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## **Benno Teschke's critique of Wallerstein**

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According to Immanuel Wallerstein, the modern world-system was created in Europe and certain parts of the Americas during the long sixteenth century. Within this geographic zone, an axial division of labour developed that took the form of a capitalist world-economy, while an institutional structure to sustain this kind of historical system grew up alongside it. One essential institutional element was the creation of so-called sovereign states that were placed within an interstate system. Of course, “this was a process and not an event.” State-building within Europe began with the New Monarchies of the late fifteenth century, the rise of diplomacy and its rules beginning with the Italian city-states in the Renaissance, the institution of colonial regimes in the Americas and elsewhere, the collapse of the Habsburg world-empire in 1557, and the Thirty Years' War concluding with the Treaty of Westphalia and its “new foundations for state integration and interstate order.”[\[1\]](#)

Wallerstein asserts that the political structures that existed in non-capitalist systems did not operate in the same way of the modern state, and that they constituted a qualitatively different kind of institution. The greatest peculiarity of the modern state is that it claims sovereignty - a claim not about the state but about the interstate system: a double claim, looking both inward and outward. Undoubtedly, “earlier state forms also claimed authority within their realms, but ‘sovereignty’ involves in addition the mutual recognition of these claims of the states within an interstate system. That is, sovereignty in the modern world is a reciprocal concept.”[\[2\]](#)

Yet, the concept of sovereignty was formulated in Western Europe at a time when state structures were actually very weak. States had small and ineffective bureaucracies, uncontrolled armed forces and strong local authorities and overlapping jurisdictions with which

to deal. Only with the so-called new monarchies of the late fifteenth century “the balance begins, just begins, to be redressed.” Modern diplomacy was a creation of Renaissance Italy that spread Europe-wide only in the sixteenth century and “the establishment of a minimally institutionalized interstate system took over a century to realize, with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.”<sup>[3]</sup>

For Benno Teschke, instead, 1648 cannot be considered a turning point in European modern history. As an alternative, he proposes a new approach, revolving around contested property relations, for theorizing the constitution, operation and transformation of geopolitical systems, with regards to early modern international relations. Inspired by the groundbreaking historical work of Robert Brenner, Teschke argues that social property relations provide the key to unlocking the changing meaning of "international" across the medieval, early modern, and modern periods. He traces how the long-term interaction of class conflict, economic development, and international rivalry effected the formation of the modern system of states. Yet, instead of identifying a breakthrough to interstate modernity in the so-called “long sixteenth century” or in the period of intensified geopolitical competition during the seventeenth century, Teschke shows that geopolitics remained governed by dynastic and absolutist political communities, rooted in feudal property regimes.

*The Myth of 1648* argues that the onset of specifically modern international relations only began with the conjunction of the rise of capitalism and modern state-formation in England. Thereafter, the English model caused the restructuring of the old regimes of the Continent. This was a long-term process of socially uneven development, not completed until World War I.

Against the cross-paradigm IR consensus that equates the Westphalian Settlement with the codification of modern international relations, Teschke’s work shows to which degree 17th and 18th century European geopolitics remained tied to rather unique pre-modern practices. These cannot be understood on the basis of realist or constructivist premises. In contrast, the theoretical argument is that the proprietary and personalized character of dynastic sovereignty

was predicated on pre-capitalist property relations. Dynasticism, in turn, translated into historically specific patterns of conflict and cooperation that were fundamentally governed by the competitive logic of geopolitical accumulation. The decisive break to international modernity comes with the rise of the first modern State – England. After the establishment of a capitalist agrarian property regime and the transformation of the English state in the 17th century, post-1648 Britain starts to restructure international relations in a long-term process of geopolitically combined and socially uneven development.

Teschke disagrees with the common view of the Westphalian system, and rather sees it as characterized by clearly non-modern relations between dynastic political communities that were embedded in pre-capitalist social property relations. The logic of inter-dynastic relations shaped early modern European politics until the regionally highly uneven 19th-century transition to international modernity. Therefore, “if European geopolitics revolved around dynasticism well beyond 1648, then we need to reconsider the significance of the ‘Westphalian Theme’ as a geopolitical turning point and source of reference for the IR community. This involves an alternative account of the emergence of the modern system of states.”[\[4\]](#)

Teschke’s study “seeks to demystify Westphalia by offering a revisionist interpretation of the development and dynamics of the European states-system between the eight and the eighteenth centuries, rooted in a dialectical historical-materialist approach.”[\[5\]](#) In his inquiry, he turns his attention on five main areas of analysis:

- A comparative historical sociology, to identify the divergences between varying geopolitical orders;
- A casual inquiry that studies the essential determinants of these systemic differences;
- A dynamic perspective to discover and theorize the main causes and methods of systemic geopolitical transformations;

- An examination of the chronological and geographical origins of modern international relations, to determine the origins of contemporary international relations and their connections with modernity and capitalism;
- A re-evaluation and refinement of IR theories “in terms of their internal logical stringency, political implications, and explanatory power.”[\[6\]](#)

Teschke develops three main theoretical arguments, relating to the constitution, operation and transformation of geopolitical orders. Firstly, he observes that although anarchy was a common characteristic of the medieval, early modern and modern geopolitical systems, they generated fundamentally different principles of international relations, due to their varying social property relations, the constitutive core of different geopolitical orders. Therefore, absolutist sovereignty is proprietary in character and personalized by a ruling dynasty, while dynastic sovereignty is fundamentally rooted in absolutist pre-capitalist property relations.[\[7\]](#)

Secondly, property relations create historically limited and antagonistic strategies of action within and between political actors that lead international relations. While variations in international systems can theoretically be clearly established, the historical exposition deals with the problem of handling the temporal coexistence of heterogeneous international actors in a manifold scenario. Yet, in spite of the diversity of 17th and 18th political communities, the nature of the early modern international system came to be subjugated by the numerical and power-political preponderance of dynastic states. Hence, Teschke develops a theory of geopolitics that is not founded upon the homogeneity of its constitutive units, but sees the Westphalian Order as an open system dominated by dynastic states, in which system-maintenance and system-transformation were actively disputed and played out processes.[\[8\]](#)

Thirdly, his approach involves a theory of systemic change that acknowledges the centrality of the consequences of class conflict on changes in property regimes, types of political authority, and international orders. Rethinking the transition from pre-modern to modern geopolitical relations in terms of class conflict produces a new set of periodical, developmental and

substantive propositions for IR.<sup>[9]</sup> The decisive rupture towards modernity is not marked by the Westphalian Peace Treaty, but relates to the emergence of the first modern state: post-revolutionary England. In any case, no single event or date can be indisputably chosen as marking the decisive system-wide *caesura* towards inter-state modernity. Instead, there is a long and extended period of transition, during which specifically modern inter-state relations progressively substituted the old Westphalian logic of inter-dynastic relations.

It seems almost inevitable a comparison – and eventually a clash - between Teschke's ambitious work and the as much ambitious oeuvre that characterized international historiographic debates since its first appearance in 1974: Immanuel Wallerstein's *The modern world-system*.

Teschke attacks Wallerstein and his mentor Fernand Braudel on the fundamentals of his world-system: the critiques that he moves are part of the “tradition” of the disapproval of the Wallersteinian structure, but the German scholar does not limit himself to a *pars destruens*. Instead, he proposes a solid alternative to the world-system theory that aims at revolving the current practice of IR.

Teschke criticizes Wallerstein on two main themes: capitalism and its relationship with the birth of modern states and the development of mercantilism; and feudalism and the transition to modernity.

- **Capitalism, modern states and the transition to modernity**

According to Wallerstein, it was only with the emergence of the modern world-economy in sixteenth-century Europe that we could observe the full development and economic predominance of market trade. This was the system called capitalism. “Capitalism and a world-economy (that is, a single division of labour but multiple polities and cultures) are obverse sides of the same coin. We are merely defining the same indivisible phenomenon by different

characteristics.”[\[10\]](#) Teschke criticizes the Wallersteinian model, as it has no theory of the specifically modern state at all. The form of the state is essentially a function of the timing of its incorporation into the international division of labour, which determines which regions specialize in what. Neither Braudel nor Wallerstein, in Teschke’s opinion, have recognized at any point the emergence of a distinctly modern state: for both of them, state and capitalism are linked and undifferentiated concepts.

Teschke contests the so-called “commercialization model”, that views trade, the growth of towns, the increasing international division of labour, and the rise of the bourgeoisie as the long-term causes behind Europe’s dominance in form of the modern world-system. His critique is therefore against both Braudel and Wallerstein.

Teschke attacks Braudel for his “theoretical shift”[\[11\]](#) that places a deep-rooted immobility at the heart of history, which is fundamentally determined by almost unalterable structures, such as geography, ecology, human infrastructures, and, later, mentalities. The author of *The myth of 1648* condemns the Braudelian background to Wallerstein’s oeuvre: the failure of the “world-system” approach is to be attributed to the methodological assumptions of the Annales school, that were themselves deeply problematic.

Braudel is criticized for his conceptions of the origins of town-centred world-economies: the historian of *Les Annales* indicated the beginning of this phenomenon in the European thirteenth, if not eleventh century, which witnessed the growth of an urban trading network linking the Italian city-states and the northern European towns and city-leagues. For Teschke, such a theory is founded on an “erroneous and fundamentally ahistorical conception of capitalism”[\[12\]](#), which Braudel politically defines as a commercial monopoly-capitalism. His world-economies are invariably capitalist to the extent that they exploit state-constituted monopolistic trade compensation in relation to their semi-peripheries and peripheries. The only remarkable distinction within and among these centres is between city-based versus national market-based world-economies, “a difference whose implications remain unexplored.”[\[13\]](#)

As regards Wallerstein and the inadequacies of his model, Teschke is even more critical. For Wallerstein, the distinctive feature of a capitalist world-economy is that economic decisions are oriented primarily to the arena of the world-economy, while political decisions are oriented primarily to the smaller structures that have legal control, the states within the world-economy. “Why should capitalism, a phenomenon that knew no frontiers, have been sustained by the development of strong states? This question has no single answer. Nevertheless, it is *not* a paradox: quite the contrary.”<sup>[14]</sup> Wallerstein individuates the origins of capitalism back to the “long sixteenth-century”, which opened intercontinental trade between Europe and the rest of the world – a needed response to the feudal crisis of the fourteenth century.

Europe was not the only world-economy but capitalistic development enabled it to outclass the others:

“It is this ceaseless accumulation of capital that may be said to be its most central activity and to constitute its *differentia specifica*. No previous historical system seems to have had any comparable *mot d'ordre* of social limitlessness. [...] At the level of this central defining activity of ceaseless growth, the ceaseless accumulation of capital [...] no other historical system could have been said to have pursued such a mode of social life for more than at most brief moments [...]. The one thing that seems unquestionable, and unquestioned, is the hyperbolic growth curves -in production, population, and the accumulation of capital -that have been a continuing reality from the sixteenth century[...] There was the genesis of a radically new system.”<sup>[15]</sup>

Capitalism has been grown by the expansion in space of its basic structure and within that by the progressive “mechanization” of production. Increasingly, the producers of surplus have been compensated with wages. Many have argued that the typical characteristics of capitalism are the total accessibility of all labour and land as commodities, the orientation of all productive activity to the creation and appropriation of surplus value. However, at no point hitherto have these typical features in fact been exclusive features. They have become progressively more predominant, but it is the combination of free and “unfree” labour and land that actually differentiates the capitalist world-economy.<sup>[16]</sup>

Yet, Teschke defines Wallerstein's argumentation as a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* claim: the American scholar refrains from specifying the nature and internal antagonisms of feudalism, and the existence of trade growth does not explain its casual necessity for resolving the crisis. Capitalism becomes timeless: we could identify the origins of capitalism in the emergence of the fourteenth-century Italian Renaissance city-states, but also the establishment of an intercontinental exchange system between India-Arabia and Europe during the same period, or indeed in trading relations between ancient Greece, Persia, and China. Capitalism is timeless not only with respect to the past, but potentially also with respect to the future, as it is understood as production for and exchange on the market with a view to accumulating profits in the process of exchange. Capitalism is not regarded as a qualitative, potentially reversible transformation of social relations, but simply a gradual quantitative expansion of the market since time immemorial.

This is quite a "classic" argument against Wallerstein's system: I will limit my discussion on this point just to the critiques made by Theda Skocpol.[\[17\]](#) She accuses the author of *The modern world-system* not to explain capitalism's dynamism. Wallerstein does not offer many insights about how and why capitalism emerged, has developed, and might one day pass from the scene. The most obvious difficulty is the lack of any theoretical conception of the dynamics of feudalism, which is neither a "world empire" nor a "world economy": the emergence of the capitalist world system is presented as the solution. As "for how world capitalism develops once it is established, although Wallerstein does assert repeatedly that the system is dynamic, he provides us with no theoretical explanation of why developmental breakthroughs occur.[...] The only definite dynamics of Wallerstein's world capitalist system are market processes."[\[18\]](#)

For Teschke, developmentally, the 18th-century world was not yet a capitalist system. Britain in this context can be seen as the "«third hand» that consciously balanced the imperial pretensions of pre-capitalist states."[\[19\]](#) Teschke's perspective requires further implications for re-conceptualizing modern international relations. The political organization of the modern world in form of a territorially divided system of states is not a function of capitalism. Rather, capitalism was born into a system of dynastic polities that had strengthened their territories and



prevailed over feudal fragmentation determined by the property-driven logic of political and geopolitical accumulation during the absolutist period. As a result, capitalism was born into a territorially prefigured states-system. However, once agrarian capitalist property relations were institutionalized in 17th-century England, it was possible to study the “differentiations between an uncoercive “economic economy” and a merely political state: the making of modern sovereignty in one country.”[\[20\]](#) On the other hand, while the development of capitalism involved a series of class and regime-transformations, it did not challenge the principle of multiple politically constituted territories that was an inheritance of pre-capitalist territory-formation. It follows that capitalism did not produce the territorially based state-system, nor it entailed a state-system, but it is nevertheless extremely congruent and compatible with it.[\[21\]](#) Capitalism’s main characteristic, for Teschke, lies in the historically exceptional fact that the capital circuits of the world market can in theory work without breaking political sovereignty. As a rule, capitalism can leave political territories intact. Contracts are concluded between private actors that form the pre-political sphere of a global civil society. Capitalism, then, is the condition of possibility for the universalization of the notion of national self-determination.[\[22\]](#) However, the performance of the world market is predicated, at a minimum, on the existence of states that maintain the rule of law, i.e. ensuring contract-based private property and the legal security of transnational transactions so as to maintain the principle of open national economies.[\[23\]](#)

The key idea of modern international relations is no longer the war-assisted accumulation of territories, but the multilateral political organization of the economy by the principal capitalist states. International economic accumulation and direct political domination are disjointed. A universalized capitalist world market can co-exist with a territorially fragmented system of states. While the logic of political accumulation through war that was thoroughly built into pre-capitalist dynastic states has been removed, the major lines of military conflict run between those states that are locked out of the world market and those states that replicate the political conditions of the open world market, have been supported by the principle of collective security.[\[24\]](#)

- *Mercantilism*

From Wallerstein's perspective, mercantilism has "historically been a defensive mechanism of capitalists located in states which are one level below the high point of strength in the system."[\[25\]](#)

For Teschke, according to the traditional analysis of mercantilism, internal and foreign trade became submitted to central rulers on the basis of the arrogation of territorial sovereignty and the concomitant integration of towns into the kingdom. The sixteenth-century surge of mercantile expansion was caused by growing royal and noble demand, mediated by rising tax income derived from an agrarian economy that was demographically expanding but still pre-capitalist, embedded in petty peasant property. The towns did not become mini-laboratories of proto-capitalism directed by an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie at odds with the sovereign. Instead, the king sold royal charters to monopoly companies, bonding merchants to himself and absorbing urban elites into the state apparatus. The citizens were therefore compelled to collaborate with the crown, and commercial profits were gathered only in the field of circulation, founded on unequal exchange.

The king also offered protection for overseas commerce: out-gunning, not under-pricing characterized the logic of the great maritime-mercantile empires, while "buying cheap and selling dear, not free economic competition based on price competition, was the maxim of the day. [...] What European merchants did not do was use their wealth as capital to acquire and transform means of production and put them in motion through the purchase of labour power offered for sale by a class of labourers. Braudel's second incarnation and Wallerstein's first manifestation of the modern capitalist world-system remained derivative of pre-capitalist, agrarian economies."[\[26\]](#)

According to Teschke, although early modern mercantilism widened the geographical spread of economic international relations, not only it was unsuccessful to create a new logic but it did

not even produce any unintentional consequences which would have shoved this system towards modern capitalism and consequently modern international relations. The core of dependency and world-system theory is, of course, the decline of peripheries to dependency and underdevelopment due to unequal terms of trade. But this was not capitalist trade.

The logic of nationalizing system, for example, was built on the political exclusion of craftsmen from the trading guilds, as they monopolized the raw materials necessary for the craftsmen's trade and acted as price-fixing bodies. Craftsmen were consequently forced to work for the guilds and in addition had to sell the finished goods to them as well. Merchants were therefore in a position to reduce the prices of production to export goods. The fortunes of the once-prosperous Venetian cloth and Genoese silk industries are a case in point.[\[27\]](#)

Bellicose inter-European relations increased with the early modern geographical partition of the extra-European world into territorialized colonies. This expansion of the reach of European metropolitan countries into previously unexplored lands also created an organization of political space in which the basically a-territorial logic of modern capitalism later had to operate. "When capitalism burst on the international scene in the 19th century, most parts of the world had already been territorially defined by mercantilism. Bounded, though not fixed or static, territoriality preceded the rise of capitalism."[\[28\]](#)

- **Feudalism**

Before the sixteenth century, when Western Europe embarked on a path of capitalist development, "feudalism" dominated Western European society. Wallerstein defined feudalism as "a series of tiny economic nodules whose population and productivity were slowly increasing, and in which the legal mechanisms ensured that the bulk of the surplus went to the landlords who had noble status and control of the judicial machinery."[\[29\]](#)

Between 1150-1300, both population as well as commerce expanded within the confines of the feudal system; however, from 1300-1450, this expansion ceased, creating a severe economic crisis. According to Wallerstein, the feudal crisis was probably precipitated by the interaction of several factors: agricultural production fell or remained stagnant. This meant that the burden of peasant producers increased as the ruling class expanded. The cycle of the feudal economy had reached its optimum level; afterwards the economy began to decline. In addition, a climate change cut agricultural productivity and contributed to an increase in epidemics within the population.

He argues that Europe moved towards the establishment of a capitalist world economy in order to ensure steady economic growth. However, this entailed the expansion of the geographical span of the world in question, the development of different modes of labour control and the creation of relatively strong state machineries in Western Europe. In response to the feudal crisis, by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the world economic system emerged.

Wallerstein considers the transition from feudalism to capitalism as the compound of three separate phenomena: the initial and unique transformation of the feudal variant of a redistributive world-empire into a capitalist world-economy; subsequent incorporations of outside arenas into this latter system; and the extension of the proletarianization of labour and the commercialization of land within the ongoing capitalist world-economy.[\[30\]](#)

As for the role of trade, Wallerstein sees it very much in international terms, stressing the development of an international division of labour supplying Europe with sufficient food and fuel to enable it to surmount the “material” crises of feudalism, and to transform itself into a capitalist world-system capable of self-sustained expansion. The internal crisis of feudalism is therefore resolved by the “external” forces of international trade and the specialized division of labour.[\[31\]](#)

Teschke, instead, speaks of a geopolitical shift from imperial hierarchy via feudal anarchy to royal anarchy that happened in tenth-century Europe. This phenomenon was synonymous with the transition from early to high Middle Ages. This Feudal Revolution established a new mode of political domination and economic exploitation, spawning a series of closely interrelated social, political, military and geopolitical innovations. The results of such a shift were lordship-based political communities that extend throughout Europe with long-term implications for regional state formation in late medieval and early modern times. This knight-led expansion was concluded only in the fifteenth century and founded the institutional and geographical limits for the international organization of the early modern state-system.

The Braudel-Wallerstein school is not able, on the word of Teschke, to explain why that “powerful indicators of the ‘growth of the West’ appeared first in North Western Europe, and specifically in early modern England.”[\[32\]](#) On the contrary, *The myth of 1648* tries to clarify this phenomenon.

The Frankish Empire’s disintegration not only had deep enduring implications for the spatial organization of the modern state-system, it also conditioned regional routes of state formation. France and England, Europe’s core countries, developed following two different paths: England in the course of the seventeenth century became a parliamentary constitutional monarchy (the first modern state) under the impact of an autochthon capitalist agrarian property regime. On the contrary, France remained an absolutist state, established on a non-capitalist agrarian economy. And yet it was *Ancien Régime* France that defined the quality of the Westphalian settlement.

While French state formation became the foundation of the Westphalian states-system, ending in absolutist sovereignty, English state formation generated capitalist sovereignty, the cornerstone of the post-Westphalian, i.e., modern, system. These different courses are the product of different starting points of feudal state formation, derived from regionally different answers to the tenth-century crisis. As a result, the medieval-to-modern shift was preceded by a

geopolitical change that had a similar historical significance and theoretical meaning. Moreover, such a shift occurred in an international context that was already resolutely anticipated by this previous epochal transformation from imperial hierarchy to royal anarchy.

- *France*

The two European regions not only emerged differently from the fourteenth-century crisis, but they had already entered into it with diverging class constellations. The Lords' ability for surplus extraction in pre-crisis France faced a slow decline, as they were stuck between peasant resistance and royal support for petty peasant property. When eco-demographic crisis hit the French countryside in the fourteenth century, the seigniorial response did not succeed because of the persistence of these two factors. Albeit French lords conserved *de iure* property rights, their political control over their lands was severely reduced, especially since rents and entry fines were set at a low level.

As a result, during and after the Hundred Years' War, the lords turned against one another to improve income and gradually took up "state" offices. "The rational route to power, status, and wealth became ownership of a part of a state in the form of an office."[\[33\]](#)

Sixteenth-century France saw the increasing consolidation of the absolutist "tax/office state", although waves of noble resistance were quite common. This state form was not based on the modern separation between the political and the economic, but was characterized by the combination of domination and exploitation characteristic of pre-capitalist societies. The change of a feudal, lord-peasant rent regime into an absolutist, king-peasant tax regime was speeded up by the widespread crisis. In other words, "the parcellized sovereignty of medieval times, premised on private personal domination, gave way to the 'generalized personal domination' of *Ancien Régime* political authority."[\[34\]](#)

The absolutist tax/office state did not succeed to create the conditions for economic take-off, instead perpetuating the logic of (geo)political accumulation. The consequence of this social

property regime was a relatively stagnant agrarian economy, especially in terms of productivity rates, still subjected to the rhythms of eco-demographic fluctuations.

With the early seventeenth-century crisis, peasant revolts, noble unrest, and royal repression strengthened class conflict in relation to the allocation of income. Pre-capitalist France, wedged between uneven taxation and strengthening military costs, experienced a series of fiscal crises during the eighteenth century that ended in the French Revolution.

In most European states the non-separation of public authority and private property continued after feudal age well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even if in altered form. In absolutist states, this merger of the public and the private can be read as a result of dynasticism and proprietary kingship. Proprietary kingship indicated the king's property of the state, yet it was not referred to territory. "Ownership of a state meant the legitimate and exclusive right of command within the realm and, in particular, personal ownership of the rights of taxation, trade, and legislation. "*L'État, c'est moi!*" implied royal ownership of public power - the basis for absolutist sovereignty."[\[35\]](#)

### **- *England***

After the fourteenth-century crisis, France, as much of Europe, experienced a period of economic and commercial recovery - the "long sixteenth century". However, "this commercial upswing, the discovery of trading routes to the Americas and India, and the growth of long-distance trade was not a breakthrough to capitalism. It merely replicated, if on a larger scale, the nexus between growing noble incomes and urban revival during the 12th century."[\[36\]](#)

In early modern England, for Teschke, state formation and economic development followed a different path from the rest of Europe. When England faced an eco-demographic crisis, caused by the Black Death, lords tried to recuperate falling income; yet, the aristocracy's reaction could not face the continuing peasant struggle, culminating in the revolt of 1381. The 15th century saw a noticeable improvement in peasant status and income, while lords gradually lost

their capacity to extort fees. The English peasantry eliminated many feudal controls, acquired full personal freedom, and came to hold in land on a copyhold basis.

Nonetheless, contrary to French development, the English peasantry failed to obtain legally protected property rights to their freeholds. Consequently, landlords gradually drove peasants off their land, strengthened and enclosed their holdings, and rented them out to large capitalist tenants. “The enclosure movement destroyed the commons and subsistence farming. English peasants were not protected by the monarchy due to tight co-operation between the king and his landholding aristocracy, blocking a French-style peasant/king alliance and the growth of an absolutist tax/office state.”[\[37\]](#) The consequence was the destruction of the old feudal powers of political surplus extraction and the beginning of a new class constellation revolving around the triad of large landlords, capitalist tenant farmers, and wage-labour. The relatively centralized self-organization of nobility and king fostered a “higher degree of inter-ruling-class-co-operation in England than in France, where the competitive relations between nobility and king inadvertently secured both peasant freedom and peasant possession.”[\[38\]](#)

The seventeenth-century crisis in England was therefore not a conflict over the distribution of a shrinking total output in a contracting agrarian economy as in France, but a conflict over the nature of property relations and, ultimately, the form of the state.[\[39\]](#)

The transformation of the militarized, landholding feudal nobility into a demilitarized, landed capitalist class with full and exclusive property rights in late 17th century, together with the establishment of an agrarian capitalist property regime, led to the redefinition of political authority in terms of parliamentary sovereignty. It provided the social basis for the new constitutional monarchy and the shift from dynastic to parliamentary sovereignty showed the consolidation of modern sovereignty. Post-1688 England utilized a new foreign policy *modus operandi* to manage the relationships with the territorially accumulated dynastic states which surrounded it.



The British case was peculiar: there, “the feudal unity of the political and the economic dissolved and gave way to their separation –the *disiecta membra* of one social totality.”[\[40\]](#)

The rise of capitalism, in this instance, was neither the result of contradictions in the feudal mode of production, or the consequence of conflicts between a rising urban bourgeoisie and a retrograde landed aristocracy. Agreeing with Brenner, Teschke affirms that agrarian capitalism was the unintentional result of class conflicts over property rights: capitalism needed not to have come into existence at all. Capitalism, however, emerged along with the first modern state – but it was capitalism in one country. Therefore, France and England are not to be intended as two variations on the same theme.

The new British role in Europe was based on the decoupling of foreign policy from dynastic interests. England developed a dual foreign policy strategy: while it continued its aggressive mercantilist “blue water” policies overseas, increased by a growing capitalist economy that financed naval superiority, Britain started to play the new role of “balancer of the European pentarchy.”[\[41\]](#) Its foreign policy was no longer led exclusively by dynastic interests, but increasingly by the “national interest” as articulated in Parliament.

While parliamentary Britain tried to manage the equilibrium of the European system by indirect interventions, absolutist states persisted with the policy of territorial equilibrium, partitions, and compensations.

### **Conclusion: present and future according to Teschke**

International relations after 1688 were not a continuance of the succession of dominant great powers in an otherwise unchanging structure of anarchy. It was rather a “long, bloody transformation - a transitional period - in which the twin processes of capitalist expansion and regime transformation were generalized from 1688 to the First World War in Europe, from the

First to the Second World War in the rest of the non-socialist world, and from 1917/45 to 1989 for the socialist world.”[\[42\]](#)

The international relations during this long period of transition may be defined modernizing, rather than modern. In fact, a legacy of pre-capitalist state formation continued in the principle of multiple politically composed territories, though the development of capitalism led to several class and regime transformations. The creation of the transnational “empire of civil society” did not require the elimination of the state-system nor the creation of a territorially coextensive and congruous political empire.

Are we now moving towards a global state? Is this post-Westphalian, post-modern geopolitical order no longer international but rather global? In the conclusive pages of his *The myth of 1648*, Teschke offers us his interpretation of present and future. If before 1989 he does not see a real world-system according to Wallerstein’s definition, Teschke cannot avoid considering the political and economic inter-relations that characterize the present world:

The Westphalian system as a historical phenomenon was rooted in pre-capitalist property relations and dynastic sovereignty. If those IR theorists that identify a shift towards post-Westphalian international relations want to get their chronology right, they will have to argue for a post-post-Westphalian order. However, if we understand the period from 1688 to 1989 as a long transformation characterized by modernizing international relations and the legacy of Westphalia and absolutism as a rudimentary system of territorially bounded states, then we may well understand the current processes of debordering and (asymmetrical) loss of state power not as a move towards a post-modern world, but rather as the erosion of pre-modern territoriality: modern international relations may just have arrived on a global scale.[\[43\]](#)

Personally, I have found Teschke’s project very ambitious, both for the wide period he treats and for the quite revolutionary aim to redefine IR theory. Yet, though criticizing Wallerstein, he falls in some errors that can come across in the modern world-system. First, Teschke’s vision is even more Eurocentric than the one of Wallerstein. The American scholar, however, stated that Eurocentrism is constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world; furthermore, as

an institutional structure, social science originated for the most part in Europe, more as a cultural than as a cartographical expression. In this sense, in the discussion about the last centuries, he is referring primarily and jointly to Western Europe and North America.[\[44\]](#) As for the issue of globalization, in my opinion the loss of state power should not be overestimated: it is unquestionable that geographical boundaries are disappearing - the EU for example - and that what Benjamin R. Barber defined as “McWorld”[\[45\]](#) is spreading on a global scale. On the other hand, we assist to reinvigorated phenomena of nationalism and struggle for the defence of national identity, while the globalized world seems more an Americanized world and international relations appear to be reduced to a mere monologue of the United States. Moreover, economic globalization has occurred without a parallel internationalization of controlling democratic institutions. In conclusion, the post-post-Westphalia system could and should be seen still as an international system, rather than a global one: if after 1648 the pre-capitalist legacy lasted until the First World War (at least for Europe), so the state as an institution is likely to survive for a very long time.

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