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Hans Hubbard
University of California, San Diego

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8

Feuds of a Thousand Years: Explaining Europe via the World System

Hans Hubbard

University of California, San Diego

ABSTRACT

This paper argues for a more comprehensive study of the European Union that includes consideration, not only of socio-economic and political processes, but also of changing conceptualisations of identity, governance and democratic legitimacy. It argues for a re-examination of traditional narratives that frame the European Union as a response to the cruelties of the Second World War. Several key paradoxes in European history cannot be satisfactorily accounted for through purely intra-European processes: the European idea's pre-dating the Second World War; the lack of a strong impulse for unified defence; the UK's late membership and euroscepticism; the desire for a closed-off European system; and the élite nature of the European project. This problematic can be helped by theorising European integration as an event embedded within a larger historical system. Indeed, the roots of the European Union are found in wider, longer-lasting processes related to Europe's shifting position in the World System.

KEYWORDS

European Integration, Governance, Feudalisation, Authority, Power, World System

‘We are asking the nations on the Continent, between whom rivers of blood have flowed, to forget the feuds of a thousand years and work for the larger harmonies on which the future depends...’ –Winston Churchill, ‘The Conservative Case for a New Parliament’. 14 February 1948.

INTRODUCTION

The Long View of History

When Winston Churchill called for the unity of the European continental nations in the aftermath of the Second World War, he certainly felt the weight of history as a determinant factor in the process of integration. Studies of European integration have for the most part ignored the contributions of World-Systems theory, to the detriment of our understanding of the transformations European states have undergone in the post-war era. This paper argues for a re-examination of traditional histories built up during the last six decades, which frame the European Union as a response to the cruelties of the Second World War. While this catastrophic event certainly left an indelible mark on Europeans, the roots of the European Union are found in larger, longer processes related to Europe’s shifting position in the World System.

Furthermore, the traditional classification of political actors in favour of integration as a relatively coherent and unified ideological group is flawed. More concretely, two main currents of thought inform European federalist thought, with its proponents divided into globalist élites, who are in some key ways the ideological descendants of earlier European feudalists; and more traditional believers in nation-states who nevertheless wish to see the re-drawing of Europe’s borders to create a larger nation.

DISCUSSION

Paradoxes of Integration

There are several paradoxes in European history that cannot be satisfactorily accounted for through intra-European processes: the seeming contradiction between claims about the EU’s roots in a desire to prevent European wars and anaemic efforts to create a common military force or strategy; as well as the opposition between claims of globalism and the desire to create a closed-off European system. Moreover, if European integration was indeed propelled by a desire to avoid the horrors of intra-European wars, how do we account for Britain’s continued euroscepticism? After all, the UK experienced both World Wars at least as dramatically as other European states. Finally, the élite-driven nature of the European project, a fact generally accepted by academics, but seldom problematised, must be explained. I propose that this problematic can be helped by theorising the history of European integration as an event embedded within a larger historical system and that these paradoxes are best explained through recourse to historical processes tied to Europe’s place in the world.

Moreover, in order to achieve a more comprehensive study of the European Union, one which includes consideration, not only of socio-political and economic processes, but also of changing conceptualisations of identity, governance and democratic legitimacy among Europeans, the long-term view of history is absolutely vital. Indeed, several key shifts in the anthropological make-up of Europe cannot be explained as intra-regionally caused, viz. the reorganisation of European societies via the reproduction of a governance

regime reminiscent of earlier feudal systems and the possible re-splitting of sovereignty into two realms, one imbued with *potestas* and the other with *auctoritas*. *Nihil sub sole novum* – understanding the pattern of shifts in the World System, and how Europe’s contemporary history relates to them, shall prove key not only in explaining past historical processes, but in attempting a discernment of possibilities for Europe’s future.

The Authors of Europe

In AD 494, Pope Gelasius wrote *Duo Sunt*, a letter to the Eastern Roman Emperor, in which he outlined the sources of sovereignty in Christendom, echoing the ancient Roman division between the Senate’s *auctoritas*, which he ascribed to the spiritual power of the bishops; and the *potestas* of the magistrates, which he allowed to the temporal power of the emperor. This separation led to the three estates of mediaeval society and dominated European political thought until the Renaissance. At this point, the organic union between mitre and crown begins to break down, when, symmetrically to what Calvin and Luther did for the independence of religion from politics, Niccolò Machiavelli advocated the emancipation of the political from the spiritual (Wolin, 2004). This led not to a split between authority and power, but to their merging. The point of unification between *auctoritas* and *potestas* was not achieved intentionally, but rather resulted from the historically contingent split between two institutions that embodied these concepts. As the Church was gradually ousted from the realm of public policy – both through the willingness of reformers within its ranks and through the increased opposition to its influence on the part of secular rulers – secular rulers took on the authority traditionally derived from the Church, much in the same way that Octavian established himself through the subsumption of all forms of legitimate rule into his person.

The concept of sovereignty, which emerges from this fusion of *auctoritas* and *potestas* into a single person, is what popular democratisation movements from the late-seventeenth to the early-twentieth contended against, which ultimately led to a generalised crisis of authority in the modern European world (Arendt, 1987). This should come as no surprise if one considers that in the Roman Republic, at least conceptually, *potestas* ultimately flowed from the people to the tribunes, while *auctoritas* was the established foundational power of the senatorial élite (Adcock, 1966). The rise of nationalism, roughly analogous with the democratisation of Europe, corresponds to the traditional characterisation of the royal as foreign (Sahlins, 1982). Indeed, Agamben’s (1998) definition of the sovereign as one who can reach from the ‘bare life’ (*zōē*) into the social life (*bios*) is in essence a relation of one who is conceptually outside society with those inside it. The rejection of the foreign, along with the concept of authority, is what created the nationalist democracies that characterised the early twentieth century. Moreover, as authority flowed from the a space located outside and above the national, it was rejected.

The conceptual vacuum left by the absence of authority prompted the birth of totalitarian movements, which sought to create a system of government based primarily on *auctoritas* (authoritarian), in what amounts to a conceptual overcompensation for a perceived flaw (Arendt, 1987). Although these movements have been traditionally depicted as nationalist, it is striking to what level their dialectic was one of globalism, with frequent calls for a unification of Continental Europe against the perceived threats of Liberalism and Marxism (Laughland, 1998). The end of the Second World War, and the attendant rejection of Fascism and National-Socialism, extinguished the fire of totalitarian rule in the West, but

did little to alleviate the ongoing crisis of authority. Mediaeval Europe was characterised by the relationship between an international religious body of authority and a localised exercise of secular power. Both of these offices were filled by members of a highly mobile and endogenous pan-European élite, who collectively made up the acting body politic. The democratisation of Europe highlighted the local nature of political power, but destroyed the overarching international authority that legitimated it. While the fascists ultimately failed in their effort to re-establish pan-European authority, they were not the last to seek such a goal, although others did so with remarkably less perverse tactics and aims. The point here, however, is not to liken subsequent attempts with those of fascists, but rather to raise the point that they represented differing responses to a pre-existing conceptual need in the European political tradition.

Schmitt (1985) stated that all modern European political concepts are secularised theological ones. Though this claim overly simplifies the historical interaction between these two disciplines, it nevertheless highlights that when creating new societal conceptualisations, humans must draw on pre-existing notions and adapt them to a new use. In other words, reformers and revolutionaries never create in a true ideological vacuum, nor can they ever fully escape the limiting effect of historical antecedent, which though it does not fully determine what new concepts will emerge, delineates the boundaries of innovation. This is the same as to say that true innovation, of the kind that creates something entirely novel and unprecedented, does not exist in human history, where all new ideas and technologies are assembled through the recombination of pre-existing concepts. Therefore we should expect new developments in European history to draw on its ideological past.

This process of hearkening back to earlier paradigms explains an overarching theme of European integration, viz. the élite-led nature of the endeavour. Indeed, the reformulation of European structures of power-authority on the guideline of an international body sanctioning the actions of national governments strikes oddly familiar to students of the Middle Ages. It is certainly not the aim of this paper to suggest any intentionality in the process, but rather that the creation of a pan-European sanctioning body organically filled an *auctoritas*-shaped void in European politics. We should expect then, to see the European Union filling the role once played by the Church, and indeed we find a focus on defining ‘European-ness in cultural and religious terms’ (Özyürek, 2005), which has also highlighted a secular European identity ultimately based on the Christian tradition (Asad, 2003). In 2011, the European Court of Human Rights declared the crucifix an ‘emphatic symbol of European heritage’ and highlighted its possible secular interpretations (Olipiant, 2012).

New Public Management and the Economics-Centred Approach to Government

The fundamental question analysts should ask is not whether the present world system works, but rather what it means to say that a system works or not. This requires an examination of the underlying values that inform political discourse. The traditionally perceived left-right divide has significantly decreased in importance during the post-War decades, so that contemporary differences among opposing political parties in Europe focus much less on economics than other areas. That is not to say they are less concerned with economics – on the contrary, financial questions have become the foremost theme of political discourse. Rather, this means that a general agreement as to economic models seems to have been reached, so that the difference between opposing parties lies less in divergent models and more in their individual claims to being more adept at manipulating economic policy

to benefit almost-universally accepted economic principles. Jacques Delors once remarked that ‘the European model is, first, a social and economic system founded on the role of the market ...’ (Hill, 2010, p. 23).

This phenomenon parallels the rise of New Public Management, a governance strategy that emerges from economic consultants in the 1960’s (Bislev & Salskov-Iversen, 2001) and presents a view of governmental administration that highlights economic prosperity over any other concern, abandoning traditional government purposes of ‘stability, legality, procedural rules and the maintenance of authority’ in favour of ‘a focus on clients and their needs and expectations, and on services to be produced and delivered’ (Bislev & Salskov-Iversen, 2001). This shift towards econo-centrism has been criticised particularly in European Union administration, with Laughland (1997) commenting that ‘[European federalists] believe that the structures of the state depend on those of the economy: that the one is a ‘super-structure’ of the other’ and going on to suggest that this ‘flows from the stranglehold of economist thinking over modern government’ (p. 3). The trend has not only been noticed by academics, with Uruguay’s president José Mujica lamenting that ‘Contemporary politics is all about short-term pragmatism. We have abandoned religion and philosophy ... What we have left is the automatisisation of doing what the market tells us’ (Watts, 2013). Thus, the justification of government shifts from the function of maintaining stable platforms for the pursuits of its citizens, to that of an enabler of material wealth. In other words, where the role of government is idealised in liberal democracies as the caretaker of socio-political structures necessary to daily life, under the economics-led regime it becomes re-defined as that of a corporate manager. Furthermore, Laughland claims that ‘in its worst forms [the economics-centred view of government] approaches a sort of feudalism, in which allegiance is bought with protection’ (Laughland, 1997, p. 4).

The Democratic Interlude to Continuous Feudalism

Constructed national and world histories emphasise the discontinuity of historical episodes, not least that which characterises the transition from Mediaeval to Renaissance Europe. Nevertheless, if we are to explain human socio-political organisation in any meaningful way, with recourse to truly long-term trends, we need to leave behind the short-sighted assumptions of Victorian historical theory. Belief in temporal exceptionality must be abandoned and replaced with anthropological uniformitarianism. This does not mean disregarding the influence of historical events or technologies (whether those of production or governance), but rather the notion that humans act according to needs and wants that do not fundamentally change over time and that varying styles of governance are expressions of these impulses. Doing so necessitates a re-definition of feudalism under modern models.

There are some difficulties with theorising feudalism under modern parameters. For starters, from the beginning it was defined from an adversarial point of view – in other words, no one who lived under a mediaeval feudal regime identified the socio-economic system of their era as feudal. Rather, it was created as a straw man system against which Enlightenment thinkers could set their proposals (Tibebu, 1990). Nevertheless, some general definitions have been attempted to take into account the vastly varying systems of mediaeval Western European countries. Sweezy and Dobb (1950) defined it as ‘an economic system in which serfdom is the predominant relation of production, and in which production is organized in and around the manorial estate of the lord’ (p. 135). There are some problems with this definition, though it shall suffice for the present exercise to say that it

ignores global processes, choosing instead to focus on local relationships of production only. At least in the European case, the local relationship was paired with a system of governance that centred decisions on a small, unelected and highly international portion of the population. Thus, for the purposes of this work I define feudalism as a system of governance that concentrates political decisions in the hands of an international élite, while implementing a heavily extractionist economic base. One of the benefits of this formulation is that it removes the idea of modes of production from the role of ultimate cause of social arrangements – the dangers of over-emphasising modes of production over modes of reproduction and social relationships have been noted before (Friedman, 1976).

While the outer trappings of feudalism were de-emphasised during the Enlightenment, its underlying structures remained and coloured debates about democracy throughout the entire process. Indeed, it has been suggested that the process of democratisation was one of constructing an ‘inverted replica’ of the old regime (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 219). This would necessarily have maintained a large part of the underlying structures of feudalism, since creating a system defined in opposition to another means maintaining the primacy of former cultural structures, precisely because these are a necessary component of the new system’s identity. Furthermore, as Abu-Lughod (1989) remarked, the processes through which world systems devolve and are restructured are typically the very same processes through which they were structured in the first place. Thus, in the same way we cannot define night without recourse to the concept of day, modern democracy cannot exist without several key cognitive and cultural assumptions dating from feudalist thought. It must be remarked that feudalism does not represent an evolutionary step in the history of Europe, but rather a state of governance resulting from a particular place in the world (Frank, 1966).

Not least among these was the notion of the commoner as unfit to make governmental decisions, which has been a central problematic since the process of democratisation began. Indeed, the majority of the male population in Britain did not receive the right to vote until the Third Reform Act in 1884. It was not until the Fourth Reform Act in 1918 that all males over 21 and women over 30 were enfranchised, and women did not achieve electoral equality until the Equal Suffrage Act of 1928 (Garrard, 2002). It has been suggested by Friedman (2002) that this process of democratic inclusiveness may presently be under a process of reversal, at least in the ideals of world élites. A closer look at the process described in his work hints at strong similarities between the world-view of his ‘champagne liberals’ and earlier feudal élites, who were strongly ‘hybridised’ across kingdom borders and shared ideological affinity with one another. It may well be that mediaeval notions of élite chivalry have given way to ideals of global liberalism, but the organisational structure of these groups, particularly when considered in relation to those outside them, are not too dissimilar.

As for the extractionist economic base previously discussed, the evidence from European Union data seems to point in that direction. The overall number of farms in Europe dropped by 20 % from 2003 to 2010, while the average farm size increased by 3.8 % per annum from 2005 to 2010. Standard economic output increased by 5.2 % per annum during the same period. This trend, which cannot be attributed to smaller banks failing during the Eurozone crisis, as it pre-dates it, speaks to the gradual but constant conversion of the European farming system into one characterised by large agricultural fields owned by a shrinking sector of the population. In other words, Europe moves towards a latifundia-based agricultural system – large holdings (over 100 ha) already represent over 50 % of used agricultural land (European Commission, 2013b). Furthermore, this development is not entirely

accidental, as suggestions for producing precisely this result represent the very first attempts at a common European agricultural policy (Bainbridge & Teasdale, 1995). Aside from this, while the EU is still more equal in income distribution than the United States, economic trends indicate a constant rise in income inequality since the mid-1980's (Bonesmo Fredrikson, 2012).

The economic trends are accompanied by a fundamental alteration in philosophies of governance within the European Union. A green paper prepared at the request of the European Commission Secretariat General marks as a major trend of modern Europe 'the development of non-parliamentary systems of governance in a wide variety of sectors, which the paper describes as 'organic governance'' (European Governance Team, 2000). The notable point about this is that such 'organic governance', carried out through independent associations and interest groups, is exactly what parliamentary systems were set up to avoid. Indeed, the same green paper goes on to call interest groups 'organisational citizens' and goes as far as to claim that 'the sovereignty of experts complements as well as competes with parliamentary or popular sovereignty' (European Governance Team, 2000). To drive the point home, it points out that globalisation and specialisation 'shift problems towards and international/supranational space not governed by the traditional forms of democracy' (European Governance Team, 2000). This constant claim of a global source for shifts in governance ideology should not be taken without scrutiny, as it ultimately originates from justifications for social processes already in motion, but it does point towards the need for a more global level of analysis in order to understand the transitions currently occurring in Europe.

It might seem an intellectual stretch to compare the present world system to feudalist Europe. After all, it goes against decades of history-building on the part of individual nation-states. Nevertheless, the traditional tale of progressive history, moving stalwartly towards a climax of democratic universalism, may not be entirely accurate. Indeed, considering the relatively short length of time since the beginning and spread of the democratisation process in Europe during the late 18th to early 20th centuries might tell us not of a progressive vector in world history, moving towards more and more democratic institutions, but rather of a brief democratic interlude, interrupting an otherwise constantly feudalist European system. This is by no means a definite, but the prospect is worth exploring. I must clarify that the use of 'feudalist' in this context refers to the specialised definition suggested above; I do not propose Europe is headed towards a reintroduction of manor-centred production, or the social norms associated with mediaeval liege-serf relationships. Nevertheless, an extractive economic system based on the patronage of a highly mobile and endogenous pan-European élite holding a majority of political clout does seem to fit current trends, and the idea of the European Union as an entity resembling the mediaeval order is also not entirely new (Zielonka, 2007).

Democratic Inclusiveness as a Measure of Ideological Positioning

The establishing of élites with new definitions of the world's borders may not be the only underlying phenomenon within the process of EU integration, however. In 2007, the signing and subsequent ratification of the Lisbon Treaty represented the greatest point of contention within European politics. Opponents objected to its text, claiming it weakened the ability of nation-states to determine their own legal policies, thus moving power away from national electorates. Supporters, on the other hand, claimed it removed imbalances of

authority within EU structures by empowering both the European and national parliaments. Rather interestingly, however, they both claimed their policies strengthened democracy, a concept against which no mainstream political voice would ever campaign in the modern West. Since all but the most radical of political agents adhere to the concept of democracy, it may be a useful exercise to consider whom they designate as undemocratic. This serves as a form of social deixis and by exploring the limits of European concepts of democracy, we may come to some form of understanding about underlying concepts in European integrationist thought. The discussion over fascist candidates in European states provides an interesting data-set to explore this very question.

Indeed, the entire debate over EU integration often reads as a game of who can call whom the least democratic. During the debate that followed the 2012 State of the Union address, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso spoke of the process of European integration as a fight ‘against nationalists, or the extreme populists’, which could only be achieved through a ‘federation of citizens, a union of the *citizens of Europe*’ (emphasis added). A proponent of the ‘community method’ of European democracy, he sought to define the European Parliament as the materialisation of democratic representation of European states, indeed bragging about his long record as an undefeated elected official, while going on to disparage Nigel Farage’s position as a career MEP, saying to him that ‘every time you tried to be elected in Britain, you were rejected – that’s why you came here.’ This is an interesting dichotomy, for though Mr Barroso would likely set it aside as a tongue-in-cheek moment, it hints at the continued belief in the primacy of the nation-state on the part of some of the most prominent integrationists. Indeed, a 2013 essay published by Bruegel proposes that ‘the task for the euro area is to leverage sovereign authority where it exists: at the national level’ (Mody, 2013, p. 7) Since we are presented with a significant and influential europhile group who pronounce their belief that integration should not erode the nation-state, but rather complement it, we must at least consider their words. It is not only presumptuous to not take people’s explanations of their own beliefs seriously; it also presents a very real danger of missing key underlying processes in our theorisation of political phenomena.

Like Barroso, many European federalists do not call for a complete breaking up of the concept of nationality. It may be that, at odds with their counterparts who seek to re-define borders based on a closing up of democracy, these politicians have a much more traditional view of the state, and simply wish to fuse existing nation-states into a larger entity that would nonetheless be entirely recognisable as a nation-state itself. This would mean that their imagined process of European integration would most resemble the formation of states in the past, out of smaller polities, as in the case of England absorbing smaller Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, or perhaps more on point, the unification of the Thirteen Colonies into the United States. It might not be sheer coincidence that the EU flag chose stars on a blue field to represent the member states. The parallel to American symbolism, achieved after an intensely researched design phase, could hint at goals inchoate in the European idea. Namely, those who promote it may hope for an eventual re-enactment of the process through which the Thirteen Colonies achieved national unity through federalism. This might indeed be reading too much into a symbol, but the stylistic parallel is interesting nonetheless. Whether there is anything to this coincidence might constitute an interesting area of exploration at a later date, focusing on the language presented along with the symbol during its creation.

This points to a sort of new nationalism, but with the locus of nationality centred

around Europe instead of individual states. How else can we explain the desire of EU federalists to create a ‘closed system to the extent of being independent of the world cost system’, but at the same time desiring a free economy ‘within the necessary area’ (Mosley, 1958, as cited in Laughland, 1997, p. 23). It is certainly a far cry from Negri’s (2000) empire of totality. While globalists like Negri define themselves through a rejection of borders, many federalists simply believe in an expansion of borders to create a larger nation–state. It may point to a defining difference within EU federalism between globalist elite thought (European feudalists) and those who believe in a European nation–state (European nationalists).

Therefore, traditional political models that divide the European debate into two camps, based solely on support or antagonism towards integration miss the point, because they fail to take into account the separate, yet equally important question of democratic inclusiveness. Thus we see that while only two positions may be available on the ballot, those who support European integration are no more a coherent ideological group than those who oppose it. If we take into account the two polemics here discussed, viz. democratic inclusiveness and localism/globalism, we find that the debate over Europe is divided not into two parts, but four (see fig. 1). If, as pointed out previously, we cannot account for changes in conceptualisations of governance via intra–European processes, however, a different level of analysis must be employed, one that takes a frame of reference larger than Europe, both spatially and temporally.

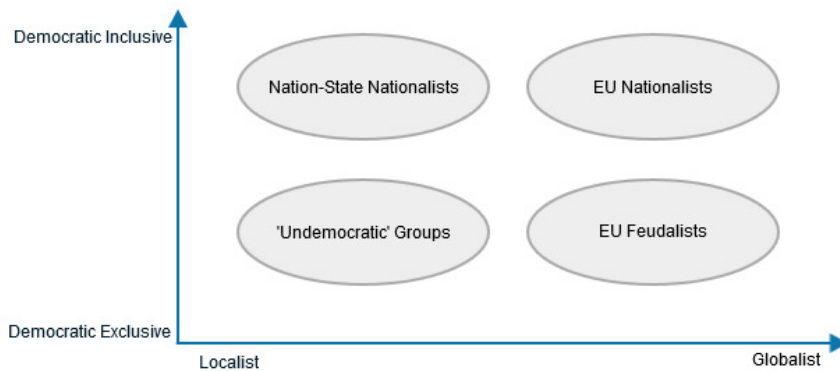


Figure 1: A model of ideological alignments in the European debate.

EUROPE IN THE WORLD SYSTEM

Here is where the concept of a global system comes into play. It is as simple as it is perspective-changing, postulating that internal modes of reproduction in bounded societies are dependent on external processes of interaction (Frank, 1966; Wallerstein, 1974; Ekholm, 1980). Furthermore, these very modes of reproduction are the shapers of social structures, as

they ‘encompass particular social worlds and link them to one another in ways that generate new forms and dissolve others’ (Friedman, 1976). The basic relationship is one where the core sends high-value prestige items to the periphery, who in turn pay for these with capital and raw materials, leading to aggregated relations of exploitation (Wallerstein, 1974). It is important to highlight the aggregate nature of these processes, as the theory does not imply constant and unrelenting domination in every social interaction. Indeed, the élites in the periphery do not feel exploited, since they maintain their status in the social structure through the control of prestige items from the core (Friedman, 1979). Thus, it is not at the level of individual relationships that we find the core-periphery dynamic, but in the general trends that appear once we start looking at the aggregate of all socio-economic interactions between conceptually bounded societies (Algaze, 2008). The system is, however, fundamentally unstable in its relationships, as the very processes that sustain it contain the seeds of its future transitions (Arrighi et al., 1999). Thus, there is no such thing as balance in the world system – one is either ascending towards core status, or descending into the periphery.

Abu-Lughod (1989) speaks of the necessity for input from both victors and the oppressed, from received core-formed wisdom as well as from what she calls the ‘subalterns’ – academics originating in traditionally peripheral states who have come to question the assumptions of core history. This lesson may be applied to objections against the probabilistic influence of the world system on the historical development on nations. If socio-economic and political changes were indeed not derived from a larger system, but intra-regional in origin, then how do we account for the common complaint about lack of agency that we hear from peripheral nations? While not explicitly empirical, this thought leads me to reject theories of transition and development that stress semi-peripheral innovation. While there may indeed be some sort of ‘advantage of backwardness’ (Morris, 2010; though proposed much earlier in Veblen, 1939) in that semi-peripheries are more free to attempt the use of new technologies than their more conservative core counterparts, this does not come about through the express agency of semi-peripheral actors, but rather through the aforementioned contradictions inherent in the world system.

Semi-peripheral states are not more innovative, at least in the simple sense. Their rise to dominance can be better explained by the depletion of resources at the core through competition with direct challengers, e.g. America’s and the USSR’s predominance following the World Wars between European powers; or China’s gradual rise as America competed with the Soviet Union. The core invests in the area that eventually becomes the semi-periphery, creating a cheaper area for investment than the core, but a safer one than the periphery. The semi-periphery, therefore, is not a *type*, but rather a *temporal state* that arises as a snapshot during a process of slow movement towards core status, funded by the actual core’s investment. Indeed, were we to theorise the semi-periphery as a type, would there be anything that is not potentially included in such a definition? After all, as a category between categories, ignoring the temporal and processual aspects of the term would mean that depending on how restrictively we draw the boundaries around it, either all or none of the world’s states would fit it.

In order to address this issue, I call for the definition of the concept of a semi-core as the symmetrical equivalent of the semi-periphery. This should aid in understanding, in the particular, the status of the more economically successful European states; and more generally the status of former cores that have not quite fallen to the dependency of semi-peripheries or outright peripheries. The relationship between the concepts of semi-periph-

ery and semi-core is a micro-projection of that between periphery and core: while the semi-periphery's defining relationship is one of dependency, the semi-core's is one of exploitation. One might wonder then, where the need for these terms lies. The key notion here is one of transition, and there one may find the usefulness of this tetrad of concepts: core and periphery represent stable relationships, while semi-core and semi-periphery do the same for relationships defined by shifting positions in the world system. Thus, while a semi-periphery is created from a periphery through investment from the core, a semi-core comes into being through the weakening influence of a core. Of course, all positions in the world system are ultimately temporal (and temporary) states – the differentiation between the core/periphery and semi-core/semi-periphery pairs refers to the speed of change and is not meant to suggest a lack thereof in any of these states. It should be understood, of course, that all these terms simply serve as models for a reality of world-wide capital flows that follow a systemic directionality centred around nodes of differing sizes. Furthermore, trends are simply probabilistic predictions of transitional direction, and are not fully deterministic of the future status of bounded societies. This is where historical contingency may come in, as a sufficiently significant event might reverse trends of accumulation and change the directionality of change in the world system (see fig. 2).

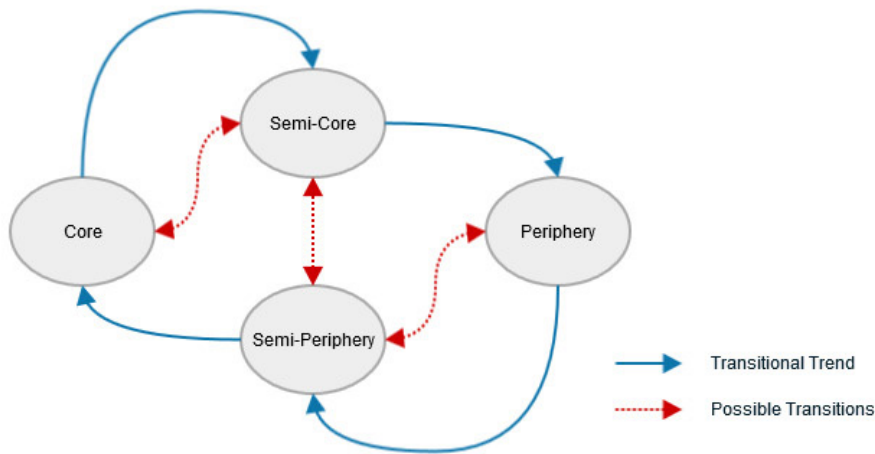


Figure 2: Directionality of transitions in the World System.

Capital flows are not the whole story, however; they simply serve as material manifestations of underlying social and geopolitical realities. The danger of falling into economic determinism is real, and we must constantly remind ourselves that we are seeing a component in a dialogical relationship between societal modes of reproduction and material goods, not a simple material causality for the entire process. The relationship between capital flows

and social realities may be likened to that between the latter and archaeological artefacts: neither can be said to completely present us with the causes of the other, but rather material goods reflect a social reality that is in turn informed by and reproduced through them. The Marshall Plan sent a large amount of capital to Europe, so how do we account, using the capital flow model, for the continued downwards trend in Europe? The key point here is that capital flows need to be systemic in order to change the status of a region from core to periphery and vice-versa. It may well be that the capital sent to Europe post-war slowed down the process of peripheralisation, but in the end could not stop it. While several states in Europe benefited greatly from this, managing to retain at least semi-core status e.g. Germany and the UK, the overwhelming majority of exported US capital ended up in China instead. It remains to be seen if China can systematise its accumulation of capital, but the rapidity and profoundness of European states' reactions to the 2008 US-led financial crisis speak to their states as dependent semi-cores.

The Rise and Fall of European Dominance

The question, then, is whether the process of unification in Europe is part of a re-organisation of its states following a shift in the world system, whereby Britain, Germany and France have become semi-cores dependent on the world's principal core(s). The data seem to support this. Using Maddison's (2007) studies of historical GDP, we can trace the rising and falling share of the world economy Western European states enjoy. Thus we see that in the year 1000, Western Europe has only 9 % of world GDP, compared to China's staggering 22 %. The rise of Europe as the world's core, however, was dramatic, and by the period of 1870-1913, just over 33 % of world GDP corresponded to Europe, a number made even more impressive by China's drop to 17 % during that period. This story, however, is one well known and indeed is not surprising. When we trace the share of world GDP belonging to individual European states at key points in the history of integration, however, we find some rather interesting results.

Competition with the United States featured heavily in the early rhetoric calling for European integration (Dinan, 2010). Indeed, much of the original plans for a European union called for the creation of a 'United States of Europe' as a way to recreate the success enjoyed by the US and thus retain Europe's primary status in the world (Laughland, 1998). The growth of the United States was indeed impressive, growing from 8.8 % of world GDP in 1870 to 18.9 % by 1913 (Maddison, 2007). Even more revealing for the purposes of this paper, the United States (27 % of world GDP) finally surpasses Western Europe (26 % of world GDP) in 1950. The Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community, would be signed a mere seven years later (Dinan, 2010). Moreover, Britain's reluctance to join the EU, an otherwise paradoxical fact if one accepts the traditional story of creating peace as the driving factor of integration, is explained by this very same trend. Britain, buttressed by its relationship to the United States and its very recent empire, enjoyed a better position in the World System in 1957, accumulating 6.5 % of world GDP to Germany's 4.1 % and France's 4.9 % (Maddison, 2007). Rather notably, Maddison's next data point is 1973, the same year Britain joined the EU, when its share of the world economy (4.21 % of world GDP) finally falls below Germany (5.8 %) and France (4.26 %) (Dinan, 2010; Maddison 2007).

European integration is thus not just a process of unification, as it is also one of splitting – the main purpose is not simply to unite Europe, but rather to close it off from the world

system. This desire is often expressed in integrationist calls for European self-sufficiency. That this may ultimately stem from a process of peripheralisation is not contradictory, though it may seem so at first glance. Élités in failing cores seldom believe their situation is not salvageable and paradoxically carry out the feudalisation of their territories precisely in the hopes that they might stop their fall from hegemony (Arrighi et al., 1999). This disconnect between the agential decisions of people and the long-term results of their actions is precisely the point of the Braudelian perspective; people act in the short term, in the realm of *l'histoire événementielle*, but larger-scale systemic changes drive the progress of history (Braudel, 1980). This does not disallow for historical contingency or personal agency, but it does provide the background against which human choices are made.

CONCLUSION – BACK TO THE PARADOX

The *Standard Eurobarometer 80* asked people to name the ‘most positive result of the EU’, under which the lack of war among European nations is listed (European Commission, 2013a). The problem with this wording should be obvious. By phrasing the question in this manner, the formulators of the barometre assume this to be a result of the EU, without qualification. Of course the lack of war among nations is a positive development, but the real question is whether people believe the EU has been instrumental in achieving this, and it is this question that is not asked. Similarly, studies of the history of European integration have focused on events rather than mechanisms and causes, in an almost Rankian approach. The traditional narrative, constructed around Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet’s ideas, which paints the integration of Europe as originating in intra-European desires for peace among states, has generally been accepted without much question. In order to fully explain the direction of European history in the last sixty years, however, this accepted wisdom must be problematised. Once we question the apparent contradictions resulting from the common wisdom, we find the value of global-level analysis.

The paradoxes that opened this essay find resolution once we take the Braudelian approach. The reason for the low commitment to common defence in the EU may be found in the idea that this was never the true driving force behind the process. Rather, the shifting position of a Europe embedded within a global system of exchange and social reproduction created the push for a re-formulation of European structures of power following a model established the last time Europe was in the global position towards which it is presently headed. The United Kingdom’s reluctance to become a member, and its continued scepticism towards the project reflects a divergent historical trend in its position within the global system, as compared with other European countries, as well as its close relationship with the current world hegemon. Moreover, the apparent contradiction between calls for globalism and the desire to create a closed European system evaporates once we note the interaction between the re-feudalisation of Europe as it heads towards the role of a more peripheral region, and the ideological base from which this process of reformulation must draw in creating a feudal system, the natural state of the periphery (Frank, 1966). Finally, it should come as no surprise that the re-creation of a system based on the authority of a pan-European body interacting with the power of local states is carried out as an élite project.

A few caveats are necessary at this point. It is very tempting, in analysing these long-term trends, to ascribe intentionality to the people who enact and embody them. That, however, misses the point of the Braudelian approach. Human actors, while possessing agency in their decision-making, are constrained by historical movements that dictate the

possibilities of action available to them. No one need be aware of the great waves of history, to borrow Braudel's (1980) metaphor, in order to be swept by them. This is, of course, not a new idea, and has been proposed by theorists of human history as varied as Marx (1994) and Tocqueville (2001). Indeed, that the past constrains human action – making some paths more probable than others, and thus shaping the present – is a driving assumption behind the study of history itself. The actors in today's European politics may well intend entirely opposite results to those engendered by the aggregate interactions between Europe and the world; this no more negates the overarching historical trends that are the purview of this work, than does the ignorance of British and Dutch élites deny the de-constructive effect of their interactions at the end of their occupancy of the global core. The nations of Europe may forget their feuds, but history has a longer memory, and it builds its progress on precisely such continuities.

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