

Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International

International relations always form an aspect of the social dynamics that prevail inside and across societies.¹ That was one of the central conclusions of *The Myth of 1648*, in which I drew out the implications for the discipline of international relations.²

The question, which I pose here, is whether the inverse also applies. Are the social dynamics inside societies also always bound up with international relations? That is another of my book's conclusions which has critical implications for the classical-Marxist understanding of bourgeois revolutions and state formation – implications with which Marxism has yet to fully come to terms. It raises the wider question of the degree to which Marxism has incorporated

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² Teschke 2003.

the role of the international into its own intellectual self-definition – both theoretically, in terms of its core vocabulary, and historiographically, in terms of the degree to which the international is not simply conceptualised as derivative of domestic trends, but an essential component in the overall reconstruction of the course of history. In fact, I argue here that it is the absence of ‘the international’ which accounts for many of the problems in contemporary Marxist thought about bourgeois revolutions and state formation.

I shall substantiate this claim in four steps. I start by outlining the orthodox-Marxist notion of ‘bourgeois revolution’ and how it has mutated over the years in order to preserve itself against the attacks of non-Marxist revisionist historians. Second, I will introduce the position of ‘political Marxism’ – the literature associated with the work of Robert Brenner, Ellen Wood, and George Comninel – on the English and French Revolutions. While this literature has provided a powerful renewal of Marxism and re-interpretation of European history, I suggest that political Marxism needs to be further developed, because, thirdly, I show, with reference to early-modern Anglo-French history, how ‘the international’ enters as a constitutive moment, and not merely as a contingent or residual quantity, into the social dynamics of early-modern revolutions and the developmental trajectories of state formation. The wider argument is that any understanding of country-specific co-developments of capitalism, revolution and state formation has to register the fact that these processes unfolded within and across an interstate system that centrally shaped their respective national peculiarities. I conclude by outlining the theoretical challenge this poses to Marxism and suggest a re-reading of political Marxism that is capable of comprehending the regionally spatio-temporally differentiated and geopolitically mediated development of Europe as a whole – a perspective that is fully alive to the constitutive role of the international in historical development.

‘Bourgeois revolution’: the classic conception, revisions and reformulations

For a long time, the textbook version of the concept ‘bourgeois revolution’ within Marxism, canonised in the *Communist Manifesto*, entailed the following four core components.³ First, it assumed a self-conscious and united class, the bourgeoisie, as the main agent of revolution. This class was both urban

³ Hobsbawm 1962, Soboul 1962.

and capitalist and engaged in commerce, manufacturing or finance. Second, it identified a growing class antagonism between a 'retrograde' feudal nobility and a 'progressive' bourgeoisie that had grown in the interstices of the feudal-absolutist régime, located in the contradiction between a feudal economy in terminal crisis that stood in the way of the full development of capitalist relations of production. Third, it supposed a temporally compressed, violent and decisive capture of state power by the bourgeoisie in a rapid revolutionary strike, that is, a short and intense period between revolutionary outbreak and successful completion. Fourth, as the result of the revolutionary project, it assumed the removal of political obstacles for the full establishment and flowering of capitalism and the emergence of a unified nation-state, a national market, an open public sphere and a liberal representative democracy – that is, the triumph of the bourgeoisie.

Largely as a result of the revisionist onslaught on the 'social interpretation' of the English and French Revolutions,⁴ the classical concept of 'bourgeois revolution' has undergone a profound re-definition since the 1980s. The reaction to revisionism generated, broadly speaking, two sharply diverging responses from within the Marxist tradition. One, associated with the orthodoxy, retained the concept while making substantive empirical concessions;⁵ the other, associated with political Marxism, dismissed the concept while re-interpreting the empirical objections on the basis of a new class analysis.⁶

The orthodox reformulation entails a number of concessions. Firstly, in terms of agency, a town-based, united and self-conscious bourgeoisie is no longer the necessary carrier of the revolutionary project. The definition of agency can be extended to include both, urban and rural capitalists, including members of the liberal professions, the intelligentsia, officers, and the 'petty bourgeoisie'. In fact, it is of secondary importance who exactly carries the revolution through, as long as the bourgeoisie remains its prime beneficiary. Secondly, in terms of outcome, the bourgeois seizure of state power is no longer a defining conceptual trait. The post-revolutionary state can be compatible with

⁴ Cobban 1999, Taylor 1967, Furet 1978, Doyle 1999.

⁵ Hill 1980 and 1981, Stone 1980 and 1988, Anderson 1992, Blackburn and Eley 1984, Evans 1987, Hobsbawm 1990, Callinicos 1989, Mooers 1991, Davidson 2003, p. 8ff.

⁶ Brenner 1989 and 1993, Wood 1991, 1995 and 2002, Comninel 1987, 2000a, 2000b and 2003. While Heide Gerstenberger retained the concept of bourgeois revolution, her general explanatory framework is much closer to the theoretical programme of political Marxism. See Gerstenberger 1990 and 1991. [Editorial note: a translation of Gerstenberger 1990 will appear in the *Historical Materialism* Book Series with Brill Academic Press.]

various state forms, ranging on a spectrum from Bonapartism and 'enlightened absolutism' to constitutional monarchies and republics, including the survival of pre-revolutionary élites in it. 'Bourgeois revolutions' are no longer deemed to produce 'bourgeois states'. In fact, the definition of the post-revolutionary state is indeterminate. Economically speaking, the full establishment of capitalism is no longer foreseen. A combination of different modes of production is possible, while the capitalist one becomes 'dominant' over time. Finally, in terms of duration, rather than being compressed into a few intense years of violent activity, 'bourgeois revolutions' can stretch out over decades, if not centuries, involving numerable 'moments of transformative convulsion'.

Overall, there has been a shift within mainstream Marxism from an episodal 'purposive' to an epochal 'consequentialist' reformulation of the term 'bourgeois revolution'. Outcomes, not causes or agents, matter. But how plausible is this conceptual redefinition? For, if this revised concept of 'bourgeois revolution' is unsure about its causal agent, unsure about its results, and unsure about its duration, then why should we still adhere to it as an over-arching explanatory category? In other words, while the content of the concept has been progressively eroded, many Marxists still hold on to its semantic shell.

Problems of ideal-type construction and comparative historical sociology

The real problem with the orthodox reformulation does not reside in definitional accuracy, but in method, for there is a tension in this new concept of 'bourgeois revolution' between a methodological ambition to construct a theoretical concept – a pure or ideal-type – and its confrontation with the diversity of historical cases, most notably the English, French, German and Russian experiences. This leads either to an expansion and thus dilution of the concept or to the demotion of cases to 'variants' – usually, to both. But how many 'variants' or 'exceptions' can a theoretical construct bear? The dilemma is further exacerbated by the realisation that most variants do not only diverge from the alleged norm, creating so many special paths – *Sonderwege* – but that the very norm itself, that is, 1789, fails to conform to the concept. However, without a norm as the defining comparator, variants are no longer variants or exceptions, but unique and free-standing phenomena. Concept and history travel towards opposite poles. The tension turns into an open contradiction – an aporia.

The reasons for this theoretical capsizing emerge directly from the adoption

of the comparative method as the adequate strategy of concept formation. Here, the premise is that discrete historical national trajectories, self-enclosed entities, serve as the units of comparison. While this is rarely openly foregrounded, the Marxist literature on bourgeois revolutions and state formations is littered with research-organising terms such as 'drawing parallels', 'finding analogies' and 'establishing patterns'. The very term 'paths of development', while admitting the multi-linear nature of passages, nevertheless reveals the tacit background assumption of distinct and disconnected trajectories that should all converge, with minor variations, towards the *telos* of capitalism within the framework of the modern nation-state, as if revolutions were pre-determined events that would occur sooner or later in the life cycles of nations. The principal idea is that the logic of national developments can essentially be reconstructed on the basis of an 'internalist' reading of social dynamics in abstraction from wider world-historical trends. Sociology, in any case, trumps geopolitics.

But this theoretical fixation on exclusively national dynamics and its concomitant invocation of comparative history fundamentally fails to problematise the fact that these plural roads towards capitalism do not run in parallel and mutual isolation, neither chronologically, nor socio-politically, nor geographically. In fact, they constantly, to stretch the metaphor, 'cross each other' in the wider forcefield of the international. This has crucial implications for fully understanding their particularities. Cross-national comparisons remain, of course, instructive; but, if our inquiry is driven by identifying uniformities for purposes of securing the concept 'bourgeois revolution', while we repeatedly encounter differences, then ideal-type construction should make way for a radically historicised reading of the great international arch of the regionally differentiated transitions to capitalism.

One counter-argument put forward by the Marxist orthodoxy to the charge of over-generalisation is the insistence on cycles of bourgeois revolutions. First, a cycle of 'classical bourgeois revolutions' comprises Holland (1572), England (1640), America (1776) and France (1789). These are classified as 'revolutions from below' against absolutist states, carried through by 'broad coalitions of small producers'. Second, a cycle of 'revolutions from above' encompasses German and Italian unification, the American Civil War (1861–5) and the Meiji Restoration (1868) in Japan, where 'the existing state apparatus was used to remove the obstacles to bourgeois domination'.⁷

⁷ Callinicos 1989, p. 116. See also Davidson 2003, pp. 9–15.

Is this a satisfactory solution? Reflecting on these two cycles, a *prima facie* case can be made that revolutions do never unfold in a geopolitical vacuum, but that their causes, courses, and consequences are always already co-constituted by their participation in a common field of 'the international'. Regarding the first cycle, the Dutch and American Revolutions were precipitated by the fiscal demands of their respective imperial rulers, the Spanish and the British. This led to the foundation of the Dutch Republic, enshrined in the Westphalian Peace Treaties, and the consolidation of US independence. One of the structural preconditions and proximate cause of the French Revolution was Anglo-French geopolitical rivalry, dramatically manifested in the disastrous Seven Years' War (1756–63) and French participation in the American War of Independence (1775–83). What followed were the terminal fiscal crisis of the *Ancien Régime* and the convocation of the Estates General in 1789. Foreign intervention, Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna followed suit.

Regarding the second cycle, the German experience was directly triggered by the modernisation pressures during the Napoleonic conquest, leading to the Prussian reform era under vom Stein and Hardenberg and, then, on to the Wars of Unification. Japan was not opened up by the heavy artillery of 'cheap commodities', but by Commander Perry (1853) and other squadrons of Western imperial powers forcing entry into the Japanese market at gunpoint. Modern Italy was forged in the cauldron of Austrian and French outside intervention.

While this approaches what the defenders of the notion of 'revolutions from above' imply, three qualifications are important here: firstly, these transformations were not so much 'revolutions from above' as 'revolutions from outside', mediated through 'revolutions from above'. Secondly, these 'revolutions from above' were not reactions to the transnational expansion of the world market, but primarily geopolitical reactions to military and diplomatic pressure transmitted through the states-system. These geopolitical shocks forced these states to invent strategies of social transformation that would, first of all, reform their military-fiscal systems in order to position themselves successfully in the states-system. Thirdly, whether and what form of capitalism was introduced, and what form of state was created, depended crucially on the conjunction of the timing and form of geopolitical pressure and the specific political strategies that state-classes were able to design, activate and implement in the face of domestic class resistance. In this respect, the claim that existing, and therefore precapitalist, state-classes or ruling classes restructured the state from within seems to be counter-intuitive, since

this restructuration would have undermined the very social bases of their economic reproduction and political domination. It is questionable whether these precapitalist ruling classes would have committed collective class suicide in the face of national emergencies as a result of outside pressure by surrendering their formidable powers of extra-economic coercion. I suggest that this clash of external imperatives and internal responses, formulated against the background of nationally pre-existing and distinct class constellations holds the key for understanding the diversity of the transitions to capitalism.

The only (partial) exception, as I will demonstrate further below, to this pattern of internationally-mediated causation was, arguably, the English Civil War and the 'Glorious Revolution', though even this case was heavily, but I would argue not centrally, co-determined by the wider strategic field of European dynastic geopolitics, as is evidenced by the impact of the struggles around the 'Protestant Succession' and the fight of Parliament against continental, absolutist and popish-catholic states, or the continental legacy of the 'Hanoverian Succession'.

This criticism of the absence of the international in Marxist attempts to retain the notion of 'bourgeois revolution' and rethink the dynamics of state formation may appear to be over-stated. Perry Anderson, for example, argues that revolutions

were, of course, historically interrelated, and the sequence of their connexions enters into the definition of their differences. Their order was constitutive of their structure. . . . Each revolution was in some measure a condition or inspiration of the next.⁸

However, rather than offering any prospect for a satisfactory theoretical resolution of this acute observation, this (and similar propositions) only states the enormity of the intellectual challenge and does not seem to have unsettled faith in the coherence of the term 'bourgeois revolution' as a general historically operative category. While the chronologically sequenced, cumulatively connected and internationally mediated nature of 'bourgeois revolutions' has been recognised, there is a marked reticence to move from an ad hoc admission of the contingent role of the international towards a general reflection on how to systematically integrate the problem of the international into Marxist social theory and, hence, to provide a theoretically-controlled historical reconstruction

⁸ Anderson 1992, p. 116.

of the dynamics of European and global developments that places the international at the centre of, and not as an afterthought to, the analysis. There is a fundamental difference between mitigating the comparative method by having recourse to auxiliary hypotheses about the temporary significance of the international, and a general and systematic attempt to elevate the international from the start to a constitutive component of any theory of history, revolutions included.

Political Marxism and the critique of the ‘bourgeois paradigm’

A much more promising Marxist response to the revisionist attack on the concept of ‘bourgeois revolution’ has been elaborated over the last two decades by ‘political Marxism’.⁹ Here, four arguments are crucial.¹⁰

First, capitalism is not a phenomenon that will inevitably emerge – in a teleological or techno-determinist way – out of the contradictions of the common European experience of medieval feudalism. In fact, capitalism originated in a highly specific sociopolitical context in late-medieval and early-modern England as the unintended consequence of class conflict between exploiters and exploited (lords and peasants) in the agrarian sector. Neither the general crisis of feudalism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, nor the twelfth- and sixteenth-century urban revivals, nor the commercial republics of the Italian Renaissance or the ‘European Discoveries’ resulted in the more or less European-wide triumph of capitalism.¹¹

Second, capitalism can neither be defined transhistorically as rational economic action based on the subjective profit motive as Max Weber maintains,¹² nor is it simply profit-oriented buying cheap and selling dear in the market (whether local, inter-urban, or long-distance) as the Braudel-Wallerstein

⁹ The term was first used pejoratively by Guy Bois in his reply to the original Brenner thesis on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but seems now to be generally accepted. Bois 1985, p. 115. Bois’s work is reviewed in Teschke 1997.

¹⁰ In addition to the references in footnote 6, see also Brenner 1977 and 1985.

¹¹ The debate on transitions to capitalism has recently been relaunched in mainstream history and historical sociology. See Emigh 2004.

¹² 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. Yet, these types follow roughly a real-historical developmental trajectory from times ancient to ‘the modern West’ within a general philosophy of history driven by the perfection of rationalisation in increasingly differentiated social spheres. See Weber 1958, pp. 13–31; 1978, pp. 110, 130, 165.

tradition argues.¹³ Capitalism is a social relation between persons in which all 'factors of production', including labour-power, have become commodified and where production of goods for exchange has become market-dependent and market-regulated. On this basis, capitalism does not mean simply production for the market, but competitive reproduction in the market based on a social-property régime in which propertyless direct producers are forced to sell their labour-power to property-owners. This separation of direct producers from their means of reproduction and their subjection to the capital relation entails the compulsion of reproduction in the market by selling labour-power in return for wages. This social system is uniquely dynamic, driven by competition, exploitation and accumulation.

Third, we need to radically dissociate the two sides of the conceptual pair bourgeoisie-capitalism. If capitalism is not simply urban commerce on a greater scale, then we cannot assume that a town-based class of *burghers* (or even a class of merchants and financiers) is the necessary carrier of the capitalist project. You can have a non-capitalist bourgeoisie, as you can have a capitalist aristocracy.

Fourth, we need to stop subsuming the English and French, and many other, revolutions under the common heading of 'bourgeois revolution'. In this respect, the assimilation of France and England as two variants of one path towards modernity, with the former achieving political centralisation a bit earlier while lagging behind in economic development, and the latter being economically precocious while having to catch up politically, needs to be rejected. In contrast, we need to embed the respective nature of the French and English Revolutions in the specificities of the long-term dynamics of their sharply diverging class relations and trajectories of state formations from the Middle Ages onwards.

According to political Marxism, the decisive class conflict in the English case did not revolve around the struggle between an urban, capitalist and progressive bourgeoisie and a landed and reactionary nobility in alliance with a monarchy. On the contrary, it was driven by conflicts between a landed, but *capitalist*, aristocracy against a reactionary class alliance of big monopoly merchants, surviving feudal magnates and the monarchy. This conflict climaxed in the Glorious Revolution with the capture of power by the capitalist aristocracy and the downgrading of the monarchy to the formula 'Crown-in-Parliament'.

¹³ Braudel 1982, pp. 223–97, Wallerstein 1979.

And it was this outcome – miles away from the classical idea of ‘bourgeois revolution’ – that produced what Ellen Wood calls ‘the pristine culture of capitalism’.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the French case also failed to pit a capitalist bourgeoisie against a feudal nobility plus absolutist ruler. In the run-up to *Quatre-Vingt-Neuf*, the class distinctions between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy had become blurred, as members of both classes made most of their wealth from landholdings and lucrative state offices. But the income from these landholdings was generated through precapitalist sharecropping and not from asserting direct control over production. Additionally, members of both classes reproduced themselves from fees collected in their capacity as office-holders, investment in state loans and royal largesse. It was competition over access to state offices that triggered the French Revolution, taking the form of an intra-ruling-class conflict among aristocratic and bourgeois, but distinctly non-capitalist, office-holders and financial *rentiers* over the form of the state. The effect of 1789 was not the establishment of capitalism, but the entrenchment of a precapitalist agrarian sector, including the consolidation of peasant holdings, and the expansion of the state apparatus to provide for bourgeois careers.¹⁵

In short, while the English Revolution was not bourgeois, it was capitalist; and while the French Revolution was bourgeois, it was not capitalist.

This re-interpretation presents a fundamental breakthrough for Marxism. However, while political Marxists have successfully dispelled the ideal-type of the ‘bourgeois paradigm’, that is, the necessary unity of bourgeoisie and capitalism, and cleared the way for a powerful re-interpretation of the long-term bifurcation of the social dynamics in England and France that also accommodates many empirical criticisms of revisionism, the international still remains under-theorised as an intervening dimension of sociopolitical transformations. In this sense, the full potential of political Marxism is still compromised by the comparative method.¹⁶ For, if we reflect on early-modern Anglo-French state formations, we will see that both national trajectories are

¹⁴ Wood 1991.

¹⁵ Comninel 1987.

¹⁶ Wood’s recent work engages much more comprehensively with the international aspects of the history of capitalism, but the theoretical problem of how the international dimension can be incorporated into the core premises of political Marxism and whether any such incorporation conflicts with the earlier emphasis on comparative history is not directly addressed. See Wood 2003.

codetermined by their wider geopolitical settings and, most directly, by their mutual interaction.

This emphasis on the geopolitical context of revolutions and constitutional developments is, of course, a staple of non-Marxist historical sociology – from Otto Hintze’s reformulation of the ‘primacy of foreign policy’ argument that dominated the discourse of the ‘Prussian School of Historiography’ ever since Leopold von Ranke,¹⁷ via Theda Skocpol’s Tocquevillian reading of the French Revolution,¹⁸ to the currently dominant neo-Weberian orthodoxy in historical sociology.¹⁹ Here, the general argument is that modern state formation is driven primarily by the dynamics of military competition compelling rulers to monopolise, centralise and maximise the means of violence. In the process, they rationalise state administrations for the more efficient raising of public revenues to sustain ever more powerful war-making capacities, leading to the competitive selection of ‘permanent war-states’ and an overall cross-European isomorphism of state institutions. These mechanisms converged in the generalisation of the modern state, which is essentially defined as a ‘fiscal-military’ machine.²⁰

This renaissance of the discourse of geopolitical rivalry in contemporary historical sociology does not mean that Marxism needs to pay homage to the neo-Weberian theme of the priority and autonomy of ‘the geopolitical’, and even less to the nineteenth-century German obsession with the ‘primacy of foreign policy’. The challenge for Marxism, rather, is to understand how social-property relations determine the modes in which different polities are inserted into the international and to integrate the geopolitical as one dimension of social reproduction into an overall reconstruction of the regionally differentiated expansion of capitalism within and through the European system of states. In other words, we need to come to terms with the nationally specific and diachronic, yet cumulatively connected and internationally mediated nature of ‘capitalist transitions’ within the framework of socially uneven and geopolitically combined development.²¹

¹⁷ Von Ranke 1973.

¹⁸ Skocpol 1979.

¹⁹ For three typical examples that stress the role of war in state formation see Bonney 1995a, Ertmann 1997, and Contamine 2000.

²⁰ The neo-Weberian orthodoxy in historical sociology is criticised in Teschke 2003, pp. 117–27.

²¹ Rosenberg 1996. For a recent critique of the neo-Gramscian theory of international relations from a perspective of uneven and combined development, see Shilliam 2004.

Post-revolutionary state formation and the role of the international: the case of England

The starting-point for this great international chain of mediation is the one country where capitalism, as Robert Brenner shows so impressively, developed endogenously and earliest: seventeenth-century England. For it was here that not only capitalism first emerged on a nation-wide basis, but that the first modern state emerged in tandem with capitalism. And it was this capitalist 'heartland', which gave European and, later, worldwide developments a very specific inflection – in fact, a revolutionary spin.²²

The claim of the modernity of the post-1688 English state may not go unopposed, because, for a long time, it was common to see continental state formation, especially in its dominant absolutist variant, as the proper home ground for the rise of the modern state. Here, it was suggested that the relentless centralisation of political power driven by the state-modernising projects of absolutist kings created the ideal-typical features of the modern state, as defined by Max Weber: a rational bureaucracy, a standing army under state control, a centralised system of taxation, the development of Roman law, the notion of absolute sovereignty, and so forth.

In contrast, the early-modern British state was long disdained as a non-entity. Even the term 'state' was held to be a peculiarly un-English concept that had no place in the English political lexicon. English political theory preferred terms such as Commonwealth, Parliament, the Bill of Rights, Common Law, civil society and the primacy of private property to capture the locus of political authority. Moreover, the British polity was regarded as weak, undertaxed, understaffed, underfunded – in short, the paradigm of a liberal polity. The dualisms of 'British Liberty' vs. 'Continental Despotism', 'Civil Society' vs. the 'State', 'the liberal subject' vs. 'the political collective' and Locke's society of property-owners vs. Rousseau's General Will litter the literature.

However, this perspective has been radically revised and, in a way, turned on its head since the mid-1980s. With regard to continental Europe, the by now dominant revisionist historians of absolutism, Marxists and non-Marxists alike, have come to de-absolutise royal power.²³ The stress is now on the

²² van der Pijl 1998.

²³ Among the vast and proliferating revisionist literature of absolutism see Beik 1985, Kettering 1986, Mettam 1988, Hoffman 1994, Parker 1996, Asch and Duchhardt 1996, and Swann 2003.

limits of their modernising and state-rationalising efforts. In fact, the French Old Régime is now regarded as a cumbersome, un-reformable, and hopelessly inefficient premodern state, riddled with office venality, patrimonialism and sinecures. The rights and prerogatives of historically deeply entrenched institutions – the *parlements*, the provincial estates and other corporate bodies – were routinely re-affirmed and expanded by the Crown in order to maintain the co-operation of powerful regional and local élites, while diverse provincial law codes and customs survived all attempts of rationalisation.

With regard to England, the debate has been dominated by the Brewer thesis.²⁴ John Brewer argues that, rather than turning into a weak, liberal state as the Whig historiography long maintained, post-1688 England – and, as of 1707, the United Kingdom – developed into a strong ‘military-fiscal’ state. The post-revolutionary state was characterised by a growing and increasingly efficient fiscal bureaucracy that generated the resources to finance spiralling military costs. An ‘Administrative Revolution’ swept the state. Core Departments of Government – the Treasury, the Excise and the Navy – turned from patrimonial into modern bureaucracies. Indeed, if any early-modern polity came to resemble Weber’s definition of the modern state, then it must have been eighteenth-century England.

What do we make of this inversion and how does this square with political Marxism? If we want to explain what appears to be a paradox, we cannot simply derive successful state modernisation from geopolitical imperatives, as Brewer suggests,²⁵ without reconnecting state development with domestic social dynamics and, in particular, social-property relations. The post-1688 British state responded to military competition so vigorously and successfully only on the back of a capitalist property régime that generated the resources to finance war without the constant threat of bankruptcy and royal defaulting on debts that was so characteristic of France. The unique fiscal responsiveness of the British polity was secured through the self-taxation of the capitalist aristocracy, so that tax levels were not only sustainable and tax collection effective, but sociopolitically far less divisive compared with absolutist France. For what had happened, of course, in 1688 was the capture of state power, clearly enshrined in the new formula ‘King-in-Parliament’, by a fairly homogenous and united class of agrarian capitalists. Agrarian capitalism had generated a social-property régime in which the political conflicts amongst

²⁴ Brewer 1989, Stone 1994.

²⁵ Brewer 1994, p. 56.

the members of the ruling class over the distribution and terms of the rights of political accumulation (Marx's 'extra-economic compulsion') were replaced by private forms of economic exploitation in the sphere of production. This shift from personalised forms of domination and appropriation to de-personalised forms generated the formal (though not substantive) separation between the economic and the political. Market and state, private and public came to be increasingly differentiated.

It was this new form of sovereignty, no longer personal-dynastic, but abstract-national sovereignty, which led to the concomitant revolution in public administration – the fiscal revolution, the financial revolution and the military revolution in particular.²⁶ This combination of revolutionary institutional innovations – Britain's naval superiority and exceptional fiscal responsiveness in the face of external military pressure on the basis of a self-sustaining capitalist economy – gave the Hanoverian state the decisive *comparative economic, fiscal and coercive advantage* over its continental competitors.²⁷ The neo-Weberian assumption of a growing cross-European isomorphism of state forms, converging *à la longue* on the model of the fiscal-military state, is a surface illusion that hides very different social dynamics. Ultimately, it was these social dynamics that decided which states could survive the geopolitical game of competitive selection and which not.²⁸

However, we cannot simply extrapolate from the successful capitalist revolution the liberal and, possibly, Marxist idea of a 'state lite' – the 'pristine culture of capitalism'. Because this could not be realised in an international context that forced the British state to spend between seventy-five and eighty-five per cent of annual expenditures between 1680 and 1780 on the army, navy and debt servicing related to war.²⁹ This also means that we should not conceive of the vectors of historical development in unidirectional terms as

²⁶ Dickson 1967; Cain and Hopkins 1993, pp. 58–84.

²⁷ British fiscal exceptionalism is clearly recognised, but not sufficiently explained, by historians who otherwise subscribe to the geopolitical-competition model of state formation. See O'Brien and Hunt 1999; O'Brien 2002; O'Brien 2003, pp. 114–16.

²⁸ In this respect, Balakrishnan misreads my argument. While all early-modern European polities were drawn into the vortex of military rivalry, facing similar pressures to render their political institutions functionally compliant with geopolitical imperatives, this did not lead to a cross-European institutional convergence of state forms. Specific institutional forms did not follow common functions, but functional compliance had to be generated within different state forms whose variations were ultimately determined by different domestic social-property relations. Eighteenth-century France and England were indeed dissimilar in all dimensions of society, economy and polity. Balakrishnan 2004, p. 153.

²⁹ Brewer 1994, p. 57. See also Bonney 1995b.

simply radiating out from Britain. Rather, there was a two-way traffic – a geopolitical feedback loop that continued to massively shape the construction of the British state: the making of a military superpower.

But we also need to de-reify and uncover the social dynamics of Britain's international environment. For this geopolitical forcefield was not any 'natural anarchy', as realists in the field of international relations would be quick to point out.³⁰ Rather, eighteenth-century international politics was played out, as I argue in *The Myth of 1648* and elsewhere, in a 'mixed-actor system', dominated by absolutist states, which had a systemic need to accumulate geopolitically on an ever-expanding scale due to their precapitalist property relations.³¹ Here, ruling-class re-investment in the means of coercion, for internal rent-extraction and external plunder, remained the normal strategy for expanded reproduction – leading to the phenomenon of the permanent-war-state. It institutionalised the social imperatives of geopolitical accumulation. It was this precapitalist complexion that gave the eighteenth-century continental system of states its over-militarised and bellicose character.

How, then, did post-revolutionary Britain adjust to this hostile international environment? And how did it 'export' capitalism to the Continent? The 'Glorious Revolution' not only rationalised the English state, it also occasioned a revolution in British foreign policy. This was characterised by a shift from dynastic to parliamentary foreign policy-making, defined no longer by the whims of dynasticism but by the 'national interest'. As a result, Parliament adopted a very distinctive 'dual foreign-policy strategy', based, on the one hand, on active power-balancing versus its rivals on the continent (a policy driven first and foremost by British 'security interests'), and, on the other hand, on unlimited commercial and colonial expansion overseas – the so-called 'blue water policy'.³² Power-balancing: in fact, Britannia holding the scales in her hand implied the disengagement from the continental dynastic game of territorial geopolitics with its endless wars of succession, political marriages and dynastic unions. Britain largely withdrew from direct military commitments and territorial aspirations on the Continent (the Hanoverian stemlands in Germany were regarded by Parliament as a constant source of

³⁰ Orthodox international relations theory subscribes to a transhistorical, but blindingly reductionist, notion of power-balancing amongst states in international orders defined by anarchy. For a recent restatement of realism see Mearsheimer 2001. For a powerful critique of realism from a Marxist perspective see Rosenberg 1994.

³¹ Teschke 2003, pp. 249–70; Teschke 2002; Teschke 2004.

³² Baugh 1988; Cain and Hopkins 1993, pp. 86–101.

irritation), yet started to regulate the states-system by means of rapidly changing alliances with and monetary subsidies to smaller powers – always to counter any emergent continental hegemony, usually, of course, French hegemony. The Seven Years' War (1756–63) ideally exemplifies British blue-water strategy. While heavily subsidising Prussia in its struggle against Austria, France and Russia, Britain defeated France overseas and incorporated Canada, Florida, Louisiana and ex-French territories in India into her expanding colonial empire. In short, Britain started to drop out of the operative logic of the Westphalian states-system, while steering it by 'remote control'.

Ironically, it may well be the core theorem of the realist theory of international relations, namely the balance of power, that needs to be re-interpreted – not as the timeless regulator of 'grand strategy' between great powers – but as the specific conduit for the unintended expansion of capitalism throughout the Continent during the nineteenth century. For it was through power-balancing, indeed through the adoption of the role of the balancer, that Britain was able to distribute military pressure on continental states. In response, continental states were forced to design political counter-strategies that would secure their military viability and fiscal-financial health to survive in the states-system. But these strategies always involved intense political conflict, both intra-ruling-class and inter-class, over the redefinition of the state and the re-arrangement of class relations as either old forms of tax extraction were intensified or new modes of taxation and property relations introduced, with regionally highly specific outcomes. In the French case, Britain's naval superiority and power balancing finally cracked the shell of French 'absolutism' and its precapitalist reproductive logic and this is really the inner meaning of the Seven Years' War and the War of American Independence, paving the way for 1789.³³

³³ For revealing figures on Anglo-French divergences with regard to war expenditures, public debts, costs of debt-servicing, taxation rates, tax compliance, interest rates and revenue-debt ratios, see Bonney 1995b, pp. 336–45. Bonney attributes the inferior fiscal performance of pre-1789 France and its repeated failures in fiscal reform to 'institutional obstacles' as if Old Régime institutions were not direct manifestations of definite social interests that reflected the specific configuration of very resilient social-property relations, but unspecified presences that had no social rationale. See also Cain and Hopkins 1993, p. 64.

State formation and the role of the international: the case of France

How was this nexus between domestic dynamics and geopolitics played out in Old Régime France? Class relations had developed in France along a very different trajectory. Here, class conflict over the distribution of peasant surplus had replaced the feudal rent-régime between lords and peasants in favour of an 'absolutist' tax-régime.³⁴ Peasant communities benefited from competition between the monarchy and local nobles for their surplus, gaining freedom in the process and establishing inheritable tenures that owed fixed dues that subsequently lost value with inflation. Agrarian capitalism did not develop in France, since neither peasants, who formed subsistence communities based on unmediated access to their means of reproduction, nor the upper classes (noble and bourgeois), which reproduced themselves through land-rents and the spoils of political offices, were subject to capitalist imperatives. With the waning of the old feudal powers of lordly domination and extraction, the monarchy became the central institution that could force income from the peasantry through taxation.

However, the relations of exploitation remained governed throughout the *Ancien Régime* (and even beyond) by political conflicts over the terms and the distribution of the means of appropriation, though now in the form of state-sanctioned rights and privileges. Taxation became the key arena of domestic political conflict. The logic of political accumulation continued to rest on personalised praxes of domination, revolving around the personalised sovereignty of the Crown: *L'État, c'est moi!* In the context of this social-property régime, a formal separation between the political and the economic that characterised post-1688 England could not be carried through. There was a structural Anglo-French divergence in their respective social relations of sovereignty.

Since the logic of political accumulation persisted internally, the logic of geopolitical accumulation, that is, the predatory accumulation of territories and control over trade routes, characterised foreign policy as well. The normal way to expand the tax base was to acquire territory and control over its taxable population. This territorial-demographic (extensive) view of taxation stood in sharp contrast to post-1688 British (intensive) forms of taxation. But, since 'absolutist' sovereignty came to be personalised in the figure of the king,

³⁴ Brenner 1985, Gerstenberger 1990.

the king also remained enmeshed in the 'Westphalian logic' of dynastic unions through royal marriage policies and its wars of succession. Warfare was endemic. Territorial redistributions were a constant of early modern international relations.

The old sword-carrying aristocracy [*noblesse d'épée*], especially during and after the crisis of the seventeenth century, came to be increasingly domesticated, absorbed and integrated into the tax/office state through office venality and other channels of privilege, while a new office nobility [*noblesse de robe*] was promoted by the Crown. These complex and ungovernable forms of inter-ruling-class co-operation created over time a very unstable and regionally differentiated *modus vivendi* between the privileged classes and the Crown. Feudalism, based on the regionally and locally autonomous powers of the militarised lordly class, was replaced by the institutionalisation of aristocratic power in estates and other representative and corporative bodies, whose powers had to be continuously renegotiated in relation to the Crown.³⁵ Autonomous lordly powers³⁶ of domination were replaced by state-sanctioned privileges. Feudalism was dead, yet absolutism never materialised (at least not in its orthodox meaning). To remain financially afloat and to pacify the office nobility, French monarchs sold and auctioned off public offices in ever-greater numbers. Over time, venal offices were held in perpetuity and heredity and became thus a privatised source of income. The Crown thus lost control over its fiscal and financial administration. It failed to establish a central bank or secure lines of credit, while being forced to borrow on short-term loans at high interest rates from a class of wealthy financiers, who were themselves tax-farmers.³⁷

As a result, during every war, French kings were obliged to resort to the artificial creation and then the sale of more and more offices in order to raise money. They effectively mortgaged the extractive powers of the state to private financiers and tax-farmers. This led to the Byzantine and hopelessly bloated nature of the French semi-private/semi-public state apparatus. This ruled out any 'progress' towards a modern, rationalised and efficient bureaucracy that would administer a uniform and country-wide tax code. At the same time, the peasantry had to carry ever-higher rates of taxation, so that the agrarian

³⁵ Miller 2003 and 2004.

³⁶ For an interpretation of feudal politics and geopolitics, see Teschke 1998.

³⁷ In addition to the literature cited in footnotes 23 and 33, see Bonney 1999, pp. 123–76.

economy – the tax base – remained mired in stagnation. While war thus increased the absolutist claims of French monarchs over their subjects, it simultaneously paralysed their long-term financial and administrative capacity to rule. Caught between spiralling military expenditures and the excessive and punitive taxation of the peasantry (nobles enjoyed tax exemption to secure their loyalty to the monarchy), precapitalist France underwent a series of fiscal crises. It was this downward spiral of warfare, royal debt-accumulation, office creation, over-taxation and inability to repay loans to an increasingly dissatisfied class of private financiers, both noble and bourgeois, that finally led to intense intra-ruling-class conflict over the form of the French state and the French Revolution.³⁸

Conclusion: problematising the international

Comparative approaches to the study of bourgeois revolutions and state formation tend to be restricted in their ability to connect social transformations inside polities with world historical trends. While Marxist historical sociology has historiographically acknowledged the significance of the international, it has generally failed to confront and theorise the *problématique* of world historical contexts by adopting a passive understanding of the geopolitical that neutralised its causal effectiveness. The perspective developed here and in *The Myth of 1648* addresses this absence by combining the theory of social-property relations with the theorem of socially uneven and geopolitically combined development. It traces how the developmental potential of regionally differentiated sets of property régimes generates inter-regional unevenness, which translates into international pressures that spark sociopolitical crises in ‘backward’ polities. These crises activate and intensify the domestic fault lines in regionally pre-existing class constellations – processes that lead to power struggles within and between polities that renegotiate and transform class relations, territorial scales and state forms. These social conflicts result in highly specific combinations of the old and the new. The dynamics of domestic trajectories are thus accelerated, their sociological composition transformed, and their directionality deflected in unforeseen ways, while their results react back on the international scene. In each particular case, domestic property relations have a determinate effect on how different polities are inserted into the inter-state-system, how they conduct their foreign policies and how they respond

³⁸ Teschke 2003, p. 173 ff.

to external pressures. The international enters as an intervening moment in the determination of revolutionary origins, courses and outcomes – either in terms of revolutions triggered by wars, outside intervention, the export of revolution, multilateral attempts to contain or re-admit the revolutionary state into the society of states, or, indeed, by revolutionising the very principles upon which the international order operates. But this dialectical internal-external nexus cannot be reduced to the mechanical inter-societal interaction between social and political forces, but also has to integrate the growing sense of ‘system’s consciousness’ that pervaded public opinion and the minds of policy-makers into the analysis. A multilateral collective management of the European and, later, global system of states – Westphalia 1648, Utrecht 1713, Vienna 1815, Versailles 1919, San Francisco 1945 to name but a few foundational moments of world order – developed, enforced and adapted rules and norms for international relations. This adds yet another dimension to the geopolitics of domestic social change. The promise of combining the theory of social-property relations with the idea of uneven and combined development consists of avoiding both the fallacy of the comparative method, in which international events are ‘external’ and ‘contingent’ to the core explanation, and the fallacy of the geopolitical competition literature that largely abstracts from the social dynamics inside distinct societies. It is by retracing the logic of the historical processes through which different societies became drawn over time into the dual orbit of a system of states and a capitalist world market, while consciously reacting to it in specific ways, that we can start to historicise the development of capitalism across a territorially fragmented international field, to account for the institutional variations of capitalism in distinct national settings, and to understand the specific trajectory, position, scale and form of each state within the modern inter-state-system. But the research programme of ‘geopolitical Marxism’ is not the story of the expansion of the long defunct ‘Westphalian system’; it is the story of the geopolitically-mediated and territorially-refracted expansion of and resistance to capitalism on a worldwide scale.

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