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Article

MASTERING THE MYSTERIES OF DIPLOMACY: KARL MARX AS INTERNATIONAL THEORIST

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Abstract

The field of international relations is one of few corners of the social sciences in which it has been relatively easy to avoid an encounter with Karl Marx and Marxist thought. Arguably, the reverse has also been true. Whatever the reasons for that mutual ambivalence, this essay claims Marx as a serious theorist of the international, not just a pamphleteer or tactician. It does so primarily by rereading his response to the suppression of the Paris Commune, *The Civil War in France*. Marx's essay, lively and provocative, challenges the distinction between 'domestic politics' and 'international relations,' and suggests that the ontological building blocks of international theory – the state and war – are revealed as historically unstable by 'the most tremendous war of modern times.' While Marx later reconsidered some of his analysis, *The Civil War in France* retains its interrogatory power especially in relation to contemporary instances of international political violence.

Keywords

Marx; international relations; Franco-Prussian War; Paris Commune

If the emancipation of the working classes requires their fraternal concurrence, how are they to fulfill that great mission with a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal designs, playing upon national prejudices, and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure? It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes, but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of England that saved the West of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation and propagation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic. The shameless approval, mock sympathy, or idiotic indifference, with which the upper classes of Europe have witnessed the mountain fortress of the Caucasus falling prey to, and heroic Poland being assassinated by, Russia; the immense and unresisted encroachments of that barbarous power, whose head is at St. Petersburg, and whose hands are in every cabinet of Europe, have taught the working classes the duty to master the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective Governments; to counteract them, if

> necessary, by all means in their power; when unable to prevent, to combine in simultaneous denunciations; and to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations.
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> - *Karl Marx (1864, 519)*

A generation ago, Vendulka Kubalkova and Albert Cruickshank (1989) began their enigmatic book, *Marxism and International Relations*, with an understated claim that the two elements of the title 'do not blend easily.' If there was a distinct Marxist tradition of theorizing about international relations, a tradition for which they were prepared to make a case, its main feature was an ambivalence about the state-system that otherwise is the unquestioned core reality of the field (see also Berki 1984). More recently, Benno Teschke, whose work represents a rare and significant theoretical challenge to international relations from within Marxism, has pressed the claim further. On the one hand, he argues, the Marxist tradition from the start left the international and the geopolitical under-theorized. In Marx's *Capital*, 'the problem as to *why* political power constitutes itself territorially in the shape of a world system of politically sovereign states, whilst the world market as the sphere of private exchange assumes a universal form, is not even formulated as a research desideratum'; and, while Marx and Engels showed an increasing awareness of international relations in their later work, their interest was still closer to journalism and political tactics than it was theoretical (2006, 331, 332). On the other hand, Teschke acknowledges the considerable gap between his own work – in which 'the economic and the political, the domestic and the international, are never constituted independently of each other,' but are interrelated in a historically unstable dynamic of property relations – and much of mainstream international relations. Yet the subject itself, he writes, must be critically engaged. It is too important to be left to the dominant paradigm, neo-realism, which he describes as a 'science of domination,' a 'technology of state power pervaded by instrumental rationality,' and a 'siren song for all undergraduates' – one that 'obscures more than it reveals and compresses the rich history of human development into a repetitive calculus of power' (Teschke 2003, 272, 274).

Evidently ambivalence and neglect continue to cut both ways. International relations is still one of the few subfields within the study of politics, indeed the social sciences generally, in which it is possible in the Anglo-American world to avoid any encounter with Marx, though a generic Marxism – highlighting, say, neo-Gramscian hegemony or world-systems theory[1] – is now the subject of a standard chapter at least in

[1] A fuller contemporary survey of the field would note, in addition to Teschke's work, the recent emergence in the UK of a position which claims a lineage through Trotsky and which engages the field of international

textbooks generated outside of the United States. Even among those who are inclined to concur with Martin Wight (1987, 1991) that theory in international relations is, in a fundamental sense, to be found in the dialogue among historically-embedded traditions of ideas and practices, or in the contested terrain of ideas, there is no rush to give Marx a seat at the table alongside such more familiar philosophical personages as Machiavelli, Grotius, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant. He is typically absent, for example, from the anthologies of 'classic' texts (e.g., Forsythe *et al* 1970; Wright 1976; Williams 1998), or the collections of interpretive essays on 'classic' thinkers (e.g., Jahn 2006), both of which have been compiled in the construction of a kind of history of international political thought.[2]

The general neglect of Marx has been explained on ontological, political, and sociological grounds which do not need lengthy repetition here. They include the difficulty of reconciling a class-centred analysis and historical materialism with the common assumptions of academic international relations; the primacy of 'social' over 'international' conflict in Marx's own day; and the coincidence of the Cold War with the emergence of international relations as a subject of inquiry especially in the US (e.g., Thorndike 1978; Halliday 1987; Kubalkova and Cruickshank 1989, 11-13; Lynch 1987). Perhaps the weakest explanation is that Marx, together with Engels, gave no sustained attention to international relations either because they considered the state-system epiphenomenal or because they lived in a world made orderly by the Concert of Europe's balance-of-power diplomacy. The fact remains that Marx was, if not a systematic theorist, then certainly a prolific and prescient commentator on the international politics of his day. The essays and pamphlets he wrote in response to European events, especially after the failed revolutions of 1848, suggest a preoccupation with such 'conventional' subjects as war and the balance of power – not for their own sake, of course, or as scholarly puzzles, but for the success of a future socialist revolution.

The purpose of this article is to read Marx as an international theorist. Modest in scope, it offers no synthetic reading of his entire corpus – least of all *Capital* – as it might be applied to international politics. Instead, its focus is a solitary text: *The Civil War in France*, 'the most brilliant of Marx's polemics' (McLellan 1973, 400). Written in 1871, in English, the text is a lively, sardonic analysis of what it called the international character of class rule revealed in the smashing of the Paris Commune earlier that same year. It was Marx's first popular success, though it quickly proved divisive on the left (Anderson 2010,

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relations through the lens of 'uneven and combined development.' See, e.g., Rosenberg (2010 and 2013). I would also note Radhika Desai's work on what she calls geopolitical economy (2013).

[2] There is a brief excerpt from *The Communist Manifesto* in Brown *et al* (2002) and from both *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto* in Williams et al (1993), whose intent is to transcend distinctions between 'political' and 'international' theory. See also Boucher (1998), who treats Marx as a political theorist of international relations. But this all amounts to limited engagement on what is the periphery of the field, though Marx's influence is much more evident in the international political economy literature, for example, the contributions of important scholars such as Robert Cox.

152-53). Widely circulated in translation, it also solidified his notoriety as a dangerous, influential radical for European governments, security services, and editorialists.

My interest here is as much pedagogical as it is theoretical or explanatory – a response to the problem of how to present and represent the subject of international relations in the classroom. My retrieval of Marx and a particular text is rooted in the understanding, first, that the intellectual positions, world-images, and historical trajectories offered to students to make sense of the international have arisen themselves out of specific social-political contexts and lived experiences; and, second, that when those perspectives are put into critical conversation, not just placed end to end, they can help to interrogate common-sense assumptions about the contemporary world. The Paris Commune is a particularly rich example in those respects. Though it may have represented only a short-lived political eruption, suppressed after 72 days in a shockingly brutal show of force, it stands out sharply against comfortable depictions of the 'long peace' of post-Napoleonic Europe; and it challenges the teleology of the 'modern' nation-state and state-system with the reality of an alternative political form – 'at once smaller and more expansive,' more local and more international (Ross 2015, 5). The Paris Commune was a surprise even to those who built it. It puzzled Marx, too, even as it demanded a position from him.

'The Most Tremendous War of Modern Times'

Marx's admonition, cited at the outset of this paper, to master the mysteries of international politics was made in his inaugural address to the International Working-Men's Association (IWMA). This compact passage reflects his political thinking at several levels as it had congealed in the post-1848 period. Most obvious is his obsession with tsarist Russia, whose intervention against the short-lived Hungarian republic in 1849 was crucial to the restoration of conservative monarchy in Central Europe, and whose expansionist policies in the Crimea and Poland, he wrote, had to be checked. In an essay for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, Marx warned of the 'Russian dream of conquest once more revealed to the world,' and made possible by Europe's economic crisis and political disarray (1853, 333). In 1863 Marx issued a proclamation attacking the betrayal of Poland, which 'alone continues to protect Germany from the Muscovite deluge'; the cause of German unity and independence from Russian domination required a Polish buffer (1863, 354). A second theme is the distrust of foreign policymakers as much for recklessness with 'people's blood and treasure' as for the clear-sighted pursuit of class interests. In a similar vein, Marx in the middle of the Crimean War had charged the British government for the amateurish state of helplessness that put the constitution at risk while 40,000 lay dead on the shores of the Black Sea (1855, 281-84). A third theme concerns the reliable political timidity of the bourgeoisie. A fourth, intriguingly – and

perhaps it was only meant to be read rhetorically – is the acknowledgement not just of the reality of distinct nationalities but also of the 'simple laws' by which to judge the relations between them. This deference to the law of nations, however, and indeed all of the above themes, must be set within the context of Marx's fundamental commitments to proletarian internationalism and emancipation. His internationalism had been introduced in the slogans of the *Communist Manifesto*, which were repeated in the inaugural address ('Proletarians of all countries, Unite!'). But, as Alan Gilbert writes, it was actual revolutionary experience that made internationalism so central and that gave it substance:

> This solidarity did not depend on an advanced level of productive forces within countries, let alone a great degree of capitalist penetration into a foreign economy. Instead, this internationalism derived mainly from a political fact: the likelihood of a common response by European exploiting classes, bourgeois and aristocratic, to a revolutionary threat affecting any one of them. (Gilbert 1981, 149)

Marx's deliberate turn to the study of political economy after 1848, Gilbert argues, was scarcely a renunciation of revolutionary strategizing. While the general theory of capital that resulted has been interpreted as a shift towards economic determinism, it cannot be extricated from its location in a dialectical relationship with Marx's more explicitly political writings and activity during the same time – that is, as a framework that permitted the contradictions of capitalist expansion to be grasped but that needed to be rethought constantly out of a willingness to learn from experience. Out of that theoretical framework of a materialist conception of history, Marx made practical journalistic judgments: on British rule in India, on the American civil war, on Bismarck's wars of unification. His lengthier essays on the spectacular events of French politics – the Bonapartist coup, the suppression of the Commune – were also general theoretical exercises in the face of apparent novelty. Thus *The Civil War in France* in particular is the occasion for the claim that 'class rule is no longer able to disguise itself in a national uniform,' that national governments 'are one as against the proletariat' (Marx 1871a, 80).

The military-diplomatic circumstances of the Franco-Prussian War and the sequence of events resulting in the declaration of the Commune cannot be recounted here in any length. For my more limited purposes, the place to begin is Marx's initial welcome of the French declaration of war on the basis that Napoleon III's defeat could provoke revolution and, as he wrote to Engels, shift the centre of the working-class movement and socialist theory to Germany (McLellan 1973, 389-90). In an address drafted for the General Council of the London-based IWMA, Marx described the war as a defensive one on the German side, nonetheless noting that Bismarck had conspired formerly with Louis Bonaparte to crush popular opposition and that the 'governments and ruling classes of

Europe' had allowed the emperor to 'play during eighteen years the ferocious farce of the Restored Empire.' The address made two other important points. First, Marx urged the German working class not to let the war lose its limited and defensive character and, in particular, not to let their government accept Russian offers of support. Second, Marx took encouragement from the 'unparalleled' exchanges of goodwill between French and German working-class organizations, while their governments rushed into a 'fratricidal feud.' They were the signs of a 'new society,' one whose '[i]nternational rule shall be peace, because its national ruler will be everywhere the same – Labour!' (Marx 1870a, 25-27 *passim*).

Marx's cheery proclamation can be read, alternatively, as a piece of pamphleteering meant to strengthen working-class resolve. Napoleon III's rapid surrender and Bismarck's occupation of Alsace-Lorraine, if anything, demonstrated the relative powerlessness of those confidently entrusted with the task of restraining Germany. Some who appealed for an honorable peace were jailed. Marx, in a second address, challenged both those who claimed the captured territory as historically German – by that reasoning, Brandenburg should be returned to Poland – and those 'more knowing patriots' who insisted only that it was necessary as a guarantee against future French aggression. The 'lesson of all history,' Marx argued, was that attempts to impose borders on the basis of the conqueror's military interest 'carry within them the seed of fresh wars' (1870b, 3). Again, he urged restraint so that the victory gained by the sacrifices of German workers would not be turned into their defeat:

> [A]utocratic Russia must think herself endangered by a German under Prussian leadership. Such is the law of the old political system. Within its pale the gain of one state is the loss of the other. The tsar's paramount influence over Europe roots in his traditional hold on Germany. At a moment when in Russia herself volcanic social agencies threaten to shake the very base of autocracy, could the tsar afford to bear with such a loss of foreign prestige? . . . Do the Teuton patriots really believe that liberty and the peace will be guaranteed to Germany by forcing France into the arms of Russia? If the fortune of her arms, the arrogance of success, and dynastic intrigue lead Germany to a spoliation of French territory, there will then only remain two courses open to her. She must at all risks become the avowed tool of Russian aggrandisement, or, after some short respite, make again ready for another 'defensive' war, not one of those new-fangled 'localised' wars, but a *war of races*—a war with the combined Slavonian and Roman races (Marx 1870b, 32-33).

For the time being, Marx wrote, the politics of the 'old system' would require gestures towards an honourable peace – at least the restoration of a modicum of continental

equilibrium – and the recognition of the new French republic despite the dubious composition of its coalition government.

These short addresses made at the beginning and end of the six-week war form the background for *The Civil War in France*. The Commune itself was declared in March 1871, six months after the emperor's surrender, in the sudden vacuum created by the coalition's capitulation to the Prussian siege and its departure for Versailles. As recent interpreters have noted, the turn of events surprised even those who had made revolution their life's ambition (e.g., Merriman 2014; Ross 2015; Gluckstein 2011).

The Commune was not the work of any one party or faction; it did not issue from a coherent, unifying manifesto. It was marked from the start, not surprisingly, both by personal rivalries and by disagreement over goals, tactics, and political authority. Its political meaning and historical significance have been debated ever since. The Commune might plausibly and minimally be described as a broad-based exercise in popular republican democracy and social reform under extreme conditions. It moved quickly to dismantle the organs of the centralized French state that was built under absolutism and then transformed, as Marx described it, into the corrupt, bloated Bonapartist parasite but also into the 'engine of class despotism' under conditions of industrialization that freed the fearful bourgeoisie from politics to concentrate on capital accumulation. The Commune abolished the standing army in favour of a citizen militia. It curbed police powers, cut public officials' salaries, disestablished the Catholic Church, opened the schools and required the election of judges.[3] While the Commune did not abolish private property, and while it kept the national bank intact, Marx was prepared to recognize it in *The Civil War in France* as the 'political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour' (1871a, 60).

Nonetheless, the Commune was embattled throughout its brief lifespan. The initial shots of the civil war were fired in an attempt by the Versailles government to reclaim artillery from the city. Parts of Paris were subject to sustained artillery bombardment. Finally, the Commune was defeated in a bloodbath – 17,000 dead, by Versailles estimates – soon after a deal was cut with Bismarck, accepting his peace terms, including prompt payment of heavy reparations, in exchange for the release of prisoners and the active assistance of German troops (Merriman 2014; Hobsbawm 1975, 200-202).

Marx, as is well known, was more equivocal towards the Commune than is apparent by the passionate tone of his essay issued in the heat of the moment (McLellan 1973). His protest of the previous September against the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine had also counselled working-class restraint in France in the difficult

[3] While the Commune inherited a longer struggle over the length of the working day and is credited famously with having abolished night-work for bakers, 'Parisians still demanded warm croissants first thing in the morning, . . . making it difficult for the Commune to enforce the measure' (Merriman 2014, 64).

circumstances presented by the siege and bourgeois control of the army and police (Marx 1870b, 34). Marx did not discount the opportunity created by an 'accident' of history. But the Commune was not directly aligned with the radical politics of the International. It drew most of its inspiration and most of the members of its governing council from other branches of socialism (Proudhonist, Blanquist), as well as republican, liberal, and anarchist tendencies. The International's Paris section had been handicapped by arrests just prior to the Franco-Prussian War. Marx, further, was critical of the Commune's tactics – its too-scrupulous reluctance to take the offensive, its hasty devolution of power – even as he admired its 'glorious deed' of 'storming heaven' (1871b, 85). Marx and Engels did amend an 1872 edition of the Manifesto to account for the political achievement of the Commune (Gilbert 1981, 161). But the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) declined to mention its example, and Marx later told a journalist that the Commune could have achieved a more helpful compromise with the Versailles government had common sense prevailed (Lichtheim 1964, 120-21). By that point, the International had been identified as being responsible for the Commune's crimes, vilified by the European press, targeted by governments, and torn apart by its own factionalism. It proved too fragile to endure the political currents unleashed by the Franco-Prussian War (McLellan 1973, 388, 401-402).

Typically, the import of *The Civil War in France* has been found in its approving description of the Commune's decentralized political form – the antithesis of the state, whose machinery could not simply have been seized and wielded for the purposes of the working class; instead, it had to be smashed. Read from the perspective of international relations, however, other parts of the essay gain in significance for their treatment of the cross-pressures of war, diplomacy and revolution. In Part I, Marx represents the coalition Government of National Defence as realizing that Paris in the new republic could not be armed without arming the working class and thereby making revolution possible in the event that the siege could be withstood. Capitulation to Prussia therefore was the one means of escape, though this option came with its own serious drawbacks. While the Second Empire had doubled the national debt and ravaged the country's resources, Bismarck (the 'Prussian Shylock') now waited on French soil with a bill for the support of one-half million German troops, reparations, and interest:

> Who was to pay the bill? It was only by the violent overthrow of the republic that the appropriators of wealth could hope to shift onto the shoulders of its producers the cost of a war which they, the appropriators, had themselves originated. Thus, the immense ruin of France spurred on these patriotic representatives of land and capital, under the very eyes and patronage of the Invader, to graft upon the foreign war a civil war – a slaveholders' rebellion (Marx 1871a, 45).

The success of that rebellion would require the disarming and defeat of Paris.

Part IV begins with Bismarck's machinations. He returned a slow stream of captured imperial soldiers 'in numbers just sufficient to keep the civil war going, and keep the Versailles government in abject dependence' (Marx 1871a, 69-70). Then he summoned its representatives to dictate peace terms. The balance of this concluding part has two principal themes. One is the hypocrisy of committing vengeful savagery in the name of civilization and justice[4]: 'The civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters….A glorious civilization, indeed, the great problem of which is how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over' (Marx 1871a, 74-75).

Against the world-wide 'calumny' that the government of Paris had been usurped by criminals, Marx pointed to the willingness of its people – women as well as men – to die willingly, and 'in numbers unequalled in any battle known to history' (Marx 1871a, 76). Against the charge of incendiarism hurled by those who tore the proletariat apart, but could no longer return to 'the intact architecture of their abodes,' Marx responded that fire was a legitimate means of war. British forces, after all, had burned the Capitol in Washington and the Chinese emperor's summer palace; Paris itself had been bombarded during the siege:

> To be burned down has always been the inevitable fate of all buildings situated in the front of battle of all the regular armies in the world. But in the war of the enslaved against their enslavers, the only justifiable war in history, this is by no means to hold good! (Marx, 1871a, 77).

Finally, against the charge of shooting its hostages, the Archbishop of Paris among them, the Commune had done no more, Marx argued, than those European armies which had resurrected the practice on the continent and in India in the 19th century. In the case of the Commune, hostages had been taken in self-defence, and offers to trade them for one man – Blanqui – were refused, when the Versailles government apparently calculated that the Archbishop was most useful in 'the shape of a corpse' (Marx 1871a, 79).

The second, and more fundamental, theme in this final section concerns the discerning of a new period of world history – the internationalization of class conflict – which remained hidden to Bismarck while he gloated over the ruins of Paris. As Marx writes in two sharp paragraphs, which deserve full quotation despite their length because they show him at his full rhetorical powers:

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[4] The reference to the language of civilization is significant. The late 19th-century saw the introduction of a diplomatic discourse, in the age of empire, that determined the 'standard of civilization' to which non-European polities, especially in Asia, were expected to conform in order to be admitted as fully recognized members of international society. Gong (1984) is one early exploration of this discourse.

> For him this is not only the extermination of revolution, but the extinction of France, now decapitated in reality, and by the French government itself. With the shallowness characteristic of all successful statesmen, he sees but the surface of this tremendous historic event. Whenever before has history exhibited the spectacle of a conqueror crowning his victory by turning into, not only the gendarme, but the hired bravo of the conquered government? There existed no war between Prussia and the Commune of Paris. On the contrary, the Commune had accepted the peace preliminaries, and Prussia had announced her neutrality. Prussia was, therefore, no belligerent. She acted the part of a bravo, a cowardly bravo, because incurring no danger; a hired bravo, because stipulating beforehand the payment of her blood-money of 500 millions on the fall of Paris. And thus, at last, came out the true character of the war, ordained by Providence as a chastisement of godless and debauched France by pious and moral Germany! And this unparalleled breach of the law of nations, even as understood by the old-world lawyers, instead of arousing the 'civilized' governments of Europe to declare the felonious Prussian government, the mere tool of the St. Petersburg Cabinet, an outlaw amongst nations, only incites them to consider whether the few victims who escape the double cordon around Paris are not to be given up to the hangman of Versailles!
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> That after the most tremendous war of modern times, the conquering and the conquered hosts should fraternize for the common massacre of the proletariat – this unparalleled event does indicate, not, as Bismarck thinks, the final repression of a new society upheaving, but the crumbling into dust of bourgeois society. The highest heroic effort of which old society is still capable is national war; and this is now proved to be a mere governmental humbug, intended to defer the struggle of classes, and to be thrown aside as soon as that class struggle bursts into civil war. Class rule is no longer able to disguise itself in a national uniform; the national governments are *one* as against the proletariat (Marx 1871a, 79-80).

By their actions, Marx wrote, European governments testify to 'the international character of class rule' while they denounce the IWMA – the counter-organization to 'the cosmopolitan conspiracy of capital.' What united workers across state borders could not be stamped out 'by any amount of carnage,' but only by governments stamping out the 'despotism of capital over labour – the condition of their own parasitical existence' (Marx 1871a, 81).

Marx as International Theorist

Marx emerges from *The Civil War in France* as a theorist engaged both within and against the 'old system' of international relations, mastering its mysteries with the purpose of transforming it. He is neither an abstract nor a romantic internationalist. As he subsequently wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, the pro-Bismarck press was right to observe that the German Social Democrats had 'sworn off internationalism.' They had borrowed slogans of 'brotherhood' from the bourgeoisie, whose internationalism was tangible in the form of trade, but had lost any idea of the international dimensions of their challenges to the German bourgeoisie or to Bismarck's foreign policy. The class struggle, Marx wrote, was national in form but not in substance; for Germany itself was situated economically within the world market and politically within the 'system of states' (Marx 1875, 533-34). The world-image most appropriate to Marx's analysis is not that of simple conflict between states but rather, to follow Fred Halliday (1990, 221), social conflict increasingly on an international scale, mediated and fragmented by states. Thus the Franco-Prussian War, the Commune, and its suppression constitute a single event – this in contrast to more conventional diplomatic-military histories that consider the Commune as a sideshow, a complication in the peace negotiations (e.g., Howard 1961). Marx makes no sharp distinction between international and civil wars. This is the future anticipated in *The Civil War in France*, with its juxtaposition of old and new worlds. While Bismarck annexed parts of two provinces – the old territorial impetus – 'the Commune annexed to France the working people all over the world' (Marx 1871a, 65). The reaction from the 'bloodhounds of order,' moreover, constituted in itself an *unparalleled fraternization* of conquering and conquered armies, and an *unparalleled breach* of international law.

Marx's own response to this event straddles the two worlds. For all his revolutionary bravado, the rhetorical purposes of which should not be dismissed in relation to a rather demoralized movement, he was remarkably willing to appeal to international law, to conventional moral categories of self-defence and proportionality, and to a standard of international legitimacy by which Germany should be declared an outlaw. He pressed at an earlier stage for formal British diplomatic recognition of the French republic. He worried about old-fashioned gains for the tsarist state and about the threat of another, much larger war created by the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, if France was driven 'into the arms of Russia.' In this way, Marx was attentive to what can be called the traditional dynamics of the European balance of power and to the effects – whether stabilizing or destabilizing – of German unification and Prussian militarism.

The point is not that Marx merits consideration as an international theorist because, and insofar as, he finally pays homage to the timeless and essential principle of the balance of power. There is no advance in admitting Marx to the canon only where he

addresses some pre-established set of problems or intersects with the vocabularies of other traditions (Thorndike 1978, 58).[5] When answers are squeezed out of him to questions he does not pose in any direct way – the cause of war and the condition of peace, for example, to take one standard attempt at disciplinary delimitation – the effect is to abstract his thought from the historical context from which it arose and to which it was, in the first instance, addressed. Marx is preoccupied with the changing character of capital, class, and the state. His rough identification of new forces at work in the latter half of the 19th century, jostling with the old, corresponds in a striking way with Karl Polanyi's account of the great transformation behind the outward appearance of the one hundred years' peace sustained by the balance-of-power system. Polanyi (1957) concedes that the system was one of the institutions on which the peace rested, but argues that the ideological basis of its cohesion changed markedly in relation to economic changes. The first half-century was dominated by the Holy Alliance's suppression of constitutionalism; the second half, at least after the 'confused and crowded' period of upheaval from 1846 to 1871, saw peace moderated by high finance, which foisted constitutions on despots and made access to credit contingent upon good behaviour. The chief danger for European capitalists was general war between great powers; for trade depended on a stable international monetary system that could not operate in such a war. Marx, in retrospect, might have been overly fixated upon Russia and the Holy Alliance. But his writing is alert to the implications of a continent made increasingly interdependent by processes of accumulation.

Marx's response to the Franco-Prussian War – 'the most tremendous of modern times' – also contains within it the suggestion that the nature of war itself was undergoing a transformation. His confidence at the outset that Napoleon would be defeated, when the French army was widely considered the best in Europe, reflects not only his famous scorn for the Bonapartist state but also the important influence of Engels' considerable interest in military affairs. It was Engels who had anticipated in print the nature of the successful Prussian strategy and the significance of advances in artillery, troop movement and supply (Neumann and van Hagen 1986, 273). War in an age when the requirement of mass mobilization conflicted with working-class organization and popular discontent meant opportunity but also risk. Marx could welcome the French declaration of war because it would expose the weakness of the state, teach the proletariat to handle guns, and make revolution a distinct possibility. But war also brought the immediate risk that Europe's two largest working-class movements would be divided against each other by rival patriotic appeals. The influence of Clausewitz's despairing analysis of modern war as

[5] Interestingly, Thorndike's account of a revolutionary-Marxist tradition makes no reference to *The Civil War in France* or the Commune, which are not mentioned at all in Kubalkova and Cruickshank (1989) and only peripherally in Teschke (2003, 2006).

possessing a logic of its own, of the difficulty of reconciling political direction with mass mobilization, might have informed Marx's passionate protest against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.[6] His concern that the old system was incapable of saving itself from military disaster – and that the proletariat would be insufficient to the task – was amplified by Engels in an introduction to *The Civil War in France* written in 1891 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Commune:

> [I]s there not every day hanging over our heads the Damocles' sword of war, on the first day of which all the chartered covenants of princes will be scattered like chaff; a war of which nothing is certain but the absolute uncertainty of its outcome; a race war which will subject the whole of Europe to devastation by fifteen or twenty million armed men, and is only not already raging because even the strongest of the great military states shrinks before the absolute incalculability of its final outcome? All the more is it our duty to make again accessible to the German workers these brilliant proofs now half-forgotten… (Engels 1891, 10).

In this light, Marx's reported allusion to revolution as the sixth great power, waiting to sweep aside the pentarchic order of Europe (Halliday 1990, 212; also 1999) yields a conservative as well as a radical reading. The threat of revolution made tangible in the Commune helped to reinforce at least a fragile sense of common interest and geopolitical discipline – if not political-doctrinal unity – among European states. It restrained war between them, even as it afforded the bloodbath of Paris. It arguably helped carry them through the Berlin Conference and the imperial remapping of Africa in 1884-85. Once the threat of revolution had evidently evaporated, however, and the weaknesses of proletarian internationalism were revealed, European diplomats, generals, and monarchs were again vulnerable to the possibility of 'sleepwalking' (Clark 2012), as they did, into a war which validated Marx's and Engels' fears.

The retrieval of *The Civil War in France* as a pedagogical tool has a number of merits related to the above interpretation. First, the text is a narrative of considerable power, however contingent and contestable some of its judgments about the Commune might be. It helps remove the imposing image of arid abstraction that surrounds Marx's analysis of capital and situates him as a participant-observer within a particular time and place. It is part of the event it describes. Even its real-time exaggerations and especially its errors are themselves of theoretical interest. Its narrative invites rough comparisons to contemporary conflicts.

[6] Clausewitz's influence on Engels and secondarily on Marx is a subject of considerable attention in Gallie (1978), ch. 4.

Second, the text challenges lazy theoretical commonplaces in the field of international relations about the unitary, territorial, and sovereign state as representative of an undivided community. The subject of *The Civil War in France* is nothing like this. The politics of the Commune spill over state boundaries and confound commonplace distinctions between international relations and domestic politics. The communards imagined in words a shared political subjectivity, but one that involved citizens, or the people – not France or Empire; their space-time register was that of a city, and a city of migrants, rather than the nation-state (Ross 2015, 17).[7] For that matter, the restoration of France after May 1871 was not a mere coming to national senses after a time of excess – the work of too many foreign radicals. It was not a matter of communal healing or purification or repentance. It began with summary mass executions in the streets, among other brutalities. With its regained coercive powers, the French state then imposed long prison sentences or forced exile to its South Pacific colonies for the surviving communards who had not escaped to more hospitable oases in Europe. Restoration also required that great monuments be built by state and church, that political authority be redistributed, and that certain memories be erased from public discourse. Marx's text pries some of this open. Herein lies its interrogative power. It requires that what is merely assumed be articulated and defended.

Third, and finally, the text snaps the spell of timelessness about the modern state and state-system that describes a good deal of international theory. It falls on the side of the historicists against the dull weight of ahistorical, structuralist, neo-realist argument. It recalls two worthy and elemental claims, often overlooked, that Martin Wight once made in *Power Politics*: first, that the state-system is 'not the rule in history, despite the illusion that it is normal,' so that its attendant revolution in loyalties begs inquiry; and, second, that its actual history over the past several centuries is divided about equally between what he called 'normal' and 'revolutionary' periods – the former denoting a settled political-ideological consensus, the latter closer to international civil war. By that division, Wight suggested, it could reasonably be asked why the former should be called normal at all (1978, quotations at 2, 87, 92).[8] Marx's *The Civil War in France* is attentive, of course,

[7] Magnussen (2011) makes the case that the city, typically assumed to be a 'lower' and mostly instrumental order of government, with less authority to act, in fact represents a different ontology of the political – one that involves the everyday experience of multiple authorities. It stands over against the 'illusion' or the imposition of state sovereignty, law, stability, and order – the focus of so much political theory, and international theory too. Magnusson's general claim for the city as much more than a limited legislated creation of so-called higher authorities – more political, more enduring – pairs interestingly with Marx's temporary interest in the Commune as the revealing of a new, emancipatory political form, whose urban setting, we might assume, was not accidental.

[8] I will leave for another occasion a proper defense of what may seem an oddly hospitable reading of Wight in relation to Marx, especially in those circles where Wight is typecast – if not much read – as a straightforwardly conservative or 'realist' British scholar in international relations in the 1950s and 1960s. My limited defense would start by placing Wight on the historicist side of what became an important divide

to the interplay of revolution and intervention in international relations, but also to the possibility of the new, the contingent, in the living spaces that people were making for themselves. His essay does not start from world-weariness about the world as it is and therefore must be. It represents one version of human beings making history, dramatically, in circumstances they did not choose.

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in the field. Wight (1991) did not regard Marx as having made a systematic contribution to international theory, though he was not sure that many fit that category (1966), but in his lectures he treated Marxism as a form of revolutionism that was committed to a transformation of the state-system, which put it inside the subject as he constructed it dialectically.

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