



Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development

David Harvey

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This book is the realization of the prestigious Hettner-Lecture series organized by the Department of Geography at the University of Heidelberg and the Klaus Tschira Foundation in 2004. The annual lecture series seeks to research post-disciplinary issues linked to geography, economics, the social sciences, and the humanities with previous lectures delivered *inter alia* by Doreen Massey (1998) and John Agnew (2000).

While due regard should be granted to the original delivery of the essays as a set of lectures, the book advances on many of David Harvey's salutary contributions to post-disciplinary political economy. Structurally, the volume is organized around two main essays, 'Neoliberalism and the restoration of class power' and 'Notes toward a theory of uneven geographical development', with the addition of a supplementary chapter on 'Space as a key word'. The ideas raised across these compositions project, in a highly accessible way, some of the essential features of the author's seminal work on the uneven geographical development of capitalism.

The chapter on the restoration of class power provides a narrative sketch of the uneven geographical development of neoliberalism that links well with the author's earlier *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005). The central normative objective here is to focus on the class exclusions typical of capitalism that are crucial to its multi-scalar articulation across national, regional, and metropolitan modes of governance. At stake here is a thorough dismissal of the liberal attachment to possessive individualism and the move toward an alternative bundle of universal rights. The task of critical engagement, as argued, is to highlight the crucial role of *class struggle* in the restoration and/or checking of neoliberalism. Harvey refers to a generation of class struggle that 'occurred in decades when many progressives were theoretically persuaded that class was a meaningless category and when those institutions from which class struggle had hitherto been waged on behalf of the working class were under assault' (p. 65). The intervention he articulates, to recognize class struggle and respond in *class terms* to the uneven geographical development of capital accumulation, is a crucial move. It is one that challenges an exclusive and prevalent concentration on discourse at the expense of agency linked to class power and political economy so that the overriding economic significance of the promotion of certain discourses, in favour of particular class interests and purposes, is grasped.



Turning to the second main chapter on the theory of uneven geographical development, a “unified’ field theory’ is proposed that embraces overlapping ways of thinking about uneven geographical development, including (1) diffusionist interpretations of capitalism; (2) arguments focusing on the development of uneven development; (3) environmentalist explanations; and (4) geopolitical interpretations. Future advances in this area would no doubt have to square debates on ‘uneven and combined development’ and earlier arguments about the ‘development of underdevelopment’. For the present, the production of a hierarchy of scales is captured within the theory of uneven geographical development that recognizes capitalism’s scalar articulation at the local, regional, national, and transnational levels. These issues are developed in more detail in the final chapter, focusing on representations of space (or conceptualized space) and spaces of representation (lived space) while affirming a materiality to the analysis through the conceptualization of exploitation and class struggle.

The book unreservedly succeeds in disseminating Harvey’s broader intellectual project related to tracing the uneven geographical development of capitalism. At the same time, though, the volume should not be read separately from his wider scholarship on the contradictions of the historical geography of capitalism, particularly his classic *Limits to Capital* (1982). For it is here that the process of uneven geographical development is captured in detail and the countervailing and contradictory forces of spatial concentration and dispersal, fixity, and motion, in the accumulation and circulation of capital are traced. The focus on *new rounds* of primitive accumulation, attacking and eroding preceding social relations of production, also receives first attention in *Limits to Capital*. A process that would later become articulated under the rubric of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ — or the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices — in his *The New Imperialism* (2003).

What is perhaps missing from the current book under review is a sense of the spiral movement in theoretical development that marks the scholarship of *Limits to Capital*. The dialectical move from abstract-simple concepts to concrete-complex arguments is less evident here but then we need to remind ourselves that the volume does stem from a lecture series. As a result, it is a text that undoubtedly succeeds in conveying more immediately the theoretical reflections and empirical research that marks David Harvey’s accomplishment. The book will therefore prove invaluable while readers should not slough off their share of intellectual work by avoiding engagement with the wider corpus of the author’s output.

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