx. Early Manuscripts to the International*. Translated by Patrick Camiller. London: Verso Books, 2018.
- Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Roberts, William C. *Marx's Inferno. The Political Theory of Capital*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Roberts, William C. "What was Primitive Accumulation?" *European Journal of Political Theory* 19, No. 4 (2020): 532-552.
- Wolff, Jonathan and David Leopold. "Karl Marx". In Edward N. Zalta, ed., *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition). [[Link](#)].