Quo Vadis, Historical International Relations? Geopolitical Marxism and the Promise of Radical Historicism

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ABSTRACT

John Maclean's 1988 call "Marxism and IR: A Strange Case of Mutual Neglect" has generated a rich bounty of Marxist studies and paradigms in International Relations (IR). This cross-pollination merged in the 1990s with the "historical turn" and shaped the sub-fields of International Historical Sociology and International Political Economy. But has it left its mark on how IR is practised today? We argue that while Marxism has spoken significantly to the discipline, mainstream IR, even Historical IR, has been largely impervious to Marxist arguments, drawing the standard charge of economism and structuralism. Rectifying these critiques, we suggest that conventional historical studies of "the international" remain methodologically and substantively impoverished. We exemplify this by showing how leading Historical IR studies of "systems change" fail to explain the inside/outside and public/private differentiations constitutive of the modern international order and to integrate the "levels of analysis" they presuppose. We further argue that this rejection has been facilitated by influential Marxist IR paradigms, which ultimately privilege structuralism over historicism: While Neo-Gramscians initially mobilised "historicism" to dissolve claims about the "sameness" of international relations across time and space, the approach became identified with the reified master-category of "hegemony". Uneven and Combined Development, in turn, has gravitated towards matching Neo-realism's claim to theoretical universality by insisting on transhistorical model-building and nomological "grand theory". Both approaches remain over-sociologised and fail to address international politics. Drawing on radically historicist Political Marxism, this article shows how its substantive socio-political premises explain the historical formation of the contemporary international order and re-unite the "levels of analysis" theoretically to provide a framework for non-reductionist and non-economistic accounts of historical international relations. This requires an answer to the agentic challenge of Neo-Classical Realism by reincorporating grand strategy, diplomacy, and international politics into a reformulated perspective of Geopolitical Marxism to track the full historicity of the making of international orders.

Keywords: Agency, geopolicy, historical sociology of international politics, method, historicity

Introduction: The Initial Wager

Concluding *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, Andrew Linklater (1990) ventured a prediction that proved to be both right and wrong. Considering the intersection between Marxism and Historical Sociology, it seemed "impossible to assume that the reconstruction of historical materialism can develop an effective alternative to realism" (Linklater 1990: 168). Acknowledging the Realist critique of Marxism theoretically derived from the effects of systematic anarchy, historical sociology had already accepted a Realist framing of "the international" as a sphere of conflict and strategic interaction to expose historical materialism's silence on inter-state relations and war. If modernity was defined by the twin-differentiation of social life into domestic-international and public-private, Marxism's inability to construct a theoretical account of the historical constitution and operation of "the international" would seriously harm the pedigree of historical materialism as a framework for explaining the *totality* of the historical constituents of modernity. Foreshadowing the historical turn of the discipline, Linklater (1990: 120, 142) also concluded that a general theoretical explanation of the history of states and the inter-state system did not exist. Marxism needed to be complemented by Realism if critical theory was to develop a general historical analysis of the inter-state system. Reflecting on the very same problem a few years earlier, John Maclean (1988: 299) drew a more optimistic conclusion, arguing for the incorporation of both Marx's historicist social-relational method into International Relations (IR) and the "international dimensions of social relations" into Marxism. According to him, the centrality Marx placed on the historicity of social relations and the relations between social phenomena and wider totalities was superior to the empiricist and ahistorical framework dominating IR. Judged by its self-understanding, Marxism seemed promising as the basis of a historical theory of geopolitical orders.

How, then, was Linklater both right and wrong? He was wrong because Maclean's call was heeded within fifteen years. By the early 2000s, Marxists of different persuasions had staged systematic critiques of major IR paradigms, reconstructing historical materialism as *the* alternative to Realist(-inspired) theorisation of the history of "the international". However, Linklater was also right. Historical IR and Historical Sociology followed his prediction, dismissing Marxist analyses of phenomena Linklater classified as exterior to their explanatory remit: state-formation, strategic interaction, war, and foreign policy. Historical IR remained impervious to conceptualising these as *historical* and *social-relational*, class-bound phenomena. Maclean's call – the incorporation of Marx's historicist and social-relational method into the study of international relations – hit the buffers even within IR's historicist variety.

Our argument proceeds in three main steps. First, while Maclean's call has been answered in the past decades, we contend that the Marxist IR literature, exemplified by Neo-Gramscian IR and Uneven and Combined Development (UCD), has relapsed into the opposite of a firm commitment to "historicism", debilitating Marxism to fully meet the Historical IR agenda and to incorporate the sphere of grand strategy and international politics into its explanatory remit. Inversely, we suggest that while Marxist IR contributions are now routinely acknowledged in leading IR textbooks, Marxism co-exists with mainstream IR approaches in a relation of *repressed tolerance*, rather than a judicious conversation of its merits and demerits. Second, we showcase this absence of intellectual engagement through a brief critical overview of some

leading Historical IR publications, concluding that because major non-Marxist IR scholars have failed to dialogue seriously with Marxist IR, the field is poorer both theoretically and historically. In a third step, we lay out the basic parameters of Political Marxism in IR and suggest that its commitment to a radical historicism requires its extension to Geopolitical Marxism to capture the spheres of foreign policy, grand strategy, diplomacy, and international politics in sociologically non-functionalist and methodologically controlled ways. We argue that only this final step will ultimately wrest the sphere of international politics from the disciplinary stranglehold of the Realist tradition in IR and in Neo-Weberian Historical Sociology.

IR and Marxism: The Stubborn Problem of "Historicity" and a Case of Repressed Tolerance

Historicism versus Structuralism

It is now widely accepted that Marxist IR Theory – World-System Analysis, Neo-Gramscianism, Open Marxism, Neo-Leninism, Political Marxism and UCD – has found a place, if minoritarian, in the field of IR. The unifying move within the diversity of these approaches lies in the premise to anchor explanations of international relations in the sociological sphere, whether in different modes of production, capitalist stages, the international division of labour and labour regimes, regimes of accumulation, social property relations/class relations, or a wider notion of uneven development. However, the theoretical parameters are predominantly set so that "secondary" IR phenomena – state formation, the state, war and conquest, foreign policy and international politics – are either derived from or collapsed back into antecedent sociological conditions or causes. This tendency generates general model-building and grand theory, elevating "general abstractions" to the level of theory, while shoehorning historical data into stable and pre-conceived conceptual premises.[1] We contend that these paradigms face problems to meet Maclean's criteria. The prevalence of sociological abstractionism and structuralism trumps meticulous historical research that may disconfirm axiomatic premises. It tends towards ahistoricism: Clio's cage! Historicism, which we define as a sensibility toward situated and conflictual agential innovations, unexpected outcomes, and the possibility of indeterminacy in the making of history, i.e., a focus on specificity (cf. Knafo and Teschke 2021a, b) is often denied. History is treated more as an under-labourer of theory. Therefore, these accounts have not been able to transcend the so-called "levels-of-analysis problem" (cf. Waltz 1959) or to unite the social totality historicistically, as international politics has either been omitted or subsumed under sociological explanations.[2] When deriving effects from, say, the capital relation, the multiple and diverse formations of grand strategy and their contested

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1   One significant exception is Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaf's (2012) work that centres the construction of US foreign policy without, however, taking the additional step of moving from Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to international politics – the encounter between multiple foreign policies – to conceptualise how domestically generated foreign policies are deflected and altered in the international sphere.

2   Our conception of uniting these so-called levels is thus compatible with calls to abandon mainstream IR's asocial and reified "international" as a distinct "level" of reality, made for example by Jonathan Joseph (2010: 63–64), even though we retain the conventional IR idiom here for reasons of clarity.

international negotiations are either folded back into the analysis or are simply surplus to requirement. The transformation of geopolitical orders – "systems change" in IR lingo – and processes of world-ordering have been less studied than derived from the functionalist requirements of capitalist reproduction. Major international peace settlements – Westphalia 1648, Utrecht 1713, Paris and Hubertusburg 1763, Vienna 1815, Berlin 1885, Versailles 1919 – that reconfigure international order and political geography and establish new principles for international conduct (international regimes) are empirically acknowledged but remain theoretically undigested. We substantiate these claims by turning to two Marxist IR literatures, Robert Cox's work and UCD. Cox is indicative of this central problem due to his explicit advocacy of historicism in theory and underlying ahistoricism in practice. UCD's commitment to universal theory, in turn, suggests an in-built ahistoricism, even when history is mobilised to substantiate its premises.

Cox's initial understanding of historicity, informed by Antonio Gramsci and Giambattista Vico, suggested that historically developed concepts should be "loose and elastic", achieving precision and attaining their meaning in close contact with concrete circumstances: critical theory concepts are forged and become intelligible – achieve specificity - through their historical concretisations, in contrast to the abstract and "timeless set of categories and concepts" typical of structuralism (Cox 1996 [1983]: 125).[3] Universalising concept-stretching, generating a lexicon of timeless and thus anachronistic IR concepts, is the opposite of historicisation. The "historicity of concepts" also implies that the central relations they refer to, such as the "state system", may change historically[4] (Cox 1981: 102). Theory should be based "on changing practice and empirical-historical study", not on aprioristic assumptions: when "reality changes, old concepts have to be adjusted or rejected and new concepts forged in an initial dialogue between" the world and the theorist (Cox 1981: 87). Cox's (1981: 93) mobilisation of Vico's historicism affirms that humans and their institutions are not fixed substances, for even if they are "only" reproduced they are continually re-created anew as this process is constituted by changing social relations. Knowledge produced in and for a particular historical context should not be mechanically universalised (Cox 1981: 94).

However, these powerful historicist commitments relapse into abstractionism and structuralism during the actual analysis of 19th and 20th Century international history. Hegemony, Neo-Gramscians' master category, reifies into a static category that guides Cox's analysis more than history guides the theorisation or disconfirmation of hegemony. Hannes Lacher and Julian Germann (2012) demonstrated this problem persuasively, concluding that hegemony is too abstract and general a concept to work as a method of historicisation, as it draws the analysis to surface similarities between two historically specific and structurally different cases, the British and the US. Both are conflated as lead-states in hegemonic world ordering, even though only the latter matches the criteria of hegemony. A sensitivity to the historicity of the social relationships and strategic agency of world ordering projects is

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3   Cox (1996, 141en3) identifies the Gramscian position with E.P. Thompson against Althusserian structuralism.

4   Contrary to World-Systems Analysis, state forms cannot be endlessly derived from their positions within a reified world-system (Cox 1981: 86–87).

missing. In the British case, now widely acknowledged, there was no domestic hegemony of industrial capitalists and even less so on the continent, even if *capitalism* had become hegemonic in the former by mid-century. Because Cox's narrative *assumes* capitalist hegemony on the continent, he cannot account for the fact that no internationalisation of the British state/society complex is identifiable, either through British agency, such as support or force, or through continental emulation. International liberalisation rested on the agency of non-capitalist social classes in the drawn-out continental transitions to capitalism. In fact, British foreign policy at the 1815 Congress of Vienna sponsored a 19th Century international order that was restorative and legitimist, rather than proactively promoting liberalism, capitalism, constitutionalism, or nationalism. From a historicist perspective, there is little active hegemonic agency in the making of world orders, only the passive acting out of a script, the super-imposition of theory onto the historical record, and little historical *study* of the constituents of hegemony domestically and internationally. Cox, in the end, commits to an "over-sociologisation" of world orders: social orders of the leading state "writ large" (Lacher and Germann 2012: 120). This omits international *politics* and concrete, dynamic relationships between classes and state managers for a historicisation of international transformations.

Similar problems prevail in the UCD literature. UCD is conceived as the most general law of world history, developed as a "general abstraction" (Rosenberg 2006). It proceeds from the aprioristic idea of the multiplicity of co-existing polities – "the international" – whose uneven trajectories of development lead to international interactions that reinforce, rather than even out, their individual patterns of development, captured in the notion of "combined development". More concretely, UCD suggests that advanced states lash the "whip of external necessity" on "backward" polities, which enjoy a "privilege of backwardness". This allows them to adopt the most cutting-edge technologies, institutions, and material practices "pioneered" by the leading states of the international system. Backward polities engage in compressed processes of combined development that generate "catch-up" and "the skipping of stages". Yet, this "universal law" runs into intractable problems when confronted with the world historical record. If this law first appears as a nomological "covering law", it remains indeterminate and agnostic as to how its mechanisms translate into a privilege or disadvantage of backwardness, since this is dependent on state strategies and the degrees of resistance or acceptance by political elites and social classes. The effect of more advanced polities on more backward regions could invite "catch-up", but the result could equally be multiple instances of de-development, non-development, and under-development – as Immanuel Wallerstein (e.g. 1974) and Robert Brenner (e.g. 1985) showed in detail. UCD struggles with the familiar conundrum of how a nomothetic, structuralist, and non-agentic conception of theory, charged with notions of "autopoiesis" and teleological progress, accommodates human agency, historical specificities, and historical open-endedness (Teschke 2014; Rioux 2015). A law is only a law, logic dictates, if it has identical effects across different historical cases. If the law holds, agents need to be conceived by default as passive bearers of a pre-ordained metaphysical script – as personifications of categories. If effects differ depending on human agency and historicity, and especially if this indeterminacy is coded into the theory through a more active

conception of agency, then its law-like status needs to be relaxed and withdrawn (Anievas and Nisancioglu 2015).[5] Alternatively, ad hoc injections of auxiliary hypotheses operating below the 'general abstraction' proliferate. In any case, the ex-post and largely rhetorical addition of agency into a hyper-structuralist causative general theory – a *passe-partout* for world history – does not convince and betrays its deeply anti-historicist premises. This is particularly apparent for an IR audience, because what seems to inter-act internationally are primarily differentially developed sociological "vectors". In effect, UCD suggests a theory of international relations without international politics.

Repressed Tolerance

Notwithstanding our critiques, Marxists have provided the most substantial challenge against conventional IR. How was this renaissance received by the mainstream of the discipline? Contrary to Maclean's expectations of a productive *rapprochement*, IR has sanitised and quarantined Marxism in the form of *repressed tolerance*. While occasionally integrated into IR textbooks, its theoretical critiques of mainstream IR or substantial arguments and findings are rarely judiciously engaged with by non-Marxists, leaving the field compartmentalised into co-existing campfires. Contributions to a recent handbook of Historical IR lament Realism's continued dominance in the study of state-formation and war (de Carvalho and Leira 2021; Bartelson 2021) – much like Linklater predicted. Norms, ideas, and culture are privileged by Constructivism, the English School, and Liberalism – institutionalist and ideational – without situating norm-production within the broader confines of socio-economic and political history (Osiander 1994; Schroeder 1994; Reus-Smit 1999; Ikenberry 2001; Clark 2011; Bell 2016; Brock and Simon 2021) as relevant contexts, which intellectuals, strategists and other agents addressed to resolve the material international problems of their times (cf. Wood 2008). Instead of substantive and historically specific social theories, Historical IR still relies on formalistic and un-substantive ones (cf. Rosenberg 1994: 46–48). If Historical IR reaches out to sociology, the social remains extremely thin (cf. Bruneau 2021) and the theory abstract. For instance, the recent incorporation of relational-processual theory into IR (Jackson and Nexon 2019), Maclean's second reason for engaging Marxism, has proceeded in de-sociologised terms without considering IR Marxism's merits and demerits. Even if competing IR approaches were to remain unconvinced by Marxist scholarship, a judicious engagement with and careful refutation of its arguments and theoretical innovations constitutes the minimum requirement for serious intellectual debate. Yet, Marxist IR is politely acknowledged, and then forgotten! While other un-orthodox paradigms remain equally marginalised in the discipline, we suggest that precisely the elements Maclean privileged, historicism and social-relational theory, remain productive for the theoretical unification of the "levels of analysis" in Historical IR and for tracking the making and un-making of geopolitical orders.

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5   The attempt to remedy UCD's congenital error by injecting a more 'processual-relational' perspective runs into aporias, as UCD sinks to a 'methodological fix' of no apparent standing. See Teschke (2022, 2023).

Historicising Geopolitical Transformations

Three significant accounts of "international" transformations reveal the problem. Daniel H. Nexon (2009), Andrew Phillips (2011) and Barry Buzan and George Lawson (2015) seek to historicise "international" orders' transformations, focusing on early modern Europe and the 19th Century. Nexon's approach, "relational institutionalism", invokes the general framework of institutional networks of "composite states" to analyse the early modern state-form. Dynastic-absolutist states are regarded as a sub-type of composite states. Notwithstanding the critiques of realist, constructivist and liberal accounts of the early modern transformation, Nexon suggests that "relational institutionalism" unifies these paradigms in his reconstruction of "international" change. The central puzzle is why and how the Reformations occasioned a serious geopolitical crisis, intense conflicts and the early-modern international transformation from "dynastic-agglomerative" to "sovereign-territorial" state-formation. While identifying central properties of the dynastic-absolutist state – personalised rule, the instability of political communities defined by overlapping rights and hierarchies, non-uniform territoriality, and heterogeneous populations "united" by dynastic agglomeration – these typological features remain divorced from absolutism's social relations and class conflicts. The occasional attempt to explain dynasticism's personalised political power and indirect rule relies on *ad hoc* references to undeveloped governmental technologies or on quasi-cost-benefit calculations. For Nexon, composite states' indirect political rule implies that local elites are executing resource extraction while renegotiating these privileges with the centre, resulting in the classic principal-agent problem, inefficiencies, and conflict. Since the conflicts pervading these networks are not explained sociologically – how is the personalised power of dynastic rulers related to the form of taxation over what kind of tax-basis? – the explanation of intra-elite conflict over resource-extraction remains historically non-specific and abstract. Similarly, developments in military technology are collapsed back into geopolitical competition, invoking Realism, without providing a social-relational theory of the early modern permanent war-state. The "military revolution", the rise of the "permanent war-state", and the bellicosity of the early modern period are contracted out to Realism or Tilly's geopolitical-competition-model (Teschke 2003). The Reformations then simply amplified the contestations and conflicts of composite polities, facilitating the unification of peripheries against centres. Religious heterodoxy undermined the major dynastic legitimation strategy, "shared" religious identity, contributed a new register for resistance, and intensified the "internationalisation" of "domestic" disputes based on diverging confessional identities. Ultimately, the consolidation of Protestantism in different European regions stopped the agglomeration of differently confessionalised territories, exhausting the "dynastic-agglomerative" in favour of the "sovereign-territorial" state-formation path – a process that outlasted "Westphalia" but whose termination is not further specified.

Phillips's (2011) account presents a Constructivist-Realist hybrid framed as a "general account" of the "common logic of international systems change". International orders are primarily constituted by inter-subjective norms and values from which "fundamental" international institutions like the configuration of power and "authoritative practices of legitimate violence" derive. In addition, an "order-enabling material context" including the prevailing productive and violent capacities and the level of "systemic interdependence"

support this normative primacy. Since the emergence of hierarchical political and international orders is framed as a Hobbesian quest for individual "security", an exposition of social power relations in the constitution of polities, forms of sovereignty and international orders falls by the wayside. While some traits of the European feudal-absolutist order are routinely invoked and additively listed – poverty, technological non-development, aristocratic oligopoly of the means of violence – their interrelations remain un-theorised. If norms are the primary lenses through which to interpret the constitution and transformation of such order, it remains opaque who consents or dissents to what kind of social, political, and international relations. Phillips ultimately relies on a heavily criticised transactional model of unequal power relations (North and Thomas 1971; early critique is Fenoaltea 1975). Transformations begin when an order's legitimating claim to provide meaning-based ("ontological") and physical security contrasts too sharply with reality. This contradiction often results from a change in the material context, altering inter-subjective social imaginaries through ideological shocks which sharpen ideological polarisation, breaking the fundamental values consensuses of international orders (Phillips 2011: 46–48). Phillips restricts such norm-contestation in political thought to an elitist and ideationalist sphere, which leaves non-elite subjects theoretically extraneous. The consequences are absolute enmity, chaos, and, subsequently, the building of a new order. The Realist framing of conflict – territorial contiguity and abstract power-hunger of elites, plus a techno-deterministic account of military technology – separates the "material context" into two: a non-developing productive sector and a developing military sector. The second becomes synonymous with "material" as the sphere of production drops from the narrative. Consequently, Phillips's disregard of social relations comes back to haunt him: an abstract notion of political conflict makes the "military revolution" a non-theorised *deus ex machina*.

Buzan and Lawson (2015) situate their account theoretically by drawing on the English School and UCD, arguing for "the long 19th Century" (1776–1914) within which the modern international order consolidated. The transformation was caused by uneven and combined development, accepted as a trans-historically operating law, that produced three interlocking developments in "the West": industrialisation, "rational state formation", plus the emergence of "ideologies of progress", including liberalism, socialism, nationalism and "scientific racism". Modernity is thus both caused by and results in further global uneven and combined development. The uneven diffusion of these three constituents of modernity converged in making the contemporary highly unequal, ossified, and globally interdependent world order: those states able to harness the drivers of modernity developed into the current core of the world order, while those states unable or impeded from mobilising them, for example through imperialism, did not. Rational state-building – the conjunction of nationalism, bureaucratisation, and de-personalisation of the modern state - as opposed to earlier, personal forms of rule is tied to industrialisation. Yet, a proper historicisation of the relation between the rise of capitalism, industrialisation and modern state-formation, both in Britain and across other historical cases, is missing. Broad arguments about their necessary conjunction replace meticulous historical research (Žmolek 2013). The possibility that 19th Century continental industrialisations materialised in non-capitalist contexts without necessarily producing the modern, rational state-form in responses to British agency is not considered. Buzan and Lawson's narrative

account fails to grasp these specificities because industrialisation and capitalism are often equated, while the former is treated with specific social relations *in absentia*. Furthermore, as theorisation does not flow from these, the state appears abstracted from social relations. Consequently, the ideationally framed change from personalised to popular sovereignty is not explained, only asserted.

While unconvincing, these accounts further contribute towards disabusing the discipline from IR's facile transhistorical assumptions and stylised accounts of "systems change", providing insights which problematise and deepen our understanding of the complexities involved in thinking through the formation of the modern inter-state system. While the encounter between IR and History remains a pressing one, we also argue that IR is theoretically pre-configured into a multiplicity of competing approaches that unilaterally privilege one dimension of reality – "levels of analysis" or spheres of determination – as entry-points for historical interpretations, which are subsequently widened, due to their inherent one-dimensionalities, to the eclectic concoction of multiple 'isms' to provide richer accounts of history. The field of IR provides a false entry-point into the problem of historicisation. The *a priori* acceptance of both, the relative validity of each IR-ism that corresponds to and captures reified spheres of determination – power/state, economy/market, norms and morals, military/technology, inside/outside – and the subsequent weighting of one over the other, or their happy co-marriage, operates on a macro-historical register that runs directly counter to the demands of historicism. Instead of using historicisation as a research method to test, alter or disconfirm entry assumptions and to generate unexpected findings, history is used – pace Buzan and Lawson – as a "data set" that can be raided selectively to corroborate pre-existing theories. Ultimately, history is absorbed and stylised into hybridised "IR-isms", instead of mobilising history to refute and dispense with these higher-order paradigms and macro-theories that populate the IR imagination. Linklater's expectation of "adding on" Realism or other Isms to Historical Sociology, whether Marxist or not, seems to be the prevailing *modus operandi*.

More concretely, these accounts fail to socially decipher the early-modern state form. We need an explanation, rather than a description of, the social nature of early modern sovereignty. The abstract-level discussion fails to explain the forms of territoriality of feudal and absolutist polities, the dynamics of conflict, and the drivers of expansion, resulting in a relapse into Realism, whether partial or complete. The key questions regarding the formation of the modern inter-state order – the inside-outside and public-private or political-economic differentiations – remain un-addressed because this depends on understanding the diverging trajectories in the sociological underpinnings of polity-forms. Instead, the accounts showcase the familiar and under-problematised assumption that "Europe" is composed of (near-)homogeneous units, extrapolating from the formal properties of one or two cases. This procedure fails to capture the real divergence of polity-forms – on the continent, in its peripheries, and maritime offshoots. Historically, it was these multiple socio-political trajectories, institutionalised as specific state-forms, that were interacting at the level of geopolitics through geopolicy: not the unevenly developing "international", but rather the spatio-temporally specific making of international orders. The central point that any account of geopolitical transformations needs to establish is that Europe did not march in lockstep through successive historical phases. There was no "system-wide" transition, which even Buzan and Lawson (2015: 22, 130)

suggest, positing a pan-European/global "agrarian empire" homogeneity lasting until the 19th Century in contravention of their process-oriented and UCD-based theoretical framework. The political science concept of "system" (e.g. Easton 1965) should in fact be dropped due to its strong autopoietic tendencies, flattening different regime-types based on different political economies, institutionalised in hundreds of diverse polities. As we know, the map of the 17th- and 18th-Century European pluriverse suggests remnants of city-states and the Hanseatic League, oligarchic merchant republics, episcopal lordships, Absolutisms with their differently institutionalised personal sovereignties, the Confederation of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, and a developing capitalist, impersonal sovereignty: England. These multi-form polities were organised in hierarchical relations. Mere attention to confessionalisation, à la Nexon and Phillips, cannot account for territorialisation of state-formation. Powerful multi-confessional, polyglot composite polities based on dynastic accumulation, like the Austro-Hungarian (Wheatley 2023) and Russian Empires, existed well into the 20th Century, while dynastic unions continued into the 19th Century. The partitions of Poland in the late 18th Century and the 1809 Russian annexation of Swedish Österland (modern-day Finland) demonstrate that diverging confessionalisations were a sidenote for Westphalian dynastic geopolitics.

Political Marxism and the Historicity of Geopolitical Orders and "Geopolitics"

Above critiques are grounded in Political Marxism (Wood 1981; Brenner 1985; Comninel 1987; Teschke 2003; Lacher 2006). We reconstruct in this section the essential argument about 1) the historicity and specificity of concepts across diverse geopolitical orders, anchored in politically-constituted social property relations, 2) show how diverging Anglo-French/ Continental trajectories of socio-political development in early modern Europe are related to the rise of capitalism in England and the persistence of pre-capitalist social relations in Old Regime France, 3) and trace how continental Old Regime Europe experienced a growing differentiation between the "domestic" and "the international" – the creation of a pluriverse – without undergoing a separation between the state and the economy, constituting the Westphalian order. In the final section, we will show how this very separation between state and economy in early 18th Century England conditioned Britain's role as the offshore balancer of the territorially preconfigured pre-capitalist inter-dynastic order of Old Regime Europe. However, disagreeing with claims about British hegemony over the absolutist continent, Britain used its primacy to geopolitically manage and restore "old Europe" – both at the 1713 Peace of Utrecht and the 1815 Treaty of Vienna – for national security reasons, rather than to promote its transformation socio-politically and economically, as Neo-Gramscians and UCD suggest. This move from "geopolitics" to "geopolicy" will reflect on the limits of Political Marxism in IR, suggesting that a full turn towards 'radical historicism' needs to take the additional step of moving beyond deriving the form of geopolitics from property relations to the active reconstruction of grand strategy and international politics by situated actors: Geopolitical Marxism. We conclude by suggesting how this de-reification of geopolitics requires a historicist method of analysis that connects contested social property relations with

institution-building and, ultimately, the situated agency of foreign policy actors, which develop and enact world-ordering strategies in contested geopolitical contexts.

Feudal Geopolitics

There is still a widely held assumption in IR that any particular moment in world history can be read in terms of the variable configuration and interaction between universalised "levels of analysis" – the market/economy, the state/political, the domestic/internal, war/international relations. This assigns an unfounded *a priori* existence and autonomy to these phenomena and ascribes a timelessness to an analytical vocabulary that is abstracted from a specific historical context (say, "European modernity") and projected back onto history at large, generating conceptual anachronisms (see esp. Polanyi 1957; Brunner 1992). Such conceptual retrofitting – tempofetishism in contemporary parlance – disables historical understanding.

Medievalists (Mitteis 1975; Brunner 1992) and Marxists (Anderson 1974; Wood 1981) have insisted on the essential unity of the economic and political in pre-capitalist times, especially during the period of feudalism. Central to this conceptual recasting is the focus on relations of domination in medieval Europe, institutionalised in the lordship – a unit of authority and exploitation – held as conditional property from an overlord in return for military assistance and advice. These scalar relations of lordship were tied into multiple vassalic and pyramidal chains of obligation (but not full sub-ordination) to overlords, routinely kings. Since none of these lordships enjoyed a public monopoly in the means of violence, political authority was dispersed and overlapping, unlike the bounded, unified and exclusive authority claimed by modern sovereign states. This oligopolistic dispersal of the means of coercion was tied, as Robert Brenner (1985) argued, to direct peasant possession of their means of reproduction, primarily land. Peasants thus found themselves under no obligation to market surpluses or sell their labour-power. The process of surplus extraction was thus essentially based on Marx's notion of "extra-economic compulsion". This shifts the focus towards the historical and geographical specificity of social property relations – the configuration between power and property – and the social conflicts over the modalities of vertical surplus transfer (dues, rents and taxes) at the centre of different trajectories of 'state' development in late medieval and early modern Europe. But this process of vertical political appropriation – what Brenner called "political accumulation" – between lords and peasants also internally divided the ruling class over property rights, the terms of appropriation and the distribution of surplus. It thereby drove equally horizontal inter-lordly competition to expand control over "land and people": geopolitical accumulation. Consequently, warfare and re-investment in the means of coercion were not a geopolitical imperative externalised to "anarchy" or "multiplicity", nor a mere cultural or ideational practice, but a normal ruling class strategy of expanded reproduction driven by the socio-political requirements of geopolitical accumulation, generating a "culture of conflict". Medieval polities were neither internally completely pacified and governed by an impersonal law, nor externally "anarchical" and governed by the balance of power. Consequently, just as the economic and the political were fused, so too were the "domestic" and "the international" non-differentiated. For the historicity of concepts, this entails the absence of categories like a public and impersonal state, public war and domestic peace, a private economy or generalised private property, fixed territoriality and borders, and the domestic/international binary. In their

stead, we have a theoretically controlled account of feudal monarchies grounded in vassalic chains, conditional property relations institutionalised in lordships, inter-lordly feuds, border zones and marches. The medieval world was *sui generis.*

Franco-British Divergence and Westphalian Geopolitics

If this medieval world was pre-international, the transition towards the inside/outside and public/private distinction in early modern Europe requires explanation of the diverging trajectories of socio-economic and political development in various European regions, exemplified here by what came to be understood as France and England (for other European regions, see Lafrance and Post 2019). Brenner (1985) suggested that the general crisis of the 14th Century was resolved differentially in various European regions through varying balances of class forces, resulting in a transition from feudalism to absolutism in France (and many other continental polities) and a transition from feudalism to agrarian capitalism in England.

In France, the outcome was the consolidation of petty peasant property, the relative decline of lords and their transformation into a venal and tax-exempted office nobility, while the powers of taxation – the main form of appropriation – were more centrally organised in the absolutist-dynastic state. The general crisis had accelerated the transformation of a feudal lord-peasant rent-regime into an absolutist king-peasant tax regime without transforming the social relations of expropriation in a capitalist direction (Lafrance 2018; Miller and Lafrance 2023). As a rule, growing royal income was not reinvested in the means of production, but spent primarily on military equipment, driving the "military revolution", and conspicuous courtly consumption, centralising political and intensifying geopolitical accumulation, if now in the form of absolutist sovereignty. The centralisation of sovereignty in the absolutist tax/office state did entail a sharper differentiation between inside and outside, as territoriality became more consolidated without entailing a separation of public and private realms, politics and economics, state and civil society (Sahlins 1991). Sovereignty was personalised by the king as his patrimonial property, codifying reason of state as *la raison des princes,* rather than establishing a de-personalised form of abstract-rational statehood.

This property/power regime governed "Westphalian" geopolitics. Since sovereignty was invested in ruling "houses" claiming divine sovereignty and legitimacy, foreign affairs were now governed by geopolitical accumulation through dynastic marriage policies, combining different lands into personal unions, and their flipside: near-permanent "wars of succession", reflecting the property conflicts amongst the European princely fraternity. Additionally, since trade was organised on pre-capitalist mercantilist principles, trade wars over exclusive trade routes organised through royal sales of monopoly charters to privileged merchant companies abounded. Both processes drove early modern colonialism and empire-building. Westphalia codified this new inter-dynastic state order, transcending papal claims to cosmopolitan rule and lordly claims to parcellised sovereignty. Still characterised by pre-modern forms of geopolitics, the "Westphalian System" became territorially a more sharply defined and ordered geopolitical pluriverse.

Diverging from continental affairs, the resolution of the general crisis of the 14th Century led in England to the removal of the customary peasant rights and their gradual eviction from

customary lands, while landlords consolidated and enclosed their holdings. These lands were leased out to large capitalist tenant farmers who started to engage in commercial farming by employing wage labour. While landlords lost direct, coercive control over the peasantry (peasant freedom), they gained full property rights over land: agrarian capitalism (Zmolek 2013; Dimmock 2014). Politically, the transformation of a militarised and decentralised lordly class into a demilitarised class of capitalist landlords provided the social base for the new constitutional monarchy. The self-organisation of these landlords – an entrepreneurial aristocracy – in Parliament meant the centralisation of sovereignty pooled in a state less involved in processes of political accumulation. After the revolutions of the 17th Century, in which agrarian private property owners consolidated their power over and against the monarchy, sovereignty was codified in the formula "King-in-Parliament". In a series of royal concessions – the 1689 Bill of Rights, the 1694 Triennial Act, and the 1701 Act of Settlement – Parliament secured essential control over taxation, the army, legislation, foreign policy and the right of self-convocation. Furthermore, the "financial revolution" combined a new system of taxation – national, uniform and effective – with a modern system of public credit (National Debt 1693, Bank of England 1694). Capitalism rose in conjunction with the first modern state. What are the implications of British uniqueness for 18th and 19th Century geopolitical order, both historically and theoretically?

Radical Historicism and the Promise of Geopolitical Marxism

If Political Marxism (PM) in IR, following Maclean's call for a historicist research practice privileging a "processual-relational" perspective, offered an account of the variability of geopolitical orders, the complex co-evolution of a territorial pluriverse in early modern Europe grounded in pre-capitalist personalised sovereignty, and the rise of capitalism and the first modern state in England within this pre-configured pluriverse, it faces however the same charge that we raised against extant Marxist IR accounts: a tendency to read "geopolitics" in structural-functionalist terms. Distinct forms and strategies of geopolitics are ultimately derived from specific sets of social property relations, rather than researched as agentic strategies by situated actors within specific contexts. In this final section, we set out more self-reflexively how PM in IR has moved towards Geopolitical Marxism by securing a methodologically less derivative notion of "geopolitics"[6]. We suggest replacing the last vestiges of structuralism through a dedicated approach to the construction of foreign policy that incorporates grand strategy making and international politics into Marxist IR to fully realise the promise of "radical historicism". Such a radically historicist Geopolitical Marxism is also able to respond to the challenge Postcolonial and Decolonial scholars have mounted against Marxism's ability to fully comprehend modernity due to its colonial lineages and legacies. The methodological move to foreground history ontologically, to focus on the historical processes of the making of distinct agents allows for the transcending of Eurocentrism (Salgado 2021) and the theorisation of the historically specific forms of colonial/imperialist strategies in a non-structuralist register, as Samuel Parris and Armando van Rankin Anaya (2024), and Jack Edwards (2024) show in this issue.

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6   The operative category of "geopolitics" is often reduced within the Realist tradition, but especially within the interwar tradition of *Geopolitik*, to a quasi-naturalised understanding of foreign and security policy determined by geographical position or geo-strategic location (Kennedy 1988: 86). For the interwar tradition, see Teschke (2006).

We direct attention to the notion of grand-strategy formation by engaging with the wider specialist-literature definition of grand strategy (Murray, Knox and Bernstein 1994; Balzacq and Krebs 2021). This suggests – different from foreign policy or simply geopolitics – the articulation not only of the essential long-term security interests and strategic war objectives of a polity, but combines the concern with how to win major wars with an emphasis on how to win the peace, implying that war-planning is intricately tied to ulterior considerations of a post-war settlement that provides international stability, consonant with the long-term security and prosperity considerations of victorious polities: geopolitical or world-ordering. In this sense, the final section lays out a method of analysis for Geopolitical Marxism to capture grand strategy making analytically and shows historically for the case of 18th Century Britain that capitalism is not only politically, but also geopolitically constituted. This, we argue, requires a turn to a Historical Sociology of International Politics.

But how should International Historical Sociology be reformulated to escape the structuralist-functionalist trap for purposes of framing our object of study – specific world-ordering strategies? Rather than externalising international politics from Historical IR, or deducing strategies and decisions from a series of antecedent causes, whether domestic (capitalism, hegemony, vectors of advanced development), international (the distribution of power, unevenness), or both, this shifts the explanatory burden away from external imperatives and domestic antecedent causes to the creative responses developed by agents to such contextual pressures, the inter-subjectively contested and negotiated resolution of these multiple agentic strategies, and their intended and unintended consequences. The key point is that theoretically derived *expectations* should not overwrite the historicist tracing of competing agencies (Knafo and Teschke 2021b).

Such a conception needs to register that power was by the early modern period articulated at the highest level of aggregation in the sovereign state, and projected abroad through statecraft, foreign policy, war, and diplomacy – geopolitics in the standard sense. For it is at this level that comparatively uneven domestic power resources are converted, through agents, into foreign policy and grand strategy among multiple polities. This is never a mechanistic process that can be directly inferred from the presence of capitalism or subsumed under a universal law or the master-category of hegemony, but an agentic process of historical construction at the level of high politics. It is at this level – the coercive and non-coercive clash and accommodation between plural foreign policy encounters – that differential class interests and power resources may or may not generate international conflicts, which are creatively and decisively resolved and politically settled through international politics with open-ended consequences. To comprehend various world-ordering strategies – articulated here with regards to the early modern British case – requires, in a first step, the explanation of variations in the domestic social relations of sovereignty (regime-type) among early modern polities, grounded in social property and authority relations. In a second step, we need a reconstruction of the different institutional contexts for foreign policy formation: the parliamentarisation of foreign policy in post-1688 England and the persistence of royal-executive foreign policy making in Old Regime polities through *Kabinettpolitik*. In a third step, it calls for the tracking of the making of statecraft, foreign policy and diplomacy in these dense institutional contexts,

succeeded, step four, by a reconstruction of foreign policy encounters in the sphere of international politics, which were settled and institutionalised in specific international regimes or world-ordering projects.

If the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) was the single most important event in the history of early modern geopolitical re-ordering, it also constituted the first international expression of Britain's rise to European and, later, global primacy, though not hegemony (Teschke 2019; 2021). While the codification of the balance of power was recognised in the Treaties for the first time, though curiously under-reported in IR (Sheehan 1996: 105), it was a new, decisive and uniquely British foreign policy technique, domestically debated and developed, articulated in the Bolingbroke Plan, and unilaterally imposed at Utrecht after the War of the Spanish Succession on Britain's former friends and foes alike through successful coercive diplomacy. Yet, the British-sponsored balance of power formed only one dimension of a much wider British grand strategy – the blue water policy – for the geopolitical management of Old Europe.

After the transition from dynasticism and the conception of foreign policy as part and parcel of the king's *arcana imperii* (the secrets of power) to the co-articulation of foreign policy by Parliament, party politics and social interests came to influence public policy, forming for the first time in history the "national interest". This implied the formation of *Realpolitik*, resting on a sober calculus of the secular interests of the "political nation", as opposed to the whims of dynastic interests. Blue-water policy represented the first conscious attempt to develop a secular, advantageous, and comprehensive strategy for rationalising geopolitical and geoeconomic space, transforming the political geography of the Continent to near-parity actors through the territorial trimming, promotion and demotion of various polities. It envisaged the "rationalisation" – de-ideologisation, de-dynastification, de-confessionalisation and de-territorialisation – of British coalition-building and ambitions on the Continent. It cleaved into two geographically distinct but joined-up aspects: defensive and concerned with security interests versus the continent to prevent the rise of any continental hegemonic state, prosecuted through power-balancing, and offensive and concerned with commercial colonialism overseas, prosecuted through an aggressive navalism. The British peace plan, elaborated, pursued, and successfully implemented at Utrecht constitutes a *sui generis* phenomenon – different from extant IR concepts, including automatic power-balancing, offshore balancing afforded by insularity, unipolarity, hegemony, international society, anarchy, imperialism, or collective security.

Henceforth, "perfidious Albion" became the offshore balancer of "Westphalian order" without actively transforming continental socio-economic or political relations, reserving military intervention as its *ultima ratio* for the prevention of threats to British primacy. This new national security strategy fortified British global primacy and was successfully re-negotiated and re-enacted after the conclusion of the Seven Year's War in the 1763 Peace of Paris and the Napoleonic Wars in the 1815 Vienna Congress. In each case, Britain, rather than actively seeking the internationalisation of its state/society complex or (unintentionally) promoting "development" through "catch-up", constructed and sanctioned post-war settlements that restored and balanced Old Regimes, while enjoying the benefits of "splendid isolation".

Conclusion

This article has problematised the encounter between IR and Marxism since Andrew Linklater and John Maclean's initial wager from the 1980s. While Marxism made a strong appearance in IR since their call for a mutual encounter, Linklater's expectation carried the day: mainstream IR, even as Historical IR, largely held on to paradigms external to Marxism, especially Realism, to populate the historical IR agenda, notably in large-scale and long-term historical explanations of the modern international order. In the best-case assessment, Historical IR embraced over time a happy theoretical pluralism, selectively opting in and out of Marxist contributions, without undergoing the demanding intellectual labour of engaging rigorously with the mutually incompatible theoretical premises of diverse paradigms. Overall, Marxist IR has been quarantined and sanitised, leading a charmed life of repressed tolerance.

Yet, the reasons for this state of affairs between IR and Marxism are not to be found one-sidedly in Historical IR's neglect of Marxist contributions, but also draw our attention back to the stubborn persistence of structuralism – quite contrary to Maclean's call for a historicist and social-relational perspective – in the Marxist canon, which has taken various forms, including a tendency towards general and universalised model-building at the highest levels of abstraction. Many have strayed off the course indicated by Maclean. This equally exposes Marxist IR's overreliance on sociology, even when reformulated as International Historical Sociology, which never captured persuasively Realism's jealously guarded sphere of explanation – the arbitrary decision by fiat regarding the autonomy of international politics as strategic statecraft – and its corresponding claim to theoretical and disciplinary uniqueness.

This structuralism-historicism and Sociology-Realism problem is however no stranger to how the Realist discourse in IR developed over the decades, as the parallels are quite striking. After the critique of Classical Realism by Structural Neorealism in the late 1970s, Neo-Classical Realism (e.g. Brawley 2009; Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009) also sought to rectify the abstract reifications of systemic IR theories, reinjecting a high dose of agency, specificity, and history into the anodyne premises of systemic Neorealism to capture specific events and outcomes. We have argued analogously that Marxist IR needs to move from the sociological explanation of fundamental geo-social transformations or "systems change" to the capture of international politics for the tracking of concrete world-ordering projects. Reformulating Political Marxism in IR into Geopolitical Marxism, this should begin with an analysis of the historically specific configuration between social and authority relations: the social relations of "sovereignty" within wider geopolitical contexts characterised by diverse forms of property relations and regime-types. A reconstruction of the institutional context of foreign policy making is the next appropriate step, followed by the tracking of foreign policy projects in specific institutional contexts. Lastly, this needs to be followed by a detailed historicist tracing of foreign policy and diplomatic encounters, particularly at major "high diplomacy summits" after general international crises that re-ordered the world: the contestations between, conflicts among and negotiation of differently based interests and policies in the sphere of international politics, codified in major international settlements that

reconfigured the principles, institutions, conventions and political geographies of distinct world orders. If nothing else, we hope that this article sparks a wider discussion with IR scholars, inviting non-Marxist IR to finally start taking Marxism seriously as a theoretical interlocutor.

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