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## Possibilities of Assessing the Changing Nature of International Politics in the Coming Multi-Order World

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### *Summary*

In her recent, praised and prized paper, 'The Coming Multi-Order World', Trine Flockhart has argued that the current international system is moving towards one consisting of several different orders 'nested within an overall international system'. When he claimed something similar in his book *World Order*, Henry Kissinger was labeled as a constructivist by some commentators. In Kissinger's case, these changes are particularly consequential, given that they bring about the unprecedented danger of simultaneous breakup within and across the many orders of today's world. The author's intention here is twofold: on the one hand, to examine what are the changes in the very notion of international politics, given the transformation of classical concepts such as interests, identities, sovereignty, legitimacy, conflict and cooperation. On the other hand, and this is the central issue, to look for suitable theoretical frameworks to successfully grasp the changing nature of international politics and the realities of the coming multi-order world. The presumed answer is that the nature of the incoming changes produces the need for more subtle and complex, cross-over theories of international relations. As it is obvious from Kissinger's example, traditional realist theory and social constructivism seem to converge irresistibly. In that sense, 'hybrid' theories such as Barkin's realist constructivism and 'liberal realism' of the English School seem to be gaining on traditional grand theories in regard to their relevance and research potential.

*Keywords:* Constructivism, International Politics, International System, Multipolarity, Realism

### **Introduction**

The issue of order has been one of the central elements of politics since its emergence as a social phenomenon and as a scientific discipline.<sup>1</sup> The modern, West-

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phalian notion of international politics is particularly oriented towards the issue of order: its emergence, transformations and sustaining. Sources of the order's legitimacy or its material foundations have, naturally, been changing in accordance with historical forces that have shaped it, but the notion itself has never lost its significance: perceived either as a goal, a state of affairs, or, within social sciences, an analytic tool. Occasional overuse of the concept has, at times, produced significant confusion regarding its meaning, scope or constitutive parts, but its paramount importance in the context of conducting social relations or their systematic explaining and understanding has rarely been questioned.

The Cold War's end, as a particularly turbulent moment in the modern history of international politics, was no exception in this regard. On the contrary, the 1980s brought about increasing interest in problems of what was correctly perceived as a dramatically changing global order. The hyper-production of articles, books and various comments on the nature of the coming transformations or the positions of the world's two superpowers ensued, in academic and wider social circles alike. A famous debate on America's position and supposed imminent decline in the context of imperial overstretching (Kennedy, 1987; Nye, 1990) at the onset of the fall of the Berlin Wall, set the stage for further disputes about perspectives of international order, the one between Fukuyama's 'end of history' and Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' being perhaps the most intensive and far-reaching (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1996). President G. H. W. Bush announced the New World Order in 1990 and for almost a decade thereafter, the 'unipolar moment' seemed like a stable condition of global politics. American primacy was regularly perceived as an almost unquestionable perspective and, by many U.S. authors, as an absolute strategic priority (Brzezinski, 1997).

As international history has condensed at the turn of the century, with far-ranging events occurring with increased dynamics, the global academic and policy community struggled to keep up with deep changes in global politics. The role of the United States of America is constantly being reassessed – given its position as the still dominant but gradually waning power (Kupchan, 2002; Mandelbaum, 2005), especially in the context of the post-9/11 global war on terror, as well as in the context of a power shift to the East and elsewhere (Khanna, 2008) and what Fareed Zakaria identified as 'the rise of the rest' (Zakaria, 2009).

The second decade of the twenty-first century brought about not only further and more serious transformations in the nature of international order, but also a significant change of discourse: what was previously claimed to be turbulence or the re-composition of the order, has increasingly been viewed as a crisis, breakdown, collapse, or 'disarray' (Ikenberry, 2011; Brzezinski, 2012; Mandelbaum, 2016; Bremmer, 2015; Emmott, 2017; Kirchick, 2017; Haass, 2017). This was, no doubt,

predominantly in relation to the notion of the post-World War II ‘liberal world order’, although it may very well be discussed whether such an order has ever been truly global (Kissinger, 2014). In 2016, the outcomes of the British EU membership referendum and the U.S. presidential election marked the triumph of radical re-conceptualization of international politics, including issues such as the value of globalization, the role of international political, economic and security regimes, or the importance of identity politics. A distinctive direction assumed by some authors was based on the thesis that the global order, even before it collapsed, was dramatically changed by becoming ungoverned, or unadministered: rather than the G-7 or the G-20, it was ‘G-Zero’ that now (mis)managed ‘no one’s world’ (Bremmer, 2012; Kupchan, 2012).

It is evident that the IR literature has aspired to follow, as closely as possible, the transformations of the international system, as well as those within it. The current state of affairs, regarding the changing world order, has caught the attention of much of the literature, especially as it becomes clear that as the order is changing, the instruments of its explanation and understanding must change also. What were before two irreconcilable approaches to the study of world politics – realism and constructivism – now seem to converge as international practices become too complex to be analyzed one-sidedly. This paper draws upon Trine Flockhart’s notion of the ‘coming multi-order world’ (Flockhart, 2016) in the endeavor to outline the emergence, or re-emergence, of hybrid theoretical frameworks, particularly suitable for the analysis of this phenomenon.

After the introductory section, the paper is divided into three main parts. In the first one, some basic concepts of international systems and orders are outlined. The second part deals with the supposed collapse of international order, arguing that rather than breaking down, the system is undergoing a radical transformation. The third and final part explores some specific details concerning the changing nature of international politics and attempts at explaining how theoretical approaches and concepts converge in order to effectively assess the recognized changes.

## **Systems and Orders**

The very definition of the international system is a problem that has long occupied the attention of political scientists. It is, at the beginning, crucially important to stress that what is meant by ‘international system’ does not comprise all the sectors of international life – however indisputably intertwined they may be. The international system is actually the international political system, and this fact, according to Waltz (1979: 79), produces certain methodological and epistemological requirements:

To be a success, such a theory<sup>2</sup> has to show how international politics can be conceived of as a domain distinct from the economic, social, and other international domains that one may conceive of. To mark international-political systems off from other international systems, and to distinguish systems-level from unit-level forces, requires showing how political structures are generated and how they affect, and are affected by, the units of the system.

In Waltz's structural realist theory, the notion of international system corresponds to one of structure, which is, along with the system's units, its constitutive element. Waltz defines structure as a 'system wide component', which 'makes it possible to think of the system as a whole' (*ibid.*). Structure is 'defined by the arrangement of its parts and comprised of three constitutive elements: ordering principle (which, in international politics, is anarchy), the character of the units (states) and distribution of capabilities' (*ibid.*: 88-101).

The distribution of capabilities is nothing else than the differentiation of states according to their power and the possibilities to project it. The outcome of such a differentiation is that some units are relatively easily defined as great powers and these are the core elements of a system's polarity. When changes at the systemic level of international politics are discussed, it is by definition an issue of changes in the system's polarity (from multipolar, to bipolar, to unipolar). Or, as Waltz (*ibid.*: 97) puts it:

The structure of a system changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across the system's units. And changes in structure change expectations about how the units of the system will behave and about the outcomes their interactions will produce.

This means that polarity is not studied as just one of the random properties of the international system, rather, it directly affects the states' behavior and their strategies (Lišanin, 2016: 531-532). In other words, it would be a mistake to assume that great power status provides a state with the possibilities of completely unconstrained action; rather, it very much limits their maneuvering space (Braumoeller, 2012). According to Mearsheimer, great power status even represents a sort of curse, given that great powers are almost never satisfied with the amount of power they have, which urges them to engage in perpetual, often brutal competition, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the 'tragedy of great power politics' (Mearsheimer, 2001). Incentives for such behavior come from the level of the international system, and specifically, its three main properties:

<sup>2</sup> A theory that can successfully explain international-political outcomes (M. L.).

1) the absence of a central authority that sits above states and can protect them from each other, 2) the fact that states always have some offensive military capability, and 3) the fact that states can never be certain about other states' intentions (*ibid.*: 3).

There is no doubt that the international system produces consequences observable at the unit level; behavior or characteristics of units may, in turn, affect the nature of the system. But when and how does a system become an order? The traditional English School concept, put forth by Hedley Bull (2002: 9) and utilized also by Trine Flockhart (2016: 12), stipulates that

A system of states (or international system) is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions, to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole.

In order to form a society, however, being in regular contact and including the other in one's own strategic calculations is not sufficient; the element of a common sense of adherence to values is necessary. It is worth quoting Bull's passage on international society in toto:

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, recognising certain common interests and perhaps some common values, they regard themselves as bound by certain rules in dealings with one another, such as that they should respect one another's claims to independence, that they should honour 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.

According to Bull, order can be sustained at the level of the international system, international society and the world society (which, aside from being 'morally prior', is deeper and wider than the international society and remains out of the scope of our analysis for this purpose). His definition of order in any social life is 'a pattern of human activity that sustains elementary, primary or universal goals of social life', those goals being the physical security of life, adherence to promises made, and the stability of property ('possession of things') (Bull, 2002: 4). An international order can thus be defined as 'a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or the international society' (*ibid.*: 8).

Trine Flockhart emphasizes an additional and very important distinction, i. e. the one

between order as a condition characterized by the achievement of three fundamental goals related to life, truth and property and order as an object constituted through a set of activities and practices linked to a specific set of values and institutions. The latter is what is often described as ‘the international order’, but confusingly it is also functionally equivalent to Bull’s key concept – ‘international society’. The problem is that the concepts of ‘order’, ‘international order’ and ‘international society’ are difficult to separate, and the focus of the current debate on ‘the international order’ appears to actually be about changes in the ‘international system’ – albeit without a clear distinction being offered between system, society and order.

Although it is stated that there are three different levels upon which order can be traced, ‘it is clear that Bull thought that order would most likely be produced at the international society level’ (Flockhart, 2016: 13). Being founded upon a sense of common interests, order needs rules and institutions to come to life. In sustaining the three primary goals of social life, order is predominantly (re)produced through five ‘primary institutions’ of international society (Bull, 2002: 62-71, 97-222): the balance of power, international law, the diplomatic mechanism, the managerial system of the great powers, and war. Instead of representing formal institutions, such as international organizations (those would be ‘secondary institutions’), these are ‘an expression of the element of collaboration among states in discharging their political functions – and at the same time a means of sustaining this collaboration’ (*ibid.*: 71). Also, Bull’s identification of institutions that sustain the international order is a good illustration of the reason the English School is sometimes called ‘liberal realism’: some important concepts from both liberal and realist theory are represented.

It is clear that Bull’s notion of international society very much corresponds to the phenomenon of a ‘liberal international order’. Flockhart resolves the tension between order as a condition and order as an object by stating that ‘the condition of order as the achievement of the three fundamental goals is to be found through the object as in the international order’ (Flockhart, 2016: 13). As it was mentioned earlier, whether such an order is sometimes deservedly rendered the ‘global liberal order’, or ‘world liberal order’, even in the era and context of the Washington Consensus, is, of course, highly debatable. It is not an issue of a binary model, either the presence or absence of order, as Lake (2014: 61) stipulates when he argues that

Order is a fundamental feature of world politics, but it is not a constant. It waxes and wanes with corresponding ebbs and flows, yet not in any predictable lunar cycle.

Rather, the issue is a possibility of simultaneous existence of a multiplicity of international orders, regardless of whether or not they constitute a more general world order (Kissinger, 2014). This enables us to make a distinction not only between system breakdown and transformation, but also between system-based and order-based inquiries and analyses of world politics.

### **The Changing Nature of International Politics: A New World Disorder or a Multi-Order World?**

Koivisto and Dunne (2010: 620) are correct when they argue that there are two predominant accounts of the liberal order's crisis: 'one suggesting the crisis is one of US-led post-war international order, the other unpacking the crisis as a legitimization crisis of the deeper institutions of contemporary international society'. Some of those accounts were mentioned in the introductory section. However, two important remarks must be made: one, the debates about the crisis of international order (often mistaken for the global order) largely correspond with the views of the institutional legitimization crisis; and two, accounts of the crisis of American power and US-led international order are much closer to debates on the crisis of the international system (although the legitimacy dimension is not automatically excluded from this perspective).

This is important because, having this distinction in mind, it is easier to estimate whether there is a crisis or breakdown of the international order, or it is all about the ill-perceived transformation of the international system (i.e. its polarity). After all, in spite of all the turbulence in contemporary world politics, it can hardly be disputed that the world is safer and richer today than it has ever been. The trends, negative developments, the potential for an actual breakdown is what actually incites premature declarations of an actual collapse (Haass, 2017).

Whether perceived as a crisis of the international liberal order's legitimacy, or the crisis of power among its main proponents (most notably, the US), the current global turbulence can be viewed through the inability of the order's mechanisms to deal with the challenges that hamper its survival. Almost every major crisis since the onset of the twenty first century, from the global war on terror, to the global financial crisis, to the Arab Spring, can be used as a showcase in this context. It has also been wrongly claimed, within the academia, as well as the policy community, that the main concepts of the liberal order are in fact, or soon will be, global in scope: one such example is Iraq since 2003, as 'a war of liberal hubris', waged on the 'false premise of universal desirability of liberal values' (Kitchen and Cox, 2011: 82).

All of this, along with the rise of populism and the return of identity politics (Brexit and Donald Trump's election win being symbols of the trend), strengthens

Kissinger's bluntly put claim that 'no truly global "world order" has ever existed' (Kissinger, 2014: 2). Thus, the 'liberal world order' has not broken down, but significant changes within particular international orders, as well as transformation of the overall structure of the international system are undoubtedly present.

Such turbulence produces, and is in turn itself produced by, some very specific changes in the main concepts of international social life. The aforementioned re-emergence of identity politics has fortified the position of the nation state as an actor: to speak in a Wendtian manner, identities and interests of actors are being (re) constructed under systemic-level influences (Wendt, 1999). This, in turn, reinvigorates the issue of Westphalian type state sovereignty, thus exposing liberalism's inherent ambivalence towards the issue of sovereignty (Ikenberry, 2011: 289-290); or, to summon another classical author, regarding issues of state sovereignty, in the environment of the international system, purpose beats rules and 'the logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness' (Krasner, 1999: 6).

At the system level, it is clear that the role of the previously hegemonic actor is diminishing, whether by choice or by external forces of the environment. In that context, and bearing in mind clearly the re-emerging significance of a number of units, almost all actors of significance become, to some extent, revisionist (Schweller, 1994; Lišanin, 2014: 452-454) – their interests are systemically shaped that way. That is why system units seem, and often in fact are, more conflict-prone than they have been in the recent past. In addition, the crisis of order legitimacy influences the framework of international cooperation: multilateral political, economic and security regimes seem to retrench in importance, and give way to traditional bilateral diplomacy or great-power-concert-like arrangements.

Along with deep political changes in the US, and perhaps even deeper crisis in the EU, Chinese economic and Russian military assertiveness, as well as the Middle Eastern collapse, seem to perfectly encapsulate all the presented changes. Different orders are produced and sustained on the basis of systemically shaped identities and interests. According to Kissinger, four distinct, competing notions of order are traceable in a historical perspective: European-Westphalian, Chinese, Islamic and American (Kissinger, 2014) now exist simultaneously. This means that, apart from rival states, the world also contains rival, culture-historically founded orders. Even though Huntington's bleak predictions regarding the relations of such civilizational clusters have not been fulfilled, it is obvious that the world is in flux and that cultural differentiations play a role in this process. Does this produce adequate flux in the field of international theory?

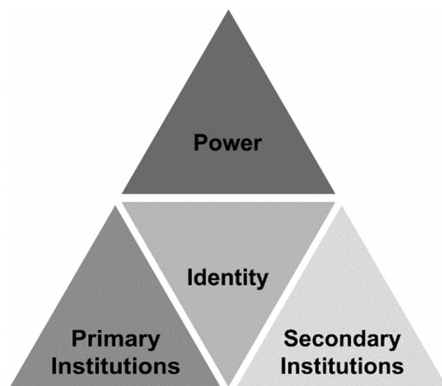


## Converging Theories

According to Flockhart (2016: 14),

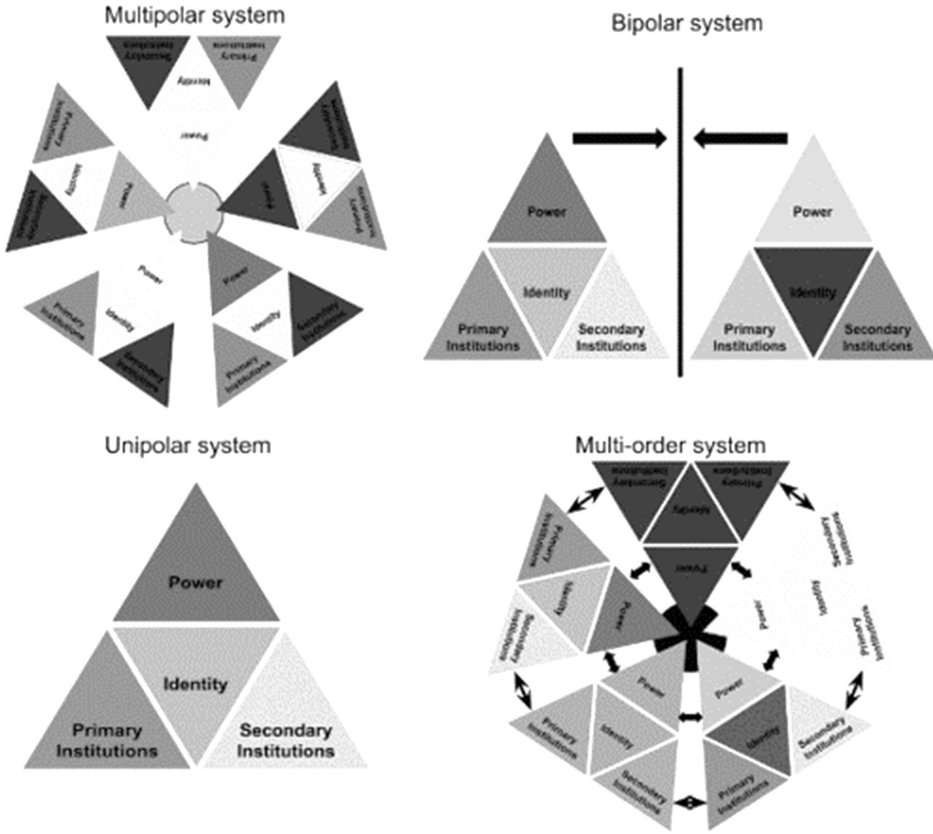
In its most basic form an international society – or an international order – may be understood as a cluster (or club) of sovereign states or nations with shared values, norms and interests, expressed through a number of institutions both primary ones that are informal and evolved (rather than designed) and performed through fundamental and durable shared practices and secondary ones that are formal and designed and which perform specific administrative and regulative functions.

In addition to primary and secondary institutions, an international order also rests upon elements of sovereignty/power (intrinsic to a state-based society) and identity, as a foundation of internal cohesion. Presented graphically, it would look like this:



**Figure 1.** The Ideal Type of International Society (Flockhart, 2016: 15).

Flockhart also argues that ‘it is difficult to imagine an international system that is not characterized by at least a minimum degree of social relations and that an international system therefore is likely to have some social attributes that are likely to be similar to those in an international society’ (*ibid.*: 17). She then proceeds to present some previous types of international systems, before pointing out that the latest transformation has brought about an essentially novel system: a system of orders, or a multi-order world (Figure 2 on the next page). The main issue regarding prospects in world politics is thus a possibility of the coexistence of orders within such a system, given that ‘the primary dynamics are likely to be within and between different orders, rather than between multiple sovereign states’ (*ibid.*: 23). So, the states remain primary actors of international politics, but their interests are mediated through an international, sub-global order they belong to.



**Figure 2.** Varieties of International Systems (Flockhart, 2016: 19).

Primary concern regarding the future of such an order is whether the dynamics will dominantly be sustained by identity, or by regions, i.e. geographic proximity. Flockhart argues that identity will represent the primary drive, while Henry Kissinger (2014: 371) stresses different fears – that failing to reconstruct the overall international system might result in a violent struggle among various identity-embedded but regionally-based orders:

The penalty for failing will be not so much a major war between states (though in some regions this is not foreclosed) as an evolution into spheres of influence identified with particular domestic structures and forms of governance – for example, the Westphalian model as against the radical Islamist version. At its edges each sphere would be tempted to test its strength against other entities of orders deemed illegitimate. They would be networked for instantaneous communication and impinging on one another constantly. In time the tensions of this process would de-

generate into maneuvers for status or advantage on a continental scale or even worldwide. A struggle between regions could be even more debilitating than the struggle between nations has been.

The contemporary quest for world order will require a coherent strategy to establish a concept of order within the various regions, and to relate these regional orders to one another. These goals are not necessarily identical or self-reconciling: the triumph of a radical movement might bring order to one region while setting the stage for turmoil in and with all others. The domination of a region by one country militarily, even if it brings the appearance of order, could produce a crisis for the rest of the world.

There are, of course, somewhat different assessments of the state of the international system. According to Schweller (2010: 147), for instance, the system was, in 2010, still unipolar, which, due to specificities of the unipole's position, made polarity centered analysis somewhat meaningless:

What may be more important than polarity is the increase in the number and kinds of state and nonstate actors that can affect the system's outcomes. That is to say, the system's process variables, not its structure, may be driving the current dynamics of world politics.

It is precisely this increase in the number of state actors that coincides with the system's apparent turn to multipolarity. In Schweller's opinion (*ibid.*: 153-160), there might be two potential roads to multipolarity:

- (1) contenders for polar status deliberately undermine the current order and then replace it with a new one by means of balancing behavior; or
- (2) a spontaneously generated equilibrium develops not from balancing behavior but from uneven rates of growth among egoistic actors seeking wealth, not power.

It may well be argued that both of those cases might occur, or even are occurring, within different sub-global orders, and that Schweller's notion of 'road to multipolarity' largely corresponds to the idea of 'the coming multi-order world'.

Does the discipline of International Relations actually have the necessary tools to adequately grasp these processes? In the context of what seems to be a radical transformation within the very core of international politics, international theory is often deemed impotent; this being a result precisely of the contemporary lack of interest in the nature of politics, or, as Reus-Smit (2012: 534-535) puts it:

By our own declaration, we are students of 'global politics' as much as international relations. Yet our embrace of the global has been matched by a declining interest in the political. The number of books and articles published in IR increases every year, and these are peppered with references to 'political' practices, 'political' institutions, 'political' actors, 'political' power and the 'political' realm. One

struggles to find IR scholars discussing the nature of politics, however. Like the concept of power, we use the terminology constantly while seldom probing its meaning.

Reus-Smit considers this problem in the context of frequent accusations that IR theory is ‘practically irrelevant’. But it can also be observed in the context of our analysis of whether analytical tools of contemporary international theory (or, perhaps, multiple theories) are sufficient to cope with issues of turbulences in present-day international system.

It is the argument of this paper that analytic apparatuses of traditional IR paradigms are mostly not sufficient if one wants to grasp the realities of the coming multi-order world. This is due to the fact that 1) traditional paradigms are built on different levels of inquiry (e.g. epistemology vs. ontology), and, perhaps more importantly, 2) they are, thus, oriented toward different elements of international social life, all of which might prove crucial for successful research.

As the international system changes, so do the tools for its assessment. One way of conducting such a change is for each theory to sharpen its own research tools by devising additional hypotheses in response to new empirical challenges, while conserving the theoretical “hard core”, i. e. the set of its main assumptions – in Lakatosian terms, this would represent an intra-paradigmatic problemshift.<sup>3</sup> Another way is to alter the very core of the theory, thus changing its very nature to the extent that it becomes something genuinely new (inter-paradigmatic shift). Leaving aside that, according to Lakatos, such changes can be made for the purpose of ad hoc repair of a paradigm, which would make the shift “degenerative”, it is only logical that, in the context of said systemic changes, traditional approaches might converge, thus creating hybrid paradigms or theories that are more suitable for responding to the challenges of contemporary international politics. The English School approach,<sup>4</sup> as represented by Hedley Bull, but also a number of contemporary thinkers including Tim Dunne, is such a hybrid approach in and of itself, given that it combines crucial concepts from both realist and liberal traditions – which is clearly illustrated, for instance, by Bull’s notion of primary institutions that sustain international order.

Another widely employed approach which can be considered at least methodologically – but also, arguably, epistemologically innovative, is neoclassical realism. It can be contended that its attempt to surmount the traditional innenpolitik/foreign policy duality represents a qualitative leap that goes beyond mere reconceptualiza-

<sup>3</sup> See: Lakatos, 1989; for a wider appraisal of the discipline from the Lakatosian perspective, see: Elman and Elman, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See: Dunne, 1998.

tion of realism's core concepts. But an even more potent hybrid might be the one created by the crossing of realism and constructivism, often a priori rejected due to the approaches' prima facie incompatibility. Claims of incompatibility come from both camps, and are supported by dubious arguments (Barkin, 2003: 326):

Claims by constructivists that realist theory is incompatible with intersubjective epistemologies and methodologies are based on either caricatures or very narrow understandings of realism. And realist critics of constructivism are similarly guilty of inferring from the worldviews of some (perhaps many) practicing constructivists that the methodology is inherently biased toward liberalism. An examination of constructivist epistemology and classical realist theory suggests that they are, in fact, compatible; not, of course, that good constructivism is necessarily realist, but that constructivist research is as compatible with a realist worldview as with any other.

Given that constructivism, in this context, is not considered an IR theory in the same way that realism is, what looks as a point of incompatibility actually provides an opportunity for a kind of social-scientific merger: the result being a theory that would rest upon realist assumptions on how the world works and constructivist assumptions on how best to study the ways the world works. As Brown (2013: 490) puts it:

It is, I hope, clear that constructivism is not a theory of IR in the sense that liberalism and realism are theories of IR – rather, it is a set of dispositions towards social reality that lead to placing more emphasis on ideas, values, norms and practices than is the case with both rational choice and structuralist theories. The role of theory here is rather different from that of its role in liberalism or realism, for example – much more to do with identifying areas for research than with developing explanatory concepts.

To go back to Barkin's aforementioned stance, this would mean: to utilize a constructivist methodology to study realism-identified issues; or, to put it the other way around, to fill constructivist epistemological construction with realist substance. After all, constructivism, especially in its "soft" or "moderate" form, exemplified by Alexander Wendt, can inherently be understood as either a refinement of Waltzian realism, or as a *via media* between realist and more radical constructivist approaches (Popović, 2016: 94-104, 104-107). Nonetheless, in order for such a bold theoretical endeavor to be fulfilled, one must 'move beyond' the traditional rationalist-constructivist debate (Jackson and Nexon, 2013: 555-556):

Some difficulties stem from the inherent limitations of positing a critical intellectual opposition between 'rationalist' and 'constructivist' theories. Rationalism is generally compatible with claims that significant aspects of political life are so-

cially and historically contingent rather than ‘determined by the nature of things’. But the opposition of rationalism to constructivism follows only from a very narrow reading of rationalism: as a claim that the decision-making procedures that drive human choices are both invariant and also structured by unmediated and objective features of the world.

This could be achieved by adopting the stance that Hans Mouritzen (2017) calls compatibilism: as opposed to perspectivism, which encloses perspectives entirely within their own understanding of the world, thus making any paradigmatic integration impossible, it ‘holds that the perspectives should – for explanatory purposes – be made compatible by the conscious effort of the analyst’. In this sense, compatibility means that theoretical approaches ‘should be mutually competitive, possibly offering contradictory real-world predictions, but (in some cases) ultimately supplementing one another in a specific explanation’ (Mouritzen, 2017: 633). The main perspectives usually seen as almost or completely incompatible are realism and constructivism, but the difference between perspectivism and compatibilism is what is really important; especially given that it has roots in their epistemological discrepancies. Namely, Mouritzen states that the issue with perspectivism is that it is based on epistemological idealism, which means that ‘there is no reality existing independently from the models and hence no neutral ground outside them’ (*ibid.*: 646); at the same time, compatibilism is rooted in epistemological/ontic realism, meaning that there is an “outside” reality, existing separately from theoretical models, with “truth” representing correspondence between the two.

According to Mouritzen, realism is much more adequate for the act of ‘borrowing’ from other perspectives than, for instance, liberalism. Neoclassical realism, with its endorsement of unit-level variables in providing explanations and predictions (cf. Ripsman et al., 2016), thus represents a good example of compatibilist design, and Mouritzen demonstrates this by attempting to explain the difference between German and Swedish answers to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. The way he does this is by employing the geopolitical perspective (‘realism with a map’) while borrowing from the constructivist perspective of ‘lessons of the past’. His goal is not to fully integrate the theories, or blend their epistemologies, but to show how elements from one can be borrowed by the other, provided that this is conducted on the same explanatory level.

Suggested ‘wider’ reading of both rationalist (in this case: realist) and constructivist approaches should come about within a more general process of introducing ‘integrative pluralism’ to the field of IR theorizing, as suggested by Dunne et al. (2013: 416-417), which ‘accepts and preserves the validity of a wide range of theoretical perspectives and embraces theoretical diversity as a means of providing more comprehensive and multi dimensional accounts of complex phenomena’.

That way, a prospect for forging more potent, hybrid approaches to studies of world politics could emerge. Diverse features of the coming multi-order world seem to particularly incite such a development. A realist brand of constructivism, proposed by Barkin (2003: 338), could that way

study the relationship between normative structures, the carriers of political morality, and uses of power. And, as a result, realist constructivism could address issues of change in international relations in a way that neither idealist constructivism (with its ultimately static view of political morality) nor positivist-materialist realism (with its dismissive view of political morality) can manage. In doing so, a realist constructivism could fill a gap in theorizing in IR between mainstream theorizing and critical theory.

A particularly ambitious effort is made by Gallarotti, with the development of the concept of ‘cosmopolitan power’ as a tool for analyzing the power dynamics of the contemporary world (Gallarotti, 2010). His goal is to cross paradigmatic boundaries by synthesizing realism, neoliberalism and constructivism in order to produce a theory of power optimization. His effort is all the more enthusiastic given that it is precisely the issue of power that dominates most of the theoretical misunderstandings among the three; but it seems largely successful. He begins by mapping the soft power concept in “less likely places” – the great texts of realism, only to develop the concept of cosmopolitan power, whose logic ‘suggests that norms and cooperation [...] can function as instruments of national power’ (*ibid.*: 268), before demonstrating the way this works through case studies.

Both Mouritzen’s idea of compatibilist borrowing and Gallarotti’s effort to synthesize various paradigms (and this also goes for other similar attempts) demand that we dispose of excessive theoretical rigidity, in the form of Mouritzen’s perspectivism or Schweller’s paradigmaticism (Schweller, 2003). This does not imply that the old, existing theories and paradigms should be disposed of, or that their convergence should inevitably lead to completely new forms of explanatory tools. At the same time, the process of improving theories should not lead to non-systematic ad-hocery, which would explain away all empirical aberrations while completely disfiguring original theories and their instruments. Theories, approaches and paradigms could use the current state of theoretical peace (Dunne et al., 2013) to lock themselves even tighter within their own domains, or to initiate the process of their improvement by integrating the elements that prove to be explanatorily compatible. The second scenario is, luckily, advocated by a growing number of members of the academic community. This is, undoubtedly, a complicated and audacious theoretical undertaking. But it might prove to be exactly what contemporary international relations, and International Relations, desperately need.

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