

What should Marxism materialism propose to International Relations?

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To argue for the acknowledgment of the importance of historical materialism today when the cold-war and communism have for more than two decades ceased to exist it might create the perception of appearing dejected. Yet such a task which we attempt to take in this work is possible, if only because of the way that our actuality has depicted itself. One can argue for example that the significance of historical materialism as an elucidating method was never reliant on the success of the authoritarian regimes of communism that gave it a face of their own, any more than has traditional conservatism been dependent on social Darwinism, racist or/and aggressive regimes. Beyond this indication we argue of the possibility that historical materialism can be recognised as explanatory system, as one that in derivation and maturity has as its focus of analysis and particularly lays emphasis on what more than ever before governs our social world today, capitalism. The cold war proved the ground or rather the fit for concealing the social and economic divide and made that division namely in competing strategic interest: with the failure of communism and the freeing of historical materialism itself, IR might as well accept the degree to which socio-economic issues determined its agenda and policy of the west.

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Introduction: Bringing Marxism back into international relations

What is a theory, if not the communication of practice, if not a discourse that reveals that relationship. Theory thus follows reality in the sense that it is shaped by the world of experience. But it also precedes the making of reality in that it orients the minds of those who by their actions reproduce or change that reality. Such is for instance Marx's revolutionary critique of political economy, itself philosophy, a philosophical foundation, just as, conversely, the philosophy underlying it already contains revolutionary praxis. Theory conceives in itself a practical aim, that is, praxis being not only the next step, the aftermath, a byproduct of a process but, as already contained from the very beginning of the theory, hence, revolutionary praxis already present in historical materialism and not external to the theory.¹ Antonio Gramsci paraphrased Marxism as becoming in a broader influence "the common sense of

¹ Marcuse presents very resourceful philosophical analyses of praxis, see further in "Foundations of Historical Materialism" in Marcuse, H. (1972), *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, (trans), Joris de Bres, London: New Left Books, p5. Henceforth, please use the bibliography section below for all full references.

our epoch”, in fact throughout the twentieth century Marxism afforded possibly the most important intellectual alternative to conventional social science.² The question is what does critical *historical* materialism mean for world politics today: after all, can its ideas from nearly a century and half ago, be applied to the partly conceived apolitical globalised world of today?³ Certainly, it would be impossible to argue that the founder of historical materialism is timeless or eternally young.⁴ A large number of critical writers in International Relations, (IR) have been discussing this topic for some time, yet it feels, the common historical materialist basis of the discussion has gone unacknowledged.⁵ Given this renewal, itself well established, we should perhaps start, rather than simply acknowledging the rise of historical materialism, by noting the different turns and stages taken by this discussion. Its purpose will be to solidify the newly resurgence of historical materialism and to push its critical edges further. I argue that a more in-depth exploration of critical social theory has considerable potential in the context of the “social turn” in IR theory. Historical materialism can represent a normative theory and alternative systematic analyses in the discipline of IR, by responding openly to the events and conventional dogmatism embalmed in the theories of contemporary world. Dialectics remains an underutilized methodology in contemporary IR theory, which represents a significant limitation to the study of world politics, an oversight that this work intends to redress. Against the disembodied understanding of International Relations put forth by mainstream theories, we will recognize the significance of historicist factors for world politics. The ultimate purpose thus is to offer the groundwork to world politics that is focused on the intersubjective engagements between human beings, which can be developed in future research.

Some writers have charged a great deal of criticism towards historical materialism in IR,⁶ with the perception of it being deterministic, reductionist, a version of historical teleology or simply Eurocentric. Even more serious are the charges that see historical

² Halliday, Fred. (1994), “A necessary encounter: historical materialism and international relations” in Linklater, Andrew. (2000), *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, (Eds. III), London: Routledge p. 1184

³ In condemning Marxism for not having an international theory, as many scholars have done in the past, it means to forget that due to the contemporary foundation of the discipline no scholar prior to 1919, as MacLean rightly observes, really focused explicitly on “international relations”, Maclean, J., 1988. *Marxism and International Relations: A Strange Case of Mutual Neglect*. Millennium – Journal of International Studies. 17(2). pp. 295-319. p.297. Therefore, over a century and half after the publication of Marx’s major treatises, there is a sense that his project needs to be revised to account for our reality and importance of the world of states.

⁴ Hardly any social scientist or historian has denied that social and historical methodology, epistemology and ontology have progressed in the period since Marx wrote the manuscript to *Capital*. But this argument must be made keeping in mind that social analysis, contemporary and historical for that matter, continue to draw inspiration and research programmes from the *classical thought*; Durkheim, E; Tocqueville, A; Weber, M; Khaldoun, I; Machiavelli, N; are all cases in point.

⁵ Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, eds., *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Stephen Gill, (1993), (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism, and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Mark Rupert, “Marxism and Critical Theory”, in Dunne et al., (eds.), *International Relations Theories*. Andrew Linklater, “Marxism”, in Burchill et al., *Theories of International Relations*.

⁶ Wight, M., 1960. Why is there no International Theory? *International Relations*. 2(1). pp. 35-48. In assessing the Marxist tradition in his foundational text on the lack of IR theory, Wight categorised Marxism as a domestic theory with little to offer international theory p.41-43. See also Wesson, R., 1976. *Marxism: For and Against*. London: Temple Smith, p.3.

materialism as being inherently inept to prescribe for the contemporary world or denied its relevance for offering a sensible interpretation of the subject matter of IR.⁷ Why do these writers think so,⁸ is it justified? In our search to elucidate these and many other questions on the way, we undertake a two part inquiry: first, engaging the approach of historical materialism and assessing its exclusion and relevancy in the academic domain since it is timely that critical historical materialism can be distinguished from its resultant companions. Our task here is to explore the potential interaction of historical materialism and the discipline of IR, which is considered here still at an initial stage. IR as a discipline has been the product of thematic sources within the Anglo-Saxon education systems and also developed from the theoretical origins of other disciplines.⁹ Despite the fact that in other academic disciplines of the social sciences as in sociology and economy, where historical materialism has constituted a recognisable analytical body of work, in the realm of international relations it has never established a secure standing. Neither in English speaking educational institutions nor their prevailing influences has historical materialism seemed to be in a commonly recognised place. One factor that has encouraged this gap between theory and discipline has been the undermining of the historical Marxian thought by the overstressing of the economic Marx at the international level, which in turn has diluted any endeavour to analyse the political, ideological and security concerns that IR views as its ground. The second factor which has impacted in its exclusion has been the ahistorical and asociological biases of the mainstream IR theory: indeed the primary purpose underlying our task is the calling for an *historical* materialist turn in IR.

This work should be read in the context of two set of issues. The first concerns my personal view about the way the study of international relations can best be advanced. The second concerns the promotion, in other sections of this work, of a range of ideas about how this way of thinking about the world could be developed. One recurring criticism of the historical method in international studies is that it has to offer a systematic research agenda as discussed above, which has been constant in the minds of many mainstream writers and in the most plural sense this criticism goes to the query of ontology. There is a gap it is suggested between the theoretical concepts and observable events of the practical reality. How can we connect the two in order to

⁷ It has been argued in the past and which now continues to be a common reference for most Realist thinkers that if Marxism cannot integrate the concepts of anarchy, arguably “the central fact of international life” and the balance of power, described as the “distinctively political theory of international politics” then it fails to offer anything substantive to the discipline. See Bull, H., 1966. “Society and Anarchy in International Relations” in Butterfield, H. & Wight, M, (eds.) *Diplomatic Investigations*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, p.35; Waltz, K., (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, p.117.

⁸ Although relatively an old textbook Berki’s insights offer some credible arguments within the discourse. See further, Berki, R. N. “On Marxian Thought and the Problem of International Relations”, *World Politics*, October 1971.

⁹ IR started in England as multi-disciplinary avenue for scholars, diplomats and government officials to research issues related to conflict, security, and sovereignty. See Brian Schmidt. *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: a Disciplinary History of International Relations*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, p3.

make sense of our social world and the international relations of today? Our second task is therefore to grasp the bearings of the ontological reconstruction of Marxism. A reconstruction that will give its proper worth to the elements ignored by what has defined international relations for the last fifty years, but which are important for understanding power relations that concern conflict, cooperation, and the likelihood of human survival. Because the ontological shift reflects and envisages structural change, it is worth therefore, that our attempts, stress the driving forces that are capable of reshaping structures established in the past. Underlying each construction is the human substance, (agency) that is active in any given ontological construction; the really existing factual social relations are therefore the primary object of our inquiry. The notion that the existence of social structures is dependent upon their instantiation in human agency also implies the possibility of emancipatory practice. Following from this theoretical commitment is the need to historicize social structures in order to understand how they are socially constituted rather than viewing them as epiphenomenon and hence how they might be changed.

Part I. An appraisal to mainstream IR theory through a critical historical materialist lens

What's at stake in bringing historical materialism back into IR? Transcending Economism, Ahistorical and Asociological biases of the Mainstream

For the best part of its young life the discipline of international relations has been dominated by rationalist modes of theorising. Neorealists and neoliberals, working from sparse assumptions about states as rational egoists have championed the development of abstract, deductive theories of IR. We attempt in this work to situate and understand why theories are established in historical contexts. One way of doing this is by deconstructing theory through a focus on basic epistemological/ontological assumptions. For instance, on the basis of the mainstream approach it has become an established truth in international relations theory that the sovereign and territorial nation-state system was established in the Westphalian conference (1648). This also implies confirmation of the non-intervention principle. However, a more global and critical awareness and a historical deconstruction falsifies this assumption. There always were well functioning nation-states in China, India, Southeast Asia and elsewhere long before it was invented in Europe. The same test can be applied to other conceptual constructs, which are either taken for granted or treated as universally valid although based on Anglo-American categories. It is possible to claim, therefore, that IR theory has been selective in its collection, recording and understanding of events and has ignored a significant part of the international system it seeks to explain. It only succeeds in assuming the universalisation of Western experience and value systems while ignoring the rest. There is no doubt that also

in academic life it remains true that world history has always been written from the more powerful nations point of view. This is why we can discern that the pendulum in IR theory has swung according to changing sentiments in the academic and political establishment in the West (in particular in the United States), and of course changing social and political realities. Neo-realists utilize neo-liberal discourses when it suits certain interests of the American economy; the ideology of neo-liberal globalization has indeed been a heavy sword applied in the aftermath of the Cold War. During this systemic confrontation, modernization theory was used as an ideological tool to counter communism world-wide. In this regard the dominant liberal discourses of economics, law, politics, peace, human rights, environment concerns, etc, are based on ambiguities and outright hypocrisies. Thus the real power of the West lies not so much in its massive economic development and technological advances but, rather, in its power to define.

We cannot stress enough the argument that there is an urgent need to reconceptualise some of the basic assumptions in international relations. This is particularly so with regard to dominant understandings of the nature of the relationship between theory and the discipline of IR. Marxism, as a theoretical approach, even after a century and half remains in evolution, there is also much that remains unanalyzed, while on the other hand there are contradictions, outdated and confused parts within its corpus. In this sense it is rather less different from other classical approaches. It might be argued that Marxism's immense contribution to IR theory is patchy, rather underdeveloped in the literature and to a considerable extent waiting an analysing in the future, its components not present in the works of historical materialists who have written to date. As a result in politics, conventional approaches tend to peripheralise the role of historical materialism in the global political order, thus obscuring a critical understanding of the contribution that interpretative Marxism can make to the constitution of political practices. Furthermore, IR as a discipline is dominated by ahistorical and state-centred theories that are incapable of dealing analytically and normatively with contemporary transformations in world power and authority. This inability is thus responsible, in no small part, for an increasingly acute legitimacy crisis for international relations. By a way of contrast critical historical materialism intends an intervention and seeks an engagement with imagining international relations as praxis and as a unity of thought and action, through a radical critique of the mainstream IR. This involves an interrogation of the historical process through which mainstream IR, creates and perpetuates social injustices and repressive interests and then give them a form of naturalisation or inevitability. The objective of this perspective is to reveal the internal contradictions in, and incoherence of IR with a view of fostering a capacity for a new basis for praxis in an increasingly alienated global order: hence, it has as its subject matter the research of social relations that result from the relations of production; historical as opposed to ahistorical, formalistic social theorising; materialist as opposed

to idealistic; and make use of the reciprocal interrelationship between the economic base, political, cultural, and ideological superstructure. Such an approach to analysing global processes is not straightforward; rather it celebrates the virtues of complexity and not those of parsimony. As conceived here critical historical materialism intends indeed, in capturing the history of the states system, through an understanding of putting the state back into the history and history back into our understanding of IR. For the historicisation of the supposedly eternal entities like *state*, *war*, *power*, *etc.*, has this double function, denaturalising and emancipating within international relations that which is present.¹⁰ If international theory is to emerge as an understanding of the rapidly changing world that we inhabit then in my view these are the kinds of issues that we need to address.

How can geopolitics and its recurring themes of anarchy and the balance of power be most consistently incorporated theoretically within a historical materialist analysis of international relations? An important proposition is that the most consistent way of incorporating the concept of anarchy, the balance of power and geopolitics generally within a historical materialist framework is to liberate them from realist fetishisation. Furthermore it is most consistent with historical materialism to confront realist concepts and demonstrate their social content rather than denying their causal significance or repeating the fetish in a modified form whilst empowering social agents to change history. If this belief of historical materialism is extended to the international, then it suggests that the central concern of IR becomes not security *per se* as the mainstream textbook theory teaches, and the actions of the nation-state directed at maximising it, but rather conflict, and the ways in which this is generated, conducted, and resolved. Underlying the web of international affairs lays therefore social conflict, the pursuit of wealth and economic power as the source of these manifold events. Thus, the dominant problem of twenty-first century international politics is not simply that of security: but arguably it can equally be seen as been that of containing inter-capitalist conflict on the one hand, and social revolution on the other. In other words, the management of social conflict is the issue that has most concerned politicians and academic analysts of foreign policy alike. Marx political insight mistakenly led him to endow the ideology of revolution with the deterministic overtones that came to be associated with it, or believing that an emancipated society would emerge from revolutionary cataclysm: but he was right to see social conflict over ownership, power, resources, as a central feature of politics, and to ask how such conflict underlay the apparently autonomous world of political strife and international conflict. This he was able to do, in part, by introducing the materialist and historical contexts. When it is said that the pursuit of international politics is one of *order*, it begs the question whose interest does this order serves? When it is said, the international is *anarchical*, yes, it's

¹⁰ Carl Boggs, "Intellectuals and Empire" In *Academic Repression*. Edited by Anthony Nocella et al. (New York: AK Press, 2010): 455.

true the international is as such but this does not mean to avoid fundamentally the assertion that anarchy conceals the fact that this superficially incoherent conflict is itself the product of factors that are definable and intelligible, even if they cannot be controlled as the principal actors would like. Moreover, for Marxism, it is above all not the anarchy of the states system but that of the market and of capitalism itself that is determinant.

The behavioural tendency to ignore context and historical contingency in order to isolate key variables for empirical testing and comparison leads to abstract transhistorical comparisons. This inability of mainstream IR to understand the historicity of the state system is due to the influence of one of its major theories, structural realism, which at least notionally claims to be scientific. Kenneth Waltz's seminal text, *Theory of International Politics*, is one of the most prominent theories in international relations. There are several assumptions about the international system that originate with Waltz's theories: one of the principal assumptions is that the structure of the international system can explain why dissimilar actors act in similar ways. Although not intended to explain the foreign policy of a country, Waltz argues that the structure of the international system creates the conditions to act in a specific way regardless of context. Waltz's theory ignores the distinct features of each country by favouring structural explanations for the actions of states. An implication being that in a similar situation, any state would act in the same way. Though systemic explanations are not just common among realists, an implication of Waltz's theory is to place emphasis at the structural level at the expense of the domestic politics.¹¹ Structural accounts of the state in IR largely ignore domestic factors, culture, history, and political institutions. Realists examine the international system, but fail to take the next step: re-examining concepts in their unique social context. Although theories of realism have evolved since Waltz, the impact of his theory and positivism in general on realism and international relations is undeniable.

There is little doubt that much, though clearly not all, of contemporary international relations is "historophobic" in that it views historical analysis as superfluous, to the subject matter of the discipline. The three major theoretical debates in IR or the inter-paradigm debates: between *idealists* and *realists*; *traditionalists* and *behaviouralists*; and between the *state centred* and *world system* perspectives have come to define the content and the conditions of further study in the discipline,¹² where historical materialism sits either plainly in contradiction or vaguely bracketed with little

¹¹ Structural explanations of outcomes are common among Marxist scholars as well – a point which we will address below throughout this work – where many scholars commonly focus on the structure of the capitalist system to explain the actions and choices of individuals. See: John Agnew. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power* (2005, Temple UP).

¹² For an excellent reading of this *debates* consult Maghroori, R. and Ramberg, Bennet. (eds), (1982), *Globalism versus Realism: International Relations' Third Debate* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press) also Lijphart, Arend (1974a) "International relations theory: great debates and lesser debates", *International Social Science Journal*, 26, 11–21.

success.¹³ It has been the obsessive quest for scientific certainty,¹⁴ and a celebration of positivism which sees legitimate IR enquiry as defined only by the attainment of objective knowledge, that prompted Waltz and many others to specify international politics as law-like pattern, evolutionary and progressivist, patterns which could not be revealed through an historical materialist lens.¹⁵ This quest for *scientificity* necessary dictated the exclusion or dismissal of historical materialism from the ever narrowing borders of legitimate IR. While not all mainstream international relations scholars are neorealists, it is now enthusiastically accepted by many IR theorists, who give assent to the current positioning of the mainstream borders that exclude historical materialism from engaging in the legitimate purposes and tasks of IR.¹⁶ It is as if Marxists, according to mainstream IR theoreticians, can exist but must not be heard. We therefore, see it as a top-priority task to undermine the popular belief that historical materialism is simply not international relations, if historical materialism is to have any success at all in being established into what constitutes “real international relations” enquiry.

While there are numerous dissenting scholars within the IR discipline, the influence of powerful political and economic interests on the study of IR has led to reluctance on the part of academia to engage with the ideas of Marx.¹⁷ Even the supposed “critical turn” of the late 1970s in IR turned out to be unsuccessful: mainstream IR theory refused to abandon its positivist commitments and instead spent time and resources on the neorealism-neoliberalism debate.¹⁸ It is worth clarifying one point here. For it might be argued today that focusing on neorealism is somewhat pointless task because, neorealism is either past its dominant peak, or because it is only one of the mainstream theories that need to be considered. We can put forth our response too. First, take a look at one of the leading IR journals, “International Security” is a good example; it is almost impossible not to find at least one contribution from the *realist* school of IR, or not find neorealists constantly referred to, even if it is in the form of a critical debate.¹⁹ Second, our main objective here is not simply to critique neorealism

¹³ Kubálková and Cruickshank argue that, in comparison with other disciplines, IR and Marxism have not forged a fruitful relationship. They ask why IR is an area in which Marxism has a comparatively weak tradition and one which has been treated as secondary, in Kubálková, V. & Cruickshank, A. A., (1985), *Marxism and International Relations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.9.

¹⁴ Hollis, M. & Smith, S. *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, (Oxford University Press, USA. 1990): 45

¹⁵ Positivism is a programme that advocates the application of some of the methods of the experimental natural sciences to the study of the social world. It stresses observation, quantification and hypothesis-testing and, since it relies on a regularity theory of causation, argues that explanation and prediction are necessarily coterminous. See further in Yosef Lapid, “The third debate: On the prospects of international theory in a post-positivist era”, *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 33 (1989): 235.

¹⁶ The most common term for this mainstream is *rationalism*, and what Waever has defined as the “neo-neo synthesis” see for more in Waever, O. (1996), “The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate” in Smith, S. & Booth, K. & Zalewski, M. (1996), (eds), *International Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.149-8

¹⁷ Paul Buhle. *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the American Left* (London: Verso: Haymarket Series: 1987). See also RBJ Walker, “History and Structure in the Theory of International Relations” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*. 18:2 (June 1989): 167.

¹⁸ Craig Murphy, “The Promise of Critical IR, partially kept”, *Review of International Studies*. Vol.33, (2007): 121.

¹⁹ Ole Waever, The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations, *International Organization* 52, 4 (2005):698.

per se but rather to use it as an example, in order to show how historical materialist enquiry can transcend the limits of “*a historicism of stasis*”,²⁰ more generally. The third and maybe the most urgent need, why we choose to critique neorealism is because it is the Waltzian version that has done more than any other theory to mark out the borders of IR so explicitly to exclude and marginalise historical materialism from what constitutes “real international relations”.²¹

Twenty-first Century Marxism and the New Parameters of Global Politics

If the analytical and theoretical foundations of mainstream IR theories pose problems for capturing contemporary global transformations, Marxists theories are no less troubled. Critical thought, nonetheless, depends on cultural soil to grow. The point in case is the Enlightenment and its subsequent traditions provided an ideal starting point for Marxian critical thought. Critical enquiry, unhampered by existing authorities and beliefs, was enshrined at the core of the Enlightenment itself. Its universalistic principle of reason provided a tribunal for critical accusation, against ancient wisdom and self-proclaimed heirs of the Enlightenment. In other words, thus, in order to make sense, a critique must depart from certain assumptions or principles embodied in its subject. Most Marxists have attempted to generate the historically specific statements about IR through a singular mode of production analysis. Indeed, the employment of this logic has profound consequences, which in the final analysis, has resulted for Marxists, claiming the incorporation of the “international” but not in fact in theoretical terms. In this respect, Marxist analyses traditionally derive the behaviour of states from their internal mode of production only. But a state’s behaviour will also be to a significant extent causally determined by other states and not just by the mode of production. If we specify IR, as a Marxist should, as an analysis of multiple modes of production that exist synchronically, then these approaches miss those causal determinations which exist between states by deriving all causality *vertically*.²² This methodology simply misses, as a theoretical approach, the external causal determinations generated by horizontally existing modes of production. In turn, by making “the domestic” the theoretical frontier it fails to fully confront the realist school of IR. This line of logic can be traced back to Lenin’s thesis: it starts with the “imperialist” phase of capitalist development, whereby, internally industrial capital has been subordinated to bank capital creating the occurrence of finance capital. Finance capital then fuses with the state becoming an instrument of capital dictating the geopolitical logic of rivalry between the advanced capitalist powers for a re-distribution of colonial assets,²³

²⁰ Ashley, Richard K. (1986), “The Poverty of Neorealism”, pp. 289, 258, 290-1, in Keohane, Robert O. (ed.), (1986), *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press.

²¹ Waltz, K., (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, chap. 2-5, pp.43-9.

²² Thus the theoretical root of the problem for Marxism, as Maclean (1988: 298) has succinctly noted, is that “the domestic political system” acts as “the theoretical boundary for the conception of the whole” in Maclean, J. (1988), “Marxism and International Relations: A Strange Case of Mutual Neglect” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 17 (2), pp.295-319, p.298.

²³ Lenin, V.I. (2004), *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, International Publishers: New York, pp.47-89.

demonstrating the same tendency towards reducing geopolitics as epiphenomenal. Like Lenin other writers have undoubtedly made a vital contribution to historical materialist IR, but everything about state's behaviour is determined by the historically specific mode of production. Do these approaches, qualify as international theories? Our belief is that they miss the theoretical necessity and ultimate desirability of incorporating the explicitly horizontal determinations within a historical materialist analysis.

The act of equalling historical materialism with the *structuralism* of Poulantzas and Althusser from the late 1960s, as a paradigm derived from Marxism, which in its usage and framework for action conveys the same method of ahistorical and unchanging laws as realism, gave the false impression that it could as a theoretical approach explain IR. Other than signifying the ways in which the economic factors influence politics Marxian structuralism has been in many cases inadequate in defining that dimension of international politics that is not merely an expression of the economic structure of society. While many independent critically inspired writers of historical materialism have been able, to an extent to dodge this, the trend of reductionism limited the analysis for the best part of the twentieth century. In developing our preferred critical historical materialist approach, we necessarily reject vulgar Materialism, which operationalises the traditional "base-superstructure" model.²⁴ In this model the *independent* base, comprising the social relations of production determines the *dependent* superstructure, thus all that lies outside of the mode of production. In consigning state behaviour to the superstructure such an approach views it as epiphenomenal, and accordingly denies such superstructural element any effectivity as an historical- social force.²⁵ Our proposition is therefore of transcending the well known *relative autonomy of the state* approach, of the French structuralist scholarship and effectively to collapse the distinction between base/superstructure, thereby in effect positing the state and international relations as constitutive of the base. Marxists must argue against the viability of the base/superstructure distinction in the face of changes in capitalist production involving the politicisation of the base with government involvement in the economy, the transformation of the superstructure with the increasing infusion of private matters into public affairs, such as the welfare state, the education system and labour practice, and changes in the nature of the capitalist state in terms of its corporativism, bureaucratisation and the legitimisation functions of the state. In this process insights can be drawn from Marx and other currents of Marxism, Gramsci's political thought for instance, which has invoked

²⁴ For an outline of this model see Marx, K. (1976), *Preface and Introduction to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Publishing House.

²⁵ As Wood rightly observes, "The base/superstructure model has always been more trouble than it is worth...it has been made to bear a theoretical weight far beyond its limited capacities", in Wood, Ellen M. (1995), *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p49.

this solution to the problem of base/superstructure model.²⁶ We cannot replace historical processes with stasis, historical practice with structural determinism, and the creativity of politics with structurally bounded economic action. It is in this context that Marxists must plead for an historical materialism of international relations that reconceptualises the fit between societies, states and geopolitics.²⁷

The divide that has emerged between the analysis of international politics and that of domestic politics is deeply problematic. The influences of Gramsci's arguments are a telling, of his understanding of the tensions between the domestic-external dimensions, in which the external developments stimulate the context for restructuring and instigating domestic change. Contrary to conventional Marxian thought that assumes social relations and the state in their particular national dimensions, Gramsci sensed that the national and the international are intricately linked and that Marxism must instead focus on how "the international situation should be considered in its national aspect".²⁸ The so called domestic and international realms are not entities that can be analysed in isolation but are part of one social world which needs to be examined as a whole. Gramsci extended the revolutionary possibility to the international realm, in a sense that he understood perfectly well that the world capitalist system should be countered across national boundaries. Phenomena that are considered to be domestic or international are co-constitutive. Similarly, Gramsci has proved very potent by recognizing as central class forces that develop through production processes; this is in contrast to Realist assumptions that see the state purely as the rational expression of national interest. By basing state power in class relations Gramsci foresaw that international relations are intertwined fundamentally with social relations and whereas the state was the terrain of struggle. He therefore argued that states are not the only entities of the international system, and that the international system is not an inter-state system: it must be understood in a more relational, active and potentially changing set of relations.²⁹ Secondly, Gramsci purely rejected an instrumentalist interpretation of Marxist thought that sees man mechanically react to their material reality. In Gramsci's view reality is not ahistorical, "static or immobile" but "a relation of forces in continuous motion and shift of equilibrium".³⁰ The state system as a whole has been one of interaction with what is its external world, the international field,

²⁶ Gramsci, A. (1971), *Selection from Prison Notebooks*, (ed and trans), Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence & Wishart; For an overview see my own work Malo, E. "Antonio Gramsci's role in Marxian thought and the contribution made to international relations by those using his ideas", *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, (Issue 7/2013), p96; for a general interest see also Thompson, Edward P. *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act*, London: Penguin.

²⁷ Halliday, F. (1994), *Rethinking International Relations*, London: Macmillan, 78-84;

²⁸ *Prison Notebooks*, pp182, pp317

²⁹ On this point Harold Laski argued against the consideration of the state as the sovereign actor with unrestricted powers over its citizens. He suggested that communities had a plurality of social organisations and that states were just one of a number of legal and political organisations which could make a claim for the loyalty of its civilians. Discussed in Schmidt, B. (1998), *The Political Discourse of Anarchy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp164-6

³⁰ *Prison Notebooks*, as above, pp272.

particularly from the expansion since the end of the nineteenth century of financial and industrial power across the world. Thus the logic of the state system, with its own processes and purposes aside serving as political community should be sufficiently stressed. A new order can only be established upon and out of the political economic space that arises within the intertwined logic of capital and the state system.

Part of the reasons, why emancipatory approaches stands on a wobbly position regarding the application of Marx's ideas to international relations is because of their rejection of a necessary aspect of Marxian thought, the paradigm of production and the belief that the oppressed classes only could liberate human beings from all forms of misery; the concept of the mode of production, which Cox argues is the cause of "static and abstract" analysis.³¹ Cox's argument might be considered wrong, since Marxism does not envisage the concept of the mode of production as abstract types, but a totality spearheaded by inner negation towards steady transformation. Although, the dominant social force of the social relations in a mode of production inflicts limitations on the type of transformation – be that political, institutional, or technological – that can be adapted within their agenda. This has produced a number of negative results. The center of the debate within the Marxist analysis is shifted rather towards in favour of emphasizing more so ideas and the complex-whole concept of hegemony. The inadequacy to position the inter-state system as contained by the totality of capitalism, in turn entails a mistaken view of the world order, characterized by, "the duality of interstate-system and world economy", each prone to distinctive internationalizing arguments.³² The theoretical aspect of Gramsci's argument, "the complex contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production", when extended to the international dimension, stresses that war and the inter-state system at one level and the global economy at another level are interdependent facets of a contradictory whole. Following Marx, Gramsci signified that "it is on the level of ideologies that men become conscious of conflicts in the world of the economy".³³ To contradict classical realist assumptions³⁴, politics is not an autonomous realm but needs to be thought about in relations to a number of other social processes.

Marx himself occasionally writes as though the political is simply the reflex of the economic. Yet he also often investigates the social, political or military motives behind historical events, without the faintest suggestion that these motives are just the surface manifestations of deeper economic ones. Material forces do sometimes leave their mark quite directly upon the social, political and creative artistry, but, their influence is however much more long term than this: it could be at times partial and at

³¹ As above in, *Social Forces, States and World Orders*, pp94

³² As above, in Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*, pp107-109

³³ *Prison Notebooks*, (1971), pp162

³⁴ Morgenthau, Hans J. (1985), *Politics Among Nations*, New York: McGraw-Hill, p13

other times a total nonsense. How is the capitalist mode of production the cause of my taste in music for example? There is no reductionism of any rate active here. Politics, culture, science, ideas and social existence are not just economics in disguise; they are and have their own reality and inner logic, evolve their own histories, etc. They also powerfully shape the mode of production itself. The interchange between economic *base* and social *superstructure* is not just one way. Here we should delve deeper, because if we reject determinism, what exactly are we claiming, besides there is a bigger question to everything we have spoken so far. How on earth could something as diverse as human history form a unified story? The claim is in the first place a negative one. It is the way that humanity produces its material life lays down limits to the kind of cultural, legal, political and social institutions they construct. Modes of production do not determine a specific kind of politics, culture or particular ideas. Capitalism was not borne out of philosophy or even fictional writing it is rather a context in which both can be elucidated. Nor do modes of production throw up only those ideas or institutions which serve their purposes. Most creative writers, academics, advertisers, newspapers, teachers, and media outlets do not produce work that is dramatically subversive of the status quo, and this fails to strike most of us as significant. Broadly speaking, the culture, law and politics of a class-society are bound up with the interest of the dominant classes. As Marx clearly argued, “the class that is the ruling *material* force, of society is at the same time the ruling *intellectual* force”.³⁵

That the business of material production bends politics, law, culture and ideas by demanding that they spend much of their functioning force in legitimating the prevailing social order, is so glaringly obvious that generally fails to strike most of us as significant. This holds as truer in contemporary capitalism as it possibly could, on many other social institutions and on everything from sport, sexuality, television and advertisement. Marx’s point is that it is not an accident. The most compelling confirmation of Marx’s theory of history is late capitalist society. It is capitalism, not Marxism, which is economically reductionist and believes in production for production’s sake. Marx by contrast argued that human self-realisation is to be valued as an end in itself, rather than reduced to the instrument of some other goal. If the later would prevail our creative energy would be invested in producing the means of living rather than savouring life itself. Besides that the economic plays a very important role, this is far a belief confined to Marxists. From Cicero to Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, even nineteenth century committed antisocialist economists and historians like John Eliot Cairnes, and W.E.H Lecky, and even Freud all clung to a form of economic determination. In England at least with its complex cultural superstructure, economic issues were less painfully felt by lyrical writers and historians. Ironically today, many of those who reject Marxist theory of history behave for the entire world as though it

³⁵ Marx, K. (1976), *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy*, Prometheus Books

were true. These people are known as bankers, financial advisors, Treasury officials, corporate executives and what have you else. Everything they do testifies to the priority of the economic.

The claim that everything for Marx is determined by *economics* is an absurd oversimplification. The economic, presupposes a lot more than itself, it concerns the way we become human beings. What shapes the course of history in Marx's view is class struggle and it is important that we speak of social classes not of economic ones. Classes are social formations, communities' as much as economic entities; they involve customs, traditions, social institutions, set of values, ideas and are also political phenomena. Classes Marx seems to suggest only become truly a class when they become self-conscious as such. They involve legal, social, cultural and political processes and most significantly are not uniform, but reveal a great deal of internal division. Classes in short, are not just economic and in fact hardly is there anything that is just economic. What most of us perceive as *the economy* is a kind of phantom, because, certainly nobody has ever clapped eyes on it. It is an abstraction from a complex social process. It is orthodox economic thought that has a tendency in narrowing the notion of the economic. One reason why Marx's theory of history becomes truer as time passes is the fact that material goods are never just material goods. They are the portal to so much that that is precious in human life. That is why humanity has struggled to the death, over land, property, money, capital.³⁶ Class was always an international phenomenon. Marx liked to think that it was the working class that acknowledged no homeland, but in reality it is capitalism. Nobody values the economic simply as the economic other than those who make a career out of it. It is because this realm of human existence folds so many other dimensions into itself that it plays a key role in human history. What these broad concepts of the "mode of production" and the "social formation" did entail was that analysis of any area of human activity had to be seen in this socio-economic context, and not in abstraction from it. There is therefore no state, no belief, no conflict, no power in general, or independent of this context. By extension, there is no "international system", or any component activity, be this war or diplomacy, abstracted from the mode of production.

The term "historical materialism" itself is in one respect too condensed, because it contains two distinct claims, the historicisation of the state and the location of that history within an international context. In contrast to mainstream international relations, in which state power is narrowly conceived as the accumulated material capabilities of the "state", historical materialism seeks to examine the social origins

³⁶ This, of course, does not imply an economic deterministic model of historical development, such as the one suggested by G.A. Cohen, but rather a complex relationship between production, culture and social systems. G. A. Cohen. (1978), *Karl Marx's Theory of History: a Defence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

of that power.³⁷ Thus, by emphasizing the capitalist nature of society, an historical materialist perspective of world politics would, as Rupert prescribes, take “as its point of departure the proposition that international politics as we know it is historically embedded in, and internally related to, capitalist social relations”, relations between social classes.³⁸ Marx’s method presents an alternative method of thinking about social reality, one that examines relations rather than causes,³⁹ and the concretisation of concepts rather than fetishist abstraction. In Marx’s argument, it is commodities which are fetishised; men are imbuing commodities with a characteristic they do not possess. Marx argues that men in capitalist society mistakenly attribute value as a property of the commodity itself, not as a product of socially necessary labour time.⁴⁰ Rather than relate to each other directly, men’s social relationships are mediated through “social relations between things”.⁴¹ What are concealed are the real social relations between men that take place in every act of exchange. As Geras has helpfully noted, it is not self-evident to men that the values of objects are social and not natural; this is a result of the way that capitalist social relations really present themselves.⁴² Thus it is most accurate to study commodity fetishism as a societal condition in which men systematically treat objects as having value “in themselves” rather than being aware of the socially necessary labour time embodied in the commodity. Ontologically for historical materialism it is impossible to conduct social research without an examination of social relations. For positivists, entities are related to each other, but only externally, in a causal sequence. For dialectical thinkers such as Marx, in contrast, relations are internal.⁴³ A concept will often vary depending on its historical context and relations. A concept in one particular historical period may have dramatically different significance in the modern period. For example, though markets have existed throughout history, the unique technological developments that have linked together time and space now means markets are global and move at an unprecedented pace. Positivism erases these distinctions for the exclusive purposes of constructing transhistorical generalizations.⁴⁴ The unique cultural, economic and

³⁷ For a classic formulation see Cox, he correctly stresses the need to “consider the state-society complex as the basic entity of international relations.” (1986: 205, emphasis added)

³⁸ Rupert, M. (1993):84

³⁹ Many concepts that are commonly associated with Marx’s method, like that of G.A. Cohen, have been influenced by positivism and have an explicit goal to find a causal relationship between the economic base of a society and the legal/intellectual superstructure. As above Cohen, 1978, p218

⁴⁰ Hence, when men see commodities: “It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things...I call this the fetishism... inseparable from the production of commodities.” Marx, K. (1976), *Capital*, London: Penguin, p165.

⁴¹ As above Marx, (1976), p.166

⁴² Geras, N. (1971), “Essence and Appearance: Aspects of Fetishism in Marx’s ‘Capital’”, *New Left Review*, Vol. 65 (Jan-Feb), pp. 69-85, p.79.

⁴³ According to Ollman, Marx’s method: treats relations in which anything stands as essential parts of what it is, so that a significant change in any of these relations registers as a qualitative change in the system of which it is a part. Ollman, B. (2003), *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx’s Method*, Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, p.5

⁴⁴ Bottomore, T. (1975), *Marxist Sociology*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, p10.

geopolitical context of the present contradictions must be considered when making historical comparisons. This does not eliminate historical comparison, but requires a greater understanding of the unique characteristics of a process as it occurs during a particular time period. Here we feel that an historical materialist approach can play an important role in properly contextualising many concepts that are often reified when associated with capitalism, such as power, control, influence, the state and the international system.

Our social world is in rapid transformation and the traditions of the social sciences are struggling to keep pace with the change. International relations, a late arrival, found itself locked into a particularly narrow definition of its object, as the study of the relations of states in international systems.⁴⁵ Globality is poorly understood in international relations. Most *globalisation* literature fails to define global and globalisation is grasped as a time-spatial development in which social relations are simultaneously stretched and intensified. There is a tendency to reduce globality to technical changes especially so in the field of and nature of communications. Its social and political contents are neglected or seen as the consequences of the core globalising processes and not as fundamental to the meaning of globality itself.⁴⁶ Politics is thought and fought out and policies are forged and implemented, all within a global space. The space itself decides nothing, only actors and their actions can do that, but it is this dimension, of world-wide connectivity that charges these actors with their strengths and weaknesses. This global space comprises three major planes. First is socio-economic, which arranges the preconditions for the social and economic orientation of politics. Second is the cultural, with its prevailing patterns of beliefs and identities and the principal means of communication. Lastly is the geopolitical plane, which provides the power parameters for confrontation between and against states. Whether its analysis tends towards celebration and acceptance or towards critique and rejection social theorisation depends on the social world it theorises. There is an unhelpful kind of technical determinism in international debates. According to many accounts changes in technology, the economy and culture are undermining the state.⁴⁷ This tendency is further endorsed by the inevitable economism of the Neo-Gramscian school of IPE and IR. For Robert Cox, there is an “internationalisation of the state” but

⁴⁵ Shaw gives an extremely important account in this direction, seeing the concept of international system as being unavoidable and indeed argued that a problem of Marxist theory has been its failure to develop such a concept. In Shaw, M. (1984), “War, Imperialism and the State System: A Critique of Orthodox Marxism for the 1980s”, pp47-70, in Shaw (eds). (1984), *War, State and Society*, London: Macmillan

⁴⁶ These arguments are developed further in Shaw, Martin. (1999), “Globality as a Revolutionary Transformation” in *Politics and Globalisation*, London: Routledge, pp. 159-73

⁴⁷ A long line of IR theorists criticising the traditional realist school of the discipline has developed parallel arguments. For example Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, (1977), talk about the decrease of the military salience as the world passed into a new phase of “complex interdependence”; Rosenau and Czempiel, (1992), called it a world of “governance without government”; another pluralist account of this type is that of Richard Falk, (1997), for whom we are moving into “a post statist world order”, p125.

only in the sense that nation states are adapting to international capital.⁴⁸ Our concern with this type of analysis and the common failing of the whole international relations critique of realism is that it bypasses the serious examination of the state and state system: thus as I have argued elsewhere, if we are not to remove states and states systems from the centre of our gaze, we must indeed reassert their continuity into the present. The common assumption that globalisation is economically driven has led to a misleading historical debate. It is more apposite to content that, while there has been a long growth of market relations on a world scale the really significant ruptures in social development that have determined much of the pace of market expansion have been the result of political and military upheavals. Based on this argument then, what has happened since 1989 is not a spontaneous surge towards the market resulting from the growth of IT, but a political upheaval erupting from a major crisis in state power. My proposal is therefore that we take the social relations and forms of state power, an argument that we develop in the next section below, as the starting point for understanding global change. In doing so, we need to make a break with the dominant ways of thinking in IR.

This is a time to begin thinking from a critical historicist perspective of a world beyond capitalism and its global joint ventures of abundant wealth and misery. Critical historical materialism is a perspective of social transformation going beyond the strategies and historical institutions of twentieth century socialist orthodoxies. It is not post-Marxist because it does not imply an acceptance of capitalism as the only possible game and because it implies a rejection neither of the goals of historical Marxism nor of the attempts to build it. On the contrary it retains the fundamental Marxian idea that human emancipation from exploitation, oppression, discrimination and the inevitable linkage between privilege and misery can come only from struggle by the exploited and the disadvantaged themselves. It recognises that the twenty-first century is beginning to look not more equal and just, but with new constellations of power and new possibilities of resistance. The exploited and the dispossessed are not to abandon their interest, which is just what their masters want them to do, but to press them all the way through. Only then might a society beyond self-interest finally emerge. Only by accepting that the contradictions of the present are of the nature of class-society, not by denying them, can we unlock the human wealth we hold back. The true image of the future is the failure of the present, not as a matter of idle speculation, but as a feasible extrapolation from the present.

What might be the basis of such a critical historicist political perspective? There are three dimensions that are worth keeping in mind. First, there is the social dialectic of

⁴⁸ Cox, R W. (1987), *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp.253-65. For an elegant critique of this school see Malo, E. "Antonio Gramsci's role in Marxian thought and the contribution made to international relations by those using his ideas", *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, (Issue 7/2013), p96.

capitalism, which continues to exist. How the appropriateness or inappropriateness of capitalist relations of production and the forces of production will turn out at the end of this century is very hard to tell. But the dialectic of class conflict still operates, although not necessarily with system transcendent implications. The spread and growth of capitalism continues to strengthen the working class. Workers' strikes and other protests are increasing today in Europe and they are likely to do so in China, Vietnam and other regions tomorrow. The very success of capitalism still generates protests against manifestations. Second, of increasing importance is a dimension of moral discourse, concerned not only with the fair wage for a fair working day, but also with human dignity. For all its hypocritical abuse by Anglo-American IR, the global spread of human rights discourse beginning in the mid-1970s opens up an area of broad concern a debate. Two aspects of this moral discourse currently stand out as urgent. One is the social anchoring of human rights in a conception of social rights. This necessitates the freeing of human rights from its over-politicised Anglo-American construction. A consistent human rights discourse means more than anything that all human beings have a right to grow, to develop, to choose how to lead their lives. This version of human rights has a admired derivation in labour movements and Marxism: solidarity with all struggles against the denial of human social rights. The second aspect of a moral discourse is antiviolence, which may be seen as derivative of human rights. Violence is a denial of human rights. The Bush regime applauded by Blairism has shown how thin the veneer of bourgeois civility is, how easily it turns into terror-bombing, abductions, torture and killing. Alongside the ruthless, albeit small scale terrorism of Al-Qaeda and other footloose militants, these manifestations indicate that violence has become the signature of the post-Cold War era of the early twenty-first century. As recent developments show, there is no moral evolution, on the contrary there is a large scale liberal regression going on, and there has never been a moral dialectic. But it could be argued that there is now a wider field of moral debate, one that may hold a greater potential for transcending class and national boundaries. Finally and thirdly, on top of a abridged social dialectic and an enlarged but highly contested arena of moral discourse the twenty-first century Marxism has to tap into a third root: a commitment to universal pleasure. The meaning of Marxian Communism was a human enjoyment, phrased in terms of a nineteenth century rural ideal. The austerity of the revolutionary struggle substituted a revolutionary heroism for Marxian hedonism, and the latter did not appeal to the workers of social democracies. But after May 1968 the playful orientation of the Marxian original must reaffirm its importance. On the one hand it is a question of the rights to pleasure, universal rather than segregated, on the other; it is a condition of adequate institutions making opportunities accessible. Left-wing commitment to labour, to socially meaningful human rights, to antiviolence, should also envisage a universal society of enjoyment and the possibility of another world.

Part II. Critical historical materialism: imagining international relations as praxis

Radical Social Theory at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century

The 1970s were the heydays of Marxian critique of capitalism in research on international relations. However, this perspective came to an impasse already in the mid-1980s because of a generalized theoretical disorientation and a perceived lack of openness to diversity. Moreover, critical Marxist research was confronted with trends toward intellectual positioning emanating from postmodernism, postcolonial studies and neoliberalism. It meant among other things a deliberate turning away from economics and politics toward cultural, aesthetic and environmental critiques. Recently, and connected to this, social sciences are being challenged by a new wave of exclusive statist perspectives with the consequence that theorizing is increasingly confronted with compartmentalized concepts, fragmented ideas, empiricist, issue-focused and sometimes action-oriented research agendas. Nevertheless new trends challenge this truism. Regardless of this tendency, the evolution of the world is reemploying the necessity of bringing back what had been prematurely dismissed. As such social forces had not died together with the fading away of class as a category of social science and the breakdown of Soviet style Marxism. On the contrary, globalisation and uneven development have put renewed focus on social actors, such as how classes construct and generate state entities as well as underlining the importance of a non-reductionist understanding of changing social formations, configurations, and constellations. In this second fin-de-siècle⁴⁹, the Marxian thought has made a comeback. In this sense Marx's teachings are much closer to the radical mood post-2008 financial crisis than that of mid nineteenth century: theory, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realise it was missed. Marx's often quoted judgement that philosophers had merely interpreted the world, becomes defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world by Marxist intellectual currents and movements during at least one hundred years had miscarried. To people of the twenty-first century the critical critique of the early 1840s Marx might appear closer than the latter Marxian critique of political economy.

Before turning to a discussion of the specific contributions of the Marxist thought to a collective research programme, it is worth reflecting on how research programmes are to be understood and how they are to progress.⁵⁰ First, research programmes should be understood as broader than a single theory; rather, they regularly involve a theoretical tradition. As such, intellectual work within a given research programme focuses on a broad range of problems that are thrown up by the programme itself.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Blackburn, Robin, "Fin-de-Siècle: Socialism after the Crash", *New Left Review*, No.185, (Jan/Feb 1991), p29.

⁵⁰ This is an extensive literature on this subject within the philosophy of science as generated by figures such as Thomas Kuhn, Karl Popper, and Imre Lakatos. For an accessible introduction, see A. F. Chalmers, *What is This Thing Called Science?* Second Edition (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1982. For the original exchanges, see I Lakatos and A. Musgrave, (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974)

Sociologically-speaking, research programmes by definition are never individual in nature but always involve a community of scholars who share its broad suppositions. What binds these scholars together as a community, moreover, is not that they share the same conclusions, they may well have serious differences of opinion in this regard. Rather, what binds them is a shared set of questions and a shared set of successfully-solved theoretical points, which stand as ideal to guide the community as a whole, as it works through those problems, which are not yet solved.⁵¹ It is only to the degree that theoretical issues continue to be solved that a research programme remains emancipatory. To that end, the greater the number of ideal examples available to inspire and guide, and the greater the extent of creative questioning which can suggest new ways of thinking about unresolved issues, the greater the chance a research programme will remain vibrant. From this perspective, the point in reviewing historical materialist thought is not so much to find definitive answers to the questions that now elude us, but rather to appreciate the novel kinds of questions Marxism raised and the ideal examples for successful problem-solving behaviour it offers. To that end, we will consider Marxist thought in relation to the weaknesses in the critical theory research programme to see how historical materialist thought may point us in a direction that will involve a *progressive* and not a gradual deterioration in problem-shift.⁵² Furthermore, any critical perspective on Marxism is not self-contained universe of its own theories and practices. Marxism has been part of an intellectual and socio-political history, with alternatives, rivals and opponents. Within such a history the proper location of Marxism in the specific sense can be ascertained.

A major reason for studying the present is to understand the power it exercises, and critiques of it are largely, if not absolutely dependent on the hope of a possible different world. Such hope in turn depends on the visibility, however faint, on an alternative power or force with the potential to carry the critique forward into active change. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, not only capitalism but also empire and imperialism have staged a triumphant return, and with them the world views of the Belle Époque. What happened to Marxism at the end of the twentieth century was that the alternative forces melted away. While the inequalities of capitalism were increasing in the most countries, while the global gap between rich and poor was widening, and while the brutality of the rulers of the main capitalism states was reaffirmed again and again, the dialectic of capitalism was imploding. Capital's new push was not accompanied by any strengthening of the working class and anti-capitalist movements or by the opening of a systemic exit into another mode of production. On the contrary, labour was weakened and embryonic systemic alternatives fell apart or were completely marginalised. The global confluence of Marxist political defeats and social meltdowns during this period

⁵¹ Ideal examples, worthy of being imitated are particularly important for engaging future generations of thinkers and academics so they may replace senior ones and, thereby, keep the research programme alive beyond a single generation.

⁵² See Lakatos, I "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, pp. 91-196

became, by any measure overwhelming. But the social world constantly changes and requires that concepts must be constantly re-evaluated due to their evolving relations. The global space of the twentieth-first, century is radically different from that of the preceding century and this holds profound implications for the historical materialist social dialectic. The new market dynamics for example reverse the tendency towards an increasingly social character of the productive forces, coming into ever sharper conflict with the private capitalist relations of production and pointing to a socialist solution. Market dynamics and the new means of private capital accumulation have made the once marginal, ultraliberal calls for unlimited private capitalism into reality of massive privatisation globally; testifying to capitalism's reinforced vigour. On the other hand the Marxist view of social transformation was not predicated on compassion for the pitiful masses of the world but on the capacity of the exploited and the oppressed to emancipate themselves through class struggle.⁵³ Marx was indeed a proponent of emancipatory reason, of a rationalist scrutiny of the world, with a commitment to human freedom from exploitation and oppression. His historical materialist approach to social analysis, his understanding of the present as history, with particular attention paid to the living and working conditions of ordinary people and to the economic and political materiality of power, was above all and must be read as an approach not to be followed as if laid out in a manual, but rather as broad insights vested with a motivation to pursue it further.

To contest the relations of exploitation and domination, and the relations of capitalism, as for the power of the state, is an active "doing", and in no way passive, not seeking merely retreat to pursue an alternative strategy for survival, which in any case cannot be. "Material force must meet material force"⁵⁴, as Marx was more than aware what it meant. We exist, and if we live, it is *in spite* of this world which we are in but also *against*; this is what is meant by a *negative ontology*, the standpoint of critique and resistant subjectivity. Negativity toward the given, the existent and "that which is". This active "doing" is what Marx identified as "species-being" or creative human essence, and to decide to do *other* than what is demanded by money and power is itself the re-appropriation of doing; but this active "doing" is also present in the theoretical and practical negation of this world, and "things-as-they-are". Critiques, thought, critical theory, are themselves a *mode-of-doing*, a different mode-of-doing from instrumental reason, which finds expression in the means-to-an-end functionality of capitalism and its imperatives. To contest the social relations of capitalism is to refuse them. This would be one example of a different mode-of-doing, and, indeed, the existential move toward a different *mode-of-being*. Such a re-making of the terms of existence appears in many different forms, and may manifest as none-too-revolutionary acts

⁵³ Karl Marx. "The Manifesto of the Communist Party", *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (ed), Robert Tucker. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1978): 469.

⁵⁴ Marx, K. (2009), [1843]. *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*. Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

of small-scale resistance or a simple “different doing”, in itself something which capitalism can potentially accommodate. However, just as capital really is an enigma, it is composed of abstract social relations, which cease once they are refused and no longer reproduced.

What is social theorising? The definition deployed here sees social theory as strung between two ambitious poles: on the one hand, providing a comprehensive explanatory framework for a set of social phenomena; on the other, making sense of such phenomena. This is an ecumenical conception of theory that applies both to explanation and the constitution of meaning. In first pole, the later salience of philosophy in the classical Marxist triangle of social science, philosophy and politics and the former’s far greater resilience to empirical developments, mean that the contributions of political and social philosophy are of particular importance to an overview of recent international theory emanating from the Marxist tradition. In terms of the second pole, it should perhaps be reiterated from our introduction above that theory is not a separate field or a sub-discipline, but the guiding compass of empirical investigation.⁵⁵ The social world differs from the laboratory settings of the natural sciences, yet according to positivist scientists, the same methodological framework must be used. For example, one of the key requirements of building generalizations in the natural sciences is replication of phenomena to test the causality of a variable for falsification. This is a near impossibility when dealing with social phenomena: even similar events such as the first and second world wars have considerable variations such as the leaders, the role of nationalism, and the technological level of military development. Yet regardless of these problems, the main method for social science seeks to replicate that of the natural sciences leading to simplifying historical events.⁵⁶ Here we have a major problem in mainstream social science: the method takes paramount importance. History is de-contextualised and fragmented for the purposes of research. So while the researcher may have a deep understanding of history and culture, the research that is produced presents the opposite: a series of events abstracted from their context.⁵⁷ The methodological *rigidity* of positive social science views abstraction and generalization as the main purpose of conducting social research. This use of history as a catch-all for the purposes of case studies has

⁵⁵ Bourdieu’s levelled criticism against Anglo-Saxon conception of social theory must be taken as an example that theory is not a form of research-free armchair thinking. See Bourdieu, P. (1992), *Responses*, Paris: Seuil, 86, 136ff.

⁵⁶ As King, Keohane and Verba in their well-regarded book on method argue, “...where possible, analysts should simplify their descriptions only after they attain an understanding of the richness of history and culture. Social scientists may use only a few parts of the history of some set of events in making inferences”, in King, G. & Keohane, R. & Verba, S. (1994), *Designing Social Inquiry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.43.

⁵⁷ This is why dialectical approaches are so confronting to positivist accounts because they reveal positivism’s inherent distortions — ahistorical analysis and structural determinism — that are posed as objective accounts of “reality”. Such positivist approaches to the study of the social world as exemplified in Waltzian neo-realism were criticized by Marx as the “abstract materialism of natural science”, a form of materialism that “excludes history and its processes”. Marx K. (1971), *Capital*, Vol. I, (trans). Moore S and Aveling E, ed. Engels F. Moscow: Progress Publishers, p.352

significant implications for the literature on re-conceptualisation of the fit between societies, states and geopolitics.

The decided preference for abstract, systemic models that could generate timeless laws pertaining to interstate interactions made IR theory intentionally insensitive to historical matters. If history mattered at all it was as a field of data to be used in the pursuit for evidence of the cycles of history that realists used to mark historical time. Contrary to realist grand theory building the vocation of the historical materialist theoretician is the struggle, to which his thinking belongs, and his theory is one single intricate existential result. He does not stand outside or above classes: between him and the ruled class exists a dynamic unity, which does so only as conflict. Through this interaction the process of social change may be accelerated. The task of critical historical materialism is to contribute to the transformation of the social whole, which will occur only through ever sharper social conflicts. Hence, the theory, offers neither short term amelioration nor gradual material improvement. In this respect historical materialism, by contrast to other schools of IR, represents in one sense a decisive break with the present. History has to be broken and remade not because Marxists arbitrarily prefer revolution to reform, but because of the depth of the sickness that has to be cured.⁵⁸ What is realistically needed to cure society is beyond the powers of the prevailing system, and in that sense impossible. But it is realistic to believe that the world could in principle be greatly improved. Those who scoff at the idea that a fundamental social change is possible are the exaggerated fantasists. The true dreamers are those who deny anything more than piecemeal reform can ever come about. There are those too, self-deceived characters who believe that given time, capitalism will deliver a world of abundance for all; but capitalism does not operate, to assure the amount of general welfare to which the present stage of our technical skills and intelligence entitle us. Inequality is as natural to capitalism as megalomania is to Hollywood. Capitalism still produces and will continue to produce a sense of outrage and to that extent a line of continuity from the nineteenth through to twentieth and twenty-first centuries will remain, in resistance as well as in critique.

The core of historical materialism is the Marxian concept of exchange, out of which developed the concrete world capitalist society in Europe.⁵⁹ Historical materialism is in many places reduced to economism, but that does not mean that the economic is regarded as too important, rather that it is barely tampered with. The process of social formation, if it is taking place needs to be studied and analysed not only in narrow economic terms, but also with regard to the functioning of the state, to the development of vital flashes of actual democracy. Relevant philosophical objects should be developed from the economic context and not vice-versa, while critique

⁵⁸ Sayer, D. *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytic Foundations of Historical Materialism*, Oxford: Blackwell

⁵⁹ See for more in Meister, R. (1990), *Political Identity: Thinking through Marx*, Oxford: Blackwell

should extend to the totality of society. This was also the problem identified in Horkheimer's initial programme for Critical Theory. For Horkheimer, the proletariat had already developed a sense of injustice of capitalist relations and it was rationally assumed that this sense of injustice merely had to be systematically articulated by a critical and reflexive social theory.⁶⁰ Yet the recognition of the inherent tensions and crisis-prone nature of the capitalist economic system does not, of itself, create the social forces necessary to change it. In social life, consciousness of contradiction is indeed a crucial step in the dialectical process of change, but without human agency it remains just that, the mere cognition of contradiction, not its negation. As argued by Rosenthal, "nobody can ever be 'forced' to solve a problem", indeed, "civilizations have been wrecked by problems that they have not faced".⁶¹ We can see even through the most superficial survey of contemporary human existence that we are capable of living with and even partially reconciling ourselves to an incredible array of irrational and antagonistic ways of life. Environmental collapse is a primary example of today's acceptance of irrational ways of life, the exploitation and marginalization of our fellow human beings is another. Only when we can conceive of society as being different from what it is, does the present society become a problem for us. The conventional controversy of Marxism as a science or as a critique misses a decisive point. The scientific claims and the self confidence of Marxists from Engels and Kautsky via the Austro-Marxists to Althusser and his disciples, rested upon the assumption that the critique was already inherent in reality, in the actually existing labour movement. It was only when the latter could be written off that the crucial moment of the antisocialist critique emerged. As Gramsci pointed out the revolution materialised out of the ideologies rather than facts.⁶² The future relevance of the Marxian dialectic has to be thought anew. Global interdependence and global chasms of misery and affluence are growing simultaneously. Since neither capitalism nor its polarisation of life chances appear very likely to disappear in the foreseeable future, there is a good chance that the spectre of Marx will continue to haunt social thought.⁶³

The most obvious way forward inspired by Marx will be to look at what is currently happening to the forces and relations of production on a global scale and their contradictory effects on social relations.⁶⁴ Marx celebrated his dialectical openness, his sensitivity to and comprehension of, contradiction, antinomies and conflict in

⁶⁰ Cited in Honneth, A. (2008), "The social dynamics of disrespect: On the location of critical theory today". In: *Disrespect* (trans. Ganahl J). Cambridge: Polity Press, pp68-69.

⁶¹ Rosenthal, AL. (1971), "A Hegelian key to Hegel's method", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 9, (2): 205-212, p.210.

⁶² Gramsci, A. "La rivoluzione contro il Capitale", (1917), in G. Gerratà and N. Gallo, eds, *2000 Pagine di Gramsci*, Vol.1, Milan: Il Saggiatore, (1964), 265

⁶³ Derrida, J. (1993), *Spectres of Marx*, Paris: Galilée

⁶⁴ "Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production". Karl Marx, *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1969).

social life. Indeed International Relations are the study of the relations not between states but between social formations. When this insight is applied to the issues of international relations, a definite shift of focus becomes visible. Thus the state is no longer seen as an embodiment of national interest or judicial neutrality, but rather of the interests of a specific society or social formation, defined by its socio-economic structure.⁶⁵ This socio-economic system has underpinned both the character of individual states and of their relations with each other: no analysis of international relations is possible without reference to capitalism, the social formations it generated and the world system they comprise. Although Marx's statement, that all the history of International Relations has been one of class struggle, is overstated, it has certainly been a major decisive component. Looking at the origins of the European empires, the two world wars, the gold crisis of the early twentieth century, the trade wars and interest rates conflicts between the US and EC, and US-Japanese economic disputes in the latter part of the twenty century, all show in some sense aspects of conflict between capitalist ruling classes, between old established capitalist powers and their new rivals. Many of the disputes that have marked twentieth century history became inter-imperialist and inter-capitalist disputes, beyond their specific national, geographic and historical characteristics. Since the State is not an independent entity, but is rather located in a particular socio-economic and class context, the debate on whether the state is losing power to non-state actors reconfigures the whole nature of the debate. For the question becomes not whether the state has since the 1970, lost preeminence to non-state actors but how far the "non-state" actors who have always affected the power and character of the state act through the state. The question of how far the borderline between domestic and international politics has neutralized also needs a rethinking. As noted above, classes have always operated internationally, from the bankers and trading companies of the sixteenth century onwards, have in turn been affected domestically by changes in the international economic and political situation. Primarily then the conceptualisation of class therefore, shows that the state itself is, to a considerable extent, a function of wider social forces, and the impermeability of domestic politics is an appearance which conceals a permanent, underlying, internationalisation of political and economic factors. To try to understand IRs' in exclusively geopolitical terms is a step back and against what has been gained in the recent international theorising and much of what Marxism is placed to offer. This is that precisely those international relations between different centres of state power are completely implicated in important relations of state and society.⁶⁶ The global nature of world politics is determined not only by the impact of technology, economics and culture but also by the way in which common global issues manifested on the

⁶⁵ See further in Bloom for some powerful insights and vision from the past, which indeed still make sense in current times. Bloom, S. *The World of Nations: a study of the national implications in the work of Karl Marx*, New York 1941, especially chapter 15: "A Varied World".

⁶⁶ For a well placed exposition of this argument see Halliday, Fred. (1999), *Revolution in World Politics*, London: Macmillan

same problematic of state power have become the substance of both international and societal politics.⁶⁷

The advance of emancipatory theories within IR rests upon a set of claims about the possibility of change in the real world, an early example as such are dependency school theory, world society theory, etc. This concern with the normative argument goes back to Karl Marx and can be traced later among a certain breed of theoreticians, i.e. Carr's critique in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* rested upon the insistence on the real world, presuppositions of any project for improving inter-state relations.⁶⁸ The origins of these alternative projects, of *critical theory*, began as a form of Marxist reflection upon the emancipatory subjects in twentieth century Europe and have at various stages encompassed radical students, the global *south* revolutionaries, various social movements, and an international civil society, said differently, agency. Rather too often, as it is well known, in classical and contemporary critical thinking the argument on agency is hazy at least: a mystical invocation of the working class, or the fight against colonialism, is replaced by a regard of personifying social movements, or by gestural invocations of selected distant examples. The themes they raise are interesting and important questions. However, given that they do not share historical materialist epistemological and ontological assumptions, democratic socialist social and political commitments, they are of limited use in advancing the goal being pursued here. The challenge of realism remains in large measure unanswered.⁶⁹ Any project for changing or reforming the world has to address this issue and pay at each stage close attention to the distinction between *ought* and *is*. Transnational social movements did not in the last century gone, stop wars, they do not presently, prevent states and combative social movements, from prevailing, they may have altered agendas though, this is not the same thing as saying they have altered state policy. The oldest error in politics as Machiavelli reminds us is to mistake wishful thinking with reality.⁷⁰ In a world where myths about cultural and religious conflict abound and where conspiracy theory has become a prevalent form of popular imagination in all continents, the correction of history and even of facts play their role. Historical materialism is, foremost, a part of the attempt by human beings to take mastery of their own surroundings, their past and their present, the better to emancipate themselves from it and determine, within the constraints of structure indeed, their future. Here historical materialism, by criticising existing norms and by advancing Runciman's "improbably plausible" forms of future organisation, can contribute massively to international relations debate.

⁶⁷ Gills, B.K. "Historical Materialism and International Relations Theory", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Summer 1987.

⁶⁸ Of all these subjects of change, the question of plausibility that Runciman put forth, must be asked, is it *improbably plausible* or *probably impossible* for change to take place? Runciman, W. Gary (1998), *The Social Animal*, London: HarperCollins

⁶⁹ For a consistent reading on this point consult further Rosenberg, J. (1994), *The Empire of Civil Society*, London: Verso

⁷⁰ See further in Malo, E. "Social praxis, party and class relations today", *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, (Issue 9/2014), pp172-198

An analysis of the contemporary world cannot ignore trends which run against a democratic regulation of state and global governance: the rise of uncontrolled corporate power, oligarchic control of the media, declining levels of education and interest in international issues, a crisis of an ethic of global responsibility matching that within societies, the increasing rapidity and complexity of the technologies and processes of global interaction, etc. The central import of critical thought in its many variants, as of Marx, is critical: the insistence on the human, social, origins of modern society and its supposedly given, i.e., alienated, manifestations.

For Marx, history is an open-ended process, and rationality is itself historical, a product of the changes in and of society.⁷¹ The dialectic is no longer a universal principle of movement of all that exists, but contained within the historical process. Contradiction for Marx was not to be found in the thought process itself. It resides in the tensions between humanity as a part of nature and as a historical force; between the ruling classes and ideas, and those arising from other sources in society; in the various aspects of exploitation, in social relations and domination. What then, is the critical question, can be used from the historical Marx? The concept of dialectic for one, which the term for us means a relation to two levels, "logic" and "real history" and that at first, requires that we think in terms of contradiction as a route to explanation.⁷² In a sense this means that concepts must be assessed against a reality and must be therefore adjusted to fit that changing reality. At the historical level dialectic directs us at feasible alternatives and that the dialectical view of conflict in any concretized historical situation may itself contribute to change. Secondly the historical materialist approach combines a vertical facet of relations, of core-periphery, the hierarchy of relations of dominant and subordinating classes. Thirdly historical materialism bridges up the relations between state and civil society, which means that the state cannot be regarded as separate from civil society. Lastly historical materialism points to the production process as a critical factor when explaining particular historical form taken by this complex of structure/agency.

The Relationship between State and Society Revisited: Contemporary Analysis

The problem of *agency* has been central to historicist thought and historiography. The debate in international relations has swung from theories that stress agency to those

⁷¹ Kandal, T. "Marx & Engels on International Relations etc.", in *Studies of Development and Change in the Modern World*, Open University Press 1989.

⁷² Bottomore et al (ed) *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Oxford 1983 – especially the entries on "Historical Materialism" and "Dialectics".

that circumscribe or deny it.⁷³ Agency nevertheless, is not going to disappear, either as an analytic question in terms of how far can conscious human subjects determine their own history, or as a normative one, since any critique of society or IR must be connected to a view of how and by whom, *change* can come about.⁷⁴ Traditionally, IR has dismissed the question of agency. One reason for this has been the division of politics and theory. Even the most brilliant and reflective political writings are largely empirical. The theoretical and scholarly works even of politically active people are very academic. International relations should be an output of critical theory rather than about critical theory. Structure is a disciplinary idea. This is true of mainstream IR's realist school, which both denies the capacity for agency and stresses the risks of any intervention to improve the system, as it is for more contemporary structural writing, be this within Marxism (dependency school), or international political economy.⁷⁵ There are two approaches to take in hand the question of agency in IR. The first is historical, which asks who made the international system and who furthermore continues on reproducing, it? We can ask this question either from the inception of the international system of the year 1500, or look at certain stages within international history, i.e. the demise of empires, the creation of EU, Cold War, globalisation, or the end of communism. The second approach is to list the candidates for agency like, states, international organisation, NGO's, social movements, or individuals. Clarification of this issue of agency, would not only serve the explanatory and normative functions, but would make a contribution to the broader debate within social science on structure and agency interaction. It might too, in so doing, deprive the determinists of their favourite source of authority.

The standard counterpoint to agency is structure, a set of determinations, which limits or denies the choices of individuals and states alike. IR is centred on the recognition of structure against the untutored common sense of agency: yet, this emphasis on structure conceals a deeper problem not just that of the role of agency, but also what we call the differentiation between static and dynamic concepts of structure. Static are those conceptions which stress the enduring, unchangeable limits that the structure imposes and which see all history being reduced to a grand continuity without content and change. However structure may operate rather differently, it can produce change with or even without the want of the actor, be this structural change from the changes of climate, time and ageing. Here structure inclines towards

⁷³ Neo-realism for example as Anderson points out proclaims to be thoroughly materialist and yet is completely ahistorical; it denies any potential for humankind's self-creation, being as we are determined automatons structured by the systemic features of international anarchy. For Linkater, here, neo-realism is seen clearly to privilege structure over agency. Anderson K (2007) *Dialectics today*. Lecture published by the Marxist-Humanist Committee. Available at: <http://marxisthumanismtoday.org/print/node/25>; Linkater, A. (1996), "The achievements of critical theory". In: Smith S, Booth K and Zalewski M (eds) *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.284.

⁷⁴ Cox, R. (1999), "Civil Society at the turn of the millennium: prospects for an alternative world order", *Review of International Studies*, Volume 25

⁷⁵ Strange, Susan, (1996), *The Retreat of the State*, UK: Cambridge University Press

change. In social affairs similar processes can be noted including economic booms and crashes, wars and revolutions, human agency can do little to seize or to predict them. The challenge of analysing agency in IR is therefore a double one, identifying historically and theoretically those areas where agency operates, while recognising where structure, far from constraining, may be precipitant of change and conflict.⁷⁶

In the aftermath of the 1989 it has become commonplace to stress the fruitless, utopian character of communism.⁷⁷ As far as its goal, of creating a fundamentally distinct and competitive political order is concerned, this is true, a failure as big as its original promises. Although, this retrospective dismissal, this sigh of relief at the disappearance of the greatest challenge capitalist modernity has faced misses the point that it was capitalism, in its contradictory and international form, which generated communism in the first place. The revolutions of the twentieth century history, the wars, the mobilisation of millions of people and the spread of radical democratic ideas reflected a rejection of a system that had for many, failed. The failure of the international in its diffusion, causes, and manifestations produced a world-wide revolt that shaped the last century. The history and analysis of this movement illustrate the question of agency. In the midst of these structural upheavals, individuals and groups of politically motivated leaders played a decisive role, in revolutionary uprisings and war. Lenin's two famous preconditions for the success of movements, the failure of existing states and the revolt of those who are ruled, both involve and often require the intervention of consciously purposive individuals. There has been much misinterpretation of the role of movements in historical change: by those that see them as manipulated by leaders and on the other hand by those that exaggerate their autonomy from structural factors or those that overstate their influence and cohesion. Yet movements express more than the wishes and goals of their leaders, even as they operate within realities of state and economic power that they ignore.⁷⁸ The example of the communist movement within modern history is an arresting case in point of this. Historical materialism needs an account of the structural factors that generated and sustained it, and needs to locate it in its transnational context, social and ideological. Historical materialism needs at the same time to develop an analysis of the collective social action and the forms of intention and achievement that communism embodied.

The broader issue of homogeneity and the pressures for it in IR are central to modern social theory. IR literature stresses this tendency either in analysis of the pressures of

⁷⁶ The complexity that this point underlies can be applied to the case of the Balkan wars: how much can be attributed to structural change, the end of communism, international realignments, the resurgence of ultra-nationalism, etc; how much to the decisions of individual leaders and parties, and how much to the decisions indecisions and non-decisions of the international community?

⁷⁷ Furet, F. (1999), *The passing of an illusion: The idea of Communism in the twentieth century*, (eds.), (trans), Debora Furet, London: The University Chicago Press

⁷⁸ For further analysis on this last point refer to my own work, Malo, E. "Social praxis, party and class relations today", *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, (Issue 9/2014), pp172-198.

modernity itself, or of the globalisation, or in those theorisations within IR that stress the impact of the *international*.⁷⁹ Beyond its political and military dimensions the Cold War and its end, reflected a competition between two rival blocs, constitutionally unrelated and inherently competitive, which could only conclude with the absorption and subordination of one by the other.⁸⁰ The former communist states have been reintegrated and their political and economic discrepancies are now unrecognisable. They are back in the global capitalist ladder from which they had only temporarily found freedom. Like runaway slaves, they were taught a lesson, including economic shock therapy, which has led with about half of their former GDP falling since the end of the post Cold War years. There are other aspects of this process that should involve further elaboration within the perspective of an IR and historical materialism. The most obvious is the nature fragmentation, that of dissimilarity, the inequality of wealth and power in the contemporary world. True enough, this has always been present and colonialism indeed took the form of this permanent system of allocation. The facts though, show that in economic terms the inequality is growing not reducing, and that the pecking order commencing in the 1500 is now more obviously sharp than ever.⁸¹ Yet the recognition of this is matched by a continued failure of social scientists to provide a convincing explanation of why it is so; this is the greatest analytic and normative challenge today, facing not only historical materialism and IR, but social science more generally.

If theoretical engagement is one challenge, the engagement with the issues of substantive analytic significance within contemporary social science itself is another. Here the challenge, relevance, and opportunity of historical materialism are enormous, which we can briefly illustrate for the contemporary debate. We can begin with the most momentous historical event of the second half of the twentieth century, the disintegration of the communist bloc. Explanation of this process requires an historical perspective with an analysis of the varying contributions of state/society, agency and structure, economics and ideology, domestic and international change.⁸² Second, globalisation in its various renderings posits a set of changing relations among states, society, economy, culture, and a claim to historical rupture associated with the past three decades. Striking a balance in this issue, the establishment of the very criteria,

⁷⁹ Fukuyama, F. (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man Standing*, London: Hamish Hamilton;

⁸⁰ Thomas G. Paterson. "The Origins of the Cold War" *OAH Magazine of History* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer, 1986): 7.

⁸¹ Arrighi makes some interesting conclusions by noting the continuity of the allocation of power and wealth with the same players (states) for more than a century and half with the only addition of Japan. Arrighi, G. (1994), *The long Twentieth Century*, London: Verso

⁸² Related to this problematique, Gramsci showed awareness of the relationship: "In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is 'original' and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. To be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is the "national"---and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise". Gramsci, A. in Sassoon, Anne Showstack. (2000), "The space for politics: Globalization, hegemony and passive revolution", in J. D. Schmidt and Jacques Hersh, *Globalization and Social Change*, London: Routledge, p240.

by which the claims to continuity or change within globalisation, is something that requires historical analysis. Finally historical materialism has a direct relevance to the most overarching issue in contemporary social theory and analysis, one with many implications for IR, that, of a transition from modernity to post-modernity. The claim to post-modernity has at least three constitutive elements: aesthetics, social theory, and modern social life.⁸³ What concerns us out of the three is the last, the claim that, over the past quarter-century society internally and externally has moved from a modern to a post-modern. Whether this is in regard to the disappearance of classic forms of state, territoriality, sovereignty, or in more general claims about the changing nature of the movements of finance and ideas, there is a necessity for a coherent historical framework. Beyond establishing what the criteria and claims may be of the points put forth here, such a perspective outlook may, allow us to identify those ways in which we do or do not inherit a significantly changed world.

Conclusion

Departments of international relations should be the inevitable homes of those who think that we cannot understand the social world without an understanding of global processes. Those who seek to understand the dynamics of global social change, inequalities between the many parts of the world, social injustices and the potential for progressive social change have often found that a global perspective is needed. The message in this work has been that these processes need to be understood in a world historical social context. In approaching the contribution of historical materialism to contemporary international debates, my starting point was therefore one of dual critique. We cannot take the categories of international relations as givens, searching for instance for more materialist explanations of traditional international realities. This is not to deny the importance of grasping the continuities, in accounting for the present, it is however, to argue that we acknowledge the radical disjuncture's of the present, that we investigate the nature of the contemporary historical change and make the evaluation of its significance a central historical task. By the same token however, we cannot simply take over the given tradition of Marxism as the basis for contemporary global understanding. Historical materialism has greatly enriched our grasp of the international processes but most important work has been located in a period in which the national-international realms were first entrenched, thus not in the present in which that duality is being transformed. Marxists and indeed other approaches will have contributions to make. Marx's central contribution to critical historicist thought is the principle of historical specificity.⁸⁴ My argument for example has been that the value of Marx's approach is enhanced if we understand it in ways

⁸³ Anderson, P. (1999), *The Origins of Post-Modernity*, London: Verso

⁸⁴ For a neat account see Korsch, Karl. (1963), *Karl Marx*, New York: Russell and Russell

more complex than his own, periodising in terms of political, as well as production relations for instance. The emancipatory thrust of Marx's social theory too, remains a powerful impetus. Similarly the idea that social groups may become collective actors in their own emancipation is a fundamental insight even if the contribution of the social movements is now partially de-linked from the role of the working class. It is true that the most fruitful contributions to critical thought have come in recent decades from writers, as mentioned in this work, whose main reference point have been other than Marx. These contributions have incorporated however some of these insight of Marx even as they have transcended a Marxist position.⁸⁵ The lessons of Marx that i have instanced may be useful correctives to any tendency towards transhistorical categories or generalisations, towards abstract structuralism, or towards neglect of the emancipatory questions which are central to understanding contemporary world changes.

In the first part of this work, therefore, our discussion has been directed to concerns how and why mainstream IR has been reconstructed since the start of the Cold War along ahistorical and asociological lines, given the interdisciplinary in the field of the *international* before the first department of IR was established in 1919. To the extent that contemporary mainstream theorists have made use of history, they have employed an instrumentalist view of it and not as a means of rethinking the present but rather in order to confirm theories of the present.⁸⁶ By contrast our argument is for the employment of a constitutive reading of history, meaning not merely an examination of history for its own sake or just so we can delve into the past, nor basically as a means of confirming theorisations of the present, but rather for the purposes of rethinking theories and problematise present views and ideas, so a reconfiguration of the IR research agenda can be met. Neglecting or bypassing history is not only a cause of injustice to the history of the international system but it also leads to a misinterpretation of the present.⁸⁷ Our task therefore was to reveal the illusions of ahistoricism that have duped us for too long. Reintroducing historical materialist enquiry is thus necessary to bring into focus continuity, discontinuity and contingency that actually constitutes past and present international debates. The extreme claim that Marxism and IR are incompatible, no less than the extreme claim that international history and IR are incompatible,⁸⁸ is usually justified on epistemologically bogus ground. It is bogus because historians always implicitly make theoretically loaded assumptions about the world based on their own experience in a

⁸⁵ This is clearly the case with one particular writer, Robert W. Cox whom has been one of the most influential theorist in international relations in recent decades, see for example Cox, R. *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, New York 1987.

⁸⁶ For this type of analysis see further in Cox, R. "Social forces, states and word orders: beyond International Relations theory", in *Neorealism and its Critics*, edited by R. Keohane, New York 1986, p212.

⁸⁷ Heilbroner, R. *Marxism: For and Against*, New York 1980, Chapters 2 & 3: "The Dialectical Approach to Philosophy" and "The Materialist Interpretation of History".

⁸⁸ Sked, Alan. (1987), "The Study of International Relations: A Historian's View", *Millenium* 16 (2): pp21-62

particular time and space. To acknowledge this should be the first task of the historian not just of the IR theoreticians.⁸⁹ The ultimate connection between Marxism and IR is the study of time and historical specificity. Social relations do not exist apart from time and all life form is affected by what has gone before thus for the understanding of the actual reality one cannot ignore the past as a matter of choice.⁹⁰

Accordingly, it must be made very clear that we are not only reallocating an unproblematised Marxist approach into the study of IR. Instead we have sought to reformulate some lessons from historical materialism in order to historicise IR; ironically, this leads to an approach that is no less critical of conventional Marxism. This provides one of the most compelling reasons why we believe the next generation of scholars should engage in the project discussed in this work, if they are to enhance their perspectives in IR and at the same time Marxism. Our remedy for the ahistorical illusions with which international relations are understood within the mainstream, rests on the theme of a dialectical process that constitutes international relations, which is intimately connected with re-conceiving international relations as praxis. In outlining our preferred critical historical materialist approach we have ultimately rejected vulgar materialism which implies the traditional base/superstructure model outlined and weightily theorised far beyond its limited capacity by a certain current of Marxism. In turn because our prime objective is that of restoring the role of international relations by enhancing its research agenda to one of giving voice to actors which harness potentially emancipatory and liberating practices that do not simply reflect class imperatives but also constitute the social relations of production, we have necessarily sought to find a critical alternative to the traditional base/superstructure. Hence, the solution was to go beyond the approach of the French structuralist school and effectively neutralise the distinction altogether, thereby in effect positing international relations as constitutive of the base.

An overall conclusion to this work would be that all versions of critical theory generally and critical historical materialism particularly are especially strong in their ability to overcome *homo economicus* reasoning and images of societies that are atomistic, by revealing the radical breaks between past and present, and in their ability to overcome the ahistorical and asociological mainstream by denaturalising existing structures and institutions, and thereby revealing the present as an imminent order of change. Reconceptualising and re-theorising the sovereign state has been central to the development of historical materialism of international relations. The conventional view of the state constituted only by the competitive dynamics of the international system, has been condemned as theoretically impoverished and empirically unhelpful. This understanding of the state, which denies connections between the domestic and

⁸⁹ See further particularly on this Carr, Edward H. (1961), *What is History*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

⁹⁰ Scholte, Jan Aart (1993), *International Relations of Social Change*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, p.7

the international and which attributes all casual significance to the balance of military power between states, obscures the complex interconnections between states and social forces, the mutually constitutive relationship between the domestic and the international and the multiple factors that shape state structure and interests. The challenge, I think for historical materialist proponents, is to re-engage or reconceive the state and to problematise, not occlude these complexities.

This work suggests that such a reengagement is not a novel undertaking but that Marxism has provided a foundation for the study of global relations, prior to and since the establishment of the discipline in the early twentieth century, particularly until the late 1980s and early 1990s. Our call for a historicist turn in IR finds an echo in an analogous call made by Hoffman in mid-twentieth century for a serious critique towards approaches in pursuit for law-like understandings developed by the behaviourist school.⁹¹ That such a critical mass should emerge at the current time is not at all surprising. Our world is undergoing an immense transformation, which cannot be understood with existing theoretical means and insights needed for explaining the character of the changes around us. An approach rooted in Marxist historicism can provide an understanding of the global transformations that are taking place. This, indeed, has been the purpose of this work, to lay out a critical historical approach in international relations on the menu for choice; to assess the contribution of the sociological understanding of global politics from historical materialism; to evaluate the current work being undertaken by IR scholars that has an historical and Marxist perspective; and to consider the future for such an approach within the discipline. Work done by Marxists provides a rich framework for thinking about international politics and the future for an historical materialist approach to the study of IR is full of possibilities; even though this argument is not new, and nor is Marxism to the study of IR. The argument has been that it was there from the initiation of the discipline and has always remained part of the study of the global processes, even if at times a somewhat marginalised. I would argue that this work is, therefore not seeking a radical reorienting of the discipline, but is suggesting a return to the discipline's core commitment to multi-disciplinarity. In this way we are not asking the discipline to deny its *raison d'être* but that it should allow historical materialism back in.

⁹¹ Hoffman, Stanley. (1959), "International Relations: The Long Road to Theory" *World Politics* 11 (3): pp346-77, and especially pp357-367

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