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The Age of Absolutism: capitalism, the modern states-system and international relations

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Abstract. Understanding the origins of capitalism in terms of feudal crisis, agrarian class structures and economic development in Europe has been an enduring concern of a growing body of scholarship focusing on changes in social property relations. This work has been distinctive in highlighting long-term patterns of social property relations central to shaping late medieval and early modern Europe, variegated patterns of serfdom within feudalism, class conflicts intrinsic to the emergence of agrarian capitalism, and thus capitalist 'transition' through different paths of development. Most recently, the implications of a focus on social property relations have been drawn out in its relevance for International Relations (IR), expressly in terms of tracing specificities within the age of absolutism that shaped the expansion of the states-system and its relation to modernity. This article outlines and engages with past and present debates linked to the social property relations approach. It raises several problematics through an engagement with the theorising of political modernity by Antonio Gramsci and on this basis offers pointers towards future lines of enquiry from which further reflection on the conditions of historical and contemporary state formation and restructuring may proceed.

> Economic history is not a sort of ventriloquist with the rest of history as its dummy.
>
> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*.

Modern state formation and capitalist transformation

There are perhaps many points of departure one could take to begin the task of reflecting on the historical sociology of modern state formation and the crisis entailed in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. The purpose of this article is to outline and engage with a distinct body of scholarship that attempts to reveal the intricately linked historical processes of state formation, the emergence of the system of sovereign states, and its relation to modernity by focusing on changes in social

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property relations.[1] Recent scholarship contributing to these debates has argued that there was no straight transition from feudalism to the modern capitalist states-system. Instead, the origins of the interstate system lie in a period of absolutist sovereignty – the 'age of absolutism' – that was crucial in determining the constitutive structure of capitalist social relations through which the states-system is mediated and reinforced.[2] As such, my argument is centred in this emerging debate in International Relations (IR) which, in Benno Teschke's formulation, persuasively undermines some of the key principles of the discipline linked to the enduring foundational myth that the 1648 Peace of Westphalia codified the practices of modernity by ushering in the era of independent, territorial, autonomous, sovereign states. By contrast, his argument holds that 'demystifying Westphalia requires a re-theorisation of absolutist sovereignty' which entails examining the constitutive features of feudalism preceding the European absolutist and capitalist states-systems.[3] These constitutive features are linked to fundamental changes in modes of social organisation resting on social property relations.

The first section outlines the fundamental contributions of a social property relations approach. A question that is difficult to answer but nonetheless essential to pose in this engagement is the extent to which such scholarship adequately embraces the ways in which cultural mechanisms and forms of sociation operate through the very fabric of state formation activities, routines, rituals, and customs. 'Too many . . . historians', as E. P. Thompson argued, 'are guilty of a crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour and function, which, if they noted in the work of marxist analogues, would make them protest.'[4] A view that is echoed within Mark Laffey's statement that the resurrection in IR of a Marxism associated with a social property relations approach can result in a renewed identification with economism due to the failure to engage with issues of subjectivity.[5]

To elaborate on this, the second section contemplates the challenges of social constructivist approaches to understanding the historical sociology of modern state

[1] See, inter alia, Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1974); Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974); Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', and Robert Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', both in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Robert Brenner, 'The Social Basis of Economic Development', in John Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Alejandro Cólas, *International Civil Society* (London: Pinter, 2002); George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (London: Verso, 1987); Hannes Lacher, *Beyond Globalisation: Capitalism, Territoriality and the International Relations of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006); Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994); Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism: An Historical Essay on Old Regimes and Modern States* (London: Verso, 1991); and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2002).

[2] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 7–9.

[3] Benno Teschke, 'Theorising the Westphalian System of States: International Relations from Absolutism to Capitalism', *European Journal of International Relations*, 8:1 (2002), p. 35.

[4] E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' [1971], in E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 187.

[5] Mark Laffey, 'The Red Herring of Economism', *Review of International Studies*, 30:3 (2004), pp. 465–6.

formation. In contrast to mainstream neo-realist principles in IR, social constructivism has been applauded for its professed introduction of intersubjective ideas, norms, and values to the consideration of states' identities, interests, and actions. Whilst it too has been criticised, principally for reducing the historical sociology of modern state formation to ideas, new claims have arisen concerning culture and social identity in the making of societies of states – including the age of absolutism – that remain uncontested.

On the basis of this further engagement and critique, in the third major section, the argument indicates how a theory of modern state formation and the structuring of identities and subjectivities in the making of this process can be better advanced by drawing from the work of Antonio Gramsci. This section does so by indicating how the path dependent – determined but not deterministic – consequences of state formation during the age of absolutism, as highlighted within the social property relations approach, can be understood through the notion of passive revolution. Previously overlooked, this notion refers to conditions of socio-economic modernisation within established political orders so that crucial changes in property relations are accommodated within existing social formations but without fundamentally challenging the established order. It is a theory of the survival and reorganisation of state identities through periods of crisis, when social relations are reproduced in new forms leading to the furtherance of state power and an institutional framework consonant with capitalist social property relations.[6] It is also by highlighting the contribution the notion of passive revolution can make to understanding issues of combined and uneven development, linked to the social property relations approach, that the social structuring of identities and subjectivities within state formation processes can be more explicitly raised. After all, it has been indicated that 'Gramsci's scattered reflections on politics provide intriguing sketches of the historical cases' that can contribute to understanding the conditions of state formation and emergence of the modern states-system from a social property relations view, as well as negotiate the overlooked consideration of the mentality and self-understanding of collective actors within such processes.[7] Hence the significant task of establishing a series of links between the passive revolutions of European modernity and the prior legacy of pre-capitalist historical state formations forged in the age of absolutism, whilst addressing more directly the intersubjective realities of such practices.

In sum, the contributions of the social property relations approach can be appreciated in terms of the account of the rise of capitalism and the modern states-system, whilst asserting how the history of passive revolutions in Europe contributes to understanding the constitutive class struggles involved and the internally linked social structuring of identities and subjectivities. Pointers are then finally made in conclusion to the structure of contemporary capitalist states and how they have been shaped up to the present by the coexistence of particularly modern forms of state sovereignty and the worldwide expansion of capitalism. Hence revealing lines of enquiry about contemporary capitalist state restructuring in times of globalisation.

[6] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 106–7. Hereafter *SPN*.
[7] Gopal Balakrishnan, 'The Age of Warring States', *New Left Review II*, 26 (2004), pp. 158–9.

The age of absolutism from the point of view of social property relations

In advancing a frame of reference linking modernity, sovereignty and the states-system it is important to note that no precise chronological limit can be applied to the age of absolutism, although the period 1660–1815 can be seen as capturing the central social forces that contributed to the development of distinctive institutions.[8] Various maps of Europe can be traced at this time. 'In Europe west of the Elbe', in the latter half of the seventeenth century, 'the economic trends of the age worked in favour of the growth of a cash nexus between landlord and tenant, between owner of the soil and tiller, and against the continued exaction of personal services'. In eastern Europe there was a contradictory tendency. 'The cultivator was attached', Max Beloff continues, 'ever more rigorously to the soil; peasantry became almost synonymous with serfdom, social and political power was the monopoly of those who could command the services of this depressed majority'. As he concludes, 'unless this dramatic contrast between East and West is appreciated, there is no beginning of understanding either this period or its successors'.[9]

The first task, then, from a social property relations point of view, is to differentiate pre-capitalist and capitalist property relations in order to comprehend the above contrast. Under feudalism, agrarian property was privately controlled by a class of feudal lords who extracted a surplus from the peasants by politico-legal relations of compulsion: 'extra-economic' coercion was articulated through means of labour services, rents in kind, or customary dues owed to the individual lord by the peasant. Feudalism therefore involved a fusion of the juridical serfdom and military protection of the peasantry by a social class of nobles exercising a monopoly of law and private rights of justice within a framework of fragmented sovereignty.[10] Accordingly, what distinguished the feudal mode of production in Europe, following Perry Anderson, was the specific organisation of seigneurial and serf classes in a vertically articulated system of parcellised sovereignty and scalar property. 'It was this concrete nexus', he notes, 'which spelt out the precise type of extra-economic coercion exercised over the direct producer'.[11]

Under capitalist social property relations the direct extraction of surplus is accomplished through 'non-political' relations associated with different forms of social power. In capitalist social forms surplus extraction is indirectly conducted through a contractual relation between those who maintain the power of appropriation, as owners of the means of production, over those who only have their labour to sell, as expropriated producers. The direct producers are thus no longer in possession of their own means of subsistence but are compelled to sell their labour power for a wage in order to gain access to the means of production.[12] Said otherwise, direct producers only have access to the means of production through the sale of their labour power in exchange for a wage, which is mediated by the purely 'economic' mechanisms of the market. The market, in this focus on social property relations, does not therefore represent an opportunity but a compulsion to which both

[8] Max Beloff, *The Age of Absolutism, 1660–1815* (London: Hutchinson, 1954), p. 17.
[9] Ibid., pp. 26–7.
[10] Anderson, *Passages*, pp. 150–1; Anderson, *Lineages*, pp. 404–7.
[11] Anderson, *Lineages*, p. 408.
[12] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 31–6.

appropriators and expropriators (capital and labour) are subjected, through the imperatives of competition, profit maximisation, and survival.[13]

The second feature of a social property relations approach is that the origin of capitalism – the displacement of 'politically' constituted property by 'economic' power – is linked to the historical process of *primitive accumulation* signifying the reconstitution of peasants in possession of the means of subsistence into propertyless individuals compelled to sell their labour. This was 'the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production' leading to a situation in which 'capitalist production is once on its own legs'.[14] According to Marx 'the peasant's title to property is the talisman by which capital held him [*sic*] hitherto under its spell, the pretext under which it set him against the industrial proletariat'.[15] Leading to this situation, the historical rupture of primitive accumulation means:

> the transformation of the individualised and scattered means of production into socially concentrated ones, of the pigmy property of the many into the huge property of the few, the expropriation of the great mass of the people from the soil, from the means of subsistence, and from the means of labour, this fearful and painful expropriation of the mass of the people forms the prelude to the history of capital.[16]

It is in the outcome of this historical process of class conflict that Teschke has framed the question of modern sovereignty, turning to the consequences of developments in late medieval and early modern Europe and the transition from feudalism to capitalism.[17] Following Robert Brenner's analysis, the transition historically involved a comparative decline in serfdom in western Europe and its intensification in eastern Europe. Alongside this, the divergent effects of the emergence of secure small peasant property versus the rise of landlord/large tenant farmer relations on the land, linked to the rise of agrarian capitalism and the growth of agricultural productivity in England, in contrast to the role played by an absolutist state in France based on centralised tax/office surplus extraction, have been examined.[18]

The third major contribution of a social property relations approach is therefore the capacity to distinguish between the differential outcomes to the 'general crisis' that faced the European economy in the seventeenth century and the ensuing class confrontations, which resulted in totally divergent paths of subsequent social and economic development.[19] To summarise, in central and eastern Europe, faced with a relatively weak and disorganised peasantry, lords politically reconstituted themselves through a greater concentration of power within large serf-estates (magnates) alongside the growing centralised states. Such 'servile agriculture' covered parts of Germany, a region to the east of a line running roughly along the Elbe, the western frontiers of what is today the Czech and Slovak Republics, and then south to Trieste,

[13] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, pp. 96–8, 102.
[14] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I [1887], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), pp. 705–6.
[15] Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* [1850], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), p. 122.
[16] Marx, *Capital*, vol. I , p. 749.
[17] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 57–73.
[18] Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', pp. 10–63; Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots', pp. 213–327.
[19] See also Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Seventeenth Century in the Development of Capitalism', *Science & Society*, 24:2 (1960), pp. 97–112; Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', in Trevor Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe, 1560–1660: Essays from* Past & Present (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 5–58.

cutting off eastern and western Austria. This eastern area was 'servile' because it was largely a food and raw-material producing 'dependent economy' of western Europe that encompassed the Mediterranean plains and Baltic areas which, as early as the fifteenth century, was required to export, among other products, cereals and wood to countries such as Holland, England, and the Iberian peninsula. Eastern Europe therefore played the role of raw-materials producer for the industrialising west in exchange for manufactured goods, notably textiles, and other luxuries.[20] This led to a *re*-feudalisation that stifled the productivity of the direct peasant producers, precluding the emergence of an 'internal' dynamic of development and the expansion of social productive powers.[21] As a result, 'the lords of eastern Europe constructed a form of state peculiarly appropriate to their rather simple needs. It was a form in which they could represent themselves in the most immediate and direct way.'[22]

In areas of western Europe, the transformation of the feudal order and serfdom was determined by further differences in class structure. In England, the agrarian situation would become uniquely transformed through the monopolisation of land by commercially-minded landlords, cultivated by tenant-farmers employing the landless or smallholders. As Brenner details, a 'tripartite capitalist hierarchy' would therefore become established between commercial landlord/capitalist tenant/wage labourer through which the landed classes had no need to revert to direct 'extra-economic' compulsion to extract a surplus.[23] What is significant here was the increasing reliance on purely 'economic' modes of appropriation, the productive and competitive utilisation of land rather than direct coercive surplus extraction, which was central to creating conditions under which the primitive accumulation of capital could proceed. It meant that the nascent ruling class of landlords could largely depend on the 'impersonal' logic of 'economic' processes of exploitation by capitalist tenants of relatively free wage-labourers leading to greater intra-capitalist competition throughout the economy as a whole.[24] Hence, 'by the end of the seventeenth century the English evolution towards agrarian capitalism had brought about the end of the age-old ''fusion'' of the ''economic'' and the ''political'', and the emergence of an institutional separation between state and civil society'.[25] In terms of the connection between the emergence of capitalism and the rise of the state, it is argued that in the historically peculiar and specific case of England the processes developed in tandem. State formation and capitalist development went hand-in-hand as the social transformations that brought about capitalism were the same that characterised the separation of state and civil society leading to the constitution of the capitalist state.[26] Therefore, the 'specificity of state sovereignty lies in its

[20] Eric Hobsbawm, 'From Feudalism to Capitalism' [1962] in Rodney Hilton (ed.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1976), p. 162.
[21] Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development', p. 73.
[22] Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots', pp. 282–3.
[23] Ibid., p. 298.
[24] Claudio J. Katz, 'Karl Marx on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism' [1993], in Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley (eds.), *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments II*, vol. 6 (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 71–2.
[25] Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots', p. 299.
[26] Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p. 26. On the mystification of the powers of the state and the scission of state and civil society, see Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' [1843], and Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' [1843], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), pp. 3–129 and pp. 146–74.

''abstraction'' from civil society – an abstraction which is constitutive of the private sphere of the market, and hence inseparable from capitalist relations of production'.[27]

Finally, this pattern of state formation, characterised by economic power displacing politically constituted property relations, is distinguished within a social property relations approach from the centralisation of these powers in France through the tax/office nexus of absolutism. In France, absolutism involved, 'consolidating the grip of the state as a gigantic landlord', a centralised apparatus of surplus extraction.[28] According to Brenner, the absolutist state therefore developed in conflict with forms of seigneurial extraction whilst absorbing into state office those lords who were undermined by the eroding feudal system, resulting in a very different class structure in the countryside revolving around a distinct triumvirate of (free)peasant/landlord/centralising state.[29] Various implications flowed from this but chief amongst them was the recourse to war as a means of 'political accumulation' that translated into state-constitutive and state-building wars.[30] Absolutist monarchies thus came to stand 'as the nation in the process of formation as opposed to disintegration into rebellious vassal states'.[31]

Spelt out recently by Teschke, whilst warfare as a means of political accumulation was central to state-making it was not the product of power-maximising unitary states but, instead, bound up with the domestic class structures of pre-capitalist polities linked to absolutism.[32] Moreover, to solely 'define the state in absolutist terms is to miss the specificity of ''purely political'' institutions under capitalism', conflating absolutist and liberal sovereignty.[33] Absolutist sovereignty is therefore clearly distinguished from modern sovereignty within a social property relations approach due to its proprietary and dynastic character, which imposed a different logic of political accumulation on the emerging states-system.[34] The absolutist state was rooted in pre-capitalist property relations and, in accord with Hannes Lacher, 'should be understood as a social formation *sui generis*, a fundamentally non-capitalist form of social organisation characterised by a form of state that was precisely non-modern'.[35]

Giving primacy to social property relations reveals variances in emergent forms of production, which signalled divergent responses to the crisis of seigneurial incomes of the late medieval period. Nevertheless, the link that is missing in this account of state formation is that between the rise of specific social property relations and the making of new social identities and subjectivities. What needs to be demonstrated more clearly is how, through the series of class struggles constitutive of absolutist and,

[27] Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society*, pp. 123–4.
[28] Ibid., p. 135.
[29] Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', p. 55.
[30] Anderson, *Lineages*, p. 31; Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots', pp. 236–42; Brenner, 'The Social Basis of Economic Development', pp. 31–2; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 181–9.
[31] Friedrich Engels, 'On the Decline of Feudalism and the Emergence of National States' [1884], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 26 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 561.
[32] Teschke, 'Theorising the Westphalian System', p. 13.
[33] Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society*, p. 138.
[34] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 167–88, 233–45.
[35] Hannes Lacher, 'Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place: The Critique of State-Centrism and Its Limits', *Review of International Studies*, 29:4 (2003), p. 539. See also Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 152.

later, capitalist state formation, customary practices of folklore and modes of social organisation were equally transformed into 'modern' moral classifications and social definitions of property, value, customs, and rights. Illustrative here is George Comninel's recent acknowledgement that the abolition of normative rules of social regulation linked to 'traditional' peasant communities within English feudalism was intrinsic to constituting capitalist society. Yet equally revealing is his confession that no 'adequate attention to the character and social relationships of the ''traditional'' peasant community' is given in his analysis nor to 'the dissolution of this characteristic peasant community ... through the intrusion of radically different social relationships rooted in the common law, based on fundamentally individualistic property rights.'[36] Competing social constructivist claims in IR that aim to raise such questions by problematising the identities and interests of states and the historical constitution of the states-system have been dismissed from a social property relations approach. This terrain will be briefly outlined shortly. Yet to remain convincing in the dismissal of social constructivism an engagement is required with such work that has similarly looked at the specifics of state formation across the absolutist and modern states-systems, claiming to address the constitution of social identities and subjectivities integral to such processes. The next two sections approach this conundrum by, firstly, examining a competing social constructivist approach to analysing the historical constitution of the states-system, which has reflected on comparisons across different societies of states within the age of absolutism. This leads in the subsequent section to the proposal that the making and unmaking of identities embedded within historically specific state formation processes can be pursued from a historical materialist perspective through the *historical* and *methodological* analyses of Antonio Gramsci.

Social constructivism and the limits of history *as* ideas

State formation within the early modern period has been commonly generalised by mainstream neo-realist IR theory as a history of predation between territorially defined and mutually exclusive states stemming from the principles of Westphalian sovereignty. This results in supposed eternal lessons from history at the expense of due regard for the regionally distinct roots of state formation that would subsequently shape divergent pathways to social and economic development.[37] The principles of neo-realism in IR have consistently been revealed to rely on ahistorical assumptions about the social world extrapolated through universal laws and generalisations and conceptions of empirically observable material power relations. As a result, state identities and preferences are given exogenously: there is no account of how states come into being in the first place, how they are constituted, or even reproduced. The international states-system is therefore abstracted from history leading to a failure to account for the social bases of state power or the historically specific ideologies and practices that have constituted and sustained state identities across different orders. Having assumed the nature of state identities and the

[36] George C. Comninel, 'English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 27:4 (2000), p. 32.
[37] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

states-system, 'history becomes for neo-realists a quarry providing raw materials with which to illustrate variations on always recurrent themes'.[38]

It is in this vein that John Ruggie charged neo-realism with a failure to 'account for, or even to describe, the most important contextual change in international politics . . . the shift from the medieval to the modern international system.'[39] Acknowledging differences within social constructivism, the research agenda originally outlined by Ruggie involves problematising the identities and interests of states, to open up the historical constitution of the states-system and reflect on issues of systemic change. Intersubjective frameworks of meaning are attached to social norms that are not taken as simple descriptive categories but as components of generative structures that shape, condition, and constrain action.[40] Yet, as the compelling critique from a social property relations approach attests, no clear, definite argument is permitted to emerge within this account of system transformation.[41] In this variant, social constructivism offers a causally indeterminate sketch of the modern states-system and 'fails to identify those social agents that sustained, lived out, and changed property titles – not merely as formal institutions, but as politically maintained and actively negotiated social relations.'[42]

The further problem identified is the assumption within this version of social constructivism that a straight switch took place from the medieval to the modern states-systems. Citing Ruggie, 'the personalised and parcellised structure of political authority relations in feudal society collapsed and was replaced by the completely different institutional system of modern states'.[43] Following Teschke, the fault here is that by identifying one major shift – or sovereignty switch – from the medieval to the modern periods, pre-capitalist absolutist and modern forms of sovereignty are conflated.[44] Thereby obliterating the different trajectories of European state formation and the uneven development of transitions from feudalism to capitalism throughout the region, as outlined in the preceding section.

Yet this same line of criticism is also advanced by competing constructivist claims analysing comparisons across different historical societies of states that have been dropped from current critiques. In trying to trace the shifting moral purpose of legitimate statehood, a major challenge has been posed by Christian Reus-Smit to rationalist neo-realist modes of thinking, which are similarly accused of an inability to explain the rise of the modern states-system and its historical transformations. Failure to explain the institutional dimension and normative foundations of international society within neo-realist historical sociology signifies in his view the 'limits

[38] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), p. 133.
[39] John G. Ruggie, 'Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis', *World Politics*, 35:2 (1983), p. 273.
[40] See, inter alia, John G. Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematising Modernity in International Relations', *International Organisation*, 47:1 (1993), pp. 139–74.
[41] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 27–32 and also Benno Teschke and Christian Heine, 'The Dialectic of Globalisation: A Critique of Social Constructivism', in Mark Rupert and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Historical Materialism and Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 165–87.
[42] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 29.
[43] John G. Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalisation* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 25–6; Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond', pp. 150–1.
[44] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 31.

of history without ideas'.[45] At the same time, writers such as Ruggie are seen to 'cast an unnecessary veil of homogeneity over the last four hundred years', ignoring crucial distinctions between the absolutist system of states and its modern successor.[46]

Reus-Smit compares historical processes of state formation by focusing on the changing nature of fundamental institutions understood as 'the deep constitutive metavalues that comprise the normative foundations of international society'. Such metavalues are situated within broader constitutional structures made up of three key components: a hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of the state; an organising principle of sovereignty; and a systemic norm of procedural justice. 'Together they form a coherent ensemble of metavalues, an ensemble that defines the terms of legitimate statehood and the broad parameters of rightful state action'.[47] Across different historical societies of states (Ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, Absolutist Europe, and the modern states-system) different constitutional structures, it is argued, have been justified according to distinct conceptions of the moral purpose of the state, norms of procedural justice, and particular sets of fundamental institutions. The problem therein is a theory of history – 'constructivist history'[48] – that indulges in an idealist understanding of transformations in social relations as the basis for changes in state forms. By disembedding intersubjective ideas, norms and values from the social relations in which they cohere, the alternative problem of the limits of history *as* ideas within social constructivism can be exposed. Constructivism is then much less capable of living up to its self-anointed reputation as the 'Swiss-blade' theory of IR, capable of addressing all manner of contrasting philosophical and social problems within international theory, than presently supposed.[49]

To elaborate, the absolutist experience of state formation is analysed by Reus-Smit to rebuff the 'Westphalian thesis' about the origins of *modern* international society, principally that the 1648 Peace of Westphalia was a watershed between previously heteronomous and subsequently homonous sovereign modes of order and territoriality.[50] Hence, firstly, the transition *to* absolutism itself is initially interpreted as a combination of the centralisation and territorial demarcation of authority, involving European monarchs claiming the right to determine religion within their territorial jurisdictions. The rationalisation and consolidation of hierarchy is also highlighted, which ensued from territorialisation and assisted the consolidation of dynastic values. In this transition, then, greater accord is given to the links between political authority, state identity, and the legitimacy of absolutist rule. At the same time, it is held that the prevailing ideology consisted of a distinctive set of metavalues, or ensemble of intersubjective beliefs, based on divine-right absolutism that impeded principles of contractual international law. This adds up to a privileging of Christian

[45] Christian Reus-Smit, 'The Idea of History and History with Ideas', in Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (eds.), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[46] Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 91–2.

[47] Ibid., p. 6.

[48] Reus-Smit, 'The Idea of History', p. 130.

[49] Recent arguments presenting constructivism in this way would include Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit, 'Dangerous Liasons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism', *European Journal of International Relations*, 4:3 (1998), pp. 259–64, and Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane and Stephen D. Krasner, '*International Organisation* and the Study of World Politics', *International Organisation*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 645–85.

[50] Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State*, p. 8.

and dynastic intersubjective values about legitimate statehood and state action centred on a divinely ordained social order. 'It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, when a new set of constitutional values had emerged to justify the authority of sovereign state, that the fundamental institutions of multilateralism and contractual international law took off'.[51]

The transition *from* absolutism is then, secondly, linked to the ascendance of new constitutional values and 'revolutionary changes in thought and practice [that] undermined the ideological and material foundations of dynastic rule'.[52] The set of metavalues that redefined legitimate statehood coalesced around individualism as the basis for social, economic, and political order as embodied in the American and French revolutions. To cite Reus-Smit directly, 'mutually reinforcing revolutions in scientific, economic and political thought and practice undermined the foundations of absolutist rule, spawning a new rationale for state sovereignty and a new conception of procedural justice'.[53] 'The crucial blow to absolutism', he continues, '. . . came from the resonance and articulation of these ideological developments with the concrete social and material transformations sweeping late-eighteenth century Europe.'[54]

The fundamental problem with this analysis of transition is that changes in human consciousness, through the rise and decline of metavalues, are held as driving the fundamental institutions of legitimate statehood. Yet the social transformations linked to the transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy are bracketed away and elided. There is therefore a recurring problem that is common across constructivist analyses: *Whose* values and beliefs have constituted or embodied the hegemonic moral purpose of the state and the relevant constitutional structure of the international society of states? *Which* agents shaped the core intersubjective beliefs about the moral purpose of the state? *Why*, finally, was there a shift from feudal structures of property rights and authority relations within the matrix of constraints and opportunities shaping social actors? [55] The emergence of capitalism across Europe, as the social structure of feudal or agrarian society was revolutionised, production was increased through changes to the social division of labour, and wage-workers were constituted, is therefore expunged from the analysis.

Returning to the alternative of a social property relations approach, there are crucial spatial and temporal distinctions to be made in the way emergent forms of production signalled the rise of capitalism and the modern states-system in Europe. As outlined, these variances raise different questions about the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the distinct intercession of absolutism in specific regional contexts within the transition to capitalism, and thus the internal link between capitalism and modern sovereignty within historical processes of state formation. A focus on social property relations affords insight into these material social transformations. At the same time, though, practices in the production and reproduction of particular intersubjective norms, values, and principles need to be better incorporated into this account of state formation.

[51] Ibid., pp. 88, 94.
[52] Reus-Smit, 'The Idea of History', p. 138.
[53] Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State*, p. 153.
[54] Ibid., p. 127.
[55] These questions link to the enquiry in Adam David Morton, 'New Follies on the State of Globalisation Debate?', *Review of International Studies*, 30:1 (2004), pp. 133–47.

One way of going beyond this cul-de-sac and addressing this aim within a historical materialist approach, is to indicate the cultural mechanisms and forms of sociation that operate through the very fabric of the class structuring of state formation. What this means is addressing the embeddedness of moral regulation within the specifics of state formation processes and the forms of cultural relations through which state activities are asserted. Drawing from Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, this entails delineating the meaning of state activities, forms, routines, and rituals in the constitution and regulation of social identities and subjectivities within and across the formation of the states-system. As they indicate, 'state formation as cultural revolution plays a far more important role in our conception of both the origins and the nature of capitalist civilisation than has normally been the case in historical materialism'.[56] In their work this assists in appreciating the centuries-long historical experience and cultural significance of state-making in England, starting in the twelfth century, to trace the moral ethos of state formation inscribed in cultural mechanisms operating through class structures within which social property relations are constituted. Central to this is the dialectical structuring of property relations in the creation of social identities and subjectivities and the part played by cultural forms – social practices, identities, organisations – integral to the making of bourgeois civilisation. This is a process that unfolds through the *internalisation* of bourgeois norms as constitutive of social identities and the active *dis*integration of other sources of identity and conceptions of subjectivity.[57] After all, internalising an identity or set of practices is one of the most potent expressions of a power relationship, a feature that precisely relates to the precocity of state formation in England, for here 'absolutism was not required to make the nation, nor *philosophes* to hegemonise bourgeois culture.'[58]

The crux of the problem is therefore how to proceed with an historical interpretation and appreciation of state formation experiences in the transition to modern capitalism that can address intersubjective realities as internalised social compulsions, needs, and demands. To resolve this dilemma, a link is sought in the work of Antonio Gramsci and his analysis of the dissemination of the French Revolution through *'class ''meatuses'' '* that led to the creation of modern European states elsewhere. These events unfolded through modernising strategies and 'successive waves' of social class struggle and national wars known as passive revolution.[59] The next section therefore continues the earlier engagement with the social property relations approach and the focus on the emergence and development of the states-system to demonstrate how Gramsci's *historical* analyses might provide pointers to the problems raised, as well as how his *methodological* insights can also contribute to tracing the social structuring of identities and subjectivities within such processes.

[56] Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution.* 2nd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 200.
[57] Ibid., p. 195.
[58] Ibid., p. 201.
[59] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 230–1.

The history of Europe seen as 'passive revolution'?[60]

The end of the absolutist age has been cast as a specific form of rule that would signal a crisis in class power, the advent of 'bourgeois revolutions' across Europe, and the emergence of the capitalist state. In France 'the state structure and concordant ruling culture perfected in the reign of Louis XIV was to become the model for much of the rest of the nobility in Europe', directly extending to Spain, Portugal, Piedmont, and Russia.[61] The repercussions of 'bourgeois revolution' in France would equally extend across the continent although the outcomes were not foreordained. Generally the notion of a 'bourgeois revolution' implies a revolutionary upheaval that advances the rise of capitalism, by changing property forms or the nature of the state, 'but such an all-embracing notion obscures as much as it reveals'.[62] Principally this is because it is difficult to distinguish whether a bourgeois revolution was cause or consequence in the transition to capitalism, leaving a problem in discerning the social transformations that brought capitalism into being.[63] 'Those who seek', warns Eric Hobsbawm, 'for a self-conscious, let alone organised ''bourgeoisie'' seeking to make a ''bourgeoisie revolution'' *before* such a revolution, are likely to be disappointed'.[64] Essentially because such attempts succumb to according *ex post facto* too much political consciousness and cohesion to a 'bourgeoisie' as a class, struggling against the old regime preventing the emergence of the institutions of 'bourgeoisie society'.

Despite these acknowledged problems, Hobsbawm has argued that both a 'feudal reaction' sparked the French Revolution alongside momentum from the nobility who, in their position of increasing economic decline and political dependence on the aristocracy, came to compete with the middle classes for official posts within the central and provincial administration. At the same time, to counteract the growing decline in seigneurial income, the nobility continued to squeeze peasant labour.

> Feudal dues, tithes and taxes took a large and rising proportion of the peasant's income, and inflation reduced the value of the remainder. For only the minority of peasants who had a constant surplus for sale benefited from the rising prices; the rest, in one way or another, suffered from them, especially in times of bad harvest, when famine prices ruled.[65]

With war and debt finally breaking the monarchy, the aristocracy sought an opportunity to protect their privileges. 'The Revolution thus began as an aristocratic attempt to recapture the state'.[66] This backfired as the independent intentions of the 'Third Estate' – an entity doomed to represent neither nobles nor clergy and dominated by the middle class – positioned itself within the social struggle coupled by profound economic and social crisis. According to Hobsbawm, within three weeks of the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, 'the social structure of French rural feudalism and the state machine of royal France lay in fragments', which would soon impact on the recurrence of 'bourgeois' politics across the continent.[67]

[60] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 118.
[61] Anderson, *Lineages*, pp. 42, 102.
[62] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, p. 118.
[63] Ibid., pp. 116–21.
[64] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Revolution', in Tony Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *Revolution in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 22, original emphasis.
[65] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), p. 57.
[66] Ibid., p. 58.
[67] Ibid., pp. 61–2.

This would involve similar but at the same time specific mobilisations of middle class reformers and the masses against reaction and counter-revolution from leaders of the *Ancien Régimes*. The definitive defeat of aristocratic power was then secured by the revolutionary wave of 1830 so that 'the ruling class of the next fifty years was to be the ''grande bourgeoisie'' of bankers, big industrialists and sometimes top civil servants, accepted by an aristocracy which effaced itself or agreed to promote primarily bourgeois policies'.[68] Hence the history of the period 1815–1848 becomes the history of the disintegration of the united front of absolute monarchy, church, and aristocracy.[69]

From a social property relations approach, it is within this period that processes of state formation forged during the age of absolutism in Europe are viewed to have undergone further modification in light of the combined and uneven development of capitalism. This means that earlier trajectories of state formation became influenced by the *combined* geopolitical emergence of the modern state with the *uneven* worldwide spread of capitalism.[70] The implications of this for IR have been drawn out in terms of how the international pressure of absolutism in western Europe obliged the nobility in eastern Europe to adopt an equivalently centralised state in order to reproduce itself.[71] It was the dynamic of feudalism within the age of absolutism, linked to the logic of political accumulation, that initiated a coercive process of state formation from above in eastern Europe. As capitalism chronologically expanded in an uneven fashion, due to the precocity of such developments in England, states configured by pre-capitalist relations were required to adapt by combining different forms of development. This was because 'once breakthroughs to ongoing capitalist economic development took place in various regions, these irrevocably transformed the conditions and character of the analogous processes which were to subsequently occur elsewhere'.[72] Absolutist sovereignty in certain cases would therefore be forcibly abbreviated by conditions of underdevelopment as the state came to give an external impulse to the progress of capitalism through primitive accumulation. Through mechanisms of centralised political power, primitive accumulation would then be impelled by employing 'the power of the state, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation'.[73]

Hence the state formation processes underway during the age of absolutism would be structurally transformed in a long-term process of geopolitically combined and socially uneven development in consolidating modern sovereignty.[74] It was only in the nineteenth century 'that durable absolutist states were erected in the east, after the full military and diplomatic integration of the continent into a single international

[68] Ibid., p. 111.
[69] Ibid., p. 113
[70] Justin Rosenberg, 'Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations', *New Left Review I*, 215 (1996), pp. 3–15. The world historical process of combined and uneven development, indicating the insertion and adaptation of states to different stages of development, was originally outlined by Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, vol. 1 (London: Victor Gollanz, 1936), pp. 25–32, 72, 334–5.
[71] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 11–12, 40–1, 262–8.
[72] Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots', p. 322.
[73] Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 739.
[74] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, pp. 97–9, 144–6, 250, 266.

system, and the resultant pressure from the west that accompanied it'.[75] The push for development came from state-driven impulses as the primary channel of primitive accumulation. The states-system was therefore a legacy of the age of absolutism, of pre-capitalist territorial and spatial relations, which preceded the expansion of capitalism.[76] As Teschke avers, only after the revolutions in Europe of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century would a new logic of free trade be advanced based on a conception of sovereignty that divided public and private spheres.[77] It is in understanding this transition to modern sovereignty, succeeding the age of absolutism, through the prism of passive revolution that a contribution can be made both to understanding the construction of the states-system and the constitution of identities and subjectivities linked to such processes.

On an *historical* level, Gramsci cast the combined and uneven development of capitalism across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a series of 'passive revolutions'. Initially developed to explain the Risorgimento, the movement for Italian national liberation that culminated in the political unification of the country in 1860–61, the notion of passive revolution was expanded to encompass a whole series of other historical phenomena. Or, as Fred Halliday notes, 'in the case of the uncompleted bourgeois revolution in Italy itself ... [Gramsci] had a powerful example of the impact of combined and uneven development.'[78] In the words of Giuseppe Garibaldi:

> the whole country, so full of enthusiasm and energy, capable not only of resisting but of overcoming the enemy occupying its territory, was reduced to a state of prostration and inertia through the folly and the treachery of the men who ruled it: its monarchy, its intelligentsia, its clergy.[79]

Whilst rooted in his writings on the crisis of the liberal state in Italy, Gramsci linked the notion of passive revolution to transformations across Europe cast in the shadow of revolutionary French Jacobinism.[80] Specifically in terms of a transformation of society in a 'bourgeois' direction but without the active participation of the masses, unlike the upheaval of the French Revolution where the Jacobins 'made the bourgeoisie into the leading, hegemonic class of the nation, in other words gave the new state a permanent basis and created the compact modern French nation'.[81]

According to Gramsci, the French Revolution established a 'bourgeois' state on the basis of popular support and the elimination of old feudal classes yet, across Europe, the institution of political forms suitable to the expansion of capitalism occurred differently. Hence highlighting 'differences between France, Germany and Italy in the process by which the bourgeoisie took power (and England)', for 'it was in France that the process was richest in development, and in active and positive political elements'.[82] Following the post-Napoleonic restoration (1815–1848), the

[75] Anderson, *Lineages*, p. 228.
[76] Teschke, 'Theorising the Westphalian System', pp. 6–8.
[77] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 263.
[78] Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 246.
[79] Giuseppe Garibaldi, *My Life*, trans. Stephen Parkin (London: Hesperus Books, 2004), p. 15.
[80] Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Derek A. Boothman (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp. 330, 348–50. Hereafter *FSPN*.
[81] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 79.
[82] Ibid., pp. 82–3.

tendency to establish 'bourgeois' social and political order was regarded as something of a universal principle but not in an absolute or fixed sense.[83] 'All history from 1815 onwards', wrote Gramsci, 'shows the efforts of the traditional classes to prevent the formation of a collective will . . . and to maintain ''economic-corporate'' power in an international system of passive equilibrium.'[84] Moreover 'the ''successive waves'' were made up of a combination of social struggles, interventions from above of the enlightened monarchy type, and national wars – with the latter two predominating'.[85] This was indicative of mid-nineteenth century European national unifications during which people become ancillaries of change organised from above, based on elite-led projects. A process that in other parts of the world would be mimetic as 'countries seeking to break through modernity are normally derivative and unoriginal in their ideas, though necessarily not so in their practices'.[86] A passive revolution therefore, *was* a revolution, marked by violent social upheaval, but it involved a relatively small elite leading to the creation of state power and an institutional framework consonant with capitalist property relations.[87]

In the case of Italy, the 'passive' aspect refers to the restrictive form of hegemony that emerged out of the Risorgimento because of the failure of potential 'Jacobins' in the *Partito d'Azione* led by Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, among others, to establish a programme reflecting the demands of the popular masses and, significantly, the peasantry. Instead, challenges were thwarted and changes in property relations accommodated due to the 'Moderates', led by (Count) Camillo Benso Cavour, establishing alliances between big landowners and the northern bourgeoisie, whilst absorbing opposition in parliament through continually assimilated change (or *trasformismo*) within the current social formation. 'Indeed one might say', Gramsci noted, 'that the entire state of Italy from 1848 onwards has been characterised by *trasformismo*'.[88] The process is not literally 'passive' but refers to the attempt at 'revolution' through state intervention or the inclusion of new social groups within the hegemony of a political order without an expansion of mass control over politics.[89] Indicative here is the way the Moderates thought 'the national question required a bloc of all the right-wing forces – including the classes of the great landowners – around Piedmont as a state and as an army'.[90] This left intact sedimentations of pre-capitalist social relations, a 'legacy of parasitism bequeathed to modern times', by the rural southern bourgeoisie – those 'pensioners of economic

[83] Antonio Gramsci, *Pre-Prison Writings*, ed. Richard Bellamy, trans. Virginia Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 230–3. Hereafter *PPW*.
[84] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 132.
[85] Ibid., p. 115.
[86] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), pp. 73, 166. This phrasing echoes the insight offered by Trotsky that 'A backward country assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries. But this does not mean that it follows them slavishly, reproduces all the stages of their past.' See Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 26.
[87] It is worth noting that the concept of passive revolution was developed by Gramsci as an explicit elaboration of Marx's 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, see Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), pp. 261–5.
[88] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 58.
[89] Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics,* 2nd edn. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 210.
[90] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 100.

history' – residing in the quiescent 'cities of silence' in Puglia or Sicily.[91] The result was a process of fundamental social change but without an attempt to embrace the interests of subordinate classes and crucially the peasantry within a national state. Lacking here was a Jacobin force 'which in other nations awakened and organised the national-popular collective will, and founded the modern states.'[92] Analysing the 1848 revolutions, Gramsci also argued that the 'precise *coups d'état*' of the '18 Brumaire type' had been changed to such an extent that 'the Forty-Eightist formula of the ''Permanent Revolution'' ', became, 'expanded and transcended in political science by the formula of ''civil hegemony'' '.[93] Hence the resultant dialectical combination of progressive and reactionary elements within conditions of passive revolution, described as 'revolution-restoration' or 'revolution without revolution'.[94] For that reason, Gramsci asked if Fascism could be understood as the most recent attempt in Italian history to further the expansion of capital, 'is not ''fascism'' precisely a new ''liberalism''? Is not fascism precisely the form of ''passive revolution'' proper to the twentieth century as liberalism was to the nineteenth?'[95]

At issue here is not the question of the historical validity of these examples.[96] As Gramsci himself was more than aware, such a theory is merely a 'criterion of interpretation' that 'cannot be applied mechanically to . . . Italian and European history from the French Revolution throughout the nineteenth century.'[97] Highly specific regional diversities in the pattern of capitalist development, the relationship between city and countryside, and the forms of political representation and tensions between social classes, within and between states, have been raised elsewhere.[98] Instead the point here is to appreciate specific outcomes within conditions of passive revolution or, 'the significance of a ''Piedmont''-type function . . . i.e. the fact that a state replaces the local social groups in leading a struggle of renewal.'[99] The theory exposes a situation in Italy whereby the 'bourgeoisie obtained economic-industrial power, but the old feudal classes remained as the government stratum of the political class'.[100] It is this weakness in the 'function of Piedmont' that then became the analogue to state-building attempts elsewhere marking the history of Europe across the nineteenth century. Passive revolution is therefore a portmanteau concept that reveals continuities and changes within the order of capital. Processes, in the example of the Risorgimento, that exemplified the inability of the ruling class to fully integrate the people through conditions of hegemony, when the leaders 'were aiming at the

[91] Ibid., pp. 91, 131, 281.
[92] Ibid., p. 131.
[93] Ibid., pp. 220, 243.
[94] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, p. 137.
[95] Antonio Gramsci, *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), pp. 264–5.
[96] Witness signal differences here between George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (London: Verso, 1987) and Eric Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marsellaise: Two Centuries Look Back on the French Revolution* (London: Verso 1990).
[97] Gramsci, *SPN*, pp. 114, 116.
[98] For an indication of the debate see, inter alia, John A. Davis (ed.), *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); John A. Davis, 'Remapping Italy's Path to the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern History*, 66:2 (1994), pp. 291–320; and Jane Schneider (ed.), *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford: Berg, 1998).
[99] Gramsci, *SPN*, pp. 105–6.
[100] Ibid., pp. 83, 104–6, 115–20; for example, Serbia, prior to World War I, was labelled the unsuccessful ''Piedmont'' of the Balkans' and post-1789 France, up to the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon, the 'Piedmont of Europe'.

creation of a modern state in Italy [but] in fact produced a bastard'.[101] Hence a situation when 'more or less far-reaching modifications . . . into the economic structure of the country' are made in a situation of 'domination without that of ''leadership'': dictatorship without hegemony'.[102] This might be because, 'the impetus of progress is not tightly linked to a vast local economic development . . . but is instead the reflection of *international developments* which transmit their ideological currents to the periphery – currents born of the productive development of the more advanced countries.'[103]

These trajectories of state formation manifested within the combined and uneven development of various passive revolutions were, once again, the precise legacy of absolutism. Recall that the absolutist state in eastern Europe was highly centralised with serfdom consolidated and seigneurial power concentrated over the peasantry as 'territorial, personal and economic lordship were generally fused in a single manorial authority, which exercised cumulative rights over its subject serfs.'[104] Here, the legacy of absolutism was a heavily concentrated, hierarchical and centralised state structure that unequivocally displayed its class composition and function alongside its oppression and exploitation of the peasantry through blunt coercion.[105] It is this bequest that led Gramsci to famously formulate that:

> In the East the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was revealed.[106]

As outlined earlier, the rich background of the age of absolutism in Europe therefore provides an insight into posterior processes of state formation, divergent trajectories of development, and the relationship between state and civil society across different regions. Linked to the concept of passive revolution, it is also further possible to appreciate similar but discrete situations characterised by the expansion of capital and the emergence of the modern state. 'The concept of passive revolution, it seems to me', declared Gramsci, 'applies not only to Italy but also to those countries that modernise the state through a series of reforms or national wars without undergoing a political revolution of a radical Jacobin-type'.[107] Lest the international dimensions of this process are neglected, Gramsci then linked capitalist expansion itself to the above processes of social transformation to explicitly articulate varied forms of passive revolution within conditions of 'uneven development' as 'a world historical phenomenon'. In his view that is why, 'the colonial populations become the foundation on which the whole edifice of capitalist exploitation is erected'.[108] Also discernible within this recourse to understanding modern state formation, as the combined and uneven development of various passive revolutions, is an emphasis on the socio-cultural aspects of class rule.

[101] Ibid., p. 90.
[102] Gramsci, *FSPN*, p. 350; Gramsci, *SPN*, pp. 105–6.
[103] Gramsci, *SPN*, pp. 116–17 emphasis added.
[104] Anderson, *Lineages*, pp. 223–4.
[105] Ibid., p. 430.
[106] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 238.
[107] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 232.
[108] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1910–1920*, ed. Quintin Hoare, trans. John Matthews (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), pp. 69–72, 302.

On a *methodological* level, the interplay between ruler and ruled within state forming struggles can be analysed in a manner that directly addresses a consideration of the mentalities and ideologies of subaltern classes, their active as well as passive affiliation to dominant social forms of political association, and thus their involvement in formations that might conserve dissent or maintain control. Here, Gramsci's own criteria on the history of subaltern classes can be taken as a point of departure, in terms of his focus on their forms of political representation and the material basis of such relationships. Firstly, in terms of their 'objective' formation linked to transformations within property relations and, secondly, in terms of those formations subaltern classes produce in order to press claims or assert autonomy within state-forming conditions. This advances an understanding of the 'decisive nucleus of economic activity' – but without succumbing to declarations of economism – by also considering questions of historical and political consciousness expressed by subaltern classes to realise the subjective implications of state formation, which are intertwined with 'the history of states and groups of states'.[109] What emerges here, then, is a methodology of subaltern historical analysis and an actual history of subaltern classes within a historical materialist political strategy of social transformation.[110]

For example, Gramsci traced within the countryside of the 'south' of Italy the *morti di fame*, or 'starvelings', constituted by the peasantry and agricultural day-labourers that embarked on confused expressions of class struggle. Their 'intellectual and moral condition' would be ' ''semi-feudal'' rather than modern in character', manifested in 'a negative rather than a positive class position' through the identification of the *signori* of officialdom on the basis of dress codes, their role as civil servants, and a dislike of country for town. Hence the peasantry could 'only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations, via their consciousness of the identity and class limits of their enemies' as representatives of the state.[111] This could be discernible in terms of brigandage, blackmail, burning down woods, the maiming of livestock, or attacks on municipal buildings that all constituted 'a form of elementary terrorism, without long term or effective consequences'.[112] Through these forms of organising, the peasantry were 'in perpetual ferment, but as a mass . . . incapable of giving a centralised expression to their aspiration and needs.'[113] Such action was 'characteristic of the ''history of the subaltern classes'', and indeed of their most marginal and peripheral elements' for they 'have not achieved any consciousness of the class ''for itself''' '.[114]

These issues are perhaps spelt out most clearly in Gramsci's essay 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question' (1926) which also traces the question of intellectuals and the function they perform in the class struggle as mediators between the *latifondisti* (or great landowners), the rural bourgeoisie, and the peasantry. Linked to their class background, southern intellectuals came to 'derive a fierce antipathy to the working peasant, considered as a work machine that can be bled dry and then replaced, given

[109] Gramsci, *SPN*, pp. 52–5, 161.
[110] Marcus Green, 'Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern', *Rethinking Marxism*, 14:3 (2002), pp. 19–20.
[111] Gramsci, *SPN*, pp. 272–3.
[112] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings, 1921–1926*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey-Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), p. 84.
[113] Gramsci, *PPW*, p. 327.
[114] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 196.

the excess working population'.[115] At the same time, however, through 'capillary processes' linked to the composition of local parties or communal and provincial councils, various strata of intellectuals would seek 'the realignment of political currents and mental attitudes' linked to the peasantry to forge an agrarian bloc that could act as an overseer for the industrial bourgeoisie in the north.[116] Hence the tracing of the nexus of ideological and class relations between class fractions of the north and south in the organisation of the national economy and the Italian state so intrinsic to the history of the Risorgimento.

What emerges in this understanding is therefore the 'epistemological significance' of class struggle revolving around shaping state and subaltern class intersubjectivities internally related to the emergence of capitalism.[117] This is furthered by tracing the residues of 'common sense' – taken for granted 'beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing and of acting' – whether in popular folklore or superstitions, religious beliefs, or practices that are transformed in the attempt to engender a 'modern outlook'.[118] The principal worldview of 'common sense' is splintered in the first instance in terms of religion with differences existing between the peasantry, the *petits-bourgeois* and town workers, women, or intellectuals.[119] Subsequently, the constitution of the human subject is composed of very contradictory ideological formations with 'common sense' standing between elements of folklore and modern philosophy, science, and economics. Identity here is protean, 'it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy', often based on educational practices intended to call modernity into existence through the rudiments of natural science, a belief in objective laws, civic rights and duties, and the disciplining of work.[120] It is such rituals and routines of state forms that are also asserted within the work of E. P. Thompson to address how cultural customs were formed in resistance to economic rationalisations (enclosures, work-discipline, 'free' markets in grain) in the exploitation and making of the working class and thus *internalised* within a certain *mentalité* of legitimation, norms, and expectations.[121] This 'moral economy' of the poor is important in indicating the 'fragmented débris' of older patterns of class formation and consciousness that originated over hundreds of years as well as emergent patterns operative in the transition to a modern state.[122] It is useful in tracing differentiating social identities and customs, as labour becomes 'decade by decade, more ''free'' of traditional manorial, parochial, corporate and paternal controls, and more distanced from direct client dependence upon the gentry'.[123] Overall, the experiential historical process of class formation is therefore recognised, situated within the lives and cognitive systems of ruler and ruled within specific contexts of antagonism and exploitation, rather than simply viewed as stemming from 'objective' determinants, or expressions of differential social property

[115] Gramsci, *PPW*, p. 329.
[116] Ibid., pp. 324–5.
[117] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 365.
[118] Ibid., pp. 34, 323.
[119] Ibid., p. 420.
[120] Ibid., pp. 33–5, 324.
[121] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1963), pp. 67–73.
[122] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', pp. 12, 293–4.
[123] Ibid., p. 9.

relations.[124] It is these historical and methodological insights that provide a historical materialist pathway to addressing the structuring of identities and subjectivities embedded in social property transformations to modernity.

By the time of the 1830 revolutions and their further spread across Europe in 1848, the continent was still roughly split internationally into the two major regions discussed earlier. Thereafter, between 1848 and 1870, capitalism broke the shackles that fettered it and did so by, among other means, ensuring that the market ruled the sale and purchase of labour power, thereby seeing the retreat of 'extra-economic' compulsion.[125] The ideology of market society based on the free pursuit of individual interest thus superseded the social property relations of serfdom and framed the very internalised transformation of social identities and subjectivities within the transition to the 'modern' world that has been raised as so fundamental to the eventual habitualisation of capitalism. Gramsci shrewdly describes the denouement in France thus:

> In fact, it was only in 1870–71, with the attempt of the Commune, that all the germs of 1789 were finally historically exhausted. It was then that the new bourgeois class struggling for power defeated not only the representatives of the old society unwilling to admit that it had been definitely superseded, but also the still newer groups who maintained that the new structure created by the 1789 revolution was itself already outdated; by this victory the bourgeoisie demonstrated its vitality *vis-á-vis* both the old and the very new.[126]

Soon after, 'industrial capitalism became a genuine world economy and the globe was transformed from a geographical expression into a constant operational reality'.[127]

Conclusion: life after Piedmont

According to Gramsci 'public opinion as it is today understood was born on the eve of the fall of the absolutist states, that is, in the period of struggle of the new bourgeois classes for political hegemony and the conquest of power'.[128] Most significantly, this was a period of state formation not only in Italy after Piedmont but also on a continental scale that would subsequently release elements for the primitive accumulation of capital, prepare the ascent of bourgeois classes, and inaugurate the formation of national states.[129] In tracing the implications of a social property relations approach to understanding the modern states-system, it has been shown how recent scholarship has drawn attention to the social order of absolutism that preceded and prepared the emergence of the modern international states-system. By doing so such arguments have demonstrated how there was a consolidation of capitalist social property relations that were affixed to the preceding historical

[124] E. P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?', *Social History*, 3:2 (1978), p. 148.
[125] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, p. 37.
[126] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 179.
[127] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, p. 47.
[128] Antonio Gramsci, *Cuadernos de la cárcel*, vol. 3 (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1999), p. 196, my translation.
[129] Anderson, *Lineages*, pp. 414–15.

processes of internal pacification and state-building central to primitive accumulation. Hence a wider continental pattern in the shift from personalised political and military power characterised by politically constituted social property relations to the 'purely economic' means associated with the impersonal form of the capitalist state.

From a social property relations point of view, it should be clear that one of the main contributions to understanding capitalism and the states-system is made by distinguishing between the distinct medieval order of feudalism and the specific era of absolutism, which prefigured the modern capitalist states-system. The almost unique advance in this respect by Teschke is the avoidance of any conflation of absolutist and modern state sovereignty.[130] What a social property relations point of view therefore offers is a distinct mode of investigating what Robert Cox referred to as 'otherwise-constituted historical structures', a task itself left open but untouched in his historical materialist approach.[131]

What is left unspoken within a social property relations approach, however, is a clearer demonstration of the processes through which new social identities and subjectivities are made through the series of class struggles constitutive of state formation and capitalist production and how modern moral classifications and social definitions of property, value, customs, and rights materialised. Ignoring these dimensions risks reducing the history of state formation to the history of state classes, missing state forms in terms of what they have made of the subaltern classes through whom they rule and function. Whilst this article shares and extends the social property relations critique of social constructivism as subjective idealism, a fuller account of the *internalisation* of bourgeois norms as constitutive of social identities and subjectivities integral to the specifics of state formation was sought. Axes along which such research could proceed were outlined whilst indicating that the radical embrace by Antonio Gramsci of how subjectivities are formed in the transition to modernity might assist in addressing the making and unmaking of identities embedded within distinct historically specific state formation processes. A historical materialism attuned to the creation of social identities and subjectivities in the making of capitalist social relations is, after all, paramount 'since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces'.[132] Wedded to this suggestion was the proposal of tracing the 'tracks of modernity' – *à la* Rosenberg – through multiple passive revolutions across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which in earlier formulations has been presented as the unfolding of combined and uneven development.[133] Recourse to the notion of passive revolution potentially reveals how the furtherance of state power and the reorganisation of state and subaltern class identities have been forged in ways consonant with capitalist property relations. Processes not that far removed from the practices of passive revolutions of the twentieth century in developing countries, tied to state mechanisms assisting in the emergence of capitalism and becoming the primary organ of primitive accumulation. Beyond this two further problematics are worth considering.

[130] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 264.
[131] Robert W. Cox, 'Postscript 1985', in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 245.
[132] Gramsci, *SPN*, p. 377.
[133] Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society*, pp. 2–4.

Firstly, from the above discussion of the social property relations approach, there is clearly a heavy indulgence in a Eurocentric perspective although 'the veiled slavery of the wage workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world'.[134] The central accord granted to the genesis of capitalism in Europe has been seriously contested by analysis that highlights more the premodern ancestry of the contemporary states-system *and* the pre-eminence of such developments in non-European regional contexts.[135] It is therefore crucial to reflect further on whether an account of the rise of capitalism and the modern state can avoid the perils of Eurocentrism. Or whether, by moving away from the genesis of capitalism in Europe, this would merely end up producing conclusions that are 'tantamount to rejecting capitalism as a useful notion for analysing world historical social change'.[136]

Secondly, there is a fundamental weakness in a social property relations approach that affirms the enduring presence of the state in capital accumulation whilst offering a totally *un*theorised account of the capitalist state and the institutional forms through which capital accumulation is mediated. It is one thing to draw attention to a theory of the modern state by structurally differentiating between state and market as internally related spheres. But quite another to merely reduce the state to a functional 'transmission belt' for capitalist imperatives;[137] to indulge in simplistic juxtapositions of state and capital within allusions to present conditions of globalisation;[138] or to provide no theorised account of 'the extent and form of the capitalist state's influence on economy and society, its relative autonomy, or the determination of policy-formation'.[139] There is, then, a need to produce a fully theorised account of forms of state that, at the same time, can reveal lines of fruitful enquiry about state transformation in times of globalisation in a way that can raise cognisance of the very *internalisation* of class interests within the restructuring and reproduction of capitalism.[140] Further reflection on processes of primitive accumulation intrinsic to historical *and* contemporary state-building and state restructuring, deriving from changes in social property relations and world order configurations, is therefore called for, especially given the hubris about the current epoch of globalisation.

[134] Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 747.
[135] Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998) and John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[136] Giovanni Arrighi, 'The Rise of East Asia and the Withering Away of the Interstate System', in Neil Brenner, Bob Jessop, Martin Jones and Gordon Macleod (eds.), *State/Space: A Reader* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), p. 133.
[137] Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, p. 176.
[138] Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'Global Capital, National States', in Rupert and Smith (eds.), *Historical Materialism and Globalisation*, pp. 36–7; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 139, 141.
[139] Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p. 150, n.24.
[140] Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, 'Globalisation, the State and Class Struggle: A ''Critical Economy'' Engagement with Open Marxism', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 5:4 (2003), pp. 481–9.