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RESPONSE

Explanation, Geopolitics, and Liberalism: A Reply to Luke Cooper
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Introduction

Since *The Global Transformation* (TGT) was published in 2015, we have taken part in a range of forums and symposiums on our book. By now, we thought we had tackled all of the issues that our colleagues, critical or otherwise, could throw at us. We were wrong. Luke Cooper's essay is an unusually insightful contribution that pushes us on a number of important issues. Cooper raises three main lines of critique: first, that our analysis is weak in explanatory terms, i.e. it does not sufficiently address the 'why' of the global transformation; second, that we are not 'realist' enough, failing to account for the pivotal role played by geopolitics in European state formation and imperial expansion; and third, that we are not 'liberal' enough in that we miss the ways in which the rise of a 'public sphere' underpinned a new 'body politic' that, in turn, served as the foundations for modern nation states. We discuss each of these points in turn.

Explanation

Before responding directly to Cooper's essay, it is worth briefly rehearsing what *The Global Transformation* argues (Buzan and Lawson 2015). *TGT* is a book premised on an argument about how modern international order emerged and the consequences of this order for contemporary world politics. Our contention is that the 19th century global transformation represents a macro-historical conjuncture of world historical proportions. Although global modernity, which is a term we use simultaneously with the global transformation, was not a year zero or big bang, it did constitute a major transformation in how social orders were organized and conceived, and in how polities and peoples related to each other. These changes combined to generate a new 'mode of power' that, in turn, reconfigured the foundations of international order.[2]

Cooper's main charge is that, although our account is *descriptively* powerful, we fail to provide a satisfying *explanation* of the global transformation. Key here, he claims, is that the concept of the mode of power, which we see as underpinning global modernity, is insufficiently precise. On this point, we agree. Our use of mode of power in *TGT* is typical of what Robert Merton (1984: 267) called a 'proto-concept': an 'early, largely unexplicated idea' rather than a fully formed construction. If it is to be more than a proto-concept, we need to differentiate changes *in* and *of* the mode of power, and to ground these in a broader historical framework. As Bourdieu puts it, 'concepts should always be picked up with historical tweezers' (in Steinmetz 2011: 59). We plan to apply some historical tweezers in future work.

However, we are going to dig in our heels when it comes to the more subterranean critique that lies beneath Cooper's complaint – that there is something distinct about description on the one hand and explanation on the other. We do not think this is the case – description and explanation are necessarily co-implicated (Lawson 2012). Indeed, we see our book as simultaneously descriptive, explanatory, heuristic, analytical, and interpretative. The theoretical and historical components of the book are not separated through the artifice of a 'theory chapter' that is surgically removed from a set of 'case studies' only for the two to be later sutured back together. We offer no explicit statement of theory construction, let alone an attempt at formal verification against 'the historical record'. Rather, in *TGT*, theory and history are mutually reinforcing components of the causal story that we tell (Buzan and Lawson 2016).

This is no accident. Our view of theory does not accord with the 'regularity-deterministic' accounts that dominate much contemporary scholarship. Regularity-deterministic accounts see theory as premised on a form of causal analysis that establishes associations between objects that are separated (or at least separable) in space and time (Kurki 2006: 192; Wendt 1998: 105). In these accounts, 'efficient causation' acts as a 'push and pull' between determinant and regularity: when A (determinant), then B (regularity) (Kurki 2006: 193). If a particular outcome (*y*) can be traced to a particular cause (*x*), then the inference is that a set of outcomes (*y*-type regularities) can be traced to a set of causes (*x*-type determinants) (Kurki and

Suganami, 2012: 403). It is this tradition that Cooper is working within. We wrote *TGT* from a different standpoint.

In our understanding, social entities are assemblages that combine in historically discrete ways. As a result, all explanations are 'case-specific' in that the processes within which social entities cohere is singular and, therefore, unrepeatable. What we name as social entities – wars, revolutions, depressions, global transformations – are 'webs of interactions' rather than collections of properties (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001: 13; Tilly 2004: 9). They are sequences of events that attain their significance as they are threaded together in and through time. To put this in Andrew Abbott's terms (1988: 179), social entities are 'closely related bundles' whose meaning arises from the order and sequence within which their events are knitted together. The focus is not on the disaggregation of entities into discrete properties, but on the relational interconnections that constitute entities in the first place. Our causal explanation relies on generating an 'intelligible connection' between 'closely related bundles' of historical events (Kurki and Suganami 2012: 404; also see Suganami 2008).

Rather than approach history as something we can isolate, disassemble and test, therefore, we view historical dynamics as temporally specific assemblages. Our first goal in *TGT* was to search for combinations of events that yielded recurrent patterns. Stable accumulations of interactions were constructed into analytical narratives that filtered historical complexity into idealized causal pathways (Jackson 2006). These causal narratives were interpretative in that they identified connections that we took to be meaningful. They were also tools of simplification in that they emphasized certain sequences of events and downplayed others. But the causal narratives we constructed were also systematically fashioned and logically coherent (Jackson 2010: 193). This procedure was how we arrived at the tripartite schema of industrialization, rational state-building, and ideologies of progress that, we argue, underpinned the global transformation. We tacked between history and abstraction in order to construct a framework that was ordered and systematic.

Our sense of Cooper's article is that he would have liked us to nail our historical account to a particular theoretical mast – in other words, to isolate the distinct causal

properties of a particular social entity, whether this be industrialization, imperialism, or the 'public sphere'. But our account rejects this way of conducting causal analysis. Rather, our emphasis is on the ways in which a 'near miraculous concatenation of circumstances' (Gellner 1988: 16), marked by an interrelated revolution of productive, coercive, and ideological forces, emerged in a particular time and a particular place. Our causal narrative unfolds through three steps: first, examining the sequences through which history is 'evented'; second, assembling these sequences into 'plot lines' that are logically coherent and supported by the available evidence; and third, abstracting the configurations that sustain these plot lines into a causal apparatus. We assemble our three main plotlines (industrialization, rational state-building, and ideologies of progress) into a single configuration (the global transformation) that, we argue, helps to unravel how modern international order emerged and how it has changed over the past two centuries. Such an approach cuts against the grain of orthodox approaches to causation, but it fits within a more pluralistic definition of causal analysis (Cartwright 2004): how and/or why a particular outcome occurred where and when it did. In our understanding, a causal explanation is a logical, systematic account of the sources and emergence of a particular outcome (also see Kurki and Suganami 2012).

Linked to this point, we do not accept Cooper's argument that the global transformation cannot be both an outcome *and* a point of departure. Our view is that global modernity represented a cluster of deep changes, some of which had centuries old origins, which occurred together within a relatively short time span. This means that there is no necessary opposition between our account and that offered by Cooper on the precursors to the 19th century global transformation. Almost all of the dynamics we highlight in *TGT* can be traced back to earlier times. The key point is that, during the 19th century, even well-established ideas and practices were contested, abandoned or reformulated. And they began to have major consequences on a *global* scale. The triad of macro-dynamics we see as lying behind the global transformation represent a causal nexus that produced a power gap that, in turn, altered the basic character of international order. The global transformation marks *both* the coming together of diverse causal strains into a single 'mode of power' *and* the extension of this 'mode of power' on a global scale. It is simultaneously origin and outcome.

Imperialism

As Cooper point out, imperialism was one of the principal vectors through which the global transformation was carried. British imperial expansion came first: between 1814-49, the size of Britain's empire in India increased by over two-thirds (Hobsbawm 1962: 136). During this period, Britain also accumulated a series of staging posts in the Mediterranean (e.g. Cyprus), the Middle East (e.g. Aden), Asia (e.g. Singapore), and Africa (e.g. Cape Town). But, Britain apart, most of the 'new imperialism' took place in the second half of the century. During this period, France sought to extend its power in the Middle East and the Americas, most notably in Mexico. Spain annexed the Dominican Republic in 1861. The US became both a continental empire, seizing territory from Native Americans, the Spanish and the Mexicans, and an overseas empire, extending its authority over Cuba, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, Samoa and the Virgin Islands. A range of other settler states also became colonial powers in their own right, including Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific. Japan constructed an empire in East Asia, while Russian expansionism accelerated both southwards to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and eastwards to Sakhalin and Vladivostok.

Imperialism, therefore, was both reflective of the 'power gap' that opened up between 'core' and 'periphery' during the global transformation, and a central component of this power gap. But imperialism was the *product* rather than the *cause* of the global transformation: it was legitimized by one or more of the ideologies of progress, and enabled through military superiority, mechanisms of state control and infrastructural developments that had their roots in industrialization. To put this another way, while the leap in interaction capacity during the 'long 19th century' occurred within a framework of empires, it is not obvious that imperialism was a necessary condition for this development. As the ongoing acceleration of interaction capacity during the second half of the 20th century shows, these developments are perfectly compatible with a (formally) postcolonial international order. We therefore resist Cooper's attempt to singularize our account to a single plotline. The synthetic account we prefer is not simply the product of ecumenical leanings, but a deliberate strategy intended to focus on the causal nexus that drove the global transformation. It is the whole package rather than any one part of it (e.g. Cooper's shorthand of 'industrial

modernity'), or an ancillary element of it (e.g. imperialism), that generated global modernity.

Geopolitics

Cooper also argues that our book insufficiently stresses the importance of geopolitics to the global transformation. We do not find this argument particularly persuasive. It is right to say that Britain was frequently at war during the early modern period. But it was hardly alone in this respect. The composite monarchies of early modern Europe were frequently destabilized as territories were redistributed through war. In many respects, Britain was a peripheral figure in these geopolitical struggles. Britain relied on militias rather than a standing army – until the last quarter of the 17th century, Britain's army was a quarter of the size of the Swedish army, an eighth the size of the Dutch army, and a tenth the size of the French army (Brewer 1990: 8). And the British navy was reliant on privateers – of the 197 vessels that sailed against the Spanish Armada in 1588, only 34 were crown ships (Brewer 1990: 10-11). British weakness left it susceptible to more powerful adversaries. Attempts by the monarchy to overcome this weakness and modernize its armed forces required considerable funds. This, in turn, led to regular confrontations with parliament, which was unwilling to deliver these funds without limiting claims to personalized sovereignty. 'Shared rule', therefore, was destabilized by the monarchy's attempts to take part in European geopolitical practices and, in particular, by its attempts to 'catch up' with more 'advanced' states. The Glorious Revolution was one consequence of this long-standing tension. And, although the reforms that the revolution engendered post-1688 produced a stronger state, this was not without considerable turmoil in the century that followed, from the various Jacobite risings to the confrontation with independence struggles in North America.

Britain was not the only European state to meet geopolitical struggle with revolution rather than programmes of state strengthening. Between 1650 and 1780, France was at war in two out of every three years. This bellicosity brought increased demands for taxation, something that Cooper rightly notes as a general tendency of war-prone states. However, the product of French bellicosity was factionalism rather than state centralization – indeed, a factionalism that was fatal to the ancién regime (Stone 2002: 259–260). War, therefore, does not have a single, determinate effect on

state power – it causes state breakdown as well as state strengthening. Take, as an obvious example, World War Two. The war devastated European states, both winners and losers alike: by its end, German GDP had returned to its 1890 level, while living standards in Britain had fallen by a third (Frieden 2006: 261); the United States, by contrast, had seen its economy grow by 50%. These examples provide little support for Cooper's claim that war, successful or otherwise, is *necessarily* generative of state power. Sometimes it is, at other times it is not.

Liberalism

Nor are we convinced by Cooper's argument that we are 'insufficiently liberal', which he associates with a lack of attention to the way in which a late 18th century 'public sphere' was generative of mass politics that, in turn, enabled the rise of nation-states. This point is linked to Cooper's critique of the concept of 'progress' that we use to capture the new ideological formations that both legitimized and helped to constitute the global transformation.

Contra Cooper, we do not define progress simply as 'forward momentum'. Rather, we see it as the central expression of Enlightenment thinking, combining the ways in which the accumulation of data and the systematization of knowledge were thought likely to improve the human condition, with ideas of civilizational superiority. Progress 'at home' meant promoting scientific research, improving education systems, fostering commercial exchange, and embracing technological change (Israel 2010: 4). Progress 'over there' meant a reinforcement of metropolitan superiority through a stark differentiation between white Europeans and 'others'. The notion of progress, therefore, fueled a dual dynamic: it lay behind the 'improvement' of European societies through processes ranging from academic research to social engineering, and it served to distinguish peoples around the world on the basis of their 'civilizational' quotient (Drayton 2000). These dual dynamics were underpinned by techniques that made populations 'legible' through practices ranging from censuses to mapping (Scott 1999; Weiner 2003; Branch 2014). And these techniques were legitimized and made possible by the four new political ideologies that underpinned progress as an ideal: liberalism, socialism, nationalism, and 'scientific' racism.

Cooper is right to say that conservatism was an important strand of 19th century political order. He is also right to point to the 'ideological amalgams' that characterized political visions during this period. We make much of these amalgams in *TGT*, whether witnessed in the strain of vernacularized Christianity that underpinned the mid-century Taiping Rebellion in China, or the Maori prophetic movement that tried to establish a 'City of God' on New Zealand's North Island. Amalgams were the norm, not the exception. And the central referent point for conservatism was the 'progressive' appeal of liberalism, nationalism, socialism, and 'scientific' racism – hence, as Cooper nicely puts it, conservatism's 'rearticulation' in novel guises. Bismarck's social insurance scheme is one of the clearest examples of this rearticulation. Whether as a source of liberation or condemnation, progress was the central ideational motif of the global transformation.

We are not clear that an imminent 'public sphere' was central to these processes. It is true that the late 18th and early 19th centuries saw the emergence of a political culture in which discussion of rights, representation and constitutionalism were commonplace. But this political culture was not deeply embedded. For one thing, it was restricted to elites. The pamphleteers and salonnières that characterized the early 19th century Congress system, for example, were diplomats and lobbyists rather than members of the emergent bourgeoisie or proletariat. At the same time, relatively few members of this elite held truck with the notion that sovereignty was derived from the will of the people; rather, both territories and populations were seen as the property of the sovereign (Mazower 2012: 40). Even when constitutions were used as forms of mediation and crisis management, as they were until the mid-1820s, these documents were restricted affairs. After the 1830 revolutions in France, Belgium and elsewhere, the use of constitutions as forms of dispute settlement was dropped, being replaced by an alliance of 'throne and altar', a reassertion of monarchy, and high levels of both censorship and police suppression (Schroeder 1994: 666). Reform movements in Prussia and several other German states were violently suppressed in 1819, the same year as the Peterloo Massacre in Britain. Over the next three decades, European secret police forces placed a range of individuals and groups under surveillance and routinely arrested those considered to be subversive. Constitutions were suspended, radical groups banned, and the media censored. The primary form of European political order

in the early part of the 19th century was the dynastic police state (Maier 2012: 68). If notions of a 'public sphere' acted as an emergent political field during this period, it was as a background set of concerns rather than as a far-reaching ideological consensus.

The 'body politic' that Cooper identifies as crucial to the establishment of nation-states owes more to the struggles of unruly publics and the emergence of mass organisations of the left in the *latter* part of the 19th century than it does to the salon culture of the early part of the century. During this period, fear of the 'social problem' saw states carry out concerted 'invasions of social life' (Tilly 1990: 23). The infrastructural and despotic capabilities of states grew commensurately with these encroachments as elites sought to stabilize the disruptive effects of global modernity through dual programs of reform and repression (Lacher and German 2012: 108). Trade union confederations emerged in Britain in 1868 and spread to a number of other countries over the next half century. International trade secretariats covering printers, shoemakers, miners, tailors, transport workers, public sector workers, and more emerged in parallel. The major growth of unions was between the mid-1880s and 1914 (Eley 2002). This period also saw the emergence of large-scale parties of the left, such as the Germany Social Democratic Party. Cooper is therefore right to say that the global transformation saw the birth of mass politics. But mass politics emerged in the crucible of struggles that either reformed or brought down imperial regimes during the late 19th and early 20th centuries rather than the coffee houses of Paris and London a century earlier.

Conclusion

We would like to close by thanking Cooper for his engaging treatment of our book. It has made us think carefully about our position on a number of important issues. If we have dug in our heels on some points, we would like to reiterate that we see Cooper's essay as an exemplary form of critique based on a close reading of our book and a deep knowledge of its subject matter. What we are left with are different interpretations of how to relate theory and history, and different views of the driving forces of the global transformation. Such an engagement makes us hopeful that *The Global Transformation* will continue to stimulate both intra- and inter-disciplinary conversations, even if these

conversations sometimes arise from frustration with paths not taken and issues not addressed.

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