Title: Structured Sovereign Inequalities and the Global South: how hierarchical positionality can inform conditions of agency for peripheral states of the international politics

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ABSTRACT

What is the Global South and what does it tell us about the states that fall in that category? Structural approaches to international relations shed little light on possibilities of agency for countries that fall out of the scramble for polarity/hegemony. This paper addresses this issue by focusing on structured inequalities that crisscross distinct global transactions. The argument here developed draws on the heuristics relational sociology, emphasizing investigation of transactions that comprise social totalities as pragmatic manifestations of structured agency. The argument is developed through two main discussions. Firstly, it situates the “state” and the “state system” as configurations of transactions of across functionally differentiated systems and the struggle for resources across them. I seek to sustain that taking the state, as an amalgam of such configuration of systems, reveals how sovereignty becomes an emerging property of the state system, instead of an ontologically primitive substance, unequally produced in unequal transactions. The second part of the paper empirically engages with those structured inequalities. Relying on network analysis, I seek to outline the blocks of positionalities within those transactions; problematize how the idea of Global South fit within that; and discuss constrains and opportunities deriving from that for these countries.
Introduction

International relations have had a historical difficulty with going global. Born to understand major powers war, it has seldom been able to understand peripheral political existences. From the barbarians to the third and developing world, our discipline has otherized those countries as some kind of rest, leaving a conceptual framework to appraise of the variety of historical realities beyond the West yet wanting. On the other hand, several challenges to that Western-centered perspective have focused on the particularities inhabiting this rest, downplaying how they are integrated and produced their integration to global dynamics. For instance, the concept of Global South is the last jargon mobilized identify this otherness or a bulk of idiosyncratic anomalies. This paper briefly discusses the idea of sovereign inequalities as concept suited to engage with the crisscrossing structures underpinning world politics, differentiating centers and peripheries.

I believe that this omission is due to a wider insufficiency of our discipline to engage with structures encompassing social action at the level of complexity achieved in international or global dynamics. In his quest for theoretical parsimony, the dynamic aspect of Waltz’s structure obviates actors that does not comprise the dispute for polarity. In another major structural perspective, Wallerstein world system’s, the functionalistic tone of such totalizing stratification also limits the study of varied peripheral realities. Recently, approaches from relational and historical sociology have been proposing new insights towards the structures of world politics, stressing historically contingent processes emerging from social action instead of reified constraints or driving forces. From this perspective and through the concept of structured sovereign inequalities, I believe additional insight could be given to international politics of non-Western states.

This paper focuses mostly on discussing the idea of sovereign inequalities as an emerging property of the encounter of positionalities in distinct structures of differentiation comprising the Modern of the international system. I firstly seek footing in the theoretical debate about autopoietic systems and fields as a means of

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1 This paper was prepared as a working paper to be discussed and improved after debate in the IX ALACIP.
2 In a rather narrow sense of the term, as in Jackson (2006).
4 McCourt (2016).
conceptualizing the world politics as system whose dynamics are emergent from other substantive social dynamics. Then it discusses these substantive structures themselves as emerging in the formation of the modern interstate system the world politics. Finally, the paper ends with the discussion of the suitability of network analysis to empirically appraise of the structures comprising manifestation of sovereign inequalities.5

**Sovereign inequalities: towards a relational view on the structures of differentiation in world politics**

The modern state is a founding feature of what we conceive as international relations, shaping the social realm of interaction bounding it as a discipline. This concept is rooted in the idea and the practices of sovereignty. It is, then, not a surprise that theoretical and historical reflections on such a constitutive idea are recursive in the discipline. From this interplay between conceptual refinement and historical revision, the concept of sovereign inequality has emerged to succinctly convey a paradoxical aspect of the inter-state politics: its presumption of formally equal authority and its pervasively uneven practices of authority.6 Furthermore, it does so by challenging clear-cut inside-outside distinctions between national and international domains of authority that the idea of sovereignty portrays.

Hence, by focusing on practices of sovereignty instead of its assumption and on their underlying sources of commonality and inequality across these practices, the concept of sovereign inequalities allows for studying the state in anti-essentialist fashion, by precisely recasting its main definitional attribute. Therefore, it is stands as an additional way of cutting into relations from which states and states systems come into substance. On this matter, relational approaches in international relations have been providing analytical tools to study the multiplicity of experiences that lies on its complexity, without reifying its objects of study or at least doing it with methodological awareness.7 Paraphrasing Michael Mann, in its relational turn, international relations has been engaged in a fruitful quest for devising concepts suited to dealing with the messiness of reality.8 The concept of sovereign inequalities seems a suitable one.

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5 As this is working paper, I was not able to conduct the empirical part stated in the abstract. In lieu, I’ll discuss the intended strategy of operationalization.
6 (Donnelly 2006).
7 Since Jackson and Nexon (1999) disciplinary “manifest”, the number and plurality of relational accounts in IR has been blossoming. McCourt (2016) and Donnelly (forthcoming) provides a comprehensive overview this relational turn and an insightful outline of its potentialities.
8 (Mann 1986, 4)
My taking on the structuring of sovereign inequality is through discussing the internal differentiation world politics. I argue that the study of this process can profit from a closer dialogue between the fields theory and autopoietic systems theory. The latter is a powerful perspective on the process of creating boundedness in the social world, hence allowing for a clearer understanding of world politics as a delimited system. Albert’s recent work, provides an insightful narrative on the construction of semantics and practices that give social existence to world politics as differentiated realm. In the remainder of this paper, I argue that a closer attention to the struggle of creating and preserving such difference, with aid of fields theory, is definitional to world politics, unveiling intrinsically heterarchical structure instantiated in the concept of sovereign inequalities.

**Structures, systemic boundaries, and social struggle in World Politics**

The vocabulary of structure focuses broadly on forms of organization of a social space, providing a lingua franca for a dialogue between the theoretical frameworks of fields and autopoietic systems. Both of the latter, in turn, provide a glance toward structured process shaping and reshaping structures. In common, structures, fields, and systems look at the arrangement of the social space. However, whereas structures look at different distances in that space in themselves, fields and autopoietic systems look at this and the production of that difference. In other words, both fields and systems portray structures as structuring process, bundle of relations that change or reproduce the completion of the social reality. In the words of White (2008), they can be regarded as processes-in-relations. Nonetheless, fields and autopoietic system are substantially different ways of cutting into these processes. To discuss that the concept of sovereign inequalities represents a configuration of world politics, emerging from the intersection of distinct process of differentiation comprising, the language of structures seems good starting point.

Simply put, structures are social arrangement of interconnected actors. In international relations, structures are often associated with the distributional patterns. In Waltz resonant definition, the prevalent distribution is the one of capabilities for military

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10 (Powell 2013, 197).
12 (Goddard and Nexon 2005)
deterrence, as anarchy precludes any further differentiation to be relevant. In Wendt, it goes beyond a distributional aspect to delimitate the heterogeneous role differentiation that安排s states in term of self and alter identities, an arrangement that produces parts. Building on sociological and anthropological tradition, Donnelly has offered a more plural account of forms arranging the (uneven) multiplicity of international societies.

International societies can be arranged vertically – with regard to (one or more) rank –; horizontally – without entailing rank; and/or radially – focusing on connectedness. Horizontal arrangements can either be segmented – in which parts are differentiated based on their similarity – or functionally differentiated – in which their “alike in their dissimilarity”. Vertical differentiation, in turn, can be based in single or in multiple ranks. A radial differentiation identifies a center as to how it mediates the connectedness of other actors (peripheries) in the social space. The interplay of those forms is empirically open. For Donnelly, Westphalian depictions of international politics describe it as segmented collection of centers; whereas globalization accounts portray heterogenous centers operating at multiple ranks. I argue that sovereign inequalities have emerged as configuration of the historical intersection of heterarchical and segmented aspects of world politics.

The argument beneat such assertion is that the idea and practices of sovereignty are create predominantly segmentary form of differentiation that is peculiarity of modern world politics, but whose dynamics (of either reproduction or change) rely constantly on the inequalities built on the disputes over channeling positionalities across distinct hierarchies into interstate relation. Hence, sovereign inequalities are a translation of distinct social hierarchies into the language of power in modern world politics. The concept of heterarchy, then, embraces such underdetermination of world politics structure

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13 (Waltz 1979, 71-81)
14 (Wendt 1999, 151-158)
15 (Donnelly 2009, 2012, forthcoming)
16 (Donnelly 2009, 55-75)
17 (Donnelly forthcoming, chap 5)
18 (Donnelly 2009, 71-75), (Luhmann 2013 [1997], 12-13)
19 (Donnelly 2009,55-71).
20 (Donnelly Forthcoming, chap 5)
21 (Donnelly Forthcoming, chap 5)
22 Cf. (Albert, 2016)
through its overdetermination by other structures that source the information that it conveys as power.23

As shall see shortly, in the framework of systems, heterarchy allows for conceiving how the operational closure of world politics irritates back the systems whose structural coupling feeds its own power operations. – by translating differentiation of other structurally coupled systems as differentiation in terms of power. In turn, in a fields perspective, it captures the shifting positionalities emerging from the homologies through which power is recognized from the misrecognition of its source, of other capitals. Hence, world politics, in itself or taken as a field of power, emerges on the encounter among hierarchical structures sourcing this power, in which the concept of sovereign inequality reflects such heterarchy. I believe the dialogue between these perspectives can enhance their ability to address the puzzling notion of power and world politics, which can be particularly illuminating to the concept of sovereign inequalities.

**Autopoietic Systems, Fields Theory and Power in Heterarchical World Politics**

Autopoietic systems theory conceives structures as the process of structuring by self-referential differentiation. The systems approach offered by Luhmann studies the production of difference itself, the social making of “boundaries, as markings of differences that oblige us to make clear which side we are indicating” and “which side of the form we are on”.24 It, then, gives coherence to the emergence of multiple distinctions as being part of some other distinction, it gives unity to a multiplicity. Society itself is the network of communications of such differences that allows for them to communicate themselves. Being autopoietic means that a system recursively communicates its own operational singularity. Hence, autopoietic systems produce meaningful and bounded interconnectedness, in which social life is bounded into some form of communication that singularizes its internal operations.

In the political system, the communication medium is the one of power and the world politics are a subsystem of the political system of world society.25 However, as Luhmann himself recognizes26, the intrinsic semantic multidimensionality of power puts the operational closure of the political system under constant irritation as to how to

23 Cf. Powell 2013, 201.
24 (Luhmann 2012 [1997], 28-29)
26 Check passages in v. 1
translate several other social distinctions in terms of the binary powerful/not-powerful. Albert provides a comprehensive account of the semantical self-referential unfolding of this distinction in the political system as well as the out-differentiation of world politics as its subsystem, though without addressing environmental irritations. In specific, he provides a systemic explanation about the emergence of the structural segmentation of world politics into sovereign subsystems, but not about forms in which this form of differentiation is associated with the production of the power differences in whose bases the political system operates hierarchically (or heterarchically). In other words, whereas sovereign equalities are autonomously structured, it’s underlying inequalities remain elusive.

The struggle over the production and reproduction of inequalities is however at the core of fields theory and can shed light on the power dynamics underlying what autopoietic system regards as self-referential process. Fields theory assesses reality through dynamics of positionality and the recursive process shaping it through the practice that they structure. It is exactly in this tautological focus on positionally structured action that structure positions that lies the analytical strength of field’s approach, as it brings attention to the concrete organized struggles that produces the social space. Fields, then, only exist in relational terms, in the absence of mechanistic efficient causation, being instantiated by the differential possession of some attribute that generates differentiated positions and disputes for such positions. In the social world, fields are essentially struggles organized by difference at striving to produce difference. Besides relations of meanings, fields are the locus of relations of force. It’s about power all the way down.

If power is present in all fields, what particularizes the field of power emerges as a relevant theoretical conundrum, even more complex to international dynamics. Although the field of power is prominently theorized in the oeuvre of Pierre Bourdieu, his empirically grounded theorization raises a ceiling in the ladder of its generality and

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27 Cf. (Martin 2003), (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)
28 (Martin 2003, 8-10)
29 It seems interesting to me that fields deal with the absence of efficient causation by mobilizing the other three Aristotelic causes. Social relations are explained by the attributes of the entities, the geometry of positionalities deriving such attributes and their purposeful motivation structured by the latter two (illusio).
30 (Martin 2003, 3-5)
32 (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 103)
hurdles its translation it to a state-less world politics.\textsuperscript{33} Bourdieu comprehends field of power as a framework to address politics in a sociological fashion, regarding the socio-specific meaning that political capital would signify and the struggle it organizes.\textsuperscript{34} The political capital for Bourdieu is intrinsically composite, it is the struggle over the stakes of distinct capitals \textit{vis-à-vis} each other; the space of play of power against power.\textsuperscript{35}

For Bourdieu, the social history of the state is an ensemble of capitals disputes, for there is no political field decoupled from the state as the holder of the meta-capital exercising power over power.\textsuperscript{36} For instance, with a distinct conception of field but a similar operationalization of the political one, Fligstein and McAdam more explicitly hypostasized the latter into the state.\textsuperscript{37} Hence, what mediates power in the absences of world state (and amidst a multiplicity of states) remains a question to be solved.

Addler-Nielsen suggests that diplomacy occupies this function in world politics, as it constructs legitimacy around other forms of capital.\textsuperscript{38} Guzzini contends that we should assess the field of power through the struggle around the production of horizons of possibility (doxa), instead of searching for its generative meta-capital.\textsuperscript{39} I would further argue the absence of such meta-capital produces a field of power in world politics which is centered in unmediated struggles among holders of capital in order to acquire such meta-capital. Symbolic power is, then, central. It is the central operation that constitutes a meta-capital, that misrecognizes “material capitals” and recognizes it as authority.\textsuperscript{40} The state, as the field of power, is a product of the monopolization of such operations not the phenomenological limits of the operations themselves.

Dynamics of misrecognition and recognition of power are present in political theory. In Machiavelli and Gramsci, it is presented in terms of the symbiosis between fear and love, coercion and consent\textsuperscript{41}. The dynamics between control and authority in Weber depicts that difference in a simple form. Whereas control is explicitly physically grounded and directly exerted, authority is what grants power in absence of (though not dissociated

\textsuperscript{33} (Pouliot and Mérand 2012)
\textsuperscript{34} (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]). (Wacquant 1993)
\textsuperscript{35} (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 114)
\textsuperscript{36} (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 111-112)
\textsuperscript{37} (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 67-71)
\textsuperscript{38} (Addler-Nielsen 2011)
\textsuperscript{39} (Guzzini 2013, 88-89)
\textsuperscript{40} (Bourdieu 1990 [1980], 122-123)
\textsuperscript{41} (Machiavelli 1984 [1980], chap 17). (Gramsci 2010)
from) control. The interplay between material and symbolic resources, the dialectical relation between misrecognition of control through its recognition as authority, is at the core of field of power. As Wacquant states, power is the capacity of producing homology among sources of power. Hence, the field of power cannot be detached from the sources of power, from the resources that generate control and authority over other resources. It is only autonomous in the production of homology among types of capital.

If we translate the peculiar autonomy of the field of power to system’s parlance, the operational closure of politics not only depends on its ability to continuously operationalize environmental irritations in terms of power distinctions, but possibilities of these distinctions are dependent on such irritations. The sources of powers appear as the structural couplings of the political system, the scope of environmental factors with “which it can carry out its autopoiesis”. Those environmental irritations “don’t determine what happens in the system, but must be presupposed (for its autopoiesis to recur)”.

The synergies seem manifest. The very communication of power, the setting up and reproduction of its systemic boundaries, engenders struggles among sources of power to be conveyed in terms of power. Without this environmental information, the system cannot operate. On the one hand, a system’s perspective allows for the analysis to bound the intrinsically multidimensionality of power, addressing it’s striving at singularizing its form of communication. On the other hand, a field’s approach towards power stresses the struggles comprise this singularizing efforts. At the encounter of those perspectives, a heterarchical picture of world politics becomes clearer.

Sovereign inequalities, therefore, could be conceived as a heterarchical (structural) feature of world politics, whose underlying dynamics as relations-in-process can be revealed by the conversation between fields theory and autopoietic systems theory. Whereas autopoietic systems logics can illuminate the emergence of sovereignty as integral to the process of operational closure of world politics, the field of power stresses the constitutive irritations it draws upon to signify other distinctions (capitals) in terms of

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42 (Weber 1958)
43 (Wacquant 1993) (Bourdieu 1990 [1980], 112-124)
44 (Wacquant 1993, 9-13)
45 (Lahmann 2012 [1997], 55)
46 (Lahmann 2012 [1997], 55)
47 Cf. Padgett and Powell (2012, 81-87), for further discussion on environment and autopoiesis.
power. In the remainder of this paper, discuss the heterarchical configuration produced in the operational closure of world politics, and the struggle at building homologies across the structures that irritated such closure, as producing systemic stratification in terms of structured sovereign inequalities.

**Sovereign inequalities as emerging property of (European) world politics**

One of the main ways of approaching the unitas multiplex of the world politics has been historicizing its contemporary configurations. Albert does it by analyzing the out-differentiation of world politics as a subsystem of the functionally differentiated political system in world society. He observes the emergence of globality in the scope of interactions of modern (European) world society and the associated semantics of world politics that make it distinctly self-observable. Per Albert, the routinization of interactions, circa the 1816-1878, are a fundamental step in the setting up of the observational scheme of world politics: the balance of power. The fundamental idea of the balance of power as the systemic programing of world politics is that the binary powerful/non-powerful is not only a dispute around puissance, but also the scheme of its recognition, specially through diplomacy.

It would be expected that balance of power, as the systemic communicative operation of world politics, would set the terms of its internal differentiation. Although Albert provides a rich account of the combinations of internal differentiation coexisting in the system (segmentation, stratification and functional differentiation) and of their composition in a variety of possible forms of organizing political authority, the balance of power programing there is seemingly tenuous. Embracing the power struggle underlying the operational closure of world politics seem a necessary step for understanding power in the building of world politics. However, it would require a greater reliance on structural couplings then on autopoiesis, on the heterarchical struggles across structures irritating its operational closure.

Centering the analysis of world politics in the structural coupling it establishes with other systems (and their structures) recasts struggle and power to the center of the narrative. Power differentiation becomes a product of a dispute for translating the

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49 (Albert 2016, 91-92)
50 (Albert 2016, 93-107)
51 (Albert 2016, 134-170)
irritation that other various forms of differentiation in other systems (and the capital positionalities they engender) emanate into world politics. Investigating the structural couplings in which autopoietic operation of world politics has been built on can be illuminating to the interplay among forms of organizing political authority leading to the ideas and practices of sovereignty and the heterarchical natures underlying it.

**Space, authority, and control in the “Eurogenetic” structural couplings of world politics**

Eurocentrism is not only a vice of eurocentric intellectual minds, but it is also a vicious consequence of the power asymmetries radiated from Europe in the actualization of international politics as it is currently practiced. Colonial modernity is a constitutive feature of modern world politics. Although the simple acritical acknowledgement of that can perpetuate hegemonic silences, its critical assessment can be insightful for peripheral realities. Recasting the European genealogy of modern world politics can be a necessary step to provide an additional perspective on a set of stratifications that create its peripheral realities: the emergence of structured sovereign inequalities.

The functional differentiation of the political system is not a European singularity, but it is founding historical particularity in the out-differentiation of world politics in the European world society. This process is manifold, but two aspects seem especially relevant: the emerging convergent territoriality and centralization of power relations. In Europe, under the idea and practices of sovereignty, power becomes inextricably entangled with space in terms of territory. It becomes bounded by the physicality of its social space. Such territorial boundedness superseding networks of control and authority demanded a progressive rationalization of the latter, disguising direct control over resources as impersonal authority over space. These two intertwined threads of the out-differentiation of European world politics highlight two forms of its structural coupling in the political system of European world society that can illuminate the heterarchical genesis of stratification in world politics.

**Power vs power: authority and control in dawn of modern world politics**

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53 Cf. (Abu-Lughod 1989)

54 (Sassen 2008)

55 (Thomas 2010, Thomas and Meyer 1984)
State formation is in a great deal a struggle over construction of homologies among sources of power to be recognized as such.\(^{56}\) Tilly’s referential account of the European modern state system formation studies it in terms of the homologies sought between holders of (economic) capital and means of coercion. Nexon adds the decoupling of religious and dynastic authorities, following the advent of religious differentiation, and the struggle over maintaining the previous homologies as a crucial element of the pathway leading to territorially bounded notions of power.\(^{57}\) The epistemological explanation of territoriality exclusivity itself depicts its social production in the creation of homologies from \textit{de facto} usufruct or control to \textit{de juris} exclusive authority over people, resources, and land.\(^{58}\) Analogously to the latter, and mirroring to Tilly’s bellocentric perspective, the econocentric approach to state formation focuses on the strive of political authority to establish control over wealth.\(^{59}\) Nevertheless, it is Mann who provides an explicit account of the interplay among sources of power operating in those perspectives towards the modern production of the European political space.

Mann observes society as open-ended “overlapping and intersecting socio-spatial power networks.”\(^{60}\) The best entry to grapple with such unboundedness is assessing the means that bind those networks of power in their interactions, which he calls the \textit{sources of power: ideological, economic, military, and political}. Ideological sources of powers refer to the attribution of meaning and the production of normative and aesthetic value that follows, it is the production of differences in terms of status.\(^{61}\) Economic power regards \textit{praxis}, work in Marx’s sense, circuits of transformation of the (non-human) material world and the struggle at appropriating the outcomes of such enterprise.\(^{62}\) Military power refers to the organized use of violence as means of producing and reproducing control.\(^{63}\) Finally, the political source of power is the purely organizational one. It refers to the territorial binding of other sources of power by some central actor, comprising the idea of a state in \textit{lattu sensu}.\(^{64}\)

\(^{56}\) (Mann 1986), (Tilly 1992 [1990]), (Nexon 2009).
\(^{57}\) (Nexon 2009).
\(^{58}\) (Ruggie 1983, 1993),
\(^{59}\) (North 1981, North and Thomas 1973), (Spruyt 1994)
\(^{60}\) (Mann 1986, 1)
\(^{61}\) (Mann 1986, 23-34)
\(^{62}\) (Mann 1986, 25)
\(^{63}\) (Mann 1986, 26)
\(^{64}\) A broad definition of state (not modern state) as any form of regulative actors exercising rule over a network.
For Mann, in general, power is only instantiated in terms of control, the capability that one has to mobilize something or someone else. The legitimation or not of that power by those who are being controlled is out of his scope. However, in this terms, authority is only power as it produces collective mobilization diffusely, as it produces misrecognized control. This allow for a further distinction of those sources of power. Military and economic sources are in themselves about control, they are inextricably physical. They manifest in the recognition of control itself and the distinctions it directly accrues. In turn, even though enabling direct control, ideology is the opposite. It is about misrecognizing control through identifying transcendence or immanence in those relations. This distinction further distinguishes the pure organization source of the political power as the site in which those other distinctions interact, producing power as authoritatively control in the social space.

In the formation of European states and state system, it appears to be precisely the case after the XIX century. It seems to me accurate that, either observing it from the entry point of ideological, economical, or military processes, the production of a social system based on territorial exclusivity can be read as an endeavor for misrecognizing control (military and economic) over resources or people and recognizing it in terms of authority over territory, as means to enable such control. In loose systems’ terminology, the struggle of power-as-control against power-as-control only finds itself as self-observable in this mediation, as authority. By XIX century this centripetal assemblage of authority and territory acquires predominance and produces a segmented form of organization the world polity as an interstate system.

I aim no theoretical claim about the nature of power, I only intend to draw on this distinction to better inform the structural coupling associated with the functional differentiation of world politics in world society as a way to analyze the empirical forms of irritations it has produced. The political system as hitherto stressed is the arena in which authority and control interplay to communicate power, but the communicating this depends on mobilizing sources of control and authority from structurally coupled

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65 (Mann 1986, 7)
66 In fact, Mann’s wide historical recollection of this interplay is seen largely as an open-ended configuration of division of labor, centralization of power (coupled or not with military power) and the producing of meaning for both of the latter.
68 Besides intuitive, such distinction has an import tradition in political theory. Cf. (Gramsci 2010, book 10), (Weber 1958), (Arendt 1970)
hierarchies. In the emergence of modern world politics and for the aims of this paper, two structural couplings seem of particular relevance. The first one is with the economic system, in a broader sense then Luhmann’s money economy, entailing communication in terms of organization of *praxis* and the appropriation of its output – whether or not in pecuniary terms. Monetarization would be a political-economic irritation in itself, as I later argue. The second structural coupling is with space, which although not properly being a system is a telling environmental source of irritations over the political system when signified in terms of territoriality. 69 There is no pretension at exhaustion in this selection, certainly ideological sources of power autonomously shape the interaction between authority and control in the world politics, but those two structural couplings seem illuminating for the configuration of sovereignty as attached to underlying structures of differentiation (an equality processed by inequalities).

From these structural coupling, I outline the role of their constitutive irritations in formation of modern world politics, whose efforts at operational closure transformed itself and its environment. In Luhmann’s words, “irritations arise from an internal comparison of (initially unspecified) events with the system’s own (self-referential) possibilities”. 70 In a purely rhetorical analogy with assemblage theory, those structural couplings establish aspects of the environment as objects that their operations have to govern.71

*Heterarchy, structural couplings and the configuration of sovereign inequalities in modern world politics*

From the Congress of Viena in the early XIX century to the decolonization wave of 1960s and 1970s, world politics consolidated itself as a system organized on segmented territorial sovereignty over social process. However, this historical configuration was processed in the translation of distinct forms of differentiation sourcing authority and control to a specific form connected to the ability of centralize and bound them territorially. Hence, we can study this configuration through the structural couplings that it builds with the transformation of the space into territory and the human-nature relation into economy. The mutual irritation produced in these structural coupling, by connecting

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70 (Luhmann 2012 [1997])66  
71 (Corry 2014)
distinct structures of differentiation, have shaped modern politics into a bundle of heterarchically produced sovereign inequalities.

The interplay between economics and politics in the building of European state system is well known. The most direct aspect of the nexus is the constructed indissociability of the authority of the control over means of violence and over taxation, a symbiosis that reaches its apex in Europe in the XIX century.72 In this sense, modern states are largely fruit of a process in which plunder and exploitation are misrecognized as such and recognized as legitimate extraction and employment. It’s the symbolic shielding of economic and military domination.73

One common thread of explanation of this symbiosis is the emergence of state enforced property rights and coinage as its means of communication in everyday transitions of resources.74 Hence the specialization of the state as an “organization that provides protection in return for revenue”75 is a functional differentiated configuration of economic and politics, that allows for a very particular institution to emerge: the market economy.76 It then creates the possibility of an economy based on distinctions of property in terms of money, which in this emerging autonomous economic system has produced growing internal functional differentiation.77

On the other side of the relation, the increased functional differentiation achieved in economic terms reshapes dynamics of control over material resources away from the ones of the state. Following the then-possible logic of profit, economic differentiation produces an unevenness that is economically functional but ranked in terms of power. Differences in control of resources – thence economic property (especially capital) – are disguised by the economic logic in their functional differentiation, but once again recognized as power by redefining homologies among capitals in favor of an autonomous economic capital. In lieu of misrecognizing an indissociably military and economic control in terms of recognition of dynastic or religious authority, market economy allows for it to be recognized in terms of property. It changes the nature of political stratification in modernity.

72 (Elias 2000, 257-362), (Tilly 1992 [1990]).
73 (Wacquant 1993).
74 (North and Thomas 1973).
75 (North and Thomas 1973, 6).
76 (Polanyi 2001 [1944]), (Wood 2002).
77 (Wood 2002).
A second structural coupling is the one between political power and territoruality. Territory is not a system but a feature of the environment, the abstraction space, that has been coupled by the political system in its operational closure. When progressive complexity among functionally differentiated systems was putting the organizational production of control and authority by politics under pressure, the territorialization of the space by power was the historical response. The econocentric version of this tale focuses on the competitive advantage of territorialized forms political of authority (the modern state) in managing to both spur and control economic functional differentiation.

Nevertheless, other aspects of the progressively complexity of European society are also part of that story. For instance, Nexon points that the decoupling of dynastic and religious authority was a relevant element in the efforts of territorializing the scope of political authority by breaking non-spatialized (even transcendental) forms of power. In their struggles to retain the ability organize control and authority, the owners of means of capital and coercion had to mobilizes territory to be recognized as the owners of power, redefine the very realm of political power and world politics. The consolidation of territorialized rule as the condition of entry to game of thenceforth interstate politics (between the Congress of Vience and the Congress of Berlin) is the utmost sign of this structural coupling.

In this sense, by mobilizing territory to segment the process of differentiation that were reaching beyond their organizational capability, owners of political power segmented itself and the territory in terms of recognized borders. Politics of territoriality are not a European novelty, neither are necessary bounded by borders, but politics of sovereign exclusivity are a relevant novelty in the European world politics. They triggered, alongside with other coeval epistemic process, a rationalization of power that encounters in territory their scope. Disputes over power became disputes over borders and recognition of power became recognition of some sovereign border.

The structural coupling of both economy and territoruality to politics, also produced mutual irritation between them and that affecting the irritations they produce into politics.

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78 (Helmig and Kessler 2007)
79 (Spruyt 1994)
80 Nexon (Nexon 2009)
81 (Ruggie 1983), (Thomson 1995), (Sassen 2008)
82 (Ruggie 1993)
83 Cf. (Thomas 2010)
84 (Vasquez 1993), (Thomson 1995), (Branch 2011), (Lawson and Shilliam 2009)
Occupation of space and division of labor largely connected. In Europe, the main narrative accounting for this nexus is the one of the radial differentiation in the process of urbanization, among central cities, their peripheral urban settings in country and their satellite villages.\(^{85}\) In economic terms that is a story of interdependence, of functionally mobilizing the territorialities in the space. This mobilization organizes the space in terms of center and peripheries designed by their functions in such interdependence.

The economic differentiation of space mobilizes combination among territories, but imprint unevenness in doing so. The Uneven and Combines Development (U&CD) perspective on world politics emphasizes this entanglement of multiple societies, socio-spatial networks, by their differences in terms of development.\(^{86}\) In itself, it does not necessarily produce stratification, it does not have rank, it produces territorial inequality among territorially bound groups in terms of centers and peripheries functionally differentiated by economic relations. The stratification of this process occurs in their re-translation to further differentiation in terms of political power. Stratification emerges from the distinctions that this territorially centralized economic functional differentiation produces in the capacity of actors to mobilize authoritatively control over those crucial transformation of the world. In effect, coupled with territorialized markets they configure a stratification in terms of sovereign inequalities.

In sum, the irritations produced in the structural coupling of economy, politics and territoriality connect forms of differentiation as a heterarchical configuration of world politics, whose stratification of states as sovereign inequalities portrays. It does not exhaust its configurations, but highlight a fundamental partial aspect of its emerging property of modern sovereignty. The territorial assemblage of authority in terms exclusive sovereignty raises a structural pressure on states, as to manage the interplay of their centripetal forces of internal autonomy and of the centrifugal forces of external integration on which their authoritatively control depends.\(^{87}\) Figure 1 display the structural coupling discussed in this section (intersections) and the irritations (dashed arrows) they produce in the out-differentiation of the political system of European world society.

\(^{85}\) (Braudel 1981-1984), (Wallerstein 2011 [1976]), (de Vries 1984), (Harvey 1987)
\(^{86}\) (Amin 1976), (Rosenberg 2010, 2016, 2013), (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015)
\(^{87}\) (Helleiner 1995), (Sassen 2008)
The world politics maturing in Europe during the long XIX century became configured in the logic of contiguous jurisdictional sovereignty. As the historically grounded literature nuancedly shows, this was not a linear nor an inexorable process. The emergence of the norms of sovereignty towards the universalization of the idea of territorial integrity were a long durée process. Nothing grant that the idea of sovereignty in XVII century Westphalia was a leading idea in the building of a modern state system that international relations has primarily studied, but the several configurations were create crucial structuring features of political relation in this path. My argument here is to show that disputes over setting the terms for recognition of power, as authoritatively control, in the emergence of functionally differentiated world society are a constitutive contradiction of the “Westphalian” aspect of world politics.

Therefore, the internal differentiation of world politics can be assessed in the interplay between the efforts of political authority (in their variety of forms) to control dynamics that structurally scape their control. Coupling authority and territory in a rationalized fashion has been a formula of doing this. It nonetheless produces its own contradictions, as the one of sovereign inequalities. It encapsulates the scope of authority in terms of territorial boundaries that parcel the unevenness of economic shaping of space.
into differences of power. In their efforts at reaching control (through segmenting authority) over processes that occur in functionally differentiated a space, overlapping divides are produced between zones of peace and war, plenty and poverty, status and stigma.\(^{90}\)

**Final remarks: elements for studying the colonial making of heterarchical networks of sovereign inequalities**

To conclude this paper, I aim to outline elements in which this configuration have been manifested in the constitution of modern world politics as interstate politics. As hinted before, part of the literature addresses this phenomenon rooted in the globalization of European interstate society, transforming global interactions into an integrated process. Therefore, the apex of European colonization and imperialism in XIX Century seems to be historical location of this process and the differentiation of actors then built its central manifestation. These constitutive processes could be studied through the following form to illuminate the configuration of sovereign inequalities:

- **Territorial segmentation of the global political space by colonial practices.** The idea of world to be divisible territorially became central to dynamics of power recognition in Europe through colonial practices.\(^{91}\) For instance, the Tordesillas in 1945 mobilized dynastic-religious authority to control the nascent long-term trade. The same logic can be seen Berlin 1878 with a completely form of authority in Europe. This seem a process entrenched into the characterization of world politics as clash of sovereign powers.

- **Segmentation of territoriality by colonial practices** - The practice of colonial domination and later of imperialism was a central input towards the thrust to segment territorially political power.\(^{92}\) Administrative regional segmentation within colonial enterprises bounded relations of power with the metropoly in terms of jurisdictional responsibilities. Furthermore, it would have direct impact on the forms of political authority that would later populate the decolonized world.

- **Radial differentiation of global economic spaces** – The relations that colonial enterprises made in interconnecting the spaces as into on world politics created an integrated global economy undetachable from the creation of world politics. The

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\(^{90}\) (Barkawi and Laffey 1999), (Zarakol 2011), (Lees 2012), (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015),

\(^{91}\) (Branch 2011)

\(^{92}\) (Branch 2011)
economic praxis, the social transformation of world, became for the first time largely structured in one common process of economic functional differentiation between metropolis and colonies as an international division of labor. This transformation created uneven and combined existences that are at the core of sovereign inequalities, whence territorial segmentation of political power became prevalent.

- Stratification of the global political space through formal sovereign inequalities. The very granting of political sovereignty as coded practice of power recognition is another central aspect of this process. The graded recognition of non-European powers, the shifting in the norms of sovereignty until 1945-60 are seem a necessary step to configuring contemporary sovereign inequalities. They seem to instantiate fundamentally how power is at the root of the process universalizing practices of sovereignty at the same time that this universalization is a symbol of fundamental shifts in the forms in which power is exerted. By granting formal equality across the political map, the owners of powers, the ones in condition of mediating sources of power were able to deterritorialize their power, leaving sovereign inequalities as residual but central feature of interstate politics.

These four processes are essentially the networked of substantive relations constructing a central part world politics, that altogether reveal its heterarchical structure. Tracing the history congealed in the relations stablished between actors seem the way to empirically grasp the configuration of sovereign inequalities stratifying interstate politics. Therefore, the following step of this research is to investigate the networks comprising these processes under the theoretical framework here discussed to unveil the heterarchical dynamics of world politics.

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