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Assessing the historical turn in IR: an anatomy of second wave historical sociology

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Assessing the historical turn in IR: an anatomy of second wave historical sociology

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Abstract *This article reassesses what is at stake in the historical turn in international relations (IR) and the attendant debate between the Second Wave of neo-Weberian historical sociology (WHS) and Political Marxism (PM). Firstly, it endeavours to recast what is at stake in the 'historical turn' in IR: the critique of reification and chronocentrism. Secondly, it examines WHS's argument against reductionism in the light of Weber's own work. We show how the Weberian dualism between the politics and the economics inhibits its capacity to complete its project of historicizing IR. Finally, it explains why recent Weberian's defence of multicausalism creates even more obstacles on the road towards an ontologically consistent historical turn.*

Introduction

What is still needed, though, is the development of a coherent synthetic theory rather than a comfortable eclecticism in which each factor is given its due. (Sanderson 1988, 311)

The perennial debate between the Marxian and Weberian sociological traditions has undergone some permutations in the field of international historical sociology. Both sociological traditions have been at the core of the historical turn in international relations (IR) and some scholars from both traditions haven't been afraid of a serious exercise of self-criticism. In this article, we want to reassess what is at stake in the historical turn in IR and the attendant critical exchange between the Second Wave of neo-Weberian historical sociology (WHS) and Political Marxism (PM). More specifically, we endeavour to evaluate to what extent Weberian Historical Sociology¹ has succeeded to fulfil the task it has set out for itself, namely to solve the agent-structure problem on the basis of an historically informed theorization of IR that meets its own standards of theoretical complexity and nonreductionism (Hobson 2000; 2002b). We argue that Second Wave WHS has not fulfilled its promises mainly because of the limits of its methodological and

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¹We will refer to WHS in order to stress the commonalities within this rich scholarly tradition. The prefixes first and second wave will be used in order to point to their specificities.

ontological underpinnings. Since WHS posits the segmentation of the social world into distinct and autonomous spheres of social action as the necessary entry point for nonreductionist Historical Sociology of IR, we argue that it ends up reifying categories of analysis that need to be historicized proper. Indeed, in maintaining the separation of the 'economic' and the 'political' akin to Liberal social theory as one of its core ontological foundation, WHS universalizes a complex of social relations specific to capitalist societies (Clarke 1982, 204; Wood 1995, 54; Lacher 2006, 122–124; Teschke 2006, 548). Thus, we contend that despite its major contributions to the critique of IR's modes of ahistorical and, more recently Eurocentred² theorizing, WHS has not escaped the pitfalls of *tempocentrism*³ in explaining structure and system change.

Our argument has one specific and one general endeavour. Its specific endeavour is to analyse a moment in the contribution of the Second Wave WHS to the historical turn in IR corresponding to the period from 1997 to 2007.⁴ Along this line, we think of our article as an anatomy because we argue that this theoretical project has encountered lethal limitations. Today, one of the theory's main advocates, John M Hobson, seems to have taken his distance with some of the positions that he defended during this period.⁵ More generally, we seek to replace these limitations in the broader context of the Weberian critique of 'reductionism'.

We contend that the Historical Sociology of IR should take as its methodological point of departure the rebuttal of static analytical matrix and categories of analysis to explain macroprocesses of social and institutional change. In this sense, we argue that the primary condition of existence of a reflexive historical sociology of IR rests on the reconstruction of the historical conditions of

² We prefer to distinguish Eurocentred from Eurocentric theorizations. By 'Eurocentric' we denote explanations that are embedded in a teleological myth of a distinctly European 'miracle' often associated with an implicit or explicit inclination to attribute normative superiority to Europe. In cases, when what is at stake is the respective weight of endogenous versus exogenous factors in the causal chain that led to the emergence of a given process, dynamic, institution or social relation in the geographical limitations of what is now 'Europe', we prefer to set apart Eurocentred from non-Eurocentred explanations. This said, while this nuance is important in debates where Europe is reified anachronistically, the important insights from Political Marxism have been precisely to stress the variations of trajectories within Europe, and the difficulties inherent to theoretical attempts to attribute to Europe, as a whole, properties which it certainly did not have during the Early Modern era.

³ As argued by John M Hobson: '[t]empocentrism is a mode of ahistoricism which conveys the illusion that all international systems are equivalent (isomorphic) and have been marked by the constant and regular tempo of a chronofetishised present, which paradoxically obscures some of the most fundamental constitutive features of the present international system' (2002a, 12, original emphasis). As we argue, the typologies at the core of WHS, which postulates prior to historical analysis the separation and autonomy of distinctive spheres of human action, represent such form of ahistoricism. For such a separation is only made possible within the specific context of the universalization of commodity production and alienated labour specific to capitalist social formations.

⁴ A period starting with JM Hobson's *The wealth of states* (1997) and ending with his chapter entitled 'To be or not to be a reductionist Marxism—is that the question?' Hobson's enthusiastic realignment *vis-à-vis* Marxism is formulated more explicitly in Hobson (2010). He did not reject explicitly his former defence of neo-Weberian multicausalism, however.

⁵ Of course, we are not implying that Hobson's reasons for his realignment *vis-à-vis* the Weberian and Marxist traditions are the same than those that we expose here.

emergence of its categories of analysis and of their historically specific interrelations. Hence, even the assumption that the ontology of IR has always been characterized by a complex overlap of national, international and global spatial dimensions reifies precisely what needs to be investigated historically (Halperin 1998; Teschke 2003; Dufour 2007; Brenner 2006).

This article will proceed as follows. In the first section, we recast what is at stake in the 'historical turn' in IR: the critique of reification and chronocentrism. Then, in the core section of the article, we examine WHS's argument against reductionism in the light of Weber's own work. We show how the Weberian dualism between the politics and the economics inhibits its capacity to complete its project of historicizing IR. In the third section, we explain why recent Weberian defences of multicausalism creates even more obstacles on the road towards an ontologically consistent historical turn. The conclusion stresses broader implications of our argument with regards to the future of the historical turn of IR in the light of recent debates.

Historical sociology, political Marxism and the historical turn

When Kenneth Waltz (1979) rejected the theoretical strategies of classical realism as speculative, he partook in a broader US-centred epistemological shift in the social sciences towards the rejection of historicism and hermeneutics. The ontological and epistemological divorce between the social sciences and history had to be celebrated. This shift has a long genealogy in the social sciences in which the Marginalist revolution in economics has been a turning point. Since then, this naturalist standpoint has come under heavy fire.⁶ It led to a myriad of dissidents often referred to as postpositivists, critical theorists, constructivists and reflexivists. Some refers to this conglomerate of dissidents as the architects of a *sociological turn* in IR.

A number of Weberians and Marxists have argued that this *sociological turn* had been too selective in its appropriation of the sociological tradition. Indeed, questions related to historically oriented issues and historically laden categories have often been left out by these dissidents. While a Weberian scholar concluded that: 'international relations is currently undergoing a "sociological turn", often equated with the rise of constructivism, we argue here that the "sociological turn" can only be *fully* realized by bringing "history" back in' (Hobson 2002a, 4; see also Halperin 1998, 330), a Marxist scholar went a step further asking the question: '[w]hy is there no International Historical Sociology?' (Rosenberg 2006). Everything was in place for a turn to historical sociology in IR.

Historical sociology is a field traditionally defined more by its macrostructural objects, and by its 'openness' (Lawson 2007), than by a strict theoretical core. As Skocpol (1998, 4) put it: '[h]istorical sociology is better understood as a continuing, ever-renewed tradition of research devoted to understanding the nature and effects of large-scale structures and fundamental processes of change.' Historical sociology (HS) seeks to foster a dialogue between sociology, global history and IR in order to forge its categories of analysis: capitalism, world system, liberalism, sovereignty, nationalism, war, revolution, imperialism and the state. The field has

⁶ Dufour (forthcoming).

questioned relations often taken for granted between liberalism, urbanization and democratization (Mann 2005; Evans et al 1985; Tilly 2004); war, technology and revolutions (Downing 1992; Lachmann 1989; McNeil 1982; Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1975; 2004); class relations, state formation and social transitions (Brenner 1986a; 1997; Comninel 2000; Evans 1995; Mooers 1991); and, social-property relations and forms of territoriality, sovereignty and nationalism (Lacher 2006; Teschke 2003; Dufour 2007; Hoffmann 2008).

Recently, however, both Weberians and Marxists have been confronted by the questions: how *historical* is historical sociology?, and, what does it mean to elaborate *historical* categories and ideal types (Lawson 2008)? In 2002, Hobson answered these questions with a typology of patterns of ahistoricism that needed to be addressed in IR. Summing up the relation between the discipline and historicity, he argues:

to the extent that contemporary mainstream international relations theorists have concerned themselves with history, they have generally employed what might be called an 'instrumentalist' view of history, where history is used not as a means to rethink the present, but as a quarry to be mined only in order to confirm theories of the present (as found especially in neorealism). (Hobson 2002a, 5)

Along these lines, the Second Wave of WHS contends that the 'first wave' (Tilly 1992; Skocpol 1979) failed to derive an historically informed conception of the international structure from their co-constitutive interactions with states. Hence, it reified an interstate structure typical of neorealism (Hobden 1999).⁷ This pitfall was reminiscent of a structuralism that fails to theorize the historical and multicausal dimensions of macrosocial processes. The Second Wave's major contribution to the historical turn was to challenge these latent realist assumptions at the core of so much work in historical sociology.

Partake also of the 'historical turn', a renewal of neo-Marxist historical sociology. Within this literature, Political Marxists have paid a particular attention to the historical origins of capitalism, modern sovereignty, territoriality, nationalism, states and globalization (Hoffmann 2008; Dufour 2007; Lacher 2006; Wood 2003; Teschke 2003; Teschke and Heine 2002). The theory's core contribution has been to debunk naïve forms of teleologism and reductionism in challenging several traditional accounts of the transition to capitalism and bourgeois revolution (Brenner 1986b; 2003; Comninel 1987; 2000; Teschke 2005). The outcome of 'developmental' processes, here, is not the derivative of an economic 'base' (Wood 1995). It needs to be reconstructed through the empirical analysis of subjectively mediated balance of class forces. Political Marxism grounds the subjectivity of social agents, and the meaning of social action, in the relational contexts of institutionalized social property relations. It contends that social rationality and social meaning is neither transhistorical (as in rational action theory), nor contingent (as in postmodernism), but grounded in the differential and antagonistic ways and strategies of social reproduction steaming from the social organization of appropriation. In the HS of IR, Political Marxism has played an important role in dissecting the consequences of the work of historian Robert

⁷ Prior to Hobson, many scholars had formulated similar critiques of Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* (1979; see Mooers 1991, 92–93; Halperin 1998, 328–329; O'Meara 1996).

Brenner for the analysis of IR (Teschke 2003). Both Teschke and Lacher have sought to move beyond Brenner's emphasis on the endogenous processes at the core of different trajectories of state's formation and transitions to capitalism. The project of this brand of geopolitical Marxism is to embed the grammars of social property regimes in the attendant geopolitical contexts in which they evolve (Teschke 2005). One of the theory's core contentions is that geopolitical relations among states are embedded in, and vary in relation with, social property regimes. Here, institutionalized patterns of political organization and their characteristics—imperial, hierarchical, anarchical, sovereign, levels of centralization, mode of taxation—are historicized in relation to the nondeterminist, yet noncontingent history of class relations in different social-property regimes. This theoretical project of historicization is also extended to the conditions of possibility of IR's phenomenology of spatial categories (imperial, regional, national, international, global). It asks the question: how has it become phenomenologically possible for social agents to conceive the relation between power and space along specifically given categories? It is from the standpoint of these contributions that we will propose a critical examination of recent neo-Weberian contributions to the historical turn in IR in the next sections.

The neo-Weberian critique of reductionism and defence of pluralism

One of the central contentions of the historical sociologist John M Hobson is that *all* Marxian inspired social theory is plagued by the original sin of reductionism: the 'base-superstructure approach' (Hobson 1998, 356; 2000, 115, 123–124, 195). Here we want to examine the neo-Weberian multicausal substitute for so-called reductionism. Against the Marxist axiomatic that historical change is primarily shaped by class contention revolving around material production or surplus extraction, WHS claims to offer a methodology that has no preconceived image of society. On the one hand, it contends that its axiomatic offers the device to grasp the principal dimensions of social reality. On the other hand, it asserts that its methodology rejects rigid chains of causality between the various dimensions that constitute social order. It therefore claims to offer a nonreductionist and nonlinear approach to social change. In so far as WHS seeks causal explanation of developmental trajectories, it proceeds in pointing to the *conjunction* of a given array of causal variables, none of which being posited theoretically as causally predominant (Mann 1986b). More precisely, its causal explanations point to the interconnections of either institutionalized (multifaceted) forms of power or power structures in given spatial and temporal contexts as the methodological entry point to account for the complexity of sociohistorical patterning (Skocpol 1979; Mann 1986b; Tilly 1992; Spruyt 1994a; Hobson 1997).

Such scepticism towards monocausal and structural explanations draws from Weber's discontent with social theories that reduced human agency to a mere bearer of structural imperatives (Aron 1967, 518; Gerth and Mills 1975, 34). Weber defended the importance of understanding individual subjective motives as an integral part of sociological analysis (Aron 1967, 511–513; Collins 1985, 84–85; Kalberg 2002, 56–58). His theory of action sought to take into account the relation between agency and structure in articulating an understanding of the subjective orientation of actions in their social contexts (Kalberg 2002, 56–58).

Although Weber's causal pluralism takes primarily its roots in his comprehensive sociology, which aimed 'to discover the source of social relations and institutions *in the meaningful orientation of individual action*' (Clarke 1982, 206, emphasis added), neo-Weberian scholars have generally turned their back on this dimension (Kalberg 2002, 40–41). Indeed, WHS research programmes have principally focused on macro social and institutional patterns of development (Tilly 1975; 1990; Skocpol 1979; Mann 1986a; 1993; Skocpol 1994; Weiss and Hobson 1995; Hobson 1997; 2004). Accordingly, WHS has generally turned down Weber's concern with the relation between the micro and the macro levels of social interactions in the guise of his interpretive sociology of meaningful value orientations of individual social actions (Kalberg 2002, 40–41).⁸ Important figures within WHS scholarship have explicitly embraced the Weberian principle of methodological individualism (Levi 1981; Levi and North 1982; Hechter 1983; Mann 1986b; 1993; Hall 1988; Evans 1993; 1995). Yet, they often interpret social action through the prism of instrumental rational action. As Kalberg (2002, 84, 88) points out, most contemporary historical sociologists have failed to take stock of this part of Weber's legacy, which draws close attention to the complex interrelations between values, customs, interests and action.⁹

It is in Weber's typology of ends that neo-Weberian scholars have mainly drawn in order to develop their analytical core. They have championed Weber's contention that social orders must be conceptualized as being constituted by irreducible autonomous variables. They contend that such typological matrix represents the necessary condition for an approach which allegedly has no preconceived image of the patterning of societies. It identifies the building blocks of every society, without assuming the specific ways in which they are arranged (Gerth and Mills 1975, 47). Insofar as Weber (1978) considered that human ends can be subsumed under three fundamental categories, namely economic, political and religious/ideological, he considered that they could be equally differentiated as the singular forms of any social order.

Weber's sociology of action builds on the assumption that singular social end can be achieved through a plurality of means. Accordingly, he considered it essential to discern ends from actions, and he emphasized the subjective meaning of individual social action. Even though most neo-Weberians do not integrate this insight in their theoretical framework, they generally follow Weber's distinction.

⁸ Weber's typology of value orientations specifies the array of forms taken by rational social conducts. He endeavoured to highlight the inherent limits of social theories that understood human conduct only as being shaped by the instrumental pursuit of self-interest (Clarke 1982). Although he considered instrumental rational action as an orientation that can be found throughout history, it has been neither the predominant nor the only form of value orientation. Rational action can equally be shaped by individual impulse to follow ancestral customs (traditional); by the intrinsic value it gives for the respect of religious or ethical imperatives (value-rational); or by emotional state of mind (affectual) (Weber 1978). Weber therefore considered as one of his fundamental task to explain the sufficient and necessary conditions for the rising preponderance of instrumental-rational action in Modern societies (Sayer 1991). Charles Tilly's late work was also characterized by a theoretical attempt to ground long-term social structures in the cumulative impact of meso- and microsocial interactions (Tilly 2006).

⁹ This is especially the case for historically oriented sociological researches building on rational choice theory, for example Spruyt (1994a; 1994b).

It should be pointed out that Weber's ambitions to construct abstract categories subsuming the various individual ends and means across history could only be achieved at the price of taking for granted the social and institutional context in which individual social actions take place (Clarke 1982, 196, 199). Thus, the typological matrix necessary for an account of social complexity *qua* multi-causality came at the cost of reifying the *empirical* separation of the social words into identifiable and discrete spheres of social action. The principal aim of sociological analysis is devoted to the investigation of the contingent lines of causality between these discrete spheres of social action. The analysis of the historical *processes* constitutive of the formation, internationalization and transformation of those spheres of action is therefore implicitly expunged from the sociological analysis of social change.

Economic ends/means/classes

In *Economy and society*, Weber (1978, 63) differentiates economic ends from economic mean:

[a]ction will be said to be 'economically oriented' so far as, according to its *subjective meaning*, it is concerned with the satisfaction of a desire for 'utilities'. 'Economic action' is any *peaceful* exercise of an actor's *control over resources* which is in its main impulse oriented towards economic ends. 'Rational economic action' requires instrumental rationality in this orientation, that is, deliberate planning.

The concept of 'economic ends' has generally been integrated within the WHS's axiomatic as a synonym for material needs. Concurrently, 'economic means' refers to given individual or collective capacities to mobilize given material resources. In Mann (1986b, 127) the 'economic' refers to the set of activities devoted to the fulfilment of subsistence means. He defines the concept of 'economic power' as the *functional means* mobilized in order to fulfil 'economic needs' (127). Comparatively, Giddens' (1983, 4) concept of 'allocative resources' stresses the *differentiated* capacities of individuals and social groupings to control (access to) the material world. It can be argued that within WHS the abstract category 'economic' stresses primarily the issue of individual or collective *control over resources*. Such differentiated control of capacities is apprehended without problematizing the historically specific sociolegal organization of the social *production* and *appropriation* of material resources—in so far as the 'economic' is conceptualized as being autonomous from politicolegal factors—which institutionalizes the capacities of institutions to exclude specific categories of people from the same access to given social production (Dufour and Rioux 2008).

This lacuna in the conceptualization of the 'economic' is similarly transposed onto the way in which WHS conceptualizes 'economic class'. Neo-Weberians generally embrace the notion of class which is the 'market situation' of individuals groupings sharing common economic situation and sociological characteristics in the possession (or nonpossession) of specific marketable commodities or technical skills (Weber 1978, 302–303; Held 1996, 159–160). The dominant strata of 'economic classes' generally refers to social groupings specialized in the acquisition and accumulation of material goods for its own sake through acts of market exchange (Weber 1978, 303; Skocpol 1979; Mann 1986b; Tilly 1992, 303; Spruyt 1994a). This conceptualization keeps untouched the subjective roots of the

liberal definition of 'economic relations'. Indeed, 'economic classes' refers to a 'particular social groups that arise out of the *free association of individuals* on the basis of their *perception* of a common economic interest' (Clarke 1982, 190, emphasis added). As Weber (1975, 181) asserts: '[t]he economic order is for us merely the way in which economic goods and services are distributed and used'. Hence, 'class' is conceptualized in abstraction of the social, institutional and legal conditions empowering 'free individuals' to 'willingly coalesce' in order to foster their 'common market interests'.

Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995, 167) rightfully stresses that the Weberian conceptualization of 'economic' and 'economic class' leaves outside the parameters of its analysis of the 'economic', the social proprietary relations of exploitation and domination *constitutive* of differentiated access to (and more importantly over) resources. This analysis of the 'economic' undertheorizes the complex of social and legal institutions that makes it possible and *necessary* for individuals to enter 'voluntarily' into (unequal) acts of exchanges to reproduce their material needs. Whether or not the insulation of 'economic' from 'political' and 'religious/ideological' factors is justified on methodological ground as providing the conceptual matrix necessary for an account of the complexity of social orders, it should be pointed out that it comes at the cost of reifying what needs to be historically explained.¹⁰

Political ends/means/status group

In *Economy and Society*, Weber (1978, 55) approached the 'economic' as expressing both the material necessities of life and the voluntary and pacific character of their acquisition through the medium of market exchange. Conversely, he subsumed under the category 'political ends' all those activities aiming at the submission of an individual or group of individuals to the will of one individual or the organizational will of a group of individuals. Insofar as those relations of subordination are characterized by the subordinates as legitimate, they are characterized as relations of authority for they are mainly reproduced by the individuals' beliefs in the rightfulness of their duty to obey. In contradistinction, when such relations depend only on the threat of the use of force they will be characterized as relations of domination. Generally speaking, 'politic' is therefore characterized by relations of authority and domination of one or more individual over others (Aron 1967, 555). Thus, 'political means' invariably refers to the individual or organizational use of *physical coercion* (Weber 1975, 159; 1978, 55).

Hence, social organizations will be characterized as 'political' only in the sense of their potential capacity to muster physical violence, irrespective of the ends pursued (Weber 1975, 159). Tilly (1992, 1, 96) follows Weber in conceptualizing the state in terms of its activities which are essentially geared towards mobilization of armed violence for either offensive or defensive purposes. 'Political actions', although having potential 'economic' implications, must be analysed independently of 'economic' factors since their orientation aim at a distinctive form of

¹⁰ Lachmann's (1989) conceptualizations of class and elite do integrate an analysis of the socioinstitutional contexts empowering specific groups of individuals to develop access capacities to material resources.

action (Weber 1978, 54–55, 70). Indeed, ‘political action’ is directed either to the achievement of political power for its own sake, or for the personal prestige it bestows to individuals specialized in such endeavour (Weber 1975, 160, 180). Irrespective of the political organization in which they are part of, all groups of individuals specialized in the pursuit of ‘political power’—whether specialized in purely administrative tasks or in the mobilization of armed violence—for its own sake equally value the prestige associated with ‘political power’ and, more specifically, the added capacity such prestige offers for its expansion (Weber 1975, 160).

Neo-Weberians generally adopt Weber’s conceptualization of ‘political elite’ as groups of ‘political entrepreneurs’ organized in a political community and groups specialized in purely ‘political’ (for example, state-based) functions whose primary endeavour is the accumulation of ‘political power’ through the use and application of available modes of domination (Collins 1985, 91). Accordingly, ‘political’ elites possess distinctive set of interests relative to ‘economic’ or ‘dominant’ classes, the most significant of which being the preservation and extension of their ‘political power’ either as an end or as a mean to ensure the material (administrative) basis of their self-preservation (or expansion) against ‘outside’ political communities (Skocpol 1979, 27, 29; Tilly 1992, 96). Although such ‘political’ communities necessarily depend on access to ‘economic resources’ for their own survival as ‘political’ organizations, their actions remain primarily concerned with the self-perpetuation of their own ‘political power’ which ultimately lays in their capacity to muster physical violence (Skocpol 1979, 29; Jacoby 2004, 409). In other words, their actions may be ‘economically oriented’ in the sense of ensuring the mobilization of ‘economic resources’ for the reproduction of their ‘political communities’, but their ends are invariably ‘political’ since they invariably seek to maintain or expand their power and prestige against their direct competitors (Mann 1986b, 17).

With his conceptualization of ‘politic’, Mann departs from the usual ‘Weberian trilogy’ in distinguishing ‘political’ from ‘military’ power and organization (Collins 2006, 21). Rejecting Weber’s interpretative methodology, Mann contends that we ought to go beyond the ‘motivational model of power’, which explains power relations on the basis of an inquiry into individual motives beyond power relations. Instead, he offers an organizational model through which power as a social phenomenon is approached in its organizational dimensions—that is as means, as organizational capacity. Whereas Weber emphasizes physical coercion as being the constitutive characteristic of ‘politic’, Mann considers that it should rather be apprehended in the specific *sociospatial character* of its *form of rule and regulation*: that is, territoriality and centralization. He argues that the organization and deployment of physical coercion has not always been monopolized by centralized and territorialized organizations. Hence, there is a necessary value in disentangling military from political *functions* in order to understand more adequately the variable ways in which they have intersected across history. Thus, whereas ‘military’ power takes its sources in the functional requirements for organized defence against physical aggression as much as the utility of its deployment; Mann (1986b, 22–24) argues that ‘political’ power arises out of the so-called functional usefulness of centralized and territorialized forms of regulation. This analytical distinction remains ambivalent, for centralized and territorialized forms of authority can hardly be maintained without the use of

physical coercion. Concurrently, juridical sanctions can hardly be applied without some threat of physical coercion. Moreover, Mann's emphasis on the singularity of political power relative to the other power sources remains problematic, at least, to account for institutionalized power relationships within 'Europe' during the medieval and early modern eras (Jones 1999; Brenner 2006). Along this line, Jones (1999, 68, 70) contends that Mann's theory of political power can't account for the history of state formation prior to the rise of the centralized sovereign state, as the institutional configuration of 'political' power was rather diffused and disseminated along a hierarchy of relations of dependence.

Wood (1995) and Brenner (2006) challenge not only the ground on which Mann's typology rests, but more significantly the foundation upon which the Weberian differentiation between 'economic' and 'political', as two irreducible and autonomous spheres of social action, lays. They draw attention to one of Marx's most significant contributions, the unveiling of the political conditions of possibility of the 'economy'. Marx challenged liberal political economists for taking the *form* of appearances taken by economic exchange in capitalism—as 'voluntary' and 'reciprocal' acts of exchange between 'free' and 'equal' individuals—as its *substantive* character (Wood 1981; 1995). As Sayer (1987, 61) points out, Marx sought to raise the fundamental question—eschewed by liberal political economy—as to how it is that in capitalism production and distribution of social labour take the form of 'pure economic' relations of contractual exchange between formally free individuals. He sought to highlight the social character of economic production and exchange in challenging the liberal abstraction of the economy from social relations. The latter took for granted the preconditions for purely 'economic exchange' to be not only desirable but equally compulsory for every individual, as the only way to access to the socially determined material needs. Marx thus raised the question as to what makes capitalist social relations of production historically unique in differentiating spatially and temporally the moment of appropriation of surplus labour—the moment of exploitation—from the moment of physical coercion—the moment of domination. The question was not arcane in its context of enunciation for in *all* societies prior to the development of capitalist social relations, individual and collective production, as much as the distribution of socially necessary labour, was generally ensured via 'nonmarket' relations (Polanyi 1957 [1944]). More to the point, the allocation of surplus labour was achieved through authoritative means—horizontally via the application of communal norms and regulations; vertically via the use of individual or collective (or threat of) physical coercion (Giddens 1983; Brenner 1986a; 1997; Wood 1998).

Thus, if the term 'economic' designates the set of activities consisting in producing and distributing socially necessary material goods, and 'political' refers to the authoritative activities consisting in accumulating and mobilizing (legitimate) means of coercion so as to make others (willingly) comply to bend to one's will. It can be argued that the Weberian distinction between the 'political' and 'economic' can hardly be either differentiated typologically or empirically as two 'distinctive spheres', 'forms of social actions' or 'social ends'. Indeed, in every noncapitalist society the appropriation of surplus labour—'economic'—is *conditional* on the capacity to mobilize accumulated means of sanctions—'juridical/political' (Brenner 1986b; Wood 1994; Comninel 2000). Thus, what is commonly referred to as two distinctive activities, namely economic exploitation and political domination, remained literally but the same act and could neither be

distinguished analytically nor substantively from one another (Wood 1981). Moreover, the analytical distinction between the 'political state' and 'civil society', which such typology presupposes is anachronistic when used as abstract categories mobilized to conduct empirical enquiries across history.

Thus, the Weberian's axiomatic, which strives to theorize historical complexity, turns out to reify an historically specific complex of social and institutional relations. The typology that stresses the irreducible and distinctive character of social factors leaves unaddressed an understanding of the historically specific institutional, legal and cultural preconditions that made possible analytically, as much as substantively, the differentiation between the 'economic' and 'political' as two *formally* distinctive 'realms'. Thus, WHS maintains an untenable tension between the abstract and formal character of its axiomatic and its endeavour to develop historically informed analyses accounting for the specificity and complexity of social life.

The second wave of WHS and the Marxist critique of multicausalism

Contemporary WHS seeks to fill the gap between global history and IR. It develops sociohistorical categories informing an historical sociology of IR *from* the empirical evidences of history. This is deemed as a qualitative departure from an instrumentalist approach to history that uses empirical evidences so as to validate its core theoretical assumptions rather than developing (and adapting) its own categories of analysis from historical investigations proper (Hobson 2002b). As such it offers an alternative to the ahistorical model conveyed by dominant theories of IR, which evacuate central issues such as the origins, and development of social institutions, social practices, and structural change. Weberian Historical Sociology brands itself as a new model of complexity. 'The most general statement that can be made is that the approach (WHS) is committed to theoretical "complexity" as opposed to "reductionism"' (Hobson 2000, 125, 194).

In addition to a more furnished walk-in of variables, WHS proposes an epistemological shift. Weberians argue that an adequate theory of the state, and of society and international relations, must embody the following aspects:

1. a study of *history and change*
2. *multicausality* (not one but many interdependent power sources)
3. *multispatiality* (not one but many interdependent spatial dimensions)
4. *partial autonomy* of power sources and actors
5. *complex* notions of history and change (historicism)
6. (nonrealist) theory of *state autonomy/power*. (Hobson 2000, 194, see also 195)

This shift seeks to overcome several pitfalls in historical sociology: (1) the cultural reductionism of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; (2) the agency-less notion of social system in Parsonian sociology; and (3) Marxism's class reductionism. However, it does create new lines of tensions. If a theory's analytical core posits a priori: (a) the partial autonomy of all power sources, (b) a radical multicausalism, 'a complex set of overlapping matrices of power', (c) no hierarchy in processes, mechanisms or structures or explanation, (d) that 'no one power source is self-constituting' (Hobson 2000, 195; see also Mann 1986b, 4), then the price to pay for 'complexity' seems to be that the theory is likely to explain

everything and/or nothing. It is, by definition, always true, for there is simply no occurrence in which it could be false or wrong. Yet, we are less interested in this epistemological issue, than in an ontological issue which is a challenge for the historical turn in IR. As we have contended at the outset of this article, the task of a reflexive historical sociology should imply the reconstruction of the historical conditions of emergence of categories of analysis and their interrelations.

We will seek to illustrate how these issues emerged in the debate on the autonomy of the state. Weberian Historical Sociology draws on Mann's social theory to escape the pitfalls of its Weberian predecessors. However, it rejects his conceptualization of the 'international'. Mann contends that analyses of social power must transcend the traditional 'societal trap'—the widespread tendency in social sciences to treat societies as self-constituted and self-enclosed units—for it is an erroneous point of departure for social scientists in so far as social relations never neatly follow territorial frontiers. Mann rather emphasizes the idea according to which networks of social power deploy themselves according to different sociospatial principles and develop along different tempo, while 'intersecting' in a variety of ways depending of the historical conjuncture. Thus networks of power ought to be analytically distinguished on the basis of organizing principles in order to analyse the specific ways in which they 'intersect' and 'develop functional promiscuity'. Hence, Mann distinguishes two intermingling sets of principles according to which power organize: intensive/extensive and authoritative/diffuse. Intensive/extensive forms of power are distinguished according to the variability in their sociospatial *reach* in the controlling of one's environment. '*Extensive power* refers to the ability to organize large numbers of people over far-flung territories in order to engage in minimally stable cooperation. '*Intensive power* refers to the ability to organize tightly and command a high level of mobilization or commitment from the participants, whether the area or numbers covered are great or small' (Mann 1986b, 7). Concurrently, authoritative/diffuse powers are distinguished according to their specific *organizing principles*, which are assessed on the basis of the variability of levels of *centralization* and *planning* in the application of power. '*Authoritative power* is actually willed by groups and institutions. It comprises definite commands and conscious obedience. '*Diffuse power*, however, spreads in a more spontaneous, unconscious, decentred way throughout a population, resulting in similar social practices that embody power relations but are not explicitly commanded' (8). This taxonomy offers ideal types, which are never neatly found in the empirical world. Notwithstanding the fact that these principles are analytically distinguished, they seldom appear as self-exclusive. The principle according to which networks of social power are organized can therefore be ultimately distinguished on the basis of their *spatial reach*. Indeed, whereas authoritative and diffused forms of power are mutually exclusive—a power organization *cannot* function according to the principle of centralized planning *and* spontaneous/decentralized occurrence—these can, however, be differently expressed spatially as intensive and extensive.

Mann (1986, 27) argues that whereas ideological, economic and military networks of power are sociospatially dual, that is they are never *contained* within neat territorial borders, political power is in *contradistinction* centralized and territorialized by its very *essence*. What distinguishes political power from all the other *sources* is that it primarily, but not exclusively, derives from the ability it gives to those in command to *lock in* individuals within territorial borders so as to

impose their specific forms of regulations, directives and commands. Having thus established the specificity of political power *vis-à-vis* other power sources, Mann moves on to the analysis of the sociospatial duality of political *organization*. Since political power is *by definition* territorialized and centralized, its organizational shape must be sociospatially dual for territorial borders demarcate what is the object of centralized regulation and command from what is not. Thus, the reverse organizational face of political power takes on a decentralized and diffuse shape, which is embodied in geopolitical competition and interstate diplomacy. Therefore, in defining *a priori* political power as territorialized and centralized leads *logically* to a definition of the 'international' in terms of anarchy, geopolitical competition and militarism.

It is at this juncture that WHS takes its distance from Mann's social theory. Indeed, both Hobson and Hobden have been critical of his conceptualization of the 'international' while nevertheless praising the heuristic value of his IEMP model for an HS of IR. Indeed, both scholars contend that Mann has not escaped the trap in which his neo-Weberian predecessors have fallen in equating the 'international' with the timeless logic of geopolitical competition (Hobden 1998, 134–135; 1999, 261–262; 2001, 283; compare Halliday 2005, 513; Hobson 2005, 519; 2006, 155). According to Hobson, Mann's conceptualization of the 'international' *qua* geopolitical militarism undermines the coherence of his IEMP model in general, and his multicausal methodology in particular. As Hobson (2005, 520) contends, such a manoeuvre 'unavoidably leads to an elevation of the "M" [military] within the IEMP model, a move which does a disservice to his multicausal analysis and its evocations to avoid issues of "ultimate primacy"'.¹¹

Mann's conception of the 'international' is deemed inconsistent, as it oscillates between a 'realist' conception stressing militarism, and a so-called 'constructivist' understanding that stresses the role of rules and norms in shaping rulers perceptions and decisions (Hobden 1998; 1999; Hobson 2005; 2006). Despite these ambiguities, Hobson argues that Mann's IEMP model already contains *potential* remedy to his problematic 'realist' tendencies. Indeed, Hobson argues that Mann's model would gain in coherence if the partially autonomous role of ideological power was systematically incorporated in his theorization of international dynamics. So far, Hobson argues, Mann's empirical works have tended to put at the forefront a 'thin' conception of ideology that is conceptualized as a set of meanings and ideas, which merely *reinforces* existing power structures—what Mann defines as immanent ideology. Nevertheless, Hobson argues that Mann's model carries concurrently a 'thick' conception of ideology that transcends existing power structures and territorial boundaries. Here, so-called transcendental ideologies are deemed 'partially autonomous' from existing power structures *and* play a constitutive role in shaping rules and norms followed by power actors. Thus, to find a remedy to Mann's 'realist' tendencies, Hobson prescribes a dose of 'constructivism' so as to downplay the monocausal role of anarchy and geopolitical militarism (Hobson and Sharman 2005; Hobson 2006, 163–165).¹¹ In other words, Hobson asserts that the 'I' (ideology) must be

¹¹ It is worth noting here that Hobson's critique of Mann's conceptualization of ideology has been the stepping stone of his later work on the constitutive role of racist ideology in the formation of international hierarchies. See for example Hobson (2007).

highlighted in order to maintain the coherence of Mann's model and, more importantly, its pluralist causal methodology. At this level, neo-Weberian critiques of Mann's conceptualization of the 'international' remain interestingly mute regarding the articulation of the 'E' (economy) in the IEMP model in order to theorize international system change.

Hobson's reorientation of Mann's model eschews a fundamental problem. Whereas Hobson's (2002a) manifesto for an Historical Sociology of IR stresses the necessity to transcend the traps of chronofetishism and tempocentrism, he however remains silent regarding Mann's conceptualization of the 'international' as *logically* derivative of a definition of political power as being inherently centralized and territorialized. The alleged dual-spatiality of power sources cannot solve Mann's isomorphic conceptualization of political power in general and of the international in particular. For such conceptualization of political power *presupposes* that it is universally organized along a modern political phenomenology of the *inside/outside* dualism (Teschke 2003; Lacher 2006). This poses serious problems to an Historical Sociology of the 'international' interested in explaining the processes of formation and transformation of geopolitical orders with their historically specific rules of reproduction and social contradictions. We argue that because Second Wave WHS remains influenced by Mann's conceptualization of political power and his theorization of state power, the latter aspect of the problem has not been addressed.

Therefore, despite its claims to provide a superior theorization of the historicity of international orders and changes, Second Wave WHS has not yet provided sound basis for a historical sociology of the international. Indeed, the main solution it puts forth to solve these deep-seated problems has been to trade one type of methodological formalism for another. It has done so in borrowing from structurationist theorizing, which stresses the double dimensions of social structure as *both* a set of constraints shaping agents course of actions, and as a set of potential resources from which the latter can draw so as to buck the logic of the former (Hobson 2001, 401).

The following quotation exemplifies Hobson's reconceptualization of state autonomy *qua* embeddedness, which paves the way to think of state capacities to transcend international structural constraints:

[i]nternational and national 'structures' are... (re)viewed as 'realms of opportunity' as well as 'realms of constraints'. In this way, domestic and international societies become partial pools into which states-as-agents dip so as to enhance their power or interests in both realms. Above all, the state is a spatially Janus-faced entity, with one face looking to the international and global realms and the other facing the domestic arena. This enables the state to play off the different realms and power sources in order to enhance its multiple interests, which in turn leads to changes in the domestic and international 'spheres'. (Hobson 2000, 210)

Hobson mobilizes the notion of 'dual-reflexivity' in order to express the co-constitutive relationship of 'international-domestic realms': 'the international and national realms are not discrete (*pace* neorealism), nor is there a one-way linkage between the two, with the latter primary (*pace* Marxism). Rather, the international shapes the national quite as much as the national shapes the international (what we call "dual reflexivity")' (Hobson 1997, 2). Despite its convenience, the notion of 'dual reflexivity' merely provides a device that can be mobilized ad hoc to escape

criticisms related to potential causal factors omitted in empirical explanations. Moreover, 'dual reflexivity' remains yet another device for mere theoretical empiricism which is no palliative for the necessity to develop what Lacher (2006) calls an 'epochal theory' of IR.

Furthermore, the assumption of the co-constitutive nature of the 'domestic' and 'international' realms—promising because of its repudiation of a conception of the domestic/international as discrete realms of constraints—reproduces the *inside/outside* dichotomy pervasive in the field of IR (Walker 1993). It could be legitimately argued that framing the issue in these terms merely reflects the inherent constraints of any process of cognition which necessary requires the use of abstractions to reassemble in thoughts the many concrete social determinations making up the world in a specific juncture. However, such an objection cannot be mobilized in the defence of Second Wave WHS theorizing of the international. For the inside/outside dichotomy derives ultimately from its theoretical assumption about the centralized and territorialized *essence* of political power drawn from Mann's social theory. This alleged essence of political power constitutes an 'external' realm in which political organizations encounter one another on a diffuse and decentralized plane. Without affecting the functions of political organizations, the interactions enacted through diplomacy and war making may lead—in combination with the taking into account of the dual spatiality of the intersecting networks of power—to interstitial change that will affect both the existing configuration of power networks and social forces.

In attempting to foster the concept of 'multispatiality' and 'dual reflexivity', with the aim of fleshing out through empirical analysis the notion of the partial autonomy of power actors, Hobson's historical sociological analysis devoted to the transformations of trade regime at the end of the nineteenth century reveals some of the pitfalls of his theoretical model. In the *Wealth of states* (1997), Hobson explains how different configurations of 'state/society complexes', and the variability in the institutional makeup of states (centralized vs federal states), influenced their responses to the twin impacts of the second military revolution, which increased the weight of military spending in states' budget and the world depression of the late nineteenth century. More specifically, Hobson seeks to understand why, in this context, continental states such as Germany and Russia used tariff protectionism and indirect taxation as a strategy to achieve fiscal autonomy while the United Kingdom maintained a free trade regime and used direct taxation. More broadly, he endeavours to demonstrate how state rulers used this changing international context, which constrained partially their margins of manoeuvre while also leaving room for some novel power strategies, to foster their own fiscal autonomy in either: (1) associating with dominant class elites (Germany); (2) ruling directly against their interests (Russia), or (3) simply balancing contending classes against one another (United Kingdom).

Hobson mobilizes the notion of 'spatial trinity' to express the multivariable lines of causation informing his empirical analysis. The line of causation begins with the identification of variables that altered the configuration of international dynamics, that is the Second Military Revolution and the world depression of the late nineteenth century. Then, the analysis proceeds with cross-national comparisons to explore how variable state/society complexes affected differentially state capacities to adapt to this changing playing field and, more importantly, how the strategies enacted led to unintended societal and

institutional domestic changes that either took the form of reform, regime collapse or revolution. Finally, he underlines how the sum of these cross-national strategies and societal/institutional changes reverberated back into the international system leading to further transformations: namely, in this case, the abolition of the Free trade regime and increased interstate tensions leading to the First World War. Hobson contends that his causal sequence eschews the unidirectional causal sequence in which timeless geopolitical imperatives command domestic/institutional transformations. Here, the impacts of unit-level changes on the international system are addressed and the changing texture of international dynamics is tentatively envisioned in a dialectical manner (Hobson 1997, 14).

This being said, the interactions between unit-level changes and systemic international transformations highlighted rest on a problematic understanding of the 'international'. Indeed, the international realm is apprehended as being constituted by two distinguishable, yet interrelated, and *fully formed* structural levels: the political *qua* interstate geopolitical rivalries and the economic *qua* international capitalist market competition. The historical process constitutive of the specific relationship linking these two analytical levels remains under-historicized as they are considered the political and economic dimensions of an international system. This raises the fundamental question of the heuristic value of the notion of 'dual reflexivity' put forward by Second Wave WHS as one pivotal device to grasp the complexity of international phenomenon. We contend that its heuristic value should be assessed not so much on the basis of the flexibility it provides to highlight the contingent lines (namely, nondeterministic) of causation between analytical levels, but rather on the basis of its capacity to problematize the social *process* through which various 'dimensions' of social relations are formed and transformed within their specific world historical contexts giving birth to new forms of social power and new realms for their deployment. Hence, even though we find important Hobson's recent invitation to evaluate seriously the weight of the Afro-Asian led wave of 'globalization' in the making of the 'Western Civilization', we would like to set apart the patterns of market-mediated social relations in the making of this wave of 'globalization', from contemporary forms. Long-distance trade might have taken a quasi 'global' form in the context analysed by Hobson, but it did not partake in the expansion of an 'empire of civil of society' (Rosenberg 1994), that is, an ever-expanding realm of deployment of private powers mediated by the market and driven by imperatives of productivity; economic competition; commodity fetishism and valorization, imposing its rationalizing scheme on all social agents (Knafo 2007; Wood 1994). Thus, though we welcome Hobson's recent attempts to bring attention to non-Eurocentred processes at the origins of contemporary globalization, our historicizing of *prima facie* market-mediated capitalist social power leads us to regard with scepticism the argument that the contemporary globalization's 'tentative origins' lies in the Afro-Asian Age of Discovery of the fifth century (Hobson 2009, 690). Again, we would contend that such an assertion underscores the specificity of the market when embedded in capitalist property relations. Bringing a hermeneutic of social relations back in, whether it is in the tradition of Marx or Weber, requires the capacity to provides such a distinction.

The main issue for HS of IR should be not so much the broadening of the ontology of the 'international' so as to adequately take into account the constraints and opportunities stemming world capitalist market competition on state actors,

and vice versa. It rather lays on the historical method and categories of analysis enabling explanations of the conditions of possibilities of world capitalist market competition and modern geopolitical rivalries, which are the prerequisites to grasp their historical specificities. The objective of this methodological strategy of investigation should not exclusively be geared to shed light on the process constitutive of international structural imperatives and dynamics, but also to explain the constitutive relationships between unit level changes and international systemic changes. Although Second Wave WHS explicitly aims at addressing this latter dimension, its axiomatic impedes its capacity to fulfil this project.

As argued from the onset of this article, WHS's axiomatic impedes its capacity to problematize the process constitutive of formally separated political and economic spheres. Thus, neither the conditions of possibility of modern geopolitical rivalry and capitalist economic competition, nor their historical specificities, are Hobson's focal points. His version of a nonreductionist HS of IR rather brings him to identify two determining factors (military revolution and world economic depression), each pertaining to distinctive levels of international social interactions, in order to point to their partially autonomous impacts on the transformations of international dynamics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His endeavour is not so much to explain the conditions of existence of these two causal factors, but rather to highlight the ways in which they created new opportunities and constraints for political elites evolving within distinctive state/society complexes. In doing so, Hobson mobilizes the notion of partial autonomy of power actors as an irreducible ontological principle, which amounts to a transposition of historically specific configuration of social power—that is akin to capitalism—on *all* social formations. In doing so, Hobson reifies the notion of (state) autonomy and projects historically specific categories of analysis into the past, constructing an isomorphic picture of social relations and institutionalized social power.

The historical specificity of the laws of motion and inner social contradictions pertaining to nineteenth century geopolitical rivalry and the (developing) capitalist world economy are therefore never considered as significant constitutive forces in shaping the transformations analysed by Hobson. This is problematic for the military revolution of nineteenth and first world economic depression expressed fundamental social and institutional transformations of the international system, institutional makeup of its core actors, and acute transformations in class relations. The second military revolution and the first world economic depression were fundamentally the product of the social transformations at the 'domestic level' of both social power and institutional order pertaining to the *uneven* transition to capitalism; its tremendous consequences in transforming the dynamics and legal underpinning of interstate relations, and the ways in which these new structural constraints reverberated back into the international system as a central part of processes of class and state formation. Thus, to bring down 'dual reflexivity' to concrete historical processes, it would necessitate a problematizing of the deep social and institutional transformations brought by the development of English capitalism and the geopolitical challenges it posed for the ruling elites in continental Europe. It would furthermore involve a discussion of the way in which this transformation not only propelled fundamental changes in the way in which individuals relate to one another, but also necessitate an explanation as to how the material basis of social relations were transformed by processes of primitive

accumulation and the formal subsumption of labour to capital (Sayer 1987). It would also call for a problematization of the way in which such transformations *were* a *necessary* condition for the development of the formal separation of economic from the political and, therefore, constituted the capacity of the transformed institutionalized political power to develop autonomous capacity of rule within the material constraints imposed by capitalist accumulation.

Interestingly, Hobson (1997, 196–197) points to some of the social dynamics at play across the European state system at the end of the nineteenth century as a way of articulating militarization and industrialization. His recent work extends this analysis both spatially and temporally by relating social processes often described as Eurocentred and Early Modern (the commercial and military revolutions, and modern sovereignty) to the broader ‘global’ context of the ‘Afro-Asian’ globalization (Hobson 2004). However, his analysis calls for the problematization of the uneven development of the military-induced process of industrialization: a process expressing the contradictory responses of ruling elites seeking to maintain the material basis of their social power and the unintended and contradictory consequences of transforming themselves in the process. As argued above, geofiscal pressures were indeed fierce in the context of the challenges posed by rapid English capitalist transformations and industrialization, which increased considerably not only the fiscal basis on which the state—*pace* the ruling class—could draw to further its domestic and international interests; but also its capacity to project its social power ‘outside’ by inducing by military threat geopolitical pressures on its competitors to transform the fabric of the social relations upon which their social power rested in order to face these external challenges. These transformations took the form, in many instances and places, of ‘revolution from above’. In starting his empirical narrative in 1870s, Hobson (1997) falls into the trap he criticizes, for military-induced industrialization and change in trade regime find their root causes, at least implicitly, in his analysis at the end of the war with Bonaparte.

Although Hobson (1997, 200) points to a salient feature of the changing relations between nobilities whose social power rested in their abilities to use extra-economic power, he problematizes these changing relations as attempts by states to find new sources of revenues in a context of heightened geopolitical pressures and military costs. Because Hobson apprehends state and society as discrete entities, his model fails to emphasize the institutional metamorphosis of state’s power and the qualitatively different nexus of social property relations in which these transformations are embedded. Hobson rightly points out that a state’s institutional make up plays a significant role in determining its capacity to extract resources *via* taxation. Centralized states are more efficient in determining and appropriating surpluses produced in society than decentralized states in large federations. The latter must compete with regional and local power sources for the appropriation of parts and parcels of the resources available at the local level. It therefore lacks the autonomy and fiscal sovereignty that centralized states possess. In order for this significant sociological insight to avoid taking the form of *static* typologies, however, it commands the sociohistorical reconstruction of processes of state and class formations in the making of the centralization of state’s power. The variation in state capacities—its penetrative infrastructural power and its ‘autonomy’ vis-à-vis civil society, to use Hobson’s terminology—cannot be abstracted from historically specific processes of class formation and transformation that affects the capacities of

various power actors in society to develop strategies to further their self-conceived interests and reproduce themselves socially.

Finally, the problematic character of WHS axiomatic is exemplified by Hobson's explanation of the causes of German and Russian shifts to tariff protectionism. In both empirical cases, Hobson argues that a shift to protectionism *cannot* be explained on the basis of states' responses to the interests of dominant economic classes. Here, his argument seems reminiscent of chronofetishism, as it does not address the sociohistorical preconditions for the alternative 'mode of taxation' to be a concrete and feasible policy option for the state. The fact that the Russian state opted for 'regressive' trade tariff to meet the increase in military expenditures at the end of the nineteenth century does not exemplify 'weak state capacities' per se. It rather rests on Russia's specific complex of institutionalized property relations, which remained characterized by politically constituted relations of surplus extraction on a widely agrarian, weakly urbanized and monetarized economy with a nascent industrial sector predominantly dominated by German capital investments. Concurrently, Hobson's analysis of German fiscal policy takes one significant aspect of German social development for granted: its contradictory and uneven transition to capitalism which sparked a transformation in class relations and configuration of power relations within German polity. Here, the manifold forms of resistance to the uneven (state-led) process of primitive accumulation and the conflicts between the factions of the nascent and older ruling classes, with their conflicting and contradictory interests in the process of state-led centralization and unification of national market—is somehow expunged from his analysis.

Thus, Hobson's critique of Marxian concept of state relative autonomy is based on an undertheorized relation between state's interest, state power and dominant class interests. Whereas Hobson notes that States may shore up the interests of the dominant class while pursuing their own autonomous interests, there is no explanation as to why it is the interests of that specific class that is protected in the end. Moreover, a State's autonomy and interests are taken as transhistorically given. They are not submitted to historical inquiry, something Hobson deems the basis of any historical sociology of IR. Although we can accept that the political is indeed autonomous—that is, separated formally from economic determinant—within capitalist societies, this statement is inadequate for precapitalist social forms. Lastly, even though we accept the notion of state autonomy from class or economic determination, that the state is not the tool of the bourgeoisie, and that state's ability to pursue its goal rests on its ability to reach out in society—for example, infrastructural power—the ability to do so in the context of a capitalist economy rests on its ability to maintain an institutional context of abstract 'economic' activity: capital investment, accumulation and profitability. Nowhere is it more obvious in Hobson's analysis of economic regime transformation of the untheorized assumption that state power is enhanced by cooperation with society—and this can be assessed by its ability to finance itself through direct taxation—taxation on income—which assumes the universalization of wage-labour relations as the foundation of economic structure.

In so far as the starting point of a reflexive Historical Sociology of IR should take as its starting point the idea that categories of analysis, and articulation between categories of analysis, cannot be assumed *a priori* on the ontological plan. The task of a reflexive historical sociology should be precisely to reconstruct the historical conditions of emergence of the specific categories of analysis and of their

interrelations before their mobilization as cognitive devices to apprehend social totalities and social change. To assume, from the start, that the core ontology of International Relations theory must build on the complex overlap of 'national', 'international' or 'global' 'levels', only leads towards a reification of what precisely needs to be investigated historically. In this regard, Griffin (1995) rightly stresses that a lot can be lost in the traditional way in which sociology has developed its typologies and conceptual apparatuses in attributing fixed meanings to its core categories of analysis. As it has been pointed out in the first section of this article, it represents, for Weberian sociology, the theoretical preconditions for historical comparative analysis. Such a methodological stance, however, poses significant difficulties to account for the different ways in which categories of analysis may have different meanings in historically specific social contexts, and be intermingled distinctively in historically situated historical practices (Griffin 1995, 1249–1250).

Conclusion

Weberian Historical Sociology's embrace of causal pluralism leads to an impasse. As it has been pointed out in the first section, the Weberian typology of ends builds upon the assumption of the irreducible and distinctiveness of 'levels' or 'spheres' that constitute the social fabric. This standpoint produces explanations that can only logically hold upon the basis of the acceptance of the state/society dichotomy as a timeless feature of social reality, or the reification of these two 'faces' of any social fabric. In this context, the objective of accounting for social complexity turns formal categories that reify the complex of social and institutional relations of our time onto world history. Whereas Weberians may rightfully criticize (some brands of) Marxism for its economicism and functionalism, they do not escape the critique of transposing contemporary historically specific cognitive apparatus as the ontological foundations for a world historical sociology. It has therefore been argued that WHS has failed to escape the pitfalls of tempocentrism in developing its conceptual apparatus, methodological guidelines and empirical analyses of international social change.

Concurrently, WHS mobilizes a rather problematic notion of agency in its empirical analyses. The endeavour to bring the state back in, more specifically to confer on a theoretical plane potential autonomy to state actors, has paved the way for a highly problematic analyses of agency in the making of social and institutional changes. On the one hand, whereas WHS has accused Marxism of putting too much emphasis on dominant economic classes as the prime focus of analysis—allegedly downplaying political agency—it has, however, put an undue focus on state rulers as the prime agency in the making of social and institutional changes. Such a focus has devised a research programme in which the principal concerns of the analysis have been to explain social and institutional changes on the basis of the structural constraints faced by rulers in specific historical junctures. On the other hand, the attempt to reconceptualize the notion of state autonomy in order to allow for state capacity to transform international structural constraints has equally led to a highly elite-centred analysis, which has not provided adequate conceptual and methodological ground to problematize policy decisions in the historically specific set of constraints and opportunities in varying

complexes of social and power relations. Quite the opposite, the notion of state autonomy *qua* embeddedness has produced, as we argued, a highly voluntarist conception of state agency, which translates into a reification of 'society' as a realm of opportunity for state elites to enact their policy goals in specific historical contexts. As Fred Halliday (2005, 513) forcefully contends: 'you cannot have a theory of power or a history of the state, with any number of dimensions of power, if you do not also analyse and narrate the history of that which is, or those, who are, the subject of that power'. Thus, as Abrams (1980) has rightly suggested, HS must go beyond the problematic of agent and structure and move towards the enquiry of process and social relations which necessarily implies an adequate understanding of human agency.

In the light of recent debates in the Historical Sociology of IR, there are two further implications to the ontological and epistemological arguments that we have developed here. The first is that we share with Teschke and Lacher (2007), and ironically with Hobson (2007, 2010), a strong scepticism towards recent attempts to blend a Marxian critique of political economy with a realist conception of interstate competition (for example, Callinicos 2007). In our views, such 'two logics' models are flawed both empirically, because of their inconsistencies with historical facts, and theoretically, as a result of their undertheorization of the historically specific variations of relations to space, territory, and sovereignty (Teschke and Lacher 2007). A second implication of the argument that we've developed here is that we would also be careful in reconstructing the spatial categories of mediation through which processes of uneven and combined development are mediated (see the exchange between Callinicos and Rosenberg 2008). These spatial categories (urban, regional, national, international, global) are historically laden, and the task of Marxist historical sociology, which takes geography seriously, should be to address their historicity. In other words, the social and phenomenological conditions of possibility of these categories need to be carefully reconstructed in relation with the generative grammar of social property relations (Teschke 2003; Lacher 2006; Brenner 2006; on the relation between space, nature and capitalism see also Smith 2008). This is a task that goes beyond the scope of this article.

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