



First Draft, Comments are Very Welcomed

**The Concept, Practice(s), and Relevance of
'International Society' in the 21st Century**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I suggest to update and apply the concept and practice of “international society,” as developed in the classic book by Hedley Bull (1977), by assessing its relevance in the third decade of the 21st century. Among the subjects to be covered I include the following: (1) the rise of non-state actors; (2) the impact of globalization; (3) and approaches to international society from the Global North and the Global South. The two major research questions to be addressed in the paper are: (1) What is the relevance of the concept and practice of international society nowadays; (2) What are the challenges ‘international society’ faces in the third decade of the twenty-first century?

Introduction

In this paper, I aim to update and apply the idea and practices of “international society,” as developed in the classic book by Hedley Bull (1977), by assessing its continuing relevance in the third decade of the 21st century. For scholarly, practical, and policy reasons, I believe that Bull’s masterpiece offers a relevant ‘guide to the perplexed’ to navigate world politics in our turbulent times. The two major research questions to be addressed in the paper are: (1) What are the challenges confronting the idea of the contemporary “international society” and its practices in the first three decades of the 21st century?; and (2) What is the relevance of the concept and practices of international society nowadays?

To answer the first question, I compile a list of significant contemporary challenges to the international society. In a nutshell, these include the rise of non-state actors and their challenge to the centrality of the state; the impact of globalization and the preponderance of global issues (such as COVID-19 and climate change), and the lack of agreed global and shared norms, in both cultural and normative terms, which make international cooperation much more difficult to take place.

Facing these intertwined challenges, I argue that the concept and practices of international society can be –and actually they are – updated to the complex realities of the third decade of the 21st century, still being relevant, kicking, and alive. I sustain this argument by linking the concept and practices of the international society to the mechanisms of global and regional governance, as embedded in its primary institutions, including the nation-states themselves, the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war, the management of great powers, and trade. Moreover, I demonstrate the continuing relevance of the international society by referring to alternative world orders, framed in the North and framed in the South.

In my own re-reading of Hedley Bull’s *The Anarchical Society* about forty-three years after its publication, I will concur with Alderson and Hurrell (2000, viiii) that “Bull’s work remains of continued relevance in understanding the political and moral dilemmas of the post-Cold War world.” As my colleagues argued twenty years ago, the intellectual framework of the international society seems to be valid and useful nowadays, in these uncertain Covid-19 days. In this sense, and in order to answer the two research questions posed above, I will focus on three dimensions that explore the intricate links between theory and praxis: the *idea* or concept of international society; the *practices* of the international society, as evidenced in its institutions, alongside humanitarian intervention(s) and mechanisms of global and regional governance; and the *relevance* of the international society as questioned by the empirical challenges coping with the complex international realities. Hence, in order to assess the idea of the international society we have to explain and understand the theoretical concept in a given historical reality (see Shaw 1994).

The Concept of the International Society

The concept or idea of an ‘international society’ or ‘society of states’ is directly related to the Grotian tradition of international politics, carving a middle ground between the realist conception of a mere system of states and the universalistic/idealistic (Kantian) view of a potential community of humankind. For Bull, the Grotian prescription for international behavior is that “all states, in their dealings with one another, are bound by the rules and

institutions of the society they form” (Bull 1977, 27). According to Bull’s definition (1977, 13),

“A *society of states* (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. If states today form an international society, this is because recognizing certain common interests and perhaps some common values, they regard themselves as bound by certain rules in their dealings with one another, such as they should respect one another’s claims to independence, that they should honor agreements into which they enter, and that they should be subject to certain limitations in exercising force against one another. At the same time, they cooperate in the working of institutions such as the forms of procedures of international law, the machinery of diplomacy and general international organization, and the customs and conventions of war.”

International societies can be traced at different levels of aggregation, from the global to the local. Historically, the idea of international societies has been translated and located at the level of regions, sharing a common culture or civilization. Thus, the European international society, evolving from medieval Europe through the nineteenth century Concert of Europe, became a global international society after World War II in the contemporary age of decolonization, nuclear weapons, and economic globalization.

There are basically three major elements of any international society: common interests and values, common norms and rules, and common institutions. Like any other society, an *international* society includes a set of actors who share a sense of *common interests* in the elementary goals of social interaction, including the preservation of life, freedom, and the limitation of violence. At the level of the international society we can identify four such goals: (1) the preservation of the system and the society of states themselves; (2) maintaining the independence and sovereignty of the individual member-states; (3) the maintenance of peace, defined as the normal absence of war among the members of the society; and (4) the limitation of violence resulting in death or bodily harm, the keeping of promises, and the stabilization of possession by rules of property (Bull 1977, 16-19; see also Kacowicz 2005, 44-6; and Barnathan 2004, 196-197).

Among many other possibilities, norms can be defined as standards of behavior spelled out in terms of rights and obligations (Krasner 1982, 186). Similarly, rules are general imperative principles that require or authorize prescribed classes of persons or groups to behave in prescribed ways (Bull 1977, 54-55). The essential norm of the international society is the principle of state sovereignty. This norm includes the principles of territorial integrity, political independence of existing states, legal equality, and nonintervention as its corollary.

Common interests, values, norms, and rules have a certain impact on the member-states of the international society through their articulation, formulation, and formalization into common *institutions*. Thus, institutions can be considered as a set of habits and practices shaped toward the realization of common goals (see Bull 1977, 74).

According to Bull, the major institutions of the international society are the nation-states themselves, in the absence of a recognized supranational authority. States cooperate and collaborate with each other, shaping institutions such as the balance of power, international

law, diplomatic mechanisms, great power management, and even the regulation of war. Institutions might sustain several and changing degrees of formalization and institutionalization, ranging from informal diplomatic contacts through elaborated schemes of economic and political integration (see Kacowicz 2005, 46). These major institutions actually embody the main practices of the international society.

The Practices of the International Society

Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot define practices as “competent performances.” In their definition, practices can be understood as socially meaningful patterns of action that embody background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world (see Adler and Poulot 2011, 6-8). In terms of applying and implementing the idea and concept of international society (the ‘theory’) in practical terms, the *practices of the international society* are actually embodied in the institutions of the international society, including (1) the balance of power and the international order, transiting from unipolar to multipolar nowadays; (2) mechanisms of international law; (3) diplomacy and international order; (4) war and international order, including the transition from international wars to civil wars and ‘intermestic’ wars (civil wars with international intervention); (5) the management of the international order by great powers; and as a possible addition (and Bull’s omission), (6) trade and other mechanisms of the international political economic system, in the context of complex interdependence and globalization (see Terrada 2020, 113-114).

In addition to these institutions, which have to be examined in their relevance and functions for keeping the international society relatively stable, I posit that the practices of the international society also include nowadays mechanisms of multilateralism, regional and global governance, humanitarian intervention, and to some extent, the concerted efforts regarding the ‘War on Terror’ since 2001. Multilateralism in our contemporary international society refers to the role states keep playing in world politics, albeit through different and transformed mechanisms and structures. It is time to shed light not only on the development of mechanisms of regional and global governance, but also on the interstate interactions that construct and manage these mechanisms, and thus give new significance to the concept of international relations and of the international society. In other words, the main point of contact between the idea and the practices of the international society is through the politics evidenced in the action of states in the contemporary international society (see Kacowicz and Mitrani 2016, 212).

The practices of international society through mechanisms of global and regional governance includes the various institutionalized modes of social coordination aiming at the creation and implementation of collectively binding rules and regulations, to provide collective goods in specific issue areas (including security, economics, environment, health and many others). In this sense, *global governance* includes the possible regulation of the global sphere and the multiplicity of spheres of authority and nature of actors, both public and private, involved in the regulative process and the production of public global goods (see Kacowicz 2018, 63). Similar mechanisms might take place at the regional level, such as in the European Union or in Latin America. A pertinent case-study will be to address the coping of the international society with the coronavirus from March 2020 to March 2021 at the global and regional levels.

As for the diverse, divergent, and contradictory practices of humanitarian intervention in the contemporary international society, they reflect the normative gaps between the ‘pluralist’ and ‘solidarist’ versions of the English school. A pluralist international society privileges order and the freedom of states to protect the rights and lives of their own citizens, but not extending these duties beyond borders. In this sense, humanitarian intervention might infringe upon the sovereignty of states, which have different interpretation of what constitutes justice and values (Wheeler 2000, 29). Conversely, a solidarist international society privileges justice, by promoting universal norms that should be enforced by the international community that justifies humanitarian intervention (Rollwagen 2015, 2). As illustration of these different practices, we could examine the (limited) international community’s against Kaddafi’s Libya in 2011 and against ISIL in 2014-2017, in contrast to the lack of intervention in the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, at least on humanitarian grounds.

In a similar vein, we could point out to the so-called ‘War on Terror’ as an epochal period (2001 to the present), including an interesting practice of global coordination and cooperation (to a certain degree) against Islamist terror organizations that included states with disparate norms (i.e., Russia, China, the USA, France), a reflected also in the military intervention against ISIL.

The Challenges and Continuing Relevance of the Contemporary International Society

What are the challenges confronting the idea and the practices of the contemporary international society in the third decade of the 21st century? On the basis of these challenges, what is its continuing relevance, if any? In a multifarious process of political metamorphosis, from the inter-national society to a more global society, different alternative world orders as suggested in the Global North and in the Global South have translated into complicated international realities that still reflect the lingering relevance of the idea of international society, as manifested through mechanisms of regional and global governance and the contradictory nature of our age, already coined by Bull in 1977, as ‘New Medievalism.’

The Major Challenges to the International Society

We can compile a relative long list of significant challenges to the international society. These include the rise of non-state actors and the challenge to the centrality of the state; the impact of globalization and the preponderance of global issues; and the lack of global and shared norms, in both cultural and normative terms.

As Galia Press-Barnathan cogently argues, one of the major challenges posed to the international society is the rise of non-state actors, both benign and malign, which present a significant threat to the state’s reign as the main actor in the international arena (Press-Barnathan 2004, 198). Across the globe, the terms of the security debate have shifted dramatically over the last thirty years. Since the end of the Cold War, many countries in different regions of the world have confronted new types of security challenges that they have been hard-pressed to tackle effectively. The end of the Cold War brought with it a more permissive strategic environment, leading new non-state actors into the forefront of the security environment, including the proliferation of violent NSAs (non-state actors). At the same time, this new post-Cold War era exposed the fragility and institutional underdevelopment of many of these states in terms of feeble governance, failing to address

issues of human security, crime, and domestic violence (see Felbab-Brown 2017, 2; and Shelley 2014 and 2018).

Moreover, in more benign terms, one can argue that the traditional concept and practices of the international society overlooks the possible influence of non-state actors and societies, including local and transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which might constitute part of a local or even global transnational civil society. As Mor Mitrani argues, international political institutions within the international society have become more open and responsive to the impact and influence of non-state actors and public opinion, broadening the scope of the international society in order to cope with the challenges posed by these non-state actors (Mitrani 2013, 183). In this context, some analysts further argue that globalization is bringing in its wake a new cosmopolitan culture, further promoting the solidarist version of the international society and enhancing the global civil society through NGOs like Amnesty and Greenpeace (Armstrong 2011, 47).

The effect of globalization upon the international order stands in the core of Andrew Hurrell's 2007 study about the changes and future prospects of the contemporary international society in the age of global politics, referring to specific issues such as human rights and economic globalization. Hurrell locates the processes of globalization in the context of order, but refers to the existence of a "global order," rather than merely an international one, with an emphasis on the development of complex global governance around but also beyond the nation-state. Similarly, Barry Buzan suggests an alternative theoretical framework to refine the conceptualization of globalization and applying that to the traditional scheme of international society, based on the idea of 'world society.' This idea involves the analytical interplay among the three pillars of the English school: the concepts of the international system, international society, and world society. There is no simple zero-sum game between globalization and the international state system, they both coexist simultaneously. More specifically, Buzan distinguishes between international and world society by their respective composition of actors – territorial (states) and nonterritorial (nonstate) actors (Kacowicz and Mitrani 2016, 205). It should be added that the world society includes in itself the international society as one of its components.

In the third place, and against the current global crisis of the coronavirus pandemic, we can point out to the relevance and salience of global issues, which are difficult to accommodate within a sovereign-based international society. Global issues such as the environment and climate change, as well as poverty and underdevelopment, demand global solutions and mechanisms of global governance that are rather inexistent or inefficient, due to the reluctance of states to give up on their sovereign rights (see Armstrong 2011, 47). Economic globalization and global problems demand the establishment or creation of new political mechanisms that transcend the state system in order to cope with the complexities of our world. In this sense, global governance mechanisms are necessary in order to manage the new world order of economic and environmental globalization and global challenges and problems. And yet, we are stuck with the 'tragedy of the commons' in the inability of nation-states to cooperate effectively beyond borders due to the lingering Westphalian structure (see Hardin 1968).

Thus, we can concur with Barnett and Sikkink (2011, 749), that world politics is transitioning from a focus on international relations towards the emergence of a global or world society,

that challenges the relevance of the traditional international society. Barnett and Sikkink recognize that in the realities “of an increasingly dense fabric of international law, norms, and rules that promote forms of association and solidarity, the growing role of an increasingly dense network of state and nonstate actors that are involved in the production and revision of multi-layered governance structures, and the movement toward forms of dialogue that are designed to help identify shared values of ‘humankind’” (Barnett and Sikkink 2011, 750; see also Buzan 2004; Linklater and Suganami 2006).

Fourth, and in juxtaposition to the argument about solidarist values of humankind (as partially deployed in the attempts and practices of humanitarian intervention), and in a dialectical fashion, we experience nowadays a remarkable withdrawal from solidaristic, cosmopolitan normative common framework back to nationalism, which result in the erosion of the institutions of the liberal international order and the international society. We have to keep in mind that earlier European international societies were characterized by a common culture and shared values. Although all states in the United Nations have formally agreed to what Robert Jackson coins a *global covenant* based on the mutual respect for sovereignty and the promotion of human rights and democracy, it does not happen in practice (see Jackson 2000; and Armstrong 2011, 46). Two of the great world powers, China and Russia, directly and openly challenge the common norms and values of the liberal international order. Furthermore, the U.S. Trump Administration itself eroded the solidaristic principles of the international society. Moreover, based on developments over the past few years, this normative disagreement has been exacerbated by anti-globalist populism, as well as the practices and discourses of authoritarianism and nationalism, which corrode the underpinnings of the international society. Thus, in dialectic terms, and in direct ideological polarization and contradiction to solidarist versions of the international society, we find the growing influence of populist leaders that support each other, from Trump in the USA (until the end of 2020), Duterte in the Philippines, Netanyahu in Israel, and Bolsonaro in Brazil. These trends further exacerbate the inherent obstacles to international cooperation, stemming from the anarchical nature of the international society (see Oye 1986).

Facing these four intertwined challenges – the rise of non-state actors, globalization, the salience of global issues, and the lack of a common normative and cultural framework, we should assess now the continuing relevance of the international society – facing these challenges. In brief, the argument refers to the proliferation of mechanisms of regional and global governance, and the complex reality, already envisioned by Bull back in 1977, of ‘New Medievalism.’ Moreover, international society exists and persists even considering alternative scenarios of ‘world order,’ designed both in the Global North and in the Global South.

The Continuing Relevance of the International Society

As stated before, facing these substantial challenges, we want to argue that the idea and practices of international society can be – and actually they are—updated to the complex realities of the third decade of the 21st century, still being relevant, kicking and alive. We want to sustain this argument by linking the concept and practices of international society to the mechanisms of global and regional governance. Moreover, we find that alternative world orders, as depicted in the Global North and in the Global South, still assume as a given the

idea and practices of the international society, whether in the traditional, inter-state form, or in the global/world politics transformed version.

Links and Analogies between International Society, World Society, World Order, and Global Governance

The relevance and persistence of international society (also evolving into global/world society) can be argued by directly related it to the concept and realities of ‘global governance’ and ‘world order’. The concept of global governance provides us with a proper theoretical terminology to describe and analyze the *complex* of systems of rule-making, political coordination, and problem-solving that transcends states and societies, constructing new political realities and reconstructing old ones. Global governance does that by describing the structures and processes of governing beyond the state where there is no single supreme supranational political authority (Held and McGrew 2002, 8; Kacowicz 2012, 686-687).

There is a long tradition in the discipline of IR of studying the present and the future of international politics by imagining alternative “institutional designs” of alternative world orders as objects of interest in themselves (see Hakovirta 2004, 47). In this sense, global governance should be located along a continuum of the changing architecture of world politics in terms of governance (regional and global), as the newest classification of world order. Thus, within the two extremes of ‘international order’ and ‘world government’ we might recognize the different phases (and faces) of global governance.

At the first phase of the continuum of global governance, its initial form takes the shape of a pluralist and limited society of sovereign states, which embodies the idea of *international order* within an *anarchical international society* (see Bull 1977). There is an interesting parallel or analogy between the idea of an ‘anarchical international society’ and the concept of ‘global governance.’ Both concepts suggest the feasibility of a peaceful, progressive, benign, and well-ordered international regime in the absence of a unifying governmental, supranational entity (despite the connotation of the society being ‘anarchic’). Similarly, both ideas are imperfect, voluntaristic, lacking a real government, and aiming at the regulation of norms and the creation of common expectations (see Hurrell 2007, 3: and Yunker 2005, 213).

At a second phase in the continuum, with the impact of globalization, international society still remains relevant by evolving into a *world or global society*. As a result of the dynamics of globalization, which imply more than just increased interstate interdependence but rather the de-territorialization of the international relations, non-state entities such as benign and malign NGOs and less organized groups become crucial components of contemporary society, which becomes global rather than international, alongside the still very important role of nation-states (see Keohane 2005, 123).

Moreover, moving into the direction of world government (but without ever reaching it, otherwise the international/global society will cease to exist), it is obvious that globalization implies that we cannot still refer to an international order, but rather to a *world order*. By “world order” Bull meant “those patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the

elementary or primary goals of social life among mankind [humankind, AK] as a whole” (Bull 1977, 20). Thus, world order is a wider category of order than the international order, which embodies both the international society and the global/world society. It takes as its units of order not just nation-states, but rather individual human beings, and assesses the degree of order on the basis of the delivery of certain kinds of public goods (such as security, human rights, basic needs, or justice) for humanity as a whole (see Clark 2005, 730; Whitman 2005, 27; and Rosenau 1992, 5).

Alternative World Orders and the Lingering Relevance of the International Society: The View from the North

World order can mean alternative ‘architectural’ designs that include the international order itself (such as the ephemeral unipolar structure of the international system at the end of the Cold War, or the messy and uncertain transition to bipolarity (US-China) or multipolarity), yet, since they include humanity as a whole they might as well refer to processes of globalization, transcending the traditional structure of the state system, but still keeping intact the relevance of the international society and the role of states, and of course of the global/world society that incorporates non-state actors and the dynamics of globalization. Eight alternative (and sometimes overlapping) world order scenarios come to mind, all of them showing the relevance, resilience, and vitality of the international society and of the global society:

- (1) “New medievalism” and the overlapping of authorities and identities (see Bull 1977);
- (2) A “tale of two worlds”: North-South divide and bifurcation of the world (see Goldgeier and McFaul 1992);
- (3) A cultural “clash of civilizations” (see Huntington 1993 and 1996);
- (4) A “coming anarchy,” disorder and disarray spraying from the developing world into the developed one (see Kaplan 1994 and 2002);
- (5) Liberal globalism and the “end of history,” the triumph of globalization and liberal values (Friedman 2005; Fukuyama 1989 and 2006);
- (6) A multilateral and polycentric world: The end of U.S. hegemony and a “multiplex” world instead (Acharya 2014; Kupchan 2012 and 2014);
- (7) A fluid world (Bauman 2012), an international order of globalized states that includes the dynamic forces of globalization, nationalism, and regionalism (Clark 2011; Kacowicz 1999); and
- (8) A cosmopolitan and global democracy, but without necessarily reaching a world government (Falk 1999 and 2002).

For the sake of brevity, I will refer here in detail to the 1st and 7th world order’s scenarios from the North, the ‘New Medievalism’ and a ‘fluid’ world, which are particularly relevant for Bull’s continuing relevance in explaining the contemporary international society.

The New Medievalism

One possible manifestation of world order is the idea (and also practice and reality) of *new medievalism*. In 1977, Bull coined the term to refer to a “modern and secular equivalent of the kind of universal political organization that existed in Western Christendom in the Middle Ages. In that system no ruler or state was sovereign in the sense of being supreme over a given territory and a given segment of the Christian population; each had to share authority with vassals beneath, and with the Pope and (in Germany and Italy) the Holy Roman Emperor above” (Bull 1977, 254).

Thus, neo-medievalism as a particular world order of the contemporary international society and/or world society encompasses a political order in which individuals are governed by a number of overlapping authorities and multiple identities. In this model of world order, the state would transfer some of its powers to international institutions (at the regional or global levels), which would deal with global problems, through mechanisms of global and regional governance. Moreover, the state would also transfer some other powers to domestic actors and regions (at the sub-national level), where the sense of a distinctive cultural identity and community remains strong (see Linklater 2011).

Bull spoke of a ‘new medievalism’ to connote the fragmentation of political authority reminiscent of the pre-Westphalian era, although he did not believe that other political actors were yet strong enough to offer a serious challenge to the paramount role of the nation-state in global politics. About forty years later, the logic of ‘new medievalism’ and the overlapping of political authority and identities, at the sub-national, supra-national, transnational, and global levels have become more and more relevant, in order to make sense of our current world order, and as a depiction of global governance. Thus, the contemporary relocation, allocation, and delegation of political authority among several layers of global governance (international, sub-national, transnational, supra-national, public, and private) resembles the complexity of competing and overlapping jurisdictions and spheres of political action and responsibility that characterized medieval Europe (see Held and McGrew 2002, 10; and Linklater 2011). In practical terms, we can find innumerable contemporary examples of ‘new medievalism’ in the daily realities of Europe, the privatization of security across the world, the increasing role of international organizations, the disintegration of states, like the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the rise of multinational corporations and social networks, and the technological shrinking of the world (see Jackson and Sorensen 2003, 172).

A “Fluid” World: An International and Hybrid Order of Globalized States

A second world order scenario that reflects the continuing relevance of the international society is an international and hybrid order of globalized states, a ‘fluid’ world. Joseph Gratale (2016) suggested that the most accurate world order to describe today’s world is encapsulated in Zygmunt Bauman’s genial metaphor of globalization and modernity as “liquid.” In Bauman’s own terms, “liquid modernity is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty” (Bauman 2012, viii).

Without falling into the traps of sheer post-modern arguments, we might agree with Gratale's analysis that our contemporary international society is characterized by both change and continuity. Despite globalization (liquid), the nation-state still matters (in solid, material terms, and not just as an idea). While it might be 'imagined,' the idea of the nation remains robust and nationalism is still appealing, as the forceful return of the state in the current coronavirus crisis shows. Moreover, despite the increasing de-territorialization of international relations in the last few decades, geography and borders are not dead. Geopolitics matters, and national borders serve as both bridges and barriers, for inclusion and exclusion (see Gratale 2016).

Similarly, we might argue that the nation-state does not disappear, it is everything else that changes as well. The nation-state remains an important political actor in the contemporary international society, but in functional terms, it is no longer the same kind of institution (Hettne 2002, 12). Similarly, regionalism and regional institutions play a more relevant role in the architecture of 'New Medievalism' that characterizes contemporary global politics.

Thus, the international society remains relevant in this hybrid world order, both territorialized and deterritorialized. In a similar vein, Ian Clark suggested the categorization of the current world order as an *international order of globalized states*. Its agenda includes the managing of relations between states penetrated by the global system, but still distinguishable within it (Clark 2011, 547 and 554). In this analysis, globalization does not make the state disappear, but it affects and transforms its functions and role. After all, we might argue that 'globalization is what states make of it,' so the international order of the international society is still relevant, though it becomes a *globalized* international order.

In a similar vein, I suggested more than two decades ago that three political forces shape world politics in the contemporary international society, interacting among them: globalization, regionalization, and nationalism. These three forces cannot be assessed in isolation, independently from one another, nor from a perspective of either convergence or divergence among them. Rather, globalization, regionalization, and nationalism should be captured and studied as forces relative to and overlapping one another, sometimes antagonistic and sometimes cooperative toward each other, but never harmonious (see Kacowicz 1999).

Alternative World Orders and the Lingering Relevance of the International Society: The View from the South

As Barnett and Sikkink cogently argue, we should keep in mind that the design of alternative world orders that refer to the contemporary international and world society is different if you look at the world from the perspective of the Global South rather than the Global North. In that sense, based on the historical record of colonialism and post-colonialism, scholars, analysts and practitioners of Third World states emphasize hierarchy, rather than anarchy, as the defining organizing principle of international relations and global politics (see Barnett and Sikkink 2011, 753). Still, reviewing the scholarship of Latin American contributions, interpretations, and understandings of

different world orders, we find different analyses that are also compatible and show the relevance of the international society, as follows:

- (1) The promotion and enhancing of a Latin American regional international society, including the enhancement of norms of international law and institutions (see Kacowicz 2005);
- (2) Developmentalism (*desarrollismo*), emphasizing the role of the state and the economic asymmetries in the ‘terms of trade’ between the North and the South (see Prebisch 1950, 1959; and Furtado 1964);
- (3) The Latin American dependency school (*dependencia*), emphasizing the negative role and impact of international structural factors, first and foremost the U.S. influence, the role of the international financial institutions, and the transnational presence of multinational corporations for the region’s economics and politics (see Cardoso and Faletto 1979);
- (4) The ‘autonomy approach’, relying on a multi-level analysis at the national, regional, and global realms: diversifying alliances in terms of foreign policy, promoting region-building, and enhancing attempts to reshape the rules of the international regimes in the global economy (see Puig 1980; and Jaguaribe 1979).
- (5) “Peripheral Realism”: Developing countries should adjust and adapt to the asymmetrical and unequal relations between the countries of the Global North and those of the Global South (see Escudé 1995; 1997; 2016).
- (6) Regionalism and multilateralism: Regionalism has been a central idea, school, approach and political praxis in the development of the international relations in the last two centuries of Latin America’s history, embodying and reflecting upon the possibilities and challenges posed by the quest for economic development and political autonomy (see Deciancio 2016, 94-96; Deciancio and Tussie 2019, 6-7; Tussie 2009; and Tussie 2018; and Kacowicz and Wajner, forthcoming).

Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that the idea, concept, and practices of ‘international society’ as developed by Hedley Bull in 1977 remain relevant to explain the complex realities of international relations and global politics in the third decade of the twenty-first century. In the last forty years, international society has evolved and merged into the broader idea and realities of world (or global) society. Moreover, innumerable challenges to the current international system and society have questioned its relevance and vitality. Still both international society and global society remain essential frameworks, both in analytical terms and as reflections of reality, to make sense of our contemporary world.

The practices of the contemporary international society include the five original primary institutions as posited by Bull (i.e, the balance of power; mechanisms of international law; diplomacy; war; the management of great power), in addition to international trade. Moreover, these practices include mechanisms of multilateralism, regional and global governance, and humanitarian intervention. The major challenges to the contemporary

international society include the rise of non-state actors; the impact of globalization and the preponderance of global issues; and the lack of global and shared norms, in both cultural and normative (moral) terms.

Facing these substantial challenges, I argue that the contemporary international society remains relevant and pertinent by linking the concept and practices of international society to the mechanisms of global and regional governance. Moreover, I find that alternative world orders, as depicted in the Global North and in the Global South, still assume as given the idea and practices of the international society, whether in the traditional, inter-state form, or in the global/world politics version, transformed and adapted. This can be illustrated especially through the perusal of two such alternative world orders, 'new medievalism' and an international and hybrid order of globalized states.

By the end of the day, the ongoing discussion between the two versions of the English school, the 'pluralist' and the 'solidarist', reflect an important philosophical and normative discussion (in moral terms), regarding the possible clash and overlapping between two major principles and values that impact and regulate the international society, order and justice (see Barnett and Sikkink 2011). The debate about which of this two values has to have paramountcy in shaping global politics remains relevant today, as it was forty years ago.

As a way of conclusions, I suggest the following assumptions/hypotheses to be further considered and explored:

- There are significant challenges to the idea, concept, and practices of the international society that erode the functioning and relevance of its primary institutions.
- World politics is transitioning from a focus on international relations towards the emergence of a global or world society, which challenges the relevance of the traditional international society, while simultaneously embodying and including it.
- Mechanisms of regional and global governance assume and prove the continuing relevance of the international society as part of its fundamental practices.
- The complex realities of current 'world orders,' such as 'New Medievalism' and multilateralism, coexist with the idea and practices of the international society.
- The major policy and moral dilemmas of the international society still involve the potential clash between considerations of order and considerations of justice.

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