

## Preface to *The Discipline of Western Supremacy* (January 2014)



This volume concludes the trilogy in which I redefine world politics as an evolving composite of modes of foreign relations. Foreign relations are about communities occupying separate social spaces and considering each other as outsiders. Occupation, its protection, and the regulation of exchange with others are universal attributes of human communities; they date back to the dawn of anthropogenesis and have evolved with the ongoing transformation of nature. Hence, as we have seen in Volume II, all human groups, communities and societies rely on mythologies and religious imaginaries to make sense of the foreign encounter. They originate in the tribal and empire/nomad modes and continue to run through contemporary foreign relations. Indeed in our contemporary epoch, such primordial imaginaries are resurgent on a grand scale.

International relations as we understand them today, constitute a historical mode of foreign relations too. The grid of sovereign states under the guidance of a self-styled 'international community' headquartered in Washington and London, not only remains imbricated with modes of older parentage; at some point it will make way for other patterns—of course, if we live to see it. With the faltering ability of the liberal West and capitalism to develop the productive forces in ways conducive to the improvement of life chances, the very idea of a future is being eclipsed by proliferating violence and the spectre of ecological disaster.

Along with the need to dissect and discard economic theories of the self-regulating market which brought us to where we are today, Western supremacy in the global political economy must be challenged in the name of human survival, too. In the present volume I take the critique of foreign relations developed in Volumes I and II to its logical conclusion as a critique of the mainstream discipline of International Relations (IR). Along with adjacent fields dealing with foreign relations such as comparative politics, area studies, and anthropology, IR serves to discipline thinking about foreign relations in terms of the pre-eminence of the Western way of life. It turns the alienated consciousness that underpins the idea of foreignness into a body of thought that denies validity to other ways of life and other political systems, whilst naturalising Western supremacy and obscuring the relations of dominance and exploitation that IR codifies.

Social science originally dealt with 'domestic' challenges. It crystallised in its present disciplinary form when the labour movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century began to embrace socialist

ideas. This triggered an epochal, across-the-board retreat from the most advanced social philosophy of the age—not just from historical materialism, but also from Hegel and others without whom Marx’s quantum leap would not have been possible. The first stage of the process saw the formulation of utilitarian economics in Britain, French sociology, and the German *Staatswissenschaften*. Their common inspiration was to create the conditions for authoritative class compromise—scientific advance was at best secondary to this task. Parcelling out knowledge across a number of different fields would allow adjustments in each whilst leaving the core structures of class society intact. For as the Anglo-Irish parliamentarian and writer Edmund Burke warned at the time of the French Revolution (*Works*, iii: 259, emphasis added), ‘a state without the means of *some change* is without the means of its conservation’.

The modern academic division of labour translates this insight into a series of teaching and research programmes in the service of the existing order (Wallerstein 2001: 20). It achieved its contemporary form in North America, where the aforementioned reformulations of social theory were further differentiated, with a common grounding in the agnostic, empirical theory of knowledge that John Locke developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When control of the universities in the United States around the turn of the last century passed from the Protestant clergy to the business world, academic discipline mutated into a straightforward continuation of class discipline by different means, subject to methods of scientific management. The process was well advanced when the Russian empire in 1917 collapsed in revolution, with the Bolsheviks emerging victorious from civil war and foreign intervention. US president Woodrow Wilson at that juncture projected what would become the implicit programme of IR till the present day—the creation of a world of formally sovereign nation-states under liberal, Anglo-American supervision, arrayed against the spread of social revolution and open for business. ‘The “problems of Hobbes,” that is, anarchy and power insecurities... had to be solved in order to take advantage of the “opportunities of Locke,” that is, the construction of open and rule-based relations,’ Ikenberry (2011: 4) summarises this project.

Wilson’s entourage at Versailles created the framework for the one remaining specialisation needed to complete the academic infrastructure developed in the United States—international politics. Every branch of science, writes Bourdieu (1984: 90), at some point changes from obeying a scientific necessity that is socially arbitrary, to a social necessity that is scientifically arbitrary. The Russian Revolution was that moment in the study of world affairs. Thus in the decades following World War I, discipline was imposed on a terrain captured by Marxist writers on imperialism and national self-determination. IR instead focuses on global governance and (subordinate) sovereign equality, two modes of foreign relations which owe their specific form to the rise of a transnational, Anglophone society and ruling class. Rival principles of world order, be they atavistic ones such as empire, or alternatives looking to equitable global governance such as socialist internationalism, are disregarded, as are tribal and other pre-modern foreign relations and their ideational forms. Hence it comes as no surprise that the academic discipline of IR, as Schmidt reminds us (1998: 13), is ‘marked by British, and especially, American parochialism’.

For Marx, historical change originates in class formation and struggle. We can analyse these in terms of a contradiction between an existing social order (including its ideational superstructures), and the vision of a different one arising from new possibilities. In the transformation of nature through the social labour process, this works out as a contradiction between forces and relations of production; in foreign relations, in which class relations are mediated by ethno-political difference, the contradiction is between human community and common humanity. Global governance, enabled by the development of the exploitation of nature and society on a world scale, would appear to be in contradiction with sovereign equality in this sense; but the contradiction is overcome in practice by making the states of the Lockean heartland ‘more equal’ than others. Since this cannot be the official introduction to a teaching programme, the discipline rests on a presumed foundational debate between Wilsonian ‘idealism’ and

1930s *Realpolitik*. Caught in a pre-Hegelian understanding of static antinomies conceived from the vantage point of the unconstrained ‘actor’, and confining itself to politics, this supposed ‘First Debate’ invites students and scholars to a partisan appreciation of either position.

Yet even by plain logic, a real or imagined global governance (imperial, Western liberal, or socialist) is always prior to any resistance to it; they are aspects of an evolving combination. Walker captures this when he writes (1993: 42) that ‘if it is necessary to identify a tradition of international relations theory,’

Then the most appropriate candidate is not “realism” but “idealism”. For what is systematically obscured by the reifying claims about political realism as a tradition is that realism has been constituted historically through the negation and displacement of a prior understanding of political life understood in the context of universalist aspirations... The tradition of political realism as we have come to know it is unthinkable without the priority ascribed to universalist claims within political theory.

As in social science generally, however, IR’s foundation in a Kantian antinomy leads to endless pirouettes on the threshold of a dialectical understanding. The same theoretical positions are reinvented over and over again under new labels, a process spawning its own clichés such as ‘bringing *x* back in’, ‘the *y* turn’, ‘*z* matters’, and so on (Abbott 2001: 32). Instead of moving forward on the basis of historical materialism (like music after Wagner, or physics after Einstein and Planck), English-speaking social thought, which today dominates academic life the world over, remains locked in the antinomy between (materialist) empiricism and (religious-idealist) moral judgement, ‘positive’ and ‘normative’ theory. But that of course is inherent in a social discipline that is scientifically arbitrary. As long as capitalist property relations are safe from critical questioning, any economics will do; as long as liberal global governance and open nation-states remain the norm, IR can be left to self-regulate, from Angell to Krasner.

Now if social science suffers from turning its back on classical thought once Marx transformed it into a challenge to the existing order, the historical materialist tradition did not survive its exclusion from academia unscathed either. Unlike the Nazi attempt to remove Einstein from physics (documented by Poliakov and Wulf 1989: 102-3), which was too short-lived to produce an ‘Einsteinism’ reproducing itself in isolation, the century-long exile of Marx has engendered sectarianism and formulaic retrogression. Marxism after Marx largely failed to assimilate his philosophical revolution, lapsing into a positive-materialist theory of economic causation again, a ‘Marxist economics’ (Desai 2013: 12-4; cf. my Volume I, 2007: viii-ix) removed from class struggle and consciousness. Lenin in his notes on Hegel’s *Logic* began the process of rediscovering the Marxist method, and Gramsci and others were to follow. In this spirit the present volume develops a critique of Anglo-American IR, its social determinants, and its practical role in sustaining Western supremacy in the world.

The English ruling class pioneered reflection on the conditions under which an Atlantic society uses maritime supremacy as a road to global dominion, whilst playing off continental contenders against each other. In Chapter 1 I address how from Elizabethan times, the dilemma between empire and liberty was recognised in ways prefiguring the eventual project of Western supremacy. By encouraging client nation-state formation against illiberal, multi-ethnic constellations, freedom could be projected abroad as informal empire; the Congress of Vienna, the Greek revolt, and the emancipation of Latin America mark the beginnings of the process in practice. Of course nationality was conceptualised differently from the Western vantage point and from that of actual emancipation from empire—the Lockean doctrine of the property-owning citizen is incompatible with Rousseau’s and Herder’s understanding of an historic, organic community. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Anglophone ideologues from J.S. Mill to Mackinder and Hobson then articulated global governance and nationality in a form prefiguring the eventual

disciplinary programme of IR. In the chapter's final section, I summarise the Marxist theses on national autonomy and imperialism to which the discipline would constitute the response in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Chapter 2, I recapitulate how Woodrow Wilson, himself a political scientist and academic politician before he became president of the United States, through his strategy of encircling revolutionary Russia also inaugurated the establishment of a dedicated IR. Wilson entrusted the think-tank, 'The Inquiry', with the task of identifying potential client states to stem the spread of revolution. Its secretary, Walter Lippmann, in turn recommended that the universities be made an adjunct of policy-making by the federal government, as an academic intelligence base. The Council on Foreign Relations and the Royal Institute of International Affairs that emerged from this episode; the large foundations spun off from the big capitalist dynasties, and the US university system were thus mobilised as a research and training infrastructure for the policy sciences including IR. Paradoxically it took until the collapse into fascist dictatorship of the states 'made safe for democracy' before a flow of refugees fleeing Nazi persecution and racism, breathed life into this skeleton academic complex. Their quasi-tribal concept of existential foreignness, borrowed from the Third Reich's crown jurist Carl Schmitt, merged with the Lockean antagonism towards illiberal societies into the Atlantic synthesis that is at the root of modern IR.

The atomic bombardment of Japan in 1945 marks a watershed in the conduct of world politics. Once the project to place the new source of energy under an equitable form of global governance had been sidelined, Western supremacy became premised on maintaining nuclear superiority. In Chapter 3, I discuss how the collective fear of atomic annihilation in the United States underpinned the communist witch-hunt of Senator Joe McCarthy. Besides intimidating the liberal intelligentsia into submission to the new national security state, McCarthyism also engendered, through the medium of IR realism and its tribal concept of the foreign, an essentially autistic understanding of world politics. With the Domsday assumption of a nuclear Pearl Harbour given, war strategists in the RAND Corporation substituted game theory for political analysis as they calculated the equilibrium point in an atomic standoff. As IR mobilised behind a 'pugnacious Christianity', the national security state crystallised into what the dean of post-war US realists, Hans Morgenthau, afterwards identified as 'the dual state'. In a dual state, he writes (1962: 400; cf. Tunander 2009),

the power of making decisions remains with the authorities charged by law with making them while, as a matter of fact, by virtue of their power over life and death, the agents of the secret policy—co-ordinated to, but independent from, the official makers of decisions—at the very least exert an effective veto over the decisions.

This dual state, which Morgenthau saw as a spill-over from totalitarian practice that in the US might still be contained, has in fact remained at the heart of the Western power structure. I will use dual (or as it is called in Turkey, 'deep') state when referring to the shadow structures which can impose or provoke the imposition of a state of exception and which by Schmitt's definition, are therefore the true sovereign. This is not a matter of saying that, e.g., 'the CIA' secretly governs. It is, by definition, the ruling class that rules; but it necessarily does so through a range of intermediate, governing structures. Although an important relay, the CIA itself was on occasion the target of deep politics, as in the 1970s 'Team B' episode (see Chapter 5). Equally when the US military failed to produce evidence of weapons of mass destruction after the invasion of Iraq, this proved once again that 'the' military, or even the military-industrial complex, are not monolithic entities in the service of imperialism. Yet when academics work for the CIA or the Pentagon, it is usually not to assist those who, like Private Bradley Manning when he released evidence of US war crimes in Iraq that ended up on the WikiLeaks website, resist abuse and secrecy, but as members of the academic intelligence base of US and NATO policy—more often than not,

its covert operations, as in the case of the ‘Marshall Plan for the social sciences’ discussed in this chapter.

Postwar decolonization posed the greatest challenge to the continued supremacy of the West since the Bolshevik Revolution. This time, a vast academic infrastructure was in place to provide expert intelligence. In Chapter 4, I discuss first how the open nation-state form emerged from colonial rule as a class compromise between the British ruling class and local bourgeois elements, with India and Pakistan as the examples. Once the US assumed leadership in handling the decolonization process in order to prevent progressive forces from pushing beyond liberalism, its academic intelligence base was mobilised to develop theories of political development. Since Cold War IR was largely irrelevant in the process, Comparative Politics and Area Studies took up the task of projecting how a decolonised, pre-industrial or even tribal society could begin the supposedly natural process of moving towards the American way of life, or at least, a pro-Western stance against state socialism. By the mid-sixties, modernisation theory gave way to a security concern articulated by the single most important ideologue of postwar US imperialism, Samuel Huntington, in his work on the role of the military in the new nations. Thus the concerns of IR merged again with those of its sister disciplines. Together, the academics involved in them (very often the same people) functioned as what Noam Chomsky famously called the ‘New Mandarins’ assisting the US government in Vietnam and other contested arenas. Indonesia in this respect occupies a place of its own as a testing ground for how the grooming of an alternative governing class followed by violent regime change secured the country for exploitation by the West. Paradoxically, Soviet theory as well as Third World national liberation ideology did not stray from positing the sovereign nation-state as the endpoint of historical development.

In Volume I, I have drawn the contours of the class coalition which will be centrally involved in any attempt to move beyond Western supremacy and globalising capitalism. Such a coalition must also revive and take forward the intellectual diversity which the May 1968 students and workers movement brought back to academia. In Chapter 5, I argue that the upsurge in international studies, which briefly broke through the stale ‘First’ and ‘Second Debates’ to rediscover the themes of imperialism and militarism sidelined by them, proved short-lived. With a new ethics to bolster Lockean liberalism and key issues such as transnational corporations absorbed into a sub-discipline of International Political Economy, IR geared to specifying actual global governance and the need to discipline the remaining non-compliant states under its regime. Wars of dispossession dressed up as humanitarian intervention and coups choreographed as velvet revolutions after the script of Harvard scholar Gene Sharp, all owe their efficacy (at least in launching them) to the work of contemporary IR scholars training new generations of cadre. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Clash of Civilizations thesis was formulated to justify continued military outlays, this time against the new contender state, China, and ‘Islam’, demonised as a hotbed of terrorism. As I document in this chapter, the outlines of a War on Terror, complemented by a domestic surveillance state, were already drawn at dedicated conferences in Jerusalem and Washington in the early 1980s. Yet once the new Pearl Harbour announced for more than a decade, actually happened, the event and its consequences have remained taboo as IR subjects. The discipline has instead assumed a mercenary quality and scholars have become ‘embedded intellectuals’ sustaining Western supremacy in the face of mounting challenges. Clearly the undercurrents of critical theory of various stripe will have to activated well beyond their present impact if intellectual integrity and social relevance to international studies are to be restored—a task that in the light of the threats to human existence can no longer be postponed.

# Detailed Table of Contents

## Preface

## Acknowledgements

### 1. Empire and Nationality in the Pax Britannica

#### The Collective Mind of Anglophone Dominion

*Formal Equivalence and the Bourgeoisie—Ideologues of the Lockean Heartland*

#### National State Formation and Informal Imperialism

*The Concept of Organic Nationality—Opening Up Illiberal Empire Through Sovereign Equality—Liberalism and the Nation-State*

#### Internationalism and National Self-Determination

*From Marx to Austro-Marxism—Nationality Between Imperialism and Revolution*

### 2. The Crusade for Democracy and World Politics

#### The Making of Disciplinary Social Science

*European Departures—The Academic Division of Labour in North America*

#### A World Made Safe for Democracy

*Nation-building Against Revolution—From the Milner Group to the Inquiry—Foundations of the IR Discipline*

#### Atlantic Synthesis in International Relations

*The Sovereign and the State of Emergency—Recruiting Central European Scholarship for Atlantic Social Science*

### 3. Cold War Discipline in International Relations

#### Compromise and Confrontation in the Nuclear Age

*Christian Ethics Against Totalitarianism—Academic Intelligence for Covert Action—RAND and the Doomsday Ideology*

#### The Ideology of Western Supremacy as Normal Science

*The ‘Second Debate’ vs. the Critique of Militarism—Theorising the Lockean Heartland*

#### A Marshall Plan for the Social Sciences

*The Intellectual Culture of Atlantic Fordism—Targets and Limits of Discipline in Western Europe*

### 4. The Pax Americana and National Liberation

#### New States and Nation-Building

*Decolonization by Compromise: The India/Pakistan Paradigm—Theorising National Integration—Stages of Growth and Polyarchy*

#### Intervention and Regime Change

*National Security Subcontractors of the Pax Americana—Training an Alternative Governing Class in Indonesia*

#### Soviet and Third World Assimilation of the Nation-State Form

*Sovereign Equality for the USSR—National Statehood as a Revolutionary Goal in the Third World*

### 5. The Crisis of International Discipline

#### Global Ethics, IPE, and the Postmodern Quandary

*Resurgent Idealism?—An IR Niche for the World Economy—Disciplining European Scholarship After May 1968*

#### The Turn to Coercive Global Governance

*Refocusing the Academic Intelligence Base—The Dual State and the Origins of the War on Terror—Limited Sovereignty and Democracy Promotion After the Soviet Collapse*

#### Western Supremacy in Crisis

*Under the Spell of the War on Terror—The Embedded Discipline*

## References