

# Karl marx, a scholar that understood the complexity of international relations

[Politics](#), [International Relations](#)



International relations are complex phenomena that many have aspired to comprehend fully but have not managed to. The complexity of the key players in international relations and lack of adequate information makes it even harder to understand. More than that, the complex dynamics and multitude of stakeholders and players are constantly shifting, which means an understanding of international relations must shift along with these changes. Many scholars have tried to write on international relations so as to make their views on some issues known. Karl Marx was one of the writers who tried to have his voice on international issues known. His writings have contributed towards the understanding of international relations. He developed the international relations theory that has been used widely by any scholars in an attempt to try and understand international relations better. Moreover, some who studied his theory have used the insights to come with their understanding of international relations (Ashworth, 2006). Nonetheless, this has not been a lot of criticism. Other theories developed by other economists such as capitalists, realists have also not fully explained the concept of international relations (Brown, 1997). This essay analyses the extent to which Marx's writings provide us with insights into international relations.

Karl Marx developed what is now known around the world as the Marxist theory of international relations in the 19th Century. The theory at first focused on the internal changes of individual's societies and how social and economic differences strain how people in the society relate with one another. With the involvement of other economists and occurrence of other events such as the rise of communism, the scope of Marxism was expanded

to include happenings in other parts of the world. In addition, the theory was initially in response to other economic theories developed by other thinkers, such as Adam Smith. Adam Smith's theory argued that a free market capitalism in which the Government or any other overreaching actor had no role to play would be the most efficient. It would also bring more outcomes (Ashworth, 2006). The theory was based on the supply and demand system and laid more emphasis on the importance of competition in an economy. Marxism, however, challenges this theory since according to him it can be used by others for exploitation (Brown 1997). It has been used by many to understand a wide spread of issues in the society through a thorough analysis of insights of the theory. The theory essentially advocates for a communist society, not only in one country but all around the world. Marx argues that social change in the society is brought about by the economic struggles and the economic disparities in the society. It advocates for communism in which all means of production in the society is publicly owned in common as opposed to being owned by a few individuals.

The Marxist theory, as it relates to international relations, and unlike the Adam Smith theory of a capital free market, advocates for social and economic equity in the society. Adam Smith capital free market is governed purely on the principles of supply and demand chains. When a commodity is in plentiful supply, it would to lowering of the cost of the commodity and everybody in the market be in a position to buy the commodity. This will also lead to the search of other markets and hence in a way promote international relations and actual competition in the market. However, Marx

argues that instead of markets establishing values in the supply and demand mechanisms can be avenues for exploitation of people. Through setting the prices of commodities, this could lower than the cost of labor necessary to manufacture them (Ashworth, 2006). Marxism in international relations examines the effects of such a relationship in the market. He examines how those in economic control use and exploit the one making the commodity. Moreover how the economic elites end up benefiting more and by making huge profits through the sale of products developed by the worker. Huge profit margins are the main objectives for those in economic control at the expense of those producing the product. Their interests and concerns are hardly taken into consideration (Vincent, 1988).

Further, Marx in his international relations theory continues to note that such form of exploitation is often seen in the private sector. Private sectors according to him do not care about the worker. Their core aim is to maximize on their profits and penetration of more markets to increase their wealth. It is also manifest in the ways in which the state is using the economic power it has to exploit others (Baylis & Smith, 2008). According to Marx the state is seen as the main conduit upon which the economically wealthy and powerful in the state use to make more profits. Over some time they become wealthy through an accumulation of wealth which gained using their power and international connections and manipulation of the working class. They also use domestic and international political institutions to enhance their profits and exploits. Some economic institutions of international repute are also used to advance such agenda. This leads to more suffering of those making

the production the other hand as they make more profits and become richer (Vincent, 1988).

From a Marxist perspective, there are examples of international trade and financial organizations of international repute that have been used to drive this selfish agenda - at least Marx would have argued this if he was still around. The international organizations have also been used to promote non-liberal economic policies that advocate for privatization and little involvement of government in economic policies. The World Trade Organization (WTO) for instance while working internationally to meet its objectives, it ensures trade tariffs are reduced. Reduced trade tariffs ease the cost of doing business and promote a robust economic environment. World Trade Organization (WTO) does not, however, provide sufficient protections such as on human rights especially for the workers and protection of the environment. Moreover many multinational companies are seen as the last resort in the production of products where fundamental human rights are not protected. Many of such enterprises have nonetheless been driven by the greed to obtain cheap labor and lack of well-documented human rights standards in such countries (Makinda, 2002).

Due to the prevailing exploitative and oppressive production conditions from the workers, the result of such a system would be the production of products cheaply and leading to high-profit margins. The companies become more economically wealthy while those working for such companies continue to suffer. Worse still such workers do not have the courage to complain of their afflictions for fear of the worst. Many fear that they will end up losing their

jobs might face the wrath of their bosses, police brutality and even punishment by the state. Class differentiation and social stratification become evident in such societies. This involves the existence of huge disparities between the rich, and the poor who live merely on the same land with the main difference being one is more exposed to economic resources compared to the other (Hoffman, 1986).

Further, the politicians use their power and positions in government to amass more wealth. Due to their centrality in power and influential positions, they make policies that favor them. Most of the policies they pass oppress and lead to the exploitation of their representatives. They neglect those they represent. In many occasions those being represented end being workers of the political class. Cases of cheap labor being flown to other nations are common occurrence. These occurrences are living testimonies of Marx views of the society (Makinda, 2002). Even amongst the developed nations, differences regarding the levels of affluence and military strength exist. The superior nations take advantage and end up exploiting the other nations. Military sanctions and bombings have been a frequent occurrence thus frustrating international relations (Franceshet, 2000).

The concept of foreign relations has been used to explain how historical periods such as colonialism used by foreign colonial masters to advance private interests. During colonialism notions of private property were imposed on societies with few people in the society owing large tracts of land and becoming wealthy. Those being colonized were hired to provide cheap labor and did not have same competition space (Brown, 1997). Neo-

colonialism According to Hoffman (1986) is still experienced in some countries in which foreign countries invade their nations in the promise of offering employment and delivering high quality products. However, he continues to note; it is the foreign countries that benefit more due to their ability to obtain cheap local labor. Further in neo-colonialism, also referred to as neo-imperialism is the perceived to be the attainment of self-autonomy status of most multinational and international companies. Its opponents believe most of these companies use their ability to access international markets to influence other nations negatively in the long run. Super powers and developed world economies use their status to coerce the nations to pass domestic policies that tend to favor them. The policies may not be in the best of the locals rather the interest of those companies.

Marxism does not only focus on how state and other actors exploit those offering the workforce. He also advocates fighting for them so that they can liberate themselves from such forms of exploitations and oppression. Some of the ways through which people can liberate themselves from such form of exploitation are through abolishing economic divisions among the working class. International relations will come in handy in mobilizing workers all over the world to come together to fight and advocate for this as one (Strange, 1987). It would be easier to eliminate economic elites as and any economic divisions in the society. A communist society would eventually be the result in which all have access to resources, and the competition is fair and just to all. Equality leading access of opportunities and lack of discrimination in the society and the marketplace will also be realized. Moreover, production

would not be centralized in one section of society rather will be nationalized. This way, elimination of modern day structure of the state would be achieved. This assertion, however, makes Marxism one of the most controversial theories of the world (Strange, 1987).

Marxist theory of has been widely used in the study of international relations in some ways. The Soviet Union picked and used the theory as a working tool. The Soviet Union then used it to progress in its quest to ensure social equity and economic divisions in the Country reduced. It was also used as a tool for governance in the country. However, this sparked a lot of controversies. Some viewed the theory had been manipulated to meet the interests of the Soviet union while others thought that it was a Soviet union project. The fact that the government opted to use Marxism attracted international attention to the use of the concept of managing the affairs of other countries. It also encouraged research and more international analysis of the concept and the relevance of its application (Goodwin, 1978).

Marxist writings have also been used widely in the development of a multiple of other theoretical approaches in the field of international relations. For instance Marx writings on international relations greatly influenced the theory of imperialism (Doyle 1986). The critical Theory branch notes Doyle (1986) if international relations have also been deeply influenced by the works of Marx on international relations. The theory borrowed most of its arguments from Marx arguments. The key concept of the theory; emancipation was heavily borrowed from Marx writings on international relations. The concept main aim is to free and liberate one from convention



things that tie one and negatively affects their positive thinking. The critical theory branch has often been used and referred to by many international scholars and people from all disciplines.

Ashworth (2006) In support of Marx asserts that many international economists have used Marx theory of international relations to analyze and deeper understand issues. His intellectual methods have been huge borrowed to get critical insights of contemporary issues. For instance, his insights have been used to study the functioning, development and expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Marx also provided the methodology for other economists and other analysis to obtain data for their various writings. Marx also inspired other professors to dig deeper besides his findings so that they could be able to obtain more information. This was from the gaps they found out in his writings thus through him more advancements in economics and the field of international relations were made. His wrings have also been widely quoted by many international books on international relations.

Many scholars have also used Markist writings on international relations to understand the concept of international relations. However, some of them differ with some of the arguments presented by Marx such as on racial and cultural inequalities. They also identify other factors that Marx overlooked. One of the key scholars who learned from Marx writing and used them to advance his thoughts and discourse was Italian Antonio Gramsci. His later works had a significant impact in the study of international relations. His work particularly was important in the study of the international political

economy. During Gramsci's writing, most of Western Europe was mainly fascist. Having read Marx works, Young Gramsci was able to pursue a theoretical work. Through this Gramsci Departs from more hard-line Marxist-Leninist formulations and offers a volitional approach to both theory and practice'' (Kauppi, Viotti).

A number of critics has challenged the application of Marx theory on international relations. The theory is deemed irrelevant by many in the modern times. The method was applicable during his era when colonialism was taking place in most nations of the world. Countries have become more democratic and passed policies and rules that support all the citizens. Oppression and exploitation levels have reduced tremendously. Human rights have also been internationalized. They apply to all persons irrespective of their color, race, and tribal affiliations. Courts have also become more impartial and can arbitrate and pass sound judgments. The formation of the ICC has also significantly led to trying and prosecution of cases against humanity. Access to justice at the international level has been enhanced (Wilson, 1998).

Marx theory has been criticized for being doctored to meet certain specific interests. When the Soviet Union adopted it, there was a widespread argument that it had been doctored to meet the interests of the Soviet Union. Others argue that there exist several versions of the theory. Moreover, it was the original idea of Marx to include the theory in foreign relations. The original thought was to be used and individual and society level. The involvement of Leni in the theory to further advance his

communists ideas could have led to the doctoring of the theory to fit into his agenda (Strange, 1987).

Marxist theories of international relations were deeply viewed to lead to the formation of a new state and a new kind of society class of people. The society would inherit the same values they were trying to eliminate in the society so as to eliminate inequalities in society. This, according to the critics would give the new class in society the upper hand over the others and make them wealthy and influential in the society. To some extent, history has proved this occurrence right since in nations where Marxism is highly practiced there exists two classes of people and a new system. According to his critics would eventually lead to strained international relations. Class differences and economic disparities as earlier on argued brings forth a myriad of negatives. The differences in economic and social capabilities lead to social fragmentation and stratification. The well of avail the best of resources to themselves and hire others to provide cheap labor. In an equal economic society, however, such forms of exploitation may not be promoted since there is anyone to exploit. Opportunities are also available for all to compete fairly and get (Wilson, 1998).

Baylis and Smith (2008) argue that some of Marx arguments were through well funded and sense data while others did not have evidence to substantiate them. This leads to fragmentation of information obtained from Marx to substantiate his economic assertions. In addition, it becomes hard for those reading his writings, in this case on international relations to choose data that was obtained from well funded sources. Other critics argue

that there was nothing new in Marx proved rather his mere interpretation of new data. This casts some doubt on some of his writings and their ability to be used in discourse. Some critics argue that Marx insights on international relations are narrow and one cannot extract as much information to obtain his arguments on the matter.

In conclusion, Marxism has no doubt contributed a great deal in the provision of insights in international relations. His works have also helped clear ideas to other thinkers who have also used the insight to develop new discourses. His works have also been used to open new ideas to the various occurrences in the society such as social disparities and economic divisions. They have also helped some countries like the Soviet Union to take a Marxist course of action in their operation in a bid to achieve economic equality and social justice. To best understand international relations, no single school of thought could be enough. Several thinkers and discourses are necessary to help one fully appreciate foreign relations. Moreover, the views of the various writers on foreign relations should be read and fully understood and how they apply to international relations. For instance, Marx formed the philosophical basis for communism movement. Communism, on the other hand, was mainly advanced by V. I Leni. Leni also helped internationalize Marxism. Such form of unity is needed amongst various scholars. The agreement will not only help unite the researchers and encourage sharing of philosophical thoughts but also lead to the understanding of issues. More insights on the subjects of international relations will be realized, and promotion of international best human practices be promoted. Nations would

also be able to relate to each other in a more free and robust environment when the international relations have been understood.