Week 2: Westphalia and the construction of international system: the birth of the modern state

Sovereignty: Is the full right and power of a governing body over itself, without any interference from outside sources or bodies. In political theory, sovereignty is a substantive term designating supreme authority over some polity. Although scholars think sovereignty commenced with the Peace of Westphalia, no one yet conceived of sovereignty as the recognition of the right of other states to rule their own territory, the increasingly complex diplomatic milieu shows how a multipolar system was able to develop. In this sense, one may relocate the origins of sovereignty around the peace of Westphalia, but only as a consequence of the negotiations, not of an explicit or implicit endorsement of the idea of sovereignty in the terms of the treaties.

International Relations

- The key feature that distinguishes international from domestic politics is that, in the international sphere, politics units are forced to coexist in the absence of an overarching authority
- Its guiding question is how order can be generated in an environment that is fragmented rather than unified.

International orders: regularized practices of exchange among discrete political units that recognizer each other to be independent. These have been existing throughout history on a regular basis, whether through trade, diplomacy, or the exchange of ideas. Over time, these exchanges among political units generate forms of interdependence in which events in one place have a major effect on others. The dominance of 'Western' ideas and institutions. Western ideas such as human rights and Western culture (particularly music) are well known around the world.

- Some people argue that Western power has arisen because of its innate strengths (liberal ideas, democratic practises, and free markets). These people tend to see Western power as both natural and enduring.
- Others see Western domination as rooted in specific historical circumstances, many of them the product of practices of exploitation and subjugation. For these people, Western power in the contemporary world is unusual and temporary.
- **Regularized exchange:**
  - <u>Economic interactions</u>: long distance trade routes in silks, cotton, sugar, tea, linen, and spices that connected places as diversely situated as Malacca, Samarkand, Acapulco, Manila for many centuries before Westphalia.
  - <u>Systems of transport and communication:</u> highlighting the European 'voyages of discovery' during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which opened up sea-lines around Africa and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. When Europeans moved into the Indian Ocean, they found a well-developed international order in place. India's huge coastline, skilled artisans, and

plentiful traders had long made it a central node in the trans-Eurasian exchange of goods, ideas, and institutions.

- o <u>Economic and infrastructural interactions,</u> highlighting dynamics such as the trafficking of African slaves, which fostered a 'triangular trade; in which the demand for sugar in London fostered the plantation system in the Caribbean, which was supplied by Africans slaves and North American provisions. This was linked both to increasing trade and to advances in transport technologies; it helped to forge the Atlantic into a regional international order.
- o <u>Increasing number of ecological transfers between the Americas and Europe:</u> maize, potatoes, tomatoes, beans and tobacco were imported from the 'New world', while horses, cattle, pigs, chicken, rice, coffee, so forth, travelled in the opposite direction.

Historical international orders

- Some accounts trace the historical origins of international orders to the period when nomadic groups first settled and became sedentary communities. The earliest recorded example of this process took place around 3-4000 years ago in Sumer – modern day Iraq.
- Sedentary communities in Sumer accumulated agricultural surpluses that allowed for year-round subsistence. These surpluses generated two dynamics: first, they fostered trade between groups, and second, they put groups states on the basis of religious belief. In other words, states assumed **sovereignty** over their own territories – first in terms of their right of confession, and later over the way they organized their governance and economies.
- **Sovereignty:** In a system of sovereign states, each recognizes the others as the final authorities within their given territories, and they can be considered actors within the system.
    - o **De Jure:** Concerns the expressed and institutionally recognised right to exercise control over a territory.
    - o **De Facto:** Concerned with whether control in fact exists.
    - o **Internal:** Claim to control what is inside of the nation.
    - o **External:** No state should interfere with the state practices.
    - o All states are sovereign. It has to be recognized by other states.
    - o Sovereignty emerges as an historical fact that was gradually recognized by statesmen and eventually acknowledged as reality.

Criticism of the Westphalian narrative

- The Treaty of Westphalia did not mark a decisive end of the Holy Roman Empire and the creation of a new international order based on sovereign states. The empire continued to exist after Westphalia.