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Introduction

East Central Europe and the Problematic of the International

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The Return of the International

The 2008 economic crisis appeared, save from a few exceptions (for example Brenner 2006; Arrighi 2007), as a bolt out of the blue, bringing down with it not only, from the post-'45 perspective, relatively meager economic progress, but also the ideological certainties of neoliberalism, according to which the Lord decreed growth to be eternal if the sinful hand of regulation were not laid too heavily on the economy. As if this was not enough, the crisis also put into sharp relief the geopolitical shifts that accompanied the period of neoliberalism. China, once dismissed by John Stuart Mill as being trapped in a “stationary state” (Mill 1859: 129–130), now had all the trappings of one of the pillars of the new order, engaging in a massive investment program at home and being courted as investor in Europe, including, as recent events reminded us again, East Central Europe, while the hegemon in decline seemed to be retreating inwards. And Europe itself, the continent that gave capitalism to the world and dominated much of it for most of modern history, exhibited signs of disarray, with the second largest economy, also having considerable geopolitical clout, leaving the EU, the rest of it left with conflicts and standards of political conduct hitherto unimaginable. Just next to it, the apparently stable authoritarian regimes, mostly former partners of some EU states, crumbled under a combination of domestic uprisings and foreign interventions, with different weight of the two elements in each. Europe's reaction to the different challenges that the fall of these regimes brought about seemed sufficient to take away from it the role, as Perry Anderson puts it, of “moral tutor to the world” (2014). The international came back with a vengeance. While in the heyday of neoliberal globalization, the international, much like history, was proclaimed to be dead or dying (Hardt and Negri 2000; Rosenberg 2000), it proved very hard in recent years to deny its existence.

This dizzying pace of events, however, almost precludes a sober analysis. One of the best ways to achieve that sobriety and potentially get an inkling of the things to come, might be to take a step back and place the current events in the context of the long history of the capitalist world-system. Long-term optics might hopefully put at least some aspects of contemporary history into a more proper focus. This was, alongside the inherent value of historical analysis, one of the intentions behind the conference “World Order in the 19th Century: Implications for the Present,” that took place at Central European University and Corvinus University in October 2015, with the support of the Departments of History and International Relations at Central European University and the Karl Polanyi Centre for Global Social Studies at Corvinus University. The papers for this volume are based on the presentations at that conference. The participants were encouraged to either present a paper on the nineteenth century international relations or start with the nineteenth century and bring their argument to the present. The focus on the nineteenth century was justified by the fact that it can be considered, unlike the seventeenth (Teschke 2003), as the century where modernity in international relations came to the fore (Buzan and Lawson 2015). Furthermore, the *Pax Americana*, with an astonishing preponderance of the hegemonic state, may be considered an exceptional state of affairs, and a new multipolar system, rather than that of immense Chinese preponderance, seems to be in the offing (Anderson 2007; Lacher and Germann 2012), at least in the coming decades.

The other aim was to organize a multi-, inter-, trans-, or even, if one prefers, uni-disciplinary conference. While most of these prefixes are something of an academic fad, and one is often prone to profess some sort of “-disciplinarity” as a way of asserting one’s seriousness as a scholar, instances where scholars have a firm grasp of several disciplines do not seem to occur often. The danger of jack of all trades, who is master of none, looms large on the horizon. And while pretense can take one some distance, it brings little genuine satisfaction. It is thus fortunate when the practitioners of some disciplines, usually faced with some type of an epistemological crisis, start to redefine what constitutes their disciplines, and in doing so turn to others for sources of rejuvenation of their field of study.

Historical Materialism and Uneven and Combined Development

There are two aspects of this process concerning the discipline of international relations (IR) relevant to this volume, the first of which, considering its novelty and character, requires much more explanation than the second. Many

IR scholars, not content with the realist assumptions of transhistorical behavioral properties of the units of the international, who are said to strive for balance in the conditions of anarchy (Waltz 1979; Gilpin 1995), plunged into history. Historians may smirk at these attempts since they have been “doing history” all the time. What could these reductionist strangers possibly contribute to the study of history? They tend to forget that they too can be ahistorical due to their empiricist inclinations and thus potentially operate with the transhistorical assumptions of realist IR. The historical sociological turn in international relations does not just bring theory to history—for that matter, realist IR is also a theory—some if it brings a radically historicizing agenda into the study of international relations. Indeed, the term “international” itself, as Benno Teschke argues, should be understood as a historical category (2014: 6).

How are we to explain these epistemologically “progressive developments” in IR? The answer is rather simple: revival of interest in historical materialism. Western Marxism has always been more removed from the intellectual straitjacket of Stalinism (Anderson 1976; Jay 1984). It has perhaps become more so after the collapse of the Soviet Union, whose fall, alongside the despondency of Stalinists, also brought with it an intellectual liberation, clearing the way for scholars less burdened with its heavy legacy.

I am acutely aware that in the region of actually existing socialism, Marxism and Stalinism might appear as synonyms, and many readers of *East Central Europe* probably had direct, negative experience with a Stalinist regime. But they should not close the journal in their hands or press X on the pdf document or their browser. This would be to accept the terms of the debate set by Stalinism. Marxism, contrary to Stalinism, has a lot to offer. As Alexander Anievas neatly summarizes, there are several advantages to Marxist IR (2010a: 2–4). One is the already mentioned historicizing agenda. A sceptic might reply: all theories have a historicizing agenda. To which I say: they do not. All the social theories have perhaps been used in *historical* work, but not as part of a radically *historicizing* agenda. The work of Weberians such as Michael Mann is fascinating, but it is based on different relationships between several transhistorical forms of power (Mann 1986, 1993). As Fredric Jameson argues, the “transhistorical” imperative of dialectical thought is “Always historicize!” It is hardly surprising that Jameson believes Marxism is best positioned to follow this injunction (Jameson 1981: ix, 3). For in Marxism, whatever might be subject to analysis, it should be related to the mode of production in which it is embedded. In place of transhistorical logics of the state and the international system, we are required to ask the question how their very nature, or for that matter their lack of existence in earlier periods, is related to the type of society they are interwoven with.

This leads us to the commitment of historical materialism to totality, one of whose main theoreticians, György Lukács, even though usually classified as a Western Marxist due to the similarity of his work with that tradition, comes from East Central Europe (Lukács 1971). Marxists believe that only the perspective of totality can fully illuminate social phenomena. This is not say that social phenomena are reduced to some instance of it, like in vulgar determinist accounts, but rather that the dialectics between the whole and the parts needs to be placed under scrutiny, which then results not in the reduction of the part to the whole, but rather in a more precise understanding of the identity of a phenomenon within the social totality (Jameson 1981: 24–26). The methodological orientation of the analysis of the whole therefore does not merely mean that we may claim that many parts of the social formation are connected. As Neil Davidson points out, few would disagree with this proposition. The bar, Davidson continues, is much higher. What is also needed is the explanation of the conditions of possibility of different parts of the social whole (Davidson 2010: 81). This requirement brings with it a high level of reflexivity on the ontology of the social world. The attempt to approach the totality is a protest against the existing disciplinary divisions. While some of the work in this tradition may be of forbidding difficulty, the commitment to totality opens the door to overcoming some unnecessary disciplinary boundaries and the walls of jargon that separate them.

The totality is to be approached via the epistemology of critical realism. Although this might seem a rather banal aspect of historical materialism, it is worth underlying. It is an improvement on both the abiding empiricism of much of historiography, and the poststructuralist rejection of the possibility of knowing history. Marxists believe that the past is knowable, but only through an ever more refined conceptual apparatus through which we approach it. It is no accident that many of the most probing critiques of the postmodern condition are Marxist (Anderson 1984, 1998; Callinicos 1989; Eagleton 1996; Harvey 1994; Jameson 1996).

Then there is praxis, the dialectic between theory and action; the need to change the world. Admittedly, if one was a proponent of a Stalinist dystopia, this would be a horrifying proposition. However, it would seem somewhat absurd and anti-democratic to contend that democratic socialism is an unacceptable position in the contemporary world. And Marxist scholars could very well argue that it would sometimes be unethical not to act in accordance with one's understanding of the world.

While these qualities, praxis included, place historical materialism in a great position to theorize the international, this has not occurred until quite recently. The international as a specific field of determinations fell victim to

two opposing and mutually reinforcing tendencies. On the one hand, it was simply absorbed into the social, becoming something akin to its enlarged version. On the other, it was completely separated from it, superimposed on societies as an externality with its own properties but with almost no implications for the nature of societies that comprised it (Rosenberg 2006: 308–309). In the first case its identity was reduced to that of society; in the second defined in the absence of it. That was quite undialectical.

Justin Rosenberg plugged this gigantic gap with a reformulation of Trotsky's concept of uneven and combined development (UCD), enabling a move away from the conception of societies in the "ontological singular." Rosenberg distinguished between three aspects of UCD, from the abstract to the more concrete. On the most abstract level, UCD refers to the multiplicity of societies. They do not exist in isolation. The second meaning of the concept is the dependence of societies' economic, social, cultural, and political structures on interaction with other societies. The final, third meaning, closest to Trotsky's conception, pertains to the social amalgamations in societies that are a result of the interaction at different levels of development (Rosenberg 2006: 321–325). Far from being a mere extension of society or a sphere of the interactions of states with no societal dynamics underpinning them, the international, Rosenberg argues, "super-adds a lateral field of causality over and above the 'domestic' determinations arising from each and every one of the participant societies" (Callinicos and Rosenberg 2008: 158).

Rosenberg's intervention has spurred a massive debate in IR literature and beyond (for a useful overview of the early debate, see Anievas 2010b). One of the key issues of the debate was whether UCD is limited to the interaction between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, and accelerated development on the periphery of capitalism, or was it perhaps to be extended to entire human history. Rosenberg (2010) argues that UCD can be abstracted from the capitalist mode of production and used as a framework for the earliest stages of human history. One of the contributors to this volume, Neil Davidson, disagrees, because, he contends, this is an overstretching of the concept. Davidson argues that the "decisive" aspect of UCD "is that former levels of stability are disrupted by the irruption of industrial capitalism and all that it brings in its wake: rapid population growth, uncoordinated urban expansion, dramatic ideological shifts" (Davidson 2012: 303). This can only occur with "rapid industrialization" (Davidson 2012: 298). Pre-capitalist societies were thus inherently incapable of bringing about the process of UCD because social earthquakes that industrial capitalism brings in its wake could not come to pass. Jamie Allinson and Alexander Anievas take a "reformist position." They argue that UCD can be a transhistorical category if it is used only as a general

condition of historical development which then invites the introduction of further, more specific categories. Thus, they agree with Davidson that only the capitalist mode of production can impel the wholesale transformation of social formations. However, although UCD is fully activated only under capitalism, this does not rule out an examination of UCD dynamics specific to other modes of production, which do not involve the wholesale transformation of the logic of social reproduction that only capitalism can bring about (Allinson and Anievas 2009: 2010).

Whatever camp the reader might be sympathetic with, what I would like to underline is that UCD offers several advantages over competitive frameworks of critical theory, namely Political Marxism and world-systems analysis (WSA). One major advantage is that it does not examine societies as homogenous totalities but rather highlights hybrid social formations. It thus better fulfills the demand of the historicizing agenda of historical materialism. It also requires a more rigorous analysis of the social formation so that the enabling conditions of UCD, or their absence, can be specified. And then the examination of agency comes into the picture, as it is the local agents who refract the pressures of the capitalist world-system, giving UCD a more agency-oriented inclination than that of rival paradigms. All these features stem from the conception of development in UCD where the social and geopolitical are not in an external relationship to each other. Moreover, as Alexander Anievas and Kamran Matin point out, UCD tackles difference better than mainstream alternatives as the framework of comparative modernities leaves the international as an external factor and suffers from the problems of comparative sociology, while postcolonial theory's aversion to a general theory of development makes it difficult to provide a powerful alternative to Eurocentric scholarship (2016: 6).

We are glad to be able to present the readers of *East Central Europe* with a contribution of one of the most important figures in these debates. In his article, Neil Davidson traces the origins of the concept of UCD. One line of thought he analyzes is the notion of uneven development. Although the Enlightenment was marked by the idea of a linear progression between modes of subsistence of ever greater complexity, some Enlightenment thinkers, for example Leibniz, thought that stages of development could be skipped. This problematic is then examined in Marxist discourse, where the transition between modes of production, unlike the Enlightenment modes of subsistence, was not even assumed to be linear. Ending with Lenin's thoughts on the problem of uneven development, Davidson notes that Lenin distinguished three aspects of it, the successful catch-up to core status of some countries, the rivalry between core

countries, and their domination of colonies and “dependent countries.” At this point, the possibility of successful catch-up strategies diminished. But some countries, like Russia, could still import some achievements of more developed countries without changing their entire social structure and reaching core status. The other discursive line Davidson discusses is that of permanent revolution. Introduced by Marx in the context of 1848 revolutions, permanent revolution refers to the ever more radical trajectory of a revolution. Turning to contemporary influences on Trotsky, Davidson points out that although Rosa Luxemburg sketched out the disrupting consequences of capitalist modernity, her influence on Trotsky is somewhat unclear. That of Parvus and Kautsky is, however straightforward, both theorizing the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie and the militancy of the working class that surpassed that of more advanced countries. These components were taken over by Trotsky, who formulated the theory of UCD, to which Davidson will turn in a forthcoming article in *ECE*.

My own contribution is focused on the potentials of WSA and UCD for the analysis of the political economy of the Habsburg Monarchy. I examine the WSA account of the Monarchy by Andrea Komlosy and contend that her argument is problematic from a WSA perspective because Komlosy argues that the Monarchy was a world-economy of its own, thus expelling geopolitics and the world-economy from the analysis. I argue that the Monarchy had to be a part of the capitalist world-economy as only the capitalist world-system is characterized by a “ceaseless accumulation of capital” (Wallerstein), a process made possible by a change in social relations of core areas, not by uneven development in itself. While these deficiencies stem from an inconsistent application of WSA, the problematic account of state formation may be attributed to several shortcomings of WSA. These are the problematic lack of the theorization of the separation of the economic and political, the sidelining of articulation and combination between societies, the theory of state formation where position in the system determines the form of the state and the general tendency (also present in realist IR) of downplaying the differences between the units of the system. WSA thus seems ill-equipped to manage the rather “anomalous” Austro-Hungarian Compromise, which placed on equal footing a core (Austria) and peripheral social formation (Hungary). UCD can better face this challenge. The Compromise, I argue, can be explained with reference to the specificity of the Hungarian social formation, the timing of the revolution, the state formation in Austria, and the defeat by a state undergoing UCD, namely Prussia. However, I conclude that WSA and UCD can to an extent be used as complementary frameworks of analysis.

Intellectual History and IR

The other development in IR relevant for this issue of *East Central Europe* is the rise of the intellectual history of international relations. In this case, a reversed form of imperialism occurred. As Fernand Braudel argued, all disciplines are imperialist and would like to impose on all the others their own vision of the world (Braudel 1980: 56). History, emerging as a critique of sources, was often the colonized, submitting itself to different theoretical fashions or even being outright plundered by pirates of other disciplines who used the work of historians to underpin their more theoretically informed arguments. But history had a few aces up its sleeve, and asserted itself as a model to be followed in the field of IR. Duncan Bell, one of the leading figures of intellectual history of IR, also a participant of the conference, noted the methodological shortcomings of IR and invited his colleagues, most of whom he saw as being “blissfully unaware of the renaissance in the history of political thought,” to turn to intellectual history for methodological guidance (2001: 116). However, this was an extension of intellectual history into an area that Bell found neglected by historians. Their focus on the state led historians to neglect the importance of the international. It would be interesting to see what would come out of a more sustained engagement between this tradition of IR and that of UCD, intimations of which are already at hand (Shilliam 2011).

In any case, this issue of *East Central Europe* contains a work of a historian who does not neglect the international. Andrei-Dan Sorescu shows how concepts referring to the international were integrated into the nationalist discourse in nineteenth-century Romania, thus making a contribution to the growing scholarship on the history of international law. Sorescu argues that precisely nationalist discourse can show the co-constitutive nature between the international and the national. An intellectual history of international relations can thus decenter the national. Sorescu examines two conceptual pairs in the Romanian context: *jus Gentium/jus publicum Europaeum* and sovereignty/suzerainty. While discussing the attempts of the Romanian state-builders to argue for a contractual relationship with the Ottoman Empire, their discarding of pre-modern legal discourse and their desire for Romanian Principalities to be included into the European community, Sorescu highlights the conceptual tensions involved in the process, from the “gap” between the principles of international law and the historical evidence that was to sustain an argument reliant on them, to the projection of the categories of modern sovereignty into the pre-modern past, and the problematic position of the *gens* in an authoritarian polity whereby it was unclear who were in fact the parties

to international contracts as well as the conceptual overlaps and divergences between nation- and state-building. Furthermore, Sorescu notes the liminal position of the Romanian political elite, who were anxious to do away with the pressure of “lateral Orientalism.” This association with non-European entities implied that Romanian Principalities could perhaps not become a part of the European order, prompting a Europeanist discourse whose contradictions Sorescu brings to the surface.

And we end with Mill, whom we started with. In a region where Fareed Zakaria’s term “illiberal democracy” (1997) has been taken over by some as a badge of honor, liberalism seems to have automatically gained in value, its virtues being apparently obvious. But a critical examination of liberalism, including its potential authoritarianism and a problematic relationship with colonialism (Bell 2007, 2016; Bowden 2009; Losurdo 2014; Pitts 2005; Wallerstein 1995, 2011), is necessary in order to understand at least partly why it has earned such a bad reputation in some circles, both on the left and the right. David Williams tackles the connection between liberalism and colonialism through an examination of John Stuart Mill’s argument in favor of liberal imperialism. The reflections on Mill serve as a vantage point from which to approach the contemporary relationship between liberalism and interventionism. Dubbing Mill’s liberalism “developmental,” Williams contrasts it to both “immanent” and “rights-based liberalism.” Developmental liberalism is characterized by a lack of teleology. Progress is certainly possible, but not inevitable. From this it follows that an “enlightened agency” may be needed to introduce progress. Williams notes that Mill also believed that institutions needed to reflect the level of development of a society. Similar institutions would not be viable in all societies and would therefore not be aiding progress. This implied that a thorough knowledge of the society was needed so as to further the cause of progress. Such reservations do not characterize imminent and rights-based liberalism, the first being characterized by a teleological belief in progress, the second by the absolute value of human rights and institutions to protect them regardless of levels of development. Williams argues that developmental liberalism, reformulated as development theory in post-’45 period, started to be unseated from its dominant position only in the 1980s, and was finally relegated to the margins after the end of the Cold War. The premises of triumphant imminent and human rights liberalism, however, proved problematic. While Millian developmental liberalism required a thorough familiarization with the society where progress was to be brought, this did not appear urgent at all when progress was automatic and human rights universal. However, Williams states that with the crisis of neoliberalism, developmental liberalism might

make a comeback. Whether that will happen or not, Williams argues that it provides a useful set of arguments with which to critically reflect on immanent and rights-based liberalism.

I hope the readers would agree that this issue conforms well to the interdisciplinary orientation of this journal. Written by two (future) historians (Medved, Sorescu), a sociologist (Davidson) and an IR scholar (Williams), it shows how, despite difficulties, different disciplines need not be far apart. The problematic of the international, with its overabundance of determinations, could hardly be adequately captured without the perspectives of several disciplines.

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