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# Deafening Silence? Marxism, International Historical Sociology and the Spectre of Eurocentrism

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Approaching the centenary of its establishment as a formal discipline, International Relations today challenges the ahistorical and aspatial frameworks advanced by the theories of earlier luminaries. Yet, despite a burgeoning body of literature built on the transdisciplinary efforts bridging International Relations and its long-separated nomothetic relatives, the new and emerging conceptual frameworks have not been able to effectively overcome the challenge posed by the ‘non-West’. The recent wave of international historical sociology has highlighted possible trajectories to problematise the myopic and unipolar conceptions of the international system; however, the question of Eurocentrism still lingers in the developing research programmes. This article interjects into the ongoing historical materialist debate in international historical sociology by: (1) conceptually and empirically challenging the rigid boundaries of the extant approaches; and (2) critically assessing the postulations of recent theorising on ‘the international’, capitalist states-system/geopolitics and uneven and combined development. While the significance of the present contributions in international historical sociology should not be understated, it is argued that the ‘Eurocentric cage’ still occupies a dominant ontological position which essentially silences ‘connected histories’ and conceals the role of inter-societal relations in the making of the modern states-system and capitalist geopolitics.

Human history is like palaeontology. Owing to a certain judicial blindness even the best intelligences absolutely fail to see the things which lie in front of their noses. Later, when the moment has arrived, we are surprised to find traces everywhere of what we failed to see. (Marx, 1965: 140)

If one were to recapitulate the mercurial disciplinary history of international relations (IR) today, a cynical voice could claim—with an interpretive license from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—that ‘the history of all hitherto existing IR theories is the history of unfulfilled promises’. This rather bold, if a bit melodramatic declaration is certainly an overstatement, yet it is not an empty one given the proclamations of the discipline’s ‘failure as an intellectual project’ (Buzan and Little, 2001) have gained common currency. Indeed, contemporary IR still struggles with a number of profound challenges posed by previous generations, ranging from the chronic ahistoricism and state-centrism of its structural variants to the multiplex forms of autocentrism which continue to haunt a vast palette of its conceptual approaches. Facing up to some, but not all, of these challenges, the discipline has

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variously crafted crucial ‘fixes’ and made several radical ‘turns’ towards critical approaches. One such attempt to reorient theoretical and ontological underpinnings has been the so-called ‘historical turn’, a multifaceted cross-disciplinary effort aimed at situating historical evidence and exposition at the heart of theory construction, derivation and verification. IR’s initial engagement and its ensuing synthesis with historical sociology materialised within the parameters of this historical turn and it was thus welcomed as a necessary move to eliminate the shortcomings of what has often been referred to as the statist, ahistorical conundrum of its mainstream theorising. This ‘necessity’ to historicise metatheoretical assumptions and exorcise mechanistic determinations had become so exigent that one scholar exclaimed that ‘the discipline’s future rests upon coming to terms with these new [historical] sociological arguments’ (Jarvis 1989: 291). Hence international historical sociology (IHS) emerged as an antidote to different modes of homogenising and selectively historicist tendencies in the discipline, ranging from neorealist IR’s ‘historicism of stasis’ which ‘freezes the political institutions of the current world order’ (Ashley, 1984: 257) to international political economy’s ‘fever of naturalizing the present and viewing the past through the lens of the present’ (Seabrooke, 2007: 396).<sup>2</sup> Much like the historical sociology literature from which it drew major methodological and analytical frameworks, inaugural works in the commencing IHS literature were dominated by a Weberian allegiance to methodological pluralism. Yet the promise of the ‘second wave’ lost its place to a new ‘third wave’ in little over a decade, as the mounting theoretical pressure on the Weberian project shifted the objective of IHS away from a mere ‘injection’ of history and necessitated ‘a sociological explanation and account of how the international system has always taken a pluralistic form’ (Hobson, 2011: 150).

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<sup>2</sup> The term International Historical Sociology is associated most directly with Fred Halliday’s contributions, but has also been criticised for reifying the nationalist bias of classical sociology which ‘carries epistemological connotations and limits . . . that require denationalization’ (Teschke, 2011: 1106). While Teschke’s call for a redefinition from *international historical sociology* to ‘social history of spatial relations’ correctly highlights the limitations of Halliday’s project—‘to produce a sociology at once historical *and* international’ (Halliday 2002: 245 original emphasis)—this article employs the IHS designation to signal the crucial position the ‘international’ occupies in analysing the trajectory of long-term, multi-scalar developments.

The aim of this paper is not to provide an overview of or to problematise the whole emerging corpus in this so called ‘third wave’, but to specifically challenge the vestiges of Eurocentrism in its Marxist wing.<sup>3</sup> I argue that despite the development of promising new research programmes in Marxist IHS such as Justin Rosenberg’s overhaul of uneven and combined development or the various adaptations of Robert Brenner’s social property relations approach, there is still a ‘disciplinary silence’ (Bhambra, 2007: 149) on the role of the non-West in the emergence, mechanisms and transformation of ‘the international’. The closing gap between postcolonial theory and Marxist approaches as well as the development of Marxist frameworks focusing on ‘inter-societal’ relations have dispelled this silence to a certain extent, yet as the following discussion reveals, Eurocentrism in IHS is persistent and can imbue even *prima facie* non-Eurocentric forms of theorising.

I define Eurocentrism as a form of autocentric material and knowledge production sustained by several narratives including:

1. An *ex post facto* hypothesis that modern socio-economic development is an exclusively endogenous European affair and that the components of this trajectory can be found unanimously within a geographically and culturally defined Europe (and in general the West).
2. A provincialist intertwinement of social theory and historiography maintaining that the ‘[i]deas of the State, sovereignty, secularism, nationalism, citizenship, civil society . . . are drawn from the European experience with negligible or non-existent contact with Europe’s others and their organizing logics’ (Pasha, 2009: 536).
3. A paternalistic theory of history defending the universal validity of the European trajectory and the ultimate necessity for others to imitate the same experience.

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<sup>3</sup> For critiques of and interventions in Eurocentric IR theorising, see, most recently Bhambra (2011); Hobson (2012); Sabaratnam (2011); Seth (2011) and Vasilaki (2012).

4. A persistent dismissal of the significance of global interconnections between social forces across time and space which then results in:
  - 4.1. The eradication of the role and effect of the non-West in engendering both conjunctural and epochal transformations, some of which are essentially constitutive of the emergence of the modern capitalist economy and the international states-system.
  - 4.2. The removal of a number of global events and processes from the analytical discussion, intentionally or unintentionally serving the ‘whitewashing all of Europe’s sins’ (Wallerstein, 1997: 102), including colonialism and imperialism.

In Marxist IHS, the Eurocentric substratum that permeates the conceptual discussions and distorts the ways in which the historical evidence is extracted does not necessarily stem from a concentrated effort to replicate a ‘European miracle’ discourse, nor does it emerge as a result of being locked in a form of methodological nationalism, but from the complete absence of the non-West in theoretical frameworks as an active agent of the global history of socio-economic development. Accordingly, the non-West does not even get *discarded* from the narrative since it was never *included* in the first place. Borrowing the term from Adam Morton (2013: 133), I describe this social, historical and geographical lacuna in the literature as an ‘ontological exteriority’ through which the rest of the world is either completely read off or extrapolated only as a comparative utility to prioritise or underscore the European experience. Thus in much of Marxist IHS, the dislocation of the non-West from a reciprocal agential axis is not necessarily a deliberate move on the scholars’ part, but is a form of what John M. Hobson calls ‘subliminal Eurocentrism’ (2007: 93), an often unconsciously maintained template that survives due to the very non-existence of the extra-European world in the foundational elements of established theories. The challenge for Marxist IHS then is to re-interiorise the non-West and incorporate it back into the most fundamental theoretical

discussions regarding the conditions of multilinear socio-economic development that can provide a comprehensive causal map of ‘diachronic intersocietal unity’, i.e. *the international* (Shanin, 1983: 18).

The argument unfolds through a brief review of the social property relations approach. I maintain that Robert Brenner’s theory of social property relations cannot form the basis of an internationalist theory as it operates on an extremely particularistic conception of social change which fails both to explain coeval processes in the rest of the world and to offer analytical tools to integrate the non-West into his strictly ‘Anglocentric’ theory. Subsequently, the argument is expanded to scrutinise whether similar factors are visible in the recent discussions on the nature of the ‘modern’ international system, geopolitics and capitalism’s relationship with the states-system. Here the focus is on two significant contributions from Benno Teschke (2003) and Hannes Lacher (2006), both of whom have developed intricate re-interpretations of the states-system, sovereignty and territoriality in capitalism by utilising Brenner’s theory of social property relations. While offering a number of innovative arguments and compelling revisions on the development of the European states-system, the Political Marxism of Teschke and Lacher is equally imbued with a stringent conception of the history of capitalism and the modern states-system within which their origins, development and expansion are predominantly explained through an exclusively European lens. This in turn creates an extremely internalist perspective wherein the ‘international’ becomes necessarily subjugated to an ‘inter-European’ position.

Following the critique of Political Marxism, the article then moves on to the analysis of one of the most important recent contributions in the field, namely Justin Rosenberg’s re-conceptualisation of Leon Trotsky’s concept of uneven and combined development (U&CD). Rosenberg’s intervention promises a potential resolution to the Eurocentric woes of the discipline as it aims to construct a general theory of inter-societal relations in the form of the

‘international’. Theorising the international thus would solve the discipline’s perennial problem by postulating the ways in which the process of uneven and combined development has historically created a “political’ multiplicity which specifically entails coexisting entities’ (Rosenberg, 2010: 170). Yet Rosenberg’s ‘transhistorical’ reincarnation has been challenged vigorously by a number of contributions which claim that the concept has to be understood exclusively with reference to capitalism, thus is only applicable to the *modern* epoch of imperialism and capitalist development. In this section, I lay stress on the continuing problems related to the selective historicism and lack of substantial engagement with peripheral voices in the ‘modernist’ version of the U&CD. I contend that while the renewed U&CD literature has succeeded in tempering a ‘deafening silence’ on the non-West in Marxist IHS, it has not fully exhausted the potential of employing a non-Eurocentric methodology.

The critical review is concluded by briefly engaging with the ways in which Marxist IHS has positioned the Ottoman Empire within the world-historical expansion of capitalism, I refute several reductionist narratives operationalised to evaluate a ‘non-Western’ society by the proponents of U&CD and Political Marxism. I argue that the cursory treatment the Ottoman Empire receives in the literature is neither an anomaly nor a justified omission, but is an indicator of the scope of exteriorisation that the non-West as a whole is subjected to in IHS.

The final part of the paper re-asserts the importance of Marx’s late writings on world history and ethnology in which he strictly rejects crude stadial conceptions of social development and attempts to devise the building blocks of a theory of ‘the global heterogeneity of societal forms, dynamics and interdependence’ (Shanin, 1983: 6). ‘Late Marx’ here is positioned as a viable alternative to re-orient IHS theorising in a non-Eurocentric formulation. I maintain that the quest to purge Marxist IHS of Eurocentrism

should not necessarily lead us away from historical materialism, or in Benno Teschke's words 'warrant the call for methodological pluralism, the intellectual abdication to contingency, and the retreat to thick narrative descriptions' (2003: 7), but should force us to rethink and '*reconstruct the very categories of understanding [of modernity and narratives of historical progress] in the process*' (Bhambra, 2007: 143 original emphasis). Such a reconstruction would only appear to be radically 'non-Marxist' (Hobson, 2011: 148) or be perceived as an absolute rejection of Marxist categories if 'the ideas which Marx was nurturing at the end of his life—and especially at the end of the 1870s and beginning of the 1880s' (Vitkin, 1982: 70) are completely overlooked.

### **Frozen history of the theory of social property relations**

In what has come to be termed the 'Brenner Debate' Robert Brenner provided an outstanding combination of economic and social history with grand scale theorising which laid out the foundations of the social property relations approach. Brenner's position on the origins and development of capitalism is a highly sophisticated reconstruction of Maurice Dobb's (1946) initial formulation that the transition to capitalism was a result of the internal contradictions of feudalism and that class struggle was the prime mover in bringing about this radical modal transformation. Like Dobb, Brenner also highlights the crisis of the thirteenth century, which was 'rooted in declining agricultural productivity and the population drop-off which was its ultimate result' (1978: 122), as a crucial factor in the subsequent stratification between classes. At the end of this period of massive depopulation, feudal lords lost their ability to continue traditional forms of surplus appropriation and the ensuing class struggle culminated in the partial emancipation of the serfs (1982: 83–89). With the rise of tenant farming and the peasants' ability to spend more time on their subsistence than in the lord's demesne, the English peasantry became much more inclined to adopt new production techniques. The



landed class as well pushed similar developments in addition to employing more ‘free’ peasants as opposed to corvée labour. However, exactly at this juncture, Brenner argues that another round of class struggle was set in motion, this time as a result of manifesting class differentiation and ultimately of the widespread employment of wage-labourers. Unchained from their compulsory service to the lords and deprived from direct access to the land, many peasants found themselves looking for a way to earn their subsistence. Wage-labour became the only alternative for many of those who had not had the opportunity or connections to secure proprietorship. Contrasting these developments with France, Brenner posits that the reason for the successful ‘emergence of the classical landlord-capitalist tenant-wage labour structure’ (1976: 63) in England was the English state’s favourable position vis-à-vis the landed nobility (1976: 71). Despite the widespread peasant resistance, by the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the second round of class struggle had been concluded with the repression of the peasant revolts and the complete defeat of ‘free’ peasantry (Brenner 1976: 62–63). Thus, Brenner concludes that, in England, the feudal aristocracy’s transformation into capitalist landlords was completed by 1640 and in the remainder of the modern period English capitalism flourished upon the pillars of its agrarian counterpart (1978: 138).

Brenner’s condensed yet comprehensive account of the rise of English capitalism is underpinned by and in turn reinforces a particular materialist theory of history. Insisting on the determinacy of the class struggle and relations of production (‘logic of production’) in creating the conditions for transition from one mode of production to another, Brenner rejects the demographic/ecological determinism of Malthusian historiography, the technological determinism of the proponents of Marx’s initial sketch in the Preface (Marx, 1987) and perhaps most vehemently the commercialisation model associated with Immanuel Wallerstein and André Gunder Frank which maintains the determinacy of exchange relations (‘logic of circulation’) and the pre-existence of certain capitalist social relations before the ascendancy

of the capitalist mode of production. Brenner's stringent final critique rejects the idea that modes of production, or at least their particular elements, can be found in each other's anatomy, an idea criticised by other scholars like M. L. Morris who argued that the "next" mode of production is not contained in the 'previous' one, nor is it produced by a movement internal to that structure' (1976: 308–309).<sup>4</sup> His formula, which postulates that the 'uniquely successful development of capitalism in Western Europe was determined by a class system, a property system, a system of surplus extraction' (1977: 68) is rather uncomplicated, yet precisely because it offers a theoretical framework supported by substantial evidence, it has become one of the centerpieces of contemporary Marxist historiography.

At this juncture, it is imperative to visit James Blaut's vitriolic assessment of Brenner's account. Blaut proclaims that despite the painstakingly detailed research agenda underpinning Brenner's thesis, his conceptualisation of capitalism is ahistorical, for his definition suggests a 'complete and entire' emergence of capitalism as if 'it were a god descending from Olympus to govern human affairs' (2000: 60). On the first point, Blaut underestimates Brenner's punctilious empirical work in which the particular history of the emergence of (English) capitalism is impressively unearthed, however, his second comment is on the mark.<sup>5</sup> Brenner's extensive analysis of the conditions in which initial capitalist social relations were materialised in England *does* present a 'complete and entire' depiction of capitalism by (I) assuming an immediate transition to capitalism once capitalist relations of production (e.g. wage-labour, separation of the producers from the means of production) take root, and (II) disregarding the subsequent processes like colonialism, the slave trade and

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<sup>4</sup> This was a point made vividly by Marx as he maintained that '[I]n Western Europe the capitalist economic order emerged from the *entrails* of the feudal economic order' (1989a: 199 emphasis added). See also Hobsbawm's comments in his introduction to Marx (1965: 36).

<sup>5</sup> Blaut's own half-sketched proposal is very much in line with the commercialisation model and vulnerable to transhistorical categorisations; yet the kernel of his critique of Eurocentrism emerges from the problematisation of the absence of the non-West rather than a strict adherence to the principles of the trade-led capitalist development model (Blaut 1993: 206).

imperialism through which capitalist expansion irreversibly altered the development trajectories, as well as domestic class structures of non-capitalist societies. As Brenner instrumentalises Marx's abstractions exclusively through the English case, conceptual tools become mere projections of English class relations, property arrangements and political structures; rendering their application to any non-Western context highly problematic. In Alan Knight's words, Brenner's 'strongly Anglo-centric lens' casts a myopic theory within which universal categories could only offer explanatory utility vis-à-vis Western Europe, since 'what works for England (if, indeed, it does) may not work for the rest of Europe, still less for the rest of the world' (Knight, 2002: 197–199). Thus for Brenner, Europe, and more specifically Western Europe becomes the 'the only active maker of history' (Washbrook, 1990: 492) as capitalism emerges irreversibly in the sixteenth century and the rest of global social development takes place in a frozen history underpinned by a 'unilinear and strictly endogenous causality' (Torras, 1980: 262).

The difficulty of re-animating this frozen history has been addressed and, to a certain extent, rectified in the works of the Brennerite camp of Marxist IHS. Benno Teschke and Hannes Lacher have taken the lead in reconstructing a (Political) Marxist analysis of the international states-system, and its constitutive relationship with capitalism and modernity, by utilising the framework designed by Brenner. Following the theoretical premises and the historical narrative of the social property relations approach, Political Marxism unequivocally affirms that '[t]he constitution, operation, and transformation of international relations are fundamentally governed by social property relations' (Teschke, 2003: 273). Positioned against both orthodox IR theorising which enforces an analytical domestic/international divide and a 'fundamentally ahistorical' world-systems theory (Lacher, 2006: 52), Brenner's discussion of England's transition to capitalism turns into a theoretical background to the re-interpretation of the rise of 'modern' international politics. According to Teschke, 'the theory of social

property relations’ provides better conceptual and historical instruments as it is able ‘to theorize the transition to modern international relations and to draw out implications for early modern and modern processes of state-building—and, by extension, the genesis of the modern European states-system’ (2003: 117).

As Political Marxism creates a direct association between international relations and ‘politically instituted class relations’ (Teschke, 2003: 272), it has to explain how a specific set of class relations in one society can transform systemic arrangements in the international arena. Or in Hannes Lacher’s formulation, the pivotal question is: ‘What are the consequences of the capitalist reconstitution of society for . . . the dynamic of the international system?’ (2006: 109). According to the Brennerite framework, given that by the seventeenth century, only in England a political system based on capitalist sovereignty had emerged, it would be misleading to project the changing nature of the states as an international phenomenon. This observation constitutes the backbone of Teschke’s important argument that the Peace of Westphalia, conventionally accepted as the genesis of the modern states-system, did not create the modern international system as the political multiplicity in the seventeenth century was largely composed of absolutist states operated on ‘dynastic sovereignty’ and compelled by the logic of ‘geopolitical accumulation’ (Teschke, 2002; 2003: 218). In fact, the modern international states-system, with its internal relation to capital mediated through nation-states, only emerged ‘after the European-wide spread of capitalism’ as ‘the series of European revolutions during the late 18th and 19th centuries and the ‘freeing’ of markets in favour of a world market’ gave birth to a new logic, replacing territorial accumulation with the accumulation of capital (Teschke, 2002: 37). The suggested framework here is extremely useful for bifurcating the nexus of capitalist development and state formation into two phases. An initial stage of political restructuring can be identified in the period from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, where the English state

gradually transformed itself into a capitalist sovereign while the rest of the world remained partitioned as ‘non-capitalist’ states. The second phase refers to the period following the end of the Napoleonic Wars where nation-state formation in Europe was fused with imperialism and colonial reconstruction of the peripheries. It is in this era the modern nation-state form gains universality even though the imperial formations continued to exist, albeit in diminishing capacities.

What is the effect of English state-making on the international system in between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries then? Is the continuing territorial division of sovereign states a residue of the existing states-system, or does the inceptive capitalist transformation of political organisation represent a further realignment in the states-system? Teschke, in conjunction with Lacher, repeatedly states that the plural territorial division is a remnant of the absolutist states-system, rather than an intrinsic character of capital’s political manifestation. The first part of the argument is a historical fact—and is also visible in the attempts to disassociate nation-state formation from capitalism in the works of historical sociologists like Theda Skocpol (1979: 22)—but the second part stems exclusively from Teschke’s conceptualisation of capitalist sovereignty being based on the separation of the economic and the political. According to Teschke, this is the *differentia specifica* of capitalism, ‘that the capital circuits of the world market can in principle function without infringing on political sovereignty’ (2003: 267). This abstraction is ‘in principle’ correct as surplus appropriation in capitalism does not require the direct intervention of a political authority. However, one only needs to remember that the historical expansion of capitalism was ‘written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire’ (Marx 1976: 875) as it was achieved through a set of coercive measures and maintained—both in domestic and international spheres—by a political will guaranteeing the survival of its core mechanisms to consider Teschke’s ‘principal’ differentiation merely as a theoretical vantage point that can

only be applied to the capitalist state ‘in its ideal average’ (Marx, 1981: 970; cf. Teschke and Lacher, 2007: 568). There is no reason to accept a highly formalistic and utilitarian separation between an ‘economistic’ conception of capitalism and the political results of its expansion, then conceptualise the latter as a mere externality to the capitalist mode of production itself. On the persistence of the ‘European political pluriverse’ (Teschke, 2003: 123), one can easily recognise the pre-capitalist origins of the phenomenon without analytically detaching it from the coeval processes of capitalist expansion and consolidation. Thus the ‘feudal’ logic of political accumulation does not have to be understood exclusively as an archaic feature of the international system, but can be conceptualised as a fundamental component of inter-state relations throughout the early modern period in tune with English mercantilism and early capitalist expansion. The ultimate difference is found not in the abolition of political accumulation but in its transformation by capitalism as another method of advancing the mechanisms of *capital* accumulation. In this sense, territorial pluriverse itself is absorbed by and integrated into capitalism rather than preserving the formal features it gained prior to and during the early modern era. Consequently, Teschke’s categorisation is useful to trace certain changes in the way in which inter-state relations were organised, but it does not explicate (I) how capitalism appropriated the existing logic of political accumulation, and (II) what were the specific positions of ‘non-capitalist’ states with regards to the changing balance of power in the early modern period and, subsequently, the global expansion of capitalism in the modern era, except for remaining passive bystanders.

Lacher offers a very brief discussion which could potentially rectify the lacunae in Teschke’s account. On the capitalist ‘internalisation of the interstate system’ he argues that, national restructuring of political sovereignty cannot automatically be translated into a ‘capitalist’ international system. The latter, as he convincingly argues, cannot be realised before ‘the separation of politics and economics in the domestic realm has been

completed . . . that the conflicts between capital and labour have replaced (or at least supplanted) those between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, the monarchy, and so on' (2006: 109). Furthermore, such a systemic transformation would require the 'completion of these processes not just in one state, but in most states, at least those which dominate the international system'. Consequently, the modern international states-system cannot be seen as a monolithic composite created by homogeneous 'capitalist' states, but only through 'a gradual process' it achieves a certain uniformity dictated by a structural logic (2006: 109). The pitfall in Lacher's argument is that he advances this conditionality to bolster his hypothesis that '[n]either capitalism nor absolutism gives us the modern sovereign state in its entirety' (2006: 58 original emphasis). But the same argument can be turned upside down to posit that the modern states-system cannot be explicated through a temporally divided analysis but should be seen as an outcome of the interaction between different political structures in the early modern and modern eras. If only the intransigent foundations of Political Marxism are accepted *a priori*, a clear demarcation between the early modern and modern political sovereignty surfaces in a way that minimises the place of non-capitalist actors in the political system.<sup>6</sup> Thus it is not unsurprising that Lacher's important question, 'what sort of history can best recover the social practices that constitute the sovereign, territorial state . . . ?' (2006: 15), is answered by himself in the form of underscoring the conjunctural features of modern *European* states.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Compare Lacher's position with that of Ellen Meiksins Wood who highlights 'the close connection between capitalism and the nation-state in general' and claim that 'capitalism developed in tandem with the process of state formation' (2002a: 19).

<sup>7</sup> Teschke and Lacher (2007: 569n.4) attempt to assuage charges of Eurocentrism against Political Marxism by maintaining that their perspective 'is not Eurocentric in the sense that it assumes something inherent to the course of European history as a whole'. Rather, they insist on the particular significance of their 'Anglocentrism' as it underscores 'the specificity of a regional sociopolitical transformation and the concomitant construction of new forms of economic and political subjectivity that would create consequences of world-historical relevance'. This, however, signals precisely the deficit of Political Marxism as the prioritised 'specificity of a regional sociopolitical transformation' is understood without a clear appreciation of inter-societal developments which facilitate, condition or even *determine* the trajectory of various regional socio-economic and political configurations.

## **Uneven and combined development and the persistence of exteriorisation**

If Political Marxism remains locked within a Eurocentric ontology which effectively invisibilises the non-West and only registers European-induced developments as causally linked with systemic change, where else can we turn in Marxist IHS to locate non-Eurocentric theorising? The most promising extant candidate for this task is Justin Rosenberg's work on the concept of uneven and combined development. Theoretically, Rosenberg's reconstruction seems to transcend many of the Eurocentric pitfalls as it strives to recapture 'the interactive multiplicity of social development as a historical process' (2006: 312). Such a position naturally requires the rejection of homogenising universalist and essentialist theoretical assumptions, for the failure to do so could easily collapse 'the interactive multiplicity' into mere static units comparable to functionally identical states in neorealist IR. Furthermore, Rosenberg takes another step forward and recognises that all units within the international system interact with each other and the system dialectically, hence 'the international' consists of an 'inner differentiation of parts, across many dimensions, but within an ontological whole' (2006: 316). The ultimate task for Rosenberg is then to develop U&CD as an explanatory framework within which 'dynamic and comparative moments of analysis' can be incorporated within a single theoretical vantage point 'in order to theorize a specifically inter-societal dimension of social change' (2006: 312).

Initially sketched out by Leon Trotsky to highlight the 'peculiar' socio-economic trajectory of Russia and its potential in bringing about a socialist revolution before the complete domination of the capitalist mode of production, the theory recasts the essence of capitalist expansion as an inherently international phenomenon, which mutually enforces and is sustained by the combination of different social relations subjugated by the capitalist 'laws of motion'. Trotsky, thus rejected the stadial interpretation of the succession of modes of



production and maintained that ‘backward’ countries do not necessarily follow the same steps the ‘advanced’ countries had taken, hence ‘a repetition of the forms of development by different nations is ruled out’ (Trotsky 2008: 4).

Trotsky’s unique contribution can be located in the addition of the term ‘combination’ to the previously designated concept of ‘uneven development’. While Lenin’s discussion of ‘uneven and spasmodic development’ is concerned with the varying degrees and outcome of competitiveness between ‘individual enterprises, individual branches of industry and individual countries’ (1964: 241); Trotsky weaves an intricate web of ‘interrelationships’ with which capitalist expansion subsumes other social formations and combines ‘archaic’ and ‘contemporary’ forms in line with the ‘laws of world economy’ (1969: 152). As with Lenin, who underlined the ‘*transitional* forms of state dependence’ in the peripheries (1964: 263 original emphasis), Trotsky too saw the most explicit manifestations of the uneven and combined character of capitalist expansion in the peripheries’ integration to the capitalist world economy and in their economic and political relationship vis-à-vis the early capitalist states; hence his theory’s genesis in the Russian context. This relationship is established through the ‘whip of external necessity’, either in the form of direct coercion or by means of financial and economic dependency. As Neil Smith has asserted, within the condition of uneven and combined development, ‘[u]nevenness now primarily emanate[s] from the laws of capital themselves rather than from the archaeology of past social and geographical difference’ (2006: 186).

Rosenberg’s contributions (1996; 2006; 2010) have attempted to expand the content and applicability of the concept by positing the view that ‘the inner causal structure of development itself as a historical phenomenon is intrinsically both uneven and combined’ (2006: 333). Built on Trotsky’s transient characterisation of ‘unevenness’ as ‘the most general law of the historic process’ and the existence of the laws of uneven and

combined development ‘throughout the whole course of history’ (Trotsky, 2008: 5, 1969: 148, 1972: 300); Rosenberg’s effort represents both a continuation of a line of theoretical interventions aimed at rebranding U&CD as ‘a general theory of the socio-economic dynamics of the historical process’ (Löwy, 1981: 87; Mandel, 1975: 23) and a novel endeavour to theorise a causal framework for inter-societal relations so as to reach ‘a sociological definition of the international’ (Rosenberg, 2006: 313).

In its recent reincarnation, the concept’s main strength stems from its latent receptivity to identify multiple trajectories and theorise the paths with which different socio-economic configurations have historically related to each other. U&CD thus potentially beckons the construction of a truly international theory, one which effectively moves beyond regionally or culturally bounded autocentric frameworks and ‘conceptualizes the process and outcomes of the interaction of diachronically simultaneous yet historically a-synchronous polities’ (Matin, 2007: 428). Moreover, it embodies the recognition of multilinear development trajectories and reinforces the centrality of the international at the formulation of a general theory of social change. Within this formulation, ‘[e]ach instance of social change, therefore, always bears the marks of both the wider process of uneven and combined development in which it is actively entangled, as well as the effects of the more organic and localized determinations and features which ultimately render it analytically distinct and amenable to concrete analysis’ (Matin, 2013: 368).

As a number of recent contributions have explicitly demonstrated, the formulation of U&CD à la Rosenberg—or what Hobson labels ‘generalised’ conception (2011: 148)—opens up a highly productive avenue in which the specific question of Eurocentrism can be tackled with a rich conceptual toolbox. According to Hobson, the ‘generalised’ version can effectively avoid the pitfall of ‘fetishising Europe with the unintended consequence of naturalising, if not eternalising, Western capitalist domination, while simultaneously denying agency to the

East' (2011: 165). Matin correspondingly maintains that U&CD, defined in these terms, offers 'a deeper theoretical foundation for a non-Eurocentric international historical materialism' as well as 'highlighting the constitutiveness of the international both to the emergence and the expansion of capitalism' (2013: 370).

These methodological pointers have already been harnessed to provide historico-theoretical exegeses in two important pre-capitalist cases, namely Iran (Matin, 2007) and the Ottoman Empire (Nişancioğlu, 2013). Matin's study positions pre-modern Iran on a particular axis of development in which state formation is understood as a consequence of 'dynamic, internationally generated combination . . . of the nomadic and agrarian polities' (2007: 438). Of note here is the extension of the parameters of state formation. By specifically incorporating the 'international' to the analysis, Matin is able to weave an analytical framework which is sensitive to the extant political and socio-economic relations in Iran *and* the conditioning developments which were structured through Iran's interaction with its neighbours and its location in the international system. In Nişancioğlu's work, the 'international' becomes a de-essentialised space of inter-societal reciprocity as the seemingly 'indirect' impact of the Ottoman Empire on early modern Europe is reconstructed to reveal a historically configured causal interaction. Both investigations attest the innate non-Eurocentric foundation of the reformulated U&CD by conceptualising long-term social and political change in a non-determinist structuralism which remains attentive to the specificities of different social formations and historically constituted interaction between them.<sup>8</sup>

While the deployment of U&CD as a transhistorical pattern of social development has proven to be an extremely valuable methodology to overcome 'frozen histories', the temporally limited conception is still susceptible to re-asserting Eurocentric claims. If the

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<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it should be reminded that the ontological breakthrough of the 'generalised conception' has so far remained incomplete as its proponents have not provided comprehensive accounts of the actual *agential processes* through which 'combination' of social and political forms take shape. See Pozo-Martin (2007: 556); Rioux (2009: 590–591); Teschke (2011: 1102).

limited position is taken, U&CD becomes an intrinsic element of the era of capitalism's worldwide expansion and 'is most usefully employed in the context of a theory of the capitalist mode of production, as capitalist social relations—and political forms—are historically unique in their systematic generation of both combination and unevenness' (Ashman, 2009: 31; Davidson, 2009: 19).<sup>9</sup> Even here, the problem is not necessarily the concept's employment to explain 'combination and unevenness' perpetuated by capitalist expansion, but the way in which capitalist expansion itself is understood as a rather unilinear and diffusionist process.

My contention is that the temporally limited conceptualisation risks undermining Rosenberg's main aim, namely the construction of a theory of 'inter-societal dimension of social change' as long as the entrenched Eurocentric presuppositions are left untouched. Unlike Political Marxism, U&CD's Eurocentrism does not emerge *directly* from its theoretical foundation, but is rather reinforced by the proponents' unwillingness to engage with peripheral social formations outside the predefined historiography of unidirectional capitalist development. Here, the re-interiorisation of the non-West is attempted only within the confines of an established modernist framework, thus even those who focus on non-Western societies end up re-introducing Eurocentric dilemmas back into the conceptual and historical discussions. Put shortly, within most recent applications of U&CD, the non-West becomes an 'empirical exteriority', not an 'ontological' one.

## **Reconfiguring the Ottoman history as a corrective lens for international theory**

As a litmus test, I now briefly look at the extant approaches on the transformation of the Ottoman tributary formation and assess whether they can fully capture the complexity of a

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<sup>9</sup> See also Smith (2006); van der Linden (2007); Morton (2011: 250–251n.1).

‘peripheral’ society’s social, economic and political reorganisation both in domestic and international levels. The selection of the Ottoman Empire is not accidental. Due to its long-lasting influence and direct involvement in as well as its geographical proximity to Europe, the Ottoman Empire can be identified as ‘the dominant Other in the history of the European states system’ (Neumann and Welsh, 1991: 330). As a particularly relevant example of the peripheral expansion of capitalism and imperialist geopolitics of the 19th century (comparable, perhaps only to Russia), the Ottoman Empire represents significant opportunities to scrutinise and substantiate theoretical propositions advanced by Marxist IHS. Moreover, its peculiar location in the literature, marked by either a curious *absence* or a contradictory *presence*, reveals the extent to which the approaches in question are ill-equipped or reluctant to engage with the non-West. Nevertheless, it is equally important to note that its specific treatment in the literature should be contextualised as part of a broader pattern in which a large portion of the IHS scholarship continually overlooks, subordinates or devalorises the experience of the non-Western societies.

In its first incarnation within the literature, the Ottoman Empire is represented essentially as an absent power in international politics. Despite the immediate centrality of the Ottoman-Christian (i.e. European) relationship in the formation of the early modern political system, we only find two passing references to the Ottomans in Teschke’s *The Myth of 1648*—the definitive IHS reconstruction of the era. This is a significant non-inclusion that cannot be justified by outlining the boundaries of the book as ‘the genesis of the modern *European* states-system’ (Teschke, 2003: 117 emphasis added). ‘Throughout nearly 600 years of its history, the Ottoman state was as much a part of the European political order as were its French or Habsburg rivals’ (Quataert, 2005: 2–3), yet beyond such descriptive categorisations, the Ottoman interaction with the European states during the early modern period marked a causal configuration in which both the individual states and the states-system

in general were correspondingly affected. Explicit manifestations of such reciprocity can be observed in the period of Franco-Ottoman Alliance (16–19th c.) or in the Ottoman-Habsburg struggle which directly influenced the Atlantic expansion of the European maritime powers through the Ottoman control of Egypt and Syria (Jensen, 1985; Hess, 1973).

In the second incarnation, the Ottoman Empire emerges as a ‘pre-modern’ or ‘archaic’ state, locked in an immobile and lethargic non-history, only to be ‘penetrated’ by Western capitalist powers (cf. Wallerstein, 1979: 398). Here, the deceptive image of the Ottoman Empire as the ‘sick man of Europe’ finds strong resonance among the proponents of both Political Marxism and U&CD. More critically, perfunctory appropriation of the propositions of a heavily disputed ‘decline paradigm’—which maintains a perennial and inevitable withering of the Ottoman state from the late 16th to the early 20th century—undermines the validity of historical evidence on which the analytical frameworks are built.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, many of the existing IHS accounts rely extensively on a narrative, in which European capitalism instantaneously and irreversibly transforms the empire, seemingly without any form of intervention by or interaction with domestic actors, conditions and structures. Correspondingly, internal changes in the socio-economic arrangements of the empire are also positioned as strictly exogenous affairs, whereby the Ottomans are effectively stripped off of any active agency. Operating on the temporally limited version of U&CD, ‘Turkey’ claims Neil Davidson, ‘under pressure from the Western powers, [was] forced for reasons of military competition to introduce limited industrialization and partial agrarian reform’ (2009: 14). A relatively more precise U&CD reading is sketched out in a recent contribution as follows:

Once the capitalist ball was rolling, after the late 18th and early 19th centuries the Ottomans were forced to attempt to restructure along the lines of a ‘rational’ European state . . . However, the Ottoman attempts to regularize administration and revenue necessarily clashed with the tax farming

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<sup>10</sup> For examinations and critiques of the decline paradigm, see Howard (1988); Salzman (1993); Karaömerlioğlu (2002); Quataert (2003).

and tribute taking social structures on which the empire had hitherto relied . . . The resulting crises and centrifugal pressures not only provided the opportunity for Western powers to grab parts of the Empire, but also created the conditions in which the ‘Young Turks’ of the Committee for Unity and Progress [sic] came to power . . . The case of the Ottoman Empire thus represents a particularly stark contrast between pre-capitalist and capitalist inter-societal relations. (Allinson and Anievas, 2010: 210)

The transformation of the Ottoman polity here is perceived as a unidirectional process which was exclusively imposed upon the empire by the capitalist West (assumed as an already-constituted entity), thus overlooks the instances of active agency within the empire. Correspondingly, the then ongoing sub-global and local level negotiations of the existing social, economic and political structures appear as exclusively imitative of the West or contingent on the incursion of imperialism. Accepting the formalistic framework offered by such analyses—which is designed purely to differentiate the modalities of capitalist and non-capitalist compulsion for social change—projects an entirely exogenous political and economic development in and a unilinear interaction of capitalist powers with the Ottoman Empire. The resulting picture vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire is a repetition of the Eurocentric arguments originally developed by European dominated historiography and IR, hence instead of recovering peripheral voices, the application of U&CD ‘erases the real subjects of history: those who actually make it and from which any concept of development must arise’ (Rioux, 2009: 590).

On the Political Marxist spectrum, a conditional agency is granted but the strict periodisation and classification between ‘pre-capitalist’ and ‘capitalist’ states based on ‘Anglocentric’, hence *non-corresponding* (see İslamoğlu-İnan, 1987: 105–106, 404–405n.2) property relations render the 19th century Ottoman polity an inherently stagnant social formation, devoid of endogenous movement for change. Even when the internal reconfigurations are recognised, they are only interpreted as consequences of the ‘Eastern

Question', thus as mere ramifications of the great power imperialism in the Balkans and the Middle East. The geopolitical calculation surrounding the survival of the imperial territorial integrity in the form of the 'Eastern Question' dismisses 'the actual structure and dynamics of Ottoman society' and further blocks the theorising of the emergent Turkish state form. This is accompanied by another round of exclusion as 'the Eastern Question is portrayed either as a European response to a purely degenerative and internally driven Ottoman decline, or as the safety-valve for the pressures emanating from the European balance of power' (Bromley, 1994: 48, 99). Interpretation of Tanzimat as a type of defensive modernisation (Shilliam, 2006: 382) is especially striking and indicative of non-engagement with the broader currents of historiography as many studies have conclusively revealed that the 'Tanzimat period cannot be considered simply as a phase of the Eastern Question, and examined from the outside looking in' (Davison, 1963: 8; Brown, 1984: 39).

Further illustrating the limits of Political Marxism, Clemens Hoffmann claims that the 19th century centralisation was merely an attempt by the central government to retain its own power: '[W]hat seems to be *raison d'état* on the surface remained *raison de prince* or rather *raison de sultan* applying new modern methods' (2008: 385). Hence, instead of providing legal, political and economic frameworks within which capitalist social relations could take root or be nurtured, the reforms were understood to be caused by and aimed at the continuation of pre-capitalist social forces in the empire. This is a common theme that unites both Political Marxism and U&CD in their engagement with the non-West, as either 'the international' is excessively prioritised or national/sub-national levels are inadequately incorporated into causal explanations. The 'whip of external necessity' itself is understood to be only handled by European capitalists which further problematises the examination of Ottoman international relations vis-à-vis other 'pre-capitalist' actors such as Russia. More significantly, both approaches ignore crucial strains in Ottoman social and economic history



that have revealed how (I) non-tributary social relations had begun permeating agricultural production and class relations as early as the 17th century (Kasaba 1987; 1988; Salzman, 1994; Reyhan, 2008), (II) the cultivators' struggles affected the central administration's economic policies as well as the re-organisation of the property and landholding arrangements (Abou-El-Haj, 2005; Aytekin, 2012), and (III) the subsequent reform movements themselves were shaped, to a certain degree, by social forces from below (Emiroğlu, 1999) as opposed to a reductionist, exclusively top-down narrative.

An empirically stronger, and theoretically non-reductionist reading of the nineteenth century Ottoman trajectory with particular reference to capitalist development, state transformation and imperialist geopolitics can be constructed in dialogue with the Ottoman historiography. Instead of resorting to analytically deficient and empirically unsustainable forms of periodisation and classification advanced by the extant Marxist IHS approaches, materialist frameworks have to dig deeper and retrace the processes with which the underlying structures of the Ottoman social formation were transformed over the early modern period (Abou-El-Haj, 2005; Tezcan, 2010). Nişancıoğlu's recent contribution succeeds in fulfilling this promise though his utilisation of the 'generalised' conception of U&CD still leaves room for a broader examination of the domestic sources of modal change that affected the Ottoman trajectory. Engaging with the processes through which 'internal' modal structures are transformed vis-à-vis international developments reveals that while the imminent confrontation between the Ottoman Empire and imperialist Europe took its most acute form in the nineteenth century following the spread of expansionary waves of capitalism, the Ottoman social formation had undergone an important, yet limited transformation in the previous two centuries. It is in this period the tributary social relations were initially challenged by incipient social forces, engendered by externally induced and

internally mediated factors ranging from the 16th century Price Revolution to the abolition of *timar* system and its gradual replacement with tax-farming.

Initially, tax-farming was implemented as a short term measure to enhance the empire's fiscal balance as the prolonged military campaigns and peasant revolts overstrained the Porte's budget. Gradual expansion of tax-farming coincided with the changes in military organisation; the imperial army had become more dependent on the salaried janissary corps rather than the cavalry ranks sustained by the *timar* system. Ömer Lütfi Barkan registers an early instance of this shift by noting that '[d]uring the period 1528–1670, the Janissary numbers increased seven times, [whereas] the Sipahi numbers [increased] three times' (1975: 19). According to İnalçık, the janissary numbers increased from 13,000 to 38,000 from circa 1550 to the 1600s (1980: 289). The main shift from the light cavalry to the armored infantry was also a reflection of the changes in European military technology. By the end of the seventeenth century, Ottomans had become acutely aware of and increasingly interested in the renewed military capacity of their western neighbours. While the refashioned Ottoman army maintained its coercive superiority until the last quarter of the seventeenth century, tax-farming and the invalidation of central control on the agricultural production resulted in a more substantial transformation in the long run. As Mustafa Akdağ has put it bluntly, 'by the seventeenth century the foundation of the empire were not the landed *sipahis* anymore' (1945: 423).

The following two centuries were marked by the gradual dissolution of the core tributary mechanisms. Provincial notables (*ayans*) and commercial intermediaries gained more influence through the control of land and production, as '[b]y the eighteenth century the applicability of tax farming had ceased to be restricted to the crown lands and was extended to cover all kinds of holdings' (Kasaba 1987: 808). In the eighteenth century, *ayans* effectively assumed the role of tax collectors (*muhasıl*) in the provinces while the central

administration had become increasingly reliant on the notables ‘for the collection of taxes, maintenance of order, and the raising of auxiliary troops’ (Kasaba 1987: 812). The further deterioration of the imperial economy and military capacity in the eighteenth century created more space for the *ayans* and intermediaries to position themselves as ‘*de facto* owners of fairly large estates by repeatedly purchasing farming privileges’ by means of ‘conversion of tax farms into property-like holdings by acquiring life-long deeds or leases, by establishing pious foundations, or by using force’ (Kasaba 1987: 808–809). ‘Experimentation with revenue extraction reached its peak in the eighteenth century with the extensive practice of *mülk* grants, which converted public lands outright into registered private property’ (Abou-El-Haj 2005: 16). According to one source, ‘[b]y the eighteenth century, a substantial portion of state-owned (*mirî*) land that had been distributed as *timars* had in effect become private land’ (Hanioglu 2008: 21). In a very elementary sense, tax farms became the forerunners of mass-scale legally guaranteed private property and production system, even though they remained firmly entrenched within the political boundaries of the tributary formation.

Thus, *contra* Allinson and Anievas, ‘the capitalist ball’ did not flatten the tributary state by enforcing structural reforms and a market economy consistent with the global expansion of European capitalism; but the ultimate restructuring of the Ottoman social formation was mediated through interminable struggles among and within social groups occupying sites of production and reproduction in the empire. The ‘factors specific to capitalism’ had become not that ‘alien’ at all in these two centuries (Wood 2002b: 56), as prebendal production was replaced by *de facto* private estates controlled by provincial notables and other intermediaries. Methodologically, this exposition underscores the importance of exploring parallel spaces of international and local (agential) interaction without eschewing the construction of causal linkages or prioritising one socio-spatial unit of analysis over another.

## **Reclaiming Marx and the ‘global heterogeneity of societal forms’**

The hitherto provided account portrays a grim outlook for the prospects of a non-Eurocentric Marxist IHS, but the limitations of the extant approaches do not necessarily signify the exhaustion of the repository of historical materialism. The question is, can Marxist IHS offer a truly universal perspective without exposing its subjects to a narrow homogeneity and imprinting the mark of a European-induced teleology on social development? By offering a brief discussion of a ‘non-Eurocentric’ reading of Marx, I aim to craft one possible alternative.

A recent wave in Marxist social theory has produced strong counter-arguments against Marx’s Eurocentrism and attempted to absolve certain tenets of historical materialism of its own Eurocentric and provincialist variations.<sup>11</sup> Here, the initial textual reading of Marx is built upon his various discussions on pre-capitalist societies, the emergence of capitalism in Europe and the evolution of his general theory of history in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. Equally important, however, is the renewed focus on some of Marx’s less analysed material, including his ‘Ethnological Notebooks’ (Marx, 1972), notebooks on world history, and letters and exchanges he penned down from the mid-1870s to 1882. The first and foremost lesson to be drawn from these writings is that Marx explicitly rejected any unilateral trajectory of historical social development, refuting, in the process, the myth that his theory of history is ‘an account of history whose teleology was always directed towards an inexorable closure’ (Young, 1990: 6). In response to his critics who read Marx’s theory as a uniformative universalisation of a particular European experience, he warned against ‘[metamorphosing his] historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophic theory of general development, imposed by fate on all peoples, whatever the

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<sup>11</sup> See Anderson (2010); Banaji (2010); Brown (2010); Lindner (2010).

historical circumstances in which they are placed' (Marx, 1989a: 200). Precisely because there is no 'formula of a general historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical' (Marx, 1989a: 201), Marx's theorising of capitalist development—starting from the tracing of its most concrete components to the creation of universal abstractions which generate *general* conceptual frameworks in which *different* manifestations can be examined—naturally assumes a polychromatic picture of global development.

The question of difference is highlighted in a much more pronounced manner in his letter to Russian populist Vera Zasulich. Outlining his depiction of the genesis of the capitalist mode of production in Western Europe, Marx quotes from *Capital* that 'the metamorphosis of *feudal production* into *capital production*' was engendered by '*the expropriation of the agricultural producer*' and that '*all other countries of Western Europe* are undergoing the same process'; yet he quickly underscores that he '*expressly limited* this 'historical inevitability' to the '*countries of Western Europe*' (Marx, 1989b: 360; 1989c: 370; 1976: 876 original emphasis). While the Marx-Zasulich exchange revolves around the issue of Russia's 'uneven and combined' transition to capitalism, Marx's broader point about the 'multilinear character of historical development' (Vitkin, 1982: 63) had long been a part of his overall theory. The evidence to this claim, within the strictly European context, can be given from Marx's delineation of commercial capital as 'a historical precondition for the development of the capitalist mode of production' (1981: 444), which then led Marx to advance that 'capitalist production developed earliest' in Italian city-states (1976: 876) and to further denominate Holland as 'the model capitalist nation of the seventeenth century' (1976: 916).

Perhaps more significantly, Marx forcefully opposed a common feature of much contemporary Marxist IHS theorising, namely the transferral of socio-historical categories from one society to another without substantially engaging with the social, economic and political histories of the recipients. Illustratively, in his vivid discussion of Maxim

Kovalevsky's *Communal Landownership*, Marx scathingly highlights how Kovalevsky, making a verbatim comparison with Western European structures, misinterpreted India as a feudal society (Marx, 1975). This is also one of the most grossly misunderstood aspects of the whole debate on the Asiatic mode of production, wherein Marx's conception was constructed not as a materialist reworking of the Eurocentric concept of 'Oriental Despotism', but as an attempt to capture the paths of divergence among different societies based on their production relations. What is missing in many Marxist critiques of the Asiatic mode of production, such as the one spearheaded by Perry Anderson (1974: 462–549), is an appreciation of the 'heterogeneity of Marx's conception of the East' (Vitkin, 1982: 65). Where Anderson's critique simply renders non-Western formations like the Ottoman Empire 'a kind of backdrop to the unfolding drama of world history, which in his view is equated with the history of the principal European states' (Abou-El-Haj, 2005: 4), Marx's horizon was approaching a much deeper understanding of 'multidirectionality . . . [a] world of mutual dependence, indeed, of heterogeneity resulting from that very interdependence' (Shanin, 1983: 31).

In short, 'Late Marx' offers a distinct methodology capable of theorising inter-societal unity and a rich spectrum of non-autocentric conceptions of social change and development. While some of these rehabilitative proposals to counteract the deep-rooted Eurocentrism of the discipline are found in a fragmentary and scattered manner in Marx's writings, they unequivocally underline that Marx took important steps towards the re-interiorisation of the non-West into historical materialism. Given the wealth of historical evidence and research available to the scholars today, compiling and reconstructing the missing pieces in Marx's puzzle should be welcomed as an essential task with which to formulate an international theory that 'systematically incorporates the causal significance of [societies'] asynchronous interaction . . . into an explanation of their individual and collective development and change over time' (Rosenberg, 2006: 335).

## Conclusion

The genealogy of IR theorising reveals repeated attempts at conceptualising the ways in which internally varied political actors constitute a coherent international system and at explaining how and why such actors—the boundaries of which are drawn along the lines of territory, political organisation, culture and economy—can and do coexist within such systems. From the English School's normative international institutionalism to the most recent attempts at rebranding inter-societal relations as a determining causality in the form of 'the international', historically oriented theorising of the international system has always promised to offer a universal perspective. With hindsight, one can easily share Teschke's sentiment that '[t]he historical turn in IR has helped break out of the state-centric straitjacket of orthodox IR' (2003: 271), yet ahistorical state-centrism has not been the only impediment along the construction of a non-diffusionist, non-autocentric international theory.

As I have outlined in this paper, the Eurocentric straitjacket still prevents even the most auspicious efforts from embracing a radically global ontology, within which the historical routes of socio-economic development are understood as the outcome of reciprocal interaction between spatially and temporally variegated units. Despite their often incompatible claims on the correct level of abstraction, the specific periodisation of the development of capitalism and the form and utility of capitalist sovereignty, there are two threads that draw together competing historical materialist approaches as exemplified by Political Marxism and the 'modernist' version of U&CD: (I) An unyielding claim to provide an exhaustive theorising of the 'international', (II) An unmissable exclusivity on the European end of the international states-system in which the political adjustments in the rest of the world are either completely ignored or are only taken into account if there is a direct relation to their Western counterparts. Thus the celebrated attempt to underscore 'inter-

societal' relations and to position them as a constitutive aspect of the 'international' system succeeds only to the extent that 'inter-societal' is understood as 'between European societies' and the 'international' devolves into 'intra-European relations' (Hobson, 2009: 674; 2011: 152). While recognising the pivotal restructuring of sovereignty in capitalist formations as the separation of political and economic spheres, none of these accounts substantially examine the differentiated and/or preserved forms of absolutist or the so-called parcellised forms of sovereignty in coeval non-capitalist societies. A direct consequence of this unipolarity is the elevation of a strictly regional phenomenon (restructuring of European sovereignty with the emergence of capitalist social forces and the consequent alteration of the wider European states-system) to a general theory of capitalist state and international states-system. Formulation of such a theory, inadvertently or not, suggests a particularly universalised accommodation of and transition to a political structure marked by capitalist sovereignty. The rise of the modern European state, with its path dependent social transformation, effortlessly becomes the foundation of a European states-system composed of more or less similarly structured former absolutist states which had remodeled themselves through bourgeois revolutions, political revolutions from above or simply through the collapse of the former social order from within. This Eurocentric international theory, however, does not, and more importantly *cannot*, account for the variegated trajectories of state formation outside Europe as they neither conform to the predefined paths of social and political reorganisation nor are deemed part of the 'international' system from which the general theory emerges. By the same token, it does not recognise the role of non-European states in the constitution of the European states-system, let alone their constant interaction in the composition of an international political multiplicity.

Within the boundaries of Marxist IHS, a non-Eurocentric reconfiguration can be undertaken with a view to conceptualising the *longue durée* of the development of capitalism



and modern states-system as an instance of ‘connected histories’, the nature of which can be unearthed ‘not by comparison alone, but by seeking out the at times fragile threads that connected the globe’ (Subrahmanyam, 1997: 761–762). In this case, these ‘fragile threads’ reveal themselves as social relations that spanned across the world, bridged different spatial scales from local to global, and most importantly encompassed a high degree of corresponding influence between and synchronicity in the ‘West’ and the ‘rest’. Instead of resorting to completely new methodological frameworks to overcome the inherent questions of Eurocentrism and provincialism, I maintain that a re-reading of Marx’s writings on both the development of capitalism in Western Europe and non-Western societies could provisionally provide a way out of the ‘Eurocentric cul-de-sac’ which continues to dominate the conceptual discussions in the literature (Hobson, 2011: 148). It could do so by following the ‘spirit of Marx’ (Dussel, 2001: 14) in advancing a universal (but not homogenising) historical-theoretical framework which remains attentive to different social, political and economic conditions constituted along the axis of varying temporal and spatial configurations. This endeavour, however, should not be undertaken in isolation, but requires substantial engagement with the growing global history and postcolonial literatures. Most importantly, it necessitates a genuine effort to enter a dialogue with the peripheral voices and histories, not so much as to ‘fit’ their realities into pre-ordained frameworks but to understand and position them as parts of a truly ‘international’ system in which they operate.

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