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Geopolitics and Historical Materialism in International Relations

<https://www.e-ir.info/2010/08/27/how-can-geopolitics-and-its-recurring-themes-of-anarchy-and-the-balance-of-power-be-most-consistently-incorporated-theoretically-within-a-historical-materialist-analysis-of-international-relations/>

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How can geopolitics and its recurring themes of anarchy and the balance of power be most consistently incorporated theoretically within a historical materialist analysis of international relations?

“The living Karl Marx”, a critic writes “was a dismal failure...The working class of England, where he lived in exile, paid him little heed and soon forgot him. Engels prepared a flattering eulogy for his burial, but only nine persons were there to hear it.” (Wesson 1976: 3) A century later and Marxism, liberated since the downfall of its purported political exponent in the Soviet Union, is confidently on the front foot in Western social science (Teschke, 2008: 163). How has its belated revival structured its relationship with international relations (IR)? It is worth noting prior to anything else that Marxism has not, since its original formulation, considered IR and its concepts worthy as an object of study in its own right. This owes much to the Marx that authored *The Communist Manifesto* (1930), in which he boldly predicted that the capitalist mode of production would replace all previous ones as a result of its abstractly identified expansionist tendencies (Marx and Engels, 1930: 31). A crucial corollary of the original formulation was that states entered as predominantly epiphenomenal actors, destined to become irrelevant with the spread of the capitalist mode (Marx and Engels, 1930: 50). But it did not spread, at least in the form that Marx predicted. On the contrary, in Russia, Trotsky observed, serfdom was actually *strengthened* under pressure from capitalist development elsewhere (Trotsky, 1932: 25). And, perhaps as a consequence, the state continues.[1] Thus, one need not search the literature for long before finding that the relationship between classical Marxism and IR, a discipline that valorises the state as its primary actor, is anything but rosy. This is captured most famously by Martin Wight (1960: 41) who, in assessing the Marxist tradition in his foundational text on the lack of IR theory, categorised Marxism as a domestic theory with little to offer international theory. Wight claims IR to be a discourse that has as its unfortunate empirical referent “the same old melodrama” of international life and hence one that is not suited to a “progressivist interpretation” (Wight, 1960: 43; 42). In condemning Marxism for not having an international theory, however, Wight forgot that due to the contemporary foundation of the discipline no scholar prior to 1919 really focused explicitly on ‘international relations’ (MacLean, 1988: 297). Still, the fact remains that Marx did not deal explicitly with the problematics we today recognise as international in nature and, from what we know, did not regard the state as having primary importance in itself.[2] Therefore, over 150 years after the publication of his major treatises, there is a sense that Marx’s project needs to be revised to account for this world of states.

Therefore the pressing question is this: can Marxism account for the persistence of geopolitics and its recurring themes? The stakes are high for Marxism. It could be strongly argued that if Marxism cannot integrate the concepts of anarchy, arguably “the central fact of international life” (Bull, 1966: 35) and the balance of power, described as *the* “distinctively political theory of international politics” (Waltz, 1979: 117) then it fails to offer anything substantive to the discipline. However, if possible, it will demonstrate Marxism’s explanatory cogency and offer a richer interpretation IR than the circumscribed and reifying analyses of realism.[3]

The central thesis of this paper is that the most consistent way of incorporating the concept of anarchy, the balance of power and geopolitics generally within a historical materialist framework is to liberate them from realist fetishisation. Furthermore it is most consistent with historical materialism to confront realist concepts and

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demonstrate their social content rather than denying their causal significance or repeating the fetish in a modified form whilst empowering social agents to change history.

In order to argue this proposition the essay will develop in five parts.

The first section will tackle the question of this paper head on in a brief history of realist discourse: from classical realism to its neo-realist variant. It will be argued that there is much continuity between Morgenthau and Waltz. *Allinson and Anievas (2010) will enter the argument at this stage in order to demonstrate the substantive difference in dealing with abstractions between realist and historical materialist authors.* This will provide the reader with an initial introduction regarding how a historical materialist approach should interpret realist themes.

The second section will then survey the crucial elements of a historical materialist analysis. Whilst not wishing to dilute the overall importance of Marx's method only the parts considered crucial for this essay are included. However, Marx's most profound argument, commodity fetishism, is introduced at this point because of its utility in instructing how a historical materialist argument should approach reified categories. It is argued that *Geras' (1971) interpretation of Marx's fetishism argument illuminates some crucial aspects that Marxism must consider when confronting an ahistorical ideology and will form the foundation for the later critical analysis.*

The third section will then note the theoretical problems that arise when attempting to incorporate geopolitical themes in a historical materialist understanding of IR, and more precisely, the generic problematics that a fragmented geopolitical system present to classical Marxist analysis using Kubáľková and Cruickshank (1985) and also Berki (1971).

With the groundwork consummated, the fourth section will then look at three types of analyses and the ways in which they attempt to incorporate the concepts of geopolitics. These attempts will then be critically assessed against the earlier developed aims of historical materialism and the problems it must address. The first of these are termed inside-out approaches on the basis of their logical inductive reasoning and, despite their detailed attention to historical detail, it will be argued that they theoretically omit the notion of horizontal causality. [4] David Harvey and Alex Callinicos' 'two logics' approach to Marxism and geopolitics will then be interrogated. It will be argued that they have encountered the notion of external causality but in a way which is highly problematic theoretically and sociologically incomplete. Finally an exposition of Rosenberg's development of uneven and combined development (U&CD) will show that it is possible to incorporate the international in a way which meets the previously defined international problematics and a method which consistently extends historical materialism to deal with the general causal effects of quantitative multiplicity. A tentative addition is then suggested to account for the historical materialist concern with social agent empowerment.

Finally this paper will conclude by returning to the thesis of this paper in light of the preceding content.

I

We necessarily begin with a brief discourse analysis of realism in order to explicate its main themes.

From human nature to anarchical structure: the development of the realist discourse

Realism as a discourse has its original roots in human nature. This 'classical realism' has its most sophisticated contemporary exposition is Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (1973) (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001: 166). Morgenthau explains international politics as "governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature" (Morgenthau, 1973: 4). This serves a historical constant (Morgenthau, 1973: 4). Although with the benefit of more contemporary formulations this could be dismissed as crude essentialism it is important to note that Morgenthau was an established theorist and considered scientific; he argued that he had found the causal property underlying international phenomena (objective human nature), such as the purportedly perennial balance of power mechanism (Morgenthau, 1973: 4). This also served as the basis, Morgenthau argued, for, in theoretical terms, abstracting from the internal composition of states and their purported guiding ideologies and instead focusing on them as "political

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entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power” (Morgenthau, 1973: 13) ultimately concerned with “survival” (Morgenthau, 1973: 12). This defines the common “iceberg” IR approach by “concentrating on ten per cent of the surface” whilst omitting anything below (Lawson and Shillam, 2010: 70). The problem with Morgenthau was not so much his mode of explanation, which perfectly conforms to the demands of a positivist science, but the content.[5] As Rosenberg (1994: 23) notes, US policymakers reading Morgenthau were probably not delighted with the explanation of such a primitive drive being posited as the basis for their actions. The important point to note is that the *explanandum* of geopolitical themes uses here the *explanans* of human nature.

Rosenberg notes that anarchy is “the property of political realism” (Rosenberg, 2007: 453). One could add that the explanatory role of anarchy permeates not just the realist paradigm, but the entire discipline of IR (Bull, 1966: 35). This shift in discourse occurred with Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Many of the features of classical realism still obtain: states are still concerned with survival (Waltz, 1979: 91), the ‘iceberg approach’ of abstracting from the internal composition of states persists (Waltz, 1979: 117), and the balance of power is still perennial (Halliday et al. 1998: 382). The real shift here is in reasoning. *Contra* Because the system is anarchic and therefore a self-help system states must be concerned with maximising their security vis-à-vis other states since this is the only way to secure survival (Waltz, 1979: 105). Concern for survival in this self-help system “stimulates states to behave in ways that tend towards the creation of balances of power” (Waltz, 1979: 118). Thus the balance of power has been derived from anarchy. And like classical realism as long as multiple states exist then so too does the balance of power, hence its operation applies equally to the Westphalian state system as it does the Middle Ages (Halliday et al. 1998: 382). Importantly, the *explanandum* of geopolitics now uses the *explanans* of the anarchical state system and not the Hobbesian reference to human nature. classical realism, Waltz’s structural realism is deductive; one starts reasoning with the abstraction that unlike domestic politics the international political structure in anarchic (Waltz, 1979: 113).

A discourse under fire

As Butterfield has noted however, references to the balance of power only really begin accumulating rapidly in the middle of the seventeenth century (Butterfield, 1966: 139). Why? If the balance is all but transhistorical, as realists claim, why did a settled discourse not emerge earlier? This is a central concern of historical materialism and can be explained by their contrasting approaches to abstractions vis-à-vis realist theoreticians. As Allinson and Anievas (2010: 55) explain, for realists the abstraction (anarchy or human nature) serves as the explanans of the argument from which one can logically deduce all other relevant parts of the theory. For historical materialism by contrast the abstraction only serves as a surface appearance, the real explanation begins by exposing its historical specificity as a general or concrete historical abstraction.

II

Marx did not leave an explicitly methodological tract behind. But a theoretically consistent one will attempt to be fused here employing a variety of textual sources.

Marx’s Method

The mode of production concept is used by Marx and Engels (1970a: 42) to denote the specific way in which men enter into a relationship with nature. It is of great importance to note that this concept captures not only the way in which men secure their own material production, but also the historically specific relationships they must enter with one another, thus capturing a way of life beyond basic material satisfactions (Marx and Engels, 1970a :43). *Contra* Wesson’s (1976: 5) claim that Marxism has nothing to offer contemporary postindustrial society, a key feature of the mode of production concept is that it can be used in an analysis of any historical society, since it is based on general abstractions about social existence (Marx, 1976: 176). Moreover, a mode of production analysis is basically twofold; on the one hand it is an analysis of the development of the productive forces with the corresponding social relations between direct producer and owner of the means of production (the “strategic relationship” (Rosenberg, 1994: 161)) which eventually develops into contradiction with the forces of production at a certain historical stage of the forces development. On the other it is an analysis of the historical peculiarities of the social formation which accompanies a

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strategic relationship (Marx and Engels, 1966: 504). Hence, for Marx, historical development is not accidental. Marx was a dialectician; he identified present abstract tendencies and attempted to, on this basis, formulate propositions about capitalism's future development trajectory (Heilbroner, 1980: 94; Kubálková and Cruickshank, 1985 :7). This conflict between classes is central to historical materialism in explaining historical change (Halliday, 1994: 65). As Marx famously stated "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels 1930: 67). This historical element takes the fundamental premises of human existence (general abstractions; starting from the organisation of men to nature (Marx and Engels, 1970a: 42)) and attempts to trace these as they express themselves in specific historical societies. One does this *empirically* and without "mystification and speculation" (Marx and Engels, 1970a: 47).

A final point which is all too often taken to be an optional appendage is Marx's emancipatory vision. Wesson (1976: 5) disparagingly refers to it as "a vibrantly unobjective call to action". In condemning Marx for his 'bias' Wesson forgets; *that was the point!* We agree here with Callinicos (2009b: 14) that this should not lead to an obscuring of the fact that relations of production should precede subjects. But Marxism must offer empowerment to the exploited classes that are so central to its theorisation. Especially at a time when primitive accumulation in China and Mexico is having abominable effects on the human condition (Harvey, 2003: 154). As Kogler (1966: 14) notes the task of the social theorist is thus to make visible structures of power and oppression that enable agents to change those structures. Hence:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." (Marx and Engels, 1970b: 123)

Marx's commodity fetishism argument

In Marx's argument, it is commodities which are fetishised; men are imbuing commodities with a characteristic they do not possess. Marx argues that men in capitalist society mistakenly attribute value as a property of the commodity itself, not as a product of socially necessary labour time (Marx, 1976: 274). Hence, when men see commodities:

"It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic *form* of a relation between things...I call this the fetishism... *inseparable from the production of commodities.*" (Marx, 1976: 165) (my emphasis)

The argument here is deceptively simple; rather than relate to each other directly, men's social relationships are mediated through "social relations between things" (Marx, 1976: 166). Of course this is *form*. What is concealed is the real social relations between men that take place in every act of exchange (Marx: 1976: 167). As Geras (1971: 75) has helpfully noted, this is a *systematic* mystification and a *real* one, not one dreamt up in consciousness, as the italicised passage emphasises. It is not self-evident to men that the values of objects are social and not natural; this is a result of the way that capitalist social relations *really* present themselves (Geras, 1971: 79). Thus it is most accurate to study commodity fetishism as a societal condition in which men systematically treat objects as having value 'in themselves' rather than being aware of the socially necessary labour time embodied in the commodity. Now, how does Marx solve the enigma of value and what can this tell us about incorporating geopolitical themes in a historical materialist approach?

The first important point to note is that Marx critically engaged with the categories of bourgeois thought. In other words, Marx did not treat surface appearances, the reality on which vulgar economics bases its concepts as illusory; their concepts correspond to a real referent (Geras 1971: 75). Marx (1976: 175) credits classical political economy with having identified the true source of exchange value in human labour. But the vulgar economists still have not fully penetrated appearances because they have not developed an historical argument for *why* human labour is expressed concretely as abstract labour in capitalism forming the social substance of value (Marx, 1976: 174).

In opposition to the vulgar interpretation, Marx wanted to ground the value form socio-historically, in opposition to the fetishism. As Geras (1971: 75) has noted, in order to do this Marx recognised that he had to 'get behind' appearances by recognising that his method must be compatible with its object: it must get behind the historically

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peculiar smoke and mirrors of the capitalist mode of production. Marx (1976: 168) recognised that the realities confronted by subjects appear to them as such because men's reflection naturally begins with the empirical reality of a finished historical process. In other words Marx is by no means dismissing that reality; he is instead positing that the reality of bourgeois society requires further historical *explanans*, namely the historically specific capitalist social relation, and concludes that value makes no sense prior to these social relations (Marx, 1976: 169). It is this insight, generated by means of historicisation, that enables Marx unravel the riddle. Thus, Heilbroner (1980: 103) notes that Marx's socioanalysis leads to the revelation that the commodity contains the "social history of capitalism". It also explains why Marx considered himself a far more advanced exponent of positivist science than Comte (Bottomore, 1975: 10). And from this follows the antipathy towards reification, the second fundamental facet that can help us when encountering realist categories. Thus, as Allison and Anievas's (2010: 48) note, rescuing realist categories from reification is a fundamental historical materialist imperative.

III

In section I it was noted that geopolitical themes belong to that "bounded realm or domain" (Waltz, 1979: 116) that Kenneth Waltz and Martin Wight (1960: 43) have defined as the subject matter of IR. We will now look at some problems concerning Marxism's encounter with it.

Some 'intractable' problems for IR?[6]

Kubáľková and Cruickshank argue that, in comparison with other disciplines, IR and Marxism have not forged a fruitful relationship. They ask why IR is an area in which Marxism has a comparatively weak tradition and one which has been treated as secondary (Kubáľková and Cruickshank: 1985: 9). A key answer they forward is logically quite simple. IR is the study of "the same old melodrama" (Wight 1960: 43) as dictated by its theoretical object, that of anarchy vis-à-vis domestic hierarchy and progress. Marxism contains the notion of progress in terms of history developing in stages (Kubáľková and Cruickshank, 1985: 11). Because of this mainstream (realist) IR theory is concerned with formulating general, transhistorical statements about a timeless arena with unique structural properties *contra*[7] Also, as Kubáľková and Cruickshank (1985: 12) rightly suggest, most Marxists will attempt to generate these historically specific statements about IR through a singular mode of production analysis. The employment of this logic has a profound corollary which Kubáľková and Cruickshank (1985:18) expose; in the final analysis, most Marxists will lay claim to the incorporation of the 'external' but this is rarely done in *theoretical* terms. An analogy from scientific discourse may help demonstrate the point. Pre-Galileo many philosophers argued motion to be an intrinsic property of objects, but after Galileo's intervention motion was reconceptualised as a general abstraction about moving objects and therefore external to each but common to all, *no longer a derivable property of the objects themselves* (Blumer, 1969: 159). To put it plainly, Marxist analyses traditionally derive the behavior of states from their internal mode of production only. But a state's behavior will also be to a significant extent causally determined horizontally (by other states) and not just vertically (by the mode of production) (Kubáľková and Cruickshank, 1985: 18). It follows that if one takes the question of this paper and further specifies 'international relations' as a Marxist should – as an analysis of multiple modes of production that exist synchronically [8] – then these approaches miss those causal determinations which exist between states by deriving all causality 'vertically'. Thus the theoretical root of the problem for Marxism, as Maclean (1988: 298) has succinctly noted, is that "the domestic political system" acts as "the *theoretical* boundary for the conception of the whole" (my emphasis). Thus, as a result of this shortcoming, realist arguments step into the gap to account for the 'horizontal' causal determinations that are not derivable from the domestic realm (Matin, 2001: 421; Rosenberg, 2007: 454; Wight, 1960: 35). Marxism's concern with reification which means that it is more concerned with historically specific propositions, as the commodity fetishism argument suggests (Kubáľková and Cruickshank, 1985: 11).

Berki continues this exegesis. Berki (1971: 80) argues that this continued state of affairs (many states) has grave implications for Marxism which proposes the abolition or private property as an explicit political goal. Berki (1971: 83) notes that states were always a transient feature of the capitalist mode for Marx. But does this imply an end of both the state's *internal* class character as a "committee for the administration of the consolidated affairs of the bourgeois class" (Marx and Engels, 1930: 29) as well as its external function as a territorial unit (Berki, 1971: 84)? The significance of the continuing existence of states regardless of internal mode of production, Berki (1971: 92) argues,

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is that one can borrow Marx's concepts to criticise it. The key concept employed is private property, which Berki (1971: 99) argues, should apply to all property owned by groups that constitute only part of a whole. And, simply put, since mankind is a whole then nations constitute a part. Thus private property exists *however these states might be organised internally*; and this leads to conflict. And this conflict emerges from the alienation caused by private property tantamount to alienation of man from his true existence (Berki, 1971: 98). If this is true of the existence of any unit in history then it appears that there are definite determinations arising from the "the given fact of separate nations" (Berki, 1971: 105) that will always escape attempts to understand it by analysis of a states internal historical development.

IV

Inside-out theorists

This first group share a common premise in the incorporation of realist categories; work from a state's mode of production outwards to forms of geopolitical interaction.

Teschke and Brenner focus on social property regimes and the affect of these on the logic of ruling class social reproduction and, in particular with Teschke, the corollaries of this for historically specific geopolitical interactions. Brenner (1977: 32) notes that the "plough back of surplus" is a systematic feature of the strategic relationship of capitalism; the separation of labour from the means of production. By contrast, in pre-capitalist property regimes Brenner (1977: 37) notes that the tendency is rather to direct investment away from productive efficiency and towards forms of coercive apparatus because this represents the most rational method of exploiting direct producers. Teschke takes this systematic tendency towards pre-capitalist coercive investment as a means of explaining the prominence of war in the era of absolutism:

"geopolitical accumulation was a necessity for the expanded personal reproduction of the ruling elites at the top of society, revolving around the monarch at the apex of the social hierarchy...absolutism was not only domestically rapacious, it also produced a structurally aggressive, predatory and expansive foreign policy." (Teschke, 2002: 12-13)

And inter-dynastic relations of this form, Teschke argues, do not result in the balance of power, but the institution of "equilibrium through elimination" (Teschke, 2002: 15). This purportedly refutes the ahistorical realist balance of power concept (Teschke 2002: 25). Thus although Teschke (2002: 7) accepts anarchy as an empirical fact about geopolitical systems from the early modern period until the present, he argues that the balance of power cannot be derived from it a priori. Thus Teschke's (2002:8) attention to history allows for an empirically rich historicisation of realist categories but also classes and conflicts occurring between them (Teschke, 2002: 11), and a detailed examination of the mode of production and its tendencies (Teschke, 2002: 30). But under critical analysis it must fail the earlier stated criteria for an international relations argument. For example, commenting explicitly on his methodology Teschke (2002: 7) states:

"property relations explain not only variations in political regimes and geopolitical systems, they generate historically bounded and antagonistic strategies of action within and between political actors that govern international relations."

*This methodology simply misses, as a theoretical approach, the external causal determinations generated by horizontally existing modes of production. And in turn, by making 'the domestic' the theoretical frontier (Maclean 1988: 298), fails to fully confront realism. The same could be said of the Lenin-Bukharin thesis; it starts with the 'imperialist' phase of capitalist development in which, internally, industrial capital has been subordinated to bank capital creating the occurrence of finance capital.[9] Finance capital then fuses with the state becoming an instrument of capital dictating the geopolitical logic of rivalry between the advanced capitalist powers for a (re)division of colonial assets (Lenin 2004: 47, 89). The same is true of Rosenberg's *Empire of Civil Society* (1994), treating the state system as a "geopolitical corollary of capitalism" (Rosenberg, 1994: 172) demonstrating the same tendency towards reducing geopolitics as epiphenomenal.*

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Discussion

The inside-out approaches undoubtedly make a vital contribution to historical materialist IR. But as is clear, in the final analysis, everything about state behavior is determined by the historically specific mode of production. It could be argued against this that the approaches follow historical materialism to the letter, and they surely do. But they do not, as our earlier discussion suggests, qualify as *international* theories. They miss the theoretical necessity and ultimate desirability of incorporating the explicitly horizontal determinations within a historical materialist analysis.

Two Logics

This second grouping shares a concern with reformulating the classical theories of imperialism. But these theorists do not treat international relations as merely derivative of a state's internal composition; their defining characteristic is the introduction of a territorial logic which complements the economic logic of capitalist accumulation. In this sense Callinicos and Harvey share a root-and-branch similarity. The attempt, broadly defined, is to combine the economic and territorial logic within the broader framework of the development of capitalism to achieve a contemporary reformulation of imperialism (and thus geopolitics) (Callinicos, 2009b: 67).

Harvey's exposition of the two logics approach starts from the premise that the interests of capitalists and statesmen fundamentally differ:

"The capitalist holding money capital will wish to put it wherever profits can be had, and typically seeks to accumulate more capital. Politicians and statesmen typically seek outcomes that sustain and augment the power of their own state vis-à-vis other states. The capitalist seeks individual advantage...while the statesmen seeks collective advantage...The capitalist operates in continuous space and time, whereas the politician operates in a territorialized space...capitalist firms come and go...but states are long-lived entities." (Harvey, 2003: 27)

And Harvey suggests that "the territorial and the capitalist logics of power as distinct from each other" (Harvey 2003: 29). And although theoretically separated, these two logics can often complexly intersect with each other, in a way which is often contradictory and "dialectical" (Harvey, 2003: 30).

Callinicos (2009b: 73) explicitly continues Harvey's two logics approach and accepts its exposition thus far but purports to strengthen it by offering a way of theoretically integrating the territorial logic within the capitalist mode of production, thus offering a historically specific capitalist geopolitics. But this is a nuanced account in the sense that Callinicos (2009b: 15) also wants to argue that the territorial logic *is not reducible to capitalism but still significantly constituted in its contemporary form by the capitalist mode*. Callinicos (2009b: 70) argues this would be an advance on the reductionism of classical theories of imperialism, and we have already agreed that the reductionism of the Lenin-Bukharin thesis makes its contribution for IR problematic. Callinicos (2009b: 91) begins to incorporate the geopolitical logic by a non-deductive method based on what he regards as the method used by Marx in *Capital* (1976); introducing increasingly complex determinations which are not reducible to causes previously introduced. As an example he claims that "Marx's exploration of the functioning of finance markets...is not somehow implicit in his analysis of the commodity" (Callinicos, 2009b: 82). It follows for him that finance markets are simply not deductively introduced by Marx. And this is exactly the way in which Callinicos wants to introduce the state system (Callinicos, 2009b: 82). Thus, when incorporated in this way, Callinicos wants to argue that the prior existence of the state system has entered the analysis non-deductively. One thing is certain: *it really is non-deductive!* By definition the territorial logic does not have its source in capitalism.

A key consequence of this introduction however, and one that will be invariably controversial when attempting to construct a historical materialist geopolitics (Callinicos, 2009b: 82), is the necessary introduction of "a realist moment in any Marxist analysis of international relations" (Callinicos, 2009a: 542). And with this comes the obvious implication that Callinicos is positing an abstracted geopolitical logic that has become detached from the mode of production as is the common critique of realism (Lawson and Shillam, 2010: 70; Rosenberg, 1994: 34) However, Callinicos retorts:

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“Far from reproducing the reified conception of the international to be found in realism...such an analysis would explore the features of a specifically *capitalist* state system, shaped by class antagonisms, competitive struggles, capital accumulation, crisis tendencies, and social political movements.” (Callinicos, 2009b: 83) (his emphasis)

Callinicos (2009b: 82) substantiates this claim with reference to Marx. He argues that prior to capitalism existed merchant's capital. However in capitalism, merchant's capital, whilst still extant, is radically transformed through its capitalist integration.[10] And so it is, according to Callinicos (2009b: 82), with the integration of the anterior state system. In doing so, Callinicos (2009b: 83) ostensibly counters Pozo-Martin's (2007: 556) critique that he is unable in theory to explain a historically specific capitalist geopolitics, since geopolitics becomes transformed by capitalism. And *Contra* Teschke, Callinicos (2009b: 80) notes that the empirical circumstance that the state system predates capitalism cannot refute the theory; the theory allows for its prior existence and incorporates it as previously discussed. And again *contra* Teschke, Callinicos regards the inherent uneven development of capitalism, “a powerful centrifugal force that keeps states multiple” (Callinicos, 2009b: 92), as sufficient in negating the practical possibility of Kautsky's ultra-imperialism (Callinicos, 2009b: 83). This makes the politically fragmented state system a *necessary* and not *contingent* feature of capitalist development. And once established both the capitalists who benefit from access to state mechanisms indirectly and state managers who benefit from control over the territory and access to resources generated by capital have a shared interest in maintaining the fragmentation of the international political structure (Callinicos, 2009b: 91).[11] Thus if one follows Callinicos, a territorial logic has been introduced that is not reducible to capitalism (avoiding reductionism) and is also historically variable (avoiding reification and introducing a capitalist geopolitics). The virtue of the new imperialist position is that their model, much like Marx's treatment of the categories of bourgeois ideology, does not ignore the mainstream abstractions of IR (realism) and is clearly not reductionist. But does it really avoid reification, and if not, is this a necessary feature of a two logics approach?

Critique

An obvious first critique of the two logics school is that it, as a result of its definition of a geopolitical logic, lacks a historically specific notion of geopolitics and thus cannot theorise a specifically capitalist geopolitics. This can be demonstrated in the very definitions employed by the two logics school. For example, Harvey (2003: 26) defines state managers as “actors whose power is based in a command of a territory and a capacity to mobilize its human and natural resources”. And from this transhistorical character of geopolitics leads certain contradictions if the aim of the study is to *theorise* a specifically capitalist geopolitics. A discussion of their ‘intersection’ commits the same mistake as Rosenberg (2007: 454) accuses Skocpol: it discusses the international but treats this as separate, supra-sociological phenomenon, not incorporated theoretically. Callinicos may link this to the historically specific tendencies of the capitalist mode of production but the definition of the source from which state managers derive their logic gives the game away; it holds for any historical period in which a multiplicity of units co-exist. Therefore capitalism does not change, at the level of theory, the logic of states beyond the assertion that the logic of capital and the logic of territoriality are dialectically related. Ellen Wood (2006: 11) has arrived independently at the same judgement arguing that the territorial logic is “fundamentally indistinguishable from what drives precapitalist imperialism”. However even if it is conceded that Harvey and Callinicos succeed in integrating the logics a sociological problem remains.

The point at which Callinicos and Harvey critically diverge from a materialist analysis is the autonomy of the geopolitical logic and the introduction of realism, but a *particular type of autonomy*. Pozo-Martin, taking Callinicos and Harvey to task, asks whether the new imperialist theorists have developed an analysis consistent with historical materialism or whether it is autonomous. Pozo-Martin judges that it is materialist on one hand because the geopolitical logic cannot be analysed in abstraction from capital. On the other it is autonomous as a result of introducing a set of determinations that are not reducible to capitalism (Pozo-Martin, 2007: 554). However, *contra* Pozo-Martin, it is fundamental to note that our earlier analysis suggested that a concept is autonomous (or reified) if it alludes sociological grounding (like the commodity prior to Marx), not if it is irreducible to the capitalist mode *per se*. Thus this paper finds agreement with Pozo-Martin superficially, but argues that the geopolitical logic is autonomous because it is bereft of social content but still remains causal. It is a necessary reification as long as a sociological explanation for the emergence of the geopolitical logic is not posited that would theoretically integrate it

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with the economic logic. This has led Jessop (2006: 150) to state that Harvey's attempts at integrating these two logics and hence incorporating 'international' determinations has led to an "underdeveloped" and "pre-theoretical" outcome. The logic of capitalist accumulation is the result of capitalism's strategic social relationship, whence, sociologically, came the geopolitical logic?

Trotsky, Rosenberg, and Uneven and Combined Development

Rosenberg purportedly offers a sociological account of the 'international', defined more specifically as the "causal pressures and behavioral patterns" generated by "political fragmentation" (Callinicos and Rosenberg, 2010: 79) as a progression of Trotsky's U&CD. The best place to begin an explanation of this model is Trotsky himself.

Trotsky

Capitalism, in Trotsky's (Trotsky, 1996: 39) interpretation, does create world history for the first time. But it also creates unevenness between different parts of the world as a totality, which can only be seen, *contra* Marx's level of analysis, through a methodologically holistic approach to the social (Trotsky, 2008: 890). And from unevenness Trotsky derives combined development which occurs because a backward country will, being compelled by the "whip of external necessity" (Trotsky, 1932: 25), 'skip' stages when catching up (if the type of backwardness is that of privilege (1932: 25)) but in any case, never replicating the original sociological process of the advanced country (Trotsky, 1932: 24). Thus combined development generally refers to "a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms" (Trotsky, 1932: 25). The general principle operative in this statement and various others is that, *contra* Marx, capital acts in combination with backward forms of society to create "profound peculiarities demanding independent study" (Trotsky, 1932: 470). In other words, *there is more than one capitalism* (Trotsky, 1939). Trotsky used U&CD mainly in reference to Russia's sociologically peculiar capitalist development under the Asiatic Czarism, but also focused on France which "stepped across the Reformation" (Trotsky, 1932: 34). Germany and the United States also entered Trotsky's exposition as remarkable examples of "the privilege of historic backwardness" (1932: 24), a condition by which latecomers can overtake more advanced countries by the very fact of their backwardness (Trotsky, 1932: 25).

Rosenberg

Rosenberg (2006: 319) takes these concepts and makes them general abstractions of socio-historical development. For example, deploying the general abstraction in a concrete precapitalist context, Matin has argued that the *uymaq* was the product of U&CD in the form of interaction between Turkish tribal nomadism and Iran's precapitalist agrarian society (Matin, 2007: 430). The proposed extension of the concept is suggested as a potential solution to the problem of endogenous sociological thought conceptualising 'society' in the singular, and also, simultaneously, a means of rescuing the fetishised realist concepts that operate without sociological foundation, subsisting from the failures of endogenous thought to integrate the international theoretically and the appearance of incompatibility this produces (Matin, 2007: 420-421; Rosenberg, 2007: 452). In other words, U&CD is a possible solution to the international problematics of section III by locating the "social ontology of the international" (Rosenberg, 2007: 44).

One will recall that Callinicos employed uneven development as an argument for the necessary persistence of political fragmentation in capitalism. The key difference here is that Rosenberg introduces unevenness, a general abstraction, as an "anterior sociological attribute of development itself" (Rosenberg, 2007: 453) rather than a notion specific to capitalism. This is potentially realisms missing sociological connection, since the international functions as the expression of unevenness (Rosenberg, 2006: 328). The utility of this derivation is that the reason for the general condition of political fragmentation ('the international') is explained, not as a reification, but itself the expression of social development. The corollary is combined development; a process generated by the necessity of catch-up to preserve autonomy (Rosenberg, 2009: 15). And because this is pursued in order to catch-up with a more advanced *political entity* combined development is a geopolitical imperative, but no longer separated from the social; it is itself an expression of the social now redefined with the additional general premise of unevenness (Rosenberg, 2009:15). And the social itself is no longer isolated since, à la Trotsky, Rosenberg's (2006: 325) methodological point of entry is *world* social development and thus societies develop not according to an endogenous dialectic, but also in relation to

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the general abstraction those singular conceptions of the social omitted according to Rosenberg (2007: 453); the unevenness and combined nature of social development. One can see emerging that the progressive premise is that U&CD does not abstract from interactive change theoretically, *à la* social theory; a particular virtue when the subject matter of IR has, from the beginning of recorded history and the institution of diplomacy, featured this empirically (Rosenberg, 2006: 320; 2008: 2). This can be explained more thoroughly through an understanding of its implications for endogenous dialectical thought.

Rosenberg (2009: 14) harnesses Trotsky's dialectic not just as a critique of the $a=a$ axiom of formal logic which fails to account for the post-Darwinian evolutionist concern with temporal existence (Trotsky, 1939). Of course, Marx and Engels (1930: 38) accommodated the dialectical presupposition that societies will develop through time. The advance is the interpolation of numerical plurality, an aspect which in Marx's dialectical thinking and the two logics approach is not *theorised* (Rosenberg, 2009: 14). In other words its breaks from the hermetic theoretical framework of endogenous thought for which highly significant empirical factors are appear as 'external' to dialectical thought because the additional dialectical premise of quantitative multiplicity is abstracted from (Rosenberg, 2008: 2). But is this addition of U&CD a theoretically consistent extension of historical materialism?

It certainly does critically engage with realism. The geopolitical categories of realism *really do* reflect real referents of the social. The approach, as Rosenberg (2008: 5) pens in a recent 'open letter' to Kenneth Waltz is not another critique of neo-realism *per se* – meaning here a denial of its explanatory purchase – the argument is an advance on that in terms of its direct correspondence with the earlier noted commodity fetishism argument; it prevents reification by positing, "from 'behind'" (2007: 454) social content in unevenness to realist observations. And thus the fixed abstractions of realism *become historicised as sociologically anchored general abstractions about the historical process*.

With regards to the *international problematics of section III* it firstly offers a way of overcoming the fallacy of deriving the behavior of states from their internal composition. It is the structure generated by unevenness that generates causal effects such as the 'whip of external necessity' (Rosenberg, 2008: 21). Secondly, can the necessarily conflictual and competitive inter-state relations envisaged by Berki as a result of private ownership in a wider community of nations be incorporated here? It seems that there is no *logical* reason why not. To posit antagonism as a generic cause of fragmentation is not by definition a reification if located as a consequence of unevenness. But Berki is implicitly asking a much broader question: can causal determinations be incorporated as general abstractions about the historical process? Whether Berki's particular abstraction is correct is a matter of historical investigation and not pursuable within this paper's remit. One would have to demonstrate, as Rosenberg (2006: 216) and Matin (2007: 431) have, the historicity of the posited causal effects through moving from the abstract to the concrete expression of unevenness. U&CD clearly provides a theoretical framework capable of accommodating this integration without reification. But what about the geopolitical categories of anarchy and the balance of power specifically?

Anarchy as a politically fragmented world clearly now operates as a direct expression of unevenness. And it is such mechanisms as 'the whip of external necessity' and 'the privilege of historic backwardness' that are the corollary of this anarchy, now not a purely geopolitical concept, but an inter-societal one (Rosenberg, 2008: 16). As mentioned earlier this 'anarchy in general' generates causal effects that are not found within units. Anarchy is thus socially determined but not ignored, and certainly not autonomous. What about the balance of power? As described in the *Empire of Civil Society* (1994) there is no reason to think that this has any other basis than civil society. But, *by this we now mean the social whole*. The shifting constellations of power relations which constitute the balance of power geopolitically for realism now have the uneven and combined nature of capitalist social development as their basis (Rosenberg, 1996: 6). This is not a return to an inside-out argument since the changing patterns of the balance reflect inter-societal dynamic. Of course the modes of production, now dialectically reproduced through interaction, mediate how international determinations are experienced of which the contemporary impersonal balance of power is one expression, but crucially, not theoretically derivable to the modes of production themselves; social transformation is now comprehended within the structure of unevenness to effect a change in that structure causing further combined development later (Matin, 2007: 427). Thus historical materialism is not discarded, but reconfigured in order not to abstract from the inter-societal facet of social reality (Matin, 2007: 440). Thus *contra* neo-realism U&CD

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conceives the US's preponderant position within the international system not as a purely geopolitical situation but a consequence of its peculiar socio-historical development and particularly, as Trotsky (1932: 24) mentioned, its benefits derive from being historically backward. Thus when modern realists such as Waltz (2001: 216) draw on examples of *Realpolitik* in classical political writers such as Thucydides and Machiavelli, they are in fact, unwittingly, expressing the timeless *social* causes of international politics.

A tentative advancement

U&CD successfully incorporates this balance sociologically and without slipping into an inside-out approach. But is there a higher plane of existence than uneven and combined development? Or is humanity condemned to play geopolitical catch-up with its consequent instability? Are we to agree with Waltz's grim outlook, or is it possible to construct a more ethical position than neo-realists allow for?

Rosenberg's fundamental theoretical advancement as earlier noted is essentially the interpolation of unevenness as a sociological premise. In the spirit of sociology perhaps another premise could be added to answer this question; that of class interpretation. Rosenberg's approach has been noted as too structural (Teshcke, 2008: 177). But what if one inserts Blumer's (1969: 2) premise that human agents themselves are constantly interpreting their social world and extend this to classes? Of course, this premise itself is indeterminate. As Blumer notes, this premise is of little significance purely in the abstract. Instead it:

"is expressed in a distinctive manner in each empirical instance and can be got at only by accepting and working through the distinctive expression." (Blumer, 1969: 148-149)

Again it must be a matter of historical investigation to see how this posited general abstraction manifests itself in specific contexts. Rosenberg has expressed in principle no problem with U&CD being used to connect the abstract to concrete in this way and remarked that general abstractions such as these can enhance the process of empirical research (Rosenberg, 2010: 171). This could operate as what Blumer (1969: 148) calls a "sensitizing concept", advancing the understanding of the concrete through careful analysis of its manifestation. As a further area on non-correspondence this could also be another nail in the coffin for vulgar formal logic (Trotsky, 1932), advancing dialectical thinking, whilst simultaneously providing the social theory of U&CD with agent empowering content. Hence it may represent a more complete rendition of the theory that recaptures human agency in social and therefore geopolitical change, and one that is consistent with the historical materialist concern with agent empowerment.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is clear that U&CD provides the basis for most consistently incorporating anarchy and the balance of power when measured against the criteria for a valid historical materialist explanation of realist categories largely based on Marx's commodity fetishism argument and the problematic set out earlier. Central to this is the fact that U&CD confronts the reality of the balance of power and anarchy whilst simultaneously grounding these concepts in social relations *contracontra* 'two logics' that confronts the international but without a social ontology of it and a plethora of theoretical confusions. 'inside-out' approaches that privilege social relations but have no conception of the international as a set of causal determinations and

The first section introduced anarchy and the balance of power as conventionally understood in the literature and began to give a sense in which the discourse of realism has developed and been criticised. This was linked to the contrasting methods of theory construction employed by realist and historical materialist writers. This provided an explicit discussion of how a historical materialist argument should consistently approach these themes.

The second section then introduced some fundamental aspects of a historical materialist analysis including its emancipatory thrust. The commodity fetishism argument developed in *Capital* (1976) was then introduced with some highly informative comments by *Geras*' (1971) *to not only add to the sections informative aspect, but to set up the later critical analysis. Principally these were a loathing of reified concepts and an attempt to confront the categories of bourgeois economic discourse that had as their referent the real appearances of capitalist society.*

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The third section further completed some essential groundwork before the critical analysis by introducing Kubálková and Cruickshank and also Berki. It was determined that these theorists pose logical problems for historical materialism when applied to IR mainly relating to the 'reductionism' of classical historical materialism. Particular attention was paid to Berki's argument that the mere existence of states implies private property and thus a capitalist world order even if the units contained in it are post-capitalist internally.

The fourth part was then concerned with analysing current theories in three categories. Firstly, the inside-out theorists were argued to fall short of consistent incorporation because they fail to overcome the qualifications already made in sections II and III. Their explanatory purchase as *theories of international relations* is greatly diminished by lack of engagement with the theoretical object of the discipline which was earlier highlighted as inconsistent with historical materialism. The two logics approach of Callinicos and Harvey was then investigated only to find that they had encountered the international but fallen to reification which was determined earlier as antithetical to historical materialist analysis. Finally a study of Rosenberg's U&CD found that it did indeed offer an explanation of the international as well as a sociological grounding of realist categories. This was determined to be an advancement on previous approaches. It was then tentatively suggested that class interpretation as an additional premise, using largely the same method as Rosenberg's interpolation of unevenness, could provide a way for furthering U&CD to empower social agents.

A key implication for further research must be the call to investigate the historicity of generic causal effects and the possibility of interpolating Blumer's symbolic interactionist premise of interpretation in a historical materialist account of geopolitics.

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[1] Even if an erroneous interpretation the empirical fact still stands and must be combated theoretically.

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[2] In a letter to Annenkov, Marx writes “Is the whole internal organisation of nations, are their international relations, anything but the expression of a given division of labour? And must they not change as the division of labour changes?” (Marx, 1975)

[3] The Marxist conceptualisation of the term ‘reification’ is meant here: “the fallacy of treating social artifacts as self-constituted entities, and vesting in them powers, attributes and dispositions which in fact they exhibit only by virtue of their social relations and agential content” (Rosenberg, 2008: 13.) Henceforth, unless otherwise specified, this meaning is intended.

[4] These correspond to the theories that Waltz has termed “second image” (Waltz, 2001: 60).

[5] Marx’s basic notion of defining the “strategic relationship” (Rosenberg, 1994: 161) of capitalism and then exploring its relation to the social formation rests on a similar scientific principle of indentifying an underlying basis for social phenomena (Rosenberg, 1994: 84).

[6] Title adapted from Berki (1971: 80)

[7] Vulgar economics takes value to be a transhistorical natural property of things whereas Marx is concerned to show that value is meaningless in abstraction from historically specific capitalist relations. Although there is some disagreement concerning whether value would exist in simple exchange. See Callinicos and Rosenberg (2010: 91,104).

[8] Abstracting from more heterodox attempts to make the entire world system a giant mode of production (Wallerstein, 1979: 5).

[9] As is well known, this claim has proven empirically inaccurate as finance capital had not developed to the extent that Lenin suggested, especially in England (Callinicos, 2009b: 69). However, although a valid critique, only the theoretical procedure is under discussion here. A simple alteration to accommodate England would not change the basic mode of argumentation that is being challenged.

[10] In effect, the signifier (merchant’s capital) finds a new signified (capitalist merchant’s capital).

[11] Callinicos does not here specify exactly what states mechanisms capitalists gain indirect access to, but it is probably safe to assume that forms of protectionism such as tariff barriers and subsidies are implied since he defines capitalists as, like Harvey, economic actors with an interest in profit maximisation (Callinicos, 2009b: 74).

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