

Chapter 049: International Relations

To be published in:

The Sage handbook of Marxism [ISBN: 9781473974234] / edited by Sara R. Farris, Beverley Skeggs, Alberto Toscano, Svenja Bromberg (Sage, 2021).

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Abstract: This chapter discusses the concept and discipline of international relations, and some of their key encounters and tensions with Marxist scholarship. As a relatively new and policy-driven discipline, emerging with racial and imperial objectives in early twentieth century Western Europe and later in the US, International Relations (IR) presented several challenges for Marxists. These challenges were increased by the fact that Marx and Engels did not have an explicit theory of the international, nor of the state. Moreover, the early Marxists developed theories of imperialism based on national and territorial concepts of the state, which became difficult to disentangle so as to produce historically and theoretically new approaches to the origins and development of capitalism. However, since the 1970s and 1980s, the influence of a post-Soviet Marxist academic impetus and of other critical approaches has produced a plethora of Marxist authors and research areas, reflecting the wide variety of Marxist theories and cross-disciplinary concepts such as hegemony, transnational class, dependency, world-systems theory, and more recently, debates in historical sociology on race, gender, class, in addition to the state and states system. As is the focus of this chapter, Marxist international relations have been dominantly Anglo- and Western-centric, in spite of efforts to develop analyses of Third World political economy, postcolonial struggle, decolonisation, and Southern epistemologies. Although international relations are a rich and influential area of Marxist thought, the chapter argues that Marxist international theory would benefit greatly from better integrating scholarship from the Global South, as well as problems of legal borders, property and methodology.

Keywords: international, state, globalisation, imperialism, historical sociology, legal borders

International relations conventionally refer, in the academic context, to events and institutions organised between states and certain non-state actors, such as international and supra-national organisations, non-governmental organisations, multilateral and bilateral trade agreements, civil society, and large-scale social movements. More generally, it refers to people's common sense of the world as a space mapped by various institutions and organisations that provide either more, or less, opportunities for interacting with other individuals. The more privileged inhabitants of this world see themselves living in an increasingly homogeneous, open, and connected space encapsulated by the phenomenon of so-called globalisation. If Marxists have widely criticised the concept of globalisation (Gill, 1995; Rosenberg, 2000), their work on international relations has nevertheless been largely concerned with its effects on the state and other governing institutions, i.e. the increased economic and political interaction between certain individuals and organisations often to the detriment of the larger and poorer population. Thus, the primary contribution Marxists make to the academic discipline of International Relations (IR), as well as

to its more common-sense notions, is to contest the ways in which capitalism is erased from analyses of globalisation and clarify how capitalism can better describe and explain its inevitably unequal dimensions.¹

To this end, this chapter problematises the idea of 'international relations'. It engages with Marxism's contribution to IR scholarship and to peoples' understanding and perceptions of worldwide class and power dynamics. As currents of thinking which evolved concurrently but independently, IR and Marxism have known various encounters and tensions. The chapter will discuss some of the key issues stemming from this relationship - mostly from within an Anglophone and Western-centric context - rather than providing an exhaustive genealogy and list of Marxist scholarship in and on IR.² In addition, it will argue that one of the most pressing ways forward for Marxist international theory is to (re)engage with the state debate in terms of the materiality of legal bodies and borders, rather than with regard to the formal relations between capital and state.

Section one unfolds a genealogy of IR marked by racism and imperialism. It emphasises the obstacles confronting fixed and universalist definitions of IR as a domain, insisting on the multiplicity of vantage points and the politics and unequal power relations involved in their formulations. Section two explores what questions Marxists in general have asked about the domain of international relations, tracing some of the major debates between Marxists regarding the distinction between international and domestic realms. Section three explores what questions - and types of Marxism - have emerged from inside the IR discipline, discussing the state debate and the extent to which Marxism challenges the main tenets of the discipline of IR.

Section 1: A Racist and Imperialist Genealogy

Defining the domain of international relations presents potentially insurmountable spatial and temporal obstacles. Referring to fixed and specific dates, places and events of origins is not only a necessarily arbitrary strategy, it is also a political one, and one that has not been sufficiently reflected upon in the literature. Instead of the conventional narrative tracing the origins of the discipline in classical ancient and early modern philosophers, from Thucydides to Kant, recent work by Vitalis (2005, 2015) has explored the discipline's institutional beginnings in Anglophone (mainly US) universities in the early twentieth century, showing that race and biology were the political and psychological determinants behind the characterisation and fixation of the world as exclusively composed of territorial states.

¹ The discipline of International Relations is referred to as 'IR', whereas the expression 'international relations' refers to the ensemble of social relations that cross the boundaries of sovereign or otherwise independent entities.

² For previous comprehensive analyses of IR and Marxism, see Hobson, 2000; Teschke, 2008; Anievas, 2010; Linklater, 2013; see Pal, 2017 for a foundational level entry point to the debates.

Although the arguments developed by early IR scholars were explicitly about formulating the transition from a world organised into empires to one constituted by states, their implicit goal was to disguise imperialism's biological erasures and hierarchies behind the apparent orderliness and sanitization of an anarchic world of states, either newly self-determined or reformed from old empires. For Vitalis, if one has to mark the discipline's birth, 1910 is a better date than 1914 - the beginning of World War One - or 1919 - the creation of the first Chair in IR at the then University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. 1910 saw the founding of the *Journal of Race Development*, later re-baptised as *Foreign Affairs*, which remains one of the discipline's leading references. 'Race development' according to a white European *qua* American standard was treated as a natural given. And this remains embedded in the ethos of the discipline, as to 'be a professional IR scholar in the US today means adopting a disciplinary identity constructed in the 1950s and '60s that rests on a certain willful forgetting' vis-à-vis the violence of its racialised, imperialist and biological origins (Vitalis, 2005: 160). Moreover, the reception and reference to ancient and early modern classics - in the leading Realist and Liberal traditions shaping the discipline since the early twentieth century - has also been revealed as deeply embedded in assumptions of racial, imperial, and civilizational superiority, often distorting the context and meaning of those classics (Jahn, 2000; Vergerio, 2018).

In other words, the 'willful forgetting' and narrow recuperation of the past is a trademark of the discipline of IR. Its name itself is an act of erasure that makes a universalist and ahistorical claim about the world, implying that nation-states are the main actors of world politics and that the way they behave has not changed for thousands of years. This is a fallacy, since empires are by very far the most present and permanent form of political organisation. Yet it remains one of the basis of Realist theory in IR, which - alongside International Liberalism - dominated the field for most of the twentieth century. Instead of the term 'international', the terms of 'inter-societal', 'trans-national' or 'trans-societal' relations have been proposed so as to avoid the misplaced focus on states. Whichever term used, definitional and genealogical issues are at the forefront of any critical understanding of the discipline. In other words, there is a need to clarify the level of abstraction on which an approach is based. Thus, from a Marxist or critical perspective, the point of the discipline of international relations is to alert us to the level of abstraction with which certain individuals and groups of individuals - and specifically classes - act and understand their interactions. Attempts to strictly define levels of analysis in the traditional and policy-oriented approaches are necessarily political - in spite of often claiming to be objective and scientific - because they tend to obscure how the differentiated experiences and theories of what is and is not 'international' were often imposed on others through colonialism and other forms

of tribal, imperial or sovereign rule. These render the subjectivity of these experiences mediated by unequal and unjust power relations.

In other words, the study of international relations is not a type of social science with a clear object of analysis, such as exploring the geographical or anthropological encounters between different societies. Studying international relations implies - especially for Marxists - that these encounters have been shaped by social processes of domination and exploitation. These processes must be visible and incorporated into the main agents and structures used to understand international relations. Acknowledging the complexity, multiplicity and diversity of analytical starting points enables us to be cautious about any attempt to define international relations from a geographically limited, fixed, and ahistorical standpoint, and calls for us to search for the political justifications and assumptions behind such attempts. Marxism can be a sophisticated and elaborate conceptual matrix that provides a plethora of interdependent concepts – a dialectic – weaving historical and theoretical challenges to conventional narratives. In response to this imperative, attempts to ‘decolonise’ the discipline and to theorise it beyond its Eurocentrism by incorporating Marxist, postcolonial, and critical race theories have flourished in the last few years (Anievas, Manchanda & Shilliam, 2014; Ling, 2014; Hobson, 2012). Thankfully, the debate on appropriate benchmarks to retrace the history of international relations is also currently taking place beyond Marxist and critical circles (Buzan and Lawson, 2014).

Before going deeper into what Marxism can specifically bring to this challenge, it is important to recall the conventional narrative. Since the nineteenth century when the term 'international' first came into use - notably by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and later, following the professionalisation and institutionalisation of other disciplines such as sociology, ethnology, and international law - conceptualisations of international relations have been overwhelmingly European, Western, and/or Northern-centric, even in Marxist scholarship. It is therefore primordial to acknowledge the political and economic consequences of this narrow yet dominant definition of the world - and of international relations. The central claim of this definition is the emergence of the modern world as a European - *qua* international - order of nation-states, a supposedly increasingly homogeneous whole constituted of independent, equal, and territorially-fixed entities whose main activity has been recorded as a series of military conflicts and alliances between European ruling classes, at home and abroad. This led Realists in IR to understand the sovereign state as driven by self-interest, survival, and security, while Liberals focused on opportunities for these states to cooperate and organise based on values of freedom, economic liberalism, and peace.

Questioning and critically analysing the modern origins of the expression 'international relations' implies (re)tracing who is assumed to have first understood and functioned with this narrow interpretation, in which the world becomes an observable 'playground' or, as is the often-quoted image, a billiard-ball table. In this scenario, the role of IR scholars is to analyse, strategise, and (very often wrongly) predict the behaviour of states - as if their behaviour was reducible to, and as predictable as, that of billiard balls. This scenario has been widely adopted since the mid to late twentieth century, and specifically since the work of Neorealist scholars in IR such as Kenneth Waltz (1979). Reducing state behaviour and rationality to a parsimonious equilibrium presents obvious advantages for making IR into a simpler more policy-alluring political science.³ But one of the crucial dangers of this approach is its implicit historicisation of the emergence of these states as unchallenged harbingers of progress and political rationality, whose methods for achieving such unprecedented universal 'acceptance' and 'adoption' by non-European societies was either justified - as the West's 'civilising mission' - or could be swept aside as a dark but unavoidable part of European history, a barbarism from which liberalism has saved modernity.

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the West ignored, exploited and eradicated non-Western societies' ideas and practices, and the world(s) these societies lived in and traversed. Of course, the categories of 'Western' and 'non-Western' are reductive and problematic, but they are a shorthand to mark out the small group of states and individuals who created the legal categories and borders in late nineteenth century conferences and institutes that set up the sovereign hierarchies at the core of our contemporary order. The West considered these 'un'- or 'semi'-civilised societies - official categories used by international lawyers (Tzouvala, 2019; Koskenniemi, 2001) - as unable to participate in the institutional construction of international relations. These hierarchies and unequal power relations between different types of states and political entities must always be the starting point to any discussion of the domain of international relations, even those only concerned with relations between modern sovereign states (Zarakol, 2017). It was only through that exploitation, eradication and downgrading of others - those not part of the nineteenth century select club of Great Powers - i.e. France, Britain, Germany, Russia and the United States - that the modern sovereign state could emerge as a 'standard of civilisation'.

To understand the relationship between Marxism and international relations, it makes sense to refer to the world-wide universalisation of capitalism from the late nineteenth century as the central benchmark to define the domain of international relations.⁴ Moreover, it is useful to

³ For Marxist critiques of realism and neorealism in IR see Rosenberg (1994), Bieler & Morton (2018) and Sakellariopoulos & Sotiris (2015).

⁴ Here is not the place to rehearse debates about the transition to capitalism. For a recent summary, see Rutar (2018). The point here is to emphasise the point at which capitalism becomes a fully global phenomenon, rather than the

point to how this universalisation rose in parallel to the development of an inherently internationalist Marxism since the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. If 1919's first Chair in IR marks, for most textbooks, the beginning of the discipline as a unique, isolated, institutional event, this chapter contrasts and rejects this ontological singularity. Instead, it understands this date as marking the early days of what Hobsbawm (1994) has called the 'Age of Extremes', of a world waking up to the Russian Revolution, and of the beginning of an age of both dreams coming true and shattering like a castle of cards for Marxists and revolutionaries worldwide. Hobsbawm ends this age, pregnant with hope yet suffering from labour pains and sickness, in 1991, providing a new terrain both for new 'global' and 'neoliberal' catchphrases and umbrella concepts of world order, and demanding that Marxists carve themselves an identity out of the dilemmas and fears of the Stalinist Soviet era.

In effect, it is no surprise that Marxist scholars, communists and revolutionary activists came so late to a discipline that remains pre-dominantly Anglo-American (Hoffmann, 1977), with leading scholars such as Henry Kissinger defining its contours while also actively occupying the corridors of power. The discipline was concerned for most of the twentieth century with matters of war, foreign policy, national interest, gun-boat diplomacy, fear and security, i.e. the so-called 'high' politics which left 'low' level political issues such as the economy and the environment to other departments and disciplines. And for the same reason, it is equally obvious why scholars in this government-led discipline had no interest – except that of seeking to destroy and eradicate them – in the fundamentally internationalist work and ideas of Marxist thinkers and political actors. We therefore need to acknowledge the fundamental antagonisms between on the one hand, Marxism as thought and praxis and, on the other, how international relations emerged and evolved academically for most of the twentieth century. This began to change post-1970s as the discipline opened to a more complex and interdependent set of approaches to understand the world, such as Feminism, Constructivism, Postcolonialism, and Poststructuralism. Marxist scholarship also started to target IR's concepts and areas of study more directly. Finally, post-USSR, it became more possible and useful for Marxists to be involved in IR debates on the state, political economy, international institutions and other non-state actors. The two following sections will now look more closely at the encounters and tensions between Marxist thought and IR.

Section 2 - Marxists and the problem of international relations

Kubàlková and Cruickshank wrote in the first book length Marxist introduction to IR (1989), that 'Western and Third World Marxists, from the Frankfurt School onwards, have tended to

thorny issue of how and when it started to expand, whether in one setting (e.g. fifteenth to seventeenth century England) or simultaneously in multiple settings (e.g. throughout the early modern period).

play down international relations regardless of the fact that, as Bernstein predicted, international relations has become "the supreme and central issue of the age".⁵ This of course does not mean that post-1960s Marxists did not have an internationalist conception of politics, of capitalism, or of revolutions. However, it does remind us that the conceptualisation of 'international relations' as a separate or independent realm of social analysis has been problematic. Moreover, Marxists, like many intellectuals emerging out of the horrors of the early and mid-twentieth century, also suffered from inheriting an understanding of the world that wilfully assumed a narrow conception of states and of international relations as derivative of those states. This can to some extent explain the rejection of this domain of study by Marxists as a way of resisting bourgeois political economy, liberal internationalism, and assumptions regarding the political and economic, international and domestic, as separate domains of analysis.

The conceptual distinction between what is international and what is not is undoubtedly highly problematic for the Marxist tradition, but it is also at the heart of its main contribution noted above, i.e. explaining globalisation and the states system as capitalist processes, whether distinct or simultaneous. Marx and Engels provided an original and ground-breaking perspective - through the broad vision of their entire corpus and the potential of the method of historical materialism - to why the international/domestic distinction reduces our abilities to understand and explain the expansion of capitalism and other modes of production. Although they wrote extensively about specific national questions, they also did so from an internationalist standpoint. However, there are important distinctions between internationalism as a standpoint and taking the international as an analytical starting point. The former is more political and strategic in terms of, for example, advancing a working-class world revolution, whereas the latter is more academic and theoretical. Thus, certain parts of *Capital* - the often used, and abused, final chapters of Volume One Part Eight on 'So-Called Primitive Accumulation' - as well as classic texts such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* or *The Communist Manifesto* are obvious benchmarks for understanding Marx and Engels's internationalist standpoint. However, they are also crucial texts to critically build on for the purpose of developing analytical starting points as a complement to their internationalist standpoint, rather than a mere amalgamation with it.⁵

As a whole, by elaborating a new conceptual framework based on the critique of classical political economy, Marx and Engels's work provides space to analyse inter-societal relations beyond the various types of political borders that emerge alongside relations of production. In contrast, bourgeois or liberal political theory assumed these political borders as natural and given

⁵ As Barker (1978/2019) argues, it is not possible to fully develop a Marxist theory of the state - and I would add of international relations - without integrating the methods and concepts of all of Marx's works, since the early Marx remains particularly problematic in terms of his conception of the state, as discussed further below. Thus, the early more political and historical Marx needs to be thought alongside the later author of *Capital*, more focused on the inner mechanisms and social relations of capitalism.

to any progressive or modern system. However, as mentioned above, the international/domestic binary did become a more persistent problem for various Marxist scholars and schools. The binary remains in various academic disciplines and everyday discourse and continues to reproduce false assumptions about - *inter alia* - the rise of the modern international order, state formation, mobility and citizenship, the role and legitimacy of institutions and organisations, and comparative methods in historical sociology. Politically, it also remains a continuing stumbling block for solidarity movements, as working classes remain tied to national political systems that can stoke the fires of racism and xenophobia by maintaining the illusion that states can control and shape economic conditions of labour. This predicament persists even though transnational corporations operate within a legal space where national boundaries have little or no leverage or authority, and where regulations for tax and labour rights often remain beyond the democratic reach of citizens.

The work of Rosa Luxemburg has known a certain revival in Marxist IR circles (Bieler et al. 2014), and more generally, after being unduly ignored for a large part of the twentieth century. An engagement with her writings is useful to showcase some of the debates and obstacles that the international/domestic binary created for early and later Marxists. Luxemburg was not content with Marx's analysis of the expansion of capitalism, and *The Accumulation of Capital* ([1913] 1951) is her attempt to provide a new theory for understanding capitalism's dependence on external markets, i.e. those provided by colonialism and imperialism. More abstractly, Luxemburg grapples with the relationships between 'individual capital' and 'aggregate capital', and what distinguishes capital accumulation from other forms of reproduction. Her central argument is that, contra Marx, the conditions for the universalisation of capitalism are different to those for the accumulation of individual capital. In other words, her astute understanding and knowledge of world events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided her with material to separate the analysis of capitalism at the individual or local level, from the analysis of capitalism at the world-wide level. This is obviously a gross generalisation and simplification of her complex economic theory, but it helps to set the scene for how Marxists became increasingly troubled by how to square this relationship from the specific to the general. However, on the whole, the use of national borders became a lazy - though admittedly in some cases necessary - marker for dividing and isolating analytical loci for understanding social relations, and these early theories of imperialism remained embedded in fixed territorial notions of the state and capital.

If the various theories of capital accumulation are a fundamental manifestation of how Marxists have integrated and conceptualised the international /domestic distinction, there are a number of other theories that need at least mentioning here, even if it will not be possible to elaborate on

their various forms and scholars.⁶ After the period of classical theories of imperialism spearheaded by Lenin, Hilferding, Luxemburg, Kautsky, and Bukharin, it is important to recall a number of events shaping Marxist thought and praxis: the Russian, Chinese, and Latin American revolutions, two world wars, decolonisation movements followed by the Tricontinental (1966) and Bandung (1977) conferences, independence wars in Africa and Asia, the rise of international organisations, Western European reconstruction, Black power struggles, the 1960s student movements, the Cold War and nuclear proliferation, the fall of the Soviet Union, rapid Asian economic transitions, to name but the most salient. In trying to make sense of and participate in these struggles, Marxists and revolutionaries worldwide were either overstretched in liberation and counter-hegemonic politics, in exile, prison, or just barely trying to survive.

Dependency theory in the 1960s - developed by authors such as Andre Gunder Frank - influenced International Political Economy scholars to reverse the dominant theories of economic development between North and South. Dependency theorists provided empirically-driven economic analyses to show how the advanced development of the Western or Northern capitalist states was dependent on those of the South and East, which were required to be kept in stages of under-development in order to continue providing - after the so-called end of colonialism - cheap labour, services and raw materials. Wallerstein's (1974) world systems theory (WST) also developed a very influential variation of these relations of dependency, by developing a more radical systemization of regions of the world (core, periphery and semi-periphery) and grounding this theory in a long-scale history of the world. The other important Marxist influence grounding the later shift towards a more explicitly international theory of historical materialism and social relations is the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's concept of hegemony - alongside analyses of civil society, subaltern actors, wars of movement and wars of position - were fundamental innovations that eventually led to perhaps the most influential group of IR Marxists, the neo-Gramscians (Cox, 1981; Van der Pijl, 1984; Cutler, 2001).

Critical geography is also an important influence perhaps less often and not sufficiently critically discussed in assessments of Marxism and IR. The critical geographer David Harvey has become a reference point for Marxists worldwide, notably thanks to his pedagogical efforts known as the 'Project Marx' to make the classic texts more accessible and thus go back to Marx's method rather than its often problematic application by Marxists. Harvey's work cannot be fully accounted for here, but his emphasis on capital accumulation as 'accumulation by dispossession' and attempts to theorise imperialism and hegemony in relation to value-based circuits of capital

⁶ Debates on imperialism continue to shape IR and political theory. Sakellariopoulos & Sotiris (2015: 86-87) for example argue that certain Marxist theories of imperialism (Harvey, Luxembourg, Gowan, Callinicos) have adopted the false territorial premises of a realist conception of international relations and propose instead a Leninist approach.

in many ways returns to some of Luxemburg's themes and aims, namely to retrieve the implicit internationalisation in the theory of historical materialism as originally proposed by Marx and Engels (Harvey, 2003). His focus on 'spatial fixes' and on capitalist expansion as not dependent on local and historical specificities of state formation has been seen as a way for some IR scholars to avoid the pitfalls of mainstream IR - notably for those interested in developing the spatial dimensions of neo-Gramscian concepts such as transnational hegemony and passive revolution (Bieler, Bruff and Morton, 2010; Hesketh, 2017). Moreover, this has opened some avenues to integrate more discussion and conceptualisation of the environment, nature, and the anthropocene, and these concepts are now being developed by a rich set of scholars outside narrow IR disciplinary circles (Moore, 2015; Malm, 2016).

Finally, it is essential to recall the work of Marxist scholars working from post-colonial and Third World contexts and perspectives as having a particular influence on not only providing alternative definitions of (and often rejecting) the international / domestic binary, but also going beyond the narrow relationship between states and empires found in Western Marxism (for example, see work by James, 1938; Williams, 1944; Wolf, 1982; Wilson, 1989; Banaji, 2010; Amin 2014; Prashad, 2014; Achcar, 2013). Although debates between postcolonial theory and Marxism have not always been productive and Marxists have pointed to crucial flaws in postcolonial approaches to the international (Matin, 2013; Chibber, 2013), these approaches are necessarily intertwined by their shared normative and emancipatory goals. Nurturing their encounters should remain a priority for IR scholars, as Rao (2016) forcefully reminds us by returning to the work of Frantz Fanon (1967; 1986), black and Third World feminists (Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 1988) and Black Marxism more generally. There is also a surge of work from a decolonial and postcolonial ethics and epistemology, which has influenced political economy and Marxist approaches emerging out of the Global South, with authors such as Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter D Mignolo (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992), as well as Constructivist attempts to build theories of 'Global IR' (Acharya, 2014). These have largely contributed to broadening the empirical and material bases of the discipline, and to creating more space for definitions of the international and of the central issues that should concern scholars - knowledge production, the environment, imperialism, and different configurations of politics, capital, and labour from regional contexts otherwise assumed to follow the Western model of development.

Section 3: International Relations (IR) and the problem of Marxists

In one of the earliest Marxist journal articles from inside the IR discipline, Fred Halliday engaged in an exercise of conceptual-empirical comparison between world events and three main ideas of

international relations dominating those events, i.e. three types of internationalisms: Liberal, Hegemonic, and Revolutionary (1988). Halliday focused on the idea of international relations, on the evolution of assumptions and expectations regarding internationalism and how it is perceived differently according to the increasingly unequal worldwide distribution of power and resources. This implies, as a crucial basis to Marxist thought, bridging 'the analytical - how the world does work - and the normative - how the world should work' (Halliday, 1988: 187). This exemplifies the way in which IR Marxists have sought to retrieve elements from both Realism and Liberal Internationalism in IR theory, and posit themselves as a fundamental alternative to these two pillars.

There are a number of critiques made against Marxism in IR. Although these aspects are less defining than in the mid-twentieth century, Marxist scholarship is still considered overly structuralist, teleological, and economically determinist. It is also still associated by the general public with Stalinist Soviet policy and other authoritarian attempts to contest the liberal order through so-called communist parties. Thus, disentangling the political engagement and critical basis essential to Marxist thought from the blind application of specific orthodoxies, events, and experiments remains a primary task for any Marxist scholar.

If Marxism officially entered the discipline of IR relatively late in the 1970s and '80s, doing so resulted in an explosion of various strands that overlap as much as they disagree with each other. The richness of IR today and its attractiveness to Marxism is also its very much enlarged research agenda, and how it speaks more and more to every day concerns, rather than merely to those of diplomats, foreign policy analysts, military strategists, and other government hacks. However, if, as Rosenberg (2016) argues, IR remains trapped in the narrow positivist agenda and vocabulary of Anglo-American Political Science, can Marxists identifying with this discipline salvage their work and help others break-out from a Euro- and state-centric cage (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2014)? The following will discuss the problem of the state debate, how it has shaped Marxist scholars evolving in the IR discipline, and how it may be taken forward. It argues that more focus on the legal dimensions of the state would enrich the debate, before concluding on how Marxism presents fundamental challenges to the discipline of IR, on ontological, epistemological, and methodological grounds, each requiring further collaborative work.

Despite efforts such as Hobson's (2000) to neatly summarise the surge of Marxist IR literature into, on the one hand neo-Marxism, and on the other, the classical Marxism of the early and mid-twentieth century, the post-1970s era is marked by a dazzling encounter between: dependency theorists, structural Marxists, neo-Gramscians, Open Marxists, Political Marxists, World Systems Theorists, derivation school theorists, Critical Theorists, the Frankfurt School,

scholarship developing Trotsky's theory of Uneven and Combined Development (U&CD), Post-Colonial Marxists, and, though more rarely, sadly, Marxist Feminists. To some extent, these distinctions have slowly been eroded in the last decade, and many scholars in IR more loosely fit under the umbrella term of the Historical Sociology of International Relations. Generally, Marxists in IR are either 1) recycling the state debate into one on transhistorical levels of abstraction or analysis, in other words the problem of 'the international'; 2) focused on specific problems and aspects of International Political Economy and Development Studies (financialisation, labour struggles, regional or area studies); or 3) exploring new subjects, problems and interdisciplinary alliances (through concepts of race, gender, migration, Eurocentrism, international law, etc.). As Keucheyan (2014: 94) remarks, we can see broadly how theories of imperialism have shifted over the course of the twentieth century from being mostly influenced by economic analysis to the consideration of other explanatory factors, such as the political and cultural dimensions of international relations.

Ultimately, these questions and positions all concern at some point or other the state's agential power. As proposed below, this should alert IR scholarship to turn to more concrete manifestations of this power. Firstly, scholarship should focus on the bodies of second and third class citizens, as well as stateless people, i.e. all those considered 'disposable' (Odysseos and Pal, 2017) or of less value to the general body politic through reduced rights, opportunities and abilities - women, migrants, minorities, prisoners, people with disabilities, precarious workers, etc. Secondly, scholarship should focus on material structures such as those used to maintain borders, offshore territories, and other extraterritorial legal spaces that provide the material means for the illusion of state sovereignty to function. These allow the state and other ruling non-state actors to evade duties and responsibilities and entrench existing and new class divisions weakening opportunities for resistance and social movements (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Mooers, 2014).

However, traditional issues from the state debate remain a central object of concern. The intractable relationship between state and capital – whether conceived as mutually constitutive or separate - and the separation between international and domestic realms remain mystified by the state form, its sovereignty principle, and by the state system derived from the state's legal form. Yet, twenty-first century struggles are - and will probably continue to be - as much against transnational capital as against authoritarian states. The seemingly universal state form produces a sense of inevitable standard that has swept all other forms of political organisation away into the dustbin of history. Because of this standard, the exploitation, inequalities, and crises of capitalism seem as natural and unavoidable as the political system that allows these to occur. Crucially, the state form is self-perpetuating, since it reproduces the idea that progress and social

justice can only be achieved through its legal mechanisms, rejecting the legitimacy of any other system or means of contestation.

Marx's theory of the state remains one of the most underdeveloped aspects of his work. Two problems have been identified from isolated readings of his early texts. One is that there is a world bourgeois state form against which the proletariat should struggle against and capture, and another is that the state is a product and property of capitalism (Barker, 1978). In some recent reflections on the state and Marxist theory, McNally (2019) highlights the distinction made by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* between an internal definition of the state, which we could see as based on possession (sovereignty as private property of the territorial limits of the state) and an external definition of the state, alternatively based on identity (representing a nationality distinct from other nation-states). Both dimensions require the use of force, meaning that militarism and war are indeed 'inherent elements of modern power' (McNally, 2019). However, one could add that both internal and external dimensions are used and justified distinctly depending on the internal or external projection of the state to various internal and external actors. In other words, this 'internal/external' distinction is only useful if we make sure to use it from various vantage points and map a more complex set of social relations and representations. This means, for example, mapping how the state justifies and avoids accountability and responsibility for its actions - or for the actions of those it should be responsible for, such as corporations - rather than merely explaining war and militarism as 'inherent elements' linked to each state's development. This requires us to focus on the agents acting on behalf of the state or who contribute to the construction of the state and who should thus be responsible for its behaviour and development. Moreover, legal dimensions of states' agentic behaviour are crucial to showing the interdependencies and complexities of the relations between states and those they represent and are accountable to, as well as to those they may fear.

These arguments can help us to think more distinctly about the state in terms of legal borders and property. This critical reflection on the early Marx's understanding of the state also introduces a link between Marx's thought and Marxist theories on law and international law that have been most concerned with the contradictions between the internal and external forms and manifestations of the state.⁷ The issue of the structure of international law and its relation to the history of capitalism remains the subject of debate. Those building on the work of Soviet legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis understand the anarchic structure of the international system, i.e. the lack of world sovereign, as a necessary outcome of capitalism, which enables an important critique of the liberal state and of the liberal legal system as unable to fulfil its promises and remain inherently driven by ruling class interests (Miéville, 2005; Knox, 2016; Baars, 2019).

⁷ Insert ref to chapter(s) in the handbook on law and international law?

However, others are critical of the formalism and ahistorical construction of Pashukanis's legal commodity form theory (Bowring, 2008; Marks, 2007; Pal, forthcoming). For example, state formation in the early modern period varies greatly, in Europe (Wood, 1992) as well as outside Europe, leading to contending state systems and legal mechanisms shaping social relations at both internal and external levels. i.e. in local regions and in overseas colonies being forcefully integrated into the state's territorial boundaries.

In other words, the view taken here is that a structural analysis of international law might erase various agentic mechanisms of domination and struggle necessary to better understand the history of capitalism. However, one must be extremely cautious when using 'internal' and 'external' as heuristic devices, since these have also produced some of the most problematic assumptions in IR on the distinction between the international and domestic realms, which can then end up being theorised in isolation, thereby justifying imperialism and militarism as inevitable and necessary dimensions of international relations. Moreover, as Barker notes, in Marxist theory the "'external" concerns of states tend to be tagged on as an afterthought, not taken into the general analysis of the form and functions of the capitalist state', emphasising the problems the notion has created even for Marxists (Barker, 1978/2019). In response, a more pluralist understanding of both capitals and states appears as a helpful way forward (Barker, 1978/2019; Davidson, 2010). Moreover, in spite of their conception of capitalism, and by extension the territorial state, as a necessary stage towards socialism and communism, Marx and Engels maintained the abolition of the state as the ultimate goal of revolution (Jessop, 1978). In an age of increasingly lethal state borders and state mechanisms of exclusion, this could not be a more important goal for Marxists to engage with.

Thus, echoing previous points by Barker, Teschke (2008: 166) argues that Marx and Engels provided 'very perceptive but primarily *ad hoc* interventions' for theorising the state and crucially the states system. What they lacked was 'a sustained reflection on geopolitical and trans-societal relations for the general course of history' (Ibid.). This has been the burden of IR Marxists, to which a plethora of efforts have contributed influential analyses. Yet Marxism's status within the discipline of IR has decreased since the 1980s. This can be most simply explained by the turn to behavioural and quantitative 'hypothesis-testing' approaches to the discipline, especially in the North American context that continues to dominate the discipline, though increasingly less in terms of theoretical diversity and innovation. For Rosenberg (2016), this narrowing of the discipline - and its distancing from contributing to other disciplines - goes deeper than trends and can be explained by its relationship to Political Science, in which IR remains, in his words, imprisoned. Therefore, the only way to contribute to the discipline of IR as Marxists is by acknowledging and clarifying the ontological, epistemological, and methodological challenges

that the Marxist framework entails. In other words, IR Marxists have to put forward more discussion of what, why, and how they can contribute to the discipline and not be constrained by the conventional Anglo-American answers to these questions.

Debates between proponents of U&CD and those associated with Political Marxism – the later school having been informally founded by historians Ellen Meiksins Wood and Robert Brenner – have gone some way into pushing the debates on ontological and epistemological grounds by discussing what constitutes, if anything, the international.⁸ More extreme proponents of U&CD such as Rosenberg and Matin tend to elevate the concept as an *a priori* condition for not only explaining capitalism and modernity, but also for developing a generic theory for understanding all inter-societal relations (Anievas and Matin, 2016). However, U&CD has also been developed as a rich concept to focus on otherwise ignored aspects of capitalist and modern expansion (Davidson, 2012). These developments in IR theory are also taken up by other IR scholars notably in the English School tradition (Buzan and Lawson, 2015). In contrast, Political Marxism has focused on developing a position of ‘radical historicism’ and agency (Knafo and Teschke, 2017), rejecting the theoretical nomenclature of an ‘international’ analytical starting point. However, many questions remain concerning the methodological implications of this historical work, as well as how it may transform the concepts and methods developed for understanding contemporary phenomena. Moreover, it remains to some extent contained in the limits set up by the tradition of Historical Sociology, which has known various waves and scholarly interventions, many from a positivist and comparativist angle antithetical to the Marxist tradition. Historical Sociology, in its 1970s Weberian era, and in its recent iterations influenced by the English School, remain tied to concepts of Western political development and linear temporality that work from the existing world order of states and international organisations.

Conclusion

In sum, the main ways in which IR Marxists have contributed analytically and normatively to the praxis of international relations is by 1) reinserting capitalism as an explanatory factor - whether as social property relations, imperialism, hegemony, WST, or U&CD; 2) challenging historically how Marxism has been falsely driven by or associated with economic determinism or a simplistic teleology of world revolution at all costs; and 3) challenging how Marxism is assumed to conflate or reduce the analysis of international transitions, state formations, revolutions, and systemic orders to problems of base and superstructure.

⁸ For some of the debates between Political Marxism, U&CD, and WST scholars, see the Symposium on *How the West came to Rule in Historical Materialism* (26: 3, 2018).

Generously aided by the 2008 subprime credit crisis, this work and that of intellectuals on the left more broadly, has contributed to giving 'capitalism' a bad name, shifting the general discourse about the legitimacy of capitalism as a natural, progressive and inevitable economic system. This shift has been made possible by ongoing and relentless contributions by intellectuals across the world to dispute the natural, progressive and inevitable assumptions regarding the interlinked development of states and capitalism. However, the opening of new socialisms has also left the door open to new forms of racist and fascist ideologies, which Marxist IR must also find ways to theoretically integrate and condemn.

Thus, if current Marxist debates over the international/domestic distinction could do much more still to enrich and transform the discipline, recent moves have strengthened a third wave of historical sociology through questions of Eurocentrism, global history, decoloniality, and how to conceptualise and historicise revolutions, for example. To further the political and pedagogic impact of this scholarship, however, it remains essential to understand and shape the institutions that make or break ideological and material borders. Crucially, Marxists would tend to emphasise how these borders determine who has access to certain resources and therefore what mechanisms should be defended or rejected to insure a better distribution of those resources. Whether IR scholars and Marxists operating in this domain will be able to develop theories that do not impose a position but keep open 'reparative possibilities' (Rao, 2016: 2) between various strands of Marxism and other critical theories, remains to be seen. For now, we hope to have brought some light to where IR Marxists have contributed – and how they could continue doing so - to avoid falling into the traps of endless analytical debates often disconnected from the everyday concerns of people.

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