Write an Essay on the Significance of a Theoretical Tradition and/or Theorist(s) of Your Choice.

Personal Question:

How has Geography Engaged with Marxist Doctrines of Thought?

Introduction:

Attributed as the "father of modern political economy" (Herod, 2016, P.458) Karl Marx was a nineteenth century German philosopher and political economist; whose focus on social inequality led to paradigmatic shift within many academic disciplines, in addition to the formation of communist and socialist political agendas (Castree, 2008). Marx focused his writings as inherent critiques of capitalism, as a response to the class conflict, inequality and poverty he observed whilst living in London, the periodical nexus of rapid capitalist industrialisation (Marx, 1867; Bassett, 2009). Despite many ideas being developed after his death in 1883 (Bassett, 2009), the collective doctrine of Marxism has had a profound effect on [human] geography in academia: in both theoretical philosophies and research. This essay will focus on how Marxist geographies have enhanced definitions of class as a result of ideological changes to the scholastic foundations of the discipline, leading to the enrichment of subsequent research. 'Class' can be defined in its most basic format as an expression to distinguish between collective groups of individuals who have similar socio-economic status within society (Herod, 2016; Gidwani, 2009). In order to explore such changes to the definition of class, this essay will follow a chronological format. First, the foundational economic and philosophical principles of class within Marxism will be explored, with additional input from Weber and Durkheim throughout the nineteenth century. Then, the interplay of geography and Marxism during the twentieth century will be unpacked, with David Harvey spearheading a paradigm shift within geography and geographical research, marked by a movement away from logically positivist spatial science approaches (Pratt, 2009). This was supported by further Marxist geographers - for example Doreen Massey - who placed an innovative focus on socio-spatial analysis, exemplified by research surrounding urbanisation and urban planning. Finally, in the late 20th/early 21st century, post-Marxist approaches will be explored, who developed identity-based, culturalist methods. Holistically, this essay will argue that

Marxist philosophy has allowed geography to develop multifaceted definitions of class over time, making social analysis research far more complex and explanatory of reality, as opposed to predictive or descriptive. This has resulted in the extension of the subject to far beyond a positivist spatial science, allowing for understandings to be given to concepts such as spatial relations, gender and identity (Massey, 1984 & 1994; Gibson-Graham, J-K, 1996).

Part I: Philosophical Foundations — 19th Century

Within *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1848), Marx formulates the idea of class analysis (Gidwani, 2009) by stating that all societal history can be boiled down to "the history of struggles" (P.1). Prior to Marx, comprehensions of class were minimal. Most understandings were feudalism-based (Herod, 2016), creating reductionist distinctions between nobility and peasantry; with class determined by ancestral privilege or basic economic indicators (Gidwani, 2009). Instead, Marx observed that class was in-fact far more nuanced and complex, founded on socio-economic relations as a result of ongoing capitalism. In order to create understandings of what he was observing, Marx worked retrospectively (Marx, 1867; Herod, 2016): looking back at history to create understandings for the present. His work entitled *Das Kapital* (1867) outlined the cleavage of society into two main groups, the working class/proletariat, and the upper class/bourgeoisie *[Marx acknowledged the existence of subgroups within society, for example 'lumpenproletariat' and 'landlords'; a notion developed by Harvey (1973) under Marxist Geographies]*. Marx posited that throughout history, a minority of bourgeoisie had continuously appropriated means of production from the majority proletariat, such as land and capital required to produce goods, via a process of 'alienation'. The two societal groups exist as mutually dependent entities, despite having vastly conflicting interests. Such dependence occurs as a result of a transaction, the content of which has changed throughout history. In feudalist systems, the peasantry/proletariat may receive protection from invasion by the nobility/ bourgeoisie in exchange for labour on their land; while after the industrial revolution, wages are exchanged for labour in production processes (Herod, 2016).

Such divergence which Marx observed throughout history was further catalysed by the onset of the industrial revolution, as mass production processes allowed for vast capital growth for

the bourgeoise. This allowed him to develop his labour theory of value (Marx, 1867; Bassett, 2009), where if we assume goods are sold in a fair market, the simple resale of goods is unable to produce surplus profit as the commodity in question has not changed. However, production processes which enhance the commodity, or create new commodities, innately do allow for surplus value to be created. Such surplus value is directly and solely a result of the input of human labour in the production process from the proletariat; yet as they do not own the means of production themselves, they also do not own the end commodity. The bourgeoise can therefore sell the commodity for a profit, reinvest in the production process and allow for the cycle to continue to enforce the cleft between the two classes of society (Marx, 1876; Cox, 2021)

Therefore, Marx initially creates an economic definition of class, with the ownership of the means of production acting as the root cause of the existence of class within society. In doing so, an inherently relational definition is created - as opposed to categorical - allowing for the subsequent development of class theory (Herod, 2016; Cox, 2021). Despite not being a solely geographical theorist, Marx demonstrates a fundamentally geographic approach to understanding class, via the observation of the experiences between individuals their environment and the subsequent relation to capitalism. This was compounded by the addition of further relational characteristics within the two primary societal classes themselves. The notions of 'klasse an sich' and 'klasse für sich' *[trans: class in itself/for itself]* add social vectors to the definition as a whole, accounting for both shared characteristics within members of the same class and a collective class consciousness and self-recognition respectively (Marx, 1876; Cox, 2021, Herod, 2016). Together, these add primary understandings of identity to Marx's definition of class, thus creating a richer, relational and objectively geographic definition.

Through his initial understandings, the philosophical foundations of geography's engagement with Marxism are set; however further Marxist thinkers also had input in creating a more detailed definition of class. Max Weber built on Marx's initial understandings of class by primarily adding the notion of subjective status groups (Weber, 1920; Jones, 1975; Gane, 2005). Such a broadening of the definition of class was not without criticism on a philosophical level (Giddens, 1973), yet allowed for prior notions of identity and belonging within society

to be extended within geographic academia. This allowed for people to *[partially]* choose their membership in society, as an economically rich individual may identify socially with lower classes, in turn purchasing less expensive commodities, and vice versa (Herod, 2016). Additionally, Émile Durkheim (1893) developed notions of subjectivity by theorising that class emerged as a result of collectively shared experiences of labour (Giddens, 1971; Grusky & Galescu, 2005). He believed that classes were held together by groups of individuals with a work-based shared identity with mutual interests and spatial experiences, thus furthering subjective and relational notions within the collective definition of class *[a notion developed later by Cox (2021)]*.

Collectively, Marxist thinkers Marx, Weber and Durkheim synthesised a relational definition of class which has laid the foundation for subsequent class analysis within geography in addition to numerous other academic disciplines. However, despite large aspects of their work being geographical [as well as political, philosophical and economic], the true interplay of academic geography and the doctrine of Marxism occurred during the twentieth century, with David Harvey spearheading paradigmatic research utilizing such definitions of class.

Part II: Marxist Geographies [Mid] 20th Century

With the philosophical and definitional foundations set for a paradigm shift within geographical research, the interplay between the academic subject and Marxism unfolded in the mid-twentieth century. Contextually, geography then represented a highly positivist spatial science approach (Pratt, 2009, Castree & Harvey, 2006; Cresswell, 2013), largely as a result of the recent 'quantitative revolution' within the field (Wilson, 1972). However, such a reliance on mathematical and falsifiable methodologies had created a chasm between research and reality (Harvey, 1973;1982), meaning the true root cause of many issues was clouded by overwhelmingly categorical definitions of class. In order to create externalist research, which is far more reflective of real life, a [periodically] radical use of "Marxist research agendas" (Castree, 2008, P.62) and spacio-relational definitions of class must be used.

Fronting such a paradigm shift within the subject was David Harvey, who worked to both change the academic framework as well as subsequent research within geography (Harvey, 1982). Once a student of 'new-geographers' Chorley and Haggett (Castree & Harvey, 2006), Harvey promoted Marxist geographies under a socio-academic movement; looking to create a brand of radical geography more reflective of society, in addition to galvanising socialist political movements in the 1960s. Whilst the latter had little success (Castree, 2008), the radical brand of Marxist geography did, and his seminal work *Social Justice and the City* (1973) represents a complete example of how altered definitions of class rooted in space can further geographical research.

Writing in a time of rapid urbanization post-industrial revolution (Cox, 2021), pre-existing class relations had been largely intensified within ever expanding cities (Harvey, 1982). In order to understand the socio-spatial implications of urbanisation, Harvey focuses his research on income inequality between comparatively richer and poorer neighbourhoods. This acts as significant challenge to traditional spatial science research agenda, whose focus on objectivity and neutrality masks a myriad of class struggles and "unjust social order" (P.62) which overwhelmingly favoured the social elites (Castree, 2008). The addition of class [and power] to his argument allowed for significant development beyond pre-existing theories such as Bid Rent Theory and the Alonso-Muth model (Ward & Aalbers, 2016). Whilst the prior theories looked to describe and predict land use within cities, Harvey's methodology gave understanding behind why such variations had occurred; in addition to subverting many of the incorrect conclusions made by prior theories, such as most low-income housing existing in the centre of the city as opposed to far outside, as according to the Alonso-Muth Model (Harvey, 1973).

Harvey's explanation was able to extend beyond "simplistic centre-periphery models" (Ward & Aalbers, 2016, P.1769) by also involving discussions of power, largely held by monopolising landlords; a development from Marx's subcategorizations of society. He developed this point further in his 1974 essay 'Class-Monopoly Rent', giving an argument for the collusion of landowners and state institutions in order to suppress the poorer classes economically by creating artificial scarcity of land. Such descriptions of power relations are inherently opinionated, and act as one of numerous examples of Harvey's retaliation against the

academic norm (Harvey, 1974; Castree, 2008). Through movement away from impartial spatial science approaches, such arguably biased discussions can be opened for debate within academic geography, allowing for much deeper - and accurate - understandings to be created surrounding geo-social phenomena; thus creating a geography of dialectics (Pratt, 2009; Castree 2008).

The primary use of such dialectics by Harvey worked to inspire a subsequent generation of Marxist geographers: observing society through the same critical lens. This led to the development of numerous social theories which were otherwise obscured by positivist logic, notably theories of urban inequality *[among other research in: suburbanisation, Walker (1981) and gentrification, Smith (1979, 1982) for example]*.

Acting as a secondary figure in the interplay between geography and Marxism, Doreen Massey (1984) presents a theory of urban inequality, driven by class inequality in her novel *Spatial Divisions of Labour*; referencing the impact of gender and workplaces on the spatial formation of inequality. Massey worked in a retrospective way akin to both Marx and Harvey before her (Stilwell, 2019), referencing 'depressed' areas within the UK and seeking to explain why. Often these areas experienced rapid capitalist growth, before post-industrial offshoring and movements of labour had removed sources of income for such areas, extending understandings far beyond accepted theories of the time: namely industrial location theory (McCann & Sheppard, 2003). Simultaneously, a discussion of identity politics is opened up; referencing the impact of race and gender as divisive forces on society. Here notions from the later Marxist philosophers *[Part I]* are evoked, allowing for class to be further broken down, into race and gender categories, as within political discussion "'whole classes' are rarely actual political subjects" (Massey, 1984, P.42). Massey's work was an initial step towards more identity based Marxist geographies of the 21st century *[notion explored in part III]*, whilst also having a significant socio-political impact (Stilwell, 2019; Cox, 2021; Barnett, 2016); markedly UK policy changes to reinvest in such 'depressed' areas to create social change.

By this point, Marxist geographical approaches were strongly established within academia, despite often being termed as 'radical' by some traditional, positivist thinkers (Herod, 2016). Their subversion of the traditional social-science definition of class to an inherently Marxist

one, based on relational concepts of space and later identity (Harvey, 1982; Massey, 1984; Barnett, 2016), allowed for richer social analysis to take place. However, such early theorists were not without modern criticism, as the definition was spatio-temporally fixated, it created understandings which are overly sensitive to changes in landscape (Barnett, 2016). Therefore, further thinkers in the late 20th/early 21st century diversified the definition of class to majority "identity-based, culturalist approaches" (P.426), in turn creating more multifaceted definitions of class.

Part III: Post-Marxism in Geography [Late] 20th/21st Century

Barnett (2016) encompasses the decline of class-centric research in academic geographies of recent years through the rhetorical comparison of "What happed to Marxism in geography?" (P.425). Post-Harvey [and Massey], geographical thinkers had moved away from definitions of class fundamentally rooted in space, and instead looked for a multidimensional approach with numerous entry points to social analysis (Smith, 2000). Criticism of Harvey's early work acted as the motivation for such a change of definition, with an overreliance on spatial landscapes causing unrealistic social sensitivity to change (Barnett, 2016). This was coupled alongside growing public disillusionment with Marxism generally after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In its place, J-K Gibson-Graham (1996) initially provided a post-Fordist account of geographical Marxism, drawing influences from "poststructuralist feminism" (P.5) among numerous other entry points to social analysis. Due to the onset of neo-liberalism and globalisation in modern society, class dichotomies had been further catalysed, causing more complex and forceful power relations, therefore meaning that postmodern approaches must be used to create relevant understandings (Gibson-Graham, 1996 & 1997; Barnett, 2016). Definitions of class were extended, beyond Harvey's understandings of class as a solely economic issue, to include notions of race, sexuality and gender. Such pluralisation allows for the true causes of class inequality and prejudice to be uncovered in geographical research, however in turn definitions of class became widely diffused within geography.

Gibson-Graham's theory allowed for geographical research to be far more reflective of the "multidimensional cultural politics" (Smith, 2000) of the time, and spawned a new understanding of class through the rise of modern identity politics. This was a highly inclusionist thought process, with many concepts previously left out of geographical research for being too ideological or theoretical, thus allowing for more politically correct and diverse research to take place. Further research under such logic could account for the increasing heterogeneity of society, with notions such as gender, race and sexuality being explored through intra-class research *[for example: Hall's (2001) work on race and culture in society]*.

However, this was not without criticism on both a philosophical and theoretical level (Harvey, 1996), as attempts to reduce the aforementioned complex relations within class to one topic, political movement or phrase were becoming increasing reductionist (Smith, 2000). Much of the initial Marxist logic had dissipated, for example the potential for the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie (Gibson-Graham, 1996), meaning that geographical research was moving further away from the initial doctrine/philosophy itself. Therefore, traditional Marxism's interplay with geography has largely ended (Barnett, 2016; Smith, 2000), leaving behind a legacy of identity politics; thus creating a brand of geography with inclusion and political correctness integral to its increasingly broad definition of class.

Conclusion:

Holistically, the fusion of Marxist philosophy and geography has been hailed as "the most significant development in human geography since the 'quantitative revolution'" (Glick, 1984, P.405), allowing for the subject to progress exponentially beyond the bounds of positivist spatial science. This essay has followed the development and creation of both Marxist philosophies and geographies, through both rise and decline. The underlying Marxist philosophy set a multi-disciplinary archetype to defining class, viewing the phenomena as a relational, capital-centric occurrence. Early notions of identity and belonging were also explored, with the majority of contributions coming from the later 19th century thinkers Weber and Durkheim. With such foundations set, the interplay of Marxism and geography was largely thanks to Harvey, who used both Marxist research agendas and definitions of class to create a relational brand of geography, capable of producing conclusions more explanatory

[as opposed to descriptive] and relative to wider society. His work *Social Justice and the City* acts as one of the most seminal and ground-breaking examples of how altered definitions of class can further develop geographical research; bringing in further concepts such as power relations. Expansion was made under the new Marxist geographies with new social theories being created, notably Massey's contributions to understanding urban inequality across the UK. However, with the continued onset of neo-liberal politics and increasingly complex class relations use of Marxism-driven research agendas and definitions of class had declined within 21st century geographical research. Instead, a multifaceted culturalist approach was adopted, with Gibson-Graham acting as the predominant voice in a post-Fordist economy, leading to a brand of identity politics to act as the lasting legacy for Marxism in geography. Overall, the use of Marxism and changes to the definition of class have had significant impact on the subsequent research and academic philosophy behind geography; allowing for the subject to flourish beyond positivist constraints. Greater understanding has also been given to concepts such as identity, gender and race, allowing for geography to remain a cosmopolitan, sensitive subject with true understandings and reflections of society.

Primary References:

Durkheim, E., & Halls, W. D. (1893). *The division of labor in society.* Trans [1984]. New York: Free Press.
Gibson-Graham, J-K. (1996). *The end of capitalism (as we know it): a feminist critique of political economy.* (Blackwell).
Gibson-Graham, J-K. (1997). *'Re-placing class in economic geography'*. In R. Lee and J. Wills (eds.) Geographies of Economies (Arnold), pp. 87-97.
Harvey, D. (1973). *Social justice and the city (Vol. 1).* University of Georgia press.
Harvey, D. (1974). *Class-monopoly rent, finance capital and the urban revolution*. Regional Studies. 8:3-4, 239-255.
Harvey, D. (1982). *The limits to capital*. Verso books.
Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The communist manifesto*. 1967. Trans. Samuel Moore. London: Penguin, 15.
Marx, K. (1867). *Das kapital.* e-artnow.
Massey, D. (1984). *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (Macmillan).
Massey, D. (1994). *'Uneven development: social change and spatial divisions of labour'*, in Space, Place and Gender (Polity).
Weber, M. (1920). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Trans. [2012] Simon and Schuster.

Secondary References:

Barnett, C (2016). *Class 2*. Chapter 31; in Agnew, J. A., & Duncan, J. S. (Eds.). (2016). The Wiley-Blackwell companion to human geography. John Wiley & Sons.
Bassett, K. (2009). '*Marxism'*, in: Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M.J., and Whatmore, S. The Dictionary of Human Geography. 5th Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
Castree, N. (2008). *Limits To Capital, David Harvey*. Chapter 8; in. Hubbard, P., Kitchin, R., & Valentine, G. (Eds.). (2008). Key texts in human geography. Sage.
Castree and D. Harvey (eds.). 2006. *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*. Oxford, Blackwell.
Cox, K. (2021). *Marxism and Human Geography*. Edward Elgar.
Cresswell, T. (2013) *Geographical Thought, Chapter 5* 'Spatial Science and the Quantitative Revolution' pages 79-102
Gane, N. (2005). *Max Weber as Social Theorist: 'Class, Status, Party'*. European journal of social theory, 8(2), 211-226.
Gibson-Graham, J-K. (2010). *'Classics in human geography revisited: Gibson-Graham, J.K. 1996: The end of capitalism (as we knew it): a feminist critique of political economy'*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Giddens, A. (1973). *Class Structure in the Advanced Societies*. Hutchinson. London.
Gidwani, V. (2009). *'Class'*, in: Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M.J., and Whatmore, S. The Dictionary of Human Geography. 5th Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
Glick, T. F. (1984). *History and philosophy of geography. Progress in human geography*. 8(2). 275-283.
Grusky, D. B., & Galescu, G. (2005). *Foundations of a neo-Durkheimian class analysis*. Approaches to class analysis, 51-81. Chicago
Hall, S., Maharaj, S., Campbell, S., & Tawadros, G. (2001). *Modernity and difference (p. 36)*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts. Chicago
Harvey, D.(1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Blackwell, Oxford)
Herod, A. (2016). *Class 1*. Chapter 30; in Agnew, J. A., & Duncan, J. S. (Eds.). (2016). The Wiley-Blackwell companion to human geography. John Wiley & Sons.
Jones, B. (1975). *Max Weber and the Concept of Social Class*. The Sociological Review. 23(4). 729-757.
McCann, P., & Sheppard, S. (2003). *The rise, fall and rise again of industrial location theory*. Regional studies, 37(6-7), 649-663.
Pratt, G. (2009). *'Marxist Geography'*, in: Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M.J., and Whatmore, S. The Dictionary of Human Geography. 5th Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
Smith, N. (1979). *Toward a theory of gentrification: A back to the city movement by capital, not people.* Journal of the American Planning Association. 45 (4).
Smith, N. (1982). *Gentrification and uneven development.* Economic Geography. 58 (2).
Smith, N. (2000). *What happened to class*?. Environment and Planning A, 32(6), 1011-1032. Chicago.
Stilwell, F. (2019). *Doreen Massey: Spatial Divisions of Labour - Progress in Political Economy* (PPE). Retrieved 7 January 2022, from https://www.ppesydney.net/doreen-massey-spatial-divisions-of-labour/
Walker, R. (1981). *A theory of suburbanization: Capitalism and the construction of urban space in the United States*. In M. Dear and A.J. Scott (eds), Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society. Methuen, London, pp. 383–429.
Ward, C., & Aalbers, M. B. (2016). *Virtual special issue editorial essay: "The shitty rent business": What's the point of land rent theory?* Urban Studies, 53(9), 1760–1783.
Wilson, A. (1972), *Theoretical Geography: Some Speculations.* Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 57