

## GEOGRAPHICAL SCHOLARSHIP ON WORKERS: REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELD IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRAZIL

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper I seek to do two things. First, I want to provide a brief overview of how what has come to be called “Labor Geography” developed as a vibrant field of research in the English-speaking world and what are some of its central tenets.<sup>2</sup> Second, I want to talk about some commonalities and differences between the approaches of those Anglophonic geographers and Brazilian geographers who are interested in questions of labor and work. Both groups, for instance, have largely relied upon Marxist theory (either explicitly or implicitly) in developing their research. At the same time, however, “Labor Geography” and what is referred to as “Estudos de Geografia do Trabalho” in Brazil also have some important differences.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANGLOPHONIC LABOR GEOGRAPHY

#### *Preliminaries – Space, Power, and Spatial Praxis*

Before outlining a little the history of the field of Labor Geography in the Anglophonic world it is helpful, I think, to set the context out of which it emerged. In particular, since the 1970s critical Anglophonic geographers – which in the early days of Critical Geography largely meant Marxists like Richard Peet (1970, 1981, 1983), David Harvey (1972, 1973, 1976, 1982), Steen Folke (1972), Doreen Massey (1973, 1984), Richard Walker (1978, 1981), Neil Smith (1984), and others – have been interested in matters of space and power. Significantly, two of the major theoretical influences upon much early work in this regard came from two French theorists: Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre.<sup>3</sup> Both Foucault and Lefebvre argued that the way in which landscapes are made is both a reflection of political power but also a shaper of how that power is articulated. Hence, in his examinations of the institutions of the industrial age – such as prisons, schools, factories, and hospitals – Foucault (1984: 252) suggested that “[s]pace is fundamental in any exercise of power”

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<sup>2</sup> For obvious reasons I have written this piece first in English and it has then been translated into Portuguese. I shall discuss later in the article some of the issues involved with translating the English term “Labor Geography” into Portuguese.

<sup>3</sup> For more on how Foucault influenced Anglophonic Geography, see Crampton and Elden (2007). For more on how Lefebvre influenced Anglophonic Geography, see Elden (2004).

and that such institutions' physical layouts have often been designed with the purpose of controlling the behavior of those contained within them through creating sufficient "supervisory architecture" and "disciplinary space" to bring about obedience (by way of example, see Herod [2010a] for more on how various different firms have controlled the spatial layout of their workspaces as a way to control their workers). Thus, he averred, "[d]iscipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (Foucault, 1975/ 1977: 141).

Whereas Foucault was largely interested in how the spatial layout of various institutions could be used to control those who lived and/ or worked in them, Lefebvre was more interested in the broader connection between capitalism and its geography. In this regard it is his work, rather than that of Foucault, that had the biggest influence on the early Marxists like Harvey. In particular, Lefebvre (1976/ 1991: 53) argued that "every society produces a space, its own space" and that, consequently, capitalism has a particular geography to it because its geographical dynamics – such as how it produces uneven development – are different from the geographical dynamics under other forms of economic organization.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, for him capitalism's survival is dependent upon the production of its geographical organization in particular ways (as a landscape of accumulation rather than of non-accumulation, for instance). As he put it (1973/ 1976: 21, emphasis in original):

capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and consequently, in the hundred years since the writing of *Capital*, it has succeeded in achieving "growth." We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: *by occupying space, by producing a space.*

For Lefebvre, then, the secret to capital's success lies in its ability to construct economic landscapes which allow the extraction and realization of surplus value during the accumulation process. But more than this, he suggested that any kind of anti-capitalist action would, at its heart, need to be geographical because, he contended (1976/ 1991: 53), "new social relationships call for a

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<sup>4</sup> Smith (1984) has argued that whereas uneven development in the pre-industrial age was largely the result of accidents of nature, such that wealthy regions were those with, for example, good climate and soil, which allowed them to produce agricultural products easily, after the rise of capitalism uneven development became endemic to the system and not shaped by the kinds of factors which had previously shaped it. Thus, through the application of capital in the form of investment in, for instance, irrigation and the application of artificial fertilizers it has become possible to make agriculture productive in areas where it had not previously been possible. For Smith, then, uneven development under capitalism is not the result of the impossibility of even development nor a historical accident which has left some places rich in resources and others with a paucity of them. Rather, it is integral to the accumulation process and is the very "hallmark of the geography of capitalism; it is] the systematic geographical expression of the contradictions inherent in the very constitution and structure of capital" (p. xiii).

new space, and vice versa.” Thus, if the way in which the landscapes of capitalism are made serves to help capitalism as an economic system survive, he reasoned, any challenge to capitalism would require new types of landscapes. Consequently, for him any social “revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses.” Rather, for a social transformation to be “truly revolutionary in character, [it] must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language *and on space*” (p, 54, emphasis added). This means that class struggle is fundamentally spatial. Whereas a post-capitalist economic system would, then, certainly make landscapes in different ways, Lefebvre saw the relationship between space and society as dialectical, such that actively making landscapes in different ways is also important for solidifying any kind of post-capitalist society.<sup>5</sup> Bringing all of this together in his *opus magnum* **The Production of Space**, he laid out a triadic framework for understanding the relationship between the functioning of capitalism and the geography of the capitalist mode of production. In so doing he distinguished between three elements, these being what he called (1976/ 1991: 33-39):

- *Spatial practice*, which is the means whereby the material spaces of any social system are made and the mechanism by which people make use of, and transform, such spaces;
- *Representations of space*, which “are tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, [and] to codes” and which are the formalized portrayals of space presented by urban planners, scientists, architects, engineers, artists, and so forth *via* a system of verbal and non-verbal signs and images – maps, models, plans, paintings, etc. – through which they guide how the built environment is materially constructed and conceptualized<sup>6</sup>; and

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<sup>5</sup> Significantly, one of the first things that many revolutionary governments have sought to do is to redesign the physical landscape. For example, in the Soviet Union in the 1920s there was a vociferous debate about how to design “Soviet cities” so as to erase the imprint of capitalism on the urban landscape by abolishing the distinction between the town and the countryside – a distinction seen as a hallmark of capitalism by Marx – and to ensure that the new Soviet landscapes helped create the “New Soviet Man” and “New Soviet Woman” (see Zile [1963] and Bater [1980]). In a more extreme example, the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia attempted to remake the landscape through erasing all evidence of French influence, although their goal was not to recreate the pre-colonial landscape, which reflected feudal social relations, but to create a landscape that was both a launching pad for, and reflective of, the new communist society they desired to build. In their eyes, this entailed quite literally annihilating all vestiges of non-Communist social relations and material practices and “required that Cambodia be literally wiped clean” of its pre-revolutionary landscape (Tyner, 2008: 119).

<sup>6</sup> Consequently, historical transformations in ideology can be delineated through examining how plans for particular spaces change over time, with a celebrated example being that of how the rise of rational thinking in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the growing use of regularized urban street grid patterns, as are found in New York City and elsewhere.

- *Spaces of representation*, which embody “complex symbolisms” linked to everyday life, which overlay physical space and which make symbolic use of what it contains, such that they are “directly *lived* through...associated images and symbols, which are the physical places in which everyday life is lived and wherein symbolic meanings are enacted in spatial form and are drawn from the built environment, as through murals, advertising billboards, vernacular architecture, and so forth.”<sup>7</sup>

These three elements in the triad correspond with what Lefebvre called “perceived space” (*l’espace perçu*), “conceived space” (*l’espace conçu*), and “lived space” (*l’espace vécu*), with all spaces exhibiting simultaneously these three elements.

Such theoretical discussions about power, space, and capitalism have provided a fertile environment for thinking about workers and the making of the economic geography of capitalism since Foucault and Lefebvre first outlined their arguments. This is especially so given that there is clearly a particular geography to capitalism with which workers must engage – the geography of capitalism is structured in specific ways and workers, capitalists, and other social actors are spatially embedded in certain places, for no one lives in the head of a pin. Thus, whatever else they may be, efforts by workers to develop, for instance, relationships of solidarity with workers elsewhere are fundamentally about “coming together [and] organizing over space” (Southall, 1988: 466) and so thinking geographically is an important element in their successfully doing so.

## **MARXISM, NON-MARXISM AND GEOGRAPHIES OF LABOR**

Prior to the 1970s labor was principally theorized in Anglophonic Geography from a capital-centric perspective.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the classic model of industrial location developed by Alfred Weber (1909/ 1929) which dominated geographical thinking viewed labor simply in terms of its cost to

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<sup>7</sup> Although in the book’s 1991 translation the term “representational spaces” is used, Elden (2004: 206) suggests that “spaces of representation” is a better English translation of the original French phrase “les espaces de représentation,” a position with which I agree.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this is also how much historical analysis up until this point had been written. As the Marxist historian Stanley Aronowitz (1990: 171) has observed: “The history of capitalism has, typically, been written as a series of narratives unified by the themes of accumulation: mercantile and imperialist interests seeking fresh sources of investment; the scientific and technological revolutions that have driven growth; international rivalries over territory and labor supplies and the multitude of conflicts among fractions of capital that take political forms, such as the struggles for power among capital’s personifications or wars...In these accounts, workers enter the theater of history as abstract labor, factors of production, dependent variables in the grand narratives of crisis and renewal.” It was only with the growth of the field of “social history” in the 1960s and 1970s that the experiences of ordinary people – rather than those of kings, presidents, and politicians – came to the fore.

industrial firms and how this influenced their locational decisions.<sup>9</sup> Shaped by the theoretical tenets of neo-classical economics, the Weberian approach and those that it spawned largely considered workers simply in terms of the geographic variation of their cost, their degree of political organization, their skill level, and so forth. As Massey (1973: 34) put it, in such an approach “profit is the criterion, wages are simply labour costs.” Equally, the economic landscape was thought of as little more than a sterile stage upon which economic relationships are played out according to various laws which could be described in mathematical terms. The economic geography of a society, then, was viewed as simply a spatial reflection of its socio-economic organization – it simply served as the canvas onto which economic demand and supply curves could be mapped. As Foucault (1980: 177) has put it, in such a perspective “[s]pace was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.” Social life, then, did not produce space but instead merely rearranged objects within it (a classic Newtonian view which sees space and time as fixed).<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in the late 1970s, however, Marxist geographers began to examine more closely the making of the geography of capitalism and the place of labor within that. For instance, the British geographer Doreen Massey (1984) – using the geological image of seeing the economic landscape as created by different rounds of capital investment in a manner similar to how sedimentary rocks are laid down – argued that capitalist accumulation spawns particular spatial divisions of labor at particular times and that these shape subsequent patterns of investment. Hence, the north of England was industrialized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and deindustrialized in the early post-World War II period. The large pools of unemployed labor that this deindustrialization created then proved attractive for subsequent investors looking for locations for light manufacturing in the 1960s and 70s because the high unemployment meant they did not have to pay wages that were as high as they would have had to do if the region had fewer desperate people looking for work. Based upon her analysis of the dynamics of the British space economy during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, then, Massey (1984a: 4) argued that the structure of Britain’s economic landscape was therefore “not just an outcome” of how socio-economic relations had unfolded but was also “part of the explanation” thereof. As she put it (Massey, 1984b: x): “[t]he geography of a society makes a difference to the way it works.” Hence, she maintained (1984a: 6), “[i]t is not just that the spatial is socially constructed; the social is spatially constructed too.”

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred was the brother of the famous sociologist Max Weber.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of different conceptions of space and time see Curry (1996).

David Harvey (1982: 233), meanwhile, suggested that capital needs a certain “spatial fix” of investment to ensure that accumulation can occur – raw materials and workers need to be brought together in particular locations, a fact which drives the construction of various types of infrastructure (“factories, dams, offices, shops, warehouses, roads, railways, docks, power stations, water supply and sewage disposal systems, schools, hospitals, parks, cinemas, restaurants”) in particular places so that surplus value can be secured and realized. For his part, Harvey’s student Neil Smith (1984/ 1990) outlined how internal contradictions within the structure of capital – particularly its need, on the one hand, to be fixed in space so that accumulation can occur but also its desire, on the other, to remain mobile so as to take advantage of opportunities arising elsewhere – are the driver of the uneven geographical development that is the hallmark of the economic landscape under capitalism. In similar fashion to Massey, Smith (1986: 94) argued that “[s]pace is not a dead ‘factor.’” Instead, it “comes alive neither as a separate thing, field or container but as an integral creation of the material relations of society.” Consequently, for him (1984/ 1990: xiii), the fundamental question is “not just...what capitalism does to geography but rather...what geography can do for capitalism [and how] the geographical configuration of the landscape contribute[s] to the survival of capitalism.”

The approaches of scholars like Massey, Harvey, Smith, and others represented a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between capitalism and its geography, between the social and the spatial. Specifically, they heralded a shift from understanding how things exist *in* space to a focus upon the production *of* space and how that production is integral to how capitalism as an economic system functions. Nevertheless, in many ways such Marxist geographers generally viewed labor in ways similar to those whom they criticized. Thus, although they had a much more sophisticated understanding of what Soja (1980) termed the socio-spatial dialectic under capitalism, they nevertheless still tended to see the making of the geography of capitalism from the point of view of capital – labor was still viewed as little more than “*variable capital*, an aspect of capital itself” (Harvey, 1982: 380-381, emphasis in original). The geography of capitalism, in other words, was generally understood to be a reflection of the actions of capitalists. Hence, Harvey (1978: 124, emphasis added) argued that it is capital that “represents itself in the form of a physical landscape *created in its own image* [and] builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time” whilst Smith (1984/ 1990: xv, emphasis added) maintained that the geography of uneven development “derives specifically from the opposed tendencies, *inherent in capital*, towards the

differentiation but simultaneous equalization of the levels and conditions of production.” As for Harvey, so for Smith (p. xv, emphasis in original), then, what capital “achieves in fact is the *production of space* in its own image.”

## THE EMERGENCE OF “LABOR GEOGRAPHY”

In response to this state of theoretical affairs for understanding how the geography of capitalism is made, in the early 1990s a number of geographers in the Anglophonic world – including myself – began to develop accounts which were self-consciously workerist.<sup>11</sup> We found the extant approaches to explaining the making of the geography of capitalism which drew heavily upon Marxist theory extremely useful but also somewhat conceptually and politically limited and limiting. Indeed, it seemed to us that, in their approach to theorizing workers as geographical actors, the Marxist approaches developed by Harvey, Smith, Massey, and others were not that much different from the neo-classical Weberian approaches, for they too focused almost exclusively upon the activities of capital, even if from a radically different theoretical perspective. Workers, we felt, were included in explanations of why the economic geography of capitalism looks the way it does largely as an afterthought. These neo-classical and Marxist perspectives on workers, then, became termed a “Geography of Labor” approach (Herod, 1997a). What I and others wanted to develop, though, was what has come to be termed a “Labor Geography,” a way of understanding and writing about the production of capitalism’s geography that, whilst recognizing that workers are not free to do just as they please, nonetheless sought to focus upon their geographical agency and how the spatial contexts within which they live their lives are shaped by, but also shape, their social, economic, and political praxis. We sought, in other words, to amend Marx’s (1852/ 1963: 15) famous dictum from **The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte** in which he remarked that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” Whereas Marx was talking about labor’s historical agency and how this is itself shaped both by the dialectical relationship it finds itself in with capital but also by the weight of history, we wanted to

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<sup>11</sup> Although there were some earlier works that should doubtless be included in any history of the emergence of Anglo-Saxon Labor Geography – an important example would be Cooke (1985) – it is probably fair to say that the field did not really begin to gain critical mass until the mid-1990s. For an account of early work, see Herod (1998).

explore labor's geographical agency whilst recognizing that workers are not completely autonomous in either synchronic or in diachronic time – their activities are constrained by their socio-spatial relationships with other economic actors but are also constrained by the spatial configuration of the economic landscapes laid down in the past and within which workers are embedded. Put another way, we sought to argue that:

Workers make their own geographies, but they do not make them just as they please; they do not make them under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The landscapes made by all the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

Central to this development, then, was the recognition that, as the Marxist geographers writing in the 1970s and 1980s had shown, capitalists need to ensure that the economic landscape is structured in particular ways so that capital accumulation can occur – in other words, so that capital can reproduce itself. But it was also our contention that workers, too, need to ensure that the landscape is made in such a way that they can secure their own social and biological reproduction on a daily and generational basis. This means that capitalists and workers are likely to have quite different visions for how the economic geography of capitalism should be made. Whereas capitalists must ensure that any landscape produced is a landscape of profitability, their actions may actually involve creating landscapes of unemployment, something that will usually greatly hinder workers' abilities to reproduce themselves. Moreover, different groups of capitalists and different groups of workers may have different visions – workers in one community are likely to want to ensure that “their” jobs are not relocated to another community whilst many capitalists in that same community may want to limit the ability of capitalists elsewhere to undercut their prices and/ or to flood local markets with cheaper goods. These intra-class conflicts and spatial concerns may frequently lead local capitalists and workers in a community, region, or country to come together to defend “their” spaces against capitalists and workers located elsewhere (for an interesting example in the British steel industry see Hudson and Sadler, 1986). Such class versus place conflicts illustrate how spatial tensions can be at the center of capitalists' and workers' political and economic goals, a recognition that greatly complicates traditional non-spatial Marxist class analysis (Herod, 1991a).

A key conceptual issue in all of this, then, was to draw a distinction between two very different ways of seeing labor in a geographical context – on the one hand, a Geography of Labor approach which did not see labor as much more than a factor and/ or variable capital to be taken into



consideration by capitalists when they seek to create their spatial fixes and, on the other hand, a Labor Geography approach which places workers ontologically at the center of the analysis and is deliberately workerist in its approach. Much as Anglophonic feminists had differentiated between the writing of histories of women (which could be from any political perspective) and the writing of Women's Histories (which were explicitly feminist in their approaches), then, we wanted to do the same with regards to labor. The goal was not to replace a Geography of Labor approach with a Labor Geography one, for a Geography of Labor approach can provide important insights into how the geography of capitalism is made through, for instance, illustrating how capitalists must consider workers and their characteristics in geographical context. Rather, the goal of developing the field of Labor Geography was to add a new dimension to understanding the geography of working-class life, one in which workers' spatial agency and constraints are specifically recognized and in which the production of space is considered through their eyes (Herod, 2001).

#### **TENETS OF LABOR GEOGRAPHY IN THE ANGLOPHONIC WORLD**

As the field of Labor Geography developed in the Anglophonic world several tenets came to be seen as lying at its core. First, it presented workers in a new theoretical light, that of active geographical agents. Rather than viewing labor from the perspective of how capitalists choose between different groups of workers when making locational decisions, Labor Geography has focused instead upon how workers develop their own spatial fixes, how they attempt to implement spatial strategies as part of their political and economic struggles, and how they thereby seek to shape the economic geography of capitalism to their own ends, all the while recognizing that, whilst they may make their own geographies workers do not do so under conditions of their own choosing. Second, it reinforced the idea that because workers may need a different spatial fix to ensure their daily and generational self-reproduction than that preferred by either capital or the state, workers', capitalists', and the state's "ideal" fixes may be in conflict with each other. This recognition allows for a much more dynamic understanding of how the economic geography of capitalism is actively struggled over as part of each social actor's spatial praxis – it does not just unfold according to the internal logic of capitalist accumulation but is subject to contestation, both directly and indirectly. Third, and related, rather than thinking of labor, capital, and the state as monolithic socio-spatial

actors, it is obvious that different segments within each of these groups may prefer quite different spatial fixes and develop strategies to enact these in the landscape.

With these tenets serving as some of the core foundation of Labor Geography, five interconnected elements have dominated Anglophonic Labor Geography's research agenda to date.

1) Explorations of how workers' spatial embeddedness and/or entrapment shapes their social praxis

One focus of research has been to investigate how workers' fixity in particular places due to kinship ties, their own sunk costs (such as owning homes they cannot sell), their particular skills mix which may only be useful in certain localities, and so forth impacts their social praxis (e.g., Cooke, 1980; Hudson and Sadler, 1983; Herod, 1991a; Carmichael and Herod, 2012). In particular, this research has sought to explain why workers often engage in boosterist coalitions with local capitalists and the local state to bring investment to their communities, coalitions in which they may agree to temper their militancy and in which they organize around spatial interests rather than class ones.<sup>12</sup> The key explanation, such researchers have argued, relates to how these workers may see their own self-reproduction as tied to the continued vitality of their own communities precisely because they cannot migrate elsewhere and because they may be fighting with other workers in other communities for a shrinking slice of a shrinking pie – if a firm is going to lay-off half its workforce, for instance, many workers will think it better that the consequences of this be felt in communities other than their own. In exploring the spatial basis of such politics, researchers have argued that workers are trying to secure their own material interests as willing partners rather than as cultural/ political dupes in the way in which much orthodox Marxist analysis would aver.

2) Workers engaging with the unevenly developed geography of capitalism

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<sup>12</sup> Molotch (1976) has explored this in the context of the phenomenon of the place-based “growth coalition” in which local capitalists, workers, and the state frequently come together to promote their communities as places for inward investment in competition with other communities. Humphrey *et al.* (1989), though, have suggested that although they are often just as spatially embedded in local communities as are local businesses, workers and their organizations (such as labor unions) are often very much junior partners in such coalitions.

A second focus of much research by Anglophonic Labor Geographers has been to analyze how workers attempt to come to terms with the economic landscapes of capitalism (and other social systems). For example, many have been very interested in understanding how unionized workers develop bargaining strategies which must incorporate radically different sets of conditions and practices across any given economic landscape – how do unions balance the interests of workers in different regions with different work traditions when seeking to develop a national contract, for instance (e.g., Sadler and Fagan, 2004; Herod, 1997b; Sweeney and Holmes, 2013)? This raises questions about why workers choose particular spatial strategies and what consequences such strategies have for how the economic landscape evolves.

### 3) Workers making new geographical scales of their own social organization

The study of how workers go about creating new geographical scales of their own organization, together with how they seek to resist being subject to new scales of social organization imposed upon them by others, has been a third significant area of research. For example, when workers seek to rework bargaining from a local to a national or even international system of bargaining, they are essentially developing a new geographical scale of organization (e.g., Wills, 1998a; Castree, 2000; Barchiesi, 2001; Cumbers, 2005; Gough, 2010; Oseland *et al.*, 2012). Likewise, when employers successfully dismantle national wage agreements they are able to then play workers in different factories or regions against each other, as has happened in recent years in the United States (Herod, 1991b), Germany (Berndt, 2000), and Australia (McGrath-Champ, 2005), amongst other countries. Struggles over such scale making and remaking are frequently at the heart of workers' organizational strategies. At the same time, though, Labor Geographers have been keen to show that it is not always capitalists who seek to decentralize collective bargaining and unions that seek to nationalize it – some groups of workers who see a strategic advantage to bargaining locally may break out of national agreements whilst high-paying employers in one city or region often try to enforce national wage agreements so that they are not undercut by their lower-waged rivals located elsewhere (Holmes, 2004).

#### 4) Spatial context and social identity

Anglophonic Labor Geographers have been very interested in what the spatial context within which workers find themselves has meant for how they construct their social identities. For instance, workers' topophilia – literally, their love of place – means that many workers identify very strongly with particular places and this shapes their behavior (e.g., Wills, 1998b; Sunley, 1990; Griffiths and Johnston, 1991). Thus, will US workers and Brazilian workers see themselves primarily as workers, in which case they may be more inclined to develop transnational solidarities, or will they see themselves primarily as Americans and Brazilians, in which case they may be more inclined to defend what they perceive to be their quite different national interests? Likewise, will workers in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro see themselves as workers with common class interests or as “Paulistas” and “Cariocas”?

In a slightly different take on the relationship between space and identity Mohammad (2010) explored how Muslim Pakistani women take on different identities when they are in the spaces of the home versus those of the paid workplace, and how they negotiate their identities according to their spatial circumstances. Meanwhile, Hyman (2004: 21-22) has argued that changes in the past few decades in how capitalism is organized spatially in many Global North countries – such as growing suburbanization, such that increasing numbers of workers do not live near either their workplace or their workmates – is having considerable consequences for worker identity. As he has put it, “the spatial location and social organisation of work, residence, consumption and sociability have become highly differentiated,” such that today the average employee “may live a considerable distance from fellow-workers, possess a largely ‘privatised’ domestic life or a circle of friends unconnected with work, and pursue cultural or recreational interests quite different from those of other employees in the same workplace.” This spatial “disjuncture between work and community (or indeed the destruction of community in much of its traditional meaning),” Hyman avers, “entails the loss of many of the localised networks which [previously] strengthened the supports of union membership (and in some cases made the local union almost a ‘total institution’).” The result is that whereas formerly many workers’ identities as workers “were reinforced by the broader networks of everyday life...the possibility and character of

collectivism are today very different when work and everyday life are increasingly [spatially] differentiated.”

##### 5) Changing spatialities of capitalism and new labor organizing models

A fifth topic of research has examined how the changing spatialities of the workplace and the changing relationships between places occasioned by globalization are having implications for models of worker organizing. For instance, during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century unions in the United States adopted a model of organizing manufacturing and mining which largely assumed that workplaces had regular shift changes and that workers could easily be identified as workers by their clothing. Under this “Fordist” regime of production a popular model of organizing was one that relied upon a union sending pickets to the entrances of various factories or mines and simply handing out leaflets to prospective union members and/ or waiting for workers in various workplaces to come to the union so that they could be “organized.” In such a model the goal was to win a representation election by 50% + 1 of the vote and then begin “servicing” the new union members (see Clark, 1989a for more on the US system of labor union organizing and representation). However, the growth of service sector employment, of “Team Work” as part of the spread of the so-called “Toyota” mode of workplace organization (Dohse *et al.*, 1985; Dassbach, 1996), and other changes mean that traditional ways of organizing work are being transformed (Parker and Slaughter, 1988; Holmes, 1989; MacDuffie, 1995) and that, consequently, this model of organizing based upon Fordist ways of managing work socially and spatially has become less effective than it perhaps once was. This has led a number of Labor Geographers to analyze newer models being developed by unions and other labor groups which have quite different sets of geographical assumptions contained in them. For example, Savage (1998) illustrated how the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles shifted tactics from seeking to organize janitors on a building-by-building basis to organizing across entire local labor markets – a less workplace-focused model. Others (e.g., Tufts, 1998; Wills, 2001; Jordhus-Lier, 2012) have detailed the rise of so-called “social unionism” or “community unionism” as a method of widening disputes and struggles beyond the confines of the workplace.

Another group of Labor Geographers (e.g., Walsh, 2000; Merrifield, 2002) have investigated the growth of “living wage” campaigns. What is significant about these campaigns is that they seek to change the spatial terrain of struggle. Hence, they are not workplace-focused but, rather, typically seek to pressure local and state governments to enact legislation requiring that a living wage – which is usually much higher than a “minimum wage” – be paid by any employer doing business within a particular area (usually the municipal or state boundaries). To date over two hundred US governmental units have passed living wage ordinances and living wage movements have emerged in other countries like Britain and New Zealand. Other unions have likewise sought to change the geographical terrain of their struggles, if in slightly different ways. Thus, Johns and Vural (2000) have studied how the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) in the US teamed with the National Consumers League (NCL) to tackle problems of sweatshops. What is significant is that UNITE and the NCL did not focus upon organizing the spaces of production directly (the sweatshops themselves), for improving conditions at one sweatshop would simply make it uncompetitive relative to others and likely cause it to close, thereby costing the garment workers their jobs. Rather, they directed their attention to organizing the spaces of consumption by encouraging consumers to pressure large retailers not to contract with manufacturers who do not meet certain wage and workplace health and safety standards. In so doing, they avoided the pitfalls of trying to organize workplace-by-workplace.

## **A SUMMARY OF ANGLOPHONIC LABOR GEOGRAPHY**

Putting all of this together, then, there are several axioms around which Anglophonic Labor Geography has developed, these being the recognition that:

- social actors are geographically embedded and this shapes the possibilities for their social action;
- for both capital and labor, negotiating the tensions between the needs for spatial fixity and for geographical mobility is a process which drives much of their economic praxis – capital must constantly look for new places of profitability even as it must be fixed in

- place so as to facilitate accumulation, whereas labor must determine whether migrating to new locations is worth abandoning current places of work and residence;
- different sets of social actors are differentially tied into local, regional, national, and transnational relationships, and the ways in which they are shapes their political and spatial praxis;
  - different sets of social actors will often have quite different spatial visions with regard to how they wish to see the geography of capitalism made and these varying spatial imaginations can result in significant political conflicts;
  - the making of new geographical scales of political and economic organization is often central to workers' political praxis;
  - how social actors behave geographically shapes how landscapes are made, with the result that landscapes are contested social products;
  - landscapes are not merely a reflection of social relations but are also constitutive of them; and
  - analyzing workers' political and economic practice requires an approach grounded in historico-geographical materialism.

Despite its successes, though, there have been some lacunae within Anglophonic Labor Geography which are now being addressed in what we might think of as being Labor Geography Version 2.0. There are three principal ones.

First, Labor Geographers have tended to focus upon industrial workers and members of labor unions. There were certainly good reasons for this. In the early days Labor Geographers' key aim was to challenge the extant Marxist theory which saw the making of geography's capitalism as the purview of capital. However, in order to make such theoretical challenges it was important to be able to point to empirical instances of workers clearly shaping capitalism's geography, lest such theoretical arguments be dismissed for lack of "real world" evidence. As a result, many Labor Geographers tended to study industrial workers organized into unions for very practical reasons – such unions often have better sets of archives and records whilst leaders who might serve as research resources are often more clearly identifiable than is the case with other types of worker organizations. However, now that the theoretical argument about workers' contributions to shaping capitalism's geography have largely been accepted growing numbers of Labor Geographers are

examining non-industrial workers and other, less formally structured, worker organizations. There is also a growing interest in the realm of consumption, for instance through exploring worker cooperative movements and how they influence how capitalism is structured geographically in particular places (e.g., Frank, 1994).

Second, Labor Geographers sometimes tended to ignore the role of the state in shaping the geography of capitalism, considering principally the relationship between capital and labor. However, this is not to say that the state was completely disregarded. Several early pieces explored workers' spatial praxis within the context of the US National Labor Relations Board's decision-making capacities (e.g., Clark, 1986, 1988, 1989b; Johnston, 1986) whereas scholars like Painter (1991) explored how the privatization of government services in Britain was impacting public employees and how they were responding.<sup>13</sup> For his part, Blomley (1994) detailed how Britain's national government under Margaret Thatcher used the police force to try to localize the political activities of the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-85 miners' strike by limiting the abilities of miners from one coalmining region of the country to travel to others – doing so, the government hoped, would prevent the union from developing national resistance to the government's plans to close various coal mines. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the state was less a focus of attention than perhaps it should have been. More recent work by Labor Geographers, however, has begun to correct this situation, with scholars such as Rutherford (2013) showing how neo-liberal policies in Canada are shaping workers' political praxis – especially with regards to the geographical scale at which they negotiate collective bargaining agreements – and Ryan and Herod (2006) dissecting how efforts by the governments of New Zealand and Australia to neoliberalize their collective bargaining systems have forced unions to develop new strategies to further their members' interests.

Third, a criticism of some of the early Anglophonic Labor Geography was that it failed to adequately theorize worker agency and was too voluntaristic because, it was argued, early Labor Geographers wrote accounts in which they tended to see workers as acting in an autonomous fashion and that everything they did counted as effective agency. In some ways this assessment ignored perhaps the most fundamental tenet of Labor Geography, that workers make their own

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<sup>13</sup> The National Labor Relations Board is a federal government entity created in the 1930s to enforce US labor law and to act as a referee when firms and unions come into conflict (McCulloch, 1974).



geographies but not under the conditions of their own choosing. It also ignored the fact that empirical case studies tended to be carefully chosen because they best illustrated the theoretical claims which Labor Geographers were trying to make, namely that workers are sentient geographical actors rather than simply flotsam and jetsam cast adrift on the waves of capitalist structuring of the economic landscape. In other words, the empirical cases of successful worker actions were meant to be exemplars to support the theoretical claims for worker agency and were not meant to suggest that workers are always successful in their efforts to shape the economic landscape. Nevertheless, this criticism has forced a more nuanced consideration of agency. In this regard the definition of British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984: 9, emphasis in original) has helped move thinking forward:

Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capacity of doing those things in the first place... Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened. Action is a continuous process, a flow, in which the reflexive monitoring which the individual maintains is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain throughout their day-to-day lives. I am the author of many things I do not intend to do, and may not want to bring about, but none the less *do*. Conversely, there may be circumstances in which I intend to achieve something, and do achieve it, although not directly through my agency. Take the example of...spilled coffee. Supposing an individual, A, were a malicious spirit and played a practical joke by placing the cup on a saucer at such an angle that, when picked up, it would be very likely to spill. Individual B picks up the coffee, and it duly spills over. It would be right to say that what A did brought the incident about, or at least contributed to its coming about. But A did not spill the coffee; B did. Individual B, who did not intend to spill the coffee, spilled the coffee; individual A, who did intend that the coffee be spilled, did not spill it.

In turn, such discussions of agency have led to consideration of different understandings of causality and what this means for conceptualizing worker agency. In particular, one useful way of thinking about causality is to go back to Aristotle, who distinguished four types which may be at play in any given event, these being: the material cause; the efficient cause; the formal cause; and the final cause. As a means to differentiate between these four types some Labor Geographers (e.g., Herod 2010b) have drawn on the work of ecologist Robert Ulanowicz (1990: 43), who suggests the following:

In the familiar example of the building of a house the material cause exists in the mortar, lumber and other supplies going into the structure. The laborers and craftsman constitute the efficient cause, while the blueprint, or *bauplan*, is cited as the formal cause. Finally, the need for housing on the part of eventual occupants is usually taken as the final cause of building the house.

Finally, in terms of pondering the future of Labor Geography within the Anglophonic world one of the most exciting developments has been the growing interest in space and questions of spatiality being paid by labor and industrial relations scholars. For instance, a growing – if yet still too small – group of non-geographer labor scholars has begun to recognize the importance not just of viewing workers and work from a geographical perspective but also of considering how struggles over space and the making of the landscape can be central elements in workers’ political and economic praxis. One of the earliest articles in this vein was by Ellem and Shields (1999), two industrial relations scholars who made the case to their industrial relations colleagues that questions of space, place, and spatiality were immensely important if scholars are to understand the social relations of work. Others have followed. For instance, the editors of a 2003 survey of the field of industrial relations included a chapter on geographical theorizing concerning matters of work, employment, and workers (HEROD *et al.*, 2003). Likewise a number of labor history and industrial relations journals have published articles arguing for the importance of geography as constitutive of workers’ political and economic praxis. For instance, in 2002 the Australian journal **Labour and Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work** published a special issue (volume 13, number 2) on “Industrial Relations Meets Human Geography: Spatialising the Social Relations of Work,” in 2003 **International Labor and Working-Class History** (issue number 64) produced a special issue on “Workers, Suburbs, and Labor Geography,” and in 2012 **Labor History** published a special issue on “Working space: An interdisciplinary conversation about geographical consciousness in labor and working-class scholarship” (volume 53, issue number 3). Several other non-Geography journals have published individual papers which have argued for the importance of a geographical perspective and spatial theory (e.g., **Work, Employment and Society** [Herod *et al.*, 2007] and Britain’s **Industrial Relations Journal** [Rainnie *et al.*, 2007]). Meanwhile the 2010 **Handbook of Employment and Society: Working Space** (McGrath-Champ *et al.*, 2010) – edited by a geographer, by an industrial relations scholar, and by an industrial relations scholar trained as a geographer – brought together 14 geographers and 22 non-geographers (who hailed from disciplines

as different as History, Sociology, Labor Studies, Industrial Relations, and Management/Organizational studies). Finally, the 2013 North American Labor History Conference – one of the most important labor studies conferences in North America – chose as its theme “Geographies of Labor.”

## **AN ANGLOPHONIC GEOGRAPHER’S REFLECTIONS UPON BRAZILIAN GEOGRAPHERS’ STUDY OF WORKERS AND WORK**

Having outlined the development and some of the major themes in Anglophonic geographical scholarship concerning workers and the production of economic landscapes under capitalism, in this remaining part of the paper I reflect upon what I observed concerning the nature of Brazilian geographical scholarship on workers, based largely upon my participation in the wonderful symposium on “Questões do Trabalho, Ambientais e da Saúde do Trabalhador” which was organized at the Centro de Estudos de Geografia do Trabalho, Departamento de Geografia da FCT, Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” in Presidente Prudente in May 2013, from interacting with some of my new-found Brazilian friends, and from reading various editions of the journals *Geografia e Trabalho no Século XXI* and *Revista Pegada*, both published out of the Centro de Estudos de Geografia do Trabalho at UNESP.

The very first thing that struck me was simply the huge amount of research being conducted that focuses upon work and workers from a geographical perspective. This was really exciting to me and very warming to the heart! Indeed, the fact that there are two geographical journals published out of UNESP that are dedicated to matters of work and workers is nothing short of extraordinary. I do not know of a single Anglophonic geography journal with such a focus, let alone two. Upon further reflection, though, it seems to me that there are some important distinctions between how Brazilian geographers and Anglophonic geographers have been approaching their research and some broader things to contemplate.

The first major difference that has become obvious to me is that the theoretical debates concerning how workers go about creating their own spatial fixes and what this means for making the geography of capitalism, a focus which has been a – if not *the* – central theme in Anglophonic work and one which drove efforts to distinguish between a Geography of Labor and a Labor Geography approach, appears not to have been as much of a concern to Brazilian geographers. This

is undoubtedly a reflection of the intellectual trajectories of geographical thought in the two realms. Thus, Anglophonic Geography was fundamentally conservative up until the 1970s, drawing largely upon neo-Kantian philosophy (which viewed Geography as a discipline for simply categorizing spaces and what they contained) and upon neo-classical economic theory (which saw the economic landscape simply as a reflection of the cumulative decisions of rational actors). Geography's neo-Kantianism reached its apogee with the Regional Geography developed by Richard Hartshorne and his acolytes and exemplified in his 1939 book **The Nature of Geography**. Rejecting the argument that Geography "is the study of the landscape, or of landscapes" (p, 159), Hartshorne's approach to understanding the geographical distribution of things in space was highly spatially fetishistic. Hence, in arguing (p. 463) that "in studying the interrelation of [geographical] phenomena, geography depends first and fundamentally on the comparison of maps depicting the areal expression of individual phenomena, or of interrelated phenomena," he suggested that the spatial distribution of one thing on the Earth's surface explained the spatial distribution of something else – space, in other words, explained itself.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, explanations of why the economic geography of capitalism looks the way it does generally relied upon neo-classical economics and principally drew upon the works of two German scholars, the geographer Walther Christaller (1933/ 1966) and the economist August Lösch (1940/ 1954). Both Christaller, who studied the evolution of urban systems, and Lösch, who was interested in the distribution of economic activity across the landscape, viewed landscapes as the geographical reflection of the search by "rational economic actors" for a "spatial equilibrium," which was itself seen as the geographical equivalent of the market search for equilibrium between supply and demand.<sup>15</sup> It is the dominance of this neo-Kantian and neo-classical thinking that Marxists like Harvey, Smith, and Massey set out to challenge in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>16</sup> In true dialectical fashion, then, the then-dominant mode of theorizing concerning how the geography of capitalism is made brought about its own negation. Certainly, both the neo-classical economic geographers and the Marxists sought to understand the location of economic activities

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<sup>14</sup> For a devastating critique of Hartshorne's approach, see Smith (1989). For more on Hartshornian Regional Geography, see Chapter 4 in Herod (2010c).

<sup>15</sup> For more on Christaller and Lösch, see Chapter 3 in Herod (2010c).

<sup>16</sup> For an interesting Spanish-language summary of the development of critical approaches in Anglo-Saxon Geography, see Puente Lozano's (2013) article in the online Brazilian journal **Terra Brasilis** created by RedeBrasilis – the Brazilian network of the history of geography and historical geography – and published by the University of São Paulo. Surprisingly, though, she does not cite a single work by Harvey, Smith, or Massey.

across the landscape. However, whereas neo-classically influenced geographers saw the making of the geography of capitalism – though they most certainly did not use such radical language – in terms of the search for a spatial equilibrium, Marxist geographers understood the production of the economic landscape and the location of capital investment in terms of the ever-present crises of capital brought about by its need to accumulate.<sup>17</sup>

In similar fashion to the negation of the intellectual fashions that had dominated Geography up until the early 1970s, the Marxist work of the 1970s and 1980s would produce its own negation with the advent of the so-called Labor Geography approach in the 1990s. Thus, whereas both the theorists like Harvey *et al.* and the Labor Geographers who emerged in the 1990s drew upon Marxist concepts and saw the making of the geography of capitalism as a reflection of political and economic struggles, rather than the product of decisions by “rational actors,” the Labor Geographers believed that the Marxist work of the 1970s and 1980s focused too much upon the activities of capital and had neglected to view workers as active and sentient geographical actors. The distinction between the concepts “Geography of Labor” and “Labor Geography” which has been so important in the Anglophonic world, then, came out of these quite specific sets of debates within Anglophonic Geography.

By way of contrast, whilst the trajectory of Critical Geography in Brazil shares some similarities with Anglophonic Marxist Geography it also has some important differences. Thus, although Bezzera (2013) has recently outlined in Portuguese some aspects of the Anglophonic debates and we might ponder how the exposure of non-English-speaking Brazilian geographers to such debates may shape how they consider matters of work, workers, and space as we move into the future, theoretical debates about workers and space in the Brazilian context have not been hung up on the definitional squabbles which have animated the debates in Anglophonic Geography. This, in turn, is likely

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<sup>17</sup> Lösch’s textbook served as a virtual Bible for economic geography during the 1950s and 1960s and his ideas are still drawn upon by neo-classical economic geographers today. This is despite the withering critique by Harvey, who showed that the notion that economic landscapes represent a spatial equilibrium is entirely inconsistent with the realities of capitalism. As he put it (1982: 390, fn 13): “[T]he spatial equilibrium set out in Lösch’s *Economics of Location*, with its neat hexagonal networks of market areas and its hierarchies of central places, is a landscape of zero accumulation, totally inconsistent with the capitalist mode of production. Hardly surprisingly, such landscapes are not observed [in reality] and Lösch himself had the greatest difficulty injecting dynamics into his argument. Technological change is treated as an externally given, unexplained phenomena when what we really have to show is how and why technological change is induced *within* a locational system by competitive pressures. A closer investigation of this point suggests that ‘spatial equilibrium’ in the bourgeois sense is an impossibility under the social relations of capitalism for deeply structural reasons.”

reflective of the specific histories of geographical ideas in Brazilian Geography, particularly how Marxism developed.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, just as Anglophonic Geography was fairly conservative during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century so, too, was Brazilian Geography. This conservative intellectual tradition had its roots in the work of people like German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, Swedish geographer Rudolf Kjellén, and French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache (Machado, 1995). Hence, two of the early giants of Brazilian Geography – Everardo Backheuser and Carlos Delgado de Carvalho – both studied in Europe and were deeply influenced by Ratzel and Kjellén (in the case of Backheuser) and Vidal de la Blache (in the case of Delgado de Carvalho), with their work shaping the long history of geopolitical work on behalf of the Brazilian nation-state (Hepple, 1986; Stevenson and Andrien, 1993; Vlach, 2003). Brazilian Geography also incorporated Hartshorne’s neo-Kantian Regional Geography approach and, later, the quantitative approaches that were common in the Anglophonic world in the 1950s and 1960s and which were encouraged by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) after the US-based quantitative geographer Brian Berry visited Brazil in 1968 (Becker, 1986).<sup>19</sup> However, whereas openly Marxist geography began to appear in the late 1960s in the United States and Britain – leading to the 1969 founding of the journal **Antipode** – the repression of critical voices in Brazil (as with, for example, the forcing into exile of Milton Santos) during the military dictatorship of 1964-1985 meant that Marxist geographical scholarship did not really begin to come into the open until more than a decade after it did in the Anglophonic world, after the “abertura política” had provided it some space in which to do so. In this regard the 1978 Fortaleza meeting of the Associação dos Geógrafos Brasileiros and Santos’s 1978 book **Por uma Geografia nova** are seen by many as being crucial catalysts.<sup>20</sup> So, not only did what would come to be recognized as Critical Geography not become widely accepted within institutions as legitimate until the late 1980s (Becker, 1986) but, given Brazil’s colonial history, much of the early Marxist

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<sup>18</sup> In this regard, there have been some interesting recent developments concerning the creation of a critical history of Brazilian Geography (e.g., Machado, 2000; Moraes, 2000; Nunes Pereira, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Certainly, as Andrade (1987) has argued, concerns about social justice appeared in Brazilian Geography in the 1940s. However, much of this type of work was suppressed when the military effectively co-opted the IBGE to its goals of controlling the territory of Brazil and persecuted some of those who had been involved in such work – academics like the historian Caio da Silva Prado Júnior, who had published in the journal **Geografia**. Nevertheless, the dominant streams were those of European-influenced geopolitics and Regional Geography and, during the period of the dictatorship, the “a-political” statistical/ mathematical approaches that were dominant in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the emergence of Marxist Geography in Brazil, see Moura *et al.* (2008).

work focused upon questions of imperialism and how that had shaped patterns of both global and Brazilian development, together with theorizing about the role that could be played by geographers in strengthening democratic governance after the return of civilian rule. The former is exemplified by works such as Santos's **A cidade nos países subdesenvolvidos** (1965), **Geografia y economia urbanas en los países subdesarrollados** (1973), and **Ensaio sobre a urbanização latino-americana** (1982), whilst the latter counts amongst its number what might be considered one of the earliest critical works by a geographer on issues of work and workers, that being Resende's (1986) **A Geografia do Aluno Trabalhador** in which she argued that because geography, work, and culture intersect to shape individuals' subject positions geographers therefore could play an important role in various emancipatory projects.

The second important reflection that came from my interactions with my new Brazilian geographer friends in thinking about similarities and differences in approaches to issues of work and workers in geographical context is that of issues of language. Clearly, some of the works that have emerged out of the Anglophonic debates have had – or at least appear to be having – some influence upon Brazilian geographers (e.g., see the bibliography in Bezzera [2013]). For Brazilian readers of English this is relatively straightforward, although the different contexts of Anglophonic Marxist Geography's development outlined above mean that even in English certain terms may have different connotations for English-speaking Anglophonic Geographers than they do for English-speaking Brazilian Geographers. The more critical issue, though, is how certain terms might be translated into Portuguese, for the distinction between the concepts “Geography of Labor” and “Labor Geography” which has been central within the Anglophonic debates only makes sense if these terms can be appropriately rendered in Portuguese. Part of the difficulty of doing this, I think, is that in English the word “labor” as used here refers not so much to “work” as it does to “workers,” for “labor” has at least three meanings in English – as an equivalent to the verb “to work” (as in “I labored to produce this journal article”), as a noun referring to the product of such work (as in “the labor that I put into writing this journal article was enjoyable”), and as a collective noun referring to those who work (as in “Labor can be a powerful political group in a society”). From my understanding of the Brazilian literature, to date the preferred term to describe research on work and workers has been “Geografia do trabalho.” Translated directly into English, this would be rendered as “Geography of Work” rather than “Geography of Labor,” with Labor in the English

here referring to workers rather than work. A more accurate translation of what is meant in English by the term “Geography of Labor,” then, might be something like “Geografia da força laboral” or perhaps “Geografia dos trabalhadores.” However, this may not sound “right” to a Brazilian ear. Equally, a translation of the term “Labor Geography” – one which incorporates the sense of a workerist approach that distinguishes itself from the “Geography of Labor” approaches against which self-identified Labor Geographers were reacting within the Anglophonic literature – would probably be something like “Geografia obreirista.” Yet, to my knowledge this is not a term that is (widely) used. This is not to suggest that the terms used in Brazil are somehow “wrong” and those used in the Anglophonic world are “correct,” nor vice versa. Rather, it is to recognize the difficulties of translating concepts that have developed in one context into a different language in such a way as to communicate the conceptual weight that such words must carry if their intent is to be conveyed accurately. The distinction in English is important because of the context out of which the debates have emerged. Given the different history of Brazilian Geography, these distinctions may be less important to Brazilian geographers and so there has been no need to develop a terminology to distinguish between them. The fact that different terms have emerged (or not) out of the contexts of these two intellectual histories has, I think, some interesting implications for thinking about the work of Brazilian and Anglophonic geographers and the possibility of linkages between them.<sup>21</sup>

Third, and following from above, in contemplating Anglophonic and Brazilian work on understanding the lives of workers within a geographical context I think it is important to consider the issue of the geographical transfer of ideas and what this means for possible intellectual cross-fertilization between Anglophonic and Brazilian geographers working on issues of labor. Thus, as I just outlined, the theoretical developments which served as the prolegomenon to what would emerge in the Anglophonic world as the self-identified field of Labor Geography largely developed out of the debates started by Harvey and others concerning concepts like the spatial fix and how to link the spatiality of capitalism to tensions within the mode of production. However, much of this Marxist work is either not available in Portuguese or only became available in Portuguese quite some

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<sup>21</sup> Relatedly, it is significant that the term “spatial fix,” which has been translated into both Spanish and Portuguese as the “ajuste espacial,” has subsequently been translated back into English in at least one Portuguese-language work (Ghizzo and Rocha, no date) as the term “spatial adjustment,” a translation that does not really carry with it the same sense as does the word “fix” in English. This is not to be unduly critical of the authors’ translation of this term but, rather, to highlight the difficulties of translating concepts between different languages.



time after its publication in English. For instance, Harvey's two most important book-length manuscripts in which he laid out his arguments about spatializing Marx and Marxifying the discipline of Anglophonic Geography – **Social Justice and the City** and **Limits to Capital** – appeared in English in 1973 and 1982 respectively. However, the Portuguese version of the first of these – translated as **A Justiça Social e a Cidade** – was not published until 1980, seven years after appearing in English, whilst a Spanish version of the second – translated as **Los Límites del Capitalismo y la Teoría Marxista** – in which he outlined the concept of the spatial fix did not appear until 1990 and a Portuguese version has yet to appear. Equally, Smith's **Uneven Development**, which also explores the idea of the spatial fix under capitalism and which was published in English in 1984, came out in Portuguese in 1988 as **Desenvolvimento Desigual**, two years before the Spanish version of **Limits to Capital**, even though Smith's work relied heavily upon **Limits to Capital**.<sup>22</sup> This means at least two things.

Firstly, it means that the earliest Labor Geography articles, focusing upon workers' efforts to create their own spatial fixes as a counterpoint to capital-centric explanations of the making of the geography of capitalism, were occurring in Anglophonic Geography at roughly the same time that some of the Marxist works which had shaped them were first appearing in Portuguese translation. Put another way, whereas what is perhaps the central concept drawn from Harvey's work – that of the spatial fix – had been introduced in 1982 and was widely disseminated for over a decade in the Anglophonic world before the emergence of the earliest works of Labor Geography which incorporated it, for non-English speaking Brazilian geographers the introduction of the concept of the spatial fix as developed by Harvey and exposure to the earliest Anglophonic Labor Geography works are likely to have been much closer in time than were the development of the concepts in English. Secondly, it means that even within the Marxist work of the 1970s and 1980s, whose negation would lead to the emergence of Labor Geography in the 1990s, the order of the publication of texts and thus the dissemination of ideas was different in the English-speaking world than it was in the Portuguese-speaking world. Thus, Harvey's **Limits to Capital** is usually seen in the English-speaking world as having shaped Smith's thinking in **Uneven Development** because the latter came after it. However, someone in Brazil reading these two works in Spanish and

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<sup>22</sup> This is perhaps hardly surprising, given that Smith was Harvey's doctoral student at John's Hopkins University in the United States.

Portuguese translation might quite understandably imagine the influence to have gone in the other direction, given their respective Spanish and Portuguese publication dates.<sup>23</sup> By the same measure, however, it is worthy of note that one of Lefebvre's key works upon which much of the Anglophonic Marxist Geography of the 1980s developed – this being **The Survival of Capitalism**, in which he argued that capitalism has been able to survive through producing particular material geographies – was published in Portuguese translation (as **A Reprodução das Relações de Produção**) in the same year in which it appeared in French (1973) but was not translated into English until 1976. Equally, although Harvey cited the 1974 French edition of Lefebvre's book the **Production of Space (La Production de l'Espace** in French), it was not until that work appeared in English in 1991 that most Anglophonic geographers paid much attention to it.

Finally, for me it is quite interesting that Harvey's book **The Condition of Postmodernity (Condição Pós-moderna)** seems to be more widely cited by Brazilian geographers working on issues of labor and work than is his **Limits to Capital**.<sup>24</sup> This is quite interesting in the context of the development of the debates in Anglophonic Labor Geography outlined above because **The Condition of Postmodernity** was largely written as a response to what Harvey saw as the dangers of the turn towards postmodernism in much academic writing in North America and the United Kingdom during the mid-1980s (as exemplified by, for instance, Dear [1988]), particularly what he perceived to be postmodernism's failure to take into consideration the material changes in capitalist society which he argued were driving the cultural transformations occurring at the time. **The Condition of Postmodernity**, then, was really about detailing what Harvey saw as the material basis for the so-called "cultural turn" which Geographers interested in postmodern theory were arguing needed to occur within Geography. He also saw postmodernism and the cultural turn as a political retreat from Marxism and therefore a conservative development within Geography. By way of contrast, it is in **Limits to Capital** that Harvey really outlined his arguments about the spatial fix and theorizing capital's production of landscapes. What this all means is that for Anglophonic Labor Geographers it is **Limits to Capital** that has been most influential in shaping the

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<sup>23</sup> Harvey was in the midst of writing **Limits to Capital** when Smith arrived at John's Hopkins University in 1977. He does, however, recognize Smith's influence on some of the ideas that shaped the book (Harvey, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> This is highlighted in Puente Lozano's (2011) article in the Spanish journal **Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica** outlining the development of critical spatial theory in Anglophonic Geography. Thus, although she lists several of the seminal Marxist geography texts, she does not mention Harvey's **Limits to Capital** yet does reference his **The Condition of Postmodernity** and Smith's **Uneven Development**.

development of the field whereas Brazilian scholars of labor and work seem to have been more influenced by Harvey's **The Condition of Postmodernity/ Condição Pós-moderna** – a book rarely cited by English-speaking Labor Geographers. In comparing Anglophonic Labor Geography with Brazilian geographers' scholarship on work and workers, then, it is clear that the use of Harvey's concept of the spatial fix to theoretically frame research has been much more prevalent in the Anglophonic literature than it has been in the Brazilian literature. Equally, Brazilian geographers appear to have drawn less on Lefebvre and Foucault than have their Anglophonic confederates and to have been less concerned with explicitly framing their research on work and workers in terms of exploring how the production of space is central to reproducing capitalism and in workers' self-reproduction. Instead, Brazilian geographers have been much more interested in understanding the conditions of workers' lives and how these vary spatially. In much the same way that the work of Henri Lefebvre – particularly his **Production of Space** – did not gain much traction within Anglophonic Geography until it was translated into English in 1991 (some seventeen years after appearing in French), we can only ponder how delays in translation of **Limits to Capital** have shaped which of Harvey's concepts have animated Brazilian Marxist geographers' thinking.

What this all suggests, then, is that there is a complicated geography with regard to the transfer of ideas – from Anglophonic Geography to Brazilian Geography (i.e., Harvey *et al.*) and from Francophonic Geography to Anglophonic and to Brazilian Geography (i.e., Lefebvre) – that has undoubtedly shaped the development of scholarship on labor and work in, on the one hand, North America, Europe, and Australia and, on the other, in Brazil.<sup>25</sup> There is also a complicated history with regard to the transfer of ideas, given that the time between the appearance in English of **Limits to Capital** and **The Condition of Postmodernity** was 17 years whereas the time between the appearance of the Spanish version of **Limits to Capital** and the Portuguese version of **The Condition of Postmodernity** was only three, which suggests a much more foreshortened evolution of the development of Harvey's ideas than was actually the case. Unfortunately, though, whereas the historical geography of the influence of the Anglophonic literature upon Brazilian geographers' study of work and workers is quite complex, the historical geography of Brazilian geographers'

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<sup>25</sup> I include "Europe" rather than the more narrow "United Kingdom" because there is a burgeoning scholarship in some non-English-speaking countries that has nevertheless been conducted in English. For instance, there is an active group of Norwegian (see Bergene *et al.*, 2010; Jordhus-Lier 2012), German (see Berndt, 2000), and Danish (see Sogaard *et al.*, 2006) scholars of labor, but much of their work has been published in English and intersected with Anglophonic Labor Geography.

influence upon Anglophonic Labor Geography is very straightforward because it has been, frankly, pretty non-existent. Indeed, the transfer of ideas between Brazilian and Anglophonic scholars of labor has been disappointingly unidirectional, principally because English-speakers are notoriously bad when it comes to learning foreign languages, because little Portuguese-language work has been translated into English, and because Anglophonic Geography is in many ways quite insular – many English-speaking scholars simply assume that non-English-speaking scholars will engage with English-language scholarship whereas English-speakers will not have to engage with non-English-language scholarship.<sup>26</sup> This speaks both to cultural attitudes but also to the realities of cultural and political power in academia, given the global dominance of English (Ammon, 2001; Harris, 2001; Short *et al.*, 2001), a dominance which is reflected in the prevalence of journals published in English, even those from a number of countries where the national language is not English (e.g., Norway’s **Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift** and the Netherlands’s **Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie**).<sup>27</sup> Although this is true in a number of fields, the dominance of English-language journals is particularly the case with Human Geography (Paasi, 2005). The result has been that the discourse of the Anglophonic world has been privileged globally (Staszak, 2001) and other voices far too frequently ignored.

## TOWARDS THE FUTURE

From my perspective, perhaps the most exciting developments in research by Brazilian geographers on the topic of work and workers relate to the effort to link geographical studies of work, the environment, and worker health – as manifested in the title and the focus of the seminar “Questões do Trabalho, Ambientais e da Saúde do Trabalhador.” To my knowledge no similar project has been attempted by Anglophonic Labor Geographers. The cross-fertilization of these three areas not only offers interesting synergies for Brazilian geographers but also, if the model can be replicated, for Anglophonic ones too. In considering how these three areas of study might be linked together in productive ways I have three observations that I wish to make.

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<sup>26</sup> One of the things I would like to see happen and that I will seek to do in my own scholarship is to make Anglophonic Labor Geographers much more aware of the extremely rich history of research on workers conducted in Brazil.

<sup>27</sup> These are, respectively, the journal of the Norwegian Geographical Society and the journal of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society.

The first of these is that one point of departure for thinking about the connections between research in the three areas of the geography of work and workers, worker health, and the environment and how this Brazilian effort might intersect with Anglophonic traditions and shape the future development of the latter is to consider how the mode of production in any society links together three sets of processes – the practices involved in the expenditure of human labor, the practices involved in the creation of either good or poor human health, and the practices involved in the destruction or not of ecosystems. One way in which we can explore how the mode of production links these three sets of practices is through understanding how any mode of production shapes the making of both the natural and the social landscape within the society in which it dominates. Significantly, because the central goal of the capitalist mode of production is to extract surplus value from workers through the mechanism of waged labor, the natural and social landscapes produced under contemporary capitalism look very different from those produced under other types of social organization (for instance, those of feudal Europe or centrally planned societies like the former Soviet Union). This has implications for how work, health, and environment are connected. A focus upon the making of landscapes – that is to say, the production of space – and how this is peculiarly shaped by capitalism as a helpful way to connect these three areas of study, I want to suggest, both because the concept of landscape is a central one in the field of Geography (and so gives the three sub-fields a way to connect to the discipline’s historical heart) but also because landscapes as material entities are fundamental shapers of how we live our lives as humans.

Such a focus upon the making of landscapes has become increasingly imperative because landscapes’ ecological organization – and so how workers work and live within them – during the past two centuries has more and more come to reflect the social forces of capitalist production. Today, the location of economic activity is less the result of naturally-given factors like climate and land fertility and more the product of socially-given ones, like the dynamics of capital accumulation. Hence, as technology and the forces of production have developed over time our ability to transform and, in effect, to “produce nature” has increased dramatically.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, human actions under other modes of production (hunter-gatherer societies, feudalism) have shaped how nature and the natural landscape are made, going back centuries. In the past this human influence was through

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<sup>28</sup> To give but one example, the application of capital in the form of investment in various technologies means that bananas are now being grown in Iceland!

fairly low-tech and geographically specific activities like clearing the land in particular regions (which changed vegetation patterns) or the selective breeding of different plants and animals (which shaped their biological rhythms and physical appearance). However, the emergence and deepening of capitalism has dramatically transformed humans' capacity to shape the natural world. Today, the power to produce nature through means such as bio-engineering (which, for example, has shortened the growing times of chickens in the modern poultry industry) and the consequences of human-induced global climate change is very much greater. Because it is conditioned by the mode of production, the way in which this production of nature occurs, then, is important for understanding the geographical and social connections between work, health, and environment under capitalism, for as Neil Smith (1984/ 1990) argued, the production of nature is the basis for the production of space and the geography of capitalism.

The second point of connection is to think about how the process of workers' self-reproduction intersects with the geography of work, the geography of health, and the geography of the natural environment. Obviously, the fact that workers must work in order to live means that they are involved in transforming the natural environment. Sometimes – as in the case of agricultural workers or miners – this involves directly working in the natural landscape. In other cases (as with manufacturing workers) it means working with raw materials that have been dug out of the ground or grown and harvested. In yet other instances (as with tertiary sector workers who manage the production and distribution process and the financing of these mining, harvesting, or manufacturing operations) it involves moving and selling products that have their origins in nature. And in still other instances it involves collecting and processing the refuse of capitalist production (as, for example, in the case of e-waste recyclers or others who manage the disposal of discarded commodities or who seek to transform them into raw materials for new commodities).<sup>29</sup> Likewise, workers' homes and the other infrastructure they need to live their lives are made out of materials which have their origins in nature. Thus, the geography of work and the geography of the environment are connected through the processes by which workers reproduce themselves on a daily or generational basis. At the same time, though, the activities in which workers engage to reproduce themselves biologically and socially have implications for the geography of health, both

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<sup>29</sup> For a theoretical framework by which to conceptualize the role of waste in ongoing cycles of capitalist accumulation, see Herod *et al.* (2013a) and (2013b).

their own and that of other people and other lifeforms. Hence, not only may environmental hazards and degradation be generated through the process of workers' self-reproduction – perhaps when poor people dispose of waste in irresponsible ways because they cannot afford to dispose of it in a responsible manner – but the process of working can have dramatic physical and psychological effects on workers' bodies. Thus, in the workplace workers may be exposed to chemicals, or they may suffer from stress or repetitive motion injuries, or they may be severely injured by accidents at work, or they may suffer depression because of the monotony of their worklives.<sup>30</sup> What this means is that the impact on their bodies of the work they do to survive also affects how they live outside the workplace – they do not leave these kinds of workplace-caused diseases and ailments behind when they leave work. Rather, they take them home with them, with all sorts of repercussions for them, for their families, and for the societies which have to deal with the consequences of such injuries. A focus upon workers' self-reproduction, then, provides a way in which to link what happens in the workplace in terms of workers' health with what happens outside the workplace in the broader society (in other words, how the spaces of work and non-work are connected) and with issues concerning the transformation of the environment.

Finally, in seeking to link the three areas of work and workers, worker health, and the environment we should explicitly consider the matter of the “socio-spatial dialectic” – that is to say, the relationship between the geographical organization of capitalism and its social organization – and how geography is constitutive of social and biological processes. So, whereas we can see that capitalism clearly produces certain types of natural and social landscapes within which workers must work and also produces certain types of damage to the human body because of the way in which the capitalist labor process is organized, how workers work and respond to the demands of capital accumulation also shapes how the geography of capitalism is made, how diseases can spread, and how the natural environment may be degraded or not. Put another way, not only does the way in which the natural environment is made and diseases are either generated in the workplace or spread beyond it have significant effects upon workers, but the agency of workers and the work they do likewise affects how the natural environment is made and the geography of various diseases, whether these are non-transmissible diseases like the development of various cancers or Carpal tunnel

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<sup>30</sup> Engels (1844/1993: 252-253) was one of the first analysts to write about how the nature of work shapes workers' bodies, providing a fascinating account of how coalmining in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain shaped coalminer's bodies. For a more recent example, see Sogaard *et al.* (2006).

syndrome or whether they are transmissible diseases, whose geographical spread is shaped by patterns of human socialization, by labor migration, and by human transformation of the land.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, a focus upon the manner in which the structure of the natural and economic landscape shapes the geography of health and diseases provides another point of intersection between the three areas of research.

Linking how the mode of production shapes workers' practices of self-reproduction and how, in turn, these practices shape the making of social and natural landscapes, then, allows us to link the three areas of worker health, the environment, and the geography of work under a single theoretical framework – that of exploring how capital makes particular spatial fixes and the consequences for the organization of work, for human health, and for environmental degradation that this brings with it but also how workers create their own spatial fixes as they struggle to survive and what this means for the geography of health, disease, and the environment. The nature of work, the health of those who do the work, and the environment (both social and natural) within which that work is done are all shaped by the capitalist mode of production and how the process of producing landscapes under capitalism is contested. As a result we must collectively ask the following fundamental question: what kinds of ecological and economic landscapes do we want to produce and what role might critical geographers play in bringing these about? We must decide collectively whether we want to produce landscapes in which workers can reach their full potential and successfully reproduce themselves from day to day and generation to generation, in which they are safe from disease and injury, and in which the physical environment is not degraded, or whether we want instead to produce landscapes in which workers live precarious lives full of bodily ailments and despoiled environments. At its heart this is both a political and a geographical question, one which should guide our praxis as critical geographers, regardless of whether we are Brazilian, North American, British, Australian, French, or anything else.

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<sup>31</sup> Martens and Hall (2000) note, for instance, that malaria has begun to reemerge in many countries and areas once thought to be free of the disease. They suggest that a major contributing factor to this reemergence is human migration, particularly of poor people looking for work. Other human-created factors include the clearing of land to create environments for rice growing (which provides breeding grounds for mosquitoes) and rapid, unregulated urbanization, which often leads to an increase in (or a resumption of) malaria transmission because of poor sanitation, lack of proper drainage of surface water, and use of unprotected water reservoirs that increase human-vector contact and vector breeding.



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