



Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe — A Rejoinder

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This rejoinder restates and develops the central theses of ‘The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations’ in relation to a set of objections raised from the perspective of IR Historical Sociology by Hendrik Spruyt, of Political and Social Theory by Roland Axtmann and of Political Geography by John Agnew. Most centrally, it re-affirms the charge of a defective historicisation and theorisation of ‘Westphalia’ in the discipline of International Relations, while suggesting that a Marxist perspective that emphasises the spatio-temporally differentiated and geopolitically mediated development of Europe is capable of providing a new long-term interpretive framework for the complex co-development of capitalism, state building and the interstate system. It thereby pleads for a paradigm-shift in IR Theory and IR Historical Sociology.

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Situating ‘1648’ in IR Theory: Problems and Perspectives

The paucity of substantive studies on the origins, evolution and expansion of the European system of states constitutes one of the defining peculiarities of the discipline of International Relations.¹ This void at the very heart of the field stands in stark contrast to the rhetorical, ritualized, but fundamentally unexamined incantation of ‘1648’ — year of the conclusion of the Westphalian Peace Treaties — as the foundational moment of the modern interstate system. In the words of two prominent IR academics, there is a ‘near consensus in the field’ on Westphalia’s crucial transformative role in the transition from the medieval to the modern world (Buzan and Little, 1999, 89). Confirming this assessment, a recent survey reports that ‘the rise of the modern state has been intimately associated with the concept of sovereignty, and it has been commonplace to date its beginnings to the Peace of Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years’ War in 1648’ (Cox *et al*, 2001, 4). Although the doubtful



historical veracity of this assumption has been noted in cognate fields (Duchhardt, 1999; Lesaffer, 2004),² references to the 'Westphalian System' continue to litter the IR literature.³

The current world-political juncture has fundamentally undermined confidence in a stable notion of sovereignty as the elementary component of world order. In the process, it has provoked a deluge of conceptual innovations to capture the essential contours of the contemporary geopolitical moment — on a spectrum from neo-medievalism and intercivilizational order to empire, the new imperialism and the global state. Realist protestations notwithstanding, sovereignty and the classical interstate system are widely regarded as having run their historical course. Various ends have been proclaimed, including those of 'Westphalia', geopolitics, geography and modernity itself. Yet, while the old order is deemed to have vanished, the new one refuses to appear. In this context, hesitations over and against an elusive present have redirected attention to the past. The growing recognition that neither the phenomena under investigation display permanent and transhistorical properties, nor that the categories adduced to conceptualize the ever-changing geopolitical landscape can remain semantically neutral, has led to a 'historical (re-) turn' in IR Theory. This moment of intellectual self-reflection has resulted in a disciplinary recasting that crystallized in a recognizable new historical sociology of international relations since the 1990s (Tilly, 1992; Spruyt, 1994; Bartelson, 1995; Hobson, 1997; Ruggie, 1998; Hall, 1999; Buzan and Little, 2000; Cox *et al.*, 2001; Philpott, 2001; Hobden and Hobson, 2002; Bobbitt, 2002; Halperin, 2003; Buzan, 2004). Its research agenda revolves around a re-examination of some of the discipline's very *Grundbegriffe* in historical context. What is the modern state? When, where and why did it come about? What is the essence of modern interstate relations?

But the re-historicization of sovereignty, both concept and praxis, and the re-interrogation of geopolitical orders not premised on the conventional inside/outside differentiation of power has, with very few exceptions (Krasner, 1993; Reus-Smit, 1999; Osiander, 2001), re-affirmed the foundational status of 1648. While studies, especially of constructivist and post-structuralist persuasion, have attempted to trace the historical genealogies of international institutions, there is a remarkable convergence on 17th century absolutist France as the model paradigm for the first successful construction of territorial sovereignty, while article 8,2 of the Treaty of Osnabrück, the *ius foederis et ius belli ac pacis*, continues to be cited as the transfer of sovereignty to the German Estates — the alleged nemesis of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. In this context, 'Westphalia' has degenerated into a cipher, denoting world order on the basis of the territorially bounded, politically autonomous, sovereign nation-state model, counterposed to a fluid, amorphous and de-territorialized post-Westphalian geopolitical configuration with no fixed locus of political



authority. Here, 'Westphalia' is synonymous with modernity, while post-Westphalia stands for post-modernity. This vocabulary has even been adopted by the circle of public policy-advisers.⁴ It therefore matters how we understand 1648 — not simply as an exercise in antiquarian historiography, but as a fundamental historical and theoretical problem for IR.

The *Myth of 1648* directly challenges the discipline-defining *Grundnorm* of the 'Westphalian Model' by providing a revisionist historical reconstruction of the origins and development of the European states-system from the 8th to the 18th century.⁵ Its central intellectual preoccupation is not so much the intractable categorization of the present (although it is that too), but rather the problematization of the defective conceptualization of the past, from which the former is derived. For what if the current gestures towards a 'post-', 'beyond' or 'after' are directly premised on an erroneous identification of modernity (at least for purposes of IR) with 'Westphalia' as a historical phenomenon — an equation that continues to reach directly into the discourse on the present? What if the geopolitical permutations of the present are judged, in reality, against a non-existent past? What if the meaning of 1648 — IR's *fons et origo* — is not at all secured, but rather systematically misinterpreted and, in the process, transformed into a disciplinary myth of gigantic proportions and implications? It was this conceptual-historical set of questions that my book was trying to address by means of a theoretically controlled re-reading of the historical material in order to rethink IR's standard conceptualization and periodization of the course of European geopolitics. For if the classical states-system was not inaugurated at 'Westphalia', then we are challenged not only to demystify 1648, but also to offer an alternative reconstruction of the making of the modern system of states — an alternative that is ultimately capable of illuminating the question whether the current world-political constellation presents a qualitative rupture with or just another mutation within a geopolitical order that we have come to call 'modern'.

Theoretically, this demand for an alternative perspective rejects Neorealism's insistence to restrict the analysis exclusively to relations between historically pre-constituted actors whose undifferentiated conduct is determined by the systemic imperatives of geopolitical anarchy and extended — by theoretical fiat — over the field of history to assert the case for the eternal return of power politics and the immutability of international relations. It also requires a shift away from the high diplomacy of multilateral congresses that overplays the efficacy of statecraft and interelite norm-construction, while also simulating a highly stylized image of a sudden and system-wide discontinuity for Europe as a whole.

At the most elementary level, my central premise is that historically and regionally specific property regimes and their associated conflicts over the terms and chances of reproduction between and among classes form the core of



any wider analysis of the constitution, operation and transformation of different forms of rule, different spatial orders and different geopolitical dynamics. The historical construction of different polities in their multilinearity and differential temporalities and the nature of their interactions are grounded in conflicting domestic strategies of reproduction over property and power. Correlatively, the focus on domestic sources of power has to be complemented by the incorporation of the domestic consequences of the international co-existence and mutual co-determination of diverse polities for their respective 'national' trajectories — as they are bound together in a wider geopolitical order. In other words, processes of differential class- and state-formation have to be interrogated simultaneously in their internal and external dimensions.

In terms of a form analysis of international relations, my argument stresses the need to trace the changes in the patterns of international conflict and cooperation across the centuries by tying these variations to differences in underlying forms of rule and strategies of reproduction which are themselves rooted in historically specific social property relations. In terms of a theory of differential world-development, I suggest that the developmental potential of regionally differentiated sets of property regimes generates inter-regional unevenness, which translates into international pressures that spark socio-political crises in 'backward' polities, while the political and geopolitical responses to internationally induced crises react back on the international scene. The challenge is to develop a perspective that is capable of comprehending the *spatio-temporally differentiated and geopolitically mediated development of Europe* (and beyond) as an open and dynamic mixed-actor system. Theoretically, this approach is derived from, but also presents a development of the literature associated with Political Marxism.⁶

When we reconceptualize the history of Europe (and beyond) on the basis of these premises, a very different account emerges — one that is historically more consonant with the historical record, yet simultaneously explains why 1648 has been misread by the IR community, as well as enabling us to conceptualize aspects of modern international relations which the Westphalian paradigm occludes. In this way, a historically and theoretically more defensible reinterpretation of the course of European geopolitics comes into view. But while this theoretical perspective seeks to capture the 'national/international' dialectics of social forces and state formations, the very multiplicity of European political actors — the precondition for geopolitics — cannot be taken for granted as an ontological given for theorizing interactor relations either. It has to be itself historicized: Why is there a multi-polar geopolitical pluriverse in Europe? Why is there a states-system?

In this sense, the *Myth of 1648* is not limited to an empiricist rectification of a series of more localized historiographical misperceptions in IR, nor is it



premised on a biased, selective and restricted reading of empirical evidence. Rather, it represents a call for a paradigm shift in IR Theory, with important consequences for comparative politics and historical sociology, based on a sustained engagement with various state-of-the-art debates in the historiographical and sociological literatures. Ultimately, this debate is therefore about the relative explanatory power of a new paradigm that organizes, interprets and illuminates the historical material in novel ways. Given the persistence of the myth of 1648, I am grateful to Hendrik Spruyt, John Agnew and Roland Axtmann for their engagement with my work and for the chance to clarify, accentuate and expand on some of my theses. Since some readers will be unfamiliar with my original arguments, I will start with a précis of my book before I counter the objections raised by the participants to this debate.⁷

Challenging the Myth: A Summary

My argument begins by posing the research-organizing question why it is that the modern international order is characterized by a system of multiple states organized around a clear inside/outside demarcation and a further differentiation within each state between the political and the economic. This double differentiation assumes the familiar form of a world order marked by the co-existence of a territorially organized interstate system and a tendentially transnational and universalizing capitalist world-market.

In order to illustrate the specificity of this constellation, I examined the case of geopolitics in the Middle Ages that has served in the IR discourse as the counter-example *par excellence* to the 'Westphalian System'. But rather than confining myself to a Weberian institutional analysis that remains restricted to an elucidation of types of power (*Herrschaftssoziologie*), or a constructivist/post-structuralist analysis of medieval discourse, I advanced a reinterpretation of medieval geopolitics by reconceptualizing Karl Marx's thought on pre-capitalist societies on the basis of the theory of social property relations. Here, conditional feudal property relations, institutionalized in the lordship, governed the contradictory strategies of reproduction of the two dominant classes (lords and peasants). The lordship conferred a degree of lordly property in the means of coercion and appropriation, establishing its character as a unit of domination and exploitation over and against direct producers who are reduced to various degrees of personal unfreedom. This *fusion between the political and the economic* did, however, not translate into a demarcation between the internal and the external as lordships were held, as a rule, on the condition of providing specified rights and obligations to the overlord. Lords were thus vertically integrated into a complex hierarchy of vassallic subordination and coordination without, however, losing their politico-military status.



The precariousness of interlordly relations was conditioned by their status as arms bearers through which they appropriated income from an actively resisting peasantry through *political accumulation* (Brenner, 1985, 1986). This also required investment in the means of appropriation/coercion, rather than in the means of production, for their expanded economic reproduction. Simultaneously, lords competed with their co-lords over land and labour, expressed in the feud, through what I called *geopolitical accumulation*. The feud, which was neither war, nor civil war, nor a legal proceeding, captures the interlordly contradictions of geopolitical accumulation as a very specific mode of dispute settlement (Brunner, 1992). As feudal territorially was internally fragmented due to the vassalic hierarchy, it also contracted and expanded directly as a result of the martial and nuptial fortunes of its ruling class. In fact, since individual lords could simultaneously hold land in different kingdoms, thereby facing problems of ultimate allegiance, feudal territoriality remained heterogeneous, shifting and unbounded. Correlatively, this geographical-oligopolistic dispersal of the means of violence among the lordly class created a *Personenverbandsstaat* ('a state of associated persons') (Mitteis, 1975) — or a 'parcellised sovereignty' (Anderson, 1974) — that was mitigated by complex intervassalic relations through which lords tried to recognize, regularize and hierarchize their positions as militarized accumulators. As a rule, the status of their land holdings was thus conditional upon military assistance and advice to the overlord expressed in a complex intervassalic bond mediated by rites of homage and fealty that ultimately underwrote their collective class power over and against the peasantry. While this rendered a state monopoly in the means of violence impossible, it meant that interlordly relations were neither anarchical nor purely hierarchical, but marked by vertical relations of subordination and horizontal relations of co-ordination. As a formal separation between the economic and political was impossible to draw, so a formal distinction between inside and outside could not be achieved. There was no medieval 'state', as there was no medieval 'states-system'.⁸ Feudal geopolitics was *sui generis*.

Exploring the configuration and transformations of the property relations that governed the rise, reproduction and fall of the Carolingian Empire — the last 'pan-European' polity, then shows the explanatory power of this approach. The analytic narrative traces the consequences of the dissolution of the Frankish empire by dissecting the nexus between the dismantling of imperial authority, the usurpation of public power by a multiplicity of banal lords and the rise of a seigniorial property regime in the old Frankish heartlands during the period of 'feudal anarchy' (Poly and Bournazel, 1991) around the turn of the millennium. It then sets out how provinces at the geographical margins of the Carolingian Empire — Catalonia, Normandy, Saxony — retained some degree of politico-institutional cohesion, due to their erstwhile status as



marcher lordships. This enabled them to engage by the late 11th century in important projects of geopolitical accumulation — the Iberian *Reconquista*, the Norman Conquest and the German *Ostsiedlung* (Eastern Settlement). Correlatively, the reconstruction of the socio-economic logic of the Crusades, orchestrated by a reformed Church that developed itself into a crucial social and political actor by the 12th century, is shown to be inscribed in the general crisis of reproduction, as ex-Frankish lords and knights were looking for new sources of income beyond their homelands. The section concludes by arguing that these developments had at least two important long-term consequences for the course of European political and geopolitical history. First, the destruction of the last pan-European Empire created multiple centers of political power in the core regions as well as the periphery of Europe. In the long run, they configured Europe as a system of multiple political communities — a geopolitical pluriverse. Second, the break-up of the Frankish Empire led the foundations for regionally diverging long-term trajectories of state formation, especially in the two important cases of 'France' and 'England'.

The narrative then narrows its geographical scope by concentrating on these two key European monarchies. Their divergent long-term developmental patterns are rooted in the differentiated reproduction and transformations of their very different social property relations (Brenner, 1985; Comminel, 1987, 2000). As the Capetian monarchy was to construct, slowly and gradually, a feudal kingdom in competition with a co-existing plurality of independent banal lords, the Norman and Plantagenets kings inherited from the very beginning, that is, as from 1066, a unitary, consolidated and politically far less divisive social property regime, based on the combination of manorialism (rather than seigneurialism) and a strict feudal hierarchy, culminating in a strong institution of kingship. These initial differences in authority relations and feudal state-formation were radicalized during the crisis of the 14th century, as the *outcomes of class conflict* between peasants, lords and the Crown resulted in late medieval and early modern Valois France in a transition from feudalism to 'absolutism' (although this term needs to be heavily qualified, if not totally abandoned), while they generated a transition from feudalism to capitalism in Tudor and Stuart England. These divergences had profound implications for the incommensurable Anglo-French forms and dynamics of 'sovereignty' and their respective foreign policy conducts.

In the French case, the generalization of an agrarian property regime of small-scale owner-occupiers and the concomitant absorption and domestication of the French nobility in the Old Regime state implied the transition from a feudal rent-regime between lords and peasants to an 'absolutist' tax-regime between Crown and peasants. The newly formed 'tax/office' state (Brenner, 1985), however, did not develop a rational and modern bureaucracy that administered a uniform, country-wide or 'Cartesian' tax-code, but relied on an



expanding system of office venality through which the Crown secured revenues from the privileged classes (office nobility) to finance its wars, while simultaneously signing away control over its fiscal-administrative system. These processes were thus decisively co-determined by the wider international pressures of geopolitical accumulation that characterized the early modern system of dynastic states as a whole. 'Absolutism' was a historical compromise between the Crown and the largely tax-exempted privileged classes that came to own and privatize the office system (Beik, 1985, 2005; Parker, 1996). However, the subsumption of the nobility under the Old Regime meant that its exalted status was no longer premised on autonomous and independent feudal rights, but on state-sanctioned privileges. The de-feudalization and demilitarization of the French nobility imparted a form of sovereignty that gave territory a much sharper definition compared to the 'parcellised sovereignty' of medieval times. Additionally, the (imperfect) centralization of the means of violence and appropriation by the French monarchy went hand in hand with the rise of the dynastic principle, so that absolutist sovereignty, in contrast to 'modern' sovereignty, remained personalized and pegged to the ruling dynasty (Gerstenberger, 1990). Thus, the mutual dependency between Crown and the privileged classes conditioned the growth of a bloated and un-reformable state-apparatus, underwritten by a system of private office venality, that was neither rationalized, nor efficient, nor modern or even modernizing. Simultaneously, this complex structure of exploitation rested primarily on the French peasantry, whose pre-capitalist and non-market dependent forms of reproduction had to carry the burden of excessive and punitive rates of taxation. Any progress towards capitalism was thus precluded. I concluded that while 'absolutism', the dominant form of rule in early modern Europe, had achieved a clearer separation between inside and outside, it had not overcome the fusion between the political and the economic as taxation remained a form of political accumulation, if now levied primarily through a more centralized, although still personalized, form of rule.

The replication of similar, although by no means identical processes of 'absolutist' state-formation across most regions of the Continent gave rise, *mutatis mutandis*, to a European system of 'states' in which dynastic rulers acted as gigantic (geo-)political accumulators. France became a central player in the absolutist-dynastic system of rivalries over territories that remained defined by very specific foreign policy praxes that adhered to the general logic of geopolitical accumulation: the war-driven accumulation of territories; the predatory and compensatory logic of power balancing; politico-militarily secured control over exclusive and monopolistic trading-routes; the elaborate dynastic strategies of territorial aggrandisement through marital policies; the resulting dynastic unions and composite monarchies and their flip-side: the endemic wars of succession, including a general drive towards territorial



empire-building. In short, it was these very specific patterns of conflict and cooperation that characterized the logic and dynamic of the 'Westphalian System' — practices which IR tends to equate with the origins of the modern international system. I concluded by suggesting that early modern 'international relations' were largely mediated by — or appeared in the form of — the 'private' family affairs of their reigning monarchs. In this context, the Westphalian Peace Treaties did not mark a breakthrough towards modern rules and norms of international relations; they rather formalized the logic of an absolutist system of 'states', supervised by France and Sweden.

If not 1648, what then? Moving from a critique of the myth of 1648 to an alternative account, I rehearsed various macro-paradigms on the rise of the modern state, capitalism and the modern interstate system — the Neo-Weberian geopolitical competition model, the Neo-Malthusian demographic model and the Neo-Marxist commercialization model — and argued that all three were fundamentally flawed on logical and historical grounds. Resuming the reconstruction of the developmental trajectory of early modern England, the argument is that the rise of agrarian capitalism and the concomitant restructuring of class relations in Stuart England resulted in a period of intense social conflict over the construction, form and control of the English state. The path to absolutism was short-circuited through an alliance between an entrepreneurial-capitalist aristocracy that, intermittently supported by the new class of 'interloper merchants', finally defeated the reactionary class alliance between the Crown, the old colonial merchant class and some surviving feudal magnates (Brenner, 1993). This conflict climaxed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in which the dynastic principle was replaced by the formula 'King-in-Parliament' which conceded that sovereignty was henceforth located in Parliament. This de-personalization of public authority inaugurated the split between the private and the public, the economic and the political, as accumulation was prosecuted increasingly in the private sphere of production, whereas the British state assumed, if not overnight, the role of the general public guardian of a private property regime (Wood, 1991).

I concluded by specifying the associated institutional (fiscal, financial, administrative and military) transformations in the nature of the British state (Brewer, 1989), including the formulation of a new foreign policy — the 'blue-water policy' (Baugh 1989) — and the rise of 18th century Britain to Europe's pre-eminent military power. Britain's structural transformation imparted a very specific geopolitical dynamic on the rest of Europe, while the simultaneous militarization of the British state was itself crucially shaped by a hostile pre-capitalist international environment. In the process, Britain's comparative institutional, military and fiscal-economic advantage exerted pressures, primarily through the assumption of the role of the balancer, on 'backward' countries that forced them to design political counter-strategies in



order to survive in the competitive system of states. Faced with the strategic consequences of economic and institutional backwardness, continental states underwent a series of 'revolutions from above' or 'passive revolutions' through which they attempted, most notably France and Prussia, to rationalize, with very different results, their state apparatuses and their fiscal-economic performances, including the tortured and crisis-ridden introduction of capitalist social property relations.

However, I drew the theoretical conclusion that, since capitalism emerged first in one country only, it could not have 'caused' a territorial pluriverse, nor could a plurality of states in any way be derived from the concept of capitalism. Rather, I suggested that capitalism arose historically in a multi-territorial matrix that was the legacy of the absolutist period. This, in turn, decisively shaped the subsequent uneven development and expansion of capitalism, as the territorial and institutional configuration of Europe was equally shaped and re-configured throughout the 19th and 20th centuries through the crisis-ridden and territorially refracted expansion of capitalism. While the diffusion of capitalist social property relations did not create the system of states, it did not obliterate it either. The creation of a capitalist world-market became the condition of possibility for a non-territorial logic of international economic accumulation without, however, fully undermining the political authority that remained entrenched in a plurality of territorially defined sovereign states. These capitalist states remain capable of harnessing their politico-military powers for forms of territorial conquest and accumulation at times of crisis (especially in relation to non-capitalist regions). However, intercapitalist war is now relegated to an *ultima ratio*, rather than the *prima ratio* of medieval and early modern times. Theoretically, I concluded by suggesting a perspective that is capable of comprehending the spatio-temporally differentiated and geopolitically mediated development of Europe (and beyond) as a mixed-actor system by invoking the concept of socially uneven and geopolitically combined development — a perspective that is fully alive to the historical efficacy of international relations on regional/national contexts.

Challenging the Challenge

Some elements of my interpretation have been called into question. Yet, it is striking that none of the participants to the debate actually defend 'Westphalia'. Spruyt denies its significance, Axtmann ignores it and Agnews agrees with my historical critique, while all three disagree with aspects of my alternative historical reconstruction and its theoretical premises. This curious situation may be itself symptomatic of a bifurcated discourse in which IR continues to subscribe to 'Westphalia' as a trope, while it is — once seriously



confronted — apparently beyond recovery in IR Historical Sociology, Political Theory and Political Geography. The terrain of engagement thus shifts to three sets of issues: (a) competing theoretical perspectives, notably the relative merits of Marxism and Weberianism; (b) meta-theoretical concerns over the dialectical understanding of totality and (c) a series of more localized debates in contemporary historiography on the rise of capitalism, the role of geopolitics and the modern state. It is on this terrain that I will try to counter my critics.

Hendrik Spruyt denies the central position of 'Westphalia' in the IR discourse, since the notion of sovereignty pre-dated 1648 and since periodization in history is fraught with ambiguities. Theoretically, he claims that the reductionist and economistic tendencies inherent in my reading of Marxism are incapable, for example, of fully understanding the military aspects of medieval geopolitics, while arguing that a hybrid theory that insists on the interaction of ontologically independent spheres is better capable of understanding the complexities of large-scale and long-term historical developments.

John Agnew finds fault with my account of territoriality formation by charging me with projecting a modern notion of strong territoriality into early modern and late medieval times, leading to an anachronistic rendition of 'France' and 'England' as primordial and geographically reified units. My epistemological demand for 'totality' translates into an ontologized reading of countries as hermetically sealed territorial-institutional containers. Correlatively, Agnew regards this tendency of a longitudinal geographical encapsulation reinforced by an exclusively internal reconstruction of regional property relations and state formation. The resulting path-dependencies are incapable of incorporating the potentially path-inflecting pressures of international relations in the overall explanation, resulting in an inside-out explanation. Furthermore, he imputes an equation of modernity with capitalism in my work that restricts the diversity of regional modernization processes to one path of true modernization. As non-capitalist social relations and other pre-modern vestiges persisted in Britain into the 19th century, so he detects in 18th century France a transition to capitalism and signs of modern state-formation in the absolutist context. He thus minimizes the fundamental differences in Franco-British developmental passages that I emphasized. Finally, he contests my account of the historical relation between capitalism and modern territoriality, suggesting that strong territoriality did not precede but rather post-date the European-wide arrival of capitalism. Implicitly, Agnew extends thus his criticism of realism that is caught in what he called 'the territorial trap' to my own work.

Roland Axtmann, finally, objects that my account marginalizes Weberian approaches and misconceives Max Weber's model of historical causation. While it insists on independent developmental logics, Axtmann suggests that it allows for the possibility of structural adequacy between them at specific



historical junctures that may result in dynamic transformations. He also identifies a lack of consideration for religion as a crucial dimension of late medieval and early modern politics and geopolitics and concludes by suggesting that, in spite of the centrality accorded in my interpretation to class conflict, there is an absence of popular struggle in the sense of social history.

'Westphalia', Sovereignty, Theory

Hybrid Theory or Theoretical Drift?

Hendrik Spruyt's retreat into a defensive position of denial on Westphalia's significance, his theoretical agnosticism and his insouciance to defend his particular approach that I criticized in my book (Teschke, 2003, 32–39) are perplexing. He defines a research agenda central to IR Theory and Historical Sociology, namely 'a theory which can generatively account for unit and system variation' and variations in external unit behaviour (p. 4). His rehearsal of various approaches in the extant literature (military, economic, ideational, 'hybrid') on this question concludes by pledging 'no allegiance to any particular approach', advocating methodological and theoretical pluralism (p. 1). Spruyt fails to realize that this apparently open and unbiased stance cannot escape from and ultimately reproduces the fundamental divorce between what needs to be represented as economically reductionist Marxist and multi-causal Neo-Weberian approaches of macro-sociological change. The declared substantive neutrality capsizes into a stark methodological re-affirmation of the superiority of 'hybrid theory', of which Spruyt professes to be an advocate (p. 6). The inability to recognize (or the attempt to disguise) the simultaneity of a choice for theoretical pluralism — with an uncontrollable and infinitely expandable list of variables that enter the causal explanation is an ad hoc basis as soon as any one variable has exhausted its temporary utility — as a choice for Neo-Weberianism, renders Spruyt's insistence 'to pledge no allegiance to any particular approach' non-sensical. This theoretical posture ends up in a performative contradiction: the implication of his theoretical precaution, that is, the implicit adoption of a multi-causal pluralism, contradicts his claim to adopt no particular theoretical position. Worse, it tends to hide a theoretical stand behind a ritualized assertion of open-mindedness.

Denying 'Westphalia', Underdefining Sovereignty

Spruyt's refusal to accept the central status that I ascribe to 'Westphalia' in IR and his own work is surprising, not least since he continues to invoke the



concept 'Westphalian System' in his own publications on the implicit assumption that its meaning is secured and generally accepted (Spruyt, 2000). But his alternative suggestion to determine the arrival of 'sovereign statehood' by defining sovereignty in terms of 'highest authority', resulting in its identification in the 12th/13th centuries, does not only contradict his research programme of 'determining the character of particular units', it fundamentally fails to advance criteria through which we can differentiate one meaning of sovereignty from another. After all, a tribal chieftain can certainly conceive of his rule in Spruyt's terms as sovereign, but nothing is gained by defending what is, in fact, a particularly vague and minimalist Realist definition of sovereignty (internal hierarchy/external equality) for determining different types of rule and their variable external behaviour. If we take, in contrast, Max Weber's classical definition of the modern state — with its analytical attributes of a legitimate public monopoly in the means of violence, bounded territoriality, rational bureaucracy defined in terms of the bureaucrat's separation from the means of administration — then we can at least start to assess whether historically this type of state formed first in post-1688 England, as I argue, or in the High Middle Ages. But without formulating a definition that encapsulates a set of analytical properties that can be tested against the historical evidence, we lack the conceptual tools to validate what must appear as arbitrary assertions.

Political Marxism vs Neo-Weberian Pluralism

But it was part of my rejection of Weber that it is insufficient to order the historical material in terms of its formal correspondence to specific ideal types. Rather, the task is to provide theoretically controlled historical explanations of different forms of rule, the transitions between them and their implications for international relations. In this respect, Axtmann objects that I misrepresent Weber's research strategy as a simple claim for multi-causal explanation. While Weber did construct a model of historical causation in which structures of social action follow 'laws of their own', the analysis of their independent developmental logics was complemented by an inquiry into their structural adequacy ('elective affinity') 'which determines the degree to which structures further or impede or exclude each other' (p. 3). Different structures form environments that social groups may or may not mobilize for their interests. Further, he regards it as a 'complete misrepresentation' to subsume the Weberian position under the rubric of the 'geopolitical competition model', while pointing out that Weber's own account of international politics also stressed, at least with reference to imperialism, class forces (p. 5).

With regard to our reading of Weber's methodology, it seems that Axtmann and I concur rather than disagree.



Weber's historical sociology first and foremost serves comparison by constructing ideal-types under which the most diverse historical and geographical cases can be subsumed and stored away. This is, of course, not without scientific value, but it implies the transformation of history as an open process into history as a database furnishing evidentiary material for a series of systematised taxonomies. This is the death of history as becoming. Certainly, Weber, the historian, did not always comply with the self-imposed methodological rules of Weber the social scientist. In the historical sections of *Economy and Society*, we find many allusions to and remarks on transitional tendencies from one type of domination to another. But these passing remarks have no systematic place in his theory of social science, and thus lack a meta-theoretical foundation, which spells out the principles of historical and social change. This leads Weber to maintain that structures of social action follow 'laws of their own' (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*). Any reconstruction of European history will therefore have to retrace the independent developmental logics of different social spheres (political, economic, legal, religious etc.) that never stand in any necessary relation of co-constitution, but may or may not form 'elective affinities'. Historical development takes then the form of an unlimited multiplication and combination of externally interacting social dimensions of an empirical whole with no underlying unity (Teschke 2003, 50–51).

We part company, however, when Axtmann re-affirms what I regard to be problematic in Weber, that is, the *a priori* existence of analytically distinct structures and the essential historical indeterminacy in their interrelations. Ultimately, we may agree that it is a question of explanatory power to adjudicate between incommensurable research strategies — Marxist *vs* Weberian. I submit in this respect that Weber's accounts of feudalism, the rise of bureaucracy and the modern state in early modern France, the origin of capitalism, state formation in England, the role of cities in late medieval and Renaissance Europe, to name but a few cases, are theoretically problematic and historiographically superseded. Furthermore I could have convinced myself of the relative plausibility of Weber's method if Axtmann had directly engaged any one of my substantive re-interpretations on this basis, rather than pointing in the abstract to the superiority of Weber's research methodology. The question then remains: does the adoption of a Weberian framework in any way refute any one of my substantive propositions on the course of European geopolitics, or does it hold out the prospect of a superior explanation?

Furthermore, it should not surprise that Weber is widely read as a pluralist — a perception that is reinforced by Axtmann's reminder that Weber's analysis of imperialism, although primarily explained by a state's concern for its prestige — read: internal legitimacy, read: ruling class power — in the face of



international rivalry, 'also' acknowledges the role of class forces. There is then an additive hierarchy of 'causal factors' without any rigorous and integrated understanding of their interrelatedness.

Certainly, Weber's, like Marx's, rules for conducting social science are sometimes ambiguous and even conflicting, forming more repertoires of methods than unified and consistent sets of rules that are evenly applied. Beyond ideal types and *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, Weber is, of course, also claimed by the hermeneutic tradition. In *Economy and Society*, he famously tried to develop an interpretive sociology based on the meaning that actions have for actors. 'We shall speak of "action" in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour'. (Weber, 1978, 4). The intention is to establish the agenda for an empirical science of action, where outcomes derive from intended purposes. The aim is to combine explanation and understanding by analysing the adequacy and efficiency of chosen means, their purposive rationality (*Zweckrationalität*), to realize given ends, which remain themselves outside of any theoretical grasp since ends are irreducible *gesinnungsethische* convictions. How this insistence on methodological individualism generates collective outcomes, how subjectively intended individual actions relate to social interaction and this to the process of *Vergesellschaftung* (societalization), remains obscured in this non-relational hermeneutic sociology. Perhaps more worryingly for those with a pluralist inclination is the question how Weber's liberal insistence on ultimate value-positions squares with his macro-sociological diagnosis of a single process of intensifying world-historical rationalization — a historical determinism of colossal proportions. This unresolved contradiction remains one of the constitutive antinomies of this disenchanting liberal thinker.

For our purposes, it suffices to reiterate that almost all neo-Weberian sociologists who study early modern state-formation and international relations adopt, consciously or unconsciously, a non-interpretive understanding of Weber, ending up with structural and multi-causal analyses. And it is these Neo-Weberians (Tilly, 1975, 1992; Giddens, 1985; Collins, 1986; Mann, 1986; Ertman, 1997) and many historians of early modern Europe (Brewer, 1994; Bonney, 1995; Contamine, 2000) whose intellectual references fall squarely in the Weber-Hintze tradition, *unisono* privileging geopolitical conflict as the key variable in the explanation of European state-formation (and much more) — an assessment reinforced by Axtmann's citation of Randall Collin's thesis that outside-in explanations constitute the defining characteristic of Weberian political sociology (p. 5). Certainly, the privileging of geopolitical competition does not exhaust their respective full analyses. Inversely, however, their wider analyses do not distract from or invalidate the overriding historical efficacy they attribute to military rivalry as the *differentia specifica* of the European experience.⁹



In contrast, instead of reverting to a problematic pluralist account that posits an *a priori* 'ontological' independence of separate spheres or levels that only interact externally, I adopted and developed a specific version of Marxism — Political Marxism. It stresses precisely the non-reductionist, non-teleological and non-structuralist character of the course of history. Political, geopolitical, technological, ideological and military aspects of society cannot be mechanically reduced to some economic imperatives, but neither can they be dissociated from the ways in which societies organize their collective social metabolism with nature and develop strategies of reproduction in order to defend and advance their modes of existence.

It is crucial to understand that there is no such phenomenon as a pre-political and pre-social economy, conceptualized transhistorically as an aggregate of individual welfare-maximizers, that exists outside of or prior to the social or the political, which determines in the first or the last instance all other social spheres. In this respect, a crude Marxian base-superstructure that conceives of the political as a mere function or a derivative of the economic is simply as misleading as the Weberian explanatory strategy. Rather, we need to examine how specific forms of society, if they are class-divided societies, are premised on specific social relations through which the transfer of surplus is regulated between producers and non-producers. This is, of course, an axiomatic statement, but one that needs to be and can be tested against the historical evidence. The ways in which this social relation is being constituted is historically always specific, depending on historically variable correlations of political forces that institutionalize different social property relations (or different 'relations of exploitation'), which, in turn, generate different class dynamics, different authority relations, different spatial regimes and different modes of external conduct.

For pre-capitalist societies (of the feudal type) it is, for example, central to recognize that the class dynamics between lords and peasants were premised on a property relation that carried always a complex of political rights and obligations on both sides of the asymmetrical relation. It codified the legally differentiated status between people: 'relations of personal dependency'. This legal inequality was premised on the possession and distribution of the *means of domination* among the members of the ruling class, since these were decisive for determining the balance of forces between exploiters and exploited and therewith the terms and rates of exploitation. This implies that class conflict was never a purely economic conflict, but always a highly *politicized struggle for power*. The conflicts over the relative distribution of peasant-produced surplus among lords and peasants, as well as among lords, assumed a directly political form. The institutionalization of this class relation in the lordship as a unit of domination and exploitation reduces direct producers to various



degrees of personal unfreedom. It is this non-separation between the political and the economic which renders the projection of a multi-variable analysis based on a categorical framework derived from modern times into a differently structured past highly problematic, anachronistic and, I would argue, fundamentally misleading.¹⁰

Since power and the chances of reproduction were intimately related to the control of the means of appropriation/violence, it was normal for individual lords to re-invest primarily, as I set out in my summary, in their military apparatuses to secure their economic security by military means, rather than in the means of production.¹¹ This explains why the rate of military innovations throughout the Middle Ages was quite spectacular, whereas the rate of productive innovations was relatively flat. But since some degree of politico-military coercion was embedded in the lordship, lords stood in interlordly competition over their relative share of land and labour. In other words, since the logic of lordly reproduction was tied primarily to their power to extract, political accumulation spilled over into *geo-political accumulation*, as the conquest and acquisition of territory was the normal way, next to increasing the rate of exploitation, to amass wealth. Consequently, feuding and warfare was endemic. I argued, therefore, that this generates the appearance of the primacy of politics/geopolitics in medieval society — an appearance that Neo-Weberians tend to take at face value at the cost of obfuscating its social content.

Inversely, the capitalist market is not a natural phenomenon resulting from the spontaneous interactions among socially de-contextualized self-interested, calculating and possessive individuals. Rather, capitalism is premised on a social property regime in which property has lost all social or political attributes. It now appears as private, unconditional and absolute property. Personal relations of domination and dependency are converted into impersonal relations between people mediated by property as a thing. But the formal equalization in the political status of subjects covers the material inequality that persists in differentiated access to property, to the means of reproduction, so that political equality hides economic inequality. The capitalist process of surplus appropriation assumes a privatized form in the process of production, as dispossessed workers are obliged to sell their labour power to make a living, driven by the 'dull compulsion of the market'. Capitalism's paradoxical character as a society that appears to be organized around the free exchange of commodities between atomistic individuals, mediated by a de-personalized market in which individuals compete and contract, conceals their asymmetrical location in a historically specific social relation — the capital relation.

While the capitalist market assumes thus an economic form, although never in a purely de-politicized form as advocated by neo-classical economics, the



state is, as a rule, no longer directly implicated in surplus appropriation, but provides an 'abstracted' political frame for private property, backed up by a public monopoly in the means of coercion. Public power is evacuated from the realm of private production and pooled in concentrated form in the sovereign state as an impersonal defender of the rule of law. However, while capitalist states enjoy considerable degrees of autonomy, they remain internally related to capitalism as a form of society due to their structural role in guaranteeing the rule of law, private property and general social order, ensuring the reproduction of capitalist society. Spruyt and Axtmann fail to recognize and to engage with this particular reading of Marxism and disfigure it as an economistic, deterministic and reductionist account.

This theoretical misreading translates into historical equivocations. For example, Spruyt questions why the dynamics of class alliances in Stuart England led to capitalism and parliamentary sovereignty rather than to absolutism. He suggests that the English pattern of class alliances may be better explained by 'non-economic factors' like the 'military conquest by the Normans'. But I argued precisely and at considerable length (Teschke, 2003, 104–107, 250–252) that the outcome of the Norman Conquest imposed a specific feudal property settlement, a distinctive class-constellation and a uniquely strong type of feudal state on medieval England — and this imposition of a new social property regime was crucial for understanding the long-term class dynamics and the transition to capitalism in England. Furthermore, I explained the reasons, form and consequences of the Norman Conquest by setting it within the socio-political crisis context of the disintegration of the Frankish Empire that around the millennium left several peripheral regions of the former Carolingian Empire — namely Catalonia, Normandy and Saxony — as regional strongholds that developed their own dynamics of geopolitical accumulation in relation to Spain, the British Isles and the Slavonic lands to the east of the Elbe-Saale line. But I argued repeatedly that these military expansionary movements cannot be separated from the geopolitical and spatial strategies of economic reproduction in a feudal context in which access to and control over land was the normal route to expanded reproduction of the lordly class. In other words, economic reproduction took, of necessity, a politico-military form so that any attempt that insists on understanding this nexus through the jargon of 'dependent' and 'independent' variables is bound to fail. It is a fundamental fallacy of the neo-Weberian approach to think that the social world has been differentiated into separate spheres 'all along' and that the task of social science is to re-establish the external interactions between these pre-existing social spheres across the course of history.



Territoriality, Path Dependency and Capitalism

A Realist Conception of Territoriality?

Turning from theoretical to more substantive questions, Agnew charges me with projecting a containerized notion of modern territoriality into a pre-modern past, leading to territorial reifications and a general inability to trace spatial metamorphoses over the centuries. One intellectual puzzle of my book was to problematize the assumption, widely held in IR Theory, Historical Sociology and Marxism of a temporal co-evolution and causal co-constitution of the rise of capitalism, multiple territory formation and political interstate relations conducted by and between sovereign states. I argued that since there is, theoretically, nothing in the concept of capitalism that *requires* a system of states for the demands of capital accumulation, a geopolitical pluriverse cannot be logically or functionally 'derived' from capitalism as a concept, but that the separate and independent social origins of capitalism and the interstate system had to be established historically. This opens up a much less deterministic and less structuralist interpretation of their dynamic co-existence during the 19th and 20th centuries. This reading of the conceptually indeterminate relation between capitalism and capitalist territorial orders leads to an agency-centred perspective that stresses how different capitalist states at different conjunctures of their internal capitalist development designed and activated different strategies of territorialization. In this way, we can start to understand why it is that, although capitalism has been a constant in all the following territorial projects — British Free Trade and Pax Britannica, 19th century formal and informal empires, the 'New Imperialism', German *Grossraumpolitik*, the Japanese interwar project of a 'Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere', US-sponsored post-war multilateral liberal international order, European Integration, globalization, to name but a few — we see very different spatial strategies and geopolitical arrangements by and between capitalist states. These variations cannot be reduced to or read off a 'logic of capitalism', but have to be understood in terms of *variable capitalist strategies of spatialization*.¹² It is in this way that Spruyt's correct reminders about the persisting capitalist projects of de-territorialization and re-territorialization during the 19th and 20th centuries can be best addressed, even though the time period that he refers to fell outside the scope of my book.

The problematization of the relation between capitalism and territoriality led me to reconstruct the pre-capitalist evolution of a multi-territorial Europe and to re-theorize the changing forms that territoriality assumed over the centuries by locating the remote origins of multiple territories in the break-up of the Carolingian Empire. Contrary to Agnew's objection that I operate throughout the book with a modern notion of territoriality, I emphasized the protean nature of feudal territoriality and demonstrated in the cases of 'France' and



'England' precisely their socio-politically and institutionally non-homogeneous and geographically ever-shifting nature.¹³ I stressed the 'transnational' birth of Anglo-Norman England, the persistence of Anglo-Norman geopolitical accumulation during the High Middle Ages into the Celtic fringes of the British Isles, and 'England's' cross-Channel 'Angevine Empire' in Aquitaine and other parts of south-western 'France' that ended with the Hundred Years' War (Teschke, 2003, 104–106 and 65–67), concluding that 'medieval political geography is the story of the cohesion and fragmentation of feudal lordships — a phenomenon of ruling class organization' (Teschke, 2003, 67).

Furthermore, I argued explicitly for the non-equivalence of early modern and contemporary forms of territoriality. Dynastic geopolitical accumulation — whether in the form of territorial conquest, mercantilist control over exclusive trading routes and overseas ports, colonialism, marital strategies of territorial aggrandizement, or the consequences of the *convenance* system of territorial liquidation and compensation — disproves any notion of a fixed, bounded, contiguous and uniformly administered territory well into the 19th century. It was my explicit thesis that as a result of interdynastic geopolitical accumulation, early modern territoriality was characterized by dynastic unions, constant territorial *revirements* and what I described as the mosaic character of many territorially disjointed, non-contiguous and institutionally heterogeneous dominions that were held together mainly by the property titles of their ruling dynasts (Teschke, 2003, 230–233). Early modern territoriality was characterized by the continuous divisions, unification and re-division of territories.

However, in contrast to the parcellised territoriality of feudal property relations, absolutist-dynastic territoriality was no longer internally fragmented and challenged since the feudal nobility had lost — let us take the Fronde as a crucial marker — their independent and autonomous territorial bases of power. At least in the French case, the nobility became demilitarized, domesticated and absorbed into the royal state. This internal pacification of royal-aristocratic relations — the demise of the feud was its index — implied the internal consolidation of territorial sovereignty which was, however, not matched externally in form of a static geographical scale of territory due to the Crown's involvement in interdynastic struggles over territory. I argued that as long as sovereignty remained personalized and pegged to the Crown, a generic identity between a 'state' and 'its' territory was unlikely to solidify. In other words, the elimination of internal contenders to a consolidated form of territoriality did not translate into external geographical fixity. One could even say that the subordination of the aristocracy to the Crown reinforced the necessity of the ruling class, organized in the absolutist state apparatus, to intensify state-led geopolitical accumulation since particularistic forays of territorial predation were increasingly repressed.



It is therefore unclear to me how Agnew can claim that I operate with a containerized notion of modern territoriality in my analysis of changes in medieval and early modern territoriality, when the entire thrust of my argument demonstrates precisely the opposite with the explicit objective to circumvent and expose the realist 'territorial trap'.

Furthermore, it is doubtful whether the Europe-wide emergence and consolidation of capitalism preceded the territorial organization of Europe as a multi-state system. Much depends, of course, on how we define capitalism. But since Agnew eschews a working definition of capitalism, we cannot and we do not know whether Agnew's charge holds. His detection of capitalism or, at least, a 'transition to capitalism (of some sort)' (Agnew, 4) in 18th century France is highly questionable, as I will argue in greater detail below that the credit market in 18th century Paris and the Crown's reliance on private lending were precisely manifestations of the pre-modern financial sector in France — in clear contrast to capitalist England that had established by the late 17th century a National Bank and the Public Debt. Agnew may be right in suggesting that Europe's state boundaries only solidified after 1815 and that they became policed barriers only in the 20th century (p. 5); he may even be right to argue that 'rigid state territorial demarcation grew during the capitalist epoch, it did not predate it' (p. 5) But this objection fails to come to terms with the question of where multiple territories — where the interstate system — comes from in the first place. If, however, we accept the notion that the age of absolutism did lay a territorial template for the 19th and 20th centuries, then it should be possible to show how 19th century continental states tried to give their inherited territories a much sharper definition in order to advance state-led projects of capitalist modernization.

Class Dynamics, Military Rivalry and Early Modern State-Formation in 'France' and 'England': Path dependency or Spatio-Temporally Differentiated and Geopolitically Mediated Development?

However, Agnew links the charge of projecting a strong notion of modern territoriality into the past to the objection of path dependency in my account of the bifurcated class dynamics and trajectories of Anglo-French state building, which abstracts from the effects of international relations on their respective developmental experiences. Correspondingly, he objects that I overstate the capitalist character of post-1688 Britain 'where all manner of non-capitalist social relations have long persisted, not least in agrarian contexts' (p. 4) and understate France's 'transition to capitalism (of some sort) after 1715' (p. 4), due to a decline of venality after the reign of Louis XIV and the growth of the Paris credit-market that relied on impersonal lending.



I started my account of 'the process of modernization' with a fundamental theoretical and empirical critique of the Neo-Marxist commercialization model, the Neo-Malthusian demographic model and the neo-Weberian geopolitical competition model. The latter explains European state-formation primarily as a process of geopolitical selection and adaptation in which rulers had to monopolize, centralize and rationalize their military capacities leading, next to state exit, *à la longue* to a European-wide institutional isomorphism of state-forms converging on the modern, sovereign state. Some Weberian sociologists make the further claim that the war-driven pressures towards the rationalization of the state's extractive capacities (fiscal system) for revenue-procurement decisively advanced the development of capitalism as state-led mercantilist strategies of economic growth started to penetrate society at large with the objective to increase national wealth. In this perspective, an increasingly rationalized bureaucracy administered an evermore productive economy in a geographically evermore consolidated territory, leading to the general strengthening of the centralized state apparatus to the detriment of particularistic centers of power.

Against this line of interpretation, I argued that while it is crucial to recognize the insertion of early modern polities in a geopolitical system characterized by military rivalry, I located the *reasons* for its bellicose character not in Realist system-theoretical assumptions of transhistorical geopolitical competition in a taken-for-granted anarchical states-system, but in the social need for *geopolitical accumulation* conditioned by pre-capitalist property relations in a historically specific anarchy. Warfare was not a geopolitical imperative imposed by international anarchy, but a normal strategy of *expanded reproduction* driven by the social and domestic imperatives of geopolitical accumulation. What is known in the literature as the 'permanent war state' or the 'fiscal-military state' institutionalized the social imperatives of geopolitical accumulation.

I made the further claim that the *effects* of military rivalry had, at least in the French case, precisely the *opposite result* of what the geopolitical competition model asserts. Rather than driving an incremental process of successful modern state-formation, as the Neo-Weberian tradition assumes, warfare exacerbated, over the long run, the social conflicts within Old Regime France, undermined its fiscal-military health, exhausted its economic performance, and shaped a distinct process of 'unsuccessful' involutory state-formation that actually weakened the French state, leading especially during and after the Seven Years' War to a permanent state of fiscal crisis and, finally, to state collapse under the geopolitical pressure exerted by a qualitatively distinct and comparatively superior capitalist state/society complex: post-1688 England.¹⁴

I drew from this the theoretical conclusion that while all early modern polities were drawn into the vortex of military rivalry, the conflictual



reproduction of social property relations that found expression in the construction of differentiated trajectories of public power determined to a large degree state-development, fiscal-military performance and state exit. *International pressures arise from and have to be refracted in their consequences for respective trajectories of development through the prism of domestic social property relations.* They mediate military rivalry to different effect. In other words, my general argument was that long-term processes of class formation resulted in regionally different property settlements that were crucial for determining the variety of early modern state-forms and their relative ability to apply, withstand and adapt to geopolitical pressure. Theoretically, I pointed precisely to the need to incorporate the mutually interactive dynamics of an international 'mixed-case scenario' into a reconstruction of the multi-linear, but interconnected, passages of different polities, rather than to insist on geographically segregated national path-dependencies. I concluded by suggesting that the formula of socially uneven and geopolitically combined development captures this processual and dialectical inside–outside–inside interface at this level of abstraction (Teschke, 2003, 249–270). In this sense, my epistemological totality is not homologous with a series of mutually insulated territorially confined units, but a differentiated totality of many determinations, including those deriving from world-historical contexts.

Thus, while I rejected the Weberian theme of a uniform European-wide modernizing impact of military rivalry, I stressed its differentiated effects on class dynamics and state formation in 'France' and 'England/Britain'. More specifically, while the transition from feudalism to absolutism in France is primarily explainable through an 'internalist' reading of class conflict, early modern state-formation was heavily co-determined by France's insertion in a wider geopolitical system — a co-determination that, however, did not dislodge but rather entrenched very resilient pre-capitalist property relations. For even though the French polity had by 1789 (and beyond) not developed a modern state presiding over a capitalist economy, the need to prepare for and conduct war had powerful consequences for the French (and any other) trajectory, although it contributed to an ultimately self-defeating logic — a process of state unmaking. Regarding England/UK, while the transition from feudalism to capitalism requires an 'internalist' explanation, early modern and, especially, post-1688 British state formation was massively shaped by geopolitical pressures without, however, dislodging pre-established capitalist property relations.¹⁵

Why, then, did class conflict and its strategic dimension — geopolitics — lead in France to absolutism, the reproduction of an 'inefficient' pre-modern state, and the relative decline of France's international position, but in England/Britain to capitalism, an increasingly 'efficient' and modern state, and Britain's rise to global primacy?



French State-Formation, Religion and the 'Involutionary' Trajectory of Absolutism

I began by reconstructing the French trajectory by focussing on the outcome of the 'feudal revolution' around the millennium that left a territorially fragmented social property regime (the multiplicity of banal lords) that was slowly and gradually centralized by the Capetian and, later, Valois monarchies. Here, in contrast to England, the competition between regional lords and royal power created room for a policy of peasant protection in which a feudal rent-regime between lords and unfree peasants was undermined during the crisis of the 14/15th century and finally replaced after the 17th century crisis by an absolutist tax-regime between the king and free peasants in possession of their lands (Brenner, 1985). In this process, the old sword-carrying and independent nobility lost many of its feudal powers and became either impoverished or absorbed into the court society of the Old Regime through office venality and other channels of privilege. Simultaneously, the monarchy actively promoted the creation of a new 'office nobility' that started to administer public power (taxation, justice and war). In this process, the demilitarization of the old feudal nobility and the loss of their autonomous feudal powers of domination and appropriation implied their domestication and their need to re-organize their privileges and powers of extraction in relation to the royal state.

It is in this secular context of intensifying internal ruling class differentiation, to take up Axtmann's question on the role of religion, that the French Reformation and the Wars of Religion (1562–1598) need to be situated. For it was through the mobilization of Protestantism that a part of the socially threatened and impoverished nobility, primarily the old sword-carrying nobility, articulated a doctrine of resistance and limited sovereignty — against Jean Bodin — that tried to re-legitimize their customary socio-political role as independent centers of local power, including a re-assertion of their traditional prerogatives, most notably the rights to tax and administer justice (Romier, 1967, 26ff.). The Wars of Religion and the wider question of interconfessional conflict in France (and beyond) are a direct index of the socio-political struggles between particularistic nobles (Huguenots) and a centralizing catholic monarchy over the distribution of power — and ultimately the contested construction of the 'absolutist' state (Lapointe, 2005). These confessional-constitutional conflicts that characterized the 'Crisis of the 17th century' started with the Wars of Religion, where re-ignited due to the costs of the Thirty Years War and exploded again in the Fronde.¹⁶ By the mid-17th century, the demise of independent feudal centers of power finally meant that territoriality became internally more consolidated, as the French polity was no longer a fragmented ensemble of lordships that defined the 'parcellised



sovereignty' of the medieval polity, but a kingdom in which the Crown was sovereign.

However, it would be a fundamental mistake to confound 'absolutist' with capitalist sovereignty, since the relations of exploitation remained politically constituted, if now in the form of the 'tax/office state'. The logic of political accumulation continued to rest on praxes of domination (Gerstenberger, 1990), revolving around the personalized sovereignty of the ruling dynasty: *L'État, c'est moi*. In the context of this social property regime, a separation of public and private realms, of the political and the economic, could not be carried through. As the king regarded the realm as his patrimonial property, *raison d'État* meant *raison de roi*. 'Divine kingship' became the dominant mode of legitimation, rather than a secularized discourse and praxis of 'popular sovereignty' or 'the national interest'. This peculiar class relation was important for it is from this specific social antagonism that French — I would argue *modernizing* — nationalism emerged from the conflict between the King and *Les Nationaux*. In turn, this specific form of nationalism shaped the Napoleonic invasion of the German states, for Napoleon introduced a *modernizing* reform of the German states under the banner of liberating a people from tyranny. Following Dufour (2004), nationalism emerged as a by-product of the geopolitically mediated pressures of England on France, and more precisely from the impacts of these military-financial pressures on the articulation of class antagonisms in France.

But absolutism never implied unlimited or unchecked royal power, but rather institutionalized a new and ultimately unstable *modus vivendi*, described by William Beik as 'social collaboration', between king and privileged groups, most notably the sword and office nobility and the higher clergy (Beik, 2005).¹⁷ The relations of exploitation between the Crown and the nobility and between the ruling class and the peasantry remained governed throughout the *Ancien Régime* by political conflicts over access to and the distribution of total peasant-produced output. Consequently, taxation became the key arena of domestic conflict. In this context, every war tested and re-negotiated the balance of power between Crown and nobility, as the monarchy tried to meet its financial needs by higher taxes, the artificial creation and selling of venal offices, or state loans advanced by private financiers who were often themselves tax-farmers. But while the nobility was, as a rule,¹⁸ exempted from taxation and therefore not represented in a national forum (the Estates General met for the last time before the French Revolution in 1614), the monarchy's reliance on the nobility for financial support translated into an entrenchment of its position in the venal 'bureaucracy', in provincial Estates and other regional corporate bodies, and into a flowering of indirect and informal deals that individual financiers struck in the clientelistic system of the Court at Versailles. Office venality became a preferred option since the recourse to aristocratic



taxation was precluded so that the pretension to absolutism was belied by the progressive loss of control by the monarchy over the state apparatus as it was alienated to and re-privatized by an office nobility of heterogeneous social origins. Increasing security of office tenure (perpetuity and heredity) and the conversion of venal offices into private property went hand in hand with the creation of a veritable market in offices. The proliferation of venal offices did not solely derive from royal authorization as individual office holders beyond the control of the king created sub-offices. In short, 'there was a direct correlation between the intensification of warfare and office proliferation, the pursuit of international geopolitical accumulation and the domestic hollowing out of state power' (Teschke, 2003, 174).

Over time, the voracious financial needs of the Crown led to a fiscal-administrative system in which more and more public offices were created, sold or auctioned off by powerful courtiers, financiers and tax-farmers, while the property rights of office holders were routinely re-affirmed. This resulted in a Byzantine and ultimately un-reformable semi-public and semi-private bureaucracy staffed by venal officers that took on a self-expanding dynamic of its own. Correlatively, taxation weighted down on a pre-capitalist agrarian sector in which neither peasants, who formed subsistence communities based on direct access to their means of reproduction, nor the upper classes (noble and bourgeois), were subjected to capitalist imperatives. Comparatively speaking, central indicators of France's pre-capitalist travails are well-documented: its demographic growth incapacity to overcome the Malthusian ceiling; its mercantilist concentration on the production of luxury goods far into the 19th century; its negligible industrial output; its credit problems. Caught between spiralling military expenditures, its inability of radical administrative reform due to deeply entrenched vested interests, and the excessive and punitive taxation of the peasantry that further undermined relative low rates of productivity, pre-capitalist 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, that finally led to a general crisis within the ruling class over the form of the state, exploding in the French Revolution. This interpretation led me to conclude that *ancien régime* class dynamics could not and did not lead to a rationalized, efficient, and 'modern' bureaucratic state. In fact, military rivalry reinforced and intensified rather than resolved the class tensions that structured Old Regime France.

Towards Modern State-Formation and Capitalism in pre-1789 France?

The two sources that Agnew adduces to argue the case for a transition to pre-revolutionary modern state-formation and capitalism in France do not refute



my argument; they confirm it. Against my interpretation of the consequences of office venality for Old Regime state-formation, Agnew objects that 'the much emphasized venality of French absolutism peaked during the reign of Louis XIV, suggesting that France was also under a transition to capitalism (of some sort) after 1715' (Agnew, 4), citing Mark Potter and Hoffman, Postel-Vilnay and Rosenthal in support of his argument.

But Potter's central thesis asserts quite the contrary of what Agnew imputes, concluding that 'warfare and the challenges of financing war clearly impacted political developments within the French absolutist state, but not in the 'modern' direction so often assumed by historians and historical sociologists' (Potter, 2003, 147). Of capitalism, he says nothing. He locates the history of office venality in the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Old Regime as the King's dependence on the privileged classes for war-finances resulted in the paradoxical situation of simultaneously strengthening and attempting to curtail their rights and privileges — a struggle that ended in a social compromise and not in a victory of either one side. Potter reconstructs the non-linear, but nevertheless persisting and expanding, consolidation of the venal office system from the 15th century to 1789 in response to war-related revenue procurement. He demonstrates the progressive privatization and repeated royal confirmations of what he terms 'politically constituted property in offices' (Potter, 2003, 144), as the status of offices moves from venality, via life tenure, to heritability. Potter also suggests that the Crown, after Louis XIV, tried to lessen its reliance on venality on the realization that office expansion alienated state property and restricted the Crown's political room for manoeuvre, but equally insists that 'venality would remain an ever-present aspect of French social and political life through the end of the Old Regime' (Potter, 2003, 147). He concludes by arguing that 'the developmental path of early modern states did not necessarily remain fixed on that Weberian endpoint of a centralized bureaucratic state' (Potter, 2003, 121). It is therefore a mystery to me how Agnew can invoke Potter against my rendition of the history of office venality, when he concurs fully with my argument. A transition to the modern bureaucratic state, prior to 1789, or a transition to capitalism is nowhere argued or even implied.

Hoffman, Postel-Vilnay and Rosenthal, in turn, argue that the conventional distinction in financial history between a pre-capitalist personal credit market with loans supporting non-productive activities and a capitalist impersonal credit market with loans being channelled into productive investment does not hold for Old Regime Paris (Hoffman *et al.*, 1999, 2000). Here, impersonal lending was carried out by financial intermediaries — the notaries — who brokered loans between borrowers and lenders 'who did not know each other'. In this, the notaries assumed control of the Paris credit market due to their privileged information of their clients' financial health since they archived



documentation of collaterals. This credit system 'invigorated long-term capital markets, allowing men and women alike to pursue investment strategies that seem surprisingly familiar to modern eyes' (Hoffman *et al.*, 1999, 71). What counts here as a transition to capitalism (at least in high finance) is the total volume of the credit market and the anonymity between lenders and borrowers, even though, by the authors' own admission, a modern impersonal banking system with pooled deposits, a public debt, and a public central bank which acts as a lender of last resort is nowhere to be seen in France until well into the 19th century.¹⁹ Furthermore, the authors remain relatively silent to what investment ends loans were made. While they suggest productive investments of a 'modern' character, they concede that

loans might serve purposes that would traditionally be considered unproductive, such as the purchase of a government office. But they could just as well be for productive uses, provided we do not impose the anachronistic standards of nineteenth-century industrialization: the loans to the Orléans family that funded development of the Palais Royal or those — admittedly to an arm of the state — that financed canals in Burgundy. (Hoffman *et al.*, 1999, 85)

What, then, is distinctly capitalist about these investment outlets? If government offices, aristocratic palaces and state-sponsored mercantilist infrastructural projects are the preferred investment options, then they reveal, not a transition to capitalism, as Agnew surmises, but the logic of pre-capitalist and very specific social relations that characterized Old Regime society and polity. Here, private investment was and remained primarily linked to the extractive power of and the opportunities for income provided by the royal 'state'.²⁰ Private investment, as Hoffman *et al.* tell us, was overwhelmingly geared towards government debts and the purchase of public offices. There was no escape from these pre-capitalist practices. It follows that the mere presence and volume of capital markets, impersonal or not, does not allow us to make any propositions about a transition to capitalism without a specification of the wider social relations and institutions within which they operated.²¹

The Rise of Capitalism, English State-Formation and the Transformation of European Geopolitics

Agnew also objects that 'the book does not come to grips with how domestic conditions are translated into hegemonic projects and why some states are able to achieve the capacity to do so when others do not' (p. 3). However, I argued that since continental patterns of property relations, class conflict and state development neither generated a breakthrough to capitalist economic development, nor to modern state-formation and a post-Westphalian logic



of territoriality and geopolitics, the stimulus for a transformation of the Westphalian System derived from the co-development of capitalism, modern state-formation in early modern England and its rise to Europe's major power. How, then, is this long-term divergence and exceptionality of 'England' to be explained? How did the institutional changes in the British polity subsequent to the rise of agrarian capitalism re-position Britain in the international system and how did this re-positioning transform international relations?

After 1066, a tight feudal hierarchy between Crown, magnates and lords was carried over from ducal Normandy in which the King retained the royal ban. This enabled a form of close, although not, of course, conflict-free, intra-ruling class cooperation that led to the enserfment of large sections of the English peasantry (a portion of the peasantry remained free-holders) while ruling out the complete fragmentation of power in 11 and 12th century France characterized by the multiplicity of banal lords. Correlatively, it reduced interlordly competition over peasant surplus so that the French pattern of royal support for peasant freedom and peasant property in order to turn lordly rents into royal taxes failed to develop. Rather, while English serfs were able to achieve personal freedom during the feudal crisis of the 14th century, they failed to secure property rights to their lands in striking contrast to their counterparts in France. Backed up by royal justice, English lords transformed relatively secure copyholds — the customary form of peasant land use that was inscribed into manorial rolls — into competitive leaseholds for which they charged market rents while levying high entry fines. In the process, the regulation of land use through customary law was replaced by Common Law. This resulted in the gradual dispossession of the peasantry, the consolidation of larger estates and the market-driven need by capitalist tenants to raise productivity in order to maintain their leases in a competitive market. By mid-17th century, we see the emergence of an entrepreneurial and socio-politically homogeneous landowning class and the overall consolidation of agrarian capitalism — a process that was accompanied and intensified by the enclosure movement (Brenner, 1985).

The transition to agrarian capitalism resulted in the well-documented qualitative quantum leap in overall British economic performance, carried primarily by its 'agricultural revolution' (Ormrod, 1985; Overton, 1996). The long-term effects were higher productivity rates, sustained, if non-linear, aggregate economic growth, higher rates of urbanization and population growth and a discourse of improvement (Jones, 1967; Wrigley, 1985; De la Escosura 2004). This socio-economic leap was throughout the 18th century observed with growing disbelief and envy by French elites, including the Physiocrats, and regarded with horror by German philosophers during the early 19th century under the impact of the industrial revolution (Crouzet, 1985, especially p. 139 *passim*; Stedman Jones, 2002). However, this leap could not



be replicated in the French, or any other national, context without a fundamental transformation of the social relations of their Old Regimes.

Thus, while I accepted Brenner's *internalist explanation* of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England and from feudalism to absolutism in France, I repeatedly stressed that Anglo-French experiences did not unfold in a geopolitical vacuum, but that their mutual interactions and their embeddedness in wider European and global relations are important for fully understanding their respective trajectories. However, while the international context, as I will show later with respect to post-1688 England, affected regional developments in multiple ways, it cannot explain either transition. While we may agree, for example, that the existence of the late medieval and Renaissance Flemish export market for wool exerted a strong incentive for English lords to redirect and commercialize sheep breeding for export, it depends on existing balances of class forces to determine whether these incentives could have led by themselves to the dispossession of the peasantry, a reorganization of property relations, the transformation of arable land into pasture, and the rise of commercial farming or, as was overwhelmingly the case in East-Elbian Europe, to lordly attempts to intensify surplus appropriation through traditional means within the given framework of feudal relations of appropriation.²² In this sense, it is crucial to recall Ellen Wood's distinction between the market as opportunity and the market as compulsion (Wood, 1994). While the former type of market existed throughout history, the latter is specific to capitalism. In late medieval England, it was the relative weakness of the peasantry and the relative strength of the lordly class that allowed lords to capitalize on market incentives in the very specific way of a transformation of property relations. In other words, the presence of a European market in textiles may have been a *necessary*, but never a *sufficient condition* for the rise of agrarian capitalism. It was the strength of Brenner's original thesis to show comparatively that different European regions reacted very differently to the opportunities of export markets. By themselves, the incentives provided by the circuits of international trade are insufficient to explain the very different reactions it provoked by agrarian classes in different regions of Europe. It thus depends on endogenous conditions to activate or neutralize external opportunities as contributing factors, but never as prime causes.

The English transition to agrarian capitalism led by the 17th century to a class constellation in which an entrepreneurial aristocracy, supported by the new 'interloping merchants', entered into a period of conflict with the monarchy, the old colonial merchant class and surviving feudal magnates over the form and control of the English state (Brenner, 1993). While the Stuarts tried to establish absolute authority, the capitalist aristocracy sought to construct a state that was responsive to the needs of private property protection, limited taxation and capital accumulation — encapsulated in the



programmatic call for 'political liberties'. This conflict between 'court' and 'country' climaxed in the Glorious Revolution and the new notion of the 'King-in-Parliament' — a formula that essentially codified that the Crown had conceded crucial powers to Parliament, which became the locus of British sovereignty. Between 1688 and 1715 the parliamentary classes consolidated their power by passing a series of fundamental constitutional acts (Harling, 2001, chapter 1). Agrarian capitalism had generated a social property regime in which the political conflicts among the members of the ruling class over the distribution and terms of the rights of political accumulation were increasingly replaced, although not overnight, by private forms of economic exploitation in the sphere of production. This shift from personalized forms of domination and appropriation to de-personalized forms generated the formal (although 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 drove the concomitant revolution in public administration — the fiscal revolution, the financial revolution and the military revolution in particular. Core departments of government — the Treasury, the Excise and the Navy — turned from patrimonial into modern bureaucracies (Brewer, 1989), while public finance was drastically modernized through the establishment of the Bank of England and the 'public debt' (Dickson, 1967; Cain and Hopkins, 1993, 58–84). 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 military advantage* over its continental competitors.²³

It is therefore insufficient to derive the character of the post-1688/1707 British state as a 'fiscal-military' machine from the exigencies of geopolitical rivalry, as John Brewer (1994, 56) suggests, 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 regime 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 and merchants which legislated in Parliament, so that tax levels were not only sustainable and tax-collection effective, but socio-politically far less divisive compared with absolutist France.

In this regard, Agnew may be right to suggest that 'all manner of non-capitalist social relations have long persisted' in the English case, although less so in the agrarian context. The series of enclosure acts, which completed the



dispossession of the peasantry from their means of reproduction, legislated by Parliament peaked in the late 18th century and terminated only in the 1820s; 'Old Corruption' was a constitutive feature of British politics throughout the 18th century; the monarchy retained a role in policy setting, including foreign policy-making, if increasingly as the 'dignified part' of the unwritten constitution. The 'Hanoverian Connection' continued to irritate Parliament while conferring on the British kings the status of Electors in the Holy Roman Empire; slavery was a widespread labour regime in the British colonies, notably in the West Indies.

In this vein, we can continue to cite very real 'pre-modern' vestiges that continued to persist in 18 and 19th century Britain (even until today) without ever establishing whether at some point in time, a qualitative transformation of state, society, economy and foreign policy had ever taken place. Alternatively, we can find intellectual succour in the ideologized one-damn-thing-after-another view of the past characteristic of mainstream English historiography. Furthermore, Agnew's insinuation of having replaced the myth of 1648 with the myth of 1649 or 1688 is rhetorically effective, but fails to correspond to my argument. Absolute caesurae that divide a prior from an after like day from night are very rare occurrences in history. Long-term preconditions build up to explode in cataclysmic *dénouements* without completely eradicating traces from the past. But it is the task of the social scientist to see through the ephemera of the *événementiel* and to avoid the idiographic temptation by means of a conceptual analysis that traces processes with a view to establish when and how a critical mass of interrelated phenomena has cumulated to form a new reality. If one date came to represent (and not merely symbolically) the decisive marker in the re-structuration of British public power, then it was 1688 and the series of fundamental constitutional acts that were passed in the three decades thereafter as part of the anti-absolutist reform programme of Parliament. This is not to discount the Civil War, the Republican Interregnum and the Restoration, but represents an acknowledgement of the fact that the social struggles around property and power that characterized England's revolutionary century were finally politically settled in the Glorious Revolution. Furthermore, rather than reverting to an undifferentiated and 'messy' continuum of history, we can acknowledge the persistence of pre-capitalist 'remnants' and demonstrate how they became internalized in capitalist society and reconstructed in order to serve very particular purposes. For example, although 'Old Corruption' was a pervasive feature of British politics until the Era of Reform in the 1830s, the use of public offices for private gain was throughout the 18th century precisely denounced as corruption, rather than accepted as a legitimate form of public administration, and part of the power struggle over the further rationalization of the 18th century British state.²⁴



However, another complication arises that speaks directly to the role of the international. For we cannot simply extrapolate from the successful capitalist revolution the liberal idea of a 'state lite' embraced by the venerable Whig historiography. A liberal night-watchman state could not be realized in an international context that forced the British state to spend between 75 and 85 per cent of annual expenditures between 1680 and 1780 on the army, navy and debt servicing related to war.²⁵ The militarization of the British state was largely externally driven. This also means that we should not conceive of the vectors of historical development in unidirectional terms as 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 super-power.

But we also need to de-reify and uncover the social dynamics of Britain's international environment. For this geopolitical force field was not any 'natural anarchy', as Realists in the field of International Relations would be quick to point out. Rather, 18th century international politics was played out, as I argue in *The Myth of 1648* and elsewhere (Teschke, 2002; Teschke, 2003, 249–270), 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 pre-capitalist property relations. 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, which institutionalized the social imperatives of geopolitical accumulation. It was this pre-capitalist complexion that gave the 18th century continental system of 'states' its over-militarized and bellicose character.²⁶

Still, the transformation of public power, property and class relations changed the position of Britain in the interstate system, forcing it to redefine and adapt its role to this wider international strategic context. I argued that the 'Glorious Revolution' not only started to rationalize the English state, it also occasioned a revolution in British foreign policy. This was characterized by a shift from dynastic to parliamentary foreign policy-making, defined no longer by the whims of dynasticism but by the 'national interest' — as articulated by the propertied classes in Parliament. As a result, Parliament adopted a very distinctive 'dual foreign policy strategy' (Baugh, 1989; Morgan, 2002), based, on the one hand, on power balancing *vs* 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'.²⁷ 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 territorial aspirations



on the Continent (the Hanoverian stemlands in Germany were regarded by Parliament as a constant source of irritation), yet started to regulate the states-system by means of rapidly changing alliances, hence: 'perfidious Albion', with and monetary subsidies to smaller powers — always to counter any emergent continental hegemony, usually, of course, French. In short, Britain started to drop out of the operative logic of the continental Westphalian states-system, while steering it by 'remote control'. Simultaneously, it built up its colonial empire overseas and rose to global hegemony by the end of the Seven Years' War (1763) — a position fortified for another century by Waterloo and sealed in the Vienna Settlement.

Against this interpretation, Paul W. Schroeder objects that England's 'greater overall success was due to obvious, familiar reasons, which had little to do with social property relations: geography, relative strategic invulnerability, a superior naval establishment, a growing economy, a better system of taxation and public credit, political stability, and above all, the God-given ability to have as much or as little of any European war as it wanted' (Schroeder, 2005, 124–125). But is it too much to suggest that there is a definitive secular causal nexus between these phenomena, rather than insisting on a fortuitous and maybe 'God-given' conjunction of independent institutional innovations that all coalesce miraculously in the same period? After all, it has been commonplace to argue that trade, economy, fiscal state and the expansion of empire formed 'inseparable connections' (O'Brien, 1998), even though O'Brien locates the reasons behind Britain's rise to global supremacy in favourable natural factor endowments (as if these had been absent in Belgium, Germany or eastern France), rather than grounding these spectacular, unprecedented and historically unique connections in their *fons et origo*: the rise of capitalist social property relations.

I concluded by proffering the hypothesis that it may well be the Baughe 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 19th 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 strategically in the states-system. But these strategies always involved intense political conflict over the re-definition 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. The repetition of these processes, what I referred to as 'revolutions from above', across continental Europe during the



19th century resulted in a transformation of European geopolitics. In the French case, Britain's naval superiority and power balancing finally cracked the shell of French 'absolutism' and its pre-capitalist 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 and beyond.

Agnew concludes his critique by suggesting that I have failed to 'investigate historically how actually existing feudalism produced different outcomes (absolutism versus capitalism) in different places which, as they were swept into different states, gave rise to different constellations of socio-economic interests and identities, including the effects of interstate and Europe-wide influences as refracted through local lenses' (Agnew, 6). Unless I misread my own book, this is exactly what I have done. Similarly, I can only read Axtmann's concluding suggestion that I neglected to discuss 'how "popular" resistance — as lived struggles — affected the trajectory of state formation' (Axtmann, 7) as misplaced irony.²⁸ Whenever popular struggles are treated in the framework of social history or 'history from below' as an independent object of inquiry divorced from a wider totality — adding yet another partial history to the proliferating approaches that pulverize a holistic perspective — critical analysis becomes neutered since it remains disconnected from issues of relational social agency where it strategically matters: as class conflict over power — ultimately institutionalized in different political projects: states.

Implications for IR: Beyond 'Westphalia' — Towards a New Research Programme

The historical record that speaks so fundamentally for a qualitative Anglo-French divergence in their respective long-term patterns of class formation, economic development and state-building leads me, finally, to return to the general question of how to formulate an adequate theoretical perspective for understanding the origins, development and expansion of the European system of states in its implications for a Historical Sociology of IR. Agnew's assertion of 'multiple paths of modernization' opens up an ideal way into this problematique, since it now turns out that Agnew's own conception of history is *internalist* and *prisoner to the comparative method*. For given that his empirical suggestion of a domestically driven transition to capitalism and modern state-formation in pre-1789 France leads him to embrace the theoretical notion of many paths of modernization, he simultaneously disables himself from constructing a theoretical perspective wide enough to incorporate the domestic consequences of geopolitical co-development. Although Agnew is right to stress the different, even incompatible, national trajectories of modernization, it does not follow that their respective singularities (or even



peculiarities) entail the acceptance — to use a term from a cognate and highly pertinent debate — of the multiple *Sonderwege* (special paths) thesis.²⁹ For it is precisely the conceit of the national-comparative method as the royal road for coming to terms with national variations that it fails to integrate the international dimension into a dynamic conceptualization of the spatio-temporally differentiated and geopolitically mediated historical movement as a whole. In this sense, neither England, nor France can serve in any way as norms or standards against which all other national passages can be judged — and then declared 'exceptions' or 'deviances' from an idealized 'Western' model-pattern. The crucial point is that even though all national trajectories are singular in appearance, none is original or undiluted in substance. All are to some degree derived!

The theoretical conclusion is this: 'Away with comparative history!' and its corollary: 'Away with all *Sonderwege*!'. For while all paths are specific or unique, none is pristine or authentic in the sense that their properties could be understood as free-standing and self-enclosed longitudinal units that exist in a geopolitical vacuum. In other words, while the term 'multiple paths of modernization' admits the multi-linear nature of passages, it rests on the background assumption of distinct and disconnected trajectories that reifies difference. Totality is eclipsed by territorial autonomy. Geopolitics is replaced by sociology. Thus, my contention is that although England is the point of departure for processes of modernization, all other national experiences came to be heavily influenced by it — either directly or indirectly by the circuitous ways of the agency of secondary modernizers (like revolutionary and Napoleonic France in relation to Prussia). The resulting combination of the old and the new in each affected region cannot be reduced to national developments of their own, but call for a perspective that reintroduces the notion of a differentiated totality to capture the multiple and intersecting courses of regional developments. Even post-1688 England, of course, could not escape the geopolitical consequences of its insertion into a wider states-system that came to co-determine its course, especially, as I show, in terms of the miniaturization of the British state. This is why I originally proposed in my book to define 1688 as the 'modern moment' in the history of England; yet, stated equally unambiguously that post-1688 international relations in Europe up to WWI and beyond may be called modernizing, rather than modern (Teschke, 2003, 266) due to England's 18th century rise and re-positioning in the states-system. The national caesura could not be replicated on an international scale, but rather set in motion a long crisis-ridden and tumultuous period of transition in which the twin processes of capitalist expansion and regime transformation became progressively universalized (yet never identically copied) — not without encountering strong resistance, including the construction of alternative political projects: socialism.



My theoretical approach and narrative reconstruction of the rise of the European system of states and capitalism's effect on it was designed to avoid two fundamental fallacies. First, the fallacy of the Weber-Hintze tradition, dominant in IR Historical Sociology and IR Theory, that prioritizes *Machtpolitik* conducted by states that are primarily defined as *Machtstaaten* in an unrelenting geopolitical environment of military competition in abstraction from their differentiated socio-domestic dynamics, tending to assume a relative long-term uniformity in the war-driven outcomes of state formation: the modern state defined as a 'military-fiscal machine'. Second, the fallacy of comparative history and historical sociology, shared by many Marxisms, that reconstructs domestic trajectories in abstraction from their wider geopolitical contexts by focusing exclusively on internal dynamics within the frame of the territorially confined nation-state model. Neither will do!

Nor will 1648! We need to finally abandon the fixation on 'Westphalia' and move the debate towards a different research programme in which the rise of the modern international order is conceptualized in terms of how the country-specific co-developments of capitalism, revolution and state formation unfolded within and across an interstate system that centrally shaped their respective national peculiarities. In other words, we need to come to terms with the nationally specific and diachronic, yet cumulatively connected and internationally mediated 'transversal' nature of capitalist transitions. This calls for a radically historicized reading of the great international arch of differential regional modernization. In this way, we may not only arrive at a better understanding of the origins and evolution of the European and international system of states by overcoming an ultimately sterile dichotomy between inside-out and outside-in explanations, we may even finally develop a better perspective on how to understand the current geopolitical moment.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Justin Rosenberg, Kees van der Pijl, Alejandro Colas, Samuel Knafo, Frédéric Dufour, Robert Shilliam, Kamran Matin and Clemens Hoffmann for comments. I also had the benefit of reading an unpublished manuscript by Thierry Lapointe.
- 2 There is now a strong revisionist current in early modern historiography that, on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1998, has strongly qualified its equation with the origins of the modern international system (Duchhardt, 1998; Asch *et al.*, 2001; Burkhardt, 2004). German IR seems now also less enthusiastic about subscribing to historically under-informed Anglo-American prescriptions (Siegelberg, 2000). However, some historians remain adamant that 17th century states can be called modern and that there is therefore little need to revise the myth of 1648 (Rabb, 2004; cf. my reply in Teschke (2004b)).
- 3 I refrain here from a listing of sources. Suffice it to say that this 'myth of 1648' pervades general IR theory, normative IR theory (especially in the debates on cosmopolitanism vs communitarianism, post-nationalism and humanitarian intervention), IR Historical Sociology, the IPE literature (especially in the debate on globalization), political geography and the



- European integration discourse. Although it is sometimes claimed that the equation of 'Westphalia' with the sovereign nation-state model functions as a heuristic device for political science, rather than as historical reality, the concept's historical lineage is still accepted as unproblematic.
- 4 See, for example, Fukuyama (2004). According to Robert Cooper, a former special adviser on foreign affairs to Tony Blair, the contemporary world can be divided into a post-modern post-Westphalian zone (EU and Japan), a modern Westphalian zone (China, India, Brazil and possibly, the US), and a pre-modern, pre-Westphalian zone, consisting of 'failed states' (Cooper, 2003).
 - 5 For a chapter-length summary of my book in teaching text format see Teschke (2004a).
 - 6 Political Marxism is most directly associated with the work of Robert Brenner, Ellen Wood and George Comninel. I have meanwhile set out my agreements and differences with Political Marxism in Teschke (2005).
 - 7 Readers familiar with my argument might want to proceed to the section 'Challenging the Challenge'.
 - 8 For a recent confirmation of the dangers inherent in the semantic fallacy of projecting modern concepts into differently structured pasts see Rees Davies (2003).
 - 9 For a fuller critique of Mann see, for example, Brenner (2006).
 - 10 From a non-Marxist standpoint of constitutional history, the attempt to analyse medieval society on the basis of a semantically neutered conceptual vocabulary derived from modern society — with its typical dichotomies between the public and the private, the political and the economic, the state and the market — was already convincingly criticized by Otto Brunner as the error of 'disjunctive thinking' (Brunner, 1992).
 - 11 This vitiates the untenable orthodox, evolutionary and techno-determinist Marxist claim of a transhistorical 'dialectic between the forces and the relations of production', where the independent development of the forces of production is at some point incompatible with outdated relations of production, forcing them to adapt to the new technological requirements.
 - 12 This line of argument is developed in Lacher (2003, 2005).
 - 13 While I used intermittently the appellations 'France' and 'England' for purposes of exposition, my whole argument stresses precisely their permutations in terms of spatial organization, territorial scale and institutionalization, as it was one of my theses that generic socio-political categories should be replaced by a historicized semantic, using, for example, the term domination, lordship, or *Personenverbandsstaat* rather than the term 'state' to denote feudal power, as I repeatedly referred to Frankish, Capetian, Valois, Bourbon, Anglo-Norman, Tudor and Stuart monarchies.
 - 14 The vocabulary of 'strong' vs 'weak' states may be inadequate to describe the situation. It may be better to say that the French state apparatus became 'heavier' over time in terms of the numbers of officers that reproduced themselves through the state and 'weaker' in its ability to absorb the financial costs associated with each war, as royal debt-accumulation and the need to retrieve income through office proliferation meant a loss of control by the Crown over its fiscal and financial system and therewith its capacity to rationalize French society for military purposes.
 - 15 I have elaborated on this point recently in Teschke (2005), where I criticize the neo-Weberian geopolitical competition model for its excessive abstraction from domestic social dynamics. Inversely, I object to different versions of Marxism, including Political Marxism, for relying too heavily on the comparative method that neglects international relations while stressing domestic developments.
 - 16 Axtmann's demand for the incorporation of Religion can be met — whether we look at 17th century Bohemia, the Holy Roman Empire during the Thirty Years War, or the question of the English Protestant Settlement — by relating confessional disputes as a crucial terrain of



- contestation over the articulation of rights and privileges to the inter-ruling class conflicts that took during this period primarily the form of regional particularism (aristocratic self-government) *vs* centralization (royal or imperial absolutism), rather than dissociating religion as yet another independent sphere of social action from wider socio-political questions.
- 17 It should be noted that my account of French 'absolutism' is consonant with the findings, but not with the explanation, of the dominant revisionist interpretation of absolutism, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, in historiography (Beik, 1985; Parker, 1996; Asch and Duchhardt, 1996; Rowlands, 2002). In his 2005 survey, William Beik nuances minor parts of the dominant revisionist thesis, particularly with respect to specific French provinces. However, he strongly confirms the view of absolutism as 'social collaboration' in contrast to the outdated Tocquevillian account of a triumphant monarchy-led project of state modernization, centralization and rationalization that erased all intermediary bodies.
 - 18 There were some successful, but always intermittent, attempts to tax the privileged through, for example, the *capitation* (head tax) and the *dixième* (income tax). 'The serious fiscal pressure of the last years of the War of the Spanish Succession was bitterly resented by the privileged classes, who made it clear that their consent to the *dixième* had been for the duration of the war only: the regent conceded its withdrawal in 1717' (Bonney, 1995, 325).
 - 19 Furthermore, 'the only other source of long-term credit was the Paris stock exchange, but trading there was essentially limited to government debt and to the bonds of state-sponsored companies, which were hardly private. The stock exchange in fact remained a meager source of capital for purely private undertakings until well into the 19th century, for nearly all the issues traded were still either government debt or railroad bonds that benefited from a state guarantee' (Hoffman *et al.*, 1999, 77).
 - 20 In fact, the argument turns out to be not so much about a transition to capitalism, as Agnew suggests, but rather the documentation of financial practices, which are linked to French 18th century aggregate economic growth, that appear 'modern' or 'capitalist' even *without* a transition to capitalism well into the 19th century (Hoffman *et al.*, 1999, 84–85).
 - 21 Everything depends, of course, as Hoffman *et al.* (2000, 286) admit, on how we want to define capitalism.
 - 22 Perry Anderson first criticized Brenner for failing to take the role of international trading networks seriously in his explanation of the origins of capitalism in England. 'English landowners could never have started their conversion to commercial agriculture without the market for wool in Flemish towns' (Anderson, 2005, 251).
 - 23 British fiscal exceptionalism is clearly recognized, but not sufficiently explained, by historians who otherwise subscribe to the geopolitical-competition-model of state formation (O'Brien and Hunt, 1999; O'Brien, 2002; most recently De la Escosura, 2004).
 - 24 See Brewer's account of the rise of a rational civil service in the 18th century British state (Brewer, 1989; cf. also Harling, 1996; Thompson, 1978).
 - 25 Brewer (1994, 57); see also Bonney (1995).
 - 26 'Over-militarized' both in its quantitative sense regarding the frequency of war and its qualitative sense regarding the catastrophic ratio between war expenditures and fiscal income — the economic sustainability of war.
 - 27 Although Britain's commercial policy retained throughout the 18th century a mercantilist character, due to its international strategic context, its distinctiveness compared with the mercantilist policies of its continental rivals lay in two areas'. The first was the commercial flexibility and efficiency of the private economic sector in Britain compared with the state run, rather rigid, mercantilism of some other western European powers. The second area was contextual and built around the state support provided by naval power and government taxes and loans — the 'fiscal-military state' — that allowed oceanic commerce to flourish in an era of international warfare' (Morgan, 2002, 167).



- 28 Similarly Morton (2005).
- 29 For two authoritative surveys of the *Sonderweg* debate see Kocka (1988, 1999). Although Kocka admits now crucial deficiencies in adopting the method of comparative history, he still defends it rather unconvincingly as the preferred method for understanding long-term patterns of national developments.

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