

Macalester College

Capitalism and World (Dis) Order

(Intl 489– 01)

Spring 2017

Carnegie 411

Professor: Dr. Ahmed I. Samatar  
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*You can tell that the capitalist system is in trouble when people start talking about capitalism. It indicates that the system has ceased to be as natural as the air we breathe, and can be seen instead as the historically rather recent phenomenon that it is. Moreover, whatever was born can always die, which is why social systems like to present themselves as immortal. Rather as a bout of dengue fever makes you newly aware of your body, so a form of social life can be perceived for what it is when it begins to break down.*

--- Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, 2011.

## I. Course Description

### A. Purpose

The age of globalization presents us with a dizzying variety of inter-connected and contradictory phenomena. Yet, ‘in the flood of the present,’ it is a major challenge to distinguish what is durable, if not controlling, and at the heart of our times from what is ephemeral and lies at the margins. This is one of the basic curiosities that animate this seminar. In this context, then, our explorations will revolve around the concept of **capitalism** – a concept of resilient heuristic value.

Capitalism, for many, is synonymous with the “natural” exchange of goods and services through “the free market.” This interpretation conveys important assumptions. However, fuller examination shows that capitalism is neither natural, free, nor limited to economic (though dominant) transactions. Capitalism more precisely is at once a historical social system and a way of being which now penetrates all forms of life: cultural, ecological, civic, and more. This senior seminar aims to identify the origins of the system, delineate the main contours of its evolution, and bring out some of the main features of its contemporary status. Thinkers such as Smith, Marx, and Braudel will loom, but readings range from classic works by Weber to contemporary renditions by Anievas and Nisancioglu, Dyer-Withford, and Sennett. The course concludes with a substantial research paper on a topic, relevant to theme, of a student’s choice.

## B. Strategy

The material for the seminar is organized into the following six sections:

1. Syllabus Review, Distribution of Assignments.
2. Capitalism: An Introductory Lecture.
3. Religion and Rise of Capitalism in Europe.
4. Geopolitics, the Role of the Rest, and The Great Divergence.
5. New Forms of Primitive Accumulation and the Emergence of Global Cyper-Proletariat.
6. Difference, Conflict, Cooperation, and Solidarity.
7. Final Research Project.

A note of caution: While the readings and the general orientation of the seminar are hoped to be broad and accessible to students from different disciplinary backgrounds, the materials may not meet the optimum test of comprehensiveness, on such a vast theme, called forth by transdisciplinarity. Despite this and other shortcomings, however, members of the seminar are strongly urged **not** to hesitate to bring their intellectual proclivities and wares to the concerns of the semester. In the end, we will strive toward **integrative thinking** — that is, a strategy of keeping the particulars and the whole together through a disciplined dialectical oscillation between theoretical abstraction and historical concreteness.

*Code of the Semester: Be wakeful, share your thoughts, be respectful of the mind, and stay **on top** of all assignments.*

## II. Texts (available at Bookstore)

- Arievas, Alexander and Nisancioglu, Kerem. *How The West Came to Rule: The Geopolitics of Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press, 2015.
- Dyer-Witthford, Nick. *Cyper-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Age*. Pluto Press, 2015.
- Sennett, Richard. *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation*. New Haven: Yale University, 2012.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2001 (1930).

### III. Course Format and Requirements

We meet on Monday evenings (7:00–10:00 p.m.). The mainstays of the seminar are: introductory lectures, dense readings, **brief student** reports, collective discussions, very early paper, mid-term examination on the commanding concepts covered thus far in the course, and a major meditative final project.

#### A. Weekly Format

Every member will be expected to have completed the readings for the week. However, *two* students (except on a few occasions) will be assigned to lead each session by doing the following:

1. Identify the principal argument(s) or point(s) and, when possible, the strategy used to deliver the argument(s);
2. Isolate 3–4 concepts that you deem most *seminal* in the author's work and *explain* their importance, and their relationship to each other;
3. Relate the gist of the material to the preceding readings;
4. Articulate your reactions (be *specific* as well as brief); and
5. Set two questions for general discussion.

Discussion leaders should prepare a typed outline (no more than two pages) that will accompany the presentation, and distribute it to the rest of the participants **before** the seminar begins. Each presentation must **not exceed twenty-five minutes**. Full participation by everyone in the life of the seminar is a supreme requirement.

#### B. Requirements:

1. Attendance: every unexcused absence will result in the **deduction** of FIVE points from the final score.
2. Continuous class participation/oral presentations (20 points)
3. First paper (3,000 words, 20 points): Personal statement on the pursuit of the seminar. The paper should include the following:
  - (a) Definitions of these concepts: *Capitalism* and *World (Dis)Order*.
  - (b) Reasons behind your decision to enroll in this course and, if different, what you anticipate that the seminar will add to your intellectual and personal growth at Macalester and beyond (be specific).
  - (c) An appropriate title page.

**\*\*\*\*Due Jan. 27 (Friday), by 3:00 p.m., in the mail holder outside of my office, 405 Carnegie Hall.**

4. Mid-term Examination (25 points), **in class**, on major concepts of the course.  
**Monday, April 10.**
5. Typed outline of the Final Independent Project: In my mail holder **no later 2:00 pm. Friday, April 14.**
6. Final Project (6,000-7000 words, *excluding* notes and bibliography, 35 points):
  - (a) Set the context.
  - (b) Chose a *specific* topic that could be examined in the context of the capitalist era.
  - (c) Express the reasons behind your choice.
  - (d) Identify the organizational structure of your paper and the techniques of analysis/synthesis.
  - (e) Identify and explain the main concepts that will drive or sustain your exploration of the topic. This is one way to get at some quick review of the relevant literature.
  - (f) Present your exploration of the phenomenon and your subsequent findings.
  - (g) Integrate the rest of the readings and lectures (and other relevant literature that you find) where appropriate.
  - (h) Compose a fitting title page.

**Due MONDAY, MAY 1st, in class.**

**Reminder and Caution: There is NO final examination for this seminar. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, with the pages numbered.**

**NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.**

#### **IV. GRADING**

100 – 95	=	A
94 – 90	=	A-
89 – 85	=	B+
84 – 80	=	B
79 – 75	=	B-
74 – 70	=	C+
69 – 65	=	C
64 – 60	=	C-
59 – 55	=	D

## V. Course Schedule

### A. *Introduction* (Jan. 23)

1. Review of seminar philosophy and syllabus
2. Distribution of Assignments
3. Clearing Preliminaries:
  - (a) What is a Paradigm?
  - (b) What is Capitalism?
  - (c) What is World Order?
  - (d) How Does One Approach the Phenomena?

### B. *The Rise of Capitalism In Europe* (Jan30).

1. Hermeneutic Tradition, History and Understanding.
2. Wealth vs. Exchange/Profit.
3. Religion/Spirit of Capitalism and Calling.

**Required Reading: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 1–50.**

Discussants: -----*Jacob Bessen*-----

-----*Ashlyn Tooley*-----

### C. *Practical Ethics/ Worldly Asceticism* (Feb. 6).

1. Ascetic Protestantism.
2. Calvinism/Puritanism.
3. Predestination/Restlessness.
4. Work/Middle Class Comfort.
5. Rationality.

**Required Reading: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. pp. 53-125**

Discussants: -----*Austin Stuedell*-----

-----*Sequoia Butler*-----

**D. Counter Paradigm (Feb.13)**

1. Eurocentrism.
2. The Transition Debate.
3. Origins and Theory of Combined and Uneven Development.
4. Nomadic Mode/Black Death.

**Required reading: Anievas and Nisancioglu, *How The West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism*. pp.1-90.**

Discussants: -----*Miriam Osman*-----

-----*Maria Melendez Margarida*--

**E. Counter-Thrust Continued (Feb. 20).**

1. The Ottoman-Habsburg Competition.
2. Pre-capitalism/Tributary Order.
3. Bourgeois revolutions
4. Slavery and The Atlantic.
5. Subsumption of Labour

**Required Reading: Anievas and Nisancioglu, *How The West Came to Rule*. pp. 91-214.**

Discussants: -----*Rosa Durst*-----

-----*Valerie Cardozo*-----

**F. Counter-Thrust Continued (Feb. 27).**

1. The Dutch and the Colonization of Southeast Asia.
2. Primitive Accumulation.
3. Antediluvian Capital.
4. The rise of the West. And the “Privilege of Backwardness.”
5. “Penalties of Progress.”
6. Revising Uneven and Combined development.

**Required Reading: Anievas and Nisancioglu, *How The West Came to Rule*. pp. 215–283.**

Discussants: -----*Taylor Joseph*-----

-----*Kava Vasquez*-----

**G. Cybernetic Capitalism (March 6).**

1. The Vortex and Newest Division of Labour.
2. Class and Cyber-Proletariat.
3. Production, Circulation, and Financialization.
4. Gender and Cheap Electronics.

**Required Reading: Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber- Proletariat: Golobl Labour in Digital Vortex*, pp. 1 –101**

Discussants: -----*Julia Makayova*-----

-----*Graeme Allison*-----

**SPRING BREAK (March 11-19).**

**H. Cyber-Proletariat Continued (March 20).**

1. Mobile Phone As Commodity/ Transmission Belt.
2. Proletarian Currents.
3. Aftermath.
4. “Militant Optimism’ v. “False Optimism.”

**Required Reading: Dyer-Witheford, *The Cyber-Proletariat*, pp. 102–205.**

Discussants: -----*Ashlyn Tooley*-----

-----*Sequoia Butler*-----

I. *Diversity, Tribalism, and Togetherness*, Part 1 (March 27).

1. The Cooperative Frame of Mind.
2. The Seeds of Cooperation.
3. The Impact of the Reformation.

**Required Reading: Sennett, *Together*, pp. 3-129**

Discussants: -----*Austin Stuedell*---

-----*Miriam Osman*----

J. *Together Continued*, Parts 11 and 111 (April 3).

1. Inequality.
2. The Uncooperative Self.
3. Cooperation Strengthened.
4. Reinventing the Community.

**Required Reading: Sennett, pp. 133- 280**

Discussants: -----*Jacob Bessen*-----

-----*Maria Melendez Margarida*--

-----*Taylor Joseph*-----

**\*\*\* MID-TERM EXAMINATION (April 10)**

**K. *Outline of the Final Project Due no later than April 14.***

**L. *Work on the Final Project (April 11 -- May 1<sup>st</sup>.)***

**Possible Topics for a Paper.**

- Capitalism and Culture.
- Capitalism and Gender.
- Capitalism and Democracy.

- Capitalism and Class.
- Capitalism and Race.
- Capitalism and Freedom.
- Capitalism and the City.
- Capitalism and Agriculture.
- Capitalism and Music.
- Capitalism and Architecture.
- Capitalism and Health.
- Capitalism and War.
- Capitalism and Development.
- Capitalism and the State.
- Capitalism and the Environment.
- Capitalism and Religion.
- Capitalism and Sexuality.
- Capitalism and Education.
- Capitalism and Mass Communication.
- Capitalism and Fashion.
- Capitalism and Food.
- Capitalism and Energy.
- Capitalism and Film.
- Capitalism and Death.