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Article (Published Version)

Teschke, Benno (2014) IR theory, historical materialism, and the false promise of international historical sociology. *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies*, 6 (1). pp. 1-66. ISSN 1308-8432

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# IR Theory, Historical Materialism and the False Promise of International Historical Sociology<sup>1</sup>

Benno Teschke

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## ABSTRACT

The three-decades old call for an inter-disciplinary *rapprochement* between IR Theory and Historical Sociology, starting in the context of the post-positivist debate in the 1980s, has generated a proliferating repertory of contending paradigms within the field of IR, including Neo-Weberian, Post-Structuralist, and Constructivist approaches. Within the Marxist literature, this project comprises an equally rich and diverse set of theoretical traditions, including World-Systems Theory, Neo-Gramscian IR/IPE, the Amsterdam School, Political Marxism, Neo-Leninism, and Postcolonial Theory. More recently, a “third wave” of approaches has been announced from within the field of IR, suggesting to move the dialogue from inter-disciplinarity towards an integrated super-discipline of International Historical Sociology (IHS). This proposition has been most persistently advanced by advocates of the theory of Uneven and Combined Development (UCD), claiming to constitute a universal, unitary and sociological theory of IR. This article charts the intellectual trajectory of this ongoing IR/HS dialogue. It moves from a critique of Neo-Weberianism to a critique of UCD against the background of the original promise of the turn in IR to Historical Sociology: the supersession of the prevailing rationalism, structuralism, and positivism in extant mainstream IR approaches through the mobilization of alternative and non-positivistic traditions in the social sciences. This critique will be performed by setting UCD in dialogue with Political Marxism. By anchoring both approaches at opposite ends on the spectrum of Marxist conceptions of social science – respectively the scientific and the historicist – the argument is that UCD reneges on the promise of Historical Sociology for IR by re-aligning, first by default and now by design, with the meta-theoretical premises of Neo-Realism. This is most visibly expressed in the articulation of a deductive-nomological covering law, leading towards acute conceptual and ontological anachronisms, premised on the radical de-historicisation of the fields of ontology, conceptuality and disciplinarity. This includes the semantic neutering and hyper-abstract re-

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a longer version of a keynote speech delivered on 2 November 2012 at the METU, Ankara, at the occasion of an international conference on “IR Theory, Historical Sociology, and Historical Materialism”. I would like to thank the organiser of this conference, Dr. Faruk Yalvac, for the invitation, comments and patience. I would also like to acknowledge the discussions with and comments by Samuel Knafo, Steffan-Wyn Jones, Clemens Hoffmann, Can Cemgil, Matthieu Hughes, Maia Pal, Frederick Guillaume Dufour, Frantz Gheller, Alexander Crawford, Nancy Turgeon, Gonzalo Pozo-Martin, Ben Selwyn, Julian Germann, Alejandro Colas, Hannes Lacher, Ray Kiely, Jan Selby, Zdenek Kavan, Dylan Riley, and the wider members of the Sussex Political Marxism Research Group. A special acknowledgment is due to Justin Rosenberg. Our intellectual trajectories have diverged over the years and we have agreed to disagree on key elements of Marxism, Historical Sociology, and IR Theory. I would like to extend a warm note of gratitude to Professor Lars Bo Kaspersen, who invited me to spend the year 2013/14 as a Visiting Professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Copenhagen, enabling the completion of this article.

articulation of the very category, which in IR's self-perception lends legitimacy to its claim of disciplinary distinctiveness: the international. The article concludes by suggesting that an understanding of Marxism as a historicist social science subverts all calls for the construction of grand theories and, a *fortiori*, a unitary super-discipline of IHS, premised on a set of universal, space-time indifferent, and abstract categories that hold across the spectrum of world history. In contrast, recovering the historicist credentials of Marxism demands a constant temporalisation and specification of the fields of ontology, agency, conceptuality and disciplinarity. The objective is to lay the foundations for a historicist social science of geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Historical Materialism and IR Theory, International Historical Sociology (IHS), Neo-Weberianism, Uneven and Combined Development (UCD), Political Marxism (PM), Scientism vs Historicism

## **Introduction: International Historical Sociology and the Post-Positivist IR Debate**

For over three decades now, the idea to reconvene the field of International Relations (IR) in terms of Historical Sociology (HS) and to redefine the field of HS in terms of IR, moving from an initial *rapprochement* and a more synthetic inter-disciplinarity towards an integrated super-discipline of International Historical Sociology (IHS), has constituted a formidable research *desideratum* beset with demanding and apparently insuperable theoretical difficulties. This challenge, to the degree that it is taken seriously, affects not only the main theoretical traditions within Rationalist IR – (Neo-)Realism and (Neo)Liberalism – and the wider field of HS – Neo-Weberianism, Constructivism, Post-Structuralism and Post-Colonialism. It also pertains to the proliferating and contending IR approaches within the tradition of Historical Materialism (HM), including World-Systems Theory, Neo-Gramscian IPE, the Amsterdam School, Uneven and Combined Development (UCD) and Political Marxism (PM).

This article takes stock of the IR/HS debate to establish the basic intellectual parameters that frame and inform the controversies around the question of IHS. It focuses specifically on how IR approaches informed by HM have tried to resolve this puzzle. This leads directly into long-standing controversies around the multiple and competing self-understandings of Marxism as a social science. To organise the material and to help the reader through an occasionally dense argument, the article starts by recalling a fundamental philosophical divide that runs through the wider Marxist tradition, which was once referred to as the "Two Marxisms", respectively "Critical Marxism" and "Scientific Marxism". Alvin Gouldner suggested that the Marxist debates in the 1970s and 1980s between these two orientations were themselves a replay of and reached right back into very real philosophical antinomies in Marx's own work. For "the

Two Marxisms could not emerge as structurally distinct tendencies but for the fact that both are truly present in Marxism".<sup>2</sup>

"Critical Marxists (or Hegelianizers) conceive of Marxism as critique rather than science; they stress the continuity of Marx with Hegel, the importance of the young Marx, the ongoing significance of the young Marx's emphasis on "alienation", and are more historicist. The scientific Marxists, or anti-Hegelians, have (at times) stressed that Marx made a *coupure épistémologique* with Hegel after 1845. Marxism for them is science, not critique, entailing a "structuralist" methodology whose paradigm is the "mature" political economy of *Capital* rather than the "ideologized" anthropology of the 1844 *Manuscripts* (...). Critical and Scientific Marxisms differ, then, in their most basic background assumptions: in their epistemologies, especially with respect to the role of science as against critique, and with respect to their domain assumptions concerning the fundamental nature of social reality (i.e. their social ontologies). Critical Marxists stress an historicism that emphasises social fluidity and change, a kind of organicism calling for the contextual interpretation of events; Scientific Marxists search out firm social structures that recur and which are presumably intelligible in decontextualized ways".<sup>3</sup>

This stylised but graphic rendition remains helpful for the purposes of this article as this constitutive divide between *scientism* and *historicism* resurfaces also in the extant theoretical literature in the IR/HS debate and cuts, it will be argued, across the Marxist/non-Marxist divide. The distinction between scientism and historicism encapsulates thus very different conceptions of social science and the conduct of research. The former seeks to formulate transhistorical or mid-range covering laws, general and abstract categories of analyses, objective and structural determinations and imperatives, stable ontologies, and essentialised rationalities. It pursues the construction of grand theories, which hold ideally independently of time and space. The latter calls for a historicisation of situated social and political practices, the specification of historically concrete concepts of analysis, the historicisation of ontologies, and the study of contextualised rationalities and inter-subjectivities. Whereas scientism is directed towards theoretical generalisations, historicism is directed towards historical specification.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alvin Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> There are three broad meanings of historicism in circulation. The first refers to Karl Popper's charge that orthodox Marxism (and some other theories of history) conceives of history as subject to a pre-programmed sequence of stages, following an inherent telos or law-likeness. Popper's concept of historicism was idiosyncratic, as he remained virtually alone in understanding the concept this way. The second refers to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Historical School (*Historismus*), which largely pursued a historicist method emphasising the specific and unique character of historical phenomena in their individuality, captured by ideography and source criticism. And the third refers to a Marxist historicism which grounds the historicity of phenomena not in abstract laws, but in specific historically situated social practices. Johnson Kent Wright, "History and Historicism", in Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross

In this sense, the question of IR/HS and, by extension, IHS, should not be conceived primarily in terms of how different theories – (Neo-)Realism, Weberianism, Marxism, Constructivism, Post-Structuralism, etc. – conceptualise the merger between IR and HS. It should be pursued by first establishing whether they subscribe to either rationalist, structuralist, and positivistic or to post-positivistic conceptions of social science and, secondly, how these premises translate into more substantive propositions of IHS.<sup>5</sup> This article starts therefore from the assumption that the IR/HS project needs to be relocated in the wider post-positivist IR debate, of which it was originally an organic part.<sup>6</sup> For this terrain of epistemology did not only challenge the prevailing rationalism in mainstream US IR theory, opening IR up to the full panoply of non-positivistic conceptions of social science, it provides also the ultimate ground on which different IR/HS theories stand and differ. The idea of the scientific/historicist divide will thus act as a general background theme throughout this text. The article argues that while the two main non-Marxist theories in the field of IR/HS under investigation – Neo-Realism, Neo-Weberianism – are anchored on the scientific side, the disjuncture between scientism and historicism cuts also through Marx's own thoughts on international relations and is still alive in contemporary Marxist approaches to IHS. In fact, the two main Marxist IR approaches under investigation – UCD and PM – are anchored on opposite sides of this long-standing divide. This has significant implications for their diverging conceptions and conduct of IHS.

The article proceeds in three steps. It starts by setting out what is at stake in IHS. Why was the turn from mainstream IR Theory to IHS first put on the agenda and what specific promises did it hold? This section includes a critique of attempts to periodise the sub-field of IHS in terms of three successive waves, each superseding the previous one, and suggests the idea of contending and ongoing theoretical centers of gravity.

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(eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science, vol. 7: The Modern Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 113-130.

<sup>5</sup> The meanings of positivism and neo-positivism in the social sciences and IR are multiple, but a conventional understanding suggests that "positivism is usually characterised by its research of the identification and explanation of universal laws in unity, or in conformity, with the practices of the natural sciences, especially physics". Frederick Guillaume Dufour, "Positivism", in Bertrand Badie, Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Stefano Morlini (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), p. 2081. Steve Smith clarifies: "Particularly important was the work of Carl Hempel, because he developed an extremely influential account of what is involved in explaining an event. He argued that an event is explained by "covering" it under a general law. Usually, this takes the form of a deductive argument whereby (1) a general law is postulated, (2) antecedent conditions are specified, and (3) the explanation of the observed event deduced from (1) and (2). This model is known as the "deductive-nomological" model, and Hempel argued famously that it could be applied to the social sciences and history". Steve Smith, "Positivism and Beyond", in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 15; Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History", *Journal of Philosophy* (Vol. 39, No. 2, 1942), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Smith, "Historical Sociology and IR Theory", in Stephen Hobden and John Hobson, *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 223-243.

After this scene-setting overture, the article reminds us in a second step why a Marxist IHS cannot passively rely on the conceptual import of the inter-state system from Neo-Weberian HS. It proceeds through a critical analysis of a prominent Neo-Weberian historical sociologist, Charles Tilly, and shows how the relative absence of international relations in the sociological, including Marxist, canon led Neo-Weberians not only to reclaim the field of IHS by re-emphasising the primacy of geopolitical over social interpretations, but to also accept rationalist and structuralist premises, re-aligning Neo-Weberianism with Neo-Realism. It further suggests that Neo-Weberians developed an acute awareness of the question of method in IHS. It asks how to overcome the internal/external (domestic/international) divide in classical HS, interrogating the problem of how to move from comparative HS towards IHS. The section concludes by showing why, in spite of a sustained effort to overcome this methodological internal/external divide, a historicist Marxism remains pertinent in the face of Neo-Weberianism's problematic answers, for it raises the question of the historicity of this very differentiation, which, in turn, disables the very formalisation of a general IHS methodological framework.

The final step opens up towards a critical dialogue between two prominent contemporary Marxist IR/IHS approaches, respectively UCD and PM.<sup>7</sup> It seeks to clarify their essential theoretical differences and demonstrates how these lead towards very different interpretations of (international) history – one informed by a renewed search for stable ontologies, transhistorical categories of analysis and causal laws of history, and the other informed by a radical historicisation of the field of ontology (what the world is made of during distinct periods in time), conceptuality, and social practices. In short, they subscribe to radically different versions of meta-theory, reflected in the "Two Marxisms". The section suggests remaining sceptical of UCD's premises and promises, most notably due to its abstract, trans-historical and deductive-nomological cast. It also argues that the very idea of a general, unitary and universal IHS theory – founding the super-discipline of IHS – does not only run counter to the idea of Marxism as a historicist and critical social science, but leads towards acute conceptual and ontological anachronisms, premised on the radical de-historicisation of the fields of ontology, conceptuality and disciplinarity. This includes the semantic neutering and hyper-abstract re-articulation of the very category, which in IR's self-perception lends legitimacy to its claim of disciplinary distinctiveness: the international. In fact, UCD reneges on the promise of HS for IR as it re-aligns with the positivistic conception of theory prevalent in Neo-Realism. The article concludes by suggesting that an understanding of Marxism as a historicist social science subverts all calls for the construction of grand theories and, *a fortiori*, a unitary super-discipline of IHS, premised on a set of universal, space-time indifferent, and abstract categories and ontologies that hold across the

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<sup>7</sup> For a survey of the wider field of Marxist IR see Benno Teschke, "Marxism", in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 163-187.

spectrum of world history. In contrast, recovering the historicist credentials of Marxism, demands a constant temporalisation and specification of the fields of ontology, conceptuality and disciplinarity.<sup>8</sup> This includes an understanding of “the international” as a historical rather than a theoretical category. This argument will be developed by drawing critically on the tradition of (Geo-)Political Marxism. The objective is to lay the foundations for a historicist social science of geopolitics.

### **What is at Stake in International Historical Sociology?**

What were the essential issues and basic problems that drove IR to “historicise” and “socialise” and HS and HM to “internationalise” their objects of inquiry, agendas, and approaches? What is at stake in IHS? For critical versions of IR Theory, the promise of this *rapprochement* between IR and HS held the prospect of subverting the mainstream IR reliance on a stable, timeless and objective disciplinary core – international anarchy – and attendant conceptual vocabulary – states, self-help, power politics, security-dilemma, balance-of-power – by historicising, socialising and therewith de-naturalising relations between polities across time and space.<sup>9</sup> This implied the historicisation of the conceptual field and geopolitical practices. This was coupled to a rejection of the trans-historical premise that the state – in IR’s generic parlance: a conflict-unit – can be conceived as a coherent analytical category in its own right, endowed with a unitary, self-enclosed and fixed rationality, derived from the competitive international strategic patterns which force the socialisation of conflict-units into an isomorphic logic of geopolitical survival. For in mainstream IR theory, political rationality was either logically deduced from a systemic conception of inter-state anarchy (Neo-Realism), formalised as a general law of world history, or subjectively posited as an innate quality of politicians, encapsulated in the notion of *animus dominandi* (the will to dominate), ultimately grounded in human nature (Realism). Opening up the state by “bringing social relations back in” and by “historicising geopolitics” encouraged the recovery of the collective and contested social agency that shapes variations in forms of political communities, geopolitical orders and strategic conduct (rather than behaviour). This suggested a turn to the study of historically diverse political subjectivities and relations in time and space, which were not subsumable under the universal axiomatics of Rationalist IR. This rejection of state-centrism, stable ontologies, and universal political rationalities implied ultimately the direct negation of the discipline-constitutive thesis that

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of *critique* in Marxism as a *critical* social science cannot be pursued in this paper. Note, however, that it is incompatible with structuralist versions of IR Marxism and has been largely disregarded in these approaches.

<sup>9</sup> Faruk Yalvac, “The Sociology of the State and the Sociology of International Relations”, in Michael Banks and Martin Shaw (eds.), *State and Society in International Relations* (New York/London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 93-113; Hobden and Hobson, 2002, op. cit. in note 6; George Lawson, “Historical Sociology in International Relations: Open Society, Research Programme and Vocation”, *International Politics* (Vol. 44, No. 4, 2007), pp. 343-368.

international relations occupy a separate, distinct and autonomous sphere of reality, justifying IR's standing as a distinct discipline, sealed off from both History and Sociology.

This break with the prevailing supra-sociological geopolitical structuralism, composed of states as unitary-rational actors, implied also a shift from systemic IR theories of strategic reproduction to social theories of dynamic historical processes, for which HS provided a richer pool of intellectual resources and theoretical traditions than mainstream IR. The re-historicisation and re-sociologisation of an apparently timeless anarchical human condition and reified set of categories facilitated studies into the historical origins and social sources of qualitatively dissimilar geopolitical orders, the contested transitions between, and the variable foreign policy conduct within distinct multi-polar orders. Rather than conforming to the general IR idea that posited an aprioristic and transhistorical extra-sociological international structuralism as the inescapable horizontal inter-state logic that forced all state-alternatives to comply with the competitive pressures of international anarchy, IHS recovered the vertical state/society relations to transcend the black box of the state by returning to the socio-historically specific trajectories of multiple polity-experiences, the construction of diverse geopolitical orders, and the variable political rationalities and relations within them. In short, it socialised and historicised "anarchy". The objective was not to displace international relations, but to show - with recourse to the standard concerns of HS: large-scale and long-term social change within particular polities - how geopolitical inter-action was historically construed in variable ways. The original promise of the inter-disciplinary dialogue between IR and HS, in the context of the post-positivist debate in IR, generated a new research agenda and re-admitted a wider array of non-positivist theoretical perspectives into the heart of the discipline.

But IR theory did not go empty-handed to HS. For here the challenge was exactly the obverse: As IR moved in the 1980s towards a more historical-sociological redefinition of the state and the states-system, HS moved in the opposite direction: reclaiming international relations and, in particular strategic inter-state rivalry, as the missing dimension in society-centered classical sociology, including Marxism.<sup>10</sup> The promise of inter-disciplinarity cleaved into two related concerns. The first interrogated not only how social relations shape political communities and external conduct over time, but also how geopolitical contexts shape political institutions, political rationalities, and social relations in space. State rationality was Janus-faced, facing inside and outside. This duality had to be incorporated into a revised methodological framework. The second concern called

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<sup>10</sup> Aristide Zolberg, "Strategic Interactions and the Formation of Modern States: France and England", *International Social Science Journal*, (Vol. 32, No. 4, 1980), pp. 687-716; Anthony Jarvis, "Societies, States and Geopolitics: Challenges from Historical Sociology", *Review of International Studies* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 1989), pp. 282-93; Roland Axtmann, "The Formation of the Modern State: The Debate in the Social Sciences", in Mary Fulbrook (eds.), *National Histories and European History* (London: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 21-45.



therefore for the development of methodological perspectives that formalised this inside/outside problem by overcoming two recurrent methodological fallacies. The first referred to the problem of internalism – “the myth of bounded societies” or “methodological nationalism” – in which polities were conceived as pre-constituted, discrete, and self-referential units of analysis, directing research to the longitudinal reconstruction of change within these units.<sup>11</sup> While internalism had the advantage of demonstrating qualitative temporal developments internal to the unit of analysis in question, it remained restricted by the systematic elision of wider international contexts – generating a methodological uni-linearity over time in abstraction from wider external relations. The second fallacy identified the limits of comparative HS, which directed research to the external comparison between the trajectories of two or more polities. While this had the advantage of demonstrating dissimilarities between the trajectories of plural units of analysis, it remained again compromised by the elision of their geopolitical relations – generating a methodological multi-linearity over time in abstraction from external relations. What was missing in HS, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, was the conception of an analytical framework wide enough to incorporate the internal and external dimensions of state/society development in time and space – a conception of spatio-temporal inter-relationality. Internalism and comparativism had to be modified and re-articulated in form of an internationally-expanded HS. The mobilisation of the classical IR literature was held to assist this theoretical re-orientation, for it brought to the table the specific problematique of geopolitical contexts, which classical HS, from Marx to Weber, had not properly recognised or theorised as a defining feature of world history.

What crystallised in the course of the last three decades was therefore not simply a two-way traffic – the mobilisation of the classical canon of HS for IR and *vice versa* – for ultimately the stakes were raised. To the degree that a commitment to general theory building (as opposed to mid-range theories, micro-studies, or narratives) was sustained, spanning both disciplines, the final prize was to generate a new and higher theoretical synthesis, which incorporated the core-problematique and findings of HS (large-scale and long term socio-historical change over time) into the core-problematique and findings of IR (the spatial separation of polities in a rulerless geopolitical pluriverse).<sup>12</sup> For a while, both disciplines – HS since the 1970s and IR since the 1980s – seemed to converge on a common research and theory agenda with ample incidences of empirical cross-fertilisation and theory import and export. In retrospect, this common project revolved around the search for an IHS that integrated internalism and externalism with a dynamic historical perspective, which overcame the limits of HS’s non-international sociological comparativism and the limits of IR’s extra-sociological

<sup>11</sup> Fred Halliday, “For an International Sociology”, in Hobden and Hobson, op. cit. in note 6, p.247; Daniel Chernilo, “Social Theory’s Methodological Nationalism: Myth and Reality”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, (Vol. 9, No. 1, 2006), pp. 5-22; Daniel Chernilo, “Methodological Nationalism and the Domestic Analogy: Classical Resources for their Critique”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 23, No. 1, 2010), pp.87-106.

<sup>12</sup> John M. Hobson, George Lawson and Justin Rosenberg, “Historical Sociology”, in Robert A. Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopaedia* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 3357-75.

geopolitical structuralism - the quest for a unitary framework within a newly pronounced super-discipline of IHS.

This analytical narrative can be retold in terms of the self-periodisation of the sub-disciplines' chronological trajectories. Both disciplines, IR and HS, have recently suggested compressed surveys that periodise, chart, and classify the evolution of their respective fields in terms of three successive waves to retrace the partial convergence, but also latter-day divergence, towards a common theoretical paradigm and research agenda.<sup>13</sup>

Within IR, the sequence comprises a first wave of primarily Weberian HS (alongside English School, Marxist and Constructivist approaches) during the 1980s, drawing on figures like Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Anthony Giddens, and Michael Mann, to explore the interaction between the inter-state system and domestic state/society relations.<sup>14</sup> This conversation, particularly for critical and Marxist scholars, hit a buffer as these contributions returned the project of IHS to the quasi-Realist overriding structural imperatives of geopolitical competition, which absorbed different polities into the homogenising logic of military rivalry.<sup>15</sup> A second wave emerging in the 1980/90s drew – again alongside developments in Constructivism, the English School, and Post-Structuralism - more directly on Marxist and Marxisant modern classics, including Antonio Gramsci, Immanuel Wallerstein, Perry Anderson, Robert Brenner and Fernand Braudel.<sup>16</sup> It incorporated social relations, class conflicts and the rise and development of capitalism into their reformulations of IHS, linking these to processes state-formations, military rivalry, international hegemonies, and the rise of the modern

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; Julia Adams, Elisabeth S. Clemens, Ann Shola Orloff (eds.), "Introduction: Social Theory, Modernity, and the Three Waves of Historical Sociology", in Adams, Clemens, and Orloff (eds.), *Remaking Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1-72.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael Mann, *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> John Hobson, *The Wealth of States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997); John Hobson, *The State and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Stephen Hobden, *International Relations and Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vol. 1 (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vol. 2 (New York: Academic Press, 1980); Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1974); Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974); T. H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World: Civilization & Capitalism*, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

inter-state system.<sup>17</sup> While this, the survey feels obliged to report, proved productive on multiple levels, the second wave was compromised as it “remained unwieldy and heterogeneous, making its distinctive contribution to the discipline hard to identify”, including a “failure to theorise the international”.<sup>18</sup> Overcoming these apparent deficiencies from 2000 onwards, the third wave comprises UCD, a non-Eurocentric “Global Dialogic” approach, and an “eventful IHS”. These three approaches, the survey suggests, partake of the third wave as they subscribe to a redefinition of the core intellectual problematique of IR/HS by replacing C. Wright Mills’ “sociological imagination” – revolving around the triangulation between structure, history and biography – with an “international imagination”, revolving around the triangulation between structure, history, and the international.<sup>19</sup>

Within the field of HS, another influential survey of the sub-discipline’s trajectory suggests a periodisation following a different temporal sequence of three waves.<sup>20</sup> Against the backdrop of classical sociology, which was centrally concerned with the transition from tradition to modernity, the first wave (up to ca. 1965) revolved largely around the paradigm of a Weber-inspired Modernization Theory and a Parsonian structural-functionalism, formulating abstract stages of development and static taxonomies with little grounding in actual historical research. The second wave (ca. 1965-1990) was characterised by a Marx/Weber synthesis, which began to break down during the 1990s and was succeeded by an ongoing post-Marx/Weber third wave. Substantively, the second wave comprised studies on large-scale and long-term processes, including the rise of capitalism, industrialisation, class-formation, revolution, war, state-making, secularization, rationalization, individuation and formal organisations. Theoretically, it embraced versions of comparativism, political economy, structuralism and determinism, while conceiving of social change in terms of linear, epochal and progressive transitions (teleology). Its conception of agency was largely utilitarian and rationalist as political action was often derived from economic or social position. The third wave, in contrast, developed as a reaction to the Marx/Weber synthesis

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<sup>17</sup> Kees van der Pijl, *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class* (London: Verso, 1984); Martin Shaw (ed.), *War, State and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Robert Cox, *Production, Power and World Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994); Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003); Hannes Lacher, *Beyond Globalisation: Capitalism, Territoriality and the International Relations of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006); Adam Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Hobson, Lawson, Rosenberg, op. cit. in note 12, p.3366.

<sup>19</sup> This erases biography and agency from IHS’s theoretical premises. Hobson, Lawson, Rosenberg, op. cit. in note 12, p. 3358.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, Clemens and Orloff, op. cit. in note 13. See also Philip Gorski, “Beyond Marx and Hintze? Third-Wave Theories of Early Modern State Formation”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Vol. 43, No. 4, 2001), pp. 851-861.

and comprises five distinct groupings: (1) institutionalism, (2) rational choice, (3) the cultural turn, (4) feminism, and 5) post-colonialism. "Rational choice" apart, it took identity, religion, ethnicity, race, culture, nation, gender and informal organisations as their central objects of analyses, while theoretically emphasising case studies, cultural and discourse analysis, agency, and contingency, conceiving of historical development in terms of moments of non-linear transposition and recomposition. While the third wave constitutes a heterogeneous group of scholars, they are largely united in their aversion to material structuralism, political economy, and essentialism.

While these two surveys – from within IR and HS respectively – suggest different disciplinary temporalities, identifying a partial bi-disciplinary convergence in the 1980s/90s towards a common Marx/Weber synthesis, they share the language of waves as a periodising device. Yet, the language of waves has not gone unchallenged. For other surveys in HS deny a temporal logic of supersession inherent in the metaphor of waves, neatly dividing a heterogeneous field into a "before" and an "after", and identify several co-existing and ongoing "centers of gravity" with no specific chronological beginnings or endings. Patrick Carroll, for example, objects to an "agonistic and inter-generational logic of supersession" by suggesting parallel and competing "centers of gravity", loosely organized around thematic and theoretical preferences (respectively the "military-fiscal", "autonomous state", and "cultural" centers of gravity).<sup>21</sup> Dylan Riley, in turn, raises a similar charge against the language of waves embraced by third-wavers since "periodising the development of historical sociology in terms of waves of development (...) would seem to be a quintessentially second wave enterprise. For the language of waves inevitably suggests a transition from one stage of development to another". Riley detects more evidence "of a field that grows through an operation of productive return to origins", which is for him a return to political economy, including Marx and Weber.<sup>22</sup>

Schematic and stylized classifications of waves in IR and HS run the risk of typological over-simplification, the misrepresentation of a diverse strands of intellectual inquiry with multiple and uneven temporalities, and are open to the charge of disciplinary and paradigmatic boundary maintenance. At worst, they constitute hegemonic gestures. This article, in contrast, starts from the assumption that the rendition of the history of theoretical diversity in IR/HS should follow the more productive, pluralist, and open-ended idea of competing centers of gravity. It further suggests that second wave theories in HS and IR are both, neither supplanted, nor sufficiently understood, explored, and refuted. The article agrees therefore with Carroll's and Riley's suggestion that the second wave of

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Carroll, "Articulating Theories of States and State Formation", *Journal of Historical Sociology* (Vol. 22, No. 4, 2009), pp. 553-603.

<sup>22</sup> Dylan Riley, "Waves of Historical Sociology", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Vol. 47, No.5, 2006), pp. 379-386.

state-formation theories in HS is neither exhausted nor superseded – particularly as culturalist approaches to state formation seem to have withdrawn from historicizing and theorizing the multi-linear and inter-active inter-political relations of state formation processes which non-orthodox theories in the field of IR keep problematizing. But the article also suggests that at least one approach within the third wave of IHS – UCD – remains theoretically and epistemologically of a par with the structuralist proclivities of the Marx/Weber second wave and, ultimately, of a par with the core positivist paradigm of IR – Neo-Realism – which the historical-sociological turn in IR was meant to overcome.

### **Neo-Weberian IHS: War and the Exteriority of the Inter-State System**

How do the tensions between scientism and historicism and internalism and externalism play out in Neo-Weberian attempts to formulate a theoretical and methodological framework for IHS? Initially, the Neo-Weberian move towards IHS was not so much conceived as an anti-Marxist project, but rather in terms of a Marxified Weberianism directed against the prevailing dominance of Modernisation Theory in US Sociology. For Charles Tilly's and his colleague's turn to history intended to test the prevailing attempts within the Political Development Literature in the fields of Politics and Sociology to formulate universal models and generalizations about large-scale political changes. These were conceptualized as transitions from traditional political orders to modern rationalized states, best encapsulated within Modernization Theory. But the largely a-historical nature of contemporary US Sociology forced a much more systematic turn to history and yielded the establishment of the new sub-discipline of HS.

#### *Method: Overcoming Internalism and Standard Path*

Tilly's most seminal research programme was delineated as an inquiry into two long and linked processes: "(1) into large-scale structural change in Western countries since about 1500; and (2) into changing forms of conflict and collective action in the same countries over the same time span. The large-scale changes that receive the most attention (...) are state-making and the development of capitalism. The countries in question are most frequently France and England."<sup>23</sup> This research programme was first announced in the volume on *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* and found its most systematic and, perhaps, popularized expression in the monograph *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, which can be described as the highwater mark and culmination of his macro-sociological and structuralist period.<sup>24</sup> The implicit theoretical assumptions governing these substantive writings were secured and rendered explicit by his two volumes on method in HS – *As Sociology Meets History* and *Big Structures*,

<sup>23</sup> Charles Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), pp. x-xii.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Tilly, "Western State-Making and Theories of Political Transformation", in Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 601-638; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, Ma.: Blackwell, 1992).

*Large Processes, Huge Comparisons.*<sup>25</sup> Tilly and his Neo-Weberian colleagues repeatedly identified two persisting weaknesses in the Political Development Literature: "The treatment of each country as a separate, self-contained, more or less autonomous case", which failed to place "the experience of specific areas squarely within the large international process which help create that experience", and the formulation of "schemes involving standard stages, sequences, or paths of development."<sup>26</sup> Tilly conceived of HS as a historically-grounded social science, whose emphasis on spatio-temporal specificity and variation subverted all epistemological calls for a social-scientific positivism oriented towards the construction and testing of generalizing and universalising social laws. As he concluded later, "the search for grand laws in human affairs comparable to the laws of Newtonian mechanics has ... utterly failed".<sup>27</sup> This rejection of the positivist assumptions of Modernization Theory prompted a re-problematisation of the question of method in relation to HS, which Tilly introduced as "encompassing comparison", to overcome the dual strictures of classical sociology: "internal logic" and "standard path".<sup>28</sup> Tilly articulated, even if only *in nuce*, the question of method for IHS. How, then, to overcome the dual strictures of classical sociology: "internal logic" and "standard path"? How to transcend "methodological nationalism" and "stagism" in the direction of IHS?

Tilly approached the problem by developing a taxonomy of four strategies of comparison: (I) individualizing – finding "specific instances of a given phenomenon as a means of grasping the peculiarities of each case"; (ii) universalizing – finding "that every instance of a phenomenon follows essentially the same rule"; (iii) variation-finding – establishing "a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining systematic differences among instances"; and (iv) encompassing comparison – selecting "locations within the structure or process and explain similarities or differences among those locations as consequences of their relationship to the whole".<sup>29</sup> Tilly's choice for "encompassing comparisons" stretches the definition of the unit of analysis to the *explananda*-encompassing "whole" – those big structures and large processes which provide the wider context within which any particular case had to be located. Spatio-temporal variations in case-specific trajectories of social change are conceived "as consequences of their relationship to the whole". The substance of this whole – the single-society transcending systemic determinants of change,

<sup>25</sup> Tilly, op. cit. in note 23; Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> Tilly, op.cit. in note 14, pp. 627 and 604. See also Reinhard Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Vol. 9, No. 3, 1967), pp. 292-346 and Theda Skocpol, "Wallerstein's World-Capitalist System: A Theoretical and Historical Critique", *American Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 82, No. 5, 1977), p. 1075.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768-2004* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004), p.9.

<sup>28</sup> Tilly, op. cit. in note 25, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82,125. Tilly never fully articulated his method "encompassing comparison" and later abandoned it altogether. For a critique see Philip McMichael, "Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method", *American Sociological Review* (No. 55, 1990), pp. 385-97.

which also double over as spatially delineating the scope conditions of the relevant unit of analysis – is clearly defined: “For our own time, it is hard to imagine the construction of any valid analysis of long-term structural change that does not connect particular alterations, direct or indirect, to the two interdependent master processes of the era: the creation of a system of national states and the formation of a worldwide capitalist system”.<sup>30</sup> The procedure of comparison between analytically discrete societies – insulated in space and time from their external contexts – is replaced by the assumption of establishing variations in relation to wider systemic properties: capitalism and the interstate system. What was the substantive result of this methodological shift?

*The Tilly-Thesis: War Made States and States Made War*

Tilly’s thesis is positioned in a stylised matrix of extant models of European state-formation that distinguish between internalist and externalist, political and economic accounts, generating four macro-paradigms – statist (internal-political), mode-of-production (internal-economic), geopolitical (external-political), and world-system’s (external-economic).<sup>31</sup> His wider model synthesizes the first three, assigning causal directionality from the geopolitical via the statist to the internal-economic, generating an “outside-in” and “top-down” explanation of temporal and institutional variations in the trajectories of state-formations. Within this general geo-statist framework, rulers responded to the strategic imperatives of military competition by adopting differential strategies to supply revenues and manpower, depending on regionally differentiated socio-economic arrangements, notably the presence or absence of capitalism. Coercion-intensive regions, defined by the absence of cities and agricultural predominance (states like Brandenburg and Russia), are distinguished from capital-intensive regions, defined by cities and commercial pre-dominance, where rulers entered into temporary coalitions with capitalists (like the Italian city-states and the Dutch republic). Both are, in turn, set apart from capitalised coercion-intensive regions (like France and England), where rulers incorporated capitalists into state structures (representative assemblies) in order to build up standing armies and rationalise bureaucracies, producing “fully-fledged national states” by the seventeenth century. Instead of uni-linearity, this generated a tri-linear model of European state-formations, which ultimately converged, driven by an ongoing process of geopolitical adaptation and selection between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries on the successful and universalising capitalised-coercion model: the modern nation-state.<sup>32</sup>

By systematically incorporating the role of war and geopolitics into their accounts of European state formations, Tilly and his colleagues had not only opened up Sociology to HS, but had also partly moved beyond Comparative HS to an internationally-extended Neo-Weberian HS. This was captured in his striking

<sup>30</sup> Tilly, op. cit. in note 25, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*, op. cit. in note 24, pp. 6-16. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

and canonical dictum that "War makes states and states make war", the key conclusion of his edited volume *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*.<sup>33</sup> The claim that warfare and state formation were strongly interrelated was developed in a number of publications from the 1970s to the early 1990s and can be regarded as Tilly's most influential and enduring legacy. It contributed to a paradigm-shift in the field of state formation studies.<sup>34</sup> The new internationally-extended HS broke not only with Modernization Theory, but also with other dominant Liberal and Marxist state-formation paradigms, as they underplayed and elided the constitutive impact of war, war finance, and revenue-procurement on the growth of state power. Rather than conceiving of state formation as a by-product of the gradual extension of political and civic individual rights, supported by a liberal discourse of Enlightenment, or as a by-product of revolutionary transitions from feudalism to capitalism in which united and secular bourgeois classes replaced traditional monarchical orders, it was war and the costs of war that drove innovations in the sources of military revenues. This forced the rationalization of tax systems and revenue-collecting bureaucracies, leading to the centralization and autonomy of state power, and ultimately to the public concentration and monopolization of the means of violence – central properties of the modern state – across many European regions.

Models like these united Neo-Weberians in expanding the unit of analysis from the national to the international, delinking the rise and development of the modern state and the inter-state system from modes-of-production analyses, replacing uni-linearity with multi-linearity, complementing internal processes with external interaction, relaxing strict notions of lawfulness with historicity and specificity, and substituting sequential stages, epochal transitions and teleology with complexity, variations and diversity (including state exit), giving rise to an "outside-in" and "top-down model".

<sup>33</sup> Tilly, "Western State-Making and Theories of Political Transformation", op.cit. in note 24, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (London and Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Lawrence Stone (ed.), *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689-1815* (London: Routledge, 1994); Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard Bonney, *The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe, c. 1200-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500-1660* (London: Routledge, 2002); Christopher Storrs (ed.), *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Honour of P.G.M. Dickson* (London: Ashgate, 2009). For an early critique see Paul Cammack, "Bringing the State Back In?", *British Journal of Political Science* ( Vol. 19, No. 2, 1989), pp. 261-290.



*The Interstate System (From Weber to Waltz) and Capitalism (From Marx to Weber)*

How plausible is this model? While Neo-Weberians successfully challenged "internalism" and "stagism", their explanations remained flawed on at least five counts. (1) the positing of the inter-state system as a reified variable; (2) a bi-sected conception of state-autonomy confined to its relation to society; (3) the absence of a social theory of war; (4) the mis-conception of capitalism and the externalisation of social relations and agency; (5) and the final relapse into a Neo-Realist logic of international competitive selection, homogenising diverse trajectories of state-formation into "like-units".

As this model requires both a definition of the nation-state and capitalism, and an account of the origins of capitalism in relation to the formation of the modern inter-state system, the critique is organised around these definitions.<sup>35</sup> Throughout his analyses, Tilly adopts a classical Weberian definition of the modern state, also equated with the category of the nation-state, comprising its control over a contiguous territory, its institutional centralization and autonomy, and its monopoly over the means of coercion.<sup>36</sup> How does he explain the formation of this state? For Tilly – and many other Neo-Weberians – state-formation is always already inserted into a wider geopolitical environment, whose strategic rivalry explains state-formation. But here, a logical sleight of hand occurred, as the inter-state system functions simultaneously as a presupposition and as an outcome. Tilly has therefore to posit a prior and more generic condition of geopolitical fragmentation to remain true to his outside-in model, but suppresses the specific question of the nature and constitution of the pre-state medieval world. In short, the formula "war-made-states and states made war" remained circular. The logical problem can be recast in terms of how to account for the transformation of a pre-interstate order – where polities were spatially de-territorialised, institutionally de-centralised, politically non-autonomous, and where the means of violence were oligopolistically dispersed – into an interstate order, predicated on multiple nation-states. For any account of plural state-formations in the context of the international system cannot take the latter for granted. Rather than placing the story of state-formations within an antecedent and more generic notion of geopolitical fragmentation, Tilly is challenged to explain the dual processes of geographical unit-differentiation: the territorialisation of state power

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Tilly's account in *Capital, Coercion and Nation-States* was no longer explicitly governed by his method of "encompassing comparison", announced – without being retracted or reformulated – a decade earlier.

<sup>36</sup> Tilly, "Western States Making and Theories of Political Transformation", op. cit. in note 14, pp. 27, 70. Tilly's conception of "nation" is never sociological and substantive, but "strictly a term of scale and scope", meaning essentially "state-wide". Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 16. For an account that takes national practices seriously, see Frederick Guillaume Dufour, "Social Property Regimes and the Combined and Uneven Development of Nationalist Practices", *European Journal of International Relations*, (Vol. 13, No. 4, 2007), pp. 583-604.

driving the external/internal distinction, generating, in turn, the state/interstate distinction, and the vertical separation within each unit of the political/military from the economic/social that generates the public/private distinction. At stake is therefore not only an organizational transformation of pre-state polities into states within a persisting condition of geopolitical fragmentation, but also a spatial transformation of de-centralised medieval polities into territorial exclusive and sovereign jurisdictions. Only this generates a new quality of inter-spatial relations, which only then appear as distinctly inter-state relations.

Thus reformulated, Tilly encounters a significant complication as the interstate system doubles over, in his account, as the "encompassing" master category into which any one trajectory of state-formation is inserted and, simultaneously, as that phenomenon which requires explanation as the aggregate of plural state-formations. But the interstate system cannot function simultaneously as the *explanandum* and the *explanans* – as outcome and presupposition. The international system appears therefore as a pre-constituted and aprioristic thing – a timeless given. The absence of a continent-wide empire is noted, yet the presence of geopolitical multiplicity in its specific pre-state and territorially heterogeneous feudal relations and its bellicose disposition is not explained. Geopolitical rivalry functions as a reified *independent variable* – a timeless structure whose anarchical nature imposes its imperatives on its members, aligning Neo-Weberian IHS with Neorealism. The content of geopolitical anarchy may change (along with its players), but its structural logic remains constant. As an objectified *explanans*, geopolitical fragmentation lies outside the model's theoretical reach and beyond historical interrogation. In other words, the critique of "methodological nationalism" cannot simply embrace a "methodological internationalism" *avant la lettre* - before the phenomenon of an inter-state system actually emerges without falling into the trap of conceptual anachronism. In fact, the dichotomy between "externalist" and "internalist" accounts of state-formation misses the non-distinction between these two dimensions in medieval Europe.<sup>37</sup> Tilly's two "encompassing" master processes of modernity – the development of capitalism and the rise of the interstate system - are now strategically reduced to one, as geopolitical rivalry was always already present in pre-interstate orders.

Second, what are the implications of Tilly's account for the question of state-autonomy? Since causal directionality invariably travels from the state-system to its components, Tilly formulates a "military-adaptive" state theory, which confines state autonomy to the domestic level as states are forced to

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<sup>37</sup> Benno Teschke, "Geopolitical Relations in the European Middle Ages: History and Theory", *International Organization* (Vol. 52, No. 2, 1998), pp. 325-358. Classically from a non-Marxist perspective, Otto Brunner, *Land and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria*, translated from the 4<sup>th</sup> revised edition by Howard Kaminsky and James van Horn Melton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992 [1939]); Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961); Heinrich Mitteis, *The State in the Middle Ages: A Comparative Constitutional History of Feudal Europe* (Amsterdam: American Elsevier, 1975 [1940]). More recently, Rees Davies, "The Medieval State: The Tyranny of a Concept?", *Journal of Historical Sociology* (Vol. 16, No. 2, 2003), pp. 280-300.

passively adapt to external pressures – or face exit.<sup>38</sup> While this provides leverage to impose state-interests on societal interests, it appears, inversely, that states dispose of no agency to influence or transform the international system – generating a one-sided concept of state autonomy. Both operations leave the interstate system intact as a timeless systemic level, immune to alterations and without any moorings in the social world.

Third, why would rulers/states conduct war? Where exactly should we locate an explanation for war and geopolitical rivalry in this model? What explains the frequency, intensity and duration of late medieval and early modern wars? Why do we see the rise of the modern state, also referred to by Neo-Weberians as the “permanent war-state” and the “fiscal-military state”? As a rule, the argument for early modern Europe’s bellicosity oscillates between an ascribed classically Weberian invariant and independent rationality of rulers to accumulate the means of coercion to preserve or extend their power (political action to maximise power and prestige) and the Neo-Realist theorem of a security-dilemma in an anarchical situation (*si vis pacem para bellum*). In the first case, Tilly resorts to the classical realist idea of a subjective *animus dominandi* of rulers (as power-holders, rulers want to expand by definition), reiterating the reification of the pursuit of power – the autonomy of politics as the quintessential quest for power. In the second case, the interstate system is essentially naturalised as a pre-social “state of nature” in which invariant foreign policy behaviour is a function derived from the system’s anarchical structure. The claim jumps from the assumption of the mere fact of co-existing contiguous polities to the analytical conclusion that this explains geopolitical rivalry. As a historical sociology of war and state-formation that explicitly embraces the “bellicist paradigm”, Tilly’s model lacks a social theory of war.

Fourth, where does this leave capitalism – Tilly’s second master-process of modernity? In the passage between his major theoretical writings and *Capital, Coercion and Nation-States*, Tilly’s definition of capitalism underwent a radical reformulation from a Marxist relational-productivist to a Weberian methodological-individualist conception.<sup>39</sup> In his earlier critique of Wallerstein’s circulationist concept of capitalism as a world-system revolving around production for sale on the world-market in which profits were made in acts of exchange (trade), he remarked:

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<sup>38</sup> Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, op. cit. in note 15, p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> Weber’s definitions of capitalism are notoriously hard to establish and reconcile, since they slide from an understanding of capitalism as a specific rational type of profit-oriented economic action, via a specific type of organisation of the enterprise, to a specific social relation between capitalists and free labour, plus various definitions of ‘political capitalism’. Generally, however, he suggested to define capitalism on the basis of “economic factors” alone. “Where we find that property is an object of trade and is utilized by individuals for profit-making enterprise in a market economy, there we have capitalism.” Max Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (London: Verso 1998), p. 51. This definition allows Weber to identify capitalism or “capitalist action” as a trans-historical phenomenon.

"In tracing the development of European capitalism I have seized the other horn of the Marxist dilemma, emphasizing the immediate relations of production as the defining features of capitalism. That choice produces a narrower, later catalog of capitalist development. Wallerstein's broad definition, it seems to me, sacrifices the sort of insight concerning the logic of capitalist social relations that Marx unfolded in his analysis of agrarian change in England – especially the insight into the way in which the capitalist's pursuit of profit helped transform workers into proletarians. For those who, like me, want to examine how the development of capitalism affected the collective action of ordinary people, that insight is essential, its loss critical."<sup>40</sup>

Here, Tilly defines the capitalism in classical Marxist productivist terms and identifies its origins in 17<sup>th</sup> Century agrarian England, rather than in Wallersteinian circulationist terms associated as a pan-European process located in the "long 16<sup>th</sup> century". This conception is abandoned, without comment, a decade later. "Let us think of *capital* generously, including any tangible mobile resources, and enforceable claims on such resources. Capitalists, then, are people who specialize in the accumulation, purchase, and sale of capital. They occupy the realm of *exploitation*, where the relations of production and exchange themselves yield surpluses, and capitalists capture them. Capitalists have often existed in the absence of capitalism, the system in which wage-workers produce goods by means of materials owned by capitalists. Through most of history, indeed, capitalists have worked chiefly as merchants, entrepreneurs, and financiers, rather than as the direct organisers of production."<sup>41</sup>

This move from a Marxist conception of capitalism as a social relation of production to a Weberian definition of capitalist action - capitalists as individual, extra-relational, and economic profit-maximisers - enables him to desist from investigating the historically specific origins of capitalism. This conceptual redefinition allows him to detect capitalists across a wide variety of social and temporal settings. By dissolving the concept of capitalism into a timeless condition (a type of economic action), capitalists preceded capitalism as a social relation of production. Through this move towards Weber, Tilly is in a position to conceive of the efficacy of the presence of capitalists on processes of state-formation in quantitative, rather than in qualitative, terms as *capital becomes an ever-present resource for rulers, rather than a historically distinct social power*. This frees him to theorise or acknowledge the transition from feudalism to capitalism as an intellectual problem.<sup>42</sup> Given the reified conceptualisation of the inter-state system and the "passive-adaptive" view of the state, the locus for explaining variations travels towards the regionally differentiated domestic configuration of what is

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<sup>40</sup> Tilly, op.cit. in note 23, pp. 41-42.

<sup>41</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*, op.cit. in note 14, p. 17. The ambiguous reference to "exploitation" drops out of Tilly's handling of the definition of capitalism in his substantive sections.

<sup>42</sup> "I will treat the changing organization of production and the resulting class structure only cursorily." Ibid., p. 33.

conceptualised as socially disembodied pools of available material resources, rather than as social relations. Where Tilly examines social forces, the account remains restricted to the analysis of inter-elite relations (relations between ruling and dominant classes) – notably, state-capitalist and state-nobility relations.

Tilly's passage between 1975 and 1992 from a minimally class-analytic to a state-centric position, which renders the agency of the peasantry passive, is instructive. For in 1975, he conceded that "the predominance of peasants drew state-makers willy-nilly into struggles and coalitions with the men who controlled the land. The strongest argument one could make for the peasant base as a cause of the state's victory is that the presence of peasants gave power to major landlords, and the necessity of coalitions with regional groups of landlords (who had some choice with which authorities to ally themselves) both limited the scale at which princes could operate and pushed them towards territorial agglomeration."<sup>43</sup> Later, peasants feature only descriptively as mere objects, as their "fate" "differed dramatically between coercion-intensive and capital-intensive regions."<sup>44</sup> But any political-military sociology of state-formation or fiscal sociology of administration needs, by definition, to incorporate those subjects over whom power is extended and fiscal extractions are exercised as active agents (as a category of social analysis), which co-determined the tax-rate. Failing that the peasantry is merely conceptualised as a de-subjectified and neutral tax-base. Given the predominantly agrarian social relations of late medieval and early modern Europe, the explanation of state-variations requires, therefore, an extension of the field of social forces to include, at a minimum, the constitutive role of the peasantry in the differential resolution of class conflicts over the sources and modalities of extraction, property-relations and the power-configurations (state-forms) that institutionalised these conflicts. But the later Tilly explicitly abandoned the analysis of social relations and class conflict: "In order to concentrate on mechanisms of state-formation I will repeatedly stereotype or take for granted the relations among landlords, peasants, agricultural proletarians, and other major rural actors."<sup>45</sup> Tilly's two "encompassing" master processes of modernity – the development of capitalism and the rise of the interstate system – are now strategically reduced to none, as capitalists were always already present in cities.

But how useful is the language of "variation"? In his quest to overcome uni-linear explanations, Tilly failed to embrace the full diversity of multi-linear and unique regional experiences of state-formations, restricting his analytical reach to a tri-linear schemer in which the "capitalised-coercion intensive" model serves as the ultimately successful norm to which all other deviant and sub-efficient cases had to adapt – from tri-linearity back to uni-linearity. The production of middle-range generalisations subsumes case-specific trajectories under one of his three rubrics. This is especially problematic for Tilly's collapsing of English and French

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<sup>43</sup> Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Europe*, op. cit. in note 14, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*, op.cit. in note 24, p. 152.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

experiences, as they do not represent roughly equivalent trajectories, but radically divergent cases. Since Tilly deploys no concept of capitalism (only capitalist economic action) and excludes the agency of the peasantry, he disables himself to identify the rise of agrarian capitalism as the *differentia specifica* of England's state-development, generating a capitalist-parliamentarian monarchical state-form, and its absence in pre-revolutionary France, generating a non-capitalist monarchical absolutism – the persistence of the Old Regime. While the move from uni-linearity to tri-linearity usefully introduces complexity, it fails to provide guidance on the full multi-linearity of all spatio-temporally specific trajectories of state-formation in Europe. This includes the need to account for variations within his triple classificatory scheme. Finally, Tilly's suggestion that the ultimately successful "capitalised-coercion" model became generalised by crowding out sub-optimal polities relies on a quasi-biological conception of neo-evolutionary selection, recalling Neo-Realism, which fails to explain the longevity, co-existence and survival of other state-forms (even today). In the end, Tilly's objective to overcome "standard path" and "stagism" generated not multi-linearity, but tri-linearity, which itself relapsed into uni-linearity, as the "successful" modern nation state allows apparently for no further variations and specificities. The result is a convergence towards Neo-Realism's inter-state system, composed of homogeneous and "like-units".

### *Two Logics of Capital and Coercion and the Reification of Agency*

Tilly's two "encompassing" and "systemic" master processes of modernity-capitalism and the interstate system– are either conceptually dissolved or posited as generic and aprioristic presences. This procedure forfeits historical specificity, as not only capitalism (in the generic form of urban-based capitalists), but also the interstate system (in the generic form of geopolitical fragmentation) appear now as pre-constituted phenomena in which only the "players" change. The specific question of how to account for both – individually and in their interrelation - disappears from view. But none of this is, of course, a problem for Neo-Weberians as these moves constitute a faithful return to Weber's ontological pluralism – the conception of the world as having always already been segmented into multiple spheres of social action – most dramatically modelled in Michael Mann's IEMP model - each endowed with their own rationalities: interdependent, but ontologically separate and pre-constituted.<sup>46</sup> This theoretical architecture connects Tilly's fourfold matrix – geopolitical, statist, economic, world-market - to a Weberian sociology of different spheres of social action that carries the claim of transhistoricity and multi-causality, as the directionality of causal arrows can, in principle, run freely from one pre-constituted sphere of social action to any other. More concretely, the account is premised on a dualistic and reificatory conception of the analytically and historically discrete logics of capital, associated with cities, and coercion, associated with states. "I will resort to metonymy and reification on

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

page after page. Metonymy, in that I will repeatedly speak of “rulers”, “kings”, and “sovereigns” as if they represented a state’s entire decision-making apparatus, thus reducing to a single point a complex, contingent set of social relations. Metonymy, in that cities actually stand for regional networks of production and trade in which the large settlements are focal points. Reification, in that I will time and again impute a unitary interest, rationale, capacity, and action to a state, a ruling class, or the people subject to their joint control.”<sup>47</sup>

For Tilly, capitalists engage in rational economic action to the degree that their pre-given ends (utility-maximisation and capital-accumulation) are realised by means of the peaceful deployment of material resources in acts of market-exchange, notably in urban markets. States engage in political action to the degree that their pre-given ends (power-maximisation to force the submission of other groups to the state’s will) are realised by means of the rational organisation and deployment of physical coercion, internally and externally. In terms of sociological micro-foundations, Tilly reduces Weber’s four types of social action (instrumental, value-oriented, emotional and habitual) to but one: instrumental rationality.<sup>48</sup> He assigns a transhistorical substantive instrumental rationality to rulers/states, generically separated and encased as a type of political action from economic action. Equally, he ascribes a transhistorical instrumental rationality to capitalists, generically separated and encased as a type of economic action from political action.<sup>49</sup> States emerge, when the means of coercion accumulate and concentrate; cities emerge, when capital accumulates and concentrates. Differential state-formation depends on the absence or presence of the contingent conjunction of their external interaction. The analytical positing of two separate logics of capital and coercion, corresponding to two irreducible and autonomous spheres of social action – ideal-typically conceived by Weber, but reified by Tilly – secures the wider argument of transhistoricity, multi-causality and contingency.

Tilly’s substantive explanation is ultimately premised on a fundamental research-organising move that relies on the acceptance of two universalised social-order-constituting a priori segmentations – the inside/outside and the economic/political distinctions. In the process, Tilly transhistoricises the very

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<sup>47</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*, op.cit. in note 14, p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Lapointe and Dufour remind us of this impoverishment of the richer classical Weberian conception of types of social action in macro-sociological and structural versions of Neo-Weberian Historical Sociology. Thierry Lapointe and Frederick Guillaume Dufour, “Assessing the Historical Turn in IR: An Anatomy of Second Wave Historical Sociology”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 25, No. 1, 2012), pp. 97-121.

<sup>49</sup> Steve Smith is therefore correct to classify Neo-Weberian HS as epistemologically “rationalist”: “Both historical sociology and rationalist international relations accept one model of how to analyse the social world. Both, therefore, are part of the social science enterprise, in the narrow sense used in the US. Accordingly, both deem causal analysis as appropriate to the social world. The leading historical sociology scholars, for example Hall, Mann, Skocpol, Tilly and Wallerstein, all accept a broadly explanatory form of social theory, one in which causal, albeit multi-causal, analysis is the way to study the development of state-society relations (...) There is little room for active agents, as distinct from agents reacting to these internal and external causal processes.” Steve Smith, op.cit. in note 6, pp. 232, 233.

*results* of plural state-formations while re-deploying and retro-activating them as causal categories, each endowed with their own "logic of action", to explain this very same process. This leads to explanatory circularity as the very outcomes of this dual differentiation are re-mobilised and anachronistically antedated as initially obtaining and temporally constant starting premises. This suggests that the inside/outside and political/economic distinctions require their own historicisations.

### **The Antinomies of Marxist IR: UCD and PM**

At this point, we can turn more directly to the challenge of how IR Marxism approaches the problematique of IHS. Both, UCD and PM started from the assumption that international relations form a void in the classical body of Marxist scholarship – reaching right back to Marx and Engels's own work. Although there are multiple readings of Marx on international relations, it is uncontentious to state that they never afforded systematic attention to the problem of how to reconcile their temporally uni-linear conception of history with the spatial multi-linearity of dissimilar and interacting developmental trajectories of co-existing polities. In fact, the *Communist Manifesto* elided the problem wholesale by positing a transnationalising world-market as the mega-subject of capitalist modernity which would flatten all geopolitical heterogeneity – the re-shaping of the world in capitalism's own image! Marx's work is replete with suggestive references to the problematique of international relations and foreign policy, including – especially towards the later part of his work – open declarations of their under-theorised nature. But this belated recognition of the significance of the sphere of international relations for the course of history, as even sympathetic commentators have repeatedly noted, did never advance beyond fragmentary and miscellaneous insights.<sup>50</sup> It failed to engender a more systematic reflection on the implications of the geopolitical dimensions of social processes over time for the classical Marxist stadial conception of history – a reflection that would have to be reconciled with and attuned to the basic premises of HM. Some commentators have concluded that this lacuna may require a substantial recasting and reformulation of the entire architecture of Marx's theory of history, while most have suggested that the magnitude of the challenge of an internationally-expanded HM may constitute an insuperable obstacle, which pushes the whole

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<sup>50</sup> Robert N. Berki, "On Marxian Thought and the Problem of International Relations", *World Politics* (Vol. 24, No. 1, 1971), pp. 80-105; Hartmut Soell, "Weltmarkt – Revolution – Staatenwelt: Zum Problem einer Theorie der Internationalen Beziehungen bei Marx und Engels", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (Vol. 12, No. 12, 1972), pp. 109-184; Walter B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Panajotis Kondylis, *Theorie des Krieges: Clausewitz – Marx – Engels – Lenin* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988); Fred Halliday, 1994, op. cit., pp. 47-73; David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 312-344. More positively: Terry R. Kandal, "Marx and Engels on International Relations, Revolution and Counterrevolution", in Michael T. Martin and Terry R. Kandal (eds.), *Studies of Development and Change in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 25-76; most recently Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).



exercise beyond recovery for the tradition.<sup>51</sup> UCD and PM also agreed that capitalism was generally misconceptualised by Neo-Weberians and that the inter-state system was misconceived as a de-sociologised and de-historicised "independent variable" and autonomous level of determination whose military pressures, similar to Neo-Realism, were held to socialise diverse polities into its geo-strategic logic of survival. But while UCD and PM agreed on these lacunae, they subsequently developed radically diverging research strategies, conceptions of the internal/external divide, historical interpretations of the relation between capitalism and the inter-state system, and proposals for how to "merge" sociology and geopolitics – encapsulated in diverging conceptions of Marxism as a social science, respectively the scientific and the historicist – the "Two Marxisms".

*UCD: The Intellectual Context and the Basic Argument*

How, then, to overcome the overwhelming of space by time in classical Marxism and classical HS and to repair the disjuncture between sociological (internalist) and geopolitical (externalist) forms of explanation in a single schema? Justin Rosenberg engaged two sets of interlocutors, one derived from classic social theory and another derived from the IR community: Kenneth Waltz.<sup>52</sup> Registering his dissatisfaction with versions of classic social theory, including works in HS/IR, which either remained trapped in a "methodological nationalism" (the conception of historical development in the ontological singular), or versions that remained trapped in a "methodological universalism" (the conception of capitalist development in the "ontological universal"), the charge was that they had no conception of IHS. The engagement with Waltz, in turn, was meant to secure his novel conception of IHS against the neorealist paradigm.<sup>53</sup> For Waltz's intellectual puzzle, namely how to theoretically account for the analytical separation between "system-level" (the international) and "unit-level" (the domestic) without reducing one to the other and, in a second step, how to incorporate both levels into a general IR theory, had remained unanswered. The objection was that Realists and Neo-Realists had reasoned from the fact of the separation between the international and the domestic without having provided a prior sociological explanation of their differentiation, and had subsequently privileged and insulated the international as that autonomous domain which recurrently socialised dissimilar polities into its isomorphic logic of survival. To rectify this defect, namely to inscribe the existence of the international into the very premises of social theory (rather than to posit a generic analytical separation between "system-level" and "unit-level" or to empirically introduce the international level descriptively *ex post factum* as *all* extant approaches in HS and IR were alleged to be liable to), Rosenberg introduced Leon Trotsky's idea of UCD.

<sup>51</sup> Skocpol, op.cit. in note 14; Giddens, op.cit. in note 14; Mann, op.cit. in note 14; Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Justin Rosenberg, "Why is there no International Historical Sociology?", *European Journal of International Relations* (Vol. 12, No. 3, 2006), pp. 307–40; Rosenberg, "Kenneth Waltz and Leon Trotsky: Anarchy in the Mirror of Uneven and Combined Development", *International Politics* (Vol. 50, No. 2, 2013), pp. 183–230.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hills, 1979).

This addressed the same question that the Neo-Weberians had already raised: How to overcome methodological nationalism, but this time without conceding any ground to (Neo-)Realism. How to think of "the international" in strictly sociological terms?

Rosenberg proceeded without returning to his earlier structuralist argument developed in his *Empire of Civil Society*, which derived the existence and anarchy of the modern inter-state system (and the balance of power as its de-personalised regulatory mechanism) from the anarchy of the logic of the capitalist market (and its "invisible hand" as its impersonal regulatory mechanism).<sup>54</sup> For what had emerged in this text was a conception of history in terms of a systemic and diachronic *en bloc* sequence of successive geopolitical orders, theoretically grounded in a systemic and diachronic *en bloc* succession of different modes-of-production. This procedure synchronised the spatio-temporally differential, inter-acting, and plural European trajectories of regional socio-economic and political developments into the abstract and spaceless category of the mode-of-production. Four recurring criticisms emerged: (a) socio-political transformations and transitions where conceived as system-wide "structural discontinuities" devoid of social (class struggle, revolutions, state-formations) and geopolitical (war, foreign policy, diplomacy) agential conflicts; (b) the explanatory power of capitalism was overstretched as the modern state and the modern inter-state system were analytically and causally derived from the concept of capitalism as structurally and temporally co-eval and co-genetic attributes of modernity; (c) the structural differentiation between a capitalist empire of civil society, regulated by the impersonal anarchy of the market, and the modern inter-state system, regulated by the impersonal anarchy of the balance of power, remained mechanistic and created an absolute opposition between the logic of a transnationalising market and the territorial logic of power politics, as both spheres drifted analytically apart into two co-existing autonomous realms; (d) the space-time indifferent perspective could not account for the spatio-temporally diachronic, dynamic and inter-relational co-development of multiple and differential trajectories of regional developments, increasingly encased in states. The idea that all European polities marched simultaneously - in unison and in lockstep - through the passages from one mode-of-production to the next suggested a broad-brush periodisation that de-internationalised and re-synchronised the regionally varying developmental tempi into an orthodox Marxist stagism that was hardly reconcilable with the historical record.

The outcome of the *Empire of Civil Society* was not so much a Marxist critique of the Realist theory of international relations, but rather an explanation, now grounded in capitalism, for the de-personalised Realist logic of international relations (anarchy, power politics, security dilemma, balance-of-power) to hold, if now restricted in its applicability to capitalist modernity: a Marxist explanation of

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<sup>54</sup> Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 17.

Realism.<sup>55</sup> For the economistic and structuralist perspective generated an account of (capitalist) international relations, which withdrew passively into the stratosphere of the "rules of the game" of Realist high politics, without impacting back onto the empire of civil society (and vice versa) – a bifurcation into two abstract levels which henceforth travelled side-by-side without disturbing each other.<sup>56</sup>

How was this conception subsequently altered and revised? Developing the notion of UCD as "the sociological formula of the international as a general abstraction" for world history as a whole, the basic argument proceeds in four basic axiomatic steps:<sup>57</sup> (i) sociological origins of the international (uneven development); (ii) definition of the international (societal multiplicity); (iii) causal dynamic of the international, registered in the categories of "advance" and "backwardness" (expressed in the "whip of external necessity" and "the privilege of backwardness"); and (iv) causal effects of the international (combined development in backward societies). The opening contention is that the international is the result of the unevenness of social development as a whole. The multiplicity of societies manifests and is therefore explained by differential developmental dynamics, which cause humanity to fragment (over 5000 years ago in the transition from hunter-gatherer bands to sedentary agriculture) into multiple societies, constituting the international.<sup>58</sup> It follows, secondly, that the international, also interchangeably rendered as the "inter-societal", is defined as "that dimension of social reality which arises from the co-existence within it of more than one society".<sup>59</sup> This numerical definition of the international lodged UCD's conception of IHS firmly in the "ontological international". Third, the international is pervaded by a deep causal dynamic as the inter-active consequences of multiple societies are re-grounded in the uneven social development between them, captured in the metaphors of the "whip of external necessity" and "the privilege of backwardness". Fourth, as more developed societies interact with less developed ones, the causal effects of uneven inter-

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<sup>55</sup> Hannes Lacher, "Making Sense of the International System: The Promises and Pitfalls of Contemporary Marxist Theories of International Relations", in Mark Rupert and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Historical Materialism and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 147-164; Teschke, op.cit. in note 17, pp. 39-41. The charge of reifying agency was a central recurring theme in extant reviews: Nick Rengger, "Clio's Cave: Historical Materialism and the Claims of 'Substantive Social Theory' in World Politics", *Review of International Studies* (No. 22, 1996), pp. 213-231; Yohan Arrifin, "The Return of Marx in International Relations Theory", *Economy and Society* (Vol. 25, No. 1, 1996), pp. 127-134; Rob Walker, "The Empire of Civil Society", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 23, No.3, 1994), pp. 770-772; Fred Halliday, "Against Hobbes and Pangloss", *Radical Philosophy* (No. 78, 1996), pp. 36-38.

<sup>56</sup> The *Myth of 1648* was designed to rectify these defects by switching from a pan-European structuralist to an intra-European multi-linear, interactive and processual perspective, which put the relational and diverse outcomes of social and geopolitical conflicts, including the very passage from a pre-international medieval order to a territorialised inter-state system, at the theoretical heart of the analysis. Teschke, op.cit. in note 17. See also Teschke, "Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International", *Historical Materialism* (Vol. 13, No. 2, 2005), pp. 3-26.

<sup>57</sup> Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 52, p. 194.

<sup>58</sup> Rosenberg, "Basic Problems in the Theory of Uneven and Combined Development Part II: Unevenness and Political Multiplicity", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 23, No. 1, 2010), pp. 165-189.

<sup>59</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit. in no. 52, p. 308.

societal development express themselves in combined developments in backward societies, which reinforce, rather than straighten out, the unevenness of world-historical development as a whole.

The suggestion is that UCD, reconceived as a theory of IHS, can overcome the strictures of classical sociology, characterized by dynamic theorizations of internal change over time, and the deficiencies of comparative HS, characterized by theorizations of external differences across space, *and* the strictures of Neo-Realism, characterised by the detachment of an autonomous and horizontal field of international relations from the vertical field of social relations. This results from the theoretical formalization of the multi-linear and interactive dimensions of uneven social development across an inherently internationally fragmented social sphere as a historical phenomenon. Whereas Leon Trotsky referred to unevenness as "the most general law of the historic process", UCD was now raised to the status of a "universal law", capable of providing a general and unified *sociological* IR theory.<sup>60</sup> At stake is therefore nothing less than a reconstruction and sublation of HM and IR into the higher synthesis of IHS.

The theoretical switch to UCD was thus performed without re-engaging the question of the relation between the historically and regionally specific origins and dynamics of capitalism, the formation and permutations of the modern inter-state system, and their ongoing historical co-development (though not co-genesis) in a processual perspective that was theoretically and historically attentive to the uneven and relational trajectories of various European regions. Rather, the suggestion was that none of the extant approaches in HS/IR – Neo-Weberian, Neo-Marxist, Foucauldian or otherwise – had anything significant to say about a social conception of "the international", declaring an intellectual *tabula rasa* encapsulated in the question "Why is there no International Historical Sociology?" The move towards UCD, first announced in the Deutscher Lecture and still restricted in its temporal and geographical applicability to capitalist history, and later abruptly extended to encompass capitalist and pre-capitalist world history *in toto*, had therefore a triple consequence:<sup>61</sup> (a) the dissolution the specific question of the rise of the modern inter-state system into a more generic and transhistorical conception of "the international"; (b) the dissipation of the question of the spatio-temporally distinct origins of capitalism in the context of dissimilarly developing regional trajectories into a more generic and transhistorical conception of uneven development; and (c) the dispersal of the question of the geopolitically and socially mediated expansion of capitalism into a more generic and transhistorical conception of inter-activity driven by uneven *and combined* development. The criticism of the lack of an active conceptualisation of agency remained un-answered. The strategic aim was to develop an ever more expansive,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 318. Matin follows Rosenberg. Kamran Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> Justin Rosenberg, "Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations", *New Left Review* (No. 215, 1996), pp. 3-15.

encompassing and, ultimately, abstract set of universal categories, as the historical concept of the inter-state system was subsumed under the broader category of the international (spatiality), capitalism under development (temporality), and international relations under unevenness/combination (interaction). The stretching of substantive social categories into space-time indifferent and invariant general abstractions was designed to formulate a meta-idiom for world-history as a whole. The dilution of the field of conceptuality at the highest level of abstraction held the prospect of providing a singular explanatory formula for recorded history – and possibly beyond. The adoption of UCD indicated therefore at the theoretical level though, as will be argued, not at the epistemological level, a break with earlier modes-of-production analysis. What are the intellectual liabilities of this project?<sup>62</sup>

This original reformulation re-energised the debate on IR and IHS in productive ways, but remains problematic and, ultimately, misleading on a least five counts:<sup>63</sup> (1) the elevation of UCD to a causal and transhistorical IR theory articulated as a universal law – a deductive-nomological covering law - modelled on the criteria of theory-production specified by Kenneth Waltz's positivistic conception of social theory; (2) an inability to meet the Waltzian law/theory distinction, resulting in the conflation of UCD as a law (identifying recurring patterns) and as an explanation (theory), rendering the argument circular and neutralising its capacity to explain social change; (3) the positing of "development" as the subject of history and a corresponding under-theorization of agency – in fact: the theoretically explicit externalisation of agency from the project, resulting in a failure to theoretically incorporate the human sources of change and development into UCD's premises;<sup>64</sup> (4) an inability to bridge the gap between theory and history, which manifests itself in an absolute opposition and dualism between a general and abstract explanatory theory – a universal *passee-partout* - and the specificities that surface in empirical narratives, which have to be either

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<sup>62</sup> For earlier criticisms of UCD see Teschke, *Marxism*, op. cit. in note 7, pp. 179-180; Teschke, "Advances and Impasses in Fred Halliday's International Historical Sociology: A Critical Appraisal", *International Affairs* (Vol. 87, No. 5, 2011), pp. 1087-1106.

<sup>63</sup> The debate in Marxist IR theory on UCD remains largely confined to this original conception. The major disagreements revolve around whether it applies to world history at large (Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 52; Matin, op.cit. in note 60), to the capitalist period exclusively (Neil Davidson, "China: Unevenness, Combination, Revolution", in B. Dunn and H. Radice, (eds.), *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, (London: Pluto, 2006), pp. 211–29; Sam Ashman "Capitalism, Uneven and Combined Development and the Transhistoric", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 22, No. 1, 2009), pp. 29–46, or subliminally for the pre-capitalist period, becoming fully activated during the capitalist period (Jamie Allinson and Alex Anievas, "The Uses and Misuses of Uneven and Combined Development: An Anatomy of a Concept", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 22, No. 1, 2009), pp. 47–67). More critically, Ray Kiely, "Spatial Hierarchy and/or Contemporary Geopolitics: What Can and Can't Uneven and Combined Development Explain?", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 25, No. 2, 2012), pp.231-48.

<sup>64</sup> Other readings of Trotsky's notion of UCD retrieve the centrality of social relations and class conflict from its original conception. Benjamin Selwyn, "Trotsky, Gerschenkron and the Political Economy of Late Capitalist Development", *Economy & Society* (Vol. 40, No. 3, 2011), pp. 421-450. Still, acknowledging the efficacy of agency as the ultimate arbiter over the form and direction of social change does not seem to translate into challenging the theoretical status of UCD as a law.

subsumed under the general law, ignored, or declared extra-theoretical, rendering the approach empirically opportunistic, confirmationist and self-validating; and (5) the ontological, rather than provisional or heuristic character of extrapolated concepts as “general abstractions”, a hollowing out of their explanatory power, and a corresponding reification and ontologisation – rather than a historicisation – of the categories of the international, society, and development. The inflation of substantive social categories into space-time indifferent and invariant general abstractions deflated their historically specific meanings.

### *A Positivist Conception of Social Theory*

UCD’s self-definition as a universal law and its status as a general social theory of international relations are constructed and validated by conforming to Waltz’s three criteria of theory-production:<sup>65</sup> (i) the delimitation of a specific “object domain” or class of phenomena, here specified as the international; (ii) the identification of structured (and hence theorisable) inter-societal patterns of law-like behaviour and outcomes operating across this domain;<sup>66</sup> (iii) the non-inductive creative act, normally called a conjecture or hypothesis, of formulating a theory (a “brilliant intuition”), designed to explain the operation of these law-like regularities and how they determine actions and outcomes.

The reconstruction of HM in terms of UCD as IHS proceeds therefore on the meta-theoretical terrain defined by Waltz’s conception of social theory, informed by Positivism.<sup>67</sup> This specific conception of social theory, modelled on the classical example of the nomological natural sciences, appears as fundamentally secured, settled and non-controversial, or as *prima facie* consonant with Marx’s or Marxism’s idea of the conduct of social science. But this closure of the question of epistemology – how shall we construct theories in the social sciences? – in favour of positivism stands in sharp contrast to the three-decades old post-positivist IR debate, which reacted precisely against the shrinking of the meta-theoretical horizon to the rationalist-positivistic paradigm, subjecting it to a series of powerful

<sup>65</sup> Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 52, pp. 185-86.

<sup>66</sup> All international patterns? What these patterns contain substantively as vectors of transmission – geopolitics, war, trade, finance, ideas, technology, migration, culture, religion – remains unspecified and awaits unpacking for the operationalisation of UCD. This looseness proved attractive for non-Marxist scholars, as everything seemed to be covered by the general formula of interactivity, but slides either towards an eclectic (Weberian?) pluralism or towards an economic reductionism, if development is meant to be an economic category (division of labour, forces of production, or growth) from which all other international vectors of transmission can be “read off”. Which spheres of inter-active determination are singled out by UCD to avoid a relapse into *ad hoc* arguments or causal pluralism?

<sup>67</sup> “I adopt the second meaning of the term: Theories explain laws. This meaning does not accord with usage in much of traditional political theory, which is concerned more with philosophic interpretation than with theoretical explanation. It does correspond to the definition of the term in the natural sciences and in some of the social sciences, especially economics”. Waltz further specifies that a theory must be constructed through simplification, including the isolation, abstraction, aggregation and idealisation of facts. Kenneth Waltz, “Laws and Theories”, in Robert O Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) pp. 33-38.

criticisms.<sup>68</sup> The IR debate, in turn, drew on deeper and longer-standing controversies within HS, Marxism and the wider philosophy of the social sciences.<sup>69</sup> This included the standard charges against positivism of structuralism, determinism, and objectification. The recurring refrain, alive since the famous *Methodenstreit* (controversy on method) in Germany, as to why theory-production in the social sciences and history cannot be modelled on the natural sciences (the "unity of science" thesis) can be summed up in one phrase: the social world is a human and historical artifice pervaded with consciousness requiring non-positivistic modes of cognition.<sup>70</sup> While these debates and charges are not engaged, discussed or resolved in Rosenberg's work, they form the very core of the long-standing dispute between sociology and history – indeed: form the very epistemological controversy in HS – in terms of the tensions between "nomothetic" and "ideographic", "deductive" and "inductive", "generalising" and "particularising", "explanatory" and "interpretive" human sciences.<sup>71</sup> Are History and Historical Sociology part of the sciences or do they form part of the Arts and Humanities? Drastically simplified, this can be rendered in form of the question whether history is amenable to objectifying sociological covering laws or whether HS should proceed on non-positivist and historicist premises, including dialectics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, post-structuralism, pragmatics or other

<sup>68</sup> Richard Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism", in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 255-300; Rob B.J. Walker, "History and Structure in the Theory of International Relations", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, (Vol. 18, No. 2, 1989), pp. 163-183; Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Smith 1996, op. cit.; Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Positivism Dispute in German Sociology* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976); Richard Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976); Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1980); Edward P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (New Shepton Mallet: Open Books, 1982); Theda Skocpol, *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983); Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988); George Steinmetz (ed.), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Methodological Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> The *Methodenstreit* (Controversy on Method) started in the late 19th Century as a debate between the German Historical School of National Economy and the Austrian Theoretical School. It opposed the defenders of *Historismus* and its emphasis on the historically unique, specific and concrete against the defenders of the general, law-like and abstract, which came to be influenced by Positivism – a controversy between the "ideographic" and "nomothetic" currents in the social sciences. The *Methodenstreit* continued into the Weimar Republic and constituted economics as a 'pure science' and affected the discipline of sociology particularly through Max Weber. Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology: From Adam Smith to Max Weber* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Dimitris Miconakis and Ben Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007); Volker Kruse, 'Von der Historischen Nationalökonomie zur Historischen Soziologie: Ein Paradigmenwechsel in den Deutschen Sozialwissenschaften um 1900', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* (Vol. 19, No.3, 1990), pp. 149-165.

<sup>71</sup> More recently see Craig Calhoun, "Explanation in Historical Sociology: Narrative, General Theory, and Historically Specific Theory", *American Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 104, No.3, 1998), pp. 846-871; William Sewall, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

epistemological traditions. In some cases, the gap between theory and history was deemed to be so unbridgeable that a retreat into more narrative modes and thick descriptions (even a return to classic historiography as “poetic” story-telling), which emphasise the subjective, unique and specific, was advocated. This centers the wider question of the relation between theory and history, which continues to plague the contemporary IR and non-IR Marxist discourse. For here as there, the perceived need towards scientific formalisation re-creates the opposition between the objectification of social (including diplomatic) praxes subject to higher laws and logics and the turn towards history for concrete analyses. The puzzle as to how to square the explanatory emphasis accorded to impersonal developmental tendencies, logics, or laws of motion with the conscious activity of historical actors, their subjectivities and inter-subjectivities, for purposes of IR inquiry remains an enduring one. But sine this social-scientific ur-problem is not grasped as destabilising the fundamental self-understanding of UCD (in IR), it keeps oscillating between these two poles, while ultimately coming firmly down on the “nomothetic” side.

Listing these controversies is not meant to overwhelm the reader pointlessly, but to suggest that the central puzzle is not to recognise that world history is multi-linear, uneven, and interactive, but to probe the question on what meta-theoretical basis we can start to theorise or interpret dynamic relations between polities, which themselves undergo change, over time. The refusal to penetrate the question of IHS epistemologically, rather than just sociologically, comes at a significant cost. For by implying that meta-theoretical questions are either irrelevant or fundamentally settled, by abstaining from addressing these epistemological divides – constitutive of the very project of IR, HS, and Marxism – and by adopting Waltz’s criteria for theory-production as an apparently self-evident social-scientific standard of validation and respectability, an epistemological void opens up which aligns UCD in IR, no longer by default but now by design, with positivism.<sup>72</sup>

But even on its own Waltzian terms, UCD remains ambiguous, equivocal and, ultimately, tautological. At times, the enormity of UCD’s status as universal causal theory seems to invite doubts and prevarications over the question whether

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<sup>72</sup> Steve Smith, “Rearranging the Deckchairs on the Ship Called Modernity: Rosenberg, Epistemology and Emancipation”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 23, No. 2, 1994), pp. 395-415. The recent attempt to provide such philosophical premises – an *ex post factum* re-attachment of dialectics to a nomothetic conception of social theory, now embraced following Trotsky, but reprimanded in extant IR dialectic thought for not having an ontological notion of the international – relapses into the addition of a sociological (but not philosophical) extra premise: multiplicity. Paradoxically, while stating that dialectical thinking requires a move towards concrete concept-formation in order to come to terms with the triple non-identity between a phenomenon and its concept (with itself over time, with other phenomena in a class of similar phenomena, and with its conceptual abstraction), Rosenberg fails to draw the conclusion of this correct observation for UCD’s own general abstractions (the international, society, development), all of which retain a static and universal meaning. Justin Rosenberg, “The ‘Philosophical Premises’ of Uneven and Combined Development”, *Review of International Studies* (Vol. 3, No. 39, 2013), pp. 569-597.



it adheres to a descriptive or a causal register, embracing over time a decidedly causal idiom littered with categories like “explanation”, “mechanism”, “knock-on effects”. This uncertainty resides in the indistinguishability between the structured and law-like patterns operating between “societies” and the theory meant to explain them. Criteria (ii) of Waltz’s stipulations for theory production, the identification of observable empirical generalisations (laws), and (iii) the non-inductive formulation of a theory capable of explaining these laws, are collapsed into each other. The illogical and circular result is that UCD explains UCD. The uneven and combined developmental patterns of inter-societal relations double over as their own explanation, rendering description and causation identical and synonymous.<sup>73</sup> UCD is therefore simultaneously, but unwittingly, presented as a law (a collection of observable empirical regularities) and a theory (a statement that explains them). This renders the construction tautological, since it remains unclear what drives uneven and combined development. Which theory, in Waltz’s sense, explains UCD?<sup>74</sup>

But if the law is descriptive, as suggested in some earlier and more cautious formulations, it follows that we have to look elsewhere to identify its explanatory core, which must now exist outside its nomological reach.<sup>75</sup> If the law is causal, as more confident passages assert, then international history is necessarily governed automatically *ex machina* by the overriding explanatory power of one universal law.<sup>76</sup> The unresolved question as to whether causality is fully internal to the core premises of UCD generates modifications and protective clauses: “The causal weight of this “law” – that societies do not develop in isolation – is variable; one cannot specify in the abstract the relative scale or qualitative form of its influence”.<sup>77</sup> Notwithstanding this qualification, the central argument that UCD contains as a general theory of IR all the explanatory elements necessary to explain the course of history is never revoked. In fact, the sequence of publications, since the idea was first launched, mounts ever-rising claims to its universal validity. Yet, to bridge this gap between the general abstraction and the historically concrete, UCD needs to bring in “auxiliary and intermediate concepts” for its operationalisation, some covered and others not by the law of UCD, to enable a firmer grasp when investigating historically more specific social relations, modes of power, political spatiality, and diplomacy.<sup>78</sup> At times, there are open admissions of UCD’s explanatory breakdown, as “not every late-developing society is able to take advantage of this privilege of historic backwardness”.<sup>79</sup> If not, why not? Presumably for reasons external to the theoretical reach of UCD. And this would demand a relaxation, re-formulation or abandonment of its standing as a universal law. For the point of a social-scientific

<sup>73</sup> Ray Kiely, *Rethinking Imperialism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan) p. 269.

<sup>74</sup> “Rather than being mere collections of laws, theories are statements that explain them.” Waltz, op. cit. in note 67, p. 32.

<sup>75</sup> Rosenberg, “Why is there no International Historical Sociology”, op.cit. in note 52, p. 319.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 320; Rosenberg, “Kenneth Waltz and Leon Trotsky”, op.cit. in note 52.

<sup>77</sup> Rosenberg, “Why is there no International Historical Sociology”, op.cit. in note 52, p. 319.

<sup>78</sup> Matin, op.cit. in note 60, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 72, p. 585.

law is that it holds. Ultimately, the explanatory bottom drops out of UCD as a theory of IHS. For the purpose of formulating a general law at the highest level of abstraction remains unclear if both the substantive practices that drive its operation – that explain uneven and combined development – and the substantive practices that nullify its impact are conveniently by-passed and cannot be specified in the abstract, in fact: lie outside the theory's ambit. How causal and how universal is the law?

If this line of reasoning holds, i.e. that theory (explanation) and observable patterns (law-like generalities) are collapsed into each other, it also becomes apparent that UCD contains no theoretical categories to account for change. For the notions of "advance" and "backwardness", coupled to the notions of the "whip of external necessity" and "the privilege of backwardness", are temporal metaphors for unevenness, which stand themselves in need of explanation. Likewise, the category of development is only a *result* of social change (a manifestation of social change) and never the cause of change in itself. This suggests that the subject of change has to be re-anchored in a category outside UCD: "human practice".<sup>80</sup> And since the theoretical premises of UCD – development, unevenness, combination – are explicitly evacuated of social agency and socio-historical content, it cannot, despite its stated objective of explaining interactive change over time, account for change, unevenness, and differences. As UCD cannot explain UCD and as it fails to respect Waltz's law/theory distinction, it is fundamentally barred from explaining not only social change, but development itself – not to mention non-development and de-development. What these reflections reveal is that the formula constitutes maximally a general and descriptive summing up of results (where they hold). What is missing is a theoretical premise that accounts for UCD, for it forms itself the *explanandum* which requires an *explanans*. UCD relapses therefore into the same kind of circularity that globalisation theorists were rightly charged with falling prey to. "In the logical structure of their argumentation, what presents itself initially as the *explanandum* – globalisation as the developing outcome of some historical process – is progressively transformed into the *explanans*: it is globalisation which now explains the changing character of the modern world."<sup>81</sup> If we replace the term globalisation with UCD, the same logical trap opens up. In the end, UCD takes for granted what demands explanation and begs the question of the subject of social

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<sup>80</sup> "All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice." "This manner of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and fixity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions". Karl Marx, cited in Derek Sayer (ed.), *Readings from Karl Marx* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 5-6 and 9. For an early mobilisation Marx's notion of praxis for the analysis of international relations and of dialectics as an epistemological mode of apprehension of reality and procedure of concept-formation, see Christian Heine and Benno Teschke, "Sleeping Beauty and the Dialectical Awakening: On the Potential of Dialectic for International Relations", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 25, No. 2, 1996), pp. 399-423.

<sup>81</sup> Justin Rosenberg, *The Follies of Globalisation Theory: Polemical Essays* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 3.

change. And if that question cannot be answered, the snake keeps chasing its own tail.

*Clio's Cave Reloaded: Theory over History, Structure over Agency*

This tension between causation and description – better: the absorption of explanation into observable regularities – manifests itself not only at the level of a problematic conception of theory and its equivocal reach. It becomes even stronger when the nomological-deductive conception of theory is applied to specific historical cases, generating an absolute opposition between a nomothetical theoreticism – the objective laws of motion of uneven and combined development – and a subsequent switch towards either a theoretically essentially unsecured or arbitrary historical register in concrete analyses. UCD, to recall, does not aim to withdraw into a self-sufficient and abstract theoreticism, which disavows historical research and interrogation. It is meant to explain history and should therefore, though this is nowhere stated, be subject to the standard criteria of disproof and falsification through the testing of its retrodictions (and presumably predictions) in dialogue with empirical evidence and counter-evidence – the historical method in the sense of the logic of historical research as the final court of appeal. If these non-confirmationist empirical controls are not taken seriously, then another form of circularity beckons, as the conclusions (of historical research) are already contained in the theoretical premises.

But how do theoretical presuppositions and empirical data relate to each other in UCD? Here, several strategies seem to be in operation, sometimes individually, sometimes simultaneously. (i) The switch to history either marshals, corrals, and regiments the historical material deductively (i.e. reasoning from an aprioristic axiomatic set of premises) and selectively (for no empirical analysis can fully grasp the complete panoply of external and internal determinations of any specific process or event) to establish an alignment with the theoretical presuppositions. This form of self-validation immunises theory against empirical surprises and arranges history in accordance with a pre-conceived theory. "As such, this stands as a view of history as the eternal underlaborer – a source of data to be mined as theoretical abstractions demand".<sup>82</sup> Theoretical determinacy leads to empirical determinacy. Selection bias excludes those instances and episodes that do not comply with theoretical presuppositions. This is the (ab-)use of history as proof. (ii) Alternatively, it acknowledges empirical contingencies and messiness in a more open-ended register, pretending that this leaves the theoretical premises undisturbed and intact at a "higher level of abstraction" by retreating into ever thinner generalisations, which simultaneously undermine their explanatory power. Here, messiness and contingencies are externalised as non-theorisable (because they are not "patterned"), forming an un-accounted for empiricist excess, while theory retreats into the unassailable citadel of the general

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<sup>82</sup> Hobson, Lawson, Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 12, p. 3361.

abstraction. Specificity is precluded from interacting with and potentially challenging the theoretical apparatus that guides research. As no conceptual net, a likely retort would suggest, is sufficiently close-meshed and can be cast wide enough to capture the *infinitesima* of historical complexity, much catch would simply slip through the meshes. Theoretical determinacy leads to empirical indeterminacy. This is not the use of history as disproof, as required by the historical method, but the (ab-)use of history as extra-theoretical surplus to intra-theoretical requirement. (iii) Finally, specificities and contingencies are neutralised by their capture through a series of infinite *ad hoc* additions to the nomological base-line – the patching up of holes in the wide-meshed conceptual net. Empirical indeterminacy leads to theoretical indeterminacy.

In any case, significant degrees of violence have to be done to the richness of history to orchestrate a “fit” between theory and history. Ultimately, however, theory and history drift apart, inhabiting two different forms of reality, licensing a dualism – causally deductive explanation here, unsecured and opportunistic empirical description there – constantly littered with protective clauses. The result is a growing gap between a rigid conception of a structural theory, which proscribes causal regularities that should engender identical effects across time and space, and an arbitrary mobilisation of agential history leading to either theoretical confirmation, extra-theoretical dismissal of specificities, or theoretical ad hocery. And this reveals the great absence and the missing link between theory and history: an epistemological emphasis on agency and praxis. For while historical agency is radically expunged from the theoretical premises of UCD, the switch to historical description amply repopulates the social landscape with agents, if primarily, as we will see in a moment, as exemplifications of a super-ordinate logic. While agency is powerfully detailed empirically, it is not admitted and problematised theoretically. This drives a wedge between theory and history, as theory forms an irrefutable conceptual *a priori*.

If the relation between theoretical presuppositions and historical-empirical research is precarious, the relation between theory and agency is asymmetric. It belongs, perhaps, to the standard responses of anyone who thinks dialectically to remind us of an old paradox: the tighter laws in the social sciences are formulated, the more agency is squeezed out – the more the chances for conscious change are reduced – in fact: ruled out. Indeed, the tighter sociological laws are articulated, the lesser the chances to use critical social science as a guide to action: as a strategic guide to emancipatory intervention on the terrain of political struggle. Social science turns affirmative by positing social-scientific laws outside any authorship, rendering agency – social, political, intellectual – passive, supine and compliant. Something similar applies to the objectification of agency and rationality (subjectivity) in UCD. For with the relapse of UCD as a world-historical law into a type of methodological positivism—a general nomological-deductive covering law—that operates behind the backs of humans, an understanding of IHS (and social science) emerges which, quite contrary to the original promise of

socialising and historicising the rich variety of (geo-)political rationalities in IHS, relapses into a structurally derived, closed and unitary conception of rationality and agency.

For how is agency conceptualised in UCD? What is posited as the subject of history are not human beings in their concrete social relations, but rather "the super-entity of human social development as a whole".<sup>83</sup> And since development is by definition uneven, multi-linear, and combined, it is UCD itself which poses as the subject of history. This move performs the classical inversion of the relation between subjects and predicates, which Marx objected to in his critique of Hegel's positing of the Spirit as the mega-subject of history. For in UCD it is development *per se* that operates analogously as the mega-subject of history, while people are conceived as mere predicates, acting out the imperatives of inter-societal development as appendices. Marx, of course, suggested turning this procedure around: positing practical human beings in their social relations who create, or maybe not, development.

And what kind of conception of political agency does UCD imply? If the collective subject of the course of history is development itself, then – thus spoke the law – it follows that politicians and diplomats (Caesar, Napoleon, Palmerston, Bismarck) appear as the proverbial Hegelian managers of the world-spirit on UCD's horse-back. Either "state-managers" have to be conceived as fully-cognisant, omniscient, and rational actors, which grasp, digest, and process all information and determinations arising from the uneven and combined character of their domestic and geopolitical contexts to pre-ordained ends ("whip of external necessity"/"privilege of backwardness"), or they have to be conceptualised as fully determined and empty throughputs, processing social and geopolitical data automatically as executioners of a logic beyond their volition and comprehension ("the cunning of UCD"). In this perspective, people are reduced to bearers of ulterior structural determinations as decisions are not made, but simply result. Decisions – policies – are presented as outcomes in an input-throughput-output model. But no decision can ever be fully resolved back into its antecedent preconditions, as context never translates on a one-to-one basis into text. This requires the historian not to assume that an outcome was preordained by a "rational" and "law-like" reaction to context (international and domestic), but to take the option of a disjuncture between the totality (provided this could ever be established *ex post factum*) of causal conditions which preceded any event or decision, and the outcome of that event or decision seriously. Inter-societal and cross-societal determinations can never function as antecedent structural causes which determine a specific course of action, as they can maximally specify the causally enabling conditions of possibility within which agency takes place. The

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<sup>83</sup> Rosenberg, "Why is there no International Historical Sociology", op. cit. in note 52, p. 332. Again, Selwyn's counter-reading is instructive as the specific resolution of social conflicts determines whether or not the "whip of external necessity" holds causally and whether its effects turn into the disadvantages rather than advantages of backwardness. However, if the locus of explanation travels to socio-political conflicts, UCD's status as a universal causal law loses its meaning by turning into an "opportunity". It then emerges that the law of UCD is inherently indeterminate. Selwyn, op. cit. in note 64.

efficacy or non-efficacy of structures is only revealed in and through social practices and cannot be pre-judged. A denial of this would re-invite the standard charge of structural-functionalism: outcomes are a function of the structural determinations of UCD. And behind this lurks the tacit idea that human activity and its effects, whether intended or unintended, can have no effect on the general law. Yet, subjectivity cannot be simply "read off" structural configurations of socio-political relations in the sense of cause and effect, as situated agents – individually and collectively – draw on and develop repertoires of experiences, which do not simply combine existing power relations into "amalgamations", but attempt to modify, circumvent and "escape" structural imperatives – often with unintended consequences. In the process, innovation – or indeterminacy – is a constant possibility.<sup>84</sup> Social agency is therefore not something that enters the historical analysis from without – as a static and pre-defined agential rationality or as an empty vessel – but something that requires constant historicisation and specification in relational contexts from within. Agents "interpret" structural imperatives in historically distinct ways. This implies a hermeneutic move.

This absence of an active notion of political agency in UCD amounts, by inference, to the erasure of any significance and partial autonomy granted to statecraft, strategy, diplomacy, and the formation of foreign policy.<sup>85</sup> Where this is descriptively admitted in UCD, it is not theoretically covered by UCD. In this sense, UCD appears as a general IR theory without politics, diplomacy and geopolitics, shadowing again its Neo-Realist model. The course of history appears thus not only de-subjectified and de-socialised, it is fundamentally de-politicised. The real subjects, human beings, are demoted to the status of predicates. Individuals appear as personifications of social-scientific categories.

UCD articulates a meta-historical law whose scientific connotations translate into a structuralism—similar to Neo-Realism—which reduces agency to

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<sup>84</sup> Samuel Knafo, "Critical Approaches and the Legacy of the Agent/Structure Debate in International Relations", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 23, No.3, 2010), pp. 493-516.

<sup>85</sup> And this raises a series of more straightforward logical and historical questions, which cannot be resolved from within UCD's own theoretical premises: What, for example, if a more "advanced" but power-politically smaller polity – say the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Low Countries after independence – faces less "advanced" but power-politically stronger polities – like Old Regime France, leading to near-defeat of the Dutch? Does this suspend the logic of the whip of external necessity, lashed by theoretical fiat by the more advanced over the less advanced polity? What if two less "advanced" polities, like late 18<sup>th</sup> France and the pre-independence American settler colonies form an alliance against a more "advanced" polity, Britain, leading to British defeat? What if a more "advanced" polity, say 18<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, forms an alliance with a smaller more "backward" polity, say Prussia, enabling in the Seven Years' War its survival against a mixed coalition (France, Russia, Austria) of more advanced/backward states vis-à-vis Prussia? What if a more "advanced" polity, say early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, forms a mixed alliance with more backward polities, like Russia, Austria and Prussia (institutionalised in the Congress of Vienna) to re-impose and freeze for strategic reasons "backwardness" (dynastic legitimacy, restoration, social repression) in Central and Eastern Europe? Is this a case of international de-development? Diplomacy, strategy, and alliance formation are always acts of calculated statecraft, which cut across the directional developmental logic of advance and backwardness and cannot be "read off" the mechanistic general law of UCD. And according to what criteria do we know whether one polity is more advanced than another?

the faithful enactment of imperatives beyond human control or volition.<sup>86</sup> Historical development is conceived as a subjectless and autogenerative process operating outside and above the wills of social agents. What counts as an explanation is the accumulation of international and domestic determinations which reduce the room of manoeuvre for agency to zero. While structural imperatives are a constant in human history, they cannot be conceived as translating into "logics of action" which fully explain outcomes, as these imperatives are always refracted through individual and collective social agency – some conscious, some less so – open to diverse and non-derivable results. According to UCD, however, outcomes in the social world appear as deduced from antecedent causes, leading to a conceptualization of agency as fully determined, passive–receptive and, ultimately, non-agential. In fact, agency is not deemed to be a category that requires separate theoretical attention. It is rather relegated to the sphere of historical description, as agents enter the equation only as bearers and dupes of laws outside their grasp and imagination. It is therefore hard to see how UCD conceptualizes politics and geopolitics, other than as a derivative and automatic response to the intertwining of outside and inside pressures, instead of reading both as contested and purposive praxes, which contain multiple moments of indeterminacy. UCD is not the law that governs historical change, it is an abstraction from the plurality of historical trajectories and their interrelations that stand in need of explanation through the specification of their real dynamics, grounded in human praxis. But in UCD, praxis appears objectified. In this sense, UCD is meta-theoretically of a piece with the modes-of-production structuralism operative in the *Empire of Civil Society*.

### *Of General Abstractions and Marxist Concept-Formation*

This gap between theory and history – between abstraction and concretion – seems to find a Marxist resolution as the law of UCD, plus sundry other categories, is justified with recourse to the procedure of "general abstraction" apocryphally modelled on Karl Marx's notes in the *Grundrisse* on "production-in-general".<sup>87</sup> Here, Marx starts by insisting that "whenever we speak of production, then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development – production by social individuals".<sup>88</sup> Marx continues by speculating that it might be helpful to identify the elements which are "common" or "general" to all production. Production-in-General as a transhistorical category may be useful, Marx suggests, as a "rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition". In analogy, UCD is developed as a general abstraction to extricate the common element in world history – the multiplicity of political collectivities and their interactive uneven development across time and space.

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<sup>86</sup> "Inter-societal order is an emergent, autopoietic property of social reproduction." Rosenberg, op.cit. in note 52, p. 323.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>88</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 85.

But what fails to transpire in the handling of general abstractions in UCD is that Marx proceeds to qualify and ultimately reject the procedure of general abstraction as bourgeois mystification, since the historically specific determinations of concrete production cannot be grasped by the general abstraction. There is a non-correspondence between the general abstraction and the multiple and dissimilar phenomena from which the general concept is abstracted from. As classical political economy had naturalised and mystified capitalist production by conflating it with production-in-general, production pure and simple or production *per se*, Marx opposed the procedure of trans-historical concept-formation by insisting on the de-naturalisation and historicisation of concepts as pertaining to historically specific social relations. For "this *general* category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations (...)" and "just those things which determine their development, i.e. the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity (...) their essential difference is not forgotten." And Marx concludes that "if there is no production in general, then there is also no general production", "(...) the so-called *general preconditions* of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped".<sup>89</sup> In fact, the move towards the general abstraction as the object of knowledge either suppresses or distorts the move towards historical concretion. For where the journey from the general abstraction to any historically concrete manifestation is undertaken, the general abstraction either loses its status as a general explanatory formula, as the "explanation" is of necessity re-anchored in historically specific social relations (revealing in the process the general abstraction as a mystification), or reifies historical agents by aligning their activities and subjectivities with the logic of the abstract pre-supposition: mere bearers of laws.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pp. 85, 88.

<sup>90</sup> The process of abstraction implies therefore abstracting out a singular feature from a class of phenomena to render it amenable to a higher and more encompassing category by disregarding all other features. Waltz exemplifies this, when he suggests that theory-construction involves simplification through the isolation, abstraction, aggregation and idealisation of facts. In this sense, for example, the conception of humans in classical political economy, *homo oeconomicus* as a utility-maximiser, is constructed by emphasising, exaggerating and absolutising certain features of humans in a one-sided manner, while others – all other features of humans' subjectivity – are ignored. This not only reduces the richness of human subjectivity to a false essence of economic calculation, but objectifies and reifies human beings by rendering the conception of wo/man functional to a market economy. Subjects become objects. Through this reductionist procedure, the conception of humans is rendered compatible with and is subjected to the law-like imperatives of the economy, enabling the modelling, formalisation, and even mathematisation of human behaviour. Everything else is externalised as non-generalisable and therefore non-theorisable in positivistic version of the social sciences. The danger in conceiving the task of the social sciences as the formation of abstractions, and *a fortiori* general abstractions, resides therefore in the positing of these abstractions as external objectifications to which human activity is theoretically rendered compliant. And if it turns out to be non-compliant, it is ignored or declared irrational and extra-theoretical. In this sense, the abstraction constitutes idealism, divorced from reality. The same procedure is at play in Waltz's abstract conception of international anarchy – another idealism.



Analogously, as "bourgeois" IR Theory – here in the form of Waltz - elevates the notion of international systemic structure (plus anarchy, the security-dilemma, and the balance-of-power) to a timeless condition and therefore Neo-Realism to a transhistorical theory of IR, UCD affirms and reinforces this "bourgeois" form of concept-formation by accepting "the international" pure and simple as a transhistorical category *sub specie aeternitatis*, defined as "more-than-one society" – a numerical definition of the international, in which quality is replaced by quantity.<sup>91</sup> The corollary of complying with the demands of "bourgeois" universal concept-formation is that the general abstraction is, by definition, devoid of any social content and must appear as a flat tautology due to its very generality: the higher the abstraction, the thinner its historical content, the more obvious its character as an a-historic and even anti-historic abstraction. The danger in definitionally fixing the essence of a particular phenomenon resides in the tendency of retreating into ever more inessential, i.e. empty, un-historical, disembodied, and abstract (here understood in its common and vernacular meaning of "vague"), over-generalisations and truisms.

And a second dilemma follows: as with mainstream IR theorists' concept of the timeless category of the international, the historical and the transhistorical are conflated in UCD's deployment of the international (and any other universal category). For what Marx, according to Derek Sayer, reacted against when he criticised the bourgeois economists' fetishisation of concepts applies here *pari passu*: "That same double dehistoricizing is manifest: ignoring the concept's roots in a particular form of society goes along with universalisation of properties of that society under the guise of pure conceptual abstraction", yielding the verities of Realist lore: the international is the international is the international.<sup>92</sup> Thus semantically neutered, these supra-historical abstractions generate either analytical anachronisms (as we will show in a moment), as they operate with a modernist vocabulary that is essentially abstracted from a specific historical context, and retrojected and super-imposed on world-history at large. Or they disappear into the sphere of space-time indifferent and transcendental categories with which no specific historical phenomenon can be grasped.<sup>93</sup> The first option re-invites the quintessential historical-sociological charge of chrono-fetishism and tempo-centrism.<sup>94</sup> The second option drifts towards an idealism similar to Platonic

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<sup>91</sup> General abstractions, as opposed to Marx's concrete abstractions, are therefore similar to Max Weber's procedure of sociological ideal-type formation, which also extricate and distil typical features from a wide variety of historical phenomena into a concentrated pure type, claiming general heuristic, but not causal or law-like, validity.

<sup>92</sup> Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytic Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 141.

<sup>93</sup> In his critique of Althusser, Edward Thompson comments that "such idealism consists, not in the positing or denial of the primacy of an ulterior material world, but in a self-generating conceptual universe which imposes its own ideality upon the phenomena of material and social existence, rather than engaging in continual dialogue with these. (...) The category has attained to a primacy over its material referent; the conceptual structure hangs above and dominates social being." Edward P. Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory: Or an Orrery of Errors", in E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays* (London: Merlin, 1978), p. 205.

<sup>94</sup> Hobden and Hobden, op. cit. in note 6.

ideas or, to the degree that it connotes an abstraction from world history, Weberian ideal-types. Yet, an obsession with essentialist ontology (seeking to fix the essence of things definitionally) is misplaced, as phenomena result only in our cumulative social interaction historically. For what was the definition of the international? More than one society! But what is a society?

Marxist IR theory's procedure of concept-formation should therefore not aspire to the formulation of the notion of the international – or any other category – in general as free-floating devices, but invites us towards a process of specification through constantly adjusting and narrowing the distance between a phenomenon and its concept. Classically, this was envisioned by Marx as a process of cognitive concretisation from the real-abstract, the empirical object, to the thought-concrete, the concept, which successively narrows the non-identity between the object of investigation and the concept as a concrete concept.<sup>95</sup> This can be understood as the dialectical method of concept-formation as a "mode of apprehension" of reality.<sup>96</sup> This procedure of concept-formation serves the purpose of historicising, socialising and specifying concepts by laying bare the human authorship grounded in historically distinct social relations and praxes which, at any moment in time, construct phenomena, including political geography, in infinitely variable ways. This points to a radically historicist method of concept-formation.

The objective is to understand the international and any other phenomena not as analytically abstract but as historically concrete and therefore specific categories, grounded in historically concrete praxes of political geographies. The purpose of concept-formation is not to work up towards ever more general categories, which once locked into a rigorous definition abstracted from history, inhabit an *Ideenhimmel* (a heaven of ideas) which subsequently descends back on earth by rendering social phenomena compliant with their ideality (the subsumption model of covering laws), but to develop a historicist sensibility which constantly forces concept-formation to "keep sailing close to the wind". This implies keep reducing the non-identity between concept and phenomenon through a process of approximation by developing historically specific categories. This means that empirical research must actually alter theoretical concepts. This can

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<sup>95</sup> Marx, op. cit. in note 88, p. 101.

<sup>96</sup> "Ontological essences, understood as timeless structures, are fundamentally opposed to the very process of historical becoming. In the sixth thesis on Feuerbach, Marx emphasises that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of human relations." As these ensembles are ever-changing, the conceptual comprehension of this flux – in order to fend off the danger of conceptual abstractions and concomitant reifications – has to come to terms with this flux "fluently": Three conclusions follow: (1) science (thinking) is on the wrong track if it sees its primary purpose as the pursuit of positive and universal social laws, or in "once-and-for-all" definitions; (2) concepts have to remain malleable and open for new concretisations; (3) the process of conceptual thinking can therefore never be terminated." Heine and Teschke, 1996, op. cit. in note 80, p. 414. Thompson embraced the notion of dialectics as a "mode of apprehension of a fluent and contradictory eventuation", but conceived it more as a learned and intuitive craft of the practising historian, resistant to abstract formalisation. E.P. Thompson, 1978, op. cit. in note 93, p. 305.

be performed by tracing the changing form of the object of inquiry as a relational contradiction-in-motion without relapsing into conceptual closure, fixed definitions, and reifications. If general abstractions are not handled as heuristic devices and brought in dialogue with evidence and counter-evidence, but remain charged *a priori* with fixed definitional content and elevated to explanatory formulas of universal reach, then their apparent rigour turns quickly into *rigor mortis*.

"Categories are the abstract ideal expression of (...) social relations. Indeed, the categories are no more eternal than the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products. There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement – *mors immortalis* (immortal death)".<sup>97</sup>

Let us exemplify and clarify the two ways of concept-formation – the idealist-subsumptionist and the dialectical. Marxism and many other non-Marxist traditions in the social sciences and historiography operate with abstract categories, like feudalism, capitalism, bourgeois revolution, hegemony, or absolutism, the state, the market, territoriality, diplomacy, foreign policy, understood as heuristic devices or ideal-types, which spell out their ideality in a fairly general definition, meant to capture a class of fairly similar real-empirical phenomena. Thereafter, however, the two modes of concept-formation diverge. For whereas in the subsumptionist mode the research process is organised towards the confirmation of the general category or the covering law (the research objective), rendering the empirical data compliant with the general presupposition or disqualifying anomalies or counter-evidence as un-theorisable empiricist excess, the dialectical mode suggests a different strategy. For it brings these general categories into a dialogue with the empirical evidence – perhaps a banal point, but one that is routinely forgotten – by the careful application of the method of historical research and the testing of concepts against the historiographical evidence. This cannot take the form of a biased selection of confirmationist cases (which only validates the abstract category), but needs to be prosecuted, ideally, against the full array of confirming and non-confirming empirical cases (minimally two) in an open-ended process of research. History (empirical controls), in the form of diachronic and synchronic comparisons of specific cases, provides a crucial corrective to the logic of generalisation.<sup>98</sup> For this turn to history involves not only taking historical scholarship and evidence seriously (a massive task for the social scientist in itself), it implies resisting the

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<sup>97</sup> Karl Marx, "Letter from Marx to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov", in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 38: Letters of Marx and Engels 1846 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1975), p. 95.

<sup>98</sup> This is exemplarily shown in Robert Brenner's famous demonstration that general structural pressures in late medieval and early modern Europe – demographic and commercial – generated widely diverging results in different regions of Europe (France, England, East-Elbia), as these pressures were refracted through different prevailing social relations and social conflicts in each region. Robert Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism", in T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 213-327.

structuralist urge to assimilate and subsume different cases under the over-generalising remit of the general category.

Dialectical concept-formation proceeds thus inversely through a process of conceptual specification, clarification and concretisation, which tests, refines, revises and, if necessary, abandons the general abstraction. In the process of the journey from the abstraction to the concretion, the general category loses its ideality as different cases of feudalism, absolutism, capitalism or bourgeois revolutions (or state, the market, territoriality, diplomacy, foreign policy) may or may not evince significant differences in their empirical manifestations. The purpose of this procedure is not to first acknowledge and then cavalierly retract (or abstract from) specificities – by either demoting variations to variations on a common theme, or by degrading specificities to extra-theoretical contingencies, or by smuggling in separate orders of reality (captured by systematic sociology or general IR theory here and specific historiography there, inhabiting two different epistemological universes). The purpose is rather to bring out, emphasise and theoretically anchor these peculiarities by retrieving the social agency which accounts for synchronic and diachronic inter-case differences, rather than cross-case identities. And this emphasis on social construction also dynamises a static category as a processual category – a historical category – whose fixed definitional essence loses its stability and heuristic value as it permutes over time and in space. The trajectories of feudalism and absolutism in “France” and “England” were different; medieval territoriality is unlike modern territoriality; the “bourgeois revolutions” in a variety of countries cannot be subsumed under the same general category; British 19<sup>th</sup> Century hegemony turns out to be hardly discernable and was very different from US hegemony; American capitalism is very different from German capitalism, etc.<sup>99</sup> And the explanation for these differences does not reside in the abstract but in the specific, re-admitting social praxes to the center of the analysis.

This procedure, then, applies not only to “static” categories, but also to “categories of movement” – Marxist and non-Marxist alike – like “the laws of motion” or other “tendencies” of the feudal or capitalist modes of production.

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<sup>99</sup> The *Myth of 1648* applied this procedure to the cases of feudalism and absolutism. Chapter two sets out a general and abstract theory of feudalism as a heuristic device, while chapter 3 moves from this generality to particularities, which are not derived from or subsumed under the abstract category, but “explained” through the recourse to historically concrete social relations and conflicts by switching to spatio-temporal specificities. The same is done for the idealised category of absolutism in chapter 5. And the same is done in chapter 8 against the Neo-Weberian concept of military rivalry, which suggests that early modern geopolitical competition isomorphically directs processes of state-formation towards the ideal-type of the “fiscal-military state”. History is here not regarded as an illustration or exemplification of a pre-conceived logic, but the necessary dialogical partner in the business of more concrete concept-formations. Teschke, op.cit. in note 17. The same procedure is pursued in the Deutscher Lecture for the category of “bourgeois revolution”. Teschke, 2005, op. cit. in note 56. And the same procedure is pursued by Hannes Lacher and Julian Germann with respect to US and British hegemony, see Lacher and Germann, “Before Hegemony: Britain, Free Trade, and Nineteenth-Century World Order Revisited”, *International Studies Review* (Vol.14, No.1, 2012), pp. 99-124.

Here, again, the objective is to test these general categories against the empirical material, drawn from a variety of cases in a comparative perspective, and refine, adapt or abandon these general categories when found out of sync with the real-empirical.<sup>100</sup> This implies that specific "instances" or "examples" cannot be simply subsumed under the general category (which fetishises and reifies the phenomenon under investigation), leaving the latter intact, but inversely, that the ultimate cognitive aim leads back to the conversion of generality into specificity. As the expectations derived from the general category are often, though not necessarily always, confounded by counter-evidence, we are *per force* led back to asking why these "anomalies" recur. And this disconnection between theoretical expectation and empirical counter-evidence forces us to retrieve human agency as the final source of differences, accounting for these variations and specificities.

This does not imply the abandonment of "theory" for "empiricism", re-inviting the charge, recurrently raised by the defenders of the Marxist orthodoxy, of an intellectual abdication to randomisation, contingency, and messiness and the overwhelming of theory by narrative.<sup>101</sup> It rather exhorts us to establish, epistemologically, that human beings in their social relations – in their diverse praxes – are the starting-point and end-point in the process of investigation.<sup>102</sup> The re-admission of history as the terrain of epistemology requires therefore a greater degree of precision to ascertain how agents navigate power relations *in concretu*. It is their open-ended making of history, rather than the alignment of

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<sup>100</sup> This was performed by Robert Brenner in his historical critique of Guy Bois's category of a "declining rate of feudal levy" – another abstraction which could not be verified in historical research. A common way to "get around" these specificities in the social sciences is to build up a casuistry of typological sub-types, leading to a conceptual architecture, which defines general categories at the highest level of abstraction, only to break-up this idealised and pure category by the addition of further sub-types, and further sub-sub-types, as in the work of Max Weber. The resultant of sociological ideal-type formation is best illustrated in Weber's own *Economy and Society* – a universal compendium and inventory of sociological categories, whose universality is immediately revoked by the re-admission of more impure sub-types as the distance between general concept and concrete phenomenon shrinks on the journey from sociological category to history. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978). Weber never elaborated ideal-types of international orders, but one would assume that this may have been constructed around qualitative, rather than quantitative traits, generating substantive sub-types, organised either around the political communities that composed such orders (states, empires, monarchies, poleis, etc.) or the character of their relations (anarchy, hierarchy, heteronomy, hegemony, etc). Waltz, in contrast, did suggest a numerical definition of international orders, generating minimal predictions around them, as multi-polar orders were deemed unstable, whereas bi-polar orders were stable. UCD also suggests a numerical definition ('more-than-one'), but little can be derived from this.

<sup>101</sup> Alex Callinicos, "How to Solve the Many-States Problem: A Reply to the Debate", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2009, (Vol. 22, No. 1, 2009), p. 96. Callinicos's alternative method to introduce "non-deductively" ever more concrete determinations of the capitalist mode of production, including the inter-state system, still fails to divulge where this inter-state system is coming from. It is simply posited and then kept alive through the "centrifugal pull" of UCD. If the inter-state system cannot be deduced from the capital-relation, as he rightly suggests, then how do we explain it on Marxist premises without letting it roll as a loose cannon on the Marxist ship, eagerly claimed by the Neo-Weberians as proof of Marxism's society-centeredness?

<sup>102</sup> In his critique of Althusser, E. P. Thompson suggested that he confused empirical procedures and empirical controls – the historical method – with "something which he calls "empiricism"". E. P. Thompson, op. cit. in note 93, p. 224.

history with pre-conceived general categories, whose overarching logic is simply acted out by human beings, which moves center-stage. For as human beings make their own history, even if not under conditions of their choosing, the common temptation – in structuralist versions of Marxism and in so many other structuralist versions of the social sciences (including Neo-Realism) – is always to privilege the conditions, the context, of action and to derive the agency behind action from this context, rather than to take seriously the “making”, i.e. the text of conscious action, which contains the nucleus and *explanans* of historical differences. This is captured in the epistemological postulate of historicity. What this requires, then, is a non-deterministic conception of agency. How do people grasp and rationalise a specific context subjectively and experientially, informing their actions? But since this cannot be specified in the abstract, as in utilitarianism or variants of rational-choice theory, as this would lead us back into the trap of essentialism and definitionalism, we need to fall back on history and specify agency as concrete agency – a turn towards a historicist conception of agency.<sup>103</sup>

This is in line with Marx’s speculation, however cryptic, dense and incomplete, that the method of critical political economy and hence historical materialism implies a double journey from the real-abstract as the point of departure in observation (*Anschauung*), via a descent into the specification of its simple determinations (its disaggregation into simple concepts), to the subsequent ascent to the rich reproduction of the phenomenon as a thought-concrete (the re-aggregation of determinations into concrete concepts), as “a rich totality of many determinations and relations”. For Marx, this was “a product of the working-up of observation and conception into concepts”.<sup>104</sup> In this sense, Marx does not suggest a positivistic science of history – either in terms of a nomothetic subsumption model or in terms of Popper’s ill-ascribed teleological historicism (ascribed to Hegel and Marx) in the sense of history as the self-unfolding of the Spirit to a pre-ordained end (reason) or the self-unfolding of a pre-programmed sequence of ascending stages in the modes of production towards another pre-ordained end (freedom) – nor a systemic logic of capital positing itself as the subject of (capitalist) history in a self-unfolding and self-actualising process, but a historicist approach to historical concept-formation with no fixed guarantees.<sup>105</sup>

But can we “get around” conceptual abstractions? PM equally suggests a general abstraction as a starting point, located in historically contested social

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<sup>103</sup> “The concrete content of human agency, or praxis, cannot be defined in the abstract. We can only grasp its meaning as a determinate moment in respective concrete historical situations.” Heine and Teschke, 1996, op. cit. in note 80, p. 414.

<sup>104</sup> Marx, 1973, op. cit. in note 88, p. 101. This procedure of concept-formation remains incomplete, since the impression may arise that the conceptualisation of a specific phenomenon is merely the resultant of the aggregate of external, if multi-sided, determinations, which leaves the crucial proviso – that these determinations need also to be analysed and refracted in terms of their conscious or non-conscious cognitive appropriation by the subject, i.e. subjectively – under-specified.

<sup>105</sup> Samuel Knafo, “The Fetishising Subject in Marx’s *Capital*”, *Capital & Class* (Vol. 26, No.1 2002), pp. 145-175.

property relations or politically-constituted property relations, rather than in production *per se*, since this category often leads to an economicist, productivist and sometimes even technicist – and in some versions techno-determinist – bias. But this heuristic device does not pretend to qualify as a general and causal covering law (or even as a general IR theory). It rather suggests a premise that facilitates the historicisation of social and geopolitical relations in time and space, including strategies of territorialisation. And the notion of property relations (rather than property structures or property rights) opens the door towards the relationality of people (their inter-subjectivity), as they agree on, contest, or transform these property relations in historically specific ways. In this context, the emphasis on the political in Marxism was decisive as it led to a redefinition of the concept “mode of production” in a socio-political and thus anti-economicist direction. Whereas many Marxisms had defined a mode of production as comprising an economic base, with its own “laws of motion” in opposition to extraneous social factors and a derivative or corresponding political superstructure, Wood and Brenner suggested that this rigid separation in orthodox versions of Marxism between economic objectivity – which did all the explanation – and socio-political subjectivity – which was relegated to the sphere of history and contingency – reproduced in fact the “bourgeois ideology” of classical political economy which “discovered “the economy” in the abstract and began emptying capitalism of its social and political content”.<sup>106</sup> This reproduced, rather than re-conceptualised, the liberal myth of the self-regulating market governed by the “invisible hand”. In contrast, Wood suggested that “for Marx, the ultimate secret of capitalist production is a political one”, since “he treats the economy itself not as a network of disembodied forces but, like the political “sphere”, as a set of *social relations*”.<sup>107</sup> This led ultimately to the reconceptualization of the category “mode of production” as a “mode of exploitation”, framed in terms of class power:

“A mode of production is not simply a technology but a social organization of productive activity; and a mode of exploitation is a relationship of power. Furthermore, the power relationship that constitutes the nature and extent of exploitation is a matter of political organization within and between the contending classes. In the final analysis, the relation between appropriators and producers rests on the relative strengths of classes, and this is largely determined by the internal organization and the political forces with which each enters into the class struggle.”<sup>108</sup>

And since modes of exploitation are not defined as economic phenomena – somehow outside of or preceding society and politics – but as socio-political relations, PM was able to draw the strategic lesson by alerting us to those aspects in which they are “actually contested: as relations of domination, as rights of property, as the power to organize and govern production and appropriation. In

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<sup>106</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism”, *New Left Review*, (No.127, 1981), p. 66.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

other words, the object of this theoretical stance is a *practical* one, to illuminate the terrain of struggle by viewing modes of production not as abstract structures but as they actually confront people who must act in relation to them".<sup>109</sup> The general category of social property relations has therefore an in-built emphasis on the praxes of people in certain relations, which admits, invites and requires by the same token historicity. This does not pre-judge the concrete content of relationality, agency and inter-subjectivity, as the "rules of reproduction" associated with historically specific social property relations indicate expectations, which have to be concretised and modified through the method of history in research.<sup>110</sup> The premise of social property relations desists therefore from positing a universal theory and suggests a general historicist perspective and, for IR purposes, a perspective on the social history of political geography and geopolitics.

This implies not only an open-ended approach to history – rather than a general theory of history or IR developed from an extra-historical Archimedean point of view (the view from nowhere) – but an understanding of critical social science as a historically circumscribed (the view from somewhere) and intervening praxis as the results of (critical) history-writing feed back into the reproduction of society as a whole. This also denies the positivist postulate of an absolute distinction between a neutral observer here and the observed world here, subject and object, as the observer brings a knowledge-guiding interest – a value – to bear on his object-matter. And this subjective value can read the historical social world either as a laboratory for grand theory, which objectifies and naturalises its course in terms of eternal laws and timeless categories, forfeiting political responsibility in the process due to the impersonal and tragic logics of causal mechanisms, or it can read the social and historical world as a series of subjective and inter-subjective constructions, of which theory is one subjective emanation. This subjectivity leaves, outside of the more or less rigorously handled historical method, always an unspecifiable artful surplus to the practice and craft of the historian, as the medium of his or her thought remains (outside cliometrics) language, as expressed in his or her own style of writing. Historiography and historical sociology are therefore not governed by the methodological protocols of a nomothetic sociology or – *a fortiori* – a nomothetic IHS, but remain lodged in

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 77. It is ironic therefore that some critics of PM refer to its conception of capitalism as economic or platonic, for the entire emphasis of PM – hence its name – is directed towards the re-socialisation, re-politicisation and historicisation of capitalism as a contested relation, even if this aspect becomes submerged in Brenner's and Wood's later works. Capitalism is a historical and not a theoretical category.

<sup>110</sup> PM in IR draws more on the first wave of work in PM, developed in Robert Brenner's and Ellen Wood's writings in the context of the "Transition Debate". Their later work is itself liable to the charge of structuralism. This relapse can be traced back to a proto-structuralism present in the concept of "rules of reproduction". Hannes Lacher and the author indicated this problem by suggesting replacing this notion with a more open-ended notion of "ways of reproduction". Hannes Lacher and Benno Teschke, "The Changing "Logics" of Capitalist Competition", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (Vol.20, No. 4, 2007), pp. 565-580.



the Arts and Humanities, even if the historical method remains a disciplinary anchor, which keeps the dialogue with the more systematic and empirical social sciences alive. Once all this is accepted, a switch from theoretical universal to historical specification – retrieving political geography as changing and malleable practices in time and space – is under way. But in UCD, the international is not understood “as a historical result but as history’s point of departure”.<sup>111</sup> It follows that as there is no international-in-general, there is no general internationality.

While this may sound like arcane Marxology, the discussion usefully frames the question of the adequate method for thinking about “the international” (or any other abstraction), either in terms of the “international-in-general” and UCD as a general law, or in terms of the particular social praxes that construct political geography in variable and historically specific ways. In her critique of Garry Cohen’s *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense*, Ellen Wood concluded that “any propositions about “production in general” will be rather empty and formal, even “trite” or tautological, since the real content of these “common elements” themselves depends precisely on their social determinations.”<sup>112</sup> And she suggested that Marx’s purpose was “to focus attention not on “abstract matter” but on the social form that gives it reality; to indicate not the usefulness but the emptiness of this abstraction; and insofar as he draws our attention to the abstraction of material production from its particular social form, he does so to stress not what the abstraction reveals but what it conceals.” And her *coup de grâce* reads that a general abstraction is, in effect, “non-falsifiable. To the extent that it is true, it is trivial and tautological – as, perhaps, any historical “law” of such generality must be.”<sup>113</sup>

To sum up: abstractions in social inquiry remain necessary and useful – every concept is an abstraction. Yet, the danger of social-scientific concept-formation geared towards the building of general abstractions resides in the de-historicisation of concepts as concrete concepts, definitional anachronism, empty essentialism, and the freezing of a reality-in-motion which constantly escapes fixed definitions. Marx suggested that there are violent abstractions which lead to ever thinner levels of generality, which carry the danger of mystification. And he insisted to decode these general abstractions as ideological targets, which require re-conversion into human agency through concretisation, rather than their naturalisation and objectification as external determinations. The gap between theory and history, widened through UCD’s recourse to general abstractions, turns into a hiatus. Dialectical concept-formation, in contrast, suggests the historicisation of the field of conceptuality.

*Historicising the Field of Conceptuality: The Case of Medieval Political Geography*

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<sup>111</sup> Marx, op. cit. in note 88, p. 83.

<sup>112</sup> Ellen Wood, op. cit. in note 106, p. 72.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

How does the fallacy of concepts as general abstractions and the concomitant problems of reification, essentialism and ontologisation play out historically for UCD's core categories of "the international" (and its disciplinary reflection in Geopolitics), "society" (Sociology) and "development" (History).<sup>114</sup> The attempt to develop omnitemporal categories that apparently bring out commonalities across the record of human history do more to conceal rather than reveal – to obfuscate rather than specify. For the notion of UCD either fails to grasp from within its premises – beyond the vague proposition that unevenness itself fragments a primordial ur-society (hunter-gatherer) into multiple societies (sedentary agrarian), creating the inside/outside distinction – the historical alterations in the constitution of political geography and inter-polity relations (to the degree that they exist at all). Or it operates on the basis of a pre-conceived territorial matrix that happens to coincide with the modern inter-state system, premised on the formal political jurisdiction over contiguous and spatially delimited territories: multiple sovereignties. This international ontology model seems to be retrojected onto history at large, eliding the fact that neither polis-federations, nor imperial, nor feudal, nor any other forms of political organisation were either organised along the idea of "the international" or the "intersocietal" – understood here as spatial co-existence, premised on mutually exclusive and fixed territoriality, or consciously conceived of their relations with each other as international relations. There may have been multiplicity of co-present communities throughout history, but no straight path leads from this numerical definition to a specification of their widely diverging political geographies, spatial practices and relations.

At this stage, we should perhaps recall that one of the key theoretical debates in the "historical turn in IR" was precisely John Ruggie's charge that Neo-Realism contained no theoretical means to capture qualitative change (neither a dimension, nor a determinant of change), able to account for the very making of an interstate system predicated on an inside/outside distinction in marked contrast to the heterogeneity of "feudal actors" in medieval geopolitics. And this IR debate exemplarily illustrates the dangers in operating with a pre-conceived modernist conceptual idiom when thinking about geopolitical orders other than the modern

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<sup>114</sup> "A fourth set of puzzles arises from the historically constituted character not only of the state and the states system, but also of the categories in which we seek to understand the dynamics of contemporary world politics (...). It is tempting to minimize the significance of the historical experiences through which crucial concepts and ways of speaking have been formed. The longing for timeless categories has exercised a profound influence on many of those we associate with rationalism in the more philosophical sense of this term. Yet it is possible to trace the history of the terms "state", "sovereignty", "individual", "culture", "security" and many of the other terms now taken for granted. In doing so, it is possible to discover how they emerged in response to specific historical conjunctions and contradictions. Accounts of history as a sharp break between life before international relations and life since international relations detract attention from the historically specific meanings embodied in concepts and categories that can so easily appear to transcend historical contingency. The categories and concepts we have learnt to use with such facility, almost without thinking, come to appear natural and inevitable". Their contested history is soon forgotten.' Rob B.J. Walker, "History and Structure in the Theory of International Relations", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 18, No.2, 1989), pp. 172.

inter-state system. For Martin Wight concluded that "the word "international" is anachronistic when applied to the Middle Ages."<sup>115</sup> And sure enough, John Ruggie argued precisely the opposite: "This system of rule was inherently "international"."<sup>116</sup> The confusion stems precisely from the conceptual rigidities that the anachronistic domestic/international IR binary imposes on any analysis of historical geopolitical orders which do not comply with this distinction and its sister-binary of anarchy/hierarchy.

The medieval system of rule, as we now know in IR and as medievalists have emphasised for decades, was neither international (anarchic) nor domestic (hierarchical), but *sui generis*, and only intelligible in terms of its own social relations of lordship, requiring its own categories of analyses.<sup>117</sup> As social relations in medieval Europe were configured in terms of semi-hierarchical relations of vassalage and personal dependence stretching out in chains of sub- and super-infeudation among lords claiming conditional property over their dispersed lordships (conditional on the provision of military service and counsel), no conception and practice of unified and exclusive political territoriality amongst multiple sovereigns could emerge. Some rear-vassals held lands from different kingly overlords, and even the English King, for example, remained a vassal to the French King until the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Since the means of violence were oligopolistically dispersed amongst multiple lords, informally held together in scalar and pyramidal chains of reciprocal loyalty (fealty), the geometric notion of "parcellised sovereignty" is as misleading as the theological notion of papal supra-territoriality. Since there were no public states and no societies in medieval Europe and since no coherent and unambiguous "unit of analysis" could be specified, the notion of "inter" breaks down.<sup>118</sup> Where is "the international" on the medieval map?<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Martin Wight, *Systems of State* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), p. 130.

<sup>116</sup> Ruggie's own exposition of medieval rule should have alerted him that the international/domestic binary is not apposite: 'To begin with, the distinction between "internal" and "external" political realms, separated by clearly "demarcated "boundaries", made little sense until late in the day. In addition, it was quite common for rulers in different territorial settings to be one another's feoffor or feoffee for different regions of their respective lands. And the feudal ruling class was mobile in manner not dreamt of since – able to travel and assume governance from one end of the continent to the other without hesitation or difficulty, because' – citing Perry Anderson – "public territories formed a continuum with private estates". John Ruggie, 'Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 142-143.

<sup>117</sup> See the references in footnote 37.

<sup>118</sup> There is an interesting subterranean intellectual line leading from the German conservative and partly fascist tradition, which insisted on "concrete concepts" in their critique of the universal and abstract categories of liberalism and the Enlightenment, to today's Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte*). This is exemplified by Otto Brunner in his attempt to retrieve a distinct medieval conception of German statehood in his own time (in contrast to the un-German concept of the liberal state), via Carl Schmitt's notion of a historically concrete European inter-state "nomos" (in distinction to the spaceless liberal cosmos), to Reinhard Koselleck's project of Conceptual History, which traces the changing semantic meanings of fundamental socio-political categories over time. In this tradition however, concrete concepts are, less so in Brunner but more so in Schmitt and Koselleck, methodologically dissociated from the social relations they were meant to capture. Conceptual History did thus not aim to provide a socio-

Medieval territoriality was a distinct spatial praxis, grounded in distinct social relations, which nullified any conception of "the international". UCD falls therefore into the same trap as had Wight and Ruggie: an inability to render the *sui generis* nature of medieval spatiality intelligible. And without a clearly identifiable "political unit", multi-linearity disappears as a meaningful category before "lines" (borders) between entities were actually drawn. The thinnest of all abstractions - multiplicity - is unable to shed light on feudal geopolitical relations, which knew no distinction between an "inside" and an "outside" - the domestic and the international.<sup>120</sup> For the fallacy of switching from the ontological singular to the ontological plural as a transhistorical constant resides precisely in the foreclosure of understanding socio-political environments which fall in neither category. If the international is defined generically and numerically in UCD as "more than one society", then this indicates that UCD has never really mentally surmounted the "conflict-unit" ontology of Realism. It follows that UCD does not

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political history of concept-formation, but remained trapped in the non-concrete, i.e. the de-sociologised but inter-textualised historicisation of conceptual semantics. Timo Pankakoski, "Conflict, Context, Concreteness: Koselleck and Schmitt on Concepts", *Political Theory* (Vol. 38, No. 6, 2010), pp. 749-779. On Carl Schmitt's concrete-order-thinking, see Benno Teschke, "Decisions and Indecisions: Political and Intellectual Reception of Carl Schmitt", *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series (No. 67, 2011), pp. 61-95; and "The Fetish of Geopolitics: A Reply to Gopal Balakrishnan", *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series (No.69, 2011), pp. 81-100.

<sup>119</sup> There is therefore no "conceptual shield" of the international that "historical sociological critiques of IR have challenged but failed to penetrate theoretically." Matin, op.cit. in note 60, p. 11. Rather, any theoretical penetration of this transhistorical illusory shield becomes a-historical. In other words, UCD takes Neo-Realism too seriously.

<sup>120</sup> Matin provides evidence for the vacuity of "the international" in the context of feudal social property relations in his critique of Brenner's and the author's account of the rise of capitalism in England, objecting that it was driven by the international dimensions of the English experience. Matin, *ibid.*, p. 53. Feudal spatial practices are misread as international determinations in alignment with UCD's colour-blindness to medieval pre-international spatiality. Operating with an ontological and transhistorical conception of the international, every spatial practice turns monochromatically into a validation of UCD. Furthermore, these antecedent "international" determinations - from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Frankish outward movements into the extra-Frankish European periphery (including the Norman Conquest and the *Ostsiedlung*) to the Flemish export markets for wool - where system-wide presences and structural opportunities, available to all European regions. However, if these "international dimensions" were causally determinative for the origins of capitalism in England, then why did a capitalist transformation occur only there, and not in East-Elbia, *Reconquista* Spain, Norman Sicily or in France? In other words, UCD relies on the fact that explanation equals the incremental and long-range accumulation of prior external and internal causes (which apparently reach at some unspecified point in time critical mass and flip over into outcomes), without clarifying why similar causal contexts led to radically different outcomes in different regions of Europe. This is why the "endogenous" emphasis on the specificities of class conflict in England, in combination with a comparative cross-case account, which clarifies the differential resolution of similar structural preconditions, remains such a powerful analytical device in PM. It also clarifies why the structuralist lense of UCD remains an impotent strategy, as it either theoretically expunges the relevance of class struggle (agency) or reduces it to a consequence of prior determinations. UCD's international correction to the Brenner Thesis relapses therefore into the same type of error committed by Brenner's original structuralist interlocutors, as the Neo-Malthusians and the Neo-Smithians were at a loss to explain why similar demographic and commercial imperatives led to such diverging results in England, France, and East-Elbia. It was because they, like UCD, evacuate class conflict from their premises.

transcend the international/domestic binary. It rather reproduces and entrenches its prominence by falsely re-inscribing it into world history at large.

And it was this historically specific question – how to conceptualise and historicise the medieval-to-modern transition not in space/time-indifferent, but in space/time-specific social relations? – which Hannes Lacher and the author tried to resolve on reformulated Marxist premises, drawing on the early work of Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood on the “Transition Debate”.<sup>121</sup> We argued that this transition was the outcome of specific historically situated struggles between specific socio-political agents, grounded in specific politically-constituted social property relations – a switch from mainstream IR’s and orthodox Marxism’s universals to historical praxis. Rather than deriving the inter-state system from capitalism or positing it as an abstract a priori, we suggested that this problem could only be addressed in a historical and processual perspective. For inter-stateness was an emergent result (a “spatial practice”) of pre-capitalist inter-lordly and lord-peasant conflicts over land and labour in a pre-territorialised context, stretching back to the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire around the millennium.<sup>122</sup> This was a process driven by the spatial practices of lordly and dynastic geopolitical accumulation – simultaneously a process of institutional state-formation and spatial state-differentiation – whereby feudal de-centralised and territorially non-exclusive lordly monarchies came to disentangle themselves from each other over time to form territorially exclusive and institutionally centralised sovereignties. This procedure does not presuppose the “international” as given and as the point of departure, or understand geopolitical orders as reflections of “modes of production”, but historicises the temporal inside/outside differentiation in the passage from feudal non-territorialised social relations to “absolutist” territorialized social relations. This generates an account of the social construction and constitution of a recognisable (though territorially still imperfect) early modern inter-state system, revolving henceforth predominantly around dynastic claims to sovereignty. And while this revised the mainstream IR thesis of the Westphalian Peace Treaties as the codification of modern statehood, sovereignty, and the modern inter-state system (since pre-capitalist state territoriality remained the patrimony of the king), the analysis also suggested that it was not capitalism, which had created the inter-state system, but rather that the non-capitalist social praxes of inter-dynasticism had constructed a multi-territorial carapace – a geopolitical pluriverse – within which capitalism subsequently emerged.<sup>123</sup> Here, in contrast to Tilly and UCD, the inter-state

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<sup>121</sup> Robert Brenner, op. cit. in note 98; Ellen Wood, op. cit. in note 106.

<sup>122</sup> Teschke, op. cit. in note 17; Lacher, op. cit. in note 17. It is thus misleading to discount the author’s work as “proto-Realist” and “limited to illuminating the changing historical forms of the international – leaving the analytically prior existence of the phenomenon itself un-theorized.” Rosenberg, op. cit. in note 52, p. 337. There cannot be any analytically prior existence of the international outside concrete historical manifestations of political geography, as in the medieval order.

<sup>123</sup> And this territorial pluriverse has to be conceived not as an invariant structural presence – the geopolitical form of capitalism – but as subject to diverse strategies of territorialisation: “The most cursory glance at the history of international relations reveals a wide gamut of different configurations between territoriality and capitalist states. From the establishment of the liberal trade system of the *Pax*

system appears as an historical outcome and not as a generic starting-point.<sup>124</sup> But unless we understand the specific non-international nature of the medieval world, we simply cannot invoke the distinction between inside and outside, and operate *ex ante* with the method of methodological internationalism. That opposition was not yet available.

This, then, was neither an inside-out, nor an outside-in explanation, nor an *ex post factum* re-attachment of Geopolitics to Sociology (or vice-versa), nor an account of the empirical interplay between two pre-constituted dimensions of reality (society and the inter-state system), for none of these distinctions were yet available. Critiques along these lines reveal precisely the conceptual hold exercised by a modernist vocabulary on the collective IR imagination, hard-wired into the minds of its practitioners. It was rather a novel Marxist socio-historical interpretation of qualitative change – spatial and social. It showed the temporally consecutive dual differentiation between an inside from an outside (achieved during the early modern Absolutist period), within which a second differentiation between the political from the social (state and society) in the context of the rise and consolidation of capitalism occurred in spatio-temporally distinctive and geopolitically inter-active ways. And only this double differentiation – spatial (outside/inside) and socio-political (above/below) – constituted the very distinction between multiple state-societies in form of the inter-state system, whose interactions came to be expressed in distinct international relations between sovereign states. And this very spatial and socio-political re-configuration came to be intellectually captured by the fragmentation of the pan-European pre-disciplinary catholic and scholastic cosmos in terms of the very disciplinary bifurcation between Sociology and Politics (and, later, IR) – the reconfiguration of the field of disciplinarity.

Certainly, if we take as self-evident that this inside/outside differentiation is transhistorical (which it is not), that Sociology and Politics/IR should have reflected and overcome this inside/outside differentiation all along (which they

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*Britannica* and the "New Imperialism" of Salisbury and Chamberlain, with its oscillation between "formal" and "informal" empire, via the territorially expansive and economically autarchic *Lebensraum* conceptions of German *Geopolitik* and the Japanese project of a "Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere", to the US-sponsored (but multilateral) postwar liberal world order and contemporary European integration; the historical record exhibits an immense co-variation in the nexus between capitalist states and projects of territorialization. To negate these historical fluctuations, as aberrations from a 'normal' correlation between capitalism and the classical states-system, would be to reify a structuralist view of an essentially invariant international order. The reality is that capitalist states have adopted different "strategies of territorialisation", ranging from the grant of full juridical independence to subaltern states, via semi-hegemonic projects like the EU, to systems of outright territorial control in the pursuit of *Lebensraum* or "formal empire". What an understanding of these diverse strategies of spatialisation requires is an agency-centred perspective that emphasises the variable politics of territorialisation, rather than a logic of empire or a logic of capital". Benno Teschke, "Imperial Doxa from the Berlin Republic", *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series (No. 40, 2006) p. 136.

<sup>124</sup> Clemens Hoffmann, "The Balkanization of Ottoman Rule: Premodern Origins of the Modern International System in Southeastern Europe", *Cooperation & Conflict* (Vol. 43, No. 4, 2008), pp. 373-396.

could not), and that theorisation in IR and IHS equals trans-historic generalisation and causal explanation (which it does not), then all cows appear to be grey in the dark night of positivism and we are returned to the sterile mantra sermonised by (Neo-)Realism that the international is the international is the international – always already there, except that UCD has now provided a “sociological” definition of it! But if we define theorisation and concept-formation as a process of historical specification, anchored in contested social relations, then we can start not to trace the historical forms of “the international” as a transhistorical given, but specify the agential construction of the rich variety of political geographies, the modalities of geopolitical relations, and the strategies of territorialisation across time and space as concrete phenomena without relapsing into essentialised sociologisms. And as Neo-Realism has no determinant or dimension of systemic change, so is UCD by definition barred, as we established earlier, to explain the medieval-to-modern transition or any other “systemic” transformation.

In short: To suppose a generic world-historical inside/outside distinction – “co-existence” - as the pre-constituted spatial matrix for the operationalization of the law of UCD seems curiously ahistorical. In fact, positing the disjuncture between the outside and the inside – allegedly reflected in the dichotomous disciplines of Sociology and Geopolitics, the “classical lacuna” - as the starting-point for IHS takes for granted what requires explanation: namely the historical process whereby one country came to be differentiated from another, constituting the very separation between the domestic and the international. For only this making of an interstate system - generating simultaneously two separate modes of reflection on this condition, respectively institutionalised in the disciplines of Sociology and Politics/IR - constructs a potential dualism between two disjointed fields of inquiry.

“The international” – if by that we mean any specific geopolitical order, like the inter-state order – is itself an *explanandum* (rather than being a metaphysical expression of uneven development) and should not be abstracted out as a general ontology and handed over to Realism’s *raison d’être* that justifies Realism’s standing as a theory of IR. For Realism and Neo-Realism always posited international anarchy as a *factum brutum* – an autonomous and constant dimension of reality subject to its own logics and laws - and never provided socio-historical accounts of geopolitical orders. This suggests that while UCD has usefully highlighted the problem of classical sociology’s singular ontology – to conceive of social theory as concerned with the internal reconstruction of societal development – there is an unrecognised danger of de-historicising and reproducing this ontology (society as a unit of analysis) by merely pluralizing it – a switch from methodological nationalism to an *a priori* methodological internationalism. For this procedure leaves the idea of co-existing societies as ontological forms intact, even when their development is co-constituted by “the international”. For what is ultimately needed is a radical historicisation of all ontologies, rather than the speculative ontologisation of history in terms of the universal multiplication of “societies”, “development”, and “the international” *ab initio*.

## *Why should there be IR/IHS Theory? Historicising the Field of Disciplinary*

In this sense, rather than demonstrating surprise that nobody seems to have answered Martin Wight's rhetorical question "Why is there no IR Theory?", we should perhaps desist from insinuating that the political theorists of the classical canon were somehow mentally disabled and rather recognise the contextual fact that they faced historically very different geopolitical environments and therefore different sets of intellectual questions, which did not correspond to the modern condition of the interstate system.<sup>125</sup> If this holds then the question "Why is there no International Historical Sociology?" is equally misleading. If neither "society", "the international", and "development" are natural and universal phenomena, then neither Sociology/Economics, Politics/IR, and History are natural and universal disciplines present to scholars since time immemorial (even though the question holds for the classical sociological tradition), which require absorption into a universal IHS.

Why, for example, should political philosophers in classical Rome ponder the puzzle of IR Theory, when their "world" was constituted by one *Imperium Romanum* during the *Pax Romana*, whose universal domination (*imperium sine fine*) was taken for granted and whose political geography was constituted by conceptual and territorial distinctions revolving around Roman citizenship, centrally administered provinces, and surrounding tributary areas, outside distinct conceptions of frontiers (*limites*) and borders (*fines*)? Why should medieval scholastic scholars, prior to the Discoveries and only interrupted by the Crusades, preoccupy themselves with IR, when their "world" was constituted by one *respublica Christiana*, which integrated the "known" Catholic world and its various intermediate powers hierarchically under the spiritual and worldly authority of the Curia and the papal mandate? Casting our eyes further afield, why should the Confucian literati of the Chinese imperial court bureaucracy, who conceived the discourse of the celestial imperial mandate (*tianming*) for the emperor to control the realm (*tong*) and to govern in harmony (*zheng*) within the wider imperial tribute system in East Asia, develop either a conception of inter-national theory or inter-national historical sociology? Each "world" has to be conceptualised as a *sui generis* case of political spatiality allergic to universal categorisation. And this

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<sup>125</sup> Martin Wight, "Why is there no International Theory?", in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.) *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin 1966), pp. 17-34. Wight seems to have four different answers. First, as "international politics is the realm of recurrence and repetition" in which "political action is most regularly necessitous", international theory shrinks by default to the writings of Realists. Second, as modern theorists write primarily as citizens from within their states, their allegiance to the state "has absorbed almost all the intellectual energy devoted to political study". Third, the modern and liberal belief in "progress" over-optimistically dissolved the persistence of international concerns. Fourth, "international theory, or what there is of it, is scattered, unsystematic, and mostly inaccessible to the layman. Moreover, it is largely repellent and intractable in form".



holds even if all these “worlds” are inserted into a wider political geography, which requires its own historical conceptualisation.

Inversely, intellectual reflections by contemporaries on the problem of geo-political co-existence and co-constitution – anarchy rather than hierarchy in IR parlance – only became acute political preoccupations if and when imperial political geographies and cosmological conceptions of world order where under threat, as during the classical Greek polis-system, the Renaissance city-states system and, finally, during the rise of the “Westphalian” inter-dynastic order, premised on new conceptions and legitimations of absolute sovereignty and the demise of both, lordly chains of personal relations and supra-regional and pan-European papal authority. These specific geo-political conjunctures generated flourishing discourses on diplomacy, statecraft and inter-polity relations, which were subsequently mobilised by IR Realism as vindications of their timeless theoretical *pronunciamentos*. After all, semantic history teaches us that the term “international” – not substantivised but as an adjective – first gained currency with Jeremy Bentham in 1789 to distinguish the supra-“national” category of “the law of nations” (the *ius gentium* which is more adequately translated as the law of peoples) – which Bentham deemed to be too close to the idea of domestic and municipal law – from “inter-national law” (*ius inter gentes*), i.e. that new body of law that came to govern specifically relations between sovereign political entities.<sup>126</sup> Here, a conceptual neologism came to capture an altered situation. What this suggests is that the changing practices of political geography have to be conceptually historicised, rather than to passively fall back on apparently secure and pre-constituted societies as units of analysis, which always presuppose an “inter” at the obfuscatory level of the general abstraction.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> “The word *international*, it must be acknowledged, is a new one; though, it is hoped, sufficiently analogous and intelligible. It is calculated to express, in a more significant way, the branch of law which goes commonly under the name of the *law of nations*: an appellation so uncharacteristic, that, were it not for the force of custom, it would seem rather to refer to internal jurisprudence”. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press [1780/89] 1907), p. 114.

<sup>127</sup> The recovery of the self-understandings of historically situated agents, pursued through the retrieval of past semantics in Conceptual History, is therefore useful as an essential hermeneutic step, but not sociologically exhaustive, as the acceptance of the historicity of concepts in terms of the self-descriptions of contemporaries cannot be taken at face value. We do not need to subscribe to the methodological protocols of Conceptual History as an approach to History, which rests largely on textuality and inter-textuality, to recognise its crucial insight that concept-formation is always a contextual affair, bound to “concrete” socio-political questions, experiences and conflicts. Rather than imputing static and “once-and-for-all” definitions to concepts, it insists on the temporalisation of the semantic meanings of socio-political concepts over time and space as “concepts of movement” (*Bewegungsbegriffe*). Reinhard Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhard Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart; Ernst Klett Verlag, 1972), pp. XIII-XXVII; Reinhard Koselleck “Social History and Conceptual History”, in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 20-37. For a general introduction see Melvin Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a recent survey, see Willibald Steinmetz, “40 Jahre Begriffsgeschichte – The State of the Art”, in Heidrun Kämper and Ludwig M. Eichinger (eds.), *Sprache – Kognition – Kultur* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 174-

And only this rise of the inter-state order forms the very condition of possibility for the disciplinary disjunctures between sociology/political economy and politics/geopolitics to arise. In other words, pre-modern social and political thought could not bridge the "classical lacuna" between outside and inside because this specific differentiation had not yet emerged historically as a pressing and visible phenomenon. Martin Wight's lament on the parerga of international thought – those accessory afterthoughts and miscellaneae outside the central intellectual task of reflecting on the "good life" within a polity – does therefore not indict the poverty of the classical canon of political theory, but rather indicates the widespread absence of "inter-national" concerns in pre-interstate orders before they became manifest as pressing empirical referents. In this sense, the lament reveals Wight's inattention to history.

Let us pursue this line of thought – the historicisation of concepts in conjunction with the disciplinary fragmentation and professionalisation of the humanities in conjunction with the historicisation of the fragmentation of the European "world" – a bit further. For the historicisation of the conceptual field also engenders the historicisation of the field of disciplinarity. Above discussion problematises the internal/external distinction in pre-international geopolitical orders as a meaningful and self-evident spatial binary, translating into its categorical non-distinction in classical political theory and disabling the rise of the notion of "the international" and the sister-discipline of IR. We now have to reflect on the historical rise of sociology, political economy, politics (*Staatswissenschaften*), and history as separate disciplines – and their referents: society, the market, the state and historicity. For their quadruple emergence was intimately tied to the spatial inside/outside distinction predicated on the formation of the inter-state system. But to this distinction, we will need to add two additional distinctions: first, the vertical distinction between the political and the social/economic, conceiving of the social ("civil society"), economic ("the market") and the political ("the state") as potentially autonomous spheres of reality; second, the temporal distinction between non-development and development, registered in yet another disciplinary re-constitution: historiography's new conception of historical time.

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197. The absence of a separate entry in the lexicon (and in the register) on the concept of 'the international' – in contradistinction to the terms "*Internationale*" (as in the First International), "internationalisation", "internationalisms", and "internationality" as distinct modern concepts, is indicative of the absence of its empirical referent as a general historical phenomenon. In contrast, terms like "*Europäisches Völkersystem*", "*Völkerrecht*", "*Völkergemeinschaft*", "*Staatengesellschaft*", and "*Mächtesystem*" appear in the register as "concrete" and historically time-bound concepts of early modernity. Ultimately, however, Conceptual History cannot render an exhaustive grasp of history, since it remains limited to a reconstruction of history *in terms* of the conceptual (and primarily elitist) self-understandings of contemporaries. To the degree that Conceptual History recognises that concepts are political concepts, designed not only to represent but also to intervene into reality in purposive and thus reality-forming ways, they lose their ability to operate as categories of analysis and become themselves the objects of critical investigation.

The constitution of sociology and political economy as independent, if pre-disciplinary, fields in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and, subsequently, as self-conscious and institutionalised disciplines in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was built as a reaction to the unproblematic of a recursive and static tradition versus a progressing and dynamic modernity.<sup>128</sup> The intellectual challenge and world-historical *novum* was to supersede cyclical conceptions of time with linear, progressive and, ultimately, teleological conceptions of time, culminating in the very *modernist* idea of the temporal directionality of history. This was captured in the widespread acceptance of evolutionary, stadial or stagist conceptions of history in Classical Sociology and Classical Political Economy. In short, the transition from tradition to modernity, feudal to commercial society, *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (society), or agrarian to industrial society – plus the acceleration and directionality of historical time manifest in these transitions – constituted “society” and “economy” as new and potentially independent objects of inquiry, reflected in sociology and political economy.<sup>129</sup> In the process, these disciplines became separated out from historiography (and theology), which re-founded itself by discovering the very notion of the historicity of a secularised conception of history (its irreversibility), which was now super-charged with notions of progress, development and teleology.<sup>130</sup> Not only spatiality, but also temporality has its very own historicity. The notion of “development” reflects a historically distinct experience, different from non-development, de-development, under-development and millennial stasis. Cyclical (life-cycles of civilisations), religious (eschatological), and metaphysical (the self-unfolding of the divine spirit) conceptions of history became widely, though not universally, replaced by secular and teleological conceptions of history in Western Europe.

This, analogous to the ontologised notions of the international and society, speaks to the historically unsecured status of the abstract category of development. For development as Reinhard Koselleck et al. suggest is, again, a historically specific category, tightly linked to a notion of progress which was born – semantically – in the context of specifically liberal conceptions of history. And both were tied, even if unwittingly, to the rise of capitalism. And the specificity of liberal-stadial and secular conceptions of history as relying on historically ascending stages of development implied the rejection of prevailing cyclical

<sup>128</sup> For sociologies of the history of sociology and social theory and their objects of analyses, see Wolf Lepenies (ed.), *Geschichte der Soziologie: Studien zur Kognitiven, Sozialen und Historischen Identität einer Disziplin*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981); Philip Abrams, “The Sense of the Past and the Origins of Sociology”, *Past and Present* (No. 55, 1972), pp. 18–32; Johan Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Peter Wagner, *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences: Not All that is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Sage Publications, 2001).

<sup>129</sup> On the concept of “society”, see Manfred Riedel, “Bürgerliche Gesellschaft” and “Gesellschaft, Gemeinschaft”, in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975), respectively pp. 719–800 and pp. 801–862; David McNally, *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism: A Reinterpretation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>130</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, „Fortschritt“; Wolfgang Wieland, „Entwicklung, Evolution“; Reinhart Koselleck „Geschichte, Historie“, in Brunner, Conze and Koselleck (eds.), op. cit. in note 129, respectively pp. 351–423, pp. 199–228, pp. 593–717.

(astronomical) conceptions of history, which conceived of history as the eternal return of the same – pitching the static-recursive against the dynamic-teleological. In which sense, then, is development a transhistorical category? In which sense can it be dissociated from the liberal-Marxist re-periodisation of history and inflated to world-historical proportions - not to speak of phases of de-development and the disadvantages of backwardness even within capitalism?

To render the concept of development compliant with the claim of its transhistoricity, UCD has therefore to undertake a conceptual *volte-face* by retracting from an earlier commitment to capitalism as a historically specific relation of production – theorised at the time with reference to Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood as originating in 16<sup>th</sup> Century England – and by embracing a Neo-Smithian conception of development, now re-grounded in a transhistoricised and quantitative widening of the division of labour, driving social differentiation.<sup>131</sup> To secure this re-conceptualisation, Karl Marx's *German Ideology* (rather than *Das Kapital*) is invoked without acknowledging the philologically and exegetically important argument that this early conception was still influenced by liberalism and classical political economy and later rejected by Marx himself.<sup>132</sup> This aligns UCD with a bourgeois and liberal conception of development.

The meaning of these concepts – society, economy, state, development, and history – underwent thus a fundamental semantic re-definition within a fundamentally reconstituted field of disciplinarity as distinctly early modern socio-political categories. And this is why most, if not all, classical socio-political concepts radically changed their semantic meanings (or were invented *ab ovo*) in Europe around that period – the “saddle time” of the turn from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – which serves as the organising chronological divide, surely temporally uneven, in Koselleck's 8-volume lexicon of fundamental socio-political concepts. As the notion of the inter-state system is a historically specific category, so is the notion of “society” in that historically specific sense of a “civil society” encased in but abstracted from the political – i.e. the state, which is itself the precondition for the inter-state order. And so are the concepts of development, progress, and historicity.

And it is only here at that historical moment in time when society and economy become distinct objects of study – separate both from the state and other societies – and as the idea (however dimly grasped) spread that the locus of

<sup>131</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit. in note 17; Rosenberg, op. cit. in note 58, p. 179.

<sup>132</sup> Robert Brenner, “Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism”, in A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, James Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 271-304. In a chapter entitled the “development of the concept of development”, Norbert Elias notes that “even the most highly educated and learned of men in those days (two hundred and fifty or three hundred years ago) were unable to grasp intellectually the conception of “development” that is nowadays taken for granted”. Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2012 [1970]), p. 143. Elias also historicises the concept of society, *ibid.*, pp. 201-213.

change and the acceleration of time are somehow grounded in secular socio-economic dynamics (rather than governed by metaphysics or theology), that separate branches of knowledge, namely sociology, political economy, and politics emerge as reflections upon but also as legitimising discourses for these new social phenomena – society, economy, state. Simultaneously, as a non-territorialised notion of the field of the social (*Respublica Christiana*, Europe, empire) became increasingly caged and contained in multiple states in a two-step process – first as absolutist Old Regimes in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and then as nation-states in the course of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries – the object of study for the new science of politics became the centralised state as a new modality of public power over a contiguous territory, encapsulated in the notion of sovereignty. And it is only then, once the co-ordinates of a politically and temporally refracted Europe as a geopolitical pluriverse subject to the differential and uneven rhythms of development became dramatically visible to contemporaries, that a process of – intra-European and inter-civilisational – comparison, arguably first grasped in Friedrich Schlegel's idea of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, generated the binary vocabulary of advance and backwardness to capture the differential temporalities and trajectories of nation-states.<sup>133</sup> This process of comparison, first more intuitively grasped by Schlegel but already systematically alive from the Physiocrats to Listian national political economy, generated finally the sub-fields of comparative historical sociology and comparative political economy.<sup>134</sup> The former was influentially expressed in Otto Hintze's comparative studies on constitutional history and in Max Weber's sociology of religion, which sought to define the developmental blockages of non-European civilisations in terms of the economic ethics of the world religions.<sup>135</sup> The latter emerged as the

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<sup>133</sup> See Robbie Shilliam, *German Thought and International Relations: The Rise and Fall of a Liberal Project* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). It should be noted that the construction of a historical sociology of political and international thought captured in the category of a "consciousness of backwardness" in terms of (or as a function of) advanced and backward development will run up against the "anomalies" that, at least in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Prussia-Germany (but also in Italy), the notions of backwardness and catch-up were not unanimously accepted. In fact, the dominant paradigm in historiography – historicism, best exemplified by Leopold von Ranke – rejected any normative act of comparison and depreciatory value-judgment on Germany's position over and against the Western powers. By insisting on historical individuality, historicism rather suggested that every "epoch is immediate or equidistant to God" ("*unmittelbar zu Gott*"). Similarly, following in the tracks of the heroic history of the Prussian state as praised in Borussian historiography, "in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of German historians were convinced that the German path to modernity was superior to the routes taken by their western European neighbours". John Brewer and Eckhart Hellmuth, "Introduction: Rethinking Leviathan", in Brewer and Hellmuth (eds.), *Rethinking Leviathan: The Eighteenth-Century State in Britain and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 7. In other words, no straight line leads from the international dimension of knowledge-production to a specification of the diversity of thought in particular national contexts.

<sup>134</sup> Milonakis and Fine, op. cit. in note 70; Jomo K.S. and Erik S. Reinert (eds.), *The Origins of Development Economics: How Schools of Economic Thought Have Addressed Development* (London: Zed Books, 2005); Kruse, op. cit. in note 70.

<sup>135</sup> Otto Hintze's work moves, at times, from a comparative to an international perspective (even if this is not self-consciously formalised as a law-like IHS), as one of his key premises suggests the reconstruction of state-formations and constitutional developments in relation to international pressures, mainly mediated by war. Otto Hintze, *Staat und Verfassung: Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Allgemeinen Verfassungsgeschichte*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

tendentially cosmopolitan assumptions of classical political economy hit the reality of political power encased in differentially developing and separate nation-states. Classical political economy segmented into comparative political economy as “development economics”, spectrally refracted in various European countries. This resulted in disciplinary and intellectual regional specificities, as the German Historical School of national political economy, premised on the historical and inductive method, was in turn challenged by the a-historical theoretical economics of the Austrian School, relying upon abstract deductions, in the *Methodenstreit*.

And it took the insight of Leon Trotsky to add to the comparative perspective, which contrasted differences and similarities between nation-states in non-relational ways over time, an international and thus relational perspective, by moving from the act of comparison and the method of comparative HS to the formalisation of temporally sequenced international inter-action by adding the adjective “combined” to his notion of uneven development.<sup>136</sup> While this was an innovation of significant importance, he hypostasised – as all modern thinkers had done before and all contemporary Neo-Trotskyite IR theorists after him - the very presence of the interstate system as a pre-given. For rather than having provided a historical explanation or a theoretical derivation of the European inter-state system, they reasoned, like Trotsky and like Waltz, from the fact of its aprioristic existence. And this left unaddressed the question across what kind of geopolitical matrix the process of UCD unfolded as its political-geographical presupposition. The result of this hypostatisation was the super-imposition of an inter-societal perspective upon an un-theorised constitutive geopolitical geography, which, if the problem was seen at all, had to be imported as an “item on loan” from somewhere else, or spirited away into the supra-historical category of the international. Trotsky deployed therefore - and his present-day followers passively rely on - a theory of inter-societal relations without a conception of the inter-state system, leaving the historically prior existence of the phenomenon itself un-theorized.<sup>137</sup> Consequently, a void opens up which keeps UCD suspended in mid-air. Why are there many states?

The conclusion of this disciplinary sketch – the historicisation of the field of disciplinarity - suggests not only that Martin Wight’s question was wrongly posed, but to further suggest that its re-articulation – “Why is there no

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<sup>136</sup> The author used therefore Trotsky’s notion in previous work (Teschke, op.cit. in note 56) as a heuristic device or “theorem” for a specific period (from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards), but not as a universal IR theory. And in this sense, UCD remains useful in generating conjectures and expectations, which (even though they cannot be answered from within its own premises) may be validated or refuted in open-ended historical research, but not as a positive and space-time indiscriminate law of world history, which self-validates through confirmationism.

<sup>137</sup> The rejection of Theda Skocpol’s conceptualisation of the international as an un-theorised “external trigger” of social revolutions is therefore hard to accept, if it is meant to be replaced with a space/time indifferent, de-substantialised and quantitative definition of the international as more than one society. For without a historical and substantive explanation of inter-state system, how does UCD improve on Skocpol’s Neo-Weberian conception of the inter-stateness as a given? Matin, op. cit. in note 60, p. 8.

International Historical Sociology?" – cannot be addressed to an imaginary audience sitting in a space-time vacuum, holding a sub-optimal trans-historical dialogue on the perennial problems of IR Theory or IHS. Any answer requires itself a historical sociology of knowledge to ascertain the historical conditions of possibility for the very question of IHS to crystallize. The production of the conception of UCD has its own historicity. And this compresses and restricts, by the same token, the applicability of any method in IHS to a very distinct period in time in which "society", "the inter-state pluriverse", and "uneven development" had become meaningful categories and phenomena. The reverse procedure, abstracting out a universal method from this distinctive historical and geopolitical conjuncture as a general framework of analysis, leads astray.

In other words, rather than wondering why nobody ever conceived of UCD as the adequate idiom of IHS as the solution to the riddle of world-history – and thus retrofitting a historically specific configuration onto history predicated on the ontologisation of the international/domestic and geopolitics/sociology distinctions, temporally super-charged with a universal notion of uneven development – we should perhaps start by noting that all three – the spatio-temporally specific configuration of the internal/external dualism and its disciplinary reflection in Sociology and Politics/IR, and the acceleration of time captured in the concepts of History as progress/development – are concrete and time-bound phenomena not subject to transhistorical generalisations, not even at the highest level of abstractions. And only once this triple differentiation between outside from the inside (and IR from Sociology), above from below (and Politics from Economics), and cyclical recurrence from progressive time (and non-Development from Development) had been established, can it make sense to speculate about the contours of an IHS, whether in the form of a positivist theory of UCD or its non-positivistic alternatives. In this sense, UCD does not only fail to overcome the outside/inside, geopolitics/sociology, and development/non-development distinctions, it rather posits, entrenches, and reifies all three as universal ontologies present since the dawn of time. Yet, when UCD accuses the classical and contemporary canon of historical sociologists and IR theorists of having "no general theory", Thompson's reply to Althusser remains suggestive. For he objected that these critics "should reflect that what they take to be innocence or lethargy may be explicit and self-conscious *refusal*: a refusal of static analytic concepts, of a logic inappropriate to history" – a refusal to propagate universal, general, and causal laws of history, predicated on universalised ontologies.<sup>138</sup>

UCD as a self-declared Marxist theory of IR, designed to replace mainstream IR theories and comparative HS through their sublation into the new paradigm of IHS has in the final analysis been corrupted by conducting the exercise largely on the intellectual terrain pre-defined by Neo-Realism's positivistic and scientistic standard of theory-construction. This yields nomological-deductive covering laws. It implies the acceptance of Waltz's definition of social science and

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<sup>138</sup> Thompson, op.cit. in note 93, pp. 230-231.

his conception of the structure and purpose of theory, leading to the progressive transformation of central historical Marxist categories of analysis into space-time indifferent universal abstractions. This reproduces Neo-Realism's claims to transhistorical generality, its excising of agency as a category of analysis, the disrespect for the historical method as a standard of validation and falsification and its exclusion from UCD's methodological protocols, the subordination of history to the drum-beat of a pre-conceived theory, the anachronistic projection of general categories of analysis over differently configured "worlds", and the conversion of theory as critique into an affirmation of the international as an insuperable objectification of world history. In the process, it turns out that UCD fails to comply with Waltz's theory/law distinction, remains circular and tautological, cannot account for change as development is axiomatically dissociated from human practice, and conveniently by-passes empirical counter-evidence. It fails to overcome and historicise the domestic/international binary by transhistoricising the distinction through complementing "methodological nationalism" with a timeless "methodological internationalism", ontologises history (rather than historicises ontologies) in terms of the general categories of the international, society and development, and remains blind to the lack of a concept of the inter-state order in Trotsky's own deployment of UCD. In the attempt to "get behind" (Neo-)Realism and to slay the dragon of the "Realist moment" by incorporating the international into a sociological definition of IHS, UCD reproduces the theoretical baggage for which a superannuated Neo-Realism has been rightly lambasted for decades: positivism, transhistoricity, self-validation, abstraction, structuralism, and affirmation. The suggestion, shared by Neo-Realism and UCD alike, that the entire course of human history can be captured by and subsumed under a single and parsimonious covering law, a universal *passé-partout* consisting of a few omnibus categories, defies belief. The danger in compressing these highly complex issues into a ready-made formula consists in letting syntactical relations between words confiscate the place of social relations between people.

For as the *Empire of Civil Society* did not provide a critique of Realism, but rather a Marxist explanation for the categories of Realism to hold in capitalist modernity, so does UCD not overthrow the transhistorical categories of Neorealism and its structural-functionalist mode of explanation, but adds another set of a-historical abstractions and another structural-functionalist mode of explanation, this time more sociological, to the Neo-Realist geopolitical categories. UCD remains therefore trapped in the same scientific logic it was meant to replace. General theories in the social sciences, normally of a structuralist type, are always seductive since they immediately hold out the prospect of providing facile and encompassing formulas – eternal truths of universal reach – which are easily comprehensible and require only application to different cases. What these panoptical delusions fail to grasp is the difference that people make. The "Two Marxisms" still haunt the "international imagination".



## **Conclusion: Recalling the Promise of Historical Sociology for IR**

This article has argued that the debate in IR/HS revolves centrally around the divide between structuralist/scientistic and historicist approaches, which cuts across the Marxist/non-Marxist divide. The former seeks to formulate transhistorical or mid-range covering laws, general and abstract categories of analyses, objective and structural determinations and imperatives, stable ontologies, and essentialised forms of rationalities. It proceeds by reasoning from an aprioristic set of axiomatics. The latter pursues the historicisation of situated socio-political practices, the specification of historically concrete concepts of analyses and ontologies, and the study of contextualised rationalities and inter-subjectivities. This includes also a constant historicisation of the construction of theories, methods and disciplines. In this respect, the fundamental divide that distinguishes approaches in IR/HS does not run between Marxist and non-Marxist approaches, but between scientistic and historicist conceptions of social science, which the idea of the "Two Marxisms" once expressed and which the post-positivist debate in IR keeps problematising. Consequently, Neo-Realism, rationalist Neo-Weberian HS, and UCD share a structuralist and positivist meta-theoretical orientation (even when they emphasise different structures that govern the law-like behaviour of states or people), whereas PM in IR, hermeneutic forms of Weberianism, Constructivism, and other IR/HS approaches abide by non-positivist meta-theoretical premises. Whereas the former are directed towards generalisations, the latter are directed towards specification.

This divide manifests itself acutely in relation to the second central analytical problem, which this article pursued across the controversies and intellectual terrain covered, namely the question of methodology for IR/HS. This was expressed in the long-standing problem of how to widen our perspective from "methodological nationalism" plus "linearity" to an "methodological internationalism" plus "multi-linearity" without either relapsing into a (capitalist) "methodological universalism", which reduced multi-linearity to global homogeneity, or subjecting multi-linearity to a supra-sociological geopolitical structuralism, which pressed isomorphically towards a new uni-linearity – multiple but homogeneous conflict-units. Neo-Realism resolved this issue by simply drawing an analytical rubicon between "system-level" and "unit-level", which posited a transhistorical "methodological internationalism", encapsulated in anarchy, but artificially severed the relation between international systemic imperatives and domestic social processes. This was complemented, by theoretical fiat, with a radical disavowal that history (temporality) mattered for the "autonomous" and "transhistorical" sphere of international relations, characterised by the recursive and necessitous. In short, it decoupled temporality from spatiality, froze history and posited an international ontology. Neorealism built its claim to constitute an IR theory on these premises and has, ever since, dismissed all alternative ways to conceptualise international relations for not conforming to its definition of IR Theory – and, consequently, not constituting IR theory. Inter-spatiality overwhelmed time.

Classical Marxism resolved this issue by either positing a spaceless stagism (succession of modes-of-production), or by positing a "methodological nationalism" which inflated itself over time – world-market formation, bourgeois world society, the universalisation of the capital relation - into a "methodological universalism", discounting inter-spatiality. Time overwhelmed space. Neo-Weberianism resolved this issue by positing an a "methodological internationalism" (spatiality) and by relating multi-linearity to the differential institutional resolutions of the conjunction between geopolitical systemic imperatives and the domestic presence or absence of capitalism (temporality). In the process, it re-aligned itself with Neo-Realism, as the international level (the inter-state system) was simply posited and transhistoricised as geopolitical fragmentation, whose military imperatives reduced multi-linearity to tri-linearity, which itself converged, driven by the logic of survival, towards uni-linearity: the successful modern capitalist nation-state. Multi-linear spatiality (variations in state-trajectories) was ultimately temporally homogenised. Inter-spatiality overwhelmed time. UCD posited a transhistorical and ontological notion of development (temporality), which generated a sociological and trans-historical definition of "methodological internationalism", defined as the "ontological international" (spatiality). This drove a transhistorical process of interactive multi-linearity, which generated socio-political heterogeneity through unevenness and combination. Inter-spatiality and time remain mutually reinforcing. Time cannot overcome space and space cannot overcome time.

All four approaches are united in their de-historicisation and de-socialisation of political geography (spatiality) and development (temporality). Neo-Realism, Neo-Weberianism, and UCD posit a "methodological internationalism" as a generic feature of the human condition. Marx remained trapped in an oscillation between the national and the universal. And since in Neo-Realism, temporality is discounted, in Neo-Weberianism transitory, and in UCD a given, history has no effect on political geography as long as "the international" is defined as more-than-one. At this level of abstraction, one and the same method, premised on the inside/outside divide, can be super-imposed on a stable numerical but not substantive political geography and, in the case of UCD, a stable idea of development. This article has suggested that the ontologisation of the world obfuscates the historicity of spatiality and temporality, respectively political geography and development. For even as the world was always already numerically composed of plural political communities, which develop and combine, this tells us little about their respective social relations, political geographies, inter- and intra-relations, and temporalities. And since we cannot articulate anything meaningful in the abstract about these phenomena, we cannot impose a generic inside/outside and development methodology, premised on the nationalism/internationalism binary, on these historically distinctive political communities and political geographies. The problem of "methodological nationalism" has its own historicity. The international is a relational and therewith historical category – in this case the relations between territorially delimited

nation-states. Other political geographies, most tellingly nomadic-tribal, civilisational, polis-federations, feudal-medieval, leagues of city-states, dynastic, imperial (recall the distinction between formal and informal empire), do not share this kind of spatiality and relations. The problem of the internal/external duality of appears at that moment in time, when an inter-state order crystallised and became itself a false dichotomy *ab initio*, as the capitalist nation-state never contained its social relations territorially. Rather than positing a purely quantitative "international ontology", we need to grasp inversely and qualitatively the historical uniqueness and specificity of the attempt to render social relations and political rule spatially congruent in one unified territory – sovereignty. We also need to recall the many strategies of territorialisation and de-territorialisation – closed trading state, autarchy, *Lebensraum*, supra-national integration, formal and informal empire, hegemony – that litter the long history of capitalist territoriality and the management of geopolitical space. And rather than positing a generic notion of development, we also need to recuperate inversely a sense of the historical uniqueness of capitalism – a sense that bedevilled Marx, for one - as the only form of socio-economic organisation - however exploitative, crisis-ridden, manic, and unjust - capable of generating growth and development on a historically unprecedented scale.

The attempt to move from an inter-disciplinary dialogue between IR and HS to a synthetic super-discipline of IHS valid for universal history is, for the time being, arrested. For any attempt to formulate macro-structuralist conceptions of world history, which press the rich variety of historically diverse political geographies into a single covering law, contravenes the original promise of IR's three-decade long turn to HS. Rather than founding another meta-discipline, which replaces Neorealism's eternal categories with yet another set of eternal categories, the vista is now cleared for a more productive return to this promise. This promise held the de-naturalisation, historicisation, socialisation, and subversion of geopolitical practices and concepts as contests over human affairs and life-chances. And, rather than to deplore their tragic, impersonal, and law-like nature, to criticise and resist them.

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