

The Frontiers of Uneven and Combined Development

Monday 18 May 2020, by [DAVIDSON Neil](#) (Date first published: 25 September 2018).

Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu's *How the West Came to Rule* is an important intervention within Marxist historical debates which seeks to use the theory of uneven and combined development (UCD) to explain the origin and rise to dominance of capitalism. The argument is shaped by a critique of Political Marxist 'internalist' explanations of the process, to which the authors counterpose an account which emphasises its inescapably 'inter-societal' nature. While recognising the many contributions that the book makes to our historical understanding, this article argues that these insights do not depend on UCD, and could have been arrived at without reference to it. In particular, it will try to show that UCD is inapplicable in periods before the consolidation of capitalism, but might be more usefully extended spatially rather than chronologically.

'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.' 'The question is', said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' [[1](#)]

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Footnotes

[[1](#)] Carroll 1982, p. 96.