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The Long Shadow of Structural Marxism in International Relations: Historicising Colonial Strategies in the Americas

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, Marxist-inspired approaches from the field of International Historical Sociology (IHS) have theorised the relationship between 16th and 17th Century European colonial expansion and the development of relations of production and economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic. In this article, we argue that such attempts – from Dependency Theory (DT), World-Systems Theory (WST), and Uneven and Combined Development (UCD) – are premised on a structuralist perspective which overextend the notion of capitalism and under examine the sphere of production, rendering divergent and distinct strategies of European colonialism a homogenous and under-historicised process. Embracing theoretical innovations from Geopolitical Marxism (GPM), we dispute this unitary logic of expansion, instead applying a radical historicist methodology to demonstrate that British and Spanish colonial strategies in the Americas (intra-imperial free trade vs. mercantilism) were shaped by nationally specific class relations (capitalism vs. feudalism/absolutism), generating unique patterns of settlement on the ground (mineral extraction vs. cash-crop production). Promoting historicism thus allows Marxist International Relations to better recognise "the 'making of' the international order" during the period of European colonial expansion from the 16th century onwards, and, in doing so, further understand its enduring legacies.

Keywords: colonialism, International Historical Sociology, Radical Historicism, foreign policy, International Political Economy.

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Introduction

The disciplinary linkages between International Relations (IR) and Marxism may have historically suffered from a *"double neglect"*, especially in comparison to other social sciences, though this division is less pronounced in our field of enquiry: early modern colonialism. Here, the study of the co-development of capitalism, colonial expansion, and

patterns of development and underdevelopment in the Americas was a key site for the constitution of Marxist IR from the 1970s onwards. Despite this productive encounter, a number of theoretical flaws still plague the study of these processes, which we identify in the abiding presence of structuralist explanations that overemphasise the spatio-temporal reach of capitalism, diluting historical specificities attached to the colonial process. Dependency Theory (DT), World-Systems Theory (WST), and Uneven and Combined Development (UCD) may all aim to overcome Eurocentric and internalist narratives, yet in doing so they to varying degrees foreground colonialism as a reified totality underpinned by the global capitalist system. These theoretical and methodological frameworks generate predefined outcomes, in which actors on both sides of the Atlantic are conditioned according to unitary and transhistorical colonial logics.

Consequently, Marxist IR struggles to effectively explain why intra-European strategies of foreign affairs fundamentally differ throughout the period of expansion, beginning in the mid-16th century with Spain, also generating a wide spectrum of diverging forms of colonial settlements and social property relations overseas. Through a comparative examination of Anglo-Spanish colonial strategy in North America and Mesoamerica, this article embraces "radical historicism" to identify divergent colonial experiences and demonstrates how distinct British and Spanish patterns of settlement were driven by radically different sets of nationally specific class relations. Drawing inspiration from Geopolitical Marxism (GPM), we demonstrate how the development of capitalist social property relations in Britain – compared to the feudal-cum-absolutist rent-regime in Spain – allowed the former to develop a unique foreign policy of intra-imperial free-trade, which was distinct from Spain's mercantilist conquistadors. These dissimilar strategies resulted in two contrasting patterns of settlement, where New Spain was reconfigured according to Mesoamerican tribute systems and mineral extraction, while British America was dominated by cash-crop production and chattel slavery.

Reasserting historicism is the main pivot allowing us to empirically reconnect social property and sovereignty relations from below with the key events in high politics – especially colonial strategy – helping to explain the comparative long-term trajectories of these territories. To develop this argument, our article is split into three key sections. Section one carries out an exposition of debates in Marxism around colonial expansion and the origins of capitalism. This moves from traditional Marxist scholarship and its neglect of the colonial question to more recent work from the subfield of International Historical Sociology (IHS). Section two critically evaluates the origins of Political Marxism (PM), explores its recent engagement with IR, and outlines how its theoretical and methodological innovations provide fertile ground for a specific understanding of colonial strategy and state-formation in the Americas. Lastly, section three applies GPM theory in practice to identify the key divergences between Spain's mercantilist approach to settlement in Mesoamerica, compared to Britain's more capitalist form of expansion across North America. In this final section, we will not only highlight how these strategies were driven by distinct polities in Europe, but also by separate colonial agents in the Americas that produced rival intercolonial political economies.

Marxist Thought and the Problem of Colonialism and Capitalism

The seminal works of Marx and Engels precede the "colonial question", where scholars delve into the origins, processes, and lingering effects of colonialism in both colonial and postcolonial societies. Marx and Engels' early work has been widely criticised for resorting to a form of "methodological nationalism", presenting sociological contexts as corresponding to societies operating in a "geopolitical vacuum" (Hobden and Hobson 2002; Teschke 2008). With respect to their early writings of the 1840s, Kevin Anderson (2010) concedes a limited exploration by Marx of societies that are supposed to be exogenous to the configuration of capitalism, with the underlying idea that peripheral societies will be gradually absorbed into the capitalist model through colonialism. However, Marx's "... perspective evolved into a more multilinear one, leaving the future development of these societies as an open question" (Anderson 2010: 2). While he suggests that Marx managed to shed light on oppressed extra-European nationalities and ethnicities as prospective places for revolutions and forms of resistance, this later work has largely been omitted and marginalised in Marxist IR.

Such blind-spots in Marx's early work were systematically addressed from the 1970s onwards, in which phenomena linked to colonialism, capitalism, and modern sovereignty were placed under intense spotlight within Marxist historical sociology (Anderson 1974; Wallerstein 1974; Wallerstein 2011; Brenner 1976). These topics productively intersect with IR's key concerns, such as the origins and the expansion of the inter-state system, historical roots of geopolitical power, in addition to racial and global economic inequalities. In this section, we provide an overview of Marxist Historical Sociology, highlighting their key arguments, contributions, and pitfalls. Our contention is that dominant accounts within Marxist Historical Sociology have typically viewed colonialism under a unitary logic of capital accumulation. We argue that such naturalised interconnectedness is empirically and historically misleading. Conceptualising European colonial enterprises as intrinsic to capitalism misses the historical specificity of each of these outward movements. As such, it overlooks the underlying patterns of political economy, which are highly specific to each time and spatiality, mobilised by variable social actors that make each colonial configuration substantially peculiar. Our critique of dominant accounts in Marxist Historical Sociology speaks directly to the divergent roots of colonial North America's conquest and territorialisation, stemming from distinct geo-economic and geopolitical strategies that must strictly be captured through a radical historicist prism.

"International Historical Sociology" and the Fusion of Marxism and the "International"

Intellectually, DT originated in the Latin American context through the contributions of André Gunder Frank (1969), although it has been conceptually mobilised within policy-making circles since the 19th century (Grosfoguel 2000). DT does not only challenge Classical Marxism as an internalist project, but also the mainstream theory of modernisation that dominated academia. The theoretical parameters of DT sought to explain the characteristics of Latin America's restricted development in comparison to other regions, most notably Europe. They focused on the unequal practices of commercial exchange through the period of colonialism and imperialism that resulted in a global economy divided according to labour regimes and systems of production. WST was greatly influenced by the work of Fernand Braudel and the

Annales School of History, with the two sharing some key arguments. Braudel (1985: 79) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) propose that the initiation of colonial enterprises by Castile and Portugal was fuelled, not by geo-political practices circumscribed to Iberian territorialities and specific feudal agencies, but by the prosperity of the European port system within an "upward" historical period.[1] While Braudel views capitalism as a system born in the 13th century Italian ports such as Venice, comparatively Wallerstein addresses the "long 16th century" to argue that long-distance trade grounded in unequal labour regimes and commercial exchange defines capitalism as a global system – a capitalist world-economy.

The colonisation and integration of the Americas into European rule allowed the configuration of a geopolitical superstructure composed of an imperial core, periphery, and semi-periphery. Within this global division of labour, those states making up the core transitioned to forms of wage labour, while modes of coercive control were promoted in the peripheries, preventing their industrialisation. Peripheries exported raw materials and imported more sophisticated and expensive technologies from the centre; herein lies the dependency and structural disadvantage identified by DT. The interconnectedness of this global division of labour is what defines capitalism as a system co-created and co-constituted by interaction between fixed colonial subjectivities (Wallerstein 1974; Tickner 2003; Oliveira 2017; Salgado 2021). Accordingly, the parallel formation of empire-ready "states" happened almost simultaneously, meaning that Europe developed generally from the 16th century onwards. In this sense, WST's entry point is that the geopolitical regions typified as the "core" of the "world economy" are treated in an undifferentiated way, so that key divergences between Spain, France, and Britain are blurred and reduced to a homogeneous and depoliticised zone. Due to this tempo-centric macro-structure, i.e., reproducing itself over time, the core driver of history is commercial exchange (a quantitative criterion over a qualitative change in social property relations). Pivotal historical transformations such as the spread of territorial sovereignty and the transformation of political authorities are reduced to an instrument of commercial traders that ensure the reproduction of the "world system", whereby the state-system (colonial or postcolonial) develops in response to the demand of capitalism (Wallerstein 1984: 29).

A systematisation of the "internal" and the "external" under similar parameters is Leon Trotsky's Marxist theory of UCD, which has spread throughout IR, IHS and International Political Economy (IPE) fields (Rosenberg 2006; Morton 2011; Anievas and Matin 2016; Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015). Their central argument is that some societies are "authors" of capitalism and others are caught within pre-capitalist sociological contexts. Given inter-spatial interaction, "backward" societies are forced, "under the whip of external necessity", to "catch up" with "advanced" societies, giving rise to societies with mixed "combined" political economies. In more recent versions, UCD seeks to shed its teleological Eurocentrism, trying to provincialise Europe by placing the interaction of extra-European and European entities as co-creators of an unequal global system at the centre of analysis. Yet, this reformulation of UCD generates intra-theoretical contradictions, as UCD's general

1 For Braudel (1985: 86), history has "upward" and "downward" trends that make turning points possible. "Upward" trends, for instance, are favourable moments for economies to flourish more generally, such as in 16th century Venice, Antwerp, and Genoa.

argument about the uneven logic of development fails to capture historical specificity – in our case: stagnation or de-development in Mesoamerica (Teschke 2014; 2023). As the most universal law of history, UCD proposes pre-defined outcomes, since interconnectivity will inevitably generate "catch-up", the "skipping of stages" and "development", while the empirical record for the early modern Americas is acknowledged but dismissed as inconsequential for the stability of UCD. For example, within their account of the geopolitical origins of capitalism, Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancioğlu (2015) draw attention to the unevenness of the Atlantic, showcasing divergences between European and Indigenous patterns of settlement, while demonstrating how "the widened sphere of activity" was integral to the formation of capitalism in England.

Our key claim here is that DT, WST and UCD subscribe to a concept of capitalism (for DT and WST) or development (UCD) that generates fixed logics of praxis that are superimposed upon historical registers. This poses significant problems to the reconstruction of historical specificities underpinning colonial experiences, including the question of agency. Agents on both sides of the Atlantic are largely assumed to carry out pre-determined and repetitive practices, highly generalised, supra-individual and represented as passive followers of historical patterns rather than makers of their own history. This substantially non-agentic conception of theory precludes these theoretical frameworks from capturing different colonial origins as temporally divergent undertakings, with contrasting drivers, motivations, and policies. In the case of Anievas and Nişancioğlu (2015), divergent social property regimes and patterns of settlement amongst European colonial projects are reduced to secondary importance, alongside their long-term implications for international politics. Understanding the nuances behind these drivers of geopolitical change prevents scholars from foregrounding the subjectivities and agencies that constructed the expansion in colonising societies, and that implemented a wide range of extra-territorial practices to secure their interests. We claim that capturing the plurality of extraterritorial practices is key, as it allows us to see the creativity in the making of early modern international politics, shaped by different intra-European relations of sovereignty, political authorities and social property relations that cannot be automatically deducted from a single abstract logic.

Yet, it is this UCD-logic that Anievas and Nişancioğlu (2015: 275) employ to assume that the emergence of productive forces and preconditions of capitalist development in the Americas contributed to the rise of capitalism and provided the foundations for "bourgeois revolutions" across Europe, instead of examining how and whether the rise of agrarian capitalism in late medieval and early modern England and English colonial strategy transformed social property relations in the Americas in a capitalist direction. While we agree that patterns of political economy contain structural pressures that inform agency and political action, a high degree of historical sensibility is required to observe how situated agents reinform, renegotiate, re-assert or reform those overarching structures. It requires a historical awareness that captures geographical unknowns and difficulties; local resistances; the massive effects of epidemics; gradual processes of conquest; the intermingling of technologies; and the role of war and foreign policies. While this series of theoretical frameworks succeeded in constructing a "relational thinking" that bridges the gap between the "internal" and the "external", they tend to fall into the bias of pan-capitalism. Capitalism (DT and WST) and/or "unevenness

and development" (as part of UCD) is centred as the ultimate engine of historical change, distracting from a historicist perspective that demonstrates how agents innovate, strategise, and assert their evolving interests in a wider context of international politics. When revisiting Marxism's engagement with 'the international', there is an opportunity for future studies to better integrate the fact of multiplicity and specificity within given spatiotemporal contexts. The formation of a pluriverse of territorialised sovereignty cannot be reduced to a product of capitalism but was the culmination of late medieval practices of political and geopolitical accumulation that came to shape the early colonial period in the Americas (Teschke and Lacher 2007).

Political Marxism in IR & the Colonial Question

This section shows how our reinterpretation of diverging Anglo-Spanish practices of early modern colonisation is theoretically and historically anchored in PM and how the "Brenner Thesis" can be brought into the field of IR. PM originated in the 1980s, when scholars including Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood sought to provide an alternative to structural forms of Marxist analysis. Focusing on the transition debate, Robert Brenner (1982) built on the work of Maurice Dobb (1946) to explain how capitalism developed first in England, while other regions – such as pre-revolutionary France and Eastern Europe – were engulfed by serfdom and other pre-capitalist forms of production. The basic entry point for PM is that Europe did not develop equally, and thus cannot be understood as a monolithic or single unit of analysis. Early modern Europe was defined by a plurality of social formations, underpinned by numerous different social property regimes. Brenner (1982), Wood (2016), and other PM scholars emphasise social property relations and class antagonisms over commercial understandings of capitalist development (including Paul Sweezy (1976) and later Immanuel Wallerstein (2011)). For PM, capitalism has specific historical origins, which can be traced back to the late 14th century British countryside: agrarian capitalism.

Since Brenner and Wood's initial articulations on the transition debate, PM has grown into a large, but heterogenous group of scholars covering transitions to capitalism across multiple spatiotemporal contexts. This includes Xavier LaFrance (France), Charles Post (US), Camus Vergara (Brazil/Mexico), and more. Benno Teschke (2003) and Hannes Lacher (2006) built upon these foundations to bring PM into the realm of international relations – and it was here that PM first became intertwined with IR theory. Specifically, they investigated how different trajectories of socio-economic development in Europe resulted in regionally distinct patterns of state-building, generating in the early modern period a 'mixed-actor system' that exhibited distinct forms of pre-capitalist sovereignty and pre-modern international relations. This move from comparative history to a Historical Sociology of International Relations showed, amongst others, that "modern" international relations cannot be associated with the Peace of Westphalia but must be rethought more directly in relation to early modern capitalist Britain which exerted from the early 18th century onwards substantial geopolitical and modernising pressure (Teschke 2003). Contra Westphalian narratives, the international system of states and the development of capitalism as a relation of production, rather than emerging co-constitutively, actually originated historically at separate points (Teschke and Lacher 2007).

Capitalist social property relations thus established themselves amidst pre-defined territorial entities in Europe, carved out during the feudal and absolutist period via the process of geopolitical accumulation. Building on this theoretically-controlled historical finding, we are suggesting that the reconstruction of diverging Anglo-Spanish colonial practices and the emergence of colonial territories in the Americas was deeply informed by the bifurcation and contestation between specifically capitalist British colonial practices and distinctly pre-capitalist Spanish strategies. Through the process of land-grabbing and indigenous appropriation, some European, especially continental absolutist polities – the notion of "states" is an anachronism – had already started to expand across the Atlantic, meaning that the production of colonial territorial entities cannot solely be read through the prism of capitalism. This is not to collapse back into a reductive, or ideal-typical view of capitalist development, which PM is often criticised for (Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015; Hobson 2020), but to comprehend capitalism as an open-ended practice of political economy, which has specific origins and that its expansion across the globe was mediated by geopolitical factors that must be unpacked rather than abstracted from fixed, transhistorical rules.

Capitalism and its relation to the origins of colonial territoriality will be pursued in more detail in section three. However, our exploration makes an additional analytical step as the residual structuralist overtones in Lacher and Teschke's (2007) earlier work will be overcome by taking grand-strategy making even more seriously as a geopolitical practice that cannot be entirely reduced to or deduced from domestically prevailing social property relations (Teschke 2019; 2021). This article is therefore conceived as a contribution to the fundamental restructuring of international relations in the long eighteenth century (1688-1815), extending the PM-narrative decisively into extra-European areas. Instead of relying upon the *"whip of external necessity"*, we explore how Britain – underpinned by a revolutionised state-society complex, including a renewed approach to foreign policy – inadvertently transformed Europe's geopolitical order in competition with a series of pre-capitalist Old Regimes that tried to project their socio-economic and political arrangements overseas. The additional analytical step that we pursue commits to a "radical historicist" methodology in order to understand the role of high politics and diplomacy – a level of analysis typically left out of Marxist scholarship (Von Pfaler and Teschke 2024).

Indeed, while there are numerous PM accounts of capitalism-formation and divergent trajectories of development, Knafo and Teschke (2020) criticised some of this work for taking a step away from its historicist roots. Turning towards "radical historicism", Knafo and Teschke sought to deconstruct the rules of reproduction, moving away from ideal-type transitions to capitalism that over-stress the importance of the market, instead urging scholars to explore open-ended and unintended outcomes. How are these theoretical and methodological innovations relevant to colonialism in the Americas? Fundamentally, PM's evolution provides a platform for us to capture divergent British and Spanish colonial strategies within the wider theatre of European geopolitics, providing greater clarity to not only the processes that drove colonial expansion, but also the variable impact they unleashed on the ground at different levels including the diversity of social property relations, political institutions, and what Salgado (2021) calls "geopolitical subjectivities". This move is encapsulated by a shift from

"geopolitics" to "geopolicies", demonstrating "… 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" (Von Pfaler and Teschke 2024).

Key Divergences between Spanish and British Atlantic Expansion

Building on this PM framework and Maia Pal's (2020) distinction between transplants and transports of authority, we identify how divergent social property relations in Europe – pre-capitalist in the case of the Kingdom of Castile vs. capitalist in Britain – resulted in the development of: (1) distinct trajectories of polity-formation in Europe, where Spain was caught amidst a pre-modern state-society complex, while Britain formulated a modern state apparatus; (2) modes of territorial expansion carried out by quite separate colonial agents, referring to the *conquistadores* in New Spain compared to the independent merchants throughout the Eastern Seaboard; and (3) the construction of distinct intercolonial political economies, governed by the laws of mercantilism and intra-imperial free trade respectively. In the remainder of this article, we will expand on these points to demonstrate the theoretical and methodological steps required to identify different forms of colonialism and patterns of settlement using a PM-inspired framework, providing a platform for Marxist IR to provide clarity to the origin and enduring legacies of this encounter moving forward.

Social Property Relations & Polity-Formation in Europe

To begin to understand the divergent strategies of colonialism between Britain and Spain, we must move away from pan-capitalist approaches that view capitalism as a unitary system, underpinned by commercial exchange and a general logic of capital accumulation. In contrast, we identify capitalism as a specific system of exploitation, which is reinforced by a unique set of social property relations. This allows our analysis to historicise the impact of these contradictory class relations on the structures of their respective "states". In the early modern period, Spain and Britain operated according to two sets of social property relations that shaped and moulded their comparative polities. As we will see below, these divergent political structures profoundly influenced the production of distinct and unique strategies of colonialism emanating from both countries.

By the mid-15th century, social property relations in Castile were dominated by three key (pre-capitalist) social classes. This included a nobility class linked to landholders from the *mesta* system – the biggest pastoral economy of Europe, a consolidated class of *hidalgos* or conquistadors (enriched by European crusades, such as the conquest of Al-Ándalus), and lastly Genoese merchants and powerbrokers. Together, these social classes shared political power, in addition to control over the means of violence and territorial expansion. The Monarch and Church were utilised to mediate and sanction their various activities (Brilli and Herrero Sánchez 2019; Dauverd 2014; Kamen 2003; Elliott 1963). According to Perry Anderson (1974: 62), the (Christian) *mesta* class represented only 2-3 percent of the population in Castile, but they controlled 97 percent of the territory. The *mesta* was a system of land tenure, defined by changing boundaries that responded to the season and soil conditions. Due to the nature of

the *mesta* system, land was required above labour, creating a surplus of landless men (soon to become conquistadors) in the Spanish feudal economy (Elliott 1963: 109). This surplus population provided war services to the *mesta* class, which aimed to conquer southern lands and expand the *mesta* system while spreading Christianity.

A key example was the reconquest of Al-Ándalus, in which the *mesta* class acquired a wide range of privileges granted by the Crown, including land allocation, noble titles, and tax exemptions (Elliott 1963; Kamen 2003; Edwards 2000). Genoese merchants financially contributed to the crusade against the Moors in Al-Ándalus, in exchange for controlling exports (predominantly wool) from the ports of southern Spain (Elliott 1963; Kamen 2003). In doing so, the Genoese merchants helped the Spanish Monarchy better connect its weak internal markets with its porous external markets, while the Crown protected Genoese merchants from potential competitors through protectionist measures (Dauverd 2014; Wolf, Diaz, and Eriksen 2010). Comparatively, in Britain, a network of lords dominated the medieval polity, while surpluses were appropriated (through extra-economic coercion) from peasants. Peasants thus benefitted from direct access to their means of subsistence. Together, lords and aristocratic landowners provided military aid to the Monarch in return for the provision of property rights, which can be compared to the mercantilist policy and geopolitical order of absolutist Spain (Comninel 2000; Anderson 1974; Teschke 2003).

Anderson's (1974) thesis asserts the existence of the first 'absolutist' state in Spain – a state that was no longer completely feudal, nor was it capitalist. It was one that conglomerated political power beneath the Monarch, exhibiting an unprecedented degree of centralism, and oversaw the emergence of colonial enterprises. Unlike Spain, Britain did not formalise an absolutist political-structure. Following the emergence and consolidation of agrarian capitalism during the 15th and 16th centuries, a new class structure emerged consisting of a capitalist aristocracy, wage labourers, and tenant-farmers (Teschke 2019). With the advent of agrarian capitalism, the British polity also dramatically changed, undergoing several subsequent reforms and revolutions. These can be broken down according to sovereignty, finance, and foreign policy. In terms of sovereignty, following the Glorious Revolution (1688), the capitalist aristocracy were stationed in Parliament, meaning that decisions were no longer taken solely by the Monarch, but instead through a collaborative process, forming what we now refer to as the "King-in-Parliament" (Teschke 2019).

Britain also benefited from a superior financial and fiscal arrangement. The "National Debt" was established in 1694, meaning that liabilities were no longer the responsibility of an individual Monarch, but dues were accountable to Parliament and the public themselves. This is a clear distinction from other feudal/absolutist polities across Europe, which relied on the fortunes of royal families, often forcing them to become bankrupt. In the Spanish case, the Monarchy was dependent upon other brokers, such as the Genoese merchants, which supported the Crown's conquests and crusades. Comparatively, with the King-in-Parliament now a figurehead, Parliament assumed control over foreign policy – spelling an end to cycles of geopolitical accumulation and dynastic wars of succession that characterised much of the period. It was this same parliamentary aristocracy that rubberstamped and legitimised

Britain's strategy of colonisation in North America (intra-imperial free trade), which, unlike the Spanish mode of expansion, did not rely on politically constituted property rights as market access was open to all those merchants that possessed the necessary capital (Brenner 2003). In contrast, Spanish expansion was highly personalised, where political power was shared amongst colonial agents. The Monarchy oversaw the empire-building process by unleashing the *hidalgos* (who would later become the conquistadors) and setting in motion a widespread system of geopolitical accumulation and land grabbing.

Extra-Territoriality and the Shaping of Social Property Relations and Polity-Formation in Colonial North America and Mesoamerica

The first dimension typically omitted from other dominant accounts in Marxist IR is the specific agents that carried out colonisation in Mesoamerica in the early 16th century, compared to those agents that colonised the Eastern Seaboard in the early 17th century. Subsequently, we need to analyse the sort of social property relations crafted according to the specific context. Most of the colonisers and conquistadors from Castile who came to the Americas were part of the *hidalgos* who had successfully seized southern Spain. As a specific social class, their reproduction depended historically on the plunder of foreign booty. Such agents emerged abruptly in Mesoamerica; a vast geographical, civilisational and cultural region that by the 1500s was populated by around 26 million people (Todorov 1999: 7). At that time, regional political power was heavily concentrated in the Aztec Empire, which consolidated a sophisticated system of taxation imposed by force on other indigenous societies. The system consisted of payments in labour and in kind, which was transferred to the Aztec headquarters (Carrasco 1976). After the dramatic fall of Tenochtitlán in 1521, the Spanish Crown awarded the conquistadors with politically-constituted property rights and noble titles according to their conquests in order to maintain the integration of the empire and their loyalty as informal rulers (Knight 2002).

Conquistadors can be conceptualised as sub-sovereign actors, with non-capitalist characteristics to the extent that they were appropriating land and resources through extra-economic means. They also spread pre-modern sovereignty relations by formally extending the Monarch's claim throughout conquered lands. The imperial dominium over Mesoamerica was gradually consolidated through mechanisms of "jurisdictional accumulation" such as *capitulaciones, entradas, requerimientos*[2] and the property regime of the *encomienda.* However, conquistadors, in a personal capacity, enjoyed the spoils of exploitation and usurpation, nobiliary title privileges and land rights, among other mercantilist practices that secured or improved their status as a social class (Cervantes 2021; Kahle 1979). To a certain degree, geopolitical accumulation backed and encouraged by the Crown remained in the hands of the conquistadors who held seigniorial-type rights. Sovereignty, legitimacy, and political power were highly fragmented and personalised as in Iberian feudalism.

Pal's (2020: 8) three types of extraterritoriality were witnessed in early modern colonialism. Spanish colonialism, when it collided with Mesoamerican indigenous

2 *Capitulaciones, entradas* and *requerimientos* are historically specific jurisdictional innovations of Spanish colonial expansion to claim sovereignty over distant lands (Pal 2020).

structures, resulted in "transplants of authority". As such, the primary interest of this type of extraterritoriality consists in the rule, subjugation and ownership of both peoples and lands through the use of legal instruments that directly benefited the conquistadors. This sort of extraterritoriality contrasts with the French, Dutch, and British forms of empire. Beginning later, Britain's strategy of settler colonialism was initially carried out by a set of company merchants, such as the Virginia Company (Parisot 2019). Company merchants were always drawn from the upper echelons of London's mercantile society. This kind of colonial undertaking outsourced Britain's sovereignty to conquer, possess and trade the land and resources of indigenous North America. The reproduction of merchant companies depended mainly on trade and land ownership rather than direct rule and seizure of indigenous peoples and the appropriation of pre-existing social property relations. This is what Pal (2020: 7–8) calls "transports of authority", where chartered, commercial interests associated with the acquisition of property were prioritised above jurisdictional expansion.

However, this was contingent on historical change. Following the breakdown of the Virginia Company in 1623, Britain's strategy of settler colonialism adapted significantly – largely unintentionally – marking the beginning of intra-imperial free-trade. Under this new paradigm, expansion was no longer politically-constituted, meaning that anybody could take part in overseas endeavours and trade within the British Empire, as long as they possessed the capital and abided by the Trade and Navigation acts. This dynamism gave rise to the independent 'interloping' merchants from the middling contours of Britain's mercantile society who took over the process of settler colonialism (Brenner 2003). They created an "aggressive, wilful, modern society far more self-sufficient and self-directing than anyone ever imagined they could be or would be" (Butler 2001: 229). Unlike the Spanish conquistadors, interloping merchants were not personally sanctioned by the British Monarchy, instead they simply seized an opportunity following the vacuum left by the Virginia Company. Intra-imperial free trade thus signals a step away from the state-sponsored, mercantilist approach of Spain, embracing increasingly capitalist dynamics of competition in the theatre of colonial expansion. Following the Peace of Utrecht in 1713-15, the British parliamentary aristocracy codified intra-imperial free trade within its grand-strategy – referred to as the Blue-Water Policy – in which the geo-economic aspect included significant provisions to tackle chartered restrictions and monopolies across the British Empire (Teschke 2019).

What kind of social property relations and political institutions were developed by these distinct colonial agents? The Spanish Crown created the Viceroyalty of New Spain, concentrating formal imperial power in the viceroy established in Mexico City, where the locus of power was in the hands of the conquistadors and *encomenderos*[3]. In contrast, British America was overseen by royally-appointed governors, proprietors, and a network of legislative assemblies. Throughout colonial life in New Spain (1521-1810), various property regimes coexisted and developed, such as the *encomienda* (1521-1600s) and the *hacienda* (1600 - post colonial

3 *Encomenderos* were colonial agents with temporary permits, issued by the Spanish Crown, to develop relations and exploit indigenous people within an occupied area to meet the needs of the conquistadors, including providing labour and foodstuffs (Knight 2002).

Mexico)[4]. Neither the *encomienda* nor the *hacienda* resulted in a process of accumulation that industrialised New Spain or the Spanish metropole in Europe. Rather, these property regimes maintained a colonial policy based on mercantilism, including the distribution of political titles; price fixing; monopolies and protected markets; politically constituted property; and extra-economic appropriation in order to guarantee the reproduction of the landholding class (Knight 2002; Lockhart 1969). The lack of control by the Monarchy over the conquistadors and *encomenderos*, and their exploitative practices towards the indigenous peoples, sparked important debates about rights.

Castile's Crown enforced regulatory policies aiming to improve political control over colonial life. Examples of these policies are the New Laws of Indies (1542) and the establishment of a Council of the Indies (1524). All these legal mechanisms exerted some control and regulation over the practice of geopolitical accumulation led by sub-sovereign *encomenderos*. However, as Baschet (2009) argues, New Spain's "state apparatus" was always significantly weaker than the power of landowners. In fact, over the decades and centuries, landholders gained more power in New Spain. Declining populations due to dramatic epidemics and the economic losses this resulted in led the Crown to reform the landholding system in order to move towards better delineated boundaries and productive units. They wanted to create a property regime that would respond to external and internal fluctuations in agricultural and mining activities. The Crown therefore allowed the privatisation of the *encomienda*, which was converted into the famous *hacienda*. As the chief institution of New Spain, the *hacienda* guaranteed the reproduction of ruling classes regardless of the crisis generated by fluctuations of bullion exploitation (Leal and Huacuja 2011).

Unlike the *encomienda*, the *hacienda* was inheritable, but it also shared key characteristics such as being politically-constituted property, as the owners had some degree of authority over the population and operated within protected markets (Lockhart 1969; Kahle 1979). In sharp contrast, British America can be categorised into three types of colonies: independent, proprietary, and royal. All colonies were technically held under the auspices of the King, but royal colonies were overseen by royally-appointed governors, whereas proprietary and independent colonies had more authority over matters of governance. Each of the thirteen colonies formalised legislative assemblies, some of them with an upper and lower chamber, which became the core theatre of decision-making throughout the Eastern Seaboard. The legislative assemblies created an embryonic form of limited democracy that directly compares with the socio-political arrangement throughout New Spain; where, as explained before, governance was embedded in the politically-constituted property of *encomiendas* and *haciendas*.

The manner in which genocidal campaigns were conducted in both empires also diverged. Central to colonial strategy in British America was the direct ownership of land, in which farmers and planters sustained themselves and produced commodities for the

4 Both the *encomienda* and *hacienda* were property regimes introduced during the Spanish colonisation of the Americas. While the *encomienda* was introduced first during the 16th century, the *hacienda* replaced the *encomienda* in the following century as a more stable and organised property regime. A distinguishing feature of the *hacienda* was its clearer territorial boundaries, which contributed to create a diverse spectrum of social classes (Knight 2002).

market. To increase surpluses, planters and farmers were restricted by an incessant need for extensification (above intensification), meaning that they commonly pursued a policy of indigenous elimination and land grabbing to expand their holdings towards the West. Treaties were continually signed and frequently broken with indigenous groups – a trend that continued even after the United States (US) was formed. For example, Blackhawk (2023) highlights that the most amount of federal commitments made by the US Senate within its first century were, in fact, treaties with Indigenous nations. So, while in British America genocide was for the possession and expansion of land, in New Spain it was seemingly for the conquest of peoples for labour exploitation, direct rule, and religious conversion. Todorov (1999: 7) suggests that conquistadors instrumentalised epidemics, which soon escalated beyond control and claimed the lives of 25 million people during the first 100 years of colonial expansion, resulting in a fundamental transformation in the prevailing property regime.

Regarding patterns of political economy, in British America, the expansion of cash-crop production was seen most clearly in Virginia, where following the collapse of the Virginia Company, the growth in tobacco production took off exponentially before being replaced by sugar and cotton. For instance, tobacco production increased from 200 thousand pounds in 1624 to 3 million in 1638 in (Taylor 2012: 182). Switching to cash-crop production was underpinned by the fact that interloping and independent merchants – while contending with governors – had more freedom to carry out profit-maximising ventures, above the well-being of the colony. Many British colonial merchants formed cliques and operations with the governors themselves, further limiting the power of the British Monarchy (Brenner 2003). Independent merchants also oversaw the switch to chattel slavery, which further accelerated the production of tobacco across the South, increasing to roughly 9 million pounds in 1660s (Gray 1993 cited in Post 2011: 177). This dynamism of intra-imperial free trade is dissimilar to New Spain, where landowners traded in increasingly limited markets and acquired luxury goods through merchants based in colonial cities, such as Mexico City and Puebla, that possessed monopolies on foreign trade (Knight 2002; Florescano 1984).

British merchants not only engaged in cash-crop production, but also forged strong business and trading ties across the Eastern Seaboard, which included shipbuilding, fishing, provisioning services, and domination of the carrying trades between the South, New England, and Middle Colonies. Despite being more capitalist in nature, intra-imperial free trade did not result in the importation of capitalism in North America as a specific social property relation, instead introducing pre-capitalist modes of production, most notably chattel slavery and subsistence farming practices. It is worth emphasising that only after the dissolution of the Royal African Company's monopoly in 1698 did the trans-Atlantic slave trade begin to exponentially grow – for instance, in 1675 there were thought to be 2,500 slaves in Virginia, although between 1700 to 1750, 75 thousand slaves entered the region (Nash 2006, 167 cited in Parisot 2019: 31). This development contrasts radically with New Spain, where economic activities were limited to agriculture for self-consumption in the *haciendas*, plus exporting silver to Spain, which was used to acquire luxury goods for the reduced landholding class. Slavery was initially forbidden in New Spain. Following various epidemics which ravaged the continent, the Viceroyalty was forced to purchase additional labour in the form of human

beings, although never to the same extent that Britain engaged in. The slave trade was managed by designated merchants based in Mexico City, Puebla, and other large cities in the Bajio region. Yet New Spain did not monopolise the slave trade like the Royal African Company.

Conclusion

European colonial expansion in North America cannot be subsumed under the logic of capital accumulation. Territorial expansion in the New World was driven by sets of specific class relations, individual to both Britain and Spain. While the Spanish Monarchy oversaw politically-constituted expansion, in which settlements relied on the mercantilist extraction of minerals and pre-existing indigenous polities to shape new property regimes such as the *encomiendas*, it was the (capitalist) parliamentary aristocracy in Britain that codified a novel strategy of expansion, coined as intra-imperial free trade, that broke away from Spain's state-sponsored approach. Within this framework, independent merchants, aristocrats, and proprietors introduced cash-crops, chattel slavery, and other profit-maximising ventures. Extant approaches from within Marxist IR and IHS typically omit these key distinctions from the sphere of their enquiry, instead adopting structuralist perspectives, overemphasising the reach of capitalism.

The issue here is not only that Marxist IR struggles to grapple with divergent patterns of settlement and political economies, but also long-term state-building trajectories. UCD's *"whip of external necessity"* is not enough to capture and explain why capitalism developed in the US from the 1780s onwards, while Mexico stayed pre-capitalist until 1910 as Morton (2011) has argued; Wallerstein's WST does not provide a theoretical framework broad enough to capture the unique drivers behind both the American Revolution of 1776, or the Mexican Revolution in 1910; and while DT sought to explain how capitalism underdeveloped the periphery, it neglects other legacies of the colonial process. This article should be viewed as a starting point for scholars working within Marxist IR to focus less on the fact of international multiplicity and more on the 'making' of international order which defined the period of European colonial expansion. Despite PM being accused of Eurocentrism (Blaut 2000; 1994; Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015) and consequently failing to grasp subaltern groups and experiences, radical historicism and its prioritisation of agency provides a foothold for scholars to reverse this trend of structuralism in international politics and engage with these debates and many more, including lasting racial hierarchies, indigenous struggles for autonomy and their influence on various trajectories of state-formation.

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