

HOW THE WEST CAME TO RULE

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The Geopolitical Origins
of Capitalism

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Introduction

History is the Nightmare from which I am trying to awake.

James Joyce, 1922¹

The writing of historical sociologies is inescapably wedded to the contexts in which they emerge; we write history but do not do so in conditions of our choosing. For decades, these conditions have been marked by ‘End of History’ triumphalism and claims that ‘there is no alternative’ to liberal capitalism. In turn, capitalism as a transient, historically specific and contradictory unit of study has been bracketed out of – if not completely wiped off – the scholarly and political agenda. Yet, after stock markets came crashing down in 2008, the force of history reasserted itself in a series of revolutions, occupations of public places, anti-austerity protests, strikes, riots and anti-state movements taking place from London to Ferguson (Missouri), Athens, Cairo, Istanbul, Rojava, Santiago and beyond. Such movements have torn at the hubristic certainties of ‘capitalist realism’ and started to sporadically – if inconsistently – challenge such long-held ‘common sense’ truisms and the power structures that undergird them.

Consequently, capitalism and critiques of it have reentered the public discourse in ways previously unimaginable. From mainstream media outlets to traditional academic publishing media, the tide has seemingly turned against the concept’s long banishment to the margins of radical Left critique and returned as a ‘respectable’ object of analysis. Indeed, a number of the most celebrated publications of recent years have in different ways oriented themselves around reinvestigating and understanding (both theoretically and historically) the meaning of capitalism, be they social democratic, Marxist, Keynesian or neoconservative.² In universities across the world, students and scholars are now collaborating in ways that seek to challenge ruling class orthodoxies.³ As a recent *New York Times* article put it, ‘A specter is haunting university history departments: the specter of capitalism’.⁴

This renewed attention to the study of capitalism is a welcome development, particularly as capitalism’s return to the limelight as the *dramatis persona* of modern history has come fit with a certain renaissance in Karl Marx’s critique of it. ‘Marx is Back’, lamented the *Economist*,⁵ and with it so too are an array of novel avenues for renewed Marxist-inspired understandings and critiques of capitalism, and particularly its formation as a historical mode of production. Why was capitalism successful in supplanting other modes of production? What propelled it to global dominance? And finally, what are its historical limits?

This book cannot hope to offer complete answers to all of these questions.

Rather, our aim is to provide new theoretical and historical perspectives in which these questions can be re-examined and answered anew, hopefully better than previous attempts. Simply stated, we argue that the origins and history of capitalism can only be properly understood in international or geopolitical terms, and that this very ‘internationality’ is constitutive of capitalism as a historical mode of production. Although this may seem intuitively obvious to many readers, in what follows we show that existing conceptions of capitalism have hitherto failed to take this internationality seriously. This has led to problematic theorisations of its origins and development that limit not only our histories, but also our critiques of the present.

This distinctly geopolitical character of the origins of capitalism is brilliantly anticipated in German Renaissance painter Hans Holbein’s 1532 masterpiece *The Ambassadors* (Figure 0.1), which illustrates a meeting between French envoys Jean de Dinteville and George de Selve in London. The painting astounds because these two aristocratic subjects are placed at the periphery, and the only explicitly religious symbol, a cross, is veiled by a curtain. While these two pillars of medieval power – the church and aristocracy – are symbolically pushed to the side, an anamorphic skull and a table littered with objects – with commodities – occupy the focal point of the painting. Was this a prophetic, if unwitting, forecast of feudalism’s imminent decline? Did it anticipate a capitalist future where social relations would come to be ‘mediated by things’?⁶

Notwithstanding such speculation, these objects constitute a vivid record of the geopolitical milieu that defined European⁷ international relations in the early 16th century.⁸ The morbidity portrayed by the skull reminds us that death was at the forefront of European consciousness in this period – indeed, Holbein’s own life would be taken by plague in the autumn of 1543 in England just ten years after the painting was completed.⁹ In the immediate time of the painting, peasant revolts were sweeping through Christendom, leaving the ashes of serfdom in their wake. In preceding centuries, Europe had been ravaged by disease, precipitating a demographic crisis that had reduced Europe’s population by between 30 and 60 per cent by the 15th century.

On the bottom right-hand side of the table in the painting, a book of Lutheran hymns sits by a broken lute, signifying the discord in Christendom between Protestants and the Catholic Church. To the left of these items rests Martin Benhaim’s terrestrial globe, made under the commission of Nuremberg merchants seeking to break the Portuguese hold on the spice trade. The globe is tilted so that after European towns, ‘Affrica’ and ‘Brisilici R’. (Brazil) are the most legible markers. We can also see the *Linea Divisionis Castellanorum et Portugal-lenum* (‘Line of division between Spain and Portugal’) demarcating the division of the New World between Habsburg Spain (west of the line) and Portugal (east of the line), here signifying the importance of these discoveries and the subsequent competition between European states over commercially profitable territories.



Figure 0.1 Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533

In front of the globe is Peter Apian's *A New and Well Grounded Instruction in All Merchant's Arithmetic*, an early textbook of commercial scholarship that covered profit-loss calculation, trading customs, navigation and route mapping. Placed alongside Benhaim's globe, it demonstrates the inseparability of commercial interests from maritime exploration, as well as the increasingly global – and competitive – character of trade. Above these items, on the top of the table, numerous scientific instruments highlight the rapid development of techniques in seafaring. Continuing the theme of Christendom's decline, these also indicate a mounting shift away from the divinity of religion as the predominant *episteme* and towards the rationality of scientific inquiry and humanism. Finally, linking the resting arms of the two ambassadors, and tying the objects together, is a Turkic rug, indicating the rivalry between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. The presence of this 'Eastern' commodity indicates that the numerous changes taking place in Europe in this period were often undergirded

by processes emanating from non-European sources, by social formations and actors that were unambiguously more powerful than anything seen in Europe at the time.

Let us run through these themes once more: a demographic crisis brought about by the Black Death; the Ottoman–Habsburg rivalry; the discovery of the New World and its division along linearly demarcated spaces of sovereignty; the festering atmosphere of revolt and rebellion; the economic significance of colonisation. Each in their own way either captures or anticipates the central dynamics and historical processes behind the collapse of feudalism and the emergence of capitalist modernity. Moreover, running throughout the themes of the painting is a resolute awareness of the *geopolitics* behind these processes. The emphasis on the New World and the Ottoman Empire reminds us that the making of capitalism in Europe was not simply an intra-European phenomenon, but a decidedly *international* (or intersocietal) one: one in which non-European agency relentlessly impinged upon and (re)directed the trajectory and nature of European development. Tracing this international dimension in the origins of capitalism and the so-called ‘rise of the West’ is what concerns us in this book.

Our primary motivation in making this argument is to subvert, and we hope displace, the dominant wisdom in the historiography and theoretical analyses of the period. For despite the latent centrality of ‘the international’ implied by Holbein’s painting, dominant theorisations of early modern Europe have been constructed with non-European societies *in absentia*. Whether in the sphere of politics, economy, culture or ideology, the emergence of capitalist modernity is generally understood as a *sui generis* development unique to Europe. Where non-European societies do figure, they are typically relegated to the status of a passive bystander, at the receiving end of Europe’s colonial whip, or a comparative foil – an Other – against which the specificity and superiority of Europe is defined. In short, the history of capitalism’s origins is an unmistakably *Eurocentric* history.

The Problem of Eurocentrism

So what exactly is Eurocentrism? At its core, it represents a distinctive mode of inquiry constituted by three interrelated assumptions about the form and nature of modern development.¹⁰ First, it conceives of the origins and sources of capitalist modernity as a product of developments primarily *internal* to Europe. Based on the assumption that any given trajectory of development is the product of a society’s own immanent dynamics, Eurocentrism locates the emergence of modernity exclusively within the hermetically sealed and socio-culturally coherent geographical confines of Europe. Thus we find in cultural history that the flowering of the Renaissance was a solely intra-European phenomenon.¹¹ Analyses of absolutism and the origins of the modern state

form are similarly conducted entirely on the terrain of Europe, with non-European cases appearing (if at all) comparatively.¹² Dominant accounts of the rise of capitalism as either an economic form¹³ or a social system¹⁴ similarly place its origins squarely in Western Europe, while non-Europe is relegated to an exploited and passive periphery.¹⁵

This internalist story of an autonomous and endogenous ‘rise of the West’ constitutes the founding myth of Eurocentrism.¹⁶ By positing a strong ‘inside-out’ model of social causality (or *methodological internalism*) – whereby European development is conceptualised as endogenous and self-propelling – Europe is conceived as the permanent ‘core’ and ‘prime mover’ of history. In its worst forms, this can lend itself to an interpretation of European society and culture as somehow superior to the rest of the world. This second normative assumption of Eurocentrism can be termed *historical priority*, which articulates the historical distinction between tradition and modernity through a spatial separation of ‘West’ and ‘East’. Through this method, non-European societies have been opposed to Europe as an ideological Other against which the specificity and distinctiveness of Western modernity has been and continues to be defined.¹⁷ Through numerous sociological trends, the ‘East’ has in turn been (re)constructed as an intransigent and threatening foe representing a fundamental and irreconcilable challenge to the values of the ‘West’.¹⁸

In establishing this ‘Iron Curtain’¹⁹ of mutual obstinacy, both Eurocentric internalism and notions of historical priority have been reinforced, not only ideologically but also materially. Expressed through either the comparative approach²⁰ or ‘methodological nationalism’,²¹ Eurocentrism tends to overlook the multiple and interactive character of social development. In doing so, it sets up an epistemological distinction between Europe and ‘the Rest’ as theoretically incommensurable objects of study, turning the study of the origins of capitalism into an exclusionary process in which the agency of non-European societies is erased or overlooked.

From these two assumptions emerges a third predictive proposition: that the European experience of modernity is a universal stage of development through which all societies must pass. This stadial assumption posits a *linear developmentalism* in which endogenous processes of social change – from tradition to modernity, feudalism to capitalism and so on – are conceived as universal stages which encompass all societies of the world, at different times and different places. These three propositions (methodological internalism, historical priority and linear developmentalism) make up the core of Eurocentric accounts.

Confronting the Problematic of Sociohistorical Difference

How the West Came to Rule challenges these assumptions by examining the ‘extra-European’ geopolitical conditions and forms of agency conducive to

capitalism's emergence as a distinctive mode of production over the *longue durée*. We do so by tracing the processes of societal transformation through an analysis of the various internationally determined historical dynamics, structures and agencies that emerged and unfolded over the late Medieval and early modern epochs. In this respect, we hope to contribute to what has proven in recent years to be a veritable historiographical revolution in the study of the early modern epoch. This has come from a disparate group of scholars challenging what they see as the fundamentally Eurocentric nature of extant theoretical and historical approaches to the genesis of capitalist modernity.²² Debates over the origins of capitalism have subsequently taken on new dimensions as scholars have forcefully problematised notions of a self-propelling 'rise of the West' while relativising the uniqueness of Western modernity.²³ Once sidelined to the margins of historical and sociological investigation, the non-European sources, dynamics and experiences of capitalist modernity have thus been at the forefront of these literatures, acting as a much needed corrective to the essentialising, self-aggrandising narratives of an internally generated 'European miracle'.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this body of literature has been the resolute focus on the relations of interconnection and co-constitution between 'the West' and 'the Rest' in their joint, if uneven, making of the modern world. This attention to 'the international' as a thick space of social interaction and mutual constitution should put International Relations (IR) scholars in a unique position to make important contributions to these debates. Yet thus far, post-colonial and world history critiques²⁴ have made little impact on the mainstream of the discipline, even after the historical sociological 'turn' in IR.²⁵ Instead, historical sociological approaches to IR have been criticised for reproducing Eurocentric assumptions, as they predominately conduct their analysis on the basis of European history.²⁶ Many of the foundational engagements with history in IR have been – and continue to be – primarily carried out on the terrain of European history and intra-European dynamics.²⁷ Where they do exist, substantive engagements with non-European societies tend to emphasise the 'Iron Curtain' of ideological-cultural difference.²⁸

Calls for a genuinely 'international historical sociology'²⁹ have thus remained locked within this Eurocentric cage, as they have yet to fully provincialise Europe, treating it instead as the privileged locale and organic birthplace of capitalist modernity (see Chapter 1). To change this perspective is the central aim of *How the West Came to Rule*. Widening the spatial optic of capitalism's emergence beyond Europe over the *longue durée*, we offer a fundamental rethinking of the origins of capitalism and the emergence of Western domination that puts non-Western sources (both structural and agential) at the forefront of analysis. In doing so, we elucidate the manifold ways that 'the West' itself, as both an ideo-political and a socioeconomic entity, was only formed in and through its interactive relations with the extra-European world. These international dimen-

sions are explored in the substantive historical chapters (Chapters 3 to 8). In each, we shift or decentre the sites of analysis on which most theoretical attention to the origins of capitalism and the 'rise of the West' has focused. Some of these sites are relatively unfamiliar or overlooked in the existing debates, as exemplified by the Mongolian and Ottoman Empires' 'contributions' to the development of capitalism (see Chapters 3 and 4 respectively). However, we also revisit more familiar sites common to contemporary debates – for example, the role of the American 'discoveries' in the making of global capitalism (Chapter 5), the 'classical' bourgeois revolutions in European history (Chapter 6), and the colonisation of Asia (Chapter 7 and 8) – precisely in order to make them *unfamiliar* through a more 'international', non-Eurocentric framework.

In so doing, we also seek to go beyond extant contributions in world history and postcolonial literatures. That is, *How the West Came to Rule* does not aim simply to add new, non-European perspectives that might expand the empirical scope of the study of capitalism's origins. Rather, it offers an alternative framework through which our theorisation of capitalism might be significantly revised. We do so by drawing on and further refining Leon Trotsky's theory of uneven and combined development which, we argue, uniquely incorporates a distinctly international dimension of causality into its very conception of development (see Chapter 2).³⁰

The debate on the transition to capitalism is a particularly apposite body of literature for assessing uneven and combined development's efficacy in theorising social change as positions within it well demonstrate the very methodological problems the theory seeks to overcome: specifically, the hardened division between 'internalist' and 'externalist' modes of explanation. In particular, the debates within (neo-)Marxist approaches have largely split between these two 'internalist' and 'externalist' poles. On the one side, scholars such as Maurice Dobb,³¹ Robert Brenner³² and Ellen Meiksins Wood³³ locate the generative sources of capitalist social relations in the internal contradictions of feudal European societies, and particularly England. On the other, Paul Sweezy³⁴ and Immanuel Wallerstein³⁵ view capitalism as having developed from the growth of markets, commerce and trade in Europe over the Long Sixteenth Century (1450–1650). The main issue between these different positions revolves around whether the intensification of exchange relations (trade) or class conflict was the prime mover in the transition to capitalism. More recently, anti-Eurocentric scholars have broadened the debate in considering the emergence of antecedent forms of capitalism (or 'proto-capitalism') in the non-West, while further emphasising the contingent, or accidental, factors explaining the rise of a globally dominant Western European capitalism.³⁶ Yet, for the most part, the anti-Eurocentrics have moved within the main methodological parameters set out by the original debate, accepting an essentially externalist explanation of the genesis of capitalism. By highlighting the spread of commerce and markets

as the prime movers, they equate ‘antediluvian forms’ of capital³⁷ with capitalism.³⁸

What is Capitalism?

The stark disagreements over precisely what factors were central in the making of capitalism beg the question: what is capitalism? In some respects this is a trick question, in that it conceals from view more than it opens to enquiry, since the content of capitalism is of a complexity that resists any single-line definition. Treating capitalism as ‘generalized commodity production’³⁹ or ‘competitive accumulation of capital through the exploitation of wage-labour’⁴⁰ or ‘market dependence’⁴¹ captures, in some respects, a ‘hard core’ around which it functions. However, the argument we advance in this book is that there is a wider complex web of social relations that stretch our understanding of capitalism far beyond what is captured in any of these phrases. We explicate further what these social relations are over the course of the book, progressively introducing more determinations and categories that we consider crucial to the origins and reproduction of capitalism. For the time being, then, we restrict ourselves to identifying a basic heuristic framework through which we may theorise capitalism.

To say what capitalism ‘is’ runs the risk of reducing capitalism to a thing, which tends to obscure the multivalent connections in society that facilitate, structure and ultimately limit its reproduction. More specifically, it carries the implication that any given social factor contains an essence that is logically independent of other factors to which it is related. Capital ‘as a thing’ is often understood simply as ‘profit’, or an accumulated pool of money, or perhaps machinery, whose existence is independent of wider social relations. Treating capital solely as a ‘thing’ therefore tends to naturalise and eternalise capitalism.

In contrast, we follow Marx in conceiving capitalism as encompassing historically specific configurations of social relations and processes. Such a relational-processual approach helps us move away from ‘abstract one-sided’ self-representations of capitalism and toward uncovering the ‘concrete living aggregate’ of ‘definite social relationships’.⁴² For example, Marx’s observation that some categories (such as capital) necessarily presuppose others (such as wage-labour) allowed him to uncover, analyse and criticise an array of structural conditions of exploitation and power that reproduce the capitalist mode of production. This reminds us that just as social relations are historically specific and constructed, they can be transformed, abolished and reconstructed. Similarly, the emphasis on process further begs a historicisation of the development of capitalism not as a fixed entity, but as one that morphs and reconfigures social relations according to certain historical problems, challenges, struggles, contradictions, limits and opportunities.

We hope this emphasis on process will assist us in moving away from any sociological or political position that posits a certain phase (or place) in capitalism's history or geography as 'pure', 'ideal-typical', 'unchanging' or its 'highest stage'. From such a perspective, we seek to subvert any attempts to read the history of capitalism as a linear progression of clearly discernible stages. Finally, 'process' should help us capture one of the defining characteristics of capital as social relation, the necessity of its movement and motion – in production, circulation and realisation.

In both senses, then – as social relations and as process – it might appear to make more sense to talk about *capitalisms* rather than capitalism. Indeed, a central thesis of this book is that the history of capitalism is a multiple, polyvalent one, irreducible to any singular process or social relation. Nonetheless, we argue that there is a certain unity to its functioning that renders necessary the study of the capitalist mode of production as an intelligible (albeit contradictory) object of analysis.

Treating capitalism in such terms – as a contradictory social totality – helps us trace the ways in which multiple relations of domination, subordination and exploitation intersect with and reproduce each other. From this perspective, we argue that capitalism is best understood as a set of configurations, assemblages, or bundles of social relations and processes oriented around the *systematic reproduction of the capital relation*, but not reducible – either historically or logically – to that relation alone. By placing an emphasis on such configurations and assemblages, we also seek to highlight how the reproduction and competitive accumulation of capital through the exploitation of wage-labour presupposes a wide assortment of differentiated social relations that make this reproduction and accumulation possible. These relations may take numerous forms, such as coercive state apparatuses, ideologies and cultures of consent, or forms of power and exploitation that are not immediately given in or derivative of the simple capital–wage-labour relation, such as racism and patriarchy.

To take one example, one of the great achievements of feminist scholarship has been to show how the existence of wage-labour presupposes a vast 'reproductive sphere' that sits outside (albeit related to) the immediate production process. Here, non-waged forms of production – cooking, house-keeping, child-bearing and so on – are fundamental to the reproduction of wage-labour, and capitalism as such. As we demonstrate throughout the book, such relations (and others) were absolutely crucial to both making the accumulation and reproduction of capital possible, and producing forms of subordination, exploitation and social stratification that were at the heart of alienating workers from their labour and from each other. We argue that an analysis of the making of capitalism should thus be one that seeks to disclose ever more complex webs, assemblages and bundles of social relations that feed into the origins and reproduction of capitalism as a mode of production.

In this book we argue that uneven and combined development provides a way into disclosing and analysing the historical emergence and development of such assemblages, which were and still are constitutive of capitalism. By constitutive, we mean *historically* constitutive: that is, those historical processes that fed into the emergence and development of capitalism. But we also use ‘constitutive’ to designate those relations and processes that continued to function (albeit in different forms) over the course of subsequent centuries, and persist today: that is, social relations that capitalism cannot do without. As we shall argue, what we consider ‘constitutive’ is considerably broader than many existing theorisations of capitalism. We argue that this necessitates a broader historical and geographical scope for the proper study of the origins of capitalism, and a theoretical framework capable of making this wider scope intelligible.

Nonetheless, it must be stressed that what follows is not intended to be a ‘total’ account of the origins of capitalism and the ‘rise of the West’. Indeed, our historical account cannot help but be partial, emphasising certain processes and leaving out others. Similarly, we must recognise that this is not a total history but one that privileges those processes that were central to the making of capitalism in Europe. This carries within itself its own dangers of Eurocentrism, in that non-European societies are studied only insofar as they are relevant to European development. We acknowledge the potential concerns that arise from this, but insist that something unique did happen in Europe that propelled it to global dominance at the expense of non-European societies. Uncovering the histories of subjugation and exploitation that lay behind this ‘rise’ is therefore crucial to critiquing the mythologising of European (or Western) exceptionalism. Taking Europe as an object of study in the telling of this history is both essential and unavoidable. Yet, insofar as gaps exist, we hope that the framework we offer nonetheless provides scope and avenues for future research, and the incorporation of further historical processes that may complement our analysis. In this respect, we seek to provide a more inclusive account of the origins of capitalism that highlights hitherto significantly neglected aspects of the story: particularly, regarding the role of ‘the international’, ‘intersocietal’ and ‘geopolitics’. Of course, this then begs the question: what are ‘the international’ and ‘geopolitics’?

What Is Geopolitics?

Most broadly defined, geopolitics and ‘the geopolitical’ can be conceived as encompassing both: first, the variegated processes and practices of communities, societies and states occupying, controlling, socialising, organising, protecting, and competing over territorial spaces and their inhabitant peoples and resources; and second, the multivalent forms of knowledge, discourses,

representations, ideologies and strategies, along with the articulations, modes and relations of power generated from such processes. From this perspective, we may then examine how the (re)production, structuring and organisation of space and the construction of human 'territoriality' itself are inherently social processes rooted in, conditioned by, and articulated through historically specific and changing power relations. This allows for the conceptualisation of territorial spaces and the exchanges that take place within, across and between them as pivotal sites of social contestation, change and transformation.⁴³

Under capitalism, for example, specific forms of territoriality and other socially constructed spaces are being persistently constituted and reconstituted, borders continually drawn and redrawn, human geographies constantly fashioned and refashioned in and through the uneven development, production, accumulation and circulation of capital across time and space, as well as by the resulting differentiated relations of power, domination, exploitation and conflict accompanying the global reproduction of capitalism as a social whole. Our focus on these geopolitical dimensions of development and reproduction is, then, not intended to reproduce the well-worn problems of geographical or geopolitical determinism. Rather, it aims to spatially broaden our analytical optic to the multiplicity of different 'geo-social' processes and determinations through which capitalism emerged. We would argue that such a spatial widening of our analytical imaginary is in fact a necessary methodological first step in any endeavour to furnish a genuinely non-Eurocentric theorisation of capitalism's genesis and development.

In order to avoid (neo)realist (mis)conceptions of 'the international' as an absolutely autonomous, suprasocial sphere of geopolitical interactions,⁴⁴ our uses of the concepts of 'the international' and 'international system' do not denote a permanent state of anarchy, or necessarily imply competition between discretely constituted political units in which the autonomous logic of this competition dictates their strategies. To make the realist move of deriving intersocietal competition from political multiplicity is to unproblematically accept the anthropologically dubious assumption that societies necessarily threaten each other.⁴⁵

We must call out all such ahistorical reificatory and essentialist perspectives for what they really are: thinly veiled rationalisation (intentional or not) of power politics in attaining states' putative 'national interests'. In short, they are particular representations and articulations of the hegemonic ideologies of modern world politics masquerading as social 'scientific' theories⁴⁶ – traditional IR as 'the Discipline of Western Supremacy', as Kees van der Pijl aptly terms it.⁴⁷ In direct contrast to such approaches, geopolitics, human territoriality and intersocietal/international conflict, along with the very demarcation of the geopolitical as such, must be conceptualised as emergent properties of a wider, interactive and uneven process of development.⁴⁸

But with these definitions of ‘geopolitics and ‘the geopolitical’ at hand, honesty compels us to admit that the subtitle of this book (*The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism*) is something of a misnomer. While we do indeed examine a wide range of sociohistorical processes that are, strictly speaking, geopolitical (such as great power rivalries, colonialism and war), many other developments we investigate are more properly captured under the rubric of ‘intersocietal’ or ‘international’ relations, as exemplified by cross-cultural diffusions of trade, commerce, ideas, technologies and disease. We nonetheless settled on this subtitle not simply because it was catchier than, say, *The Intersocietal Origins of Capitalism*, but rather because it captures a fundamental point we are at pains to make throughout this book: that capitalism could only emerge, take root and reproduce itself – both domestically and internationally – through a violent, coercive, and often war-assisted process subjugating, dominating, and often annihilating many of those social forces that stood in its way – processes that continue to this day.

In this sense, our book seeks to offer a ‘counter-history’ to the many liberal-inspired narratives emphasising the fundamentally pacifying and ‘civilising’ nature of capitalist development. They present a world where the spread of free trade and markets is equated with the promotion of a more cooperative and peaceful international order; one in which ‘globalisation’ is viewed as transforming contemporary international politics into a series of ‘positive-sum’ games whereby states can realise absolute gains; where increasingly integrated transnational circuits of capital and global market relations are in turn identified as advancing more liberal-democratic civic cultures, identities and norms.⁴⁹ As we demonstrate through the pages that follow, this is a conception of capitalist development that is fundamentally at odds with the historical record, both past and present.