The majority of global commodity chain analysis is concerned with producer firm upgrading, because it is held to engender local-level development. This represents a myopic comprehension of the interaction of firms under capitalism. This article argues, in contrast, that lead firm chain governance and supplier firm upgrading attempts constitute strategies and practices that reproduce global poverty and inequality. Schumpeter’s concept of creative destruction represents a starting point in undertaking this endeavour. However, his formulation of capitalist competition ignores class and global economic relations. A Marxian conception of creative destruction, in contrast, rests upon an understanding of globally constituted class relations, which provides a novel perspective in comprehending and investigating processes that re-produce global poverty and inequality. The article substantiates these claims by examining cases of buyer-driven global commodity chains, and lead firm strategies of increasing labour exploitation throughout these chains.

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