

# Advances and impasses in Fred Halliday's international historical sociology: a critical appraisal

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## The question of international historical sociology

Fred Halliday gave decisive impetus to the development of the discipline of International Relations (IR) in a historical–sociological direction, spawning a rich and growing legacy which contributed to the establishment of international historical sociology (IHS) as a distinct area of enquiry within the field. Halliday's engagement with historical sociology and his sustained advocacy of an IHS emerged from the encounter between his formative intellectual background—a heterodox Marxism influenced by figures like Isaac Deutscher, Bill Warren, Maxime Rodinson and the internationalist culture of the *New Left Review* in the 1970s and 1980s—and his colleagues in the LSE's Sociology Department who drew their inspiration more from Max Weber; among such colleagues were Ernest Gellner, John Hall, Michael Mann and, later, Anthony Giddens, plus Theda Skocpol, based at Harvard. After Halliday's appointment to the LSE IR Department in 1983, the distinctive historical and sociological orientation of the department's particular liberal tradition of IR theorizing, the 'English School', further challenged and enriched this intellectual mix. The combination of Halliday's own intellectual convictions and his new institutional setting provided a unique platform on which to set out a research programme and a corresponding theoretical framework that promised to address systematically the challenge of IHS.

Halliday staked out a distinct problematic, whose core comprised the historical and contemporary relationships between capitalism, revolution, war and states in the international context, reflecting his normative and political agenda for a progressive internationalism. Theoretically, he sought to ground these empirical preoccupations essentially, though not exclusively, in an amalgamation of an 'internationalized' Marxism and Weberianism, producing an extraordinarily voluminous and influential literature across a temporal and geographical terrain that started with the Reformation and the 'dual' industrial and French revolutions and ended with the continuing revolutionary challenges to the Cold War and post-

\* This is one of a group of articles in this issue originating in a workshop held in November 2010 at the London School of Economics in honour of the life and work of the late Fred Halliday, and further developed through a study group held on 12 May 2011 at Chatham House. I would like to thank Alejandro Colás, Toby Dodge, Clemens Hoffmann, George Lawson, Maryam Panah, Richard Saull and the participants in both meetings for valuable comments.

Cold War international order. On the basis of this conception, Halliday embarked on a project both to recharge IR theory with central themes and concepts of classical sociology and, conversely, to mobilize and reformulate this classical canon for the analysis of contemporary international phenomena. Both moves appeared justified by his unremitting defence of the modernist master-narrative of a geographically expanding capitalist modernity as the overarching context for his reflections on the modern international condition.<sup>1</sup> Halliday repeatedly delineated the academic parameters for a recognizable IHS, initially designed as a counter-programme against the then prevailing presentism, positivism and anti-sociologism in mainstream IR theorizing, associated with the rationalist realist and liberal traditions represented by, as he saw it, the hegemonic US academia that was setting the agenda in the discipline.<sup>2</sup> This opening position prompted his call for a 'sociological turn' in IR theory, leading to a series of programmatic theoretical statements and interventions, from his 1987 *Millennium* article on 'State and society in International Relations' to his 2002 text 'For an international sociology' and beyond.<sup>3</sup> This enterprise was driven by an acute desire to frame his central research programme in terms of an analytically sharper and theoretically deeper idiom. This search for foundations, for all its novelty in IR in the 1980s and 1990s, was plagued by a good deal of ambivalence, inconsistency and inconclusiveness, as Halliday's IHS was informed by multiple and often conflicting contributory elements, drawing on a variety of authors and traditions, classical and contemporary.<sup>4</sup> Rather than providing a definitive and final statement, or even a consecutive and cumulative elaboration and revision of his core theoretical premises, his theoretical propositions on the subject, many of them fragmentary and subliminal, have to be gleaned from sometimes disparate and miscellaneous texts and reassembled for purposes of reappraisal.

This article provides a reconstruction and sympathetic critique of Halliday's attempts to set out the theoretical premises for an IHS. Rather than proceeding chronologically by retracing successive steps in Halliday's intellectual trajectory—a difficult task, given his intellectual doubts about the urgency of 'that meta-stuff' and temperamental aversion to 'epistemological hypochondria'—it adopts a more systematic mode to establish what impelled his turn to IHS, what puzzles beset his engagement with it, and what may count as his most articulate and sophisticated resolution of them.<sup>5</sup> The sometimes circuitous nature of Halliday's response to the question of IHS manifests itself in several theoretical reprises within his multifac-

<sup>1</sup> Fred Halliday, *Revolution and world politics: the rise and fall of the sixth great power* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Halliday, 'International Relations in a post-hegemonic age', *International Affairs* 85: 1, 2009, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Halliday, 'State and society in International Relations', in *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan 1994), pp. 74–93; Fred Halliday, 'For an international sociology', in Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson, eds, *Historical sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 244–64.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller appreciation of Halliday's wider intellectual references and trajectory, see Alejandro Colás and George Lawson, 'Fred Halliday: achievements, ambivalences and openings', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39: 2, 2010, pp. 235–58.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in international relations: power, politics and ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), p. 12.

eted work, as he found himself repeatedly forced to confront the challenge without ever arriving at a definitive and, ultimately, plausible response. Interrogating his successive theoretical stances—‘global conjunctural analysis’, ‘neo-Weberian historical sociology of the inter-state system’, ‘international society as homogeneity’ and ‘uneven and combined development’—this article argues that Halliday never sufficiently secured his categories of analysis, and ultimately drew back from formulating a systematic and comprehensive theoretical framework—a formalized approach—that laid out the premises for his sustained call for an IHS. While this abstention can be read as an intellectual failure, it can also be read as a deliberate intellectual strategy in tune with an implicit historicism (and sometimes empiricism), which generated a reluctance to translate his personal experience of everyday forms of struggle on the ground into the abstract sociologisms of international life. Ultimately, this unresolved tension between formalization and anti-formalism—the abstract and the concrete—can be understood as a central index of Halliday’s work.

The article suggests that while Halliday’s work was instrumental in reconnecting IR with historical sociology, his theoretical emphases remained nevertheless too syncretic and additive to shift the debate onto firmer ground, while the most insightful and influential of his ideas for an IHS—the concept of uneven and combined development—is itself suffused with problems which still resonate in the contemporary debate. The article concludes by suggesting that the very term ‘international historical sociology’ may itself be problematic, since it carries the baggage of a distinctly modernist vocabulary—notably the very notions of ‘the international’ and ‘sociology’—which may be too restrictive and anachronistic to provide conceptual resources adequate as a basis for developing a perspective open to all praxes of social relations, authority relations and political geography across time and space.

## **From historical sociology to international sociology**

The nearest equivalent to a dedicated reflection by Halliday on historical sociology attuned to the purposes of IR was articulated in his 2002 chapter entitled ‘For an international sociology’. The title was programmatic, for it raised the challenge of how to carry the promise of the classical programme of historical sociology into a reformulated set of premises that specified the contours for an IHS, which would not simply enrich mainstream IR theory but advance a multidisciplinary and unified synthesis that could replace the restrictive assumptions of the classical IR canon. The motivation behind Halliday’s—and many other scholars’—turn towards historical sociology resided in its apparent potential to denaturalize and historicize and, consequently, reconceptualize core IR categories that were taken for granted. This move towards a theory of process immediately entailed the further challenge to identify dynamics of long-term and large-scale change, which—*contra* IR’s conception of the interstate system as a static realm of recurrence and repetition—carried emancipatory potential. ‘For the historicisation

of the supposedly eternal entities—state, nation, war, power, the international and the “real” itself—has this double function, denaturalising and emancipatory, within international relations.<sup>6</sup> For Halliday, the classical theorists of sociology (Saint-Simon, Marx, Weber) remained exemplary in their pre-disciplinary ability to combine ‘historical perspective, social totality and analysis of modernity with analysis of the international’ in their respective reconstructions of the rise of central modern phenomena—capitalism, revolution, industrialization, rationalization, individuation, the modern state, society, the division of labour, the genealogy of war and peace, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Yet ‘the term “historical sociology” itself’, Halliday contended, ‘is in one respect too condensed, for it contains two distinct claims: the historicisation of the state on the one hand, and the location of that history within an international context on the other. It is this double challenge—to produce a sociology at once historical *and* international—which the broader agenda encompassed within “historical sociology” can meet.’<sup>8</sup> For much of classical and contemporary historical sociology had suffered from ‘the myth of bounded society’, leading to the abstractions of ‘methodological nationalism’ that restricted historical sociology to the diachronous, but essentially ‘national’ and unilinear, analyses of long-term and large-scale developments within discrete, self-contained and self-referential units of analysis—nation-states. This perspective could generate either a historical sociology of singular societies or a comparative, but non-international, historical sociology which contrasted the dissimilar trajectories of distinct state/society complexes in abstraction from their international contexts. What was missing was an IHS that could integrate the supra-sociological logic of realist interstate geopolitics with a historical sociology of multiple and differential domestic contexts that informed their variable geopolitics. Consequently, ‘the promise of historical sociology is, therefore, a double one—international *and* historical’.<sup>9</sup> These reflections established Halliday’s call for a paradigmatic transition to an internationally expanded historical sociology.

## International historical sociology and Marxism: a promise aborted

These opening observations raise the question of how Halliday conceived of the incorporation of ‘the international’ into a reformulated IHS—initially mediated via the encounter between IR and Marxism. Halliday’s trajectory across this terrain can be restated in terms of three intellectual moves: a partial critique of classical Marxism, which first prompted a reformulation from within that tradition; a subsequent validation of the neo-Weberian historical sociology of the state and its superimposition of geopolitical categories on the social premises of Marxism; and finally a synthesizing, but ultimately dualistic and ambivalent, move which tried to marry the two traditions, manifested in the tensions between his simultaneous

<sup>6</sup> Halliday, ‘For an international sociology’, p. 247.

<sup>7</sup> Halliday, ‘For an international sociology’, p. 244.

<sup>8</sup> Halliday, ‘For an international sociology’, p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> Halliday, ‘For an international sociology’, p. 246.

turn towards the notion of 'international society as homogeneity' and the idea of 'uneven and combined development'.

Could Marxism provide categories that transformed 'methodological nationalism' into a 'methodological inter-nationalism'?<sup>10</sup> From the outset, Halliday noted the theoretical distance that had to be covered to move Marxism—or, at least, one particular reading of history by Marx and Engels—closer to the concerns of IR.

The very concept of 'the international' itself poses problems for Marxists, in that the implicit contrast with the 'national' is not one that they readily accept: from the cosmopolitan assertion of the *Communist Manifesto* onwards, as fine a statement of liberal transnationalism as one would want to find with its invocations of 'interdependence', Marxism has seen world affairs confidently in terms of a single world process: the result was that the very need for a study of inter-state and international relations might appear to be irrelevant, a diversion from analysis of the real, universal, forces shaping world politics.<sup>11</sup>

In the early work of Marx and Engels, the mega-subject of modern history was capitalism, which would inflate itself geographically to world-market proportions, creating first a transnational bourgeoisie and then a communist cosmopolis.<sup>12</sup> This narrative would eventuate in the abolition of national histories and prepare the terrain for world history proper—a world-historical convergence towards a uniform 'world in capitalism's own image'. In this perspective, national antagonisms and war—among capitalist states, and between capitalist and non-capitalist states—would decline as a result of the 'universal interdependence of nations'. The trade-driven expansion of capitalism would progressively perfect a unified world-market populated by a transnational bourgeois world society, whose rise would establish capitalist class relations globally and whose dynamics would intensify and polarize class conflict. The dialectical outcome was envisaged in terms of the formation of a world proletariat as a universal class, precipitating a world revolution 'all at once' on a planetary scale.

The key point here is that Marx and Engels envisaged an automatic transnationalizing and homogenizing process that discounted the refraction of capitalism's expansion through a pre-existing interstate system that generated resistance and differences through geopolitics, war and class conflict in the contested and regionally highly differentiated (non-)transitions from pre-capitalist to capitalist state-society complexes. Not only was how to integrate the mediating impact of the interstate system on the expansion and reproduction of capitalism not a problem for the founding fathers of Marxism, the question could not even be captured by these early economic, cosmopolitan and universalizing assumptions, since the territorial fragmentation of the interstate system did not follow from the formation of a transnationalizing capitalist bourgeoisie. This pristine conception extrapolated directly from the national to the universal, eliding the

<sup>10</sup> For a critical exploration of the tension between various traditions of historical materialism and International Relations see Benno Teschke, 'Marxism', in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, eds, *The Oxford handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 163–87.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Halliday, 'A necessary encounter: historical materialism and international relations', in Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and world politics*, pp. 72–82.

international as the intermediate level that frames the national and fractures and disables the universal to this day. Here, the unit of analysis appeared as a capitalist world market freed of all international politics or, alternatively, as a bourgeois world society. In this version of historical materialism, historical sociology's methodological nationalism was dissolved into a teleological methodological universalism. Capitalist geopolitics appeared as a non-problem.

Still, classical Marxism's original and partial blindness towards 'the international' could be overcome, according to Halliday, by a return to and a resumption of four central themes of the 'historical materialist paradigm'—modes-of-production analysis; historicity and the history of the modern interstate system; class conflict (national, transnational and international); and revolutions. For 'with Marx, as with other theorists, what is most pertinent to the theory of the international may lie not so much in what is explicitly said about IR but in the implications of his broader theory'.<sup>13</sup> This invocation of the Marxist legacy provided—at least in embryo—foundations for a radical socialization and historicization of International Relations.

Prior to this, Halliday outlined how this universalizing legacy could be overcome from within Marxism by reconceiving 'the theory of world politics as a contradictory unity', predicated on the geographical unity of the global context and the temporal unity of specific conjunctures.<sup>14</sup>

What is specific about the historical materialist conception of global unity is that it is based upon a materialist conception of the world as having been increasingly unified by the spread of a specific mode of production, namely capitalism, and challenged by its alternatives. This unity is not one of homogenisation but of socio-economic, as well as political, contradiction based upon the resistance of pre-capitalist societies and forces and, subsequently, the existence of a post-capitalist sector of the world that is no longer subservient to capital and is, in some measure, in conflict with it.<sup>15</sup>

World politics, conceived spatially and socially as a 'contradictory unity', would generate specific temporal conjunctures which allowed the capture of national differences in terms of clashes between social forces tied to different modes of production. Rather than projecting the proliferation and replication of identical state-society complexes across the globe as somehow written into the DNA of capitalism in the process of expansion, the implication was that such an analytical adjustment could incorporate the dimension of 'world politics' without repudiating an underlying explanatory principle, facilitating an analytical grasp of regional and local specificities. Halliday termed this 'global conjunctural analysis'.<sup>16</sup> Inversely, this perspective also rejected the structuralist conception of a capitalist world system—formulated by dependency theory and developed in

<sup>13</sup> Halliday, 'A necessary encounter', p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Fred Halliday, 'The conjuncture of the seventies and after: a reply to Ougaard', *New Left Review* 1, no. 147, 1984, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Halliday, 'Conjuncture of the seventies', p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> Halliday, 'Conjuncture of the seventies', p. 77. These reflections were informed by Warren's understanding of capitalism as a progressive historical force. See Bill Warren, *Imperialism: pioneer of capitalism*, ed. John Sender (London: Verso, 1980).

Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory—which conceived of the capitalist world system as a fairly static tri-zonal order (core, periphery, semi-periphery) which reproduced and entrenched peripheral zones of dependency and underdevelopment. Where did this leave states and the interstate system? For Halliday,

the contradiction is one of social forces and social systems. These include but relativise states. Within the overall clash, and its sub-divisions, states play an important role, as the institutionalised expression and instrument of class rule. States are not, however, seen as the sole or ultimately determining factors in this conflict, since they are themselves the objects upon which the determinant social forces act. Nor can they be ignored, as mere epiphenomena or obstacles to an underlying universal, irrelevant to the conflicts of world politics. Hence a conception of the contradictions within world politics has to maintain a balanced picture of how the fundamental conflicts within the world interlock with the conflicts of states.<sup>17</sup>

This formulation, focusing on the problem of states and geopolitics, remained beset by an underexplored oscillation between a structuralist and an instrumentalist concept of the state—echoing the legacy of the Poulantzas–Miliband debate in 1970s Marxism—while also conceding the partially autonomous agency of states. This tension between objectification and subjectification of states as either passive-adaptive recipients or active players was not further pursued, as the very phenomenon of the interstate system was empirically recognized without being theoretically explained from the perspective of a mode-of-production analysis. Halliday's attempt to reconceptualize the problem of International Relations from within Marxism had reached a temporary impasse. Still lacking was a closer interrogation and conceptualization of the phenomenon that tied his original Marxist set of categories—modes of production, historicity, class conflict, revolutions—together for the purposes of constructing an IHS: that is, a more definitive recasting of the concept of the state and, by extension, the interstate system.

### **The state and the interstate system: the turn to neo-Weberianism**

Registering his dissatisfaction with the traditional realist IR concept, Halliday suggested moving towards a 'sociological concept' of the state, comprising both neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist insights. Sharpening his critique of the absence of the international in Marx's early writings, Halliday noted that

the problem with much Marxist writing is that it understates the role and distinct efficacy of states. This latter paradigm begs the question of why, if there is a world economy in which class interests operate transnationally, there is a need for states at all. What, in other words, is the specificity and effectivity of distinct states within a single economic totality?<sup>18</sup>

Why is the political form of the capitalist world economy not a single and territorially congruous world state, but rather a geopolitical pluriverse? This question resulted in a qualified endorsement of the contemporary new Weberian historical

<sup>17</sup> Halliday, 'Conjuncture of the seventies', p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Halliday, 'State and society in International Relations', p. 91.

sociology of the state—notably in the works of Theda Skocpol, Charles Tilly, Michael Mann and Anthony Giddens—which drew its intellectual impulses primarily from the bellicist German Weber–Hintze tradition. ‘States and their internal organisation’, Halliday noted,

have developed in a world-historical context, i.e. in interaction with, and imitation of, other states. Far from the internal constitution of states and societies being immune, at least until recently, to international phenomena, the international dimension provided the context and formative influence for these states, not only for the majority of the world states that are post-colonial and so shaped by the colonial experience, but equally for European states.<sup>19</sup>

The very formation and presence of the interstate system were now captured with recourse to the Weber–Hintze tradition, as the key dynamics of this international dimension were manifested in the strategic and military rivalries transmitted through the interstate system. In addition, strategic rivalry between pre-modern conflict units was now revealed as constitutive of the very interstate order as such, intensified military competition during the early modern period having spurred the building of centralized administrations able to extract resources and taxes to finance wars, thereby removing intermediary feudal powers and territorializing state authority, giving rise to modern sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> This figure of thought was most memorably phrased in Charles Tilly’s dictum that ‘war-made-states and states-made-war’ and most categorically repeated in Michael Mann’s conclusion that ‘the growth of the modern state, as measured by finance, is explained primarily not in domestic terms but in terms of geopolitical relations of violence’. And even more sharply: ‘States and the multistate civilization developed primarily in response to pressures emanating from the geopolitical and military spheres.’<sup>21</sup>

This move not only filled the international vacuum left by classical Marxism but also implied the redefinition of the state as a ‘set of coercive and administrative institutions’ primarily concerned with the problems of fiscal extraction and military mobilization for geopolitical survival and administrative control for social repression. For Halliday, this paradigmatic turn opened up new distinctions—state/society, state/government, state/nation—and new areas of investigation, previously closed off by the ‘black-box’ legal–territorial concept of the state in IR. Centrally, ‘the most significant theme for International Relations pervading this literature is that the state is seen as acting in two dimensions, the domestic and the international. In its simplest form, the state seeks both to compete with other states by mobilising resources internally, and to use its international role to consolidate its position domestically.’<sup>22</sup> More specifically, ‘the sociological approach enables us to pose much more clearly the question of the effectivity of

<sup>19</sup> Halliday, ‘State and society in International Relations’, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> This endorsement of neo-Weberian historical sociology was most clearly expressed in Halliday, *The Middle East in international relations*, pp. 36–8. Here, Halliday’s master category of ‘capitalist modernity’ sat uneasily with the notion of ‘modernity and force’.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Tilly, ‘Reflections on the history of European state-making’, in Tilly, ed., *The formation of national states in western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 42; Michael Mann, *The sources of social power*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 490 and 511.

<sup>22</sup> Halliday, ‘State and society in International Relations’, p. 84.

the international dimension: i.e. why and how participation in the international realm enhances and strengthens states, and, in particular, why it enables them to act more independently of the societies they rule'.<sup>23</sup>

For Halliday, it was this redefinition of the state as an *institution of coercion and appropriation*, and its repositioning between the competitive pressures of the interstate system and the societal demands from the domestic arena, that gave the category of the state a new inflection, while opening up new research programmes within IR. This *rapprochement* with neo-Weberianism was significant, since the neo-Weberian research agenda was originally formulated as a critique of Marxian 'society-centred' approaches. It delinked the rise of the state and the interstate system from modes-of-production analyses (exemplified by Charles Tilly and Anthony Giddens);<sup>24</sup> reasserted the centrality of geopolitics, and the partial autonomy and primacy of the state over and against social interests, while assigning one reified realist rationality to states (exemplified by Michael Mann);<sup>25</sup> and regrounded modern social revolutions in geopolitical rivalries (exemplified by Theda Skocpol).<sup>26</sup> It replaced the Marxian epistemological demand for a relational and differentiated totality with an explicit embrace—most notably in Mann's IEMP model—of a methodological pluralism of spheres of determination, which, while interdependent, were conceived as analytically independent, mutually irreducible and causally autonomous.<sup>27</sup> The overall thrust in the neo-Weberian literature, while professing multi-causality, aimed to complicate a facile inside-out conceptualization of world-historical development by adding causal directionality from the geopolitical via the state to society.

Halliday never addressed the problematic nature of these propositions in any depth.<sup>28</sup> Still, for him the displacement of the unitary realist conception of the

<sup>23</sup> Halliday, 'State and society in International Relations', p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> This charge applies to those texts by Tilly that Halliday cited and that were most widely received within IR: Tilly, ed., *The formation of national states in western Europe*; Charles Tilly, 'War making and state making as organised crime', in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds, *Bringing the state back in* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169–91; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990–1990* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Wherever Tilly refers to capitalism, he defines it either in terms of commercial activity or simply as urban capital conceptualized as an economic resource, rather than as a specific social relation. This maldefinition results in a specious and misleading historical narrative of the regionally differentiated interaction between capital(ism), its absence and state formation across western Europe. For a critique see Benno Teschke, 'Revisiting the "war-makes-states" thesis: war, taxation and social property relations in early modern Europe', in Olaf Asbach and Peter Schröder, eds, *War, the state and international law in seventeenth-century Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 35–59; Anthony Giddens, *The nation-state and violence: volume 2 of a contemporary critique of historical materialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Mann, 'The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results', in John Hall, ed., *States in history* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 109–36; Mann, *The sources of social power*. Mann did little to dispel this view in a more recent interview conducted by George Lawson, 'The social sources of life, the universe and everything: a conversation with Michael Mann', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34: 2, 2005, pp. 487–508.

<sup>26</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and social revolutions: a comparative analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> In Mann's case, the 'military' (or geopolitics) was added to Max Weber's original tripartite model (ideological, economic, political); see Mann, *The sources of social power*. For critiques see Perry Anderson, 'Michael Mann's sociology of power', in Anderson, *A zone of engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 76–86; Robert Brenner, 'From theory to history: "the European dynamic" or from feudalism to capitalism?', in John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder, eds, *An anatomy of power: the social theory of Michael Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 189–232.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, though, that Halliday criticized Mann's history of the sources of social power, premised

state in mainstream IR by a 'two-dimensional' sociological concept facing both inwards and outwards generated a catalogue of axes of enquiry along international and transnational lines: (1) geopolitical–geopolitical (wars, diplomacy, Great Power strategy), (2) geopolitical–political (changes in the character of the state apparatus as a result of geopolitical pressure), (3) geopolitical–societal (social changes as a result of geopolitical pressures, notably through externally induced revolutions) and (4) societal–societal (transnationalization of ruling class formation). The outcome of this theoretical repositioning was an amalgamation of the neo-Weberian account of the rise and reproduction of the state with classical Marxist concerns for modes of production, classes, society and revolutions. The apparent achievement of a 'methodological internationalism' was effected by the wholesale importation, indeed superimposition, of the neo-Weberian historical sociology of the state and the interstate system onto the societal and world-market premises of Marxism.

### **Capitalism, revolutions, states and 'the international': theory versus history**

This interplay between neo-Weberianism and neo-Marxism was originally demonstrated in Halliday's most seminal area of theoretical research: modern revolutions.<sup>29</sup> For Halliday, the key phenomenon—second only to war—that converted the international pressures of socialization into actual historical practices was revolution: for revolutions constituted the pressure points and crises which connected international relations with internal socio-political change and vice versa. Rather than conceiving of revolutions—as in classical Marxism—as necessary staging-posts in the life-cycles of discrete national societies undergoing their teleological sequence of modes of production, or—as in conventional political science—as anomalous and atypical breakdowns of domestic and international order in the eruption of irrational collective violence, Halliday situated revolutions as an organic and iterative component squarely within his master category of an unfolding capitalist modernity. In fact, he argued that they were constitutive of the very formation of the modern international order—without reconciling this statement with his embrace of war-making as the midwife of the interstate system—and necessary repeated occurrences in its successive reconstructions and planetary expansion, driven by the internationalization of social conflict. Consequently, revolutions should form a central preoccupation, rather than a repressed anomaly, in the discipline of IR.

Theoretically, this merger between Marx and Weber was effectuated by combining the insights of 'third wave' historical sociology, notably the writings of Theda Skocpol, Ellen Trimberger and, to a lesser extent, Jack Goldstone, and

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on his IEMP model (the 4 organizational networks for understanding power—ideological, economic, military and political), for its 'off-the-shelf realism': Fred Halliday, 'He hasn't finished yet: achievements and challenges in the work of Michael Mann', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34: 2, 2005, p. 513.

<sup>29</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and world politics*; Fred Halliday, "'The sixth great power": revolutions and the international system', in Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 124–46.

their insistence on the role of interstate competition as a cause of revolutions and the formation of post-revolutionary states, with Halliday's contemporary canon of Marxist historical sociology, stressing large-scale and long-term social conflict, whose proponents included Isaac Deutscher, Eric Hobsbawm, Eric Wolf and, from a cognate perspective, Barrington Moore.<sup>30</sup> The resultant research programme explored the international causes of revolutions, revolutionary movements and their leadership, revolutionary trajectories and outcomes, the export of revolution and the dynamics of counter-revolution and intervention, and the socialization and accommodation of post-revolutionary states into the status quo of the international order, sealed by comprehensive post-revolutionary international settlements. In passing, Halliday noted that 'capitalism and the modern state'—and, one might add, revolutions—'arose in an international context, not the other way around'.<sup>31</sup> For Halliday, the modern cycle of revolutions started with the sixteenth-century revolts around the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, extended via the seventeenth-century Dutch and English revolutions and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Atlantic revolutions, culminated in the Bolshevik Revolution and its Third World inheritors, and 'ended' in the demise of the socialist world. Each revolutionary phase resulted in the transformation and extension of the international system—in 1648, 1815, 1918/1948, and 1989–91.

While this recasting of the origins and development of the 'modern' international order proved a liberating, productive and historically more plausible corrective to the prevailing theoretical focus on the timeless 'anarchy' and balance of power frameworks in much of mainstream IR theory, Halliday's periodization and explanation of the historical relations between the origins of capitalism, (bourgeois?) revolutions, modern state formation and the interstate system were underspecified, as his notion of capitalism (and its origins) remained loose, giving his organizing category of capitalist modernity a rather vague geographical and temporal meaning.<sup>32</sup> This failure to secure his categories of analysis and their slack historical deployment to set his cycle of revolutions in international context was compounded by his alternation between the construction of a generic analytical model of revolutions—redolent of the procedure of ideal-type formation under which diverse historical instances could be subsumed—and his rival method of paying attention to the specificity, uniqueness and historicity of revolutions. The two strategic orientations remained unreconciled and underreflected.<sup>33</sup>

Both problems were manifested most visibly in his brief and schematic historical survey of these revolutionary cycles and, especially, his account of 1789,

<sup>30</sup> Skocpol, *States and social revolutions*; Ellen Trimberger, *Revolution from above: military bureaucrats and development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1978); Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and rebellion in the early modern world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Isaac Deutscher, *Marxism, wars and revolution* (London: Verso, 1984); Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of revolution: Europe 1789–1948* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962); Eric Wolf, *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* (London: Faber, 1971); Barrington Moore Jr, *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy* (London: Penguin, 1967).

<sup>31</sup> Halliday, "The sixth great power", p. 142. Elsewhere, he suggested the opposite: "Thus, the 'system' is not, as realism claims, a timeless world of interstate anarchy but a result of the expansion of modern capitalism" (Halliday, *The Middle East in international relations*, p. 37).

<sup>32</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and world politics*, pp. 192–206.

<sup>33</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and world politics*, pp. 184–5.

which formed the pivot of his revolutionary narrative. For Halliday's first phase (1517–1648) was notable, even within his own text, for the absence of capitalism, while his insistence that it spurred the emergence of the modern state-system codified in the Westphalian settlement—validating the 'myth of 1648' in IR—remained specious. This failure to integrate the role of capitalism as a historical phenomenon into his analysis was replicated in his discussion of phases two and three, the Dutch, English, French and American Revolutions, which elided large parts of the most innovative debates in the contemporary Marxist literature on the theme.<sup>34</sup> Attention to his master category of 'capitalist modernity' as the leitmotiv around which his historical narrative was organized was all but swamped by Halliday's more immediate objective of identifying and listing the international causes and consequences of revolutions in ideal-typical fashion. In the process, 'the international' became an omnibus term to catalogue all possible instances in which the international dimension was implicated in revolutionary crises, with little discriminatory power to establish historical causality for any one revolutionary case.

A third and even greater complication emerged. If capitalist modernity was the primary context for Halliday's set of interlinked phenomena (capitalism, revolution/war and the modern state), then how was this related to the formation of 'the international' itself? For the one phenomenon that seemed to do most of the explanatory work was 'the international', conceived as an a priori and pre-existing 'context' that seemed itself outside history. While Halliday recognized the changing form of 'the international' resulting from the changing components (different political communities) that made up its complexion, it appeared to have been *always already* there as a transhistorical constant: the international is the international is the international. This revealed the problems inherent in Halliday's 'off-the-shelf' import of the neo-Weberian category of 'the international' into his notion of 'capitalist modernity', replicating the circular reasoning of its mantra that 'war-made-states and states-made-war', conflating premises and conclusions. But this procedure failed to specify and explain the conversion of the generic concept of 'the international' into the historical phenomenon of the modern interstate system. For this sleight of hand elided the key question: how can we explain, rather than presume, the pluriverse of sovereign jurisdictions predicated on a territorial differentiation between inside and outside spheres of power? I will return to this question in the final section of the article.

In this context, Halliday also tried to strike a middle way between hyperstructuralist and determinist accounts of revolutions—best exemplified in Skocpol's

<sup>34</sup> Robert Brenner, 'The agrarian roots of European capitalism', in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds, *The Brenner debate: agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 213–327; Ellen Wood, *The pristine culture of capitalism: a historical essay on old regimes and modern states* (London: Verso, 1991); George Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the revisionist challenge* (London: Verso, 1987); Heide Gerstenberger, *Impersonal power: theory and history of the bourgeois state* (Leiden: Brill, 2007; first publ. 1990). The implications of this body of literature for IR are drawn out in Benno Teschke, *The myth of 1648: class, geopolitics and the making of modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003); Benno Teschke, 'Bourgeois revolution, state-formation and the absence of the international', *Historical Materialism* 13: 2, 2005, pp. 3–26; Benno Teschke, 'Debating "the myth of 1648": state-formation, the interstate system and the rise of capitalism—a rejoinder', *International Politics* 43: 5, 2006, pp. 531–73.

*States and social revolutions*—and more voluntarist and consciousness-based renditions of revolutionary agency and subjectivity. Repeatedly trying to calibrate the balance between freedom and necessity, particularity and generality, agency and structure—over time, increasingly stressing the prevalence of conscious human activity and will—he registered his disagreement with Skocpol's famous dictum that 'revolutions are not made, they happen', notably by emphasizing the role of social movements, leadership, ideas and ideologies. Yet Halliday never conceptualized agency—and specifically class agency—in relation to structure, either in terms of positional location and corresponding interest formation or in terms of class-consciousness formation through experience, at any length or depth.

### **'International society as homogeneity' and 'uneven and combined development': a higher synthesis for IHS?**

How did Halliday secure his conception of IHS to this research programme? In a third theoretical reprise, he rehearsed and refined his quest for a unified perspective, precipitating his articulation of the notion of 'international society as homogeneity' as a synthetic concept for IHS. This time, Halliday brought the two prevailing contemporary IR concepts of international society—the state-centric English School and the transnational liberal concept—up against theorists of socio-political homogeneity (Burke, Fukuyama and Marx), and ultimately combined them with Marx's insistence on the deep workings of capitalism as a universally socializing and homogenizing force. 'The implicit premise of *Capital* is that an international society is being created by the global spread of capitalism.'<sup>35</sup> International society, in Halliday's sense, meant 'a set of norms shared by different societies and which are promoted by inter-state competition. This is based neither on inter-state nor on transnational models, but on the assumption of inter-societal and inter-state homology. This refers to a similarity of domestic values and organisation; i.e. to what has been termed "homogeneity", in the way societies are organised.'<sup>36</sup> The mechanism of homogenization was conceived of as socialization, that is, the imposition and construction within societies of norms established elsewhere in the system, leading to an international alignment of states not only along diplomatic and political practices, as suggested by the English School, but in terms of the adoption of fundamental constitutional and social structures—the internationalization of liberal capitalist states.

This perspective had the advantage of overcoming the stateless and geopolitics-free original Marxian and liberal conceptions of world development, while retaining the theme of the expansion of capitalism as the underlying dynamic that gave the process unity and geographical directionality. International development is reconceptualized as an organic process in which the pressures for constitutional and social adjustment are transmitted via a competitive interstate system, transforming and assimilating—through war, revolutions and counter-revolutions—dissimilar

<sup>35</sup> Fred Halliday, 'International society as homogeneity', in Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations*, p. 115.

<sup>36</sup> Halliday, 'International society as homogeneity', pp. 94–5.

state–society complexes in their internal complexions without obliterating their existence as independent entities. Halliday’s international society is neither Marx’s capitalist world society nor the English School’s normative international society, but a conflict-ridden, if ultimately pacified, capitalist interstate society. In spite of this conceptual problematization, Halliday likened his notion of homogenization to Francis Fukuyama’s democratic end-of-history thesis, concluding counter-intuitively that ‘the end of history may mean the end of international relations as power politics’—generating a zone of peace.<sup>37</sup> In the end, the concept of homogenization had impelled Halliday to return to the liberal, cosmopolitan and war-less world of Marx’s *Manifesto*, and he ended his reflections on revolutions by adding a conservative and disillusioned note on the success and further likelihood of revolutionary change, as indicated by the subtitle of *Revolutions and world politics—the fall of the sixth great power*.

But the simple notion of homogeneity was retracted, even as it was formulated. For in a paradoxical parallel, and resuming his earlier critique of Marx by drawing on the classical Marxist theorists of imperialism, Halliday applied a decisive qualification to the proposition of capitalist interstate homogenization. ‘Far from leading to the creation of one single bourgeoisie the world over, or to cooperation between bourgeoisies for mutual economic benefit’, homogenization ‘went hand in hand with growing antagonisms between the bourgeoisies of different countries’, predicated on ‘uneven development which led the ruling classes of the more advanced countries to go to war with each other’—an insight ‘formalised as the theory of combined and uneven development’.<sup>38</sup> This notion of uneven and combined development (UCD) was already posited in his 1974 text *Arabia without sultans* as a background research-organizing device.<sup>39</sup> It resurfaced in *Rethinking International Relations* as a residual and fleeting idea, but received a more determinate standing in what can probably count as Halliday’s greatest work, *Revolution and world politics*. ‘The insight, expressed most clearly by Trotsky, into the “combined and uneven” character of capitalist development, that such development *unifies* the world but in a dramatically unequal and disjointed way, is one of the most important means of understanding the international dimensions of revolution.’<sup>40</sup> The differential temporalities of international capitalist expansion in their encounter with the uneven developmental geographies of particular state–society complexes entailed combinations in the socio-political complexions of backward states of the old and new. This charged the story of capitalism outbound with antagonisms (wars and revolutions), whose outcomes generated heterogenizations and national particularities. The resulting combinations sharpened and perpetuated unevenness between relational but qualitatively different political communities—apparently without dislodging Halliday’s rival concept of ‘international society as

<sup>37</sup> Halliday, ‘International society as homogeneity’, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> Halliday, ‘International society as homogeneity’, p. 116. See also Fred Halliday, ‘The pertinence of imperialism’, in Mark Rupert and Hazel Smith, eds, *Historical materialism and globalization* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 75–89.

<sup>39</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia without sultans* (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and world politics*, p. 5.

homogeneity'. Nevertheless, classical historical sociology's methodological nationalism, neo-Weberian geopolitical internationalism, and Marx's economic universalism could be synthesized to form a promising methodological internationalism which did not flatten capitalist world development, but rather integrated a sense of organic causality with regionally specific outcomes. In spite of this potentially far-reaching announcement, the notion of UCD, explicitly referred to as 'the inescapable context', was not further explored, nor did it organize the composition and execution of *Revolution and world politics* (or any other later text) as an exercise in IHS.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, Halliday concluded his reflections on a symposium on this book with a somewhat agnostic rejection of the prevailing understanding of theory in IR as an exercise in the articulation of transhistorical general abstractions—for which the archetypal model was still provided by neo-realism's positivistic structuralism. 'This book does not claim to produce a theory of either IR in general, or revolutions in particular. It is, rather, a contribution to the interaction of IR and historical sociology, aiming both to examine revolutions in this analytical context and to use revolutions to address some issues, historical and conceptual, within IR.' Furthermore, Halliday noted that 'I am happier with the broad and suggestive, theoretical framework of IR and historical sociology, which does allow for explanations and for a sense of historical change, than with the abstract, but also banal, framework of neorealism.'<sup>42</sup> The abandonment of theory—or a particular definition of it—thus appeared not as a failure, but possibly as a deliberate and strategic intellectual choice to avoid a relapse into positivism.

Can a more dedicated elaboration of the idea of UCD escape some of the dilemmas raised, but not resolved, by Halliday's attempts to formulate a perspective on IHS that overcame the disjuncture between sociological and geopolitical forms of explanation in a single schema? Developing the notion of UCD—against Halliday's hesitations—as a 'general abstraction' for world history as a whole, Justin Rosenberg contends that the international itself, defined as the coexistence of multiple societies (also interchangeably rendered as 'the intersocietal'), is a result of the uneven development among them.<sup>43</sup> The international according to this sociological definition is marked by an inherent dynamism as more developed societies interact with less developed ones, causing combined developments in backward societies, which reinforce, rather than straighten out, the unevenness of world-historical development as a whole. Rosenberg argues that UCD, thus reconceived as a theory of IHS, can overcome the strictures of classical sociology, characterized by dynamic theorizations of internal change over time, and the deficiencies of comparative historical sociology, characterized by theorizations of external differences across space, through a theoretical formalization of the multilinear and interactive dimensions of social development as a

<sup>41</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and world politics*, pp. 319–21. UCD was, for example, replaced by the notion of 'differential integration' in Halliday, *The Middle East in international relations*.

<sup>42</sup> Fred Halliday, 'The great anomaly', *Review of International Studies* 27: 4, 2001, p. 696.

<sup>43</sup> Justin Rosenberg, 'Why is there no international historical sociology?', *European Journal of International Relations* 12: 3, 2006, pp. 307–40.

historical phenomenon. In fact, whereas Leon Trotsky referred to unevenness as ‘the most general law of the historic process’, UCD was now raised to the status of a ‘universal law’.<sup>44</sup>

This original reformulation re-energized the debate on IR and IHS in productive ways, but remained marred by those deficiencies—on at least three counts—from which Halliday intuitively distanced himself: the elevation of theory to a transhistorical general abstraction, a corresponding undertheorization of agency, and a reification of the categories of the international and society. In this regard, it is instructive to recall that Halliday’s original attraction to Marxism was motivated by his opening bid to denaturalize and historicize the ‘supposedly eternal entities’ that formed the canon of the IR vocabulary with a view to accounting for change—and with emancipatory intent. For the notion of UCD as a world-historical law relapses into a type of methodological positivism—a general nomological–deductive covering law—that operates behind the backs of humans, and an understanding of social science, quite contrary to Marx’s conception of social science as critical theory, as independent of the reality it observes and describes. UCD articulates a meta-historical law whose scientific connotations translate into a structuralism—similar to neo-realism—which reduces agency to the faithful enactment of imperatives beyond human control or volition. Historical development is conceived as a subjectless and autogenerative process operating outside and above the wills of social agents. What counts in UCD as an explanation is the accumulation of international and domestic determinations which reduce the room of manoeuvre for agency to zero. Outcomes seem to be preordained. While structural imperatives are a constant in human history, they cannot be conceived as translating into ‘logics of action’ which fully explain outcomes, as these imperatives are always refracted through conscious and collective social agency open to diverse and non-derivable results.<sup>45</sup> According to UCD, however, outcomes in the social world appear as deduced from antecedent causes, leading to a conceptualization of agency as fully determined, passive–receptive and, ultimately, non-agential. It is therefore hard to see how UCD conceptualizes politics and geopolitics, other than as a derivative and automatic response to the intertwining of outside and inside pressures, rather than as a contested and purposive exercise, which contains multiple moments of indeterminacy. Human practice appears objectified.

Similar caveats apply to the apparently transhistoricized categories of ‘the international’ and ‘society’. For the notion of ‘the international’ in UCD—in a way similar to its use in neo-Weberianism—is tacitly modelled on a historically specific territorial matrix predicated on the configuration of the fragmentation of political power over distinct and delimited jurisdictions—the modern interstate system. This renders its deployment as a universal category problematic, as neither nomadic (hunter-gatherer), nor tribal sedentary, nor feudal, nor even

<sup>44</sup> Rosenberg, ‘Why is there no international historical sociology?’, p. 318.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Knafo, ‘Critical approaches and the legacy of the agent/structure debate in IR’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23: 3, 2010, pp. 493–516.

imperial political communities knew of a notion of spatial coexistence, premised on mutually exclusive and fixed territoriality. To suppose a generic world-historical inside/outside distinction as the preconstituted spatial matrix for the operationalization of the law of UCD seems curiously ahistorical and precludes an investigation of different modes of power and spatiality. And as the notion of 'the international' is a historically specific category, so is the notion of 'society'. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that Halliday's scepticism around these problems led him to refer to UCD as an inescapable context, without conferring on it the explanatory power or theoretical standing that others have claimed for it.

### **Whither international historical sociology?**

Did Halliday formulate a plausible theoretical framework for an international historical sociology that escaped both the 'methodological nationalism' characteristic of classical historical sociology and the economistic universalism characteristic of orthodox Marxism? While Halliday's *rapprochement* with neo-Weberian historical sociology and his tentative endorsement of UCD moved him one step closer to a 'methodological internationalism', he never fully answered this question theoretically, even though he powerfully demonstrated, analytically and substantively—notably in his analyses of revolutions—how international and domestic contexts were reciprocally implicated in co-constitutive dynamics, avoiding the reduction of one to the other.

But this procedure ultimately cannot satisfy as a theoretical foundation for the conceptualization of IHS as a general framework for history, since it remained beset by some of the original deficiencies that plagued neo-Weberianism, which was premised on (varying numbers) of transhistorically generalized spheres of social reality and on a categorical distinction between outside and inside, which justified the inclusion of geopolitics in the original tripartite Weberian schema. For if one of the central concerns of classical historical sociology was the explanation of the rise of the modern territorialized nation-state as the decisive unit of analysis that confined social relations, then the critique of 'methodological nationalism' needs to be widened towards a critique of a transhistoricized 'methodological internationalism'. In other words, if 'the international' is itself but the flipside of the historically specific emergence of multiple bounded state-society complexes, then the category of 'the international' itself stands in need of radical historicization and cannot be inflated to a transhistorical dimension of history and objectified as a constant. The two categories, the national (here conceived as a shorthand for 'the domestic') and the international—the state and the interstate—are co-emergent and historically specific phenomena, concretely situated in time and space. Their very existence calls for an approach which captures the processes through which a pre-interstate social order became transformed into an interstate order through the differentiation between an inside and an outside. For once the international, even if redefined as 'the intersocietal', is posited as a transhistorically relevant category, then the historical analysis will impose retrospectively

(and possibly prospectively) a historically specific socio-political and territorial configuration—and its attendant vocabulary—into differently configured pasts (and futures) and operate with anachronistic inside/outside binaries.

These problems replicate some of the insufficiencies of the neo-Weberian historical-sociological literature. For substantive explanations within this literature are premised on a fundamental research-organizing move that relies on the acceptance of, minimally, two universalized a priori differentiations that constitute social orders—the distinctions between inside and outside, and between economic and political. This assumption generates the four conceptual abstractions of the international, the state, the economy and the world market, conceptualized as irreducible and autonomous structures of social action. In the process, neo-Weberians naturalize and transhistoricize the very *results* of plural state-formations—the inside/outside and the political/economic (public/private) distinction predicated on the bounded territoriality of the modern state and its monopolization of the means of violence—while redeploying and retrospectively activating them as causal categories, each endowed with its own ‘logic of action’, to explain this very same process. This leads to explanatory circularity and tautology, as the very outcomes of this dual differentiation are remobilized and anachronistically antedated as initially obtaining and temporally constant starting premises. If tautology is to be avoided, an outcome cannot be accounted for by smuggling it into the premises of the explanation.

Political spatiality is itself a historically varying praxis that transcends the sharp demarcations that we associate with modern bounded territoriality. Ultimately, the term ‘international historical sociology’ is itself a paradox since it operates with a modernist vocabulary, which reifies precisely what requires interrogation: a socially grounded account of the historical emergence of the interstate system that generated the very problematic of the international as an emergent property. For it was this double differentiation—state/society plus inside/outside—that lay at the centre of the IR debate on the medieval-to-modern transformation. In this context, John Ruggie suggested that ‘the early modern redefinition of property rights and reorganization of political space unleashed both interstate political relations and capitalist production relations’, demonstrating a clear awareness of the historicity of ‘the international’.<sup>46</sup> Taking up the problematic, Hannes Lacher’s and my work resisted the temptation to short-circuit the rise of capitalism by coupling it with the origins of the interstate system in early modern Europe, developing accounts that explained the rise of the interstate order as the outcome of regionally divergent conflicts about social property relations among pre-capitalist medieval lords and absolutist rulers, which generated an early modern territorial pluriverse through processes of geopolitical accumulation within which capitalism emerged endogenously in one country: late medieval and early modern England.<sup>47</sup> Only the historical co-development and imbrication of both phenomena over time

<sup>46</sup> John Ruggie, ‘Continuity and transformation in the world polity: toward a neorealist synthesis’, *World Politics* 35: 1, 1983, p. 281.

<sup>47</sup> Hannes Lacher, *Beyond globalization: capitalism, territoriality and the international relations of modernity* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2007); Teschke, *The myth of 1648*.

generated a specific capitalist interstate order (starting in the nineteenth century). Only once the scalar—neither hierarchical nor anarchical—medieval authority claims to conditional and overlapping territories were rationalized in favour of unitary sovereignty claims to discrete and bounded territories could the very problematic of inside/outside causality appear as a theoretical problem for IR.

Neo-Weberian contributions are united by an underproblematized deployment of analytical categories—be they levels of determination, sources of social power or factors—for large-scale and long-term historical analysis. The axiomatic assumption that any particular moment in world history can be read in terms of the variable configuration of and interaction between pre-existing and universalized spheres of determination—the ideological, economic, military and/or political, or, alternatively, the state, the market, society, war, the domestic, the international and so on—assigns an unfounded a priori existence and autonomy to these phenomena and ascribes, simultaneously, a timelessness to an analytical vocabulary that is essentially abstracted from a specific historical context (let us call it 'European modernity') and projected back onto history at large. Thus semantically neutered, these suprahistorical abstractions generate analytical anachronisms. This procedure has been repeatedly and convincingly challenged from both ends of the politico-theoretical spectrum, exemplified by Otto Brunner's warnings against the temptations of 'disjunctive thinking' (meaning: projecting the modern state–society dualism onto medieval society) in his analysis of the constitution of medieval polities and by Jürgen Habermas's historical enquiry into the rise and transformation of a public sphere in early modern Europe.<sup>48</sup>

These writings have drawn our attention to a proper historicization of social phenomena and a corresponding sensibility to their context-specific semantics. More directly, they have insisted on the essential unity of the economic and the political—their non-differentiation—in pre-capitalist times. As 'the state', 'economy' and 'society' are quintessentially modern concepts, the historicization of these concepts will also allow us to re-problematize the historical construction and differentiation between 'the domestic' and 'the international', with important implications for how to conceive of 'international history' and 'geopolitics' in medieval and early modern Europe.

The notion of IHS is problematic on a second count. For as the concept of 'the international' in IHS is resistant to cross-historical generalization, so is the notion of sociology. The social sciences, including sociology, emerged as a by-product and discourse of the construction of societies that actively legitimized and reinforced the national territorialization of authority claims over previously non-territorialized social relations. During the nineteenth century, the social sciences underwent a nationalization, their point of reference becoming national society—in fact,

<sup>48</sup> Otto Brunner, *Land and lordship: structures of governance in medieval Austria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992; first publ. 1939); Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989; first publ. 1965). The *locus classicus* remains Karl Polanyi, ed., *Trade and market in the early empires: economies in history and theory* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); see Rees Davies, 'The medieval state: the tyranny of a concept?', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16: 2, 2003, pp. 280–300.

contributing to the legitimation of the nationalization of society.<sup>49</sup> Sociology became the study of ‘society’, for this was the new phenomenon that demanded conceptualization. Correlatively, the expansion of this interstate/society order can hardly be conceived as ‘intersocietal interaction’, as claimed by UCD, as this presupposes the existence of ‘societies’ outside their European home. The very term ‘sociology’ therefore carries epistemological connotations and limits—resulting less from a lack of imagination on the part of its early practitioners and more from the historical emergence of their object of investigation—that require denationalization: not by the external addition of a substantivized adjective (‘the international’) and a corresponding universalization of both categories, but through a more radical break and redefinition in the direction of a ‘social history of spatial relations’ (and, possibly, a sociology of knowledge and a history of ideas on the historical semantics of ‘international’) to capture the totality of historically varying configurations of socio-political spatiality as contested practices. This perspective posits a radical socialization and historicization, grounded in contested social property relations, of the political configurations of authority relations over space. This implies abandoning the term IHS and replacing it with an approach that might be termed a social history of geopolitical relations.

What these reflections point to is a problematization and, ultimately, rejection of abstract theory-building and model formation. In this sense, Halliday’s note of caution against grand theorizing tending towards positivism and structuralism remains pertinent.

<sup>49</sup> Jan Heilbron, *The rise of social theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).