

This is the accepted version of Anievas, Alexander and Nişancioğlu 'How Did the West Usurp the Rest? Origins of the Great Divergence over the *Longue Durée*' Comparative Studies in Society and History Vol. 59 (1), 34-67. Published version available from Cambridge University Press at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417516000608>  
Accepted Version downloaded from: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/24382/>

## How did the West Usurp the Rest? Origins of the Great Divergence over the *Longue Durée*

Alexander Anievas, University of Connecticut

Kerem Nişancioğlu, SOAS University of London

### Introduction

How in the space of some 300 years did the leading edge in global economic and military power pass from 'East' to 'West'? How was this process bound up in the breakthrough to capitalist modernity in Western Europe and its ascendancy to global domination? However formulated, the question of how 'the West' came to rule has been at the forefront of social scientific debates since its inception. Whether focusing on Europe's unique cultural and institutional inheritance, its distinctively 'restless rationalism', and/or its advantageous ecological system, traditional explanations of Europe's rise locate its origins as *immanent* to Europe itself.<sup>1</sup>

The 'European miracle' is conceived as one of self-generation emerging from the unique if not peculiar attributes of a singular European developmental experience. "The "miracle" of massive economic development', Michael Mann writes, 'occurred "spontaneously" in Europe, and nowhere else'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Ricardo Duchesne insists on the 'uniqueness of the West' emphasizing its 'higher intellectual and artistic creativity' and 'exceptional' development of reason, and freedom.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, from such perspectives, there was – and perhaps still is – something inherently exceptional about 'the West' that distinguished it from 'the rest'.

Such self-aggrandizing narratives of Western 'exceptionalism' have come under criticism from an array of scholars in different fields.<sup>4</sup> While diverging in their analyses and conclusions,

---

<sup>1</sup> See, *inter alia*, Daniel Chirot, "The Rise of the West", *American Sociological Review*, 50,2 (1985):181-195; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*, Vol. I (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1986), Chapters 12-15; David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Are Some So Rich and Others So Poor?* (New York:W.W. Norton, 1998); Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2003); Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (London:Penguin, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Mann, "European Development: Approaching a Historical Explanation", in Jean Baechler, John A. Hall, and Michael Mann, eds., *Europe and the Rise of Capitalism* (Oxford:Basil Blackwell, 1989), 6-19, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ricardo Duchesne, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (Leiden:Brill, 2011), 236, 237-238.

<sup>4</sup> See, among others, A.G. Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1998); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 2000); John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*

they share a common theme of problematizing the notion of a uniquely self-propelling 'rise of the West'. They have instead focused on the conjunctural, 'accidental', and sometimes downright lucky factors that they argue explains Europe's rise. They have also highlighted the *intersocietal* conditions shaping Europe's trajectory to global dominance. These revisionist perspectives provide a significant challenge to Eurocentric narratives by arguing that there was nothing unique or endogenous about Europe's development that led them to global supremacy.

Despite some affinities, this article challenges the revisionists' conjunctural explanation of Europe's late breakthrough and their tendency to deny substantive developmental differences between 'West' and 'East' and within Europe itself. After demonstrating the myriad difficulties the revisionists' run into in theoretically explaining the 'rise of the West' in Section I, we then provide an alternative explanation drawing on and further refining the theory of uneven and combined development (U&CD). Such a perspective assists in redressing shortcomings found on the two sides of the debate: namely, the traditional Eurocentric approaches focus on the immanent (*sui generis* yet structural) characteristics of European development; and, the revisionists' emphasis on the developmental homogeneity of Eurasian societies (the flattening of substantive societal differences) and role of contingencies in explaining Europe's ascent. The theory of U&CD resolves these problems by integrating structural and contingent factors into a unified explanation: unevenness makes sense of the sociological differences that the revisionists miss, while combination captures the aleatory processes of interactive development overlooked by Eurocentric approaches. In Section II, we examine the structural specificities of European and Asian societies' development over the *longue durée* along with the sociologically generative interactions between them reconceptualized through the perspective of U&CD thereby allowing for the incorporation of ostensibly contingent, 'external' factors into the realm of theory.<sup>5</sup>

This sets up the conjunctural analysis offered in Section III, where we explore the multifaceted interaction of 'internal' and 'external' processes leading to the fall of the Mughal Empire and its colonization by the British. Here we argue that Britain's transformation from a capitalist to industrial capitalist society was appreciably assisted through the colonization of India. Not only did the exploitation of Indian raw materials and the stronghold over their markets

---

(Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jack Goody, *Capitalism and Modernity: The Great Debate* (Cambridge:Polity, 2004); Jack A. Goldstone, *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500-1850* (New York:McGraw-Hill, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Luke Cooper, "Can Contingency be 'Internalised' into the Bounds of Theory?", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26,3 (2013):573-597.

provide invaluable inputs to 'kick-start' Britain's industrialization process, but the capturing of the Indian landmass afforded the British Empire with crucial strategic advantages. In addition to occupying a territorialized dominion at the very heart of Asia, Britain obtained a substantial and relatively cheap military force, which it utilized to open up other markets throughout the world further aiding Britain's industrialization. Britain's colonization of India was therefore a critical conjunctural factor explaining Britain's – and later Europe's – usurping of 'the rest'.

## Rethinking the 'Rise of the West': Advances and Impasses in the Revisionist Challenge

*Late and Lucky: Contingences, the Eurasian Homogeneity Thesis, and the Great Divergence*

In numerous revisionist works there has been an emphasis on the overall *homogeneity* of 'Eurasian development'.<sup>6</sup> This stems from the revisionist attempts to demonstrate the fallacy of traditional accounts of the 'rise of the West' conceived in terms of a rigid East-West binary: that is, Europe and Asia's developmental paths strikingly diverged over the *longue durée* due to internal attributes of their respective social structures. Summarizing the key findings of the revisionist school Jack Goldstone writes that

(1) most conditions in Europe do not seem broadly different from those in the advanced regions of Asia until relatively recently, c. 1800; and (2) the later great divergence need not be rooted in great and long-standing prior differences, but could well be the result of small differences and chance events that created oddly exceptional political and cultural conditions not in 'Europe' but in small parts of Europe and, much later, in Japan.<sup>7</sup>

In correctly attempting to problematize Eurocentric claims regarding the uniqueness of the European experience, revisionists nonetheless erase important differences between European and non-Western social structures when explaining the advent of capitalism, modernity and industrialization. Jack Goody, for example, cautions 'against drawing too sharp a contrast between East and West in those features of social organization that could relate to the onset of capitalism, modernization and industrialization' since 'economically the distinct qualitative

---

<sup>6</sup> There are exceptions, notably, Hobson, *Easter Origins*, 192; Frank, *ReOrient*, 324.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Goldstone, "The Rise of the West-Or Not?", *Sociological Theory*, 18,2 (2000):175-194, 191.

difference between East and West came only with industrialization'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Kenneth Pomeranz writes of the 'variety of early modern core regions with roughly comparable levels and trends of development in their everyday economies'.<sup>9</sup> More radically still, Goldstone claims that

From 1500–1800 the major states of Europe, China, India, and the Ottoman Empire were all experiencing a similar course of advanced organic development, with absolutist bureaucratic states, highly productive agriculture, a sophisticated urban culture, and extensive long-distance trade in both luxuries and daily necessities... in all of them, the material standard of living c. 1800 was no greater than it had been c. 1500.<sup>10</sup>

As laudable as such attempts are downplaying any narrative of European 'exceptionality', the theoretical drawbacks are immense, to say nothing of the empirical difficulties of sustaining such arguments.<sup>11</sup> By flattening the myriad social structures making up the early modern world, it becomes very difficult – if not impossible – to explain the striking divergences in their developmental trajectories.<sup>12</sup> The point here is not to reinstate any 'European exceptionalist' explanation, but rather highlight how the *interactively-generated* differences between Europe and other societies were key to 'Western' ascendancy. As examined below, the very 'backwardness' of feudal Europe facilitated the propitious conditions from which capitalism could emerge, while this process was structurally conditioned by Europe's near-constant interaction with more advanced non-Western agents.<sup>13</sup>

With the initial breakthroughs to capitalism made in the Netherlands and England, this led to increasing material disparities – a widening of the competitive gulf – between these societies and others.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the advent of capitalism in Northwestern Europe did not immediately translate into the kind of hierarchical power relation that characterized the nineteenth century. While capitalism offered the productive *potential* for increased technological innovations

---

<sup>8</sup> Goody, *Capitalism and Modernity*, 102, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, 111.

<sup>10</sup> Goldstone, 'Capitalist Origins', 120.

<sup>11</sup> For critiques of the revisionists denial of socioeconomic differences in the early modern world, see Stephen Broadberry and Bishnupriya Gupta, "The Early Modern Great Divergence: Wages, Prices and Economic Development in Europe and Asia, 1500-1800", *Economic History Review*, 59,1 (2006):2-31; Robert C. Allen *et. al.*, "Wages, Prices, and Living Standards in China, 1738–1925: In Comparison with Europe, Japan, and India", *Economic History Review*, 64,S1 (2011):8–38.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph M. Byrant, "The West and the Rest Revisited", *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 31,4 (2006):403-444, 418.

<sup>13</sup> For the details, see OMITTED.

(including, significantly, within the military sphere) and superior financial and organizational capacities, the developmental effects were not instant or undifferentiated, but staggered, uneven and interactively conditioned by opportunities and pressures emanating from non-Western sources (more below).

An account of the origins of capitalism in Northwestern Europe is in itself not enough to explain the region's subsequent ascendancy.<sup>15</sup> Rather, capitalism should be conceived as having provided the *conditions of possibility* for Europe to eventually overcome and dominate their Asian rivals. Bryant is then correct when writing that

The protracted and forcible dominion of the West over the Rest...cannot logically be accounted for on the basis of fundamental similarities between conqueror and conquered, oppressor and oppressed, but must, in the very nature of so inequitable an outcome, register the relational consequences of differences and disparities...as these played out in a coercive contest for land, resources, mastery.<sup>16</sup>

Without recourse to some form of structural explanation of these diverging paths of development over the *longue durée*, the revisionists are left to account for the 'rise of the West' in terms of pure contingencies and world-historical accidents. In the words of John M. Hobson: '...the rise of the West could indeed be explained almost wholly through contingency'.<sup>17</sup> Goldstone in turn describes the conjunctural factors leading to Britain's transformation into a modern, industrialized state as the 'most freakish of accidents'.<sup>18</sup> For Pomeranz, the contingent combination of coal and colonies provided Europe with the necessary resources to launch itself into self-sustaining economic growth thereby escaping the labour-intensive path of development.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, '[i]n place of cumulative, path-dependent lines of causality and densely contextual interdependencies', Bryant notes, 'the revisionist paradigm offers a more episodic and atomistic view of social change, wherein determinant efficacy is vested not with ongoing trajectories and systemic institutional configurations, but with the autonomous play of variables and the re-routings occasioned by extraneous contingencies'.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Bryant, "The West", 434.

<sup>17</sup> Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, 313.

<sup>18</sup> Goldstone, "Rise of the West", 187.

<sup>19</sup> Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Bryant, "The West", 435.

This is then a historical sociological approach that essentially erases the 'historical' and 'sociological' from the equation as sociohistorical developments are conceived in radically discontinuous terms and sharp breaks, whereby antecedent conditions from which developments usually unfold are entirely displaced. This is not to deny that contingent or fortuitous factors may have *aided* the process of 'catch up' and 'overtake' development that occurred in Northwestern Europe. Nonetheless, something deeper – more structural – was also clearly at work in these processes.

While marking some important advances over conventional Eurocentric explanations of the 'rise of the West', the revisionist challenge nonetheless fails to offer a viable alternative. It remains beset by the problems of analytical indeterminacies, empirical shortcomings, and a reliance on a purely conjunctural mode of explanation that foregoes a theorization of the sociohistorical processes at work for the play of free-floating contingencies. In the absence of any alternative theorization, the revisionist approach is unable to fully overturn the prevailing 'rise of the West' paradigm. Hence, as Bryant concludes: '[w]e need neither a new sociology nor a new history; all that is required is a fully integrative and encompassing historical sociology'.<sup>21</sup> As we hope to demonstrate, this is what the theory of U&CD provides: a more integrative and encompassing *international* historical sociology.

### *Uneven and Combined Development and 'the Rise of the West'*

Recent years have witnessed unprecedented scholarly attention to Leon Trotsky's idea of U&CD as a potential resource in theorizing 'the international' and, by extension, rethinking world history.<sup>22</sup> For implicit in Trotsky's original formulation of U&CD was a reconceptualization of *all* development as interactive and multilinear, redefining the very concept and logic of development itself.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the classical sociological tradition conceptualized society as a singular

---

<sup>21</sup> Bryant, 'New Sociology', 164-165.

<sup>22</sup> For a list of some of these contributions, see <<http://www.unevenandcombineddevelopment.wordpress.com/writings/>>.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 3 Vols. (Ann Arbor:University of Michigan Press, 1959), esp. Chapter 1. Though it is often assumed that Trotsky employed U&CD exclusively to examine the 'peculiarities' of Russian development in explaining the October Revolution, Trotsky clearly envisioned U&CD as being *universally* applicable in both time and space, writing for example that: 'The law of uneven development is supplemented throughout the whole course of history by the law of combined development' (Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, New York: Monod, 1937, 30). For reconstructions of U&CD as a 'general abstraction' applicable to different historical

abstraction,<sup>24</sup> Trotsky's conception of development was inscribed with a 'more-than-one' ontological premise.<sup>25</sup> So what exactly is the importance of U&CD for explaining the 'rise of the West'?

The significance of the concept is primarily three-fold. First, the theory uniquely incorporates a distinctly intersocietal dimension of causality into its most basic conception of development as it reconceives the process as strategically interactive, co-constitutive and thus necessarily multilinear, the outcome of which is always the composite effect of a multiplicity of spatially diverse nonlinear causal chains that combine in any given conjuncture.<sup>26</sup> Those aspects of world-historical development – alterity, mimesis, hybridity, translation, etc. – that revisionist and postcolonial scholars highlight are thus rendered theoretically explicable in substantive historical and sociological terms. Such developmental characteristics are thereby lifted from mere descriptive statements of otherwise arbitrary instantiations of societal differences into active causal factors explaining Western ascendancy. Second, by reformulating 'the international' as an 'object of social theory – organically contained... within a conception of social development itself'<sup>27</sup> – U&CD allows for the theoretical internalization of contingent, 'external' factors and variegated developmental outcomes.

Third, U&CD allows for a holistic account of the 'rise of the West' and 'decline of the East' as interconnected and mutually constitutive in a way that brings the role of 'the international' to the forefront of social-theoretical explanation. This goes some way in breaking out of the analytical stalemate between 'internalist' and 'externalist' modes of explanations characterizing existing debates.<sup>28</sup> The following offers a schematic exposition of the theory's two main concepts – unevenness and combination.

---

eras and contexts, see Justin Rosenberg, Justin Rosenberg, "Why Is There No International Historical Sociology?", *European Journal of International Relations*, 12,3 (2006):307-340; Kamran Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2013); OMITTED.

<sup>24</sup> Rosenberg, 'International Historical Sociology?'

<sup>25</sup> Justin Rosenberg, "The Philosophical Premises of Uneven and Combined Development", *Review of International Studies*, 39,3 (2013):569-597, 581-83.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenberg, "International Historical Sociology?'

<sup>27</sup> Rosenberg, "International Historical Sociology?'", 308.

<sup>28</sup> The revisionist historiographical approaches have largely fallen into the latter 'externalist' mode of explanation, particularly those drawing on World-Systems Analyses exemplified in the works of Frank, *ReOrient*, Eric H. Mielants, *The Origins of Capitalism and the 'Rise of the West'* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years Or Five Thousand?* (London: Routledge, 1993), but also including more 'neo-Weberian' scholars such as John M. Hobson, *Eastern Origins*. Traditional explanations have, by contrast, largely operated with an 'internalist' mode of analysis: see e.g., Duchesne, *The Uniqueness*; Landes, *Wealth and Poverty of Nations*; Ferguson, *Civilization*. While the likes of Michael Mann and Perry Anderson partly transgress the

*Unevenness* denotes developmental variations both *within* and *between* societies, along with the attendant spatial differentiations between them. The starting point for Trotsky was then an empirical observation about the basic ontology of human development: that a multiplicity of societies varying in size, culture, political organisation, and socioeconomic system is a general feature of human history – its ‘most general law’.<sup>29</sup> From this empirical observation, Trotsky was able to infer both the quantitative (multiple societies) and qualitative (different societies) unevenness of development.<sup>30</sup> But rather than simply describing two static conditions of such development (multiplicity – difference), he sought to capture how their dialectical interaction formed the basic socio-relational texture of the historical process as a whole, wherein the shifting identity of any particular society accumulated and crystallized.<sup>31</sup>

Developmentally differentiated societies are conceived as constantly impacting upon one another’s development and reproduction instigating various forms of combined development. Thus while specific spatio-temporal patterns of socio-cultural diversity may be contingent, ‘the fact of this diversity itself is not’.<sup>32</sup> That is, when diverse and differentially situated societies interact – whether through cooperation, conflict or cross-cultural exchange – this ‘results in particular outcomes that cannot be anticipated in advance and are therefore “contingent”’.<sup>33</sup> This international dimension of development thus imbues the historical process with a highly unpredictable, contingent character generating widely diverse effects. As such, the dynamics and modalities of societal differences are not to be visualized as the result of pure essentialisms – an inherent property of a society’s endogenous development – but rather ‘dependent on a whole web of “necessary but contingent” interactions’.<sup>34</sup>

The indeterminacy of such ‘contingent’ outcomes can therefore be reconceptualized as an intrinsic property of development itself. U&CD thereby provides a theoretical means of explicating the differentiated forms of agency and outcomes emergent from these ‘necessary but contingent’ intersocietal interactions contradicting any pre-determined, linear interpretation of sociohistorical causality and development. In these ways, ‘contingency’ and ‘necessity’ can be

---

divide between ‘internalist’ and ‘externalist’ poles, they do so only formally as neither substantively *theorize* ‘the international’.

<sup>29</sup> Trotsky, *History*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenberg, “Uneven and Combined Development”, 576.

<sup>31</sup> Rosenberg, ‘International Historical Sociology?’, 324.

<sup>32</sup> Rosenberg, “International Historical Sociology?”, 316.

<sup>33</sup> Cooper, “Bounds of Theory?”, 592.

<sup>34</sup> Cooper, “Bounds of Theory?”, 592.



brought into a more historically-sensitive theoretical framework that goes beyond contingent and structural-based explanations of the 'rise of the West'.

*Combination* refers to the ways in which the internal relations of a society are determined by their relations with other developmentally differentiated societies. This results in the intermingling and fusion of the 'foreign' and 'native', 'advanced' and 'backward', within a social formation, whilst simultaneously ontologically blurring the analytical distinctions between such categories.<sup>35</sup> As with unevenness, combination holds a strong empirical referent: multiple societies do not simply exist hermetically side-by-side, but interactively coexist, which by necessity (and with varying degree) determines their collective social and geopolitical development.<sup>36</sup> For example, in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, we find numerous processes through which the more 'backward' Russia attempted to developmentally 'catch up' with a more advanced Western Europe by making use of their pre-existing developmental achievements. The 'privilege' of Russia's backwardness thereby entailed a 'skipping' of stages, ensuring attempts at catch up did not follow the same paths of antecedent developments.<sup>37</sup> In the context of debates on the 'rise of the West', this is a particularly important point since up until the mid-thirteenth century, it was those social formations that would come to make up 'Europe' that were the *least developed* in the emerging 'world system' of increasing economic integration and cultural contacts between 'East' and 'West'.<sup>38</sup>

Arising late on the periphery of this world system, European development had the most to gain from the new intersocietal links being forged, particularly through the diffusion of new technologies and 'resource portfolios' spreading from 'East' to 'West'. The principles of mathematics, navigational inventions, arts of war, and military technologies all originated in the more advanced 'East' before passing to the 'backward' West.<sup>39</sup> This enabled European states to acquire the means to revolutionize their own societies in much more intensive concentrations of time than had the original purveyors. Later developing states did not need to start from scratch but could instead acquire and refine the most advanced technologies and organizational forms pioneered by earlier developers. In this respect, European societies benefitted from a 'privilege of

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity*.

<sup>36</sup> Rosenberg, 'International Historical Sociology?', 319.

<sup>37</sup> Trotsky, *History*, 27, 476.

<sup>38</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>39</sup>Hobson, *Easter Origins*; McNeil and McNeil, *Human Web*, 117–118; Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 112.

backwardness' which was a key precondition for the eventual emergence of capitalism within them and their subsequent global ascendancy.

By contrast, the earlier and more developed tributary Empires in Asia, enjoyed for a time certain 'advantages of progressiveness'. However, these advantages would eventually turn into strategic liabilities as less developed societies came to reap the 'privilege of backwardness' concomitant to processes of developmental 'catch-up'. As Andre Gunder Frank writes,

The common global economic expansion since 1400 benefited the Asian centers earlier and more than marginal Europe, Africa, and the Americas. However, this very economic benefit turned into a growing absolute and relative disadvantage for one Asian region after another in the late eighteenth century... Europe and then also North America ...were able to take advantage of this pan-Asian crisis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries...That may have afforded [them] some 'advantage of backwardness'.<sup>40</sup>

In this sense, the qualitative unevenness of development, exhibited by the asynchronous simultaneity of an interactive multiplicity of different societies, afforded late-comers particular strategic advantages. This was neither an automatic nor predestined process, but one where both conjunctural and structural factors and agency were key. In what follows, we historically unpack these structural and conjunctural combinations as key components in the 'rise of the West'. First we examine the structural condition of European feudal crisis before moving on to an exploration of the conjunctural specificity of British colonisation in India.

## **Structure and Conjuncture in the 'Rise of the West'**

### *Feudalism, Merchants, and the States System in Europe*

Thus far we have been emphasizing the need to widen the analysis of the 'rise of the West' to conditions and determinations emerging outside of Europe in order to dislodge the familiar Eurocentric claims of some innate European dynamism. There is, however, one specific structural attribute unique to late medieval and early modern European development that

---

<sup>40</sup> Frank, *ReOrient*, 318, 324.

requires further investigation as it does seem to provide some important clues into Europe's eventual attainment of a comparative advantage in the making of war and production: that is, the decentralized and politically fragmented nature of European feudal relations that gave rise to a fiercely competitive multi-state system. Indeed, the ferociously conflictual character of the European state system has often been cited as a crucial factor in the conventional literature on the 'rise of the West', particularly among neo-Weberians holding to a 'geopolitical competition model' of development.<sup>41</sup>

The main problem with such accounts emphasizing interstate competition as the main driver of European developments is the implicit syllogism underlying the model's causal sequencing: 'political multiplicity – anarchy – competition'. In other words, the significant socioeconomic and political effects that the neo-Weberians derive from the persistent 'whip' of geopolitical competition in spawning technological and organizational innovations in European state-building practices takes for granted precisely what needs to be explained: why was the European states system so competitive and war-prone? The neo-Weberians thereby smuggle in the highly problematic (neo-)realist assumption that any anarchic system of multiple political units will automatically induce geopolitical competition, rivalry, and war, which only works if 'we assume the anthropologically questionable idea of man as a natural power-maximizer or a psychologizing rational-choice model, where risk minimization creates an inherent security dilemma'.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, by emphasizing the essentially *undifferentiated* effects of military rivalry on European state formation processes there is a partial convergence between neo-Weberian historical sociology and neorealism over the role of geopolitical competition as a kind of Darwinian selection mechanism sorting out the weak from the strong.<sup>43</sup> Yet European state responses to the universal problem of war facing them in the late medieval and early modern epochs were strikingly different.<sup>44</sup> What we need then is a theory that organically combines both 'sociological' and 'geopolitical' factors in a unified conception of development. And, again, this is what the theory of U&CD offers as the historically-specific sources, dynamics, and scales of

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, I; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States: A.D. 990-1992* (Cambridge:Blackwell, 1992); Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648* (London:Verso), 123.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (London:McGraw Hill).

<sup>44</sup> Teschke, *Myth of 1648*, 124.

unevenness and combination must be grounded in historical social structures. What then explains the particularly war-prone nature of the European states system and were its effects beneficial to processes of state modernization, specifically in affording certain European states' with a comparative advantage in the means of violence?

The answer lies in Europe's feudal relations of production. At first sight, this might seem like an illicit return to the kind of internalist Eurocentric theorizing we have been attempting to avoid. Yet, when widening the analysis beyond Europe, it is important to recognize that while feudal relations— and the geopolitical system emerging therewith – were indeed unique to Europe their technological, military, and ideological components all bore distinctly *intersocietal* origins. Indeed, the rise of feudalism in Europe was the consequence of the 'catastrophic collision of two dissolving anterior [ancient and primitive] modes of production': namely, the 'decomposing slave mode of production' on which the Roman Empire had once been constructed, and the 'deformed primitive modes of production of the Germanic invaders which survived in their new homelands' after the conquests.<sup>45</sup> The developmental trajectory of Europe's Germanic forest 'tribes' converged with the remnants of the ancient Roman Empire producing an entirely novel, synthesized form of sedentary society hitherto unknown in human history – feudalism. Moreover, the recombination of the 'disintegrated elements' of these two anterior modes of production – the 'Romano–Germanic synthesis'<sup>46</sup> – into feudalism proper, was 'itself a product of the constant and eventually unbearable pressure of the nomadic Huns on the Germanic world of the Teutonic tribes'.<sup>47</sup>

The genesis of feudalism in European was thus a consequence of these nomadic-sedentary interactions emanating from within and outside of Europe. Furthermore, the nomadic-sedentary interactions generated by the Mongol Empire's expansion into Europe and the accompanying spread of the Black Death, impinged upon and (re)directed the trajectory and nature of European development.<sup>48</sup> Such 'extra-European' dimensions of feudalism's development reached far beyond these initial nomadic-sedentary interactions. For not only was the feudal system the result of new technologies (notably, the stirrup) diffusing from Asia to Europe, but the ideological and normative underpinnings of the system (Christendom) was

---

<sup>45</sup> Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London:New Left Books, 1974), 128, 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nisancıoğlu, 'What's at Stake in the Transition Debate? Rethinking the Origins of Capitalism and the "Rise of the West"', *Millennium*, 42,1 (2013):78-102, esp. 87-92; OMITTED.

continually evolving in response to the Ottoman 'Islamic threat'.<sup>49</sup> As Hobson notes, Christendom was in many respects imagined as 'Catholic Christian in contradistinction to the Islamic Middle East'.<sup>50</sup> What is more, it was only through the conjunctural combination of the Euro-Ottoman conflict with the Euro-Amerindian encounter that Christendom was destroyed as the defining normative order, clearing the way for an emergent quasi-secular identity of 'Europe'.<sup>51</sup> As such, it would be fundamentally mistaken to conceive of feudalism and its crisis as solely European developments.<sup>52</sup>

While keeping these intersocietal, extra-European sources of the making of European feudalism in mind, we must now return to the original question we set out to address: how did feudalism generate such a competitive and war-prone geopolitical system?

In the absence of the kind of unprecedented economic dynamism afforded by capitalist social relations, war was an expedient mode of expanding the surpluses available to the ruling classes under feudalism. Feudal relations offered few incentives for either peasant or lord to *continuously* and *systematically* introduce more productive technological methods, particularly as peasants had direct access to their means of production and subsistence.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, lordly interests lay in extracting more surpluses by directly coercive means. This could be done by pushing the peasants to the limit of their subsistence or by seizing the demesnes of other lords. The latter course resulted in a process of 'political accumulation' amongst the lords themselves – a war-driven process of state formation.<sup>54</sup>

This condition meant that the aristocratic ruling class required the sufficient political, ideological, and military means to exploit the peasantry and extract surpluses for lordly

---

<sup>49</sup> Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517-1648* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 10-11, 300. Although Christendom was reproduced in the 'Ottoman mirror', its reproduction was contradictory. During the sixteenth century, the Ottomans would actively exploit the divisions within Christendom, thus contributing to its breakdown: see OMITTED.

<sup>50</sup> Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, 112.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed*; OMITTED.

<sup>52</sup> The 'Eastern' origins of European feudalism are examined in Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, 99-115. Further regarding the impact of the Ottoman Empire in the development (and decline) of Christendom, see OMITTED.

<sup>53</sup> To clarify, we are *not* claiming that feudalism was inherently stagnant or that agents operating under feudal rules of reproduction were incapable of introducing labour-saving technologies and developing the productive forces more generally. Indeed, they often did in significant ways (see e.g. Chris Wickham, 'Productive Forces and the Economic Logic of the Feudal Mode of Production', *Historical Materialism*, 16,2 (2008): 3-22). The point we are making here is that despite such technological innovations feudal rules of reproduction still set clear limits to the nature and extent of such developments and these limits compelled lords to find other means of expanding their incomes, particularly through processes of 'geopolitical accumulation'. We must thank one of the reviewers for pushing us to clarify this point.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Brenner, "The Social Basis of Economic Development", in John Roemer, ed, *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 23-53, 31-32.

consumption.<sup>55</sup> However, unlike the tributary empires in Asia, these means were not controlled by – or concentrated in – a centralised and unified state, but instead dispersed across the nobility.<sup>56</sup> The dispersion of coercive capabilities meant that political authority in Europe was fragmented, parcellised and therefore also highly competitive, with heightened intra-lordly struggle taking place over territories within and outside of feudal 'states'.<sup>57</sup> In short, military competition and war was more pronounced within Europe than it was within tributary societies such as the Ottoman, Mughal and Chinese empires.

The lords left standing at the end of the process of geopolitical accumulation formed the basis for the absolutist state. Representing a '*redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination*',<sup>58</sup> the absolutist states system of early modern Europe remained driven by the systemic imperatives of geopolitical accumulation explaining the endemic state of warfare marking the epoch. The uneven and combined development of feudal-absolutist Europe was thus rooted in this territorially-expansionist dynamic of geopolitical accumulation that entailed a deep systemic pressure (Trotsky's 'whip of external necessity') for European states to continually innovate upon their means of violence. Over time this had the unintended effect of generating military and armament industries pioneering distinctly capitalist production relations.<sup>59</sup>

Since European powers had a direct interest in the conquest or control of lucrative overseas territories for economic and other purposes, this meant that the dynamic of geopolitical accumulation spawned significant technological and organization innovations, particularly in the military sphere. The reason was due to the relative backwardness of European feudal rules of reproduction which, in contrast to the tributary empires in Asia,<sup>60</sup> were dependent on wealth drawn from merchants and financiers to either fund geopolitical accumulation (in the case of Habsburg Spain and Austria) or for reproducing the ruling class itself (as with city-states such as Genoa and Venice).<sup>61</sup> Because of the fragmented and parcellized character of political power, Europeans that wanted to make war required extraordinary financing outside of day-to-day ruling

---

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity*, 147.

<sup>56</sup> Anderson *Passages from Antiquity*, 148.

<sup>57</sup> Teschke, *Myth of 1648*, 43-44.

<sup>58</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London:New Left Books, 1974),18.

<sup>59</sup> See, *inter alia*, William H. McNeil, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1982), 117-143; Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago:Haymarket, 2012), 539-542; Pepijn Brandon, 'Masters of War: State, Capital, and Military Enterprise in the Dutch Cycle of Accumulation (1600-1795)', PhD Dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2013, 139-207, 314-315.

<sup>60</sup> See OMITTED.

<sup>61</sup> Mielants, *Origins of Capitalism*, 70-71.

class reproduction. In order to raise armies, European rulers borrowed from international banking houses or asked wealthy and powerful sections of society for contributions, either in terms of military support or taxes.<sup>62</sup> A by-product of European feudal war-making was an attendant rise in the political autonomy, power, and influence of merchants, with increasing degrees of representation in the decision making structures of states.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the state was sensitive to – or at the behest of – merchant interests, wherein state resources, especially military, were deployed in order to obtain (and maintain) commercial advantages.

The key difference between the functioning and sociopolitical position of merchants within feudal Europe and the tributary societies in Asia, was then the structural dependence of feudal governments on merchants for war-financing and reproduction. This gave merchants a relatively stronger position of social and juridical autonomy. In Mughal India, by contrast, state managers exhibited an attitude of 'indifferent neutrality' towards merchants' maritime activities.<sup>64</sup> There was very little oppression of merchant activities, but neither was there much support. By contrast, European governments often provided merchants with considerable resources and state backing, most dramatically exemplified in the Dutch Republic where the VOC represented the institutional fusion of political and mercantile interests in which '[c]ompany shareholders and members of government, were often one and the same'.<sup>65</sup> As M.N. Pearson writes in regards to the relationship between states and merchants in Europe vis-à-vis India: "The difference is that in Europe guilds were backed up by governments; in India merchant groups were not".<sup>66</sup>

The overseas orientation of imperial expansionism partly in pursuit of commercial advantages among European states led to a number of significant military innovations, particularly in the naval field. Over time, this provided them with a small but *decisive* competitive edge in the means of violence vis-à-vis the primarily land-based tributary empires in Asia, such as the Ottomans and Mughals. We may therefore partially agree with Ronald Findlay's assessment that 'it was the long history of naval rivalry in the North Sea and the Atlantic that developed the sailing ship as a floating gun platform, a combination of the two technologies' that later enabled

---

<sup>62</sup> Tilly, "History of European State-Making", 73-74.

<sup>63</sup> Chirot, "Rise of the West"; Mielants, *Origins of Capitalism*, 79; Thomas A. Brady, "The Rise of Merchant Empires, 1400-1700: A European Counterpoint", in James D. Tracy, ed., *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350-1750* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117-161, 149-150.

<sup>64</sup> Irfan Habib, "Merchant Communities in Precolonial India", in James D. Tracy, ed., *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distant Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1990), 371-399, 396.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Van Dyke, "How and Why the Dutch East India Company Became Competitive in the Inter-Asian Trade in East Asia in the 1630s", *Itinerario*, 23,3 (1997):41-56, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Pearson, "States and Merchants", in *Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, 41-116, 56.

the Portuguese, Dutch, and British to dominate the Indian Ocean and South Pacific.<sup>67</sup> It was these latter two burgeoning Dutch and British merchant *capitalist* empires that came to attain a critical military advantage on the seas. 'Mediterranean naval techniques and conceptions' – where the Ottomans were dominant – would prove ineffective in competing with the new, Atlantic-based sea powers of Holland and England. 'The consequent transfer of supremacy at sea to northwestern Europe', William C. McNeil writes, 'had much to do with the general decline of the Mediterranean lands that became manifest in the first decades of the seventeenth century... the roar of Dutch and English naval guns closed off the last avenue of escape from the economic and ecological impasse confronting the Mediterranean populations'.<sup>68</sup>

To reiterate, the point is not to claim that Northwestern European powers were somehow cleverer and more resourceful in the arts of naval warfare than the tributary Empires, but that there was simply very little systemic incentive or compulsion for the Ottomans, Mughals or Chinese to make sustained investments and innovations in naval technologies past a certain point. As Findlay points out, 'a very significant difference between West and East appears to be that long-distance trade was a vital interest to commercial city-states like Venice and Genoa, and also to smaller nation-states such as Portugal and later Holland and England, while the Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern states drew their revenue mainly from the taxation of land'.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, the variegated character of the external threats facing European states compared to the tributary empires in Asia, as well as the differential nature of warfare, had important effects on the types of military strategies and innovations states' focused on. In late medieval and early modern Europe, there was little possibility for a single empire or state to subdue the entire continent, however much various states tried. This lent itself to a more unstable and fluid geopolitical environment where military competition and war were a near-constant feature of European life. Consequently, European states were in almost ceaseless conflict with one another forcing each 'to adopt quickly any [military] innovation by their rivals'.<sup>70</sup>

One of the primary reasons why geopolitical conflict and war in this period was so persistent in Europe was that the feudal ruling classes were themselves under serious threat. Not only had the feudal system virtually exhausted all possibilities for further internal expansion, but

---

<sup>67</sup> Ronald Findlay, "The Roots of Divergence: Western Economic History in Comparative Perspective", *American Economic Review*, 82,2 (1992):158-161, 159.

<sup>68</sup> McNeil, *Pursuit of Power*, 101-102.

<sup>69</sup> Findlay, "Roots of Divergence", 159.

<sup>70</sup> Findlay, "Roots of Divergence", 160.



this also precipitated a sharp fall in seigniorial revenues, itself further exacerbated by the plague-induced demographic crisis spread from the Mongol expansion into Europe, leading to a dramatic rise in peasant revolts and class conflicts more generally.<sup>71</sup> This perilous situation was continually exacerbated and 'overdetermined' by the persistent geopolitical-ideological threat emanating from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>72</sup>

Under such conditions, a near continuous state of war – including both intra-ruling class struggles and the incessant efforts to crush peasant rebellions – was a sociological 'necessity'. And since European states 'did not have the resources of an agrarian empire in cheap manpower' they were unable 'to substitute "quantity for quality"'.<sup>73</sup> By the early modern period, this led to an unprecedented dynamism in the military sector which 'could maintain productivity growth for centuries, a feat virtually unknown elsewhere in pre-industrial economies'.<sup>74</sup> The rapid growth in Europe's military sectors was perhaps a key reason, along with the development of stronger fiscal and organizational capacities,<sup>75</sup> for Europe's later successes in overseas conquests. In these ways, the overall conditions of uneven and combined development emanating from both *within* and *without* Europe created the propitious 'geo-social' environment in which specific countries, notably the Dutch and English, could emerge and consolidate themselves as capitalist states.<sup>76</sup>

Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Mughal Empire was by contrast considerably weakened by the incessant interstate wars in Asia, along with insurgency and piracy within their realm and the coast. The Mughals had to contend with both the 'conventional threat' posed by the invading armies of Durrani Empire from Afghanistan and the 'unconventional warfare launched by the Marathas'.<sup>77</sup> While Britain had by the mid-seventeenth century come to attain a slight advantage in fiscal-military capabilities vis-à-vis the Mughal Empire, their ability to colonize the Indian landmass was appreciably aided by these external pressures and internal divisions ravaging the Empire. The Mughals were particularly vulnerable to a European intervention at that time since the various contending regional rulers were unwilling or unable to

---

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Guy Bois, *The Crisis of Feudalism: Economy and Society in Eastern Normandy, c 1300-1550* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1984); Sevket Pamuk, "The Black Death and the Origins of the 'Great Divergence' across Europe, 1300-1600", *European Review of Economic History*, 11,3 (2007): 289-317; OMITTED.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Kerem Nisancioğlu, "The Ottoman Origins of Capitalism: Uneven and Combined Development and Eurocentrism", *Review of International Studies*, 40,2 (2014):325-347.

<sup>73</sup> Findlay, "Roots of Divergence", 160.

<sup>74</sup> Philip T. Hoffman, 'Prices, the Military Revolution, and Western Europe's Comparative Advantage in Violence', *Economic History Review*, 64,S1 (2011):39–59, 41.

<sup>75</sup> Jeremy Black, *European Warfare in a Global Context, 1660-1815* (London:Routledge, 2007), 26-27.

<sup>76</sup> See OMITTED.

<sup>77</sup> Kaushik Roy, *Military Transition in Early Modern Asia, 1400-1750* (London:Bloomsbury, 2014), 108.

unite against the Western threat. The British were thereby able to play one ruler against another facilitating its capturing of Plassey and other regions (see further Section III).<sup>78</sup>

*Unevenness Combined: North-South Interactions in the 'Rise of the West'*

These points go some way in turning on its head typical Eurocentric conceptions of the more 'backward' and 'stagnant' imperial empires of Asia, since it was the less developed nature of European feudal societies – their very reproductive weaknesses – that made them more susceptible to potential capitalist breakthroughs.<sup>79</sup> However, in order to fully subvert Eurocentric accounts of the 'rise of the West', we must move beyond a simple *comparative* historical sociological analysis of the differences between the feudal and tributary systems, and examine how their *interactive* developmental dynamics produced the structural and conjunctural conditions enabling European societies' transition to capitalism and eventual global ascendancy. We see here again the operation of uneven development as demonstrated by the 'privilege of backwardness' granted to feudal Europe by the 'penalty of progressiveness' characterizing the tributary empires of Asia. In the geopolitical interactions between feudal and tributary societies, it was the latter that presented the 'whip of external necessity' to the former.

Indeed, the various state-backed forms of commercial expansion noted above were dependent upon the geopolitical conditions generated by Europe's constant interaction with non-European societies. Over the 'Long Thirteenth Century' (1210-1350), the *Pax Mongolica* lowered commercial protection and transaction costs along Asian overland trade routes providing European merchants an opening to take over the pre-existing trade and exchange links of the 'world-system'.<sup>80</sup> Then, during the sixteenth century, the capitulations given to particular European states by the Ottomans and the concomitant economic blockade they imposed upon Europe resulted in a *structural shift* away from the geopolitical and commercial centrality of the Mediterranean towards the Atlantic. At the same time, Ottoman military pressure on the Habsburg Empire and Papacy acted as a geopolitical 'buffer', providing the propitious conditions ('isolation') that enabled the modern state-building activities and processes of primitive

---

<sup>78</sup> Peter A. Lorge, *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2008), 137.

<sup>79</sup> Davidson, *How Revolutionary*, 545-546.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*; Anievas and Nisancioğlu, "What's at Stake", 87-92; OMITTED.

accumulation in England.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the 'discoveries' of the Americas resulted in hugely significant effects on trade and production, providing a large injection of bullion into a European economy increasingly oriented around the deployment of finance and capital.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the emergent forms of territorialised states sovereignty first forged in the Atlantic crucible (exemplified by the linearly-defined claims to political authority found in the 1493 Papal Bulls and 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal) would radiate back to the imperial core in Europe forming a crucial step in the formation of the modern territorially-defined states system.<sup>83</sup> These territorial sovereign states were subsequently taken over and reconstituted by the capitalist revolutions in Holland, England and France that stretched from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.<sup>84</sup> Finally, through the colonial activities of merchant companies (specifically, the Dutch and English East India Companies) and slave traders, communities across both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean littoral were incorporated into an integrated system of exploitation and extraction. In these ways, the value appropriated from a globally dispersed mass of labour-power constituted a key input for the formation and reproduction of European capital.<sup>85</sup> Europe's 'unique' developmental trajectory out of feudalism and into capitalism – assisting its rise to global pre-eminence – was therefore rooted in and conditioned by extra-European determinations and agents. It was the *combination* of these multiple spatio-temporal vectors of development – many of which non-European in origin – that explains the so-called European 'miracle'.

These conditions of uneven and combined development emanating from both within and without Europe created a favourable 'geo-social' environment in which specific countries could emerge and consolidate themselves as capitalist states: territorialized sovereign centres of capital accumulation.<sup>86</sup> As we have seen, the methods and means of 'geo-social' reproduction in Europe and Asia were strikingly different, producing divergent forms and trajectories of geopolitical accumulation which, over the course of Europe's early modern development, came to interact and fuse with the emerging logic of capital accumulation accompanying those states making the

---

<sup>81</sup> Nisancıoğlu, "Ottoman Origins"; OMITTED.

<sup>82</sup> See Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*; Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*; Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, "The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth", *American Economic Review*, 95,3 (2005): 546-579; Anievas and Nisancıoğlu, "What's at Stake", 97-100.

<sup>83</sup> Jordan Branch, "'Colonial Reflection' and Territoriality: The Peripheral Origins of Sovereign Statehood", *European Journal of International Relations*, 18, 2 (2012): 277-297; OMITTED.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Alexander Anievas, "Revolutions and International Relations: Rediscovering the Classical Bourgeois Revolutions", *European Journal of International Relations*, 21,4 (2015): 841-866.

<sup>85</sup> See Jan L. van Zanden, *The Rise and Decline of Holland's Economy: Merchant Capitalism and the Labour Market* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); OMITTED.

<sup>86</sup> Davidson, *How Revolutionary*; Anievas, "Revolutions and International Relations".

transition to capitalism (notably, the Netherlands, England, and later France). These differential geo-social conditions and rules of reproduction in Europe and Asia in turn required varied types of military capabilities. At the same time, the external threat environments prevailing in the two regions were characterized by significant differences lending themselves to different systemic incentives and pressures for developing certain military techniques and technologies over others.

In these ways, ostensibly 'sociological' and 'geopolitical' factors interacted and entwined in setting certain European states on the path to acquire what would become a decisive comparative advantage in the means of violence, fiscal and organizational capacities,<sup>87</sup> particularly once these factors were buttressed by and harnessed to dynamically capitalist social structures. Moreover, Northwestern European states had attained this comparative advantage before 1800 by which time they had already 'conquered some 35 per cent of the globe' whilst controlling 'lucrative trade routes as far away as Asia'.<sup>88</sup> This, we argue, is what largely explains Europe's eventual ascendancy to global pre-eminence. For, as Geoffrey Parker notes, while the advent of industrialization 'helps to explain how the Europeans extended their control over the total land area of the globe from 35 percent in 1800 to 84 percent in 1914, it cannot explain how they managed to acquire that initial 35 percent'.<sup>89</sup> What is more, that initial 35% was in fact crucial for conquering much of the other 84%, as exemplified by the Indian case examined below.

To put all of this in more theoretical terms, we can see how 'unevenness', in terms of both the divergent development between a feudal-cum-capitalist 'West' and tributary 'East' and the differential forms of their respective geopolitical systems, and 'combination', operating at the level of geopolitical interactions and competition facilitating military and organizational innovations, were crucial explanatory factors in the 'rise of the West'. While neo-Weberians' are correct to single out geopolitical competition as significant, their inability to root this factor in a strong conception of social structures – and examine the differential forms and effects of military competition – leaves them into the well-worn (neo)realist cul-de-sac of ahistorical reification and unit homogenization (the 'state-qua-state' assumption). By contrast, the theory of U&CD solves both these problems: it offers a theoretical explanation of geopolitical competition and its effects that remains sensitive to substantive societal differences whilst incorporating a distinctly 'geopolitical' causal component into its conception of development thereby eliding the problem

---

<sup>87</sup> Hoffman, "Prices", 39.

<sup>88</sup> Hoffman, "Prices", 39.

<sup>89</sup> Geoffrey Parker, "Europe and the Wider World, 1500–1750", in *Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, 161–195, 163.

of reification. But to fully understand how 'the West' came to rule we must first look at the causes of the Mughal Empire's collapse and its colonization by the British.

## The Conjunctural Moment of 'Overtaking': Britain's Colonization of India

### *The Significance of India's Colonization to the 'Rise of the West'*

Britain's colonization of India has been underappreciated in 'rise of the West' debates,<sup>90</sup> which have largely centred around the origins of industrialization in Europe and, in particular, the question of why Britain was first to industrialize. Conceived as such, the prior history of British colonization is relegated to a secondary status in explaining the 'rise of the West', if it is examined at all. Yet not only was Mughal India the first of the great tributary empires in Asia to 'fall' to the Europeans, but it also provided the greatest material and strategic benefits of all the colonized states. For not only did India offer Britain the material inputs (notably, textiles and cotton) and capital crucial to the start of its industrialization drive but, after its colonization, it also provided the Empire with a relatively cheap and sizeable military force that assisted the British in forcibly opening other markets around the world.

Thus even the more restrictive question as to the causes of Britain's industrialization within the debates have been both *temporally* and *spatially* misplaced. *Temporally* so, in the sense that in order to explain Britain's industrial ascent we must first look at the preceding epoch of British colonialism in both the Atlantic and India which, in turn, means that our *spatial optic* must be widened to include an analysis of these extra-European regions' contributions to Britain's industrialization.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the Indian economy was absolutely critical to the 'formation and consolidation of a UK-centred system of accumulation', particularly through India's role in providing a continual balance-of-payments surplus for the Empire.<sup>92</sup> Britain earned huge annual surpluses from the Empire's transactions with India (and through it, China) that allowed Britain to sustain substantial deficits with the US, Germany and its' white Dominion states as 'the large

---

<sup>90</sup> But see Frank, *ReOrient*, 267-271.

<sup>91</sup> For such an attempt, see OMITTED.

<sup>92</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling – 2", *New Left Review*, 33 (2005):83-116, 103.

surplus in the Indian balance of payments became the pivot of the enlarged reproduction of Britain's world scale processes of capital accumulation and the City's mastery of world finance'.<sup>93</sup>

In 1750, India produced approximately 25% of the world's manufacturing output. By 1800, India's share had already dropped to less than a fifth, by 1860 to less than a tenth, and by 1880 to under 3%.<sup>94</sup> It is therefore no stretch of the imagination to claim that Britain's industrial ascent was to a large degree predicated on India's forced de-industrialization.<sup>95</sup> And, if so, it is then no mere coincidence that Britain's colonization of India preceded the start of Britain's industrialization by some twenty years.

The massive contribution of the British Indian army to Britain's overall strategic position has also been largely overlooked in debates. The British Indian army numbered approximately 160,000 in 1900 and later reached a strength of nearly two million persons during the Second World War, making a substantial contribution to Britain's war efforts of the period.<sup>96</sup> According to David Washbrook, the British Indian army was of great significance not only to the 'rise of the West', but also in the development of capitalism as a global system, as the Indian contingent operated as

the army of British imperialism, formal and informal, which operated worldwide, opening up markets to the products of the industrial revolution, subordinating labor forces to the domination of capital and bringing to 'benighted' civilizations the enlightened values of Christianity and Rationality... Moreover, because the British Empire was the principal agency through which the world system functioned in this era, the Indian army was in a real sense *the major coercive force behind the internationalization of industrial capitalism*.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, Geoffrey Parker writes of how

the military resources of India, once under European control, were to prove decisive for the further rise of the West. For the Europeans now possessed the means to challenge even their most powerful opponents. The Western armies that invaded China in 1839-42, 1859-60, and 1900 all included

---

<sup>93</sup> Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 263.

<sup>94</sup> Jeffrey G Williamson and David Clingingsmith, "Mughal Decline, Climate Change and Britain's Industrial Ascent: An Integrated Perspective on India's 18th and 19th Century Deindustrialisation", *NBER Working Paper* 1, 1730, Cambridge, MA, 2005, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 299-301; Williamson and Clingingsmith, "Mughal Decline", 24.

<sup>96</sup> Tarak Barkawi, *Globalization and War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 44-45.

<sup>97</sup> David Washbrook, "South Asia, the World System, and World Capitalism", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49,3 (1990):479-508, 481, emphasis ours.

important Indian contingents... 'It was as if the British had subjugated the Indian peninsula simply in order to use its resources against China'.<sup>98</sup>

An additional underappreciated factor in Britain's ascent over Asia resulting from India's colonization was Britain's resourceful appropriation and adaptation of Indian military technologies, particularly the Mysorean rocket, that came to play a crucial role in its' decimation of the Imperial Chinese Navy in 1841. The rocket was first encountered by forces of the East India Company at the Battle of Pollilur in 1780, where the British suffered a shattering defeat at the hands of the Indian Kingdom of Mysore.<sup>99</sup> In an exemplary – if overlooked – case of a combined development, the British subsequently took the original Mysorean rocket designs and remodelled them with the application of modern engineering techniques at the Woolwich Arsenal.

The resulting Mysorean-cum-Congreve rocket was later deployed against Chinese forces with devastating consequences at the Second Battle of Chuenpee (7 January 1841). The case of the Mysorean rocket thus represents one of the many 'non-endogenous sources of British imperial power' suggesting that the period between 1780 and 1840 'was critical to Britain's "leap-frogging" over the hitherto more advanced Eurasian polities'.<sup>100</sup> This was a development that took place over the course of *decades* not centuries, as traditionally assumed,<sup>101</sup> and was fundamentally predicated upon Britain's colonization of the Indian subcontinent. In this respect, Britain was not an early, but 'late-developer'.<sup>102</sup> For these reasons, the causes of the decline of the Mughal Empire and its colonization are crucial to the story of Western ascendancy.

### *The Mughal Empire and the Tributary Mode of Production*

The Mughal Empire represented a variant of the tributary mode of production.<sup>103</sup> Unlike feudal Europe, where lords directly intervened into the production process to coercively extract the

---

<sup>98</sup> Parker, "Europe", 184-185.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Luke Cooper, "The Opium War, Eurocentrism and the Mysorean Rocket", Paper Presented at the *International Studies Association* 56th Annual Convention, New Orleans, USA, February 2015.

<sup>100</sup> Cooper, 'Opium War'.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Mann, *Social Sources*, I; Jones, *European Miracle*; Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 186-187; Bryant, "The West", 410-411.

<sup>102</sup> Hobson, *Eastern Origins*; Cooper, 'Opium War'.

<sup>103</sup> See Kate Currie, "Problematic Modes and the Mughal Social Formation", *Critical Sociology*, 9 (1980):9-21.

surplus from the peasants, in Mughal India a state bureaucracy taxed the peasantry. Throughout the Empire, the emperor transferred the rights to land revenue and other taxes within particular territorial limits to specific subjects on a temporary basis. These areas were called *jāgīrs* and the assignees known as *jāgīrdārs* who were predominately *mansabdārs*; subjects holding ranks (*mansabs*) bestowed to them by the emperor making them high-ranking state officials. The primary obligation of the *mansabdārs* was the maintenance of standing armies and particularly cavalry contingents which the emperor could call upon for the imperial army in times of war.<sup>104</sup> In their assigned *jāgīrs*, it was the *jāgīrdārs* who collected land revenues and other taxes from the peasantry, who were nominally free, cultivating the land on behalf of the emperor who was allotted a set share of such revenues. Over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, approximately half the agricultural product was extracted from the peasantry in the form of this imperial land revenue.

The *jāgīrdārs* were then not equivalent to feudal lords exercising direct personal control over their subjects. Rather, they approximated more of a 'state class' dispersed throughout the empire by a centralized political apparatus to extract surpluses – as tax or outputs – from a peasantry they did not personally control. These two different modalities of surplus-extraction thereby entailed very distinct dynamics of social (re-)production: a feudal 'coercive rent-taking' system and a tributary 'state tax-raising' one.<sup>105</sup>

In the feudal mode, the process of exploitation was much more fragmented and decentralized. Lords sought to uphold and extend their military and juridical powers necessary to control the peasants' lives whilst safeguarding a steady stream of revenues. At the same time, a much weaker state sought to gain access to income and the means of coercion. By contrast, under the tributary mode, the exploiting class' interest centred on expanding its tax base and tax extracting apparatus, through the use of the state's coercive functions.<sup>106</sup>

The particularly centralized nature of the tributary state, along with its ability to effectively monopolize the means of violence in comparison to the fragmented and parcellized character of feudal political relations, made for a more cohesive and unified ruling class.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, intra-ruling class tensions still remained. In particular, the potential for conflict between local state

---

<sup>104</sup> Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn., 1999), 298-299, 364.

<sup>105</sup> Chris Wickham, "The Uniqueness of the East", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12,2-3 (1985):166-196.

<sup>106</sup> Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (London:Polity, 2009), 117-118.

<sup>107</sup> See Habib, *Agrarian System*, 365-366.



officials, private landowners and the centralized imperial state was a central contradiction of tributary rules of reproduction. Within the tributary mode, one can discern a tendency for the state's local agents to develop into feudal-like lords with their own landed estates and armed contingents or for wealthy landowners to emerge with significant independent economic and political powers.<sup>108</sup> Both tendencies could ultimately result in the development of feudalistic power relations emerging from tributary mode's 'laws of motion'.

In Mughal India, the imperial state sought to counter the former tendency of state officials transforming themselves into feudal-like lords by divorcing the *jāgīrdārs*, as far as possible, from any permanent rights to the land while constantly transferring them to different territorial assignments after short periods of time (usually between three or four years).<sup>109</sup> While this transfer system generally worked in countering any potential for *jāgīrdārs* to develop into feudal lords, in the long term, the system tended to subvert agricultural productivity and growth (see below). For the Mughal Empire, then, it appears that the latter tendency of a landed aristocracy emerging with considerable independent economic and political powers was the most problematic for intra-ruling class relations as demonstrated by the recurring conflicts between the *zamīndārs* (landowners) and imperial authority.

The *zamīndārs* were a distinct class of potentates with varying claims to the shares in the produce of land and/or part of the land revenue. They shared a number of common attributes: their rights to the land did not (with some exceptions) originate from imperial grants; command over armed retainers was usually a complement of this right; and they were frequently leaders of a caste group. The key point of potential conflict between the imperial authorities and the *zamīndārs* was, then, the *size* of the latter's share in the land revenue or surplus produce. 'The struggle between the imperial administration and the *zamīndārs*, breaking out frequently into armed conflict', Irfan Habib writes, 'was thus an important feature of the political situation'.<sup>110</sup>

The most significant of these armed conflicts between the *zamīndārs* and the imperial authorities was the *zamīndār*-led Maratha Revolt of the late seventeenth century.<sup>111</sup> As a result of

---

<sup>108</sup> Callinicos, *Imperialism*, 118.

<sup>109</sup> This practice was established by Akbar in 1568. Habib, *Agrarian System*, 301.

<sup>110</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, 384, 386; see further, Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and the High Road to Empire, 1500-1700* (London:Routledge, 2002), 79-80; John F. Richards, "Warriors and the State in Early Modern India", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47,3 (2004):390-400, 392-393.

<sup>111</sup> On the socioeconomic background of the leaders of the Maratha revolt, see Satish Chandra, "Social Background to the Rise of the Maratha Movement During the 17<sup>th</sup> Century in India", *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 10 (1973):209-217; Habib, *Agrarian System*, 389, 400-404; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 76-80.

the Maratha Revolt, there emerged a distinct class of feudal-like lords, now separate and autonomous from the Mughals, wielding significant powers over their subjects in occupied lands. 'Unlike the Mughal *jāgīrdārs*', Fukazawa writes, 'the big assignees in the Deccan Muslim kingdoms exercised wide administrative powers in their assigned territories, which tended to become hereditary, unchecked by the central authority'.<sup>112</sup> This was a case wherein certain features characteristic of one mode of production (feudalism) *emerged from* and *combined with* the existing dominant mode of production (tributary). In this sense, the Mughal Empire of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries represented a kind of *organic* mode of sociological combination whereby two differentiated modes of production co-existed and causally interacted in contradictory and crisis-prone ways.<sup>113</sup>

The importance of the rise of the Marathas challenging the Mughal Empire cannot be overstated as it 'constituted the greatest single force responsible for the downfall of the Mughal Empire'.<sup>114</sup> The Mughal wars in the Deccan (1681-1707) against the Marathas were a major drain on imperial institutions and resources eventually destabilizing Mughal rule throughout its territories.<sup>115</sup> As the imperial demand for revenue increased, so too did the exploitative pressures on the peasantry as the wars drew key resources out of the agricultural economy whilst leading to considerable destruction of existing capital.<sup>116</sup> To understand how this translated into widespread peasant unrest and flight, we must first examine the contradictions of the *jāgīr* system in a bit more detail.

### *The Imperial Revenue System and Agricultural Decline in the Mughal Empire*

The land revenue system created by the Mughal Empire was perhaps unequalled by any of its contemporaries. It far surpassed the revenue structures in Europe in both its scale of operation (i.e., the total land area, population, and resources controlled) and its organizational sophistication

---

<sup>112</sup> Fukazawa, "Maharashtra", 197.

<sup>113</sup> This is *not* to claim that the feudal mode of production in its totality was ever fully established or secured in the Maratha Empire, but rather that its socioeconomic system can be characterized as sharing certain commonalities with feudalism while nonetheless remaining overdetermined by the wider dominant tributary context in which it formed a part. See further, Fukazawa, "Maharashtra", 198-199.

<sup>114</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, 400; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 77.

<sup>115</sup> John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244-245, 252.

<sup>116</sup> Williamson and Clingingsmith, "Mughal Decline", 13; C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 70-71.

and cohesion (i.e., the use of paid officials and formal administrative mechanisms). In contrast to the French kings of the *ancien régime*, for example, the Mughal imperial authorities did not generally have to resort to private capital, short-term loans and intermediary financiers to fund their war efforts except in the case of the wars against the Marathas.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, despite its organizational scale and sophistication, the revenue system would over time develop a number of problems that came to hinder the overall functioning of the Mughal economy: particularly, the tendency to over-exploit the peasantry.

Since the time of Akbar (1568), a practice was established whereby *jāgīrdars*, who held no permanent rights to the land, were transferred to new territorial assignments every three to four years. This kept in check any tendency for them to develop into feudal-like lords. However, it also had a number of unintentional negative consequences, increasing over time, for the agrarian economy. For as the *jāgīrdars* were being continually transferred to different territorial assignment every few years, their short-term interest was not necessarily in increasing or even maintaining agricultural growth and productivity, but rather in maximizing the exploitation of the peasantry in their assigned territorial domain thereby subverting the long-term objectives of the imperial authority. As Habib explains,

...there was an element of contradiction between interests of the imperial administration and the individual *jāgīrdars*. A *jāgīrdar*, whose assignment was liable to be transferred any moment and who never held the same *jāgīr* for more than three or four years at the most, could have no interest in following a far-sighted policy of agricultural development... his personal interest would sanction any act of oppression that conferred an immediate benefit upon him, even if it ruined the peasantry and so destroyed the revenue-paying capacity of that area for a long time.<sup>118</sup>

Inherent to the Mughal revenue system was then a tendency towards the absolute 'maximization of exploitation' to the point of destabilizing the entire agrarian economy.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, as military contingents were maintained by the *mansabdars* out of the revenues of the *jāgīrs*, the imperial authorities tended to set revenue demand at a high enough level to secure the greatest amount of

---

<sup>117</sup> J.F. Richards, "Mughal State Finance and the Premodern World Economy", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23,2 (1981):285-308, 299-300. However, in 1702, Aurangzeb did (unsuccessfully) attempt to secure interest-free loans to pay for troop arrears in the Deccan. Karen Leonard, "The 'Great Firm' Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21,2 (1979):151-167, 160.

<sup>118</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, 367-368.

<sup>119</sup> Shireen Moosvi, "Scarcities, Prices and Exploitation: The Agrarian Crisis, 1658-70", *Studies in History*, 1,1 (1985):45-55, 53.

military strength for the Empire. However, if the revenue rate was set too high, it would leave the peasant without enough subsistence to survive. Consequently, revenue collection could soon fall in absolute terms.<sup>120</sup>

Yet, with the costly wars with the Marathas straining imperial revenues in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, increased revenue demands came to press harder still on the lower peasantry. For unlike earlier periods when the Mughal Empire had expanded into wealthy regions, thereby making up the costs of their conquests, the Deccan campaigns were a very different story. There, Mughal military expenditures consistently outpaced revenues and office-holders saw their incomes decline. The Mughal state thus sought to step up its 'revenue demands which in turn stirred up resentment in large parts of the empire that, when coupled with religious and political rivalries, manifested itself in the emergence of popular movements such as the Sikhs in the Punjab or the Marathas in Central India'.<sup>121</sup>

State revenue demand had in fact more than doubled between the eras of Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707).<sup>122</sup> Moreover, as centralized Mughal authority began to crack under the continuing geopolitical pressures from the Marathas, the state increasingly resorted to tax-farming which became ever more widespread within its successor states.<sup>123</sup> This had the effect of raising the effective rent share of the state to 50% or higher, greater than the 40% that the Mughals had previously extracted.<sup>124</sup> The massive fiscal pressure that the Mughal state brought to bear on the peasantry in turn led to increasing indebtedness in the villages, causing peasant flight and rebellions. 'As oppression increased, the number of absconding peasants grew, cultivation declined and peasants took to arms giving birth to rural uprisings of varying intensity. Consequently the empire fell prey to the wrath of an impoverished peasantry'.<sup>125</sup> The result was a generalized 'agricultural crisis' manifesting itself throughout the Mughal Empire by the late seventeenth century for which the *jāgīr* system, and its associated high taxation, land desertion and peasant unrest, coupled with the increasing costs of war, was primarily to blame.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Habib, *Agrarian System*, 367.

<sup>121</sup> Douglas M. Peers, *India under Colonial Rule 1770-1885* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 17.

<sup>122</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 186.

<sup>123</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 47, 51, 57.

<sup>124</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The Mid-Eighteenth-century Background", in Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 17.

<sup>125</sup> R.P. Rana, "Was There an Agrarian Crisis in Mughal North India during the Late-Seventeenth and Early-Eighteenth Centuries?", *Social Scientist*, 34,11/12 (2006):18-32, 21-22.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Rana, "Agrarian Crisis?", 27; see further, Habib, *Agrarian System*, 364-405.

Indeed, peasant unrest and rebellion were generally increasing during this period politically destabilizing many Mughal territories.<sup>127</sup> At the same time, the political fragmentation and warfare accompanying the Marathas Revolt further acted to disrupt India's major internal trade routes, increasing transportation costs and insurance rates.<sup>128</sup> As such, Satish Chandra notes, '[t]he available social surplus [in the Empire] was insufficient to defray the cost of administration, pay for wars of one type or another, and to give the ruling class a standard of living in keeping with its expectations'.<sup>129</sup> Curiously enough, Washbrook suggests that the very vibrancy and strong economic growth of the Mughal Empire over the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may have been a cause of its later troubles as 'economic growth started to nurture the political ambitions, and the regional and "community" forces, which eventually undermined it'. Here we find another expression of the 'penalties of progressiveness', resulting from overall uneven and combined character of development, besetting the Indian economy.<sup>130</sup>

#### *European Trade and Colonial Conquest: Towards the Battle of Plassey*

There were, moreover, a number of distinctly *international* factors further exacerbating the Mughal Empire's economic woes during this period. For over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the world economic and geopolitical environment in which the Mughal Empire was embedded was dramatically transformed as the Portuguese, Dutch, English, and later French, made their excursions into the Indian Ocean. Firstly, the Mughal-Maratha Wars (1680-1707) were themselves 'overdetermined' by an array of uneven causal chains generated by a geopolitical environment fundamentally transformed by the entry of the Europeans. Occupying key coastal areas in the commercial shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean, the Marathas experienced extensive geopolitical contacts with Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards. This was a relation of 'contained warfare' with belligerence and collaboration employed in near equal measure. On the one hand, the Marathas developed a powerful naval force that was able to repel

---

<sup>127</sup> See R.P. Rana, "Agrarian Revolts in Northern India during the Late 17th and Early 18th Century", *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 18,3-4 (1981):287-325; Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi:Tulika, 1995), 233-258.

<sup>128</sup> Williamson and Clingingsmith, "Mughal Decline", 14.

<sup>129</sup> Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village* (Madras:Macmillan, 1992), xiv.

<sup>130</sup> Washbrook, "India", 105-106; Cf. C.A. Bayly, "The Middle East and Asia during the Age of Revolutions, 1760-1830", *Itinerario*, 10,2 (1986):69-84, 75.

European ships if and when they so desired.<sup>131</sup> On land, a large and sophisticated network of fortresses formed the backbone of Maratha military might.<sup>132</sup> Both land and sea capabilities were often mobilised in response to European penetration into the region. On the other hand, the Marathas sought to reap the 'privileges of backwardness' in any areas in which Europeans held a comparative advantage – namely, the use of firearms and modern military strategy.

From the Portuguese and French came the main supplies of firearms – gunpowder, cannon balls, and lead were all purchased and entered use in the Maratha army.<sup>133</sup> Such was the integration of the Euro-Maratha military-commercial complex that the Marathas allowed the French to build a factory at Rajapore in 1679 and 'employed Portuguese agents to purchase artillery from them'.<sup>134</sup> But the integration of Europeans extended beyond exchange in military goods.

As early as 1692, the French Governor Martine was providing tactical assistance to the Marathas at the time of their war with the Mughals.<sup>135</sup> A number of European adventurers of Portuguese, French, Dutch and English origin, were employed as mercenaries and commanders, responsible for training and organising armies and assisting Maratha chiefs in battles. The expansion of European trained battalions and the purchase of European expertise and weaponry proved costly incentivising processes of geopolitical accumulation.<sup>136</sup> The Maratha confrontation with the Mughals was arguably a direct – if partial – outcome of the need to finance the hybridisation of Euro-Maratha military operations. This military combination proved remarkably efficient and, up to that point, historically exceptional in challenging the hitherto preponderant Mughal Empire.

Meanwhile, the increasing Dutch and English penetration into Asian markets over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries caused serious disturbances in the Mughal economy and intensified the financial difficulties of the ruling classes. As the costs of luxury goods consumed by the ruling classes increased with their diversion from their 'traditional'

---

<sup>131</sup> The Marathan admiral Kanhoji Angre famously never lost a battle to Europeans during his 58-year career. See T. R. Raghavan, "Admiral Kanhoji Angre", in K.K.N. Kurup, ed., *India's Naval Traditions: The Role of the Kunhali Marakkars* (New Delhi:Northern Book Centre, 1997), 72-78

<sup>132</sup> Ram Krishna Tandon, "European Adventurers and Changes in the Indian Military System", in Hans Hagerdal, ed., *Responding to the West: Essays on Colonial Domination and Asian Agency* (Amsterdam:Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 29-43, 33.

<sup>133</sup> S.N. Sen, *The Military System of the Marathas* (Calcutta:Orient Longman, 1958), 85.

<sup>134</sup> Tandon, "European Adventurers", 37.

<sup>135</sup> V.G. Hatakar, *Relations between the French and the Marathas (1668-1815)* (Bombay:University of Bombay, 1958).

<sup>136</sup> Tandon, "European Adventurers", 41.

markets with the Europeans, this meant that revenue demands had to also be increased. Consequently, the Indian ruling class's 'income previously obtained no longer sufficed. Here was a factor for an attempt at greater agrarian exploitation; and when that failed, or proved counter-productive, for reckless factional activities for individual gain, leading to interminable civil wars'.<sup>137</sup>

The economic difficulties of the Mughal Empire seem to have been quite widespread. K.N. Chaudhuri observes, for example, that 'the 1730s were a bad time for southern India' and that 'the great Anglo-French wars of the mid-eighteenth century further dislocated trade that was already in serious difficulties'.<sup>138</sup> Around the same time in Jugdia, the most important Bengali cotton producing region, matters were 'coming to a crisis in the production sphere'. By the middle of the eighteenth century, there were already 'some signs of deindustrialization' under the impact of strong foreign economic competition and weaker local mercantile organizations.<sup>139</sup>

More generally, Indian merchant groups throughout the Empire suffered from the presence of European traders, with 'most indigenous traders' in key exporting regions assuming 'a position subordinate to the servants of the East India companies'.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, under the competitive pressures of European trade, the early eighteenth century witnessed the collapse of one of the Empire's hitherto greatest commercial marines in Gujarat, 'arguably the most important developments in the trade of the Indian Ocean during the period'.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, the substantial commerce of the Coromandel Coast was dramatically hindered by the intrusion of Dutch merchants over the seventeenth century, which, as Arasaratnam tells us, 'cut deep into the trade that had been traditionally carried out in the region' interrupting the 'the ancient links between Coromandel and Southeast Asia which had been, in many ways, the lifeline of Coromandel's commerce'. As Arasaratnam goes on:

It was this commercial artery that was punctured violently in the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.... In a series of military and naval actions, these ports and markets were shut off from competitive trading. It meant the denial of a lucrative export trade in spices to Coromandel. And it meant the denial of

---

<sup>137</sup> M. Athar Ali, "The Passing of Empire: The Mughal Case", *Modern Asian Studies*, 9,3 (1975):385-396, 388.

<sup>138</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1978), 309,294.

<sup>139</sup> Rila Mukherjee as quoted by Andre Gunder Frank, "India in the World Economy, 1400-1750", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31,30 (1996):50-64, 61.

<sup>140</sup> Richards, "Mughal State Finance", 306.

<sup>141</sup> A. Dasgupta, "Indian Merchants and the Trade in the Indian Ocean", in *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I, 407-433, 433.

minerals – gold and tin – which had formed a profitable import to India. It must be emphasized that all these were achieved by brute force and not by superior commercial expertise.<sup>142</sup>

Crucial to note, it was not the 'superior commercial expertise' of the Dutch merchants that made them so competitive and disruptive, but rather their comparative advantage in the *means of violence*, and, particularly, their naval superiority.

Indeed, both the Dutch and English had attained a position of relative naval superiority over the Mughal Empire by the late seventeenth century.<sup>143</sup> Given their continuing inability to outcompete Indian merchants on the open market, the Dutch and English continually utilized the use or threat of violence to back up their commercial activities. In the end, this superiority in the means of violence would prove crucial in the final fall of the Mughal Empire to the British dramatized by the Battle of Plassey in Bengal of 23 June 1757.

The immediate motivations behind Major-General Robert Clive's coup of 1757 seem to have arisen from Britain's increasing preoccupation with intensified French competition and a desire to protect British trading interests in Bengal against the perceived depredations of local rulers.<sup>144</sup> In this respect, the competitive pressures of European capitalist states, transmitted both economically and geopolitically, 'overdetermined' and redirected the pattern and dynamics of India's development. Again we see how the *uneven* and *combined* nature of India's development in relation to the European powers came to play a causally decisive role in the Mughal Empire's collapse. The contemporaneous existence of a multiplicity of societies, all exhibiting varying forms of development (unevenness), came to causally interact (geopolitical combination) in ways that produced further axes and layers of sociologically differentiated patterns of development (sociological combinations) in turn leading to sharp divergences in their own developmental trajectories.

It is important to reiterate, however, that the Mughal Empire was already suffering from innumerable economic and political difficulties, stemming in part from the competitive pressures European traders had already brought to bear on the Empire during the preceding century, well before the time of Britain's formal colonization of the country over the second half of the

---

<sup>142</sup> S. Arasaratnam, *Maritime Trade, Society and European Influence in Southern Asia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot:Variorum, 1995), 28-29.

<sup>143</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 239.

<sup>144</sup> See Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-32.



eighteenth century.<sup>145</sup> As noted, divisions among local regional rulers mitigated their ability and wiliness to join military forces in thwarting European incursions.<sup>146</sup> Consequently, the British were able to pit one ruler against another in their conquering efforts.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, at the Battle of Plassey, 'Clive's success owed much to divisions among the Nawab's army'.<sup>148</sup> Meanwhile, the British were further assisted in the process of conquest by various indigenous merchant and financial groups whose political and economic power had been steadily growing since the late seventeenth century as centralized state power began to breakdown.<sup>149</sup> In this rather perverse sense, 'Eastern agency' was a significant part in how the British succeeded in their colonization efforts.

With the capture of Bengal, probably the wealthiest province of Mughal India, the East India Company and its servants achieved an enormous advantage in dealing with all states and economies in the subcontinent thereby further aiding subsequent British conquests as they came to bring the entirety of the Mughal Empire under their dominion.<sup>150</sup> And with the colonization of the entire Indian landmass completed by the early nineteenth century, the British state accrued significant strategic and material advantages in further expanding and buttressing its burgeoning global empire as it sought to open all the markets of the world to its industrial products. In these ways, the 'decline of the East' and the 'rise of the West' were *mutually conditioning* and *co-constitutive processes*, where one state's gain turned into another's loss.

## Conclusion

If we were to choose a single symbolic moment of the *beginning* of the West's systemic 'overtaking' of the 'East' in its rise to global dominance, the years between the British taking of Bengal in 1757 and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 would likely suffice. For it was during these seven world-transforming years that the first of the great tributary empires in the Asia fell at the hands of the Europeans, while the final external systemic threat to the

---

<sup>145</sup> See Frank, "India".

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Roy, *Military Transition*, 199; Lorge, *Asian Military Revolution*, 136.

<sup>147</sup> Lorge, *Asian Military Revolution*, 136.

<sup>148</sup> Black, *European Warfare*, 17.

<sup>149</sup> See Leonard, "The 'Great Firm'", 158-159; Bayly, *Indian Society*, 50-52; Washbrook, "India", 106-107, 110; Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire*, 29-30.

<sup>150</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 51.

development of British (and thus world) capitalism, the French monarchy, was extinguished in a string of spectacular military victories.

After the defeat of France and Spain in this conflict, Britain would acquire dominion over a large portion of three continents under the terms of the 1763 Treaty. This also meant that the white settlers in North America would no longer need protection from British forces.<sup>151</sup> The decisive defeat of the French in 1759 both paved the way for the establishment of the Raj in India and made the emergence of North America possible. Thus, Frank McLynn is correct to claim that this was the year that marked the beginning of Britain's (and subsequently Europe's) dominance of the world as the 'entire history of the world would have been different but for the events of 1759. If the French had prevailed in North America, there would have been no United States (at least in the form we know it)' and if 'France had won in India, the global hegemony of the English language could never have happened.'<sup>152</sup> In short, McLynn concludes, '[t]he consequences of 1759 really were momentous; it really was a hinge on which all of world history turned'.<sup>153</sup>

While anti-capitalist and colonial struggles would continually and forcefully challenge capitalism's global hegemony, the capitalist world system was by this time now firmly entrenched and resting on solid (geo)political foundations (notably, the British Empire). From the second half of the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, the world witnessed the steady growth and domination of capitalist social relations (spread by force or otherwise). In the process, the Global South came to be subjugated in a tangled web of economic, (geo)political and racial hierarchies with the Europeans and subsequently United States sitting at the top. The rich and powerful states grew richer and more powerful on the backs of the weak and impoverished. The process of Western domination culminated in the imposition of unequal trade treaties on China and Japan in the mid and late nineteenth century. Nearly a century later, the sublime dictatorship of capital over the world was largely completed.

In this article, we have argued that the 'rise of the West' was the composite outcome of multiple – uneven – processes of historical development that were international in their origins and scale. In so doing, we have moved away from self-aggrandizing Eurocentric narratives which locate European supremacy exclusively in the peculiar, internal characteristics of Europe itself. This was demonstrated through an analysis of the breakdown of European feudalism – a process

---

<sup>151</sup> Michael Mann, "The Sources of Social Power Revisited", in John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder, eds., *An Anatomy of Power* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2005), 343-396, 383-384.

<sup>152</sup> Frank McLynn, *1759: The Year Britain Became Master of the World* (London:Vintage, 2004), 1.

<sup>153</sup> McLynn, *1759*, 391.

This is the accepted version of Anievas, Alexander and Nişancioğlu 'How Did the West Usurp the Rest? Origins of the Great Divergence over the Longue Durée' Comparative Studies in Society and History Vol. 59 (1), 34-67. Published version available from Cambridge University Press at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417516000608>  
Accepted Version downloaded from: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/24382/>

that is inexplicable without taking into consideration non-European agency. We have also moved beyond those revisionist accounts that explain away the 'rise of the West' through recourse to contingency – the claim that Europe rose to prominence because of luck, chance and accident.

When reassessed from the vantage point of U&CD, we demonstrated that the homogenised conception of global history – a global history expunged of substantive sociohistorical difference – that the revisionists hold breaks down upon closer scrutiny. By reintroducing the multilinear and interactive dimension of development as our basic premise, we argued that the 'rise of the West' is best understood as the interconnected outcome of structural and contingent historical processes that were in each instance overdetermined by intersocietal interactions. In making this argument, we do not claim the final word on debates around the 'rise of the West', but rather hope to introduce U&CD as a framework through which this debate can be assessed anew. In this respect, we hope that revisionist, internationalist approaches might be advanced and strengthened against the increasingly untenable assumptions of Eurocentrism that have hitherto plagued our understanding of how 'the West' came to rule.