International Society FREE

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Summary

The essay discusses the origins and development of the idea of international society in the discipline of International Relations (IR). It locates the concept in the English School tradition, providing a summary of the classic statements as found in the writings of Wight, Bull and Manning. It engages with more recent writing, including Buzan's reconceptualization of international society and explaining the pluralist-solidarist distinction. The essay traces key debates surrounding the concept, such as the expansion of international society, humanitarian intervention and the standard of civilisation. The final part presents the main criticisms of the concept and explores the ontological status of international society.

Introduction: The English School and Its Core Concept of International Society

The idea of international society relies on the assumption of the "societal" nature of inter-state relations. This concept is usually taken to mean that order in international politics is maintained due to social bonds between states. Hedley Bull authored the most concise definition, according to which 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" (Bull, 2002, p. 13).

Despite this frequently repeated characterization, international society remains a puzzling concept. Even though it may seem persuasive and tends to evoke positive connotations through its promise of orderly international relations, it has amassed devoted supporters as well as ardent critics. A steadily growing research programme has accompanied the idea. This essay looks at the roots and development of the idea of international society in the discipline of international relations (IR) and outlines major interpretations of international society in an attempt to establish why it arouses both reproach and enthusiasm. The article highlights themes and research areas that, making use of the concept, contributed to its development, such as the standard of civilization, pluralism, solidarism and (in)equality. Moreover, the essay

does not shy away from exploring contradictions stemming from the writing on international society. Rather than insulating the idea from inconsistencies, it tries to engage with its contradictions.

Notably, the early discussion of international society unfolded in the context of the development of IR as an academic discipline. The urge to establish IR as a separate field of scholarly inquiry was an important factor that stimulated the debate on international society. As a result, the idea became entangled in broader considerations of the subject and methodology of IR and in a quasi-competition between American and European interpretations of international politics.

The idea of international society is most commonly attributed to the English School of international relations. Considered its "master concept," it played an important role in establishing this school of thought among other approaches to theorizing international relations (Brown, 2001). The English School was a name given to a group of scholars interested in the history and "workings" of international society. The "English School" label was successfully popularized by a largely critical article that advocated the school's closure (Grader, 1988; Jones, 1981). Known also as the British institutionalists, these scholars are usually associated with postulating rationalism and a greater attention to history in the study of relations between states (Suganami, 2003). There is, however, no agreement as to the unifying characteristics of the English School or to whether a particular group of writers should be recognized as constituting a distinct school (Linklater & Suganami, 2006; Wilson, 1989). This long-standing debate has had a bearing on the concept of international society. The feature common to the writing of the first generation of the English School scholars was the rejection of the "domestic analogy," by which they meant that international politics cannot be modeled on a state's internal arrangements. They also shared the aim to distinguish their research and approach from American IR. The following quotation, which is explicit in that regard, also presents the general orientation the English School took in exploring international society: "The British have probably been more concerned with the historical than the contemporary, with the normative than the scientific, with the philosophical than the methodological, with the principles than policy" (Butterfield & Wight, 1966).

Although most commonly identified with the English School of international relations, the concept of international society cannot be limited to the English School tradition. There is a large body of literature in IR that presupposes the existence of international society whether or not the term is used directly. International legal studies, historical sociology and regime theory, as well as or among them some constructivist writers, have relied on the idea that relations between states are subject to norms and rules. Due to the breadth of this writing, the penultimate section of this essay introduces this literature only marginally; it focuses on works that refer more specifically to the international society idea.

What Is International Society?

In its simplest exposition, international society is one of the ways of characterizing relations between states both historically and in the present. The idea relies heavily on a particular historical narrative used to account for the emergence of the European interstate system. According to this interpretation, the modern society of states originated in Europe, and, by the 19th century, its members recognized themselves as forming a club of civilized states bound by international law. Through the process known as "expansion," the institutional structure of international society is said to have spread around the globe (Keene, 2014).

In IR, the employment of the concept of a society to account for interactions between states dates back to Charles Manning (Manning, 1962), Martin Wight (Wight et al., 1991) and Hedley Bull (Bull, 1966b). These three thinkers are also considered the primary figures or even the founding fathers of the English School. They are also recognized as the pioneers of the idea of international society (Dunne, 1998; Linklater & Suganami, 2006; Suganami, 2001).

C. A. W. Manning can be regarded as the first to have pondered the concept within the framework of IR as an academic discipline. Manning, in the first half of the 20th century, thought of the society of states as of a particular ontology of international relations. He viewed international society as an idiosyncratic subject matter, explicating the need to create a separate discipline dedicated to the study of IR (Manning, 1962). Manning was particularly interested in the way in which states coexist in the absence of an international system of government, as they are neither in the Hobbesian state of nature nor form part of a world state. Manning argued that the condition of possibility for such an arrangement was based on common assumptions that states shared as well as on their constant effort to keep such an organization in place. According to Manning, international society was an element of a prevalent assumption operating in international politics. It was only as a result of state leaders and diplomats' acting on this assumption that interstate relations could take on features that external observers recognized as "societal" (Long, 2005; Manning, 1962; Wilson, 2004). The classical minimalist conception of international society, ascribed to Manning (1962) and James (1973), encompassed states, international law and diplomacy. The very existence of international law was deemed sufficient to conceive of relations between states as forming a society (Mapel & Nardin, 1998, p. 20).

Wight interpreted world politics through a conversation between the three traditions: Grotian, Kantian and Hobbesian. This move was intended to equip international relations with a proper theory as well as to overcome the dichotomy between realism and idealism. However, by referring to the three thinkers and intending to delineate clearly between them, it has been argued that Wight abused the history of thought (Bull, 2002).

Hedley Bull and Martin Wight together with a number of other scholars and diplomats, formed the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (Dunne, 1998). Their key volume, *The Diplomatic Investigations*, outlined the contours of the international society idea (Butterfield & Wight, 1966). This is, however, Hedley Bull and his seminal work *The*

Anarchical Society (2002), who is credited with this idea's first comprehensive as well as succinct exposition. For Bull, international society was not the only possible way of arranging international politics. He distinguished the international system, in which states maintain contact with each other, need to take others into account in their own calculations and are able to impact another's decision but are not bound by common values, rules and institutions (Bull, 2002, pp. 9, 240–241). Bull also described a world society, in which humanity as a whole shares interests and values (Bull, 2002, p. 269). Nonetheless, in his view, it was the society of states that prevailed in international politics. In Bull's words, international society existed when a group of states, realizing they shared certain interests and values, formed a society. This meant that these states accepted certain rules that steered their relations with one another and recognized common institutions, which Bull interpreted as sets of habits and practices (Bull, 2002, p. 13).

In Bull's view, these societal ties binding states secured order in international politics. Order was one of the principal themes in Bull's *Anarchical Society*, where he sought to demonstrate how order can be maintained in the system of states and argued that this system has to be constantly assessed in relation to the goal of world order. Bull identified several goals he deemed elementary for each social life: the restriction of violence, respect for agreements and the stabilization of possession. On that basis, he claimed that international society should be valued since it provided a degree of order conducive to the attainment of societal goals. Shared rules were to provide guidance as to how common interests could be achieved (Bull, 2002, pp. 51–52). Common institutions were to assist in the realization of common goals (Bull, 2002, p. 71). Bull identified five such institutions: the balance of power, international law, the diplomatic mechanism, the managerial system of the great powers and war.

Since these initial but also fundamental contributions to the development of the idea of international society, this concept has been used to explain the fact that states are in no need of a supra-state or world government above them to maintain orderly relations. The binding force constructed on the basis of common interests and values has been deemed enough of an authority. Key to such an arrangement is consent. States agree that certain norms and rules will govern their behavior and their relations with each other. The major incentive is that the advancement of common interests is made possible only by respecting the agreed upon rules.

A specific narrative of European history heavily influenced the English School's concept of international society. There are clear links to A. H. L. Heeren's early-19th-century definition of a states system where member states were joined by a reciprocity of interests (Bull, 2002, p. 12). States system was indeed a term used by the English School authors, and their initial aim was to formulate a comparative history of such state systems (Wight, 1977; Watson, 1992).

Reviving the Idea of International Society

Insights provided by Hedley Bull, Martin Wight and Charles Manning remain at the heart of the idea of international society. However, changes that have taken place in international politics since their writing, such as the end of the Cold War, as well as new developments in the discipline of IR, have spurred attempts at revising the classical definition.

One approach focused on establishing ways of defining international society. The degree of cultural homogeneity, which initially perplexed Martin Wight as the necessary component for the effective functioning of the then-called states system, was followed by other considerations. Ian Clark focused on legitimacy, which for him could be used to denote the existence of international society (Clark, 2005). Further, Christian Reus-Smit argued that the modern society of states is underpinned by two fundamental institutions: contractual international law and multilateralism (Reus-Smit, 1997, 1999).

Barry Buzan offered one of the most thorough reconceptualizations of the idea of international society. In his endeavor, Buzan postulated that the classical definition needed to be elaborated to encompass developments that were not present or scarce under the conditions of the Cold War. Moreover, for Buzan, the English School was an "imperfect" theory but nevertheless a candidate for a grand theory of international relations (Buzan, 2004, pp. 25–26). Buzan thus attempted to turn the English School scholarship into a systematically organized field of study (Buzan, 2004, pp. 24–25). To that end, he reworked the classical Wightian triad of realism, rationalism, and revolutionism and proposed viewing the international system, international society and world society as analytical concepts that revealed the material and social structures of the international system.

As a point of departure, Buzan asserted that all interaction in the state system is social and that norms and values are the building blocks of societies (Buzan, 2004, p. 102). International society "is about the institutionalization of shared interest and identity among states, and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of the IR theory" (Buzan, 2004, p. 7). In order to introduce the coherence needed to build a clear theoretical framework, Buzan presented relations between individuals as first-order society and those between collectives (e.g., states) as second-order societies. He also insisted that the difference between international and world society should be constructed on the basis of the type of unit (state or non-state) and not with regard to the attitude toward dominant ideas (Buzan, 2004, pp. 96–97). The aim was for the theory to encompass three domains: interhuman, transnational and interstate (Buzan, 2004, p. 159). The reworked definition of international society encompasses a political and legal frame composed of states but where transnational actors and individuals are participants. States are defined as international society members and as the dominant actors in the triad, able to shape the two others to a larger extent than vice versa (Buzan, 2004, pp. 202, 259). Buzan's expansion of the international society concept led him to drop the idea of a mechanistic international system. If the spectrum of interstate societies spreads between asocial and confederative, there is no need for an additional category of a state system to explain relations between states (Buzan, 2004, pp. 128–129, and see p. 159 for graph).

An account of primary and secondary institutions of international society complements the picture. Whereas earlier writing by Hedley Bull distinguished only five institutions of international society (balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and great powers), Buzan suggested that distinguishing between primary and secondary institutions helps to consider international order globally and from a regional perspective. Primary institutions, in Buzan's view, should be understood as fundamental and durable practices that evolved from

interactions between states and remained a constitutive of actors and their legitimate activities. Secondary institutions, in turn, were consciously designed by states for specific purposes (Buzan, 2004, pp. 164–170).

International society as a theoretical lens animated several strands of research. The authors of *Theorising International Society* (2009) were chiefly concerned with endowing international society research with an adequate methodological foundation, such that would allow the English School to identify the social structures and normative content of international politics (Navari, 2009). As Navari argued, the English School distanced itself from methodological concerns and took pride in an eclectic approach. Navari's edited volume pointed to the limitations of methodological pluralism.

Globalization of International Society

Hedley Bull's work is important for the development of the idea of international society not solely for the considerations he outlined in *Anarchical Society* but also for his volume co-edited with Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*. This influential work argued that international society, spreading from the European center, reached the entire globe (Bull & Watson, 1984). The expansion was understood in terms of the expansion of rules and institutions, especially that of international law, seen as the crucial element of social interactions between sovereign states (Bull, 2002, p. 123, p. 136; Bull & Watson, 1984). The volume described encounters of European international society with entities considered parts of the outside world, such as Russia (Watson, 1984b), Spain and the Indies (Donelan, 1984) and Africa (Bull, 1984b). The process of broadening the international society membership was presented as a result of non-European polities, such as the Ottoman empire (Naff, 1984), China (Gong, 1984a) and Japan (Suganami, 1984), joining the society of states. *The Expansion* concluded with a discussion of the evolution of a European-turned-global international society, and it addressed the possibility of the Third World's revolt against the West (Bull, 1984c) and the question of racial equality (Vincent, 1984).

According to Manning, the expansion of international society was a "pragmatic inevitability." States needed to accept positive international law that originated in the West (Aalberts, 2012, p. 176). The English School scholars generally saw this expansion as a historical process but also as a rational way to conduct international relations (Suganami, 2011). Bull and Watson suggested that the formation of the European international society and the expansion of Europe were two interrelated processes.

It is now 30 years since Bull and Watson's classic work was published. In the intervening years, a wealth of new scholarship has challenged many aspects of this account with special reference to its Eurocentric approach to history. The historical narrative of the expansion of international society remains a contested issue. According to Bull and Watson, international society emerged in Europe and spread globally; it superseded other political organizations mainly because of its military supremacy (Bull, 1984a; Watson, 1984a). Gong (1984b) and Watson (1992) reinforced this narrative. The competing approach stressed the relative

underdevelopment of the European international society at the beginning of its global expansion and the resulting evolution of this society under the influence of encounters with non-European political entities (Buzan & Little, 2008). The critics of the European foundations of the global international society pointed to numerous historical inaccuracies of such a Eurocentric grand narrative. They argued that up to the 19th century, the development of norms and rules was the result of two-way interactions between Europe and other regions (Suzuki, Zhang, & Quirk, 2013). Finally, critics of the expansion thesis proposed replacing the concept of "expansion" with "stratification" and suggested it would be more fruitful to ask who was where within international society rather than who was a member, thereby dictating the boundaries of that society (Keene, 2014).

In spite of the many disputes surrounding the expansion question, it has undoubtedly inspired a broad research agenda. The topic of "entry" into international society has been explored with regard to Russia (Neumann, 2011), Greece (Stivachtis, 1998), Egypt (Roberson, 2009), Southeastern Europe (Bilgic, 2015; Ejdus, 2015; Wigen, 2015) and West and Central Africa (Pella, 2014).

Regional International Societies

The other dynamic that has come to the forefront in the studies of international society is the increasing attention paid to regions. Together with the greater regional integration observed in practice, the need arose to take the sub-global structures into consideration. A pressing need was felt to account for regional dynamics at play in global international society (Dunne, 2005, p. 159). Barry Buzan was the chief advocate and an ardent critic of the English School's neglect of the regional dimension (Buzan, 2004, pp. 201–212). Arguably, the regional aspect had been present in what Wight termed the "comparative sociology of states systems" (Wight, 1977). However, Buzan accurately claimed that having established that the international society expanded to cover the globe, regional developments have never been a key concern for the English School with its preference for analyzing the state system in its totality. In order to change this pattern and to allow the English School to account for a wider range of international phenomena, Buzan mapped his conception of international society onto regional developments. His chief claim was that elements of international society existing at the global level can also be found at the sub-global scale. Moreover, some societal aspects could be more pronounced regionally than globally (Buzan, 2004, p. 134). Certain regional groupings of states may represent "greater normative content" or an increased consciousness of common interests and values and, thus, a propensity for the joint formulation of specific common rules and institutions (Ayoob, 1999, p. 248). For Buzan, sub-global international societies were not deemed to fall into rivalry with each other. There were also no grounds to suggest that regional developments would necessarily weaken the global social dimension (Buzan, 2004, p. 209).

Scholars attempted to apply the concept of a regional international society with regard to the Middle East (Buzan, 2009) and Scandinavia (Schouenborg, 2012). Other regional groupings approached from the English School perspective included Europe (Sakwa, 2011), the

European Union (Czaputowicz, 2003; Diez, Manners, & Whitman, 2011; Stivachtis & Webber, 2011), the Association of Southwest Asian Nations (Narine, 2006), Southeast Asia (Quayle, 2013), East Asia (Buzan & Zhang, 2014) and Africa (Tan Shek Yan, 2013). In spite of the sophisticated theoretical approach several of these studies adopted, including the application of Buzan's insights on primary and secondary institutions, the results were inconclusive. The reliance on primary institutions resulted in a conclusion that the Middle East can be thought of as a sub-global interstate society (Gonzalez-Pelaez, 2009, pp. 114–115). The analysis of secondary institutions, however, contested this claim (Murden, 2009).

The Pluralist-Solidarist Debate

The idea of international society encompasses a number of contradictions. The division between pluralism and solidarism and a cognate tension between order and justice are the two most contentious aspects that characterize this approach to international politics.

The pluralist-versus-solidarist debate has long been described in terms of "the best-known tension within English School theory" (Williams, 2005, p. 20). The understandings of solidarism and pluralism, however, have been changing and separating from this dichotomy and have shifted toward a more complex form of interplay and merging between the two (Weinert, 2011). To be able to appreciate this development, we have to start with the distinction and return once more to Hedley Bull, its original proponent. Bull defined *solidarist international society* as one where the collective enforcement of international rules and the guardianship of human rights were possible (Bull, 1966a). Building his argumentation on the Grotian thought exposed in *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, Bull assumed that individuals should be subject to international law, and solidarism was to reflect this line of reasoning. A solidarist international society was thought of as prioritizing justice, embracing the possibility for progress and acknowledging the existence of superior human values that should be promoted and protected. From this strand of thinking arose the proposition that states have duties to humanity—a thesis difficult to reconcile with sovereignty, the principal pluralist rule and the building block of international society. Pluralism, in contrast, embraced diversity as the fundamental feature of international society. The pluralist view of international society was based on the concept of coexistence and on the appreciation of difference. It embraced the idea that states are inclined to only agree on a narrow set of purposes and will avoid activities taking individuals as the point of reference (Bull, 1966a). Bull's approach strengthened the impression that pluralism and solidarism are mutually exclusive and that international society may represent only one type at any given time.

Bull's own position with regard to international society as pluralist or solidarist fluctuated. Bull's pluralism was much more prominent in his earlier work, whereas his later interventions leaned toward solidarism. His ambiguous position led Wheeler and Dunne to advocate for "Bull's pluralism of the intellect and solidarism of the will" (Wheeler & Dunne, 1996). Throughout Bull's work, the topic of justice and the "revolt against the West" perplexed him. He called for a redistribution of power and wealth from North to South, without which non-Western peoples would not support international society (Bull, 2002, pp. 316–317). Although

emphasis was always placed on order, Bull at the same time recognized the need for greater justice (Bull, 1984a, p.18). On other hand, he feared that "solidarist visions can be used to defend a homogenous international society" (Linklater & Suganami, 2006, p. 157). He also observed that "the nascent cosmopolitan culture" was biased 'in favor of the dominant cultures of the West (Bull, 2002, p. 305) and that solidarism and its "tools" (e.g., trial and punishment of war criminals) were selective and prone to the influences of power politics (Bull, 2002, pp. 85–86). Hedley Bull's solidarism rested on the presumption that there existed common human good and that some sort of human society is not only desirable but also attainable (Bull, 2002, p. 278).

The pluralist-solidarist tension returned as the central analytical framework following the end of the Cold War and Western claims to victory coupled with greater normative ambitions on part of liberal democratic states (Buzan, 2004, pp. 47–49; Hurrell, 2005, p. 21, 2007c, p. 58). Democratic states pledging of responsibility for peace and security globally was interpreted as the ascendance of solidarism. This international society, with an extending range of cooperative norms, rules, and institutions and composed of states converging in terms of ideology and internal governance, was seen as having goals that were much more ambitious than the preservation of order (Buzan, 2004, p. 131; Hurrell, 2007c, pp. 59–60). This society, and especially liberal states purportedly forming its core, have shown growing acceptance of different types of intervention (Hurrell, 2005, pp. 20–21).

The humanitarian intervention debate has been one important offshoot of the solidarist question in international society propagated with Nick Wheeler's seminal work *Saving Strangers*. Wheeler's theory of humanitarian intervention helped to determine what should count as legitimate humanitarian intervention (Wheeler, 2000). Wheeler not only recognized the solidarity exhibited by the society of states but also openly advocated a "solidarist project." He claimed it was possible to reconcile order and justice, especially with regard to the enforcement of human rights (Wheeler, 2000, p. 285).

In addition to the human rights issue as an important theme for solidarist ideas, the literature also links solidarism to normative requirements regarding states' internal organization—in technical-bureaucratic as well as in ideological terms. The promotion of a particular example of a state, with a specific political and institutional set-up modeled on the West, was influenced by Robert Jackson's introduction of the concept of a quasi-state (Jackson, 1990). Reus-Smit, for whom the starting point of the analysis was "modern international society" built on the pillars of contractual international law and multilateralism, argued that international society's intersubjective values have a bearing on a state's identity and provide the rules of rightful state action (Reus-Smit, 1997, pp. 584–585, 1999, pp. 36–39). Clark further argued that legitimacy, which he regarded as crucial for the conceptualization of international society, was composed of rightful membership and rightful conduct (Clark, 2005, p. 2).

On the most general level, it may be stated that solidarists defend the breach of national sovereignty (Linklater & Suganami, 2006, p. 143). The ethical standpoint is much more pronounced than it is in pluralism, and it is revealed in the call for ethical international society. Human rights are viewed as standards rather than as enforceable commitments, and norms acquire common-sense quality.

Up until the events of 9/11, scholars tended to agree that order ceased to be the exclusive objective states should pursue. The post 9/11 era was interpreted as a reversal of previous gains as states ceased to see purposes "beyond themselves" and restored to the framework of national security (Dunne, 2007, p. 142).

Buzan attempted to transgress the division between pluralism and solidarism, arguing that they should be understood "as positions on a spectrum representing, respectively, thin and thick sets of shared norms, rules and institutions" not as mutually exclusive positions (Buzan, 2004). Weinert (2011) further developed the proposition that solidarism and pluralism are not mutually exclusive but operate in tandem. Features of the solidarist-pluralist debate have been reflected in William Bain's discussion of *societas* vs *universitas*. Using Oakeshott's concept, Bain proposed viewing international society as organized along the values of *societas*, an association based on authority grounded in law, or *universitas*, an association in recognition of a common purpose. Contemporary international politics do not resemble either one or the other image; both are present in international society practice (Bain, 2006, pp. 201–202).

Membership and (In)equality

The question put forward by Wight, "How far does international society—supposing there be one—extend?" (Wight et al., 1991, p. 49), continues to animate scholarly debates. Much of Bull's work was concentrated on the issues of international society membership, criteria for it and the question of those at its fringes/borders. Bull was preoccupied with the position of weaker states in international society and their role in legitimizing the international society. In his opinion, there was no other way for the international society to last then taking into consideration and in fact reflecting the values and interests of weaker states. While the problem of what type of states should be accommodated remains underdeveloped in Bull's writing, Clark (2005) and Hurrell (2007b, p. 41) addressed the membership question.

International society proponents have agreed that the idea is premised on the equality of states. Wight asserted that "the movement from a hierarchical to an egalitarian principle was probably inherent in the reciprocal recognition of sovereignty" (Wight, 1977, p. 135). International society, as a voluntary association, was supposed to be a reciprocal agreement based on the idea of free will expressed by equal members (Bain, 2003b, p. 70).

The English School paid considerable attention to the fact that, in a judicially equal society, there exists unequal distribution of power: "the modern European states-system, while formulating the principle of the equality of states, has modified it by establishing the class of

great powers" (Wight, 1977, p. 42). Manning suggested that states do not vary in formal status as sovereignty is uniform; what differs is the stature and hence the standing in international relations (Manning, 1962, p. 190). Great powers have been identified as one of the institutions of international society, possessing special rights as well as responsibilities for international society management and preservation (Bull, 2002, p. 17, chapter 9).

Several authors have pointed to the existence of international society's core composed of liberal-constitutionalist states. These states have prevailed as the winning coalition following all major conflicts, most recently the Cold War. The core states have been principal agents in the production and reproduction of the practices underpinning international society (Buzan, 2004). Their values shape the modern constitutional structure (Reus-Smit, 1997, pp. 584–585). In other words, the powerful are seen as privileged in relation to the rest of the international society members, despite formal equality of all states (Buzan, 2004, pp. 222–227). The "inner" grouping' interprets and implements the wishes of international society as a whole (Clark, 2005, p. 159). The core is also presented as a homogenizing force and as a model others are expected to emulate (Buzan, 2004, p. 60). Bain argued that international society as a voluntary association is no longer the case if one analyses modern instances of "trusteeship," such as Kosovo under the UN administration (Bain, 2003a).

The inequality theme found its most comprehensive reflection in the debate about the standard of civilization. The narrative developed around the standard of civilization suggested that Western states in their encounters with non-Western societies before the early 20th century demonstrated that they considered themselves to be the representatives of a genuine (read "better") civilization. This belief justified the expansion of their own social, political, legal and cultural norms and practices beyond Western Europe.

The first exponent of this approach was Gong (1984b). Historically, the relationship between the expansion of the international society of European states and the standard of civilization was intimate. The standard of civilization originated in Europe in the 19th century and was used as an explanation and legitimation of powerful states' expansion. As such, it also forged changes in the European international society and altered states that sought international society membership (Gong, 1984b, p. 4). The standard of civilization has been used to express a tacit or explicit set of rules that enabled the distinction between those states belonging to an allegedly more advanced grouping and those that did not (Gong, 1984b, p. 3). The standard of civilization was premised on and perpetuated the division between the advanced, the privileged, those setting the rules and those following (willingly or as a result of coercion). The standard of civilization was an idea as well as means to organize international society and enable its expansion. Non-Europeans, due to their alleged lack of an "adequate" civilization or their "shortcomings" in terms of religion, were not sovereign international society members (Sørensen, 2006, p. 49). As it became enshrined in international law, the standard also took an increasingly explicit juridical character (Gong, 1984b, p. 5).

As the standard itself was a broad and evolving category, the goals of the employment of the 19th century were far from uniform. It served either to bar certain countries (Japan, China) from participating in the international society, to impose unequal treaties on them or to

legitimize colonization. An important objective—especially with regard to these elements of the standard that touched upon the internal organization of a state (i.e., the effectiveness in running state affairs, the independence of judiciary from the executive and, especially, the protection of property)—was also to protect Europeans leaving in the colonies (Gong, 1984b, p. 64).

More recently, scholars reengaged with the standard of civilization argument: (Bowden 2009), Keene (2002) and Suzuki (2009). Keene, in particular, saw it as leading to the creation of two distinct orders ruled by contrasting laws: one superior and one subordinate deliberately sustained by the leading states in colonial peripheries (Keene, 2002). The inscription of the standard of civilization in international law allowed for sustaining this unequal relation between the two orders (Anghie, 1999, 2005).

Critique of the Idea of International Society

Several currents can be distinguished in the critique of the idea of international society. The first, originating from the English School camp, advances a mild criticism centered on the problem of the decline of international society. Another "insider" criticism relates to the lack of methodological rigor in the study of international society. The English School methodological orientation is said to be either difficult to pin down (Keene, 2009) or nonexistent (Jackson, 2009). Scholars who do not identify with the English School research agenda have typically pointed to the Eurocentric nature of the idea of international society. The third charge castigates the international society idea for providing an illusion of certainty and simplicity. The failure to take the complexity and multidimensional aspect of international politics on board undermine, to a large extent, the idea's potential for a meaningful engagement with contemporary international developments (Edkins & Zehfuss, 2005).

Already in 1975, Bull considered international society to be "in decline" (in Bull, 2002, p. xxi). Western primacy established in the aftermath of the Cold War propelled doubts as to the durability of global international society. Ian Hall argued that solidarist developments reflected in the works of Time Dunne or Nicholas Wheeler undermined the very foundations of international society, such as the centrality of states or the importance of power politics (Hall, 2001).

This strand of critique was strengthened in the wake of the United States' reaction to the 9/11 attacks. International society was regarded as threatened by the extent of American preponderance. Other members of the international society could not compel the United States to act in ways that would support the existing international order. Instead, the United States rearranged international politics along the lines of hierarchical order (Dunne, 2003). American actions were largely considered as undermining international society (Bellamy, 2005). These discussions culminated with an attempt to reconcile practices of hierarchy with the idea of international society. Presenting hegemony as one of the primary institutions of international society, Ian Clark sought to reinvigorate international society as a still adequate framework to account for developments in international politics (Clark, 2009, 2011).

Another current criticized the idea of international society as reflecting only a particular historical experience: that of Western states. The classical figures of the English School have been castigated for their excessive Eurocentrism and for the downplaying of the role of imperialism in bringing about the allegedly shared norms of international society. The idea, according to Keal, helped legitimize a highly unequal international system, comprising the practices of imperialism and colonialism (Keal, 2003). Edward Keene, who chose to examine international society and its membership requirements from the point of view of the non-Western world, criticized the overreliance on the Western European example and the superficiality of order built on the supposedly shared foundations of international society. He proposed acknowledging the "dualistic nature of order." The modern world's history, Keene argued, was divided into two different patterns of international political and legal order. Institutional and legal structures of that order developed differently in Europe and beyond. While European order was tolerant with regard to ethnic, cultural and political difference, the "extra-European" one was preoccupied with the civilizing mission—an inward world of promoting toleration and outward of promoting civilization. The key challenge posed by Keene centers on the fact that thinking in terms of international society prevents us from taking other forms of international order, such as imperial systems, seriously (Keene, 2002, p. 41).

The English School has also been criticized for the neglect of coercive aspects of international society's expansion and for presenting the expansion as a progressive and positive process (Suzuki, 2009). Some critics vowed to replace "expansion" with the "subjugation" of other regions by European states (Halliday, 2009).

International Society Beyond the English School

Despite this essay's focus on the English School's take on international society, it is necessary to acknowledge that the idea of international society has a larger following. This is particularly visible among scholars of international law and of historical sociology. The common feature of this writing is that authors generally do not pay particular attention to defining international society. Instead, they approach it as a given, as the state of affairs or the organizing future of international politics. Adopting such a standpoint, most authors have relied on the Grotian conception of international law. Whereas for the English School international law is but one element or—to use their nomenclature—one institution of international society, for scholars outside of the English School tradition, it is international law that is central to the existence of international society, a *sine qua non* of international society.

For Richard Falk, for instance, international society provides a political framework that conditioned and enabled the existence and operation of international law (Falk, 1970). Falk simply acknowledged the existence of international society, without any specific consideration of its features and principles. Concerned with the politics of international law, he asked how international law emerged and continues to be conditioned by politics as well as how it cannot be treated as objective or politically neutral.

Hermann Mosler equated international society with an international legal community composed of independent political entities organized on a territorial basis and "a general conviction" that these entities are bound by reciprocal rules (Mosler, 1980, p. 2). His definition is therefore not markedly different from that put forward by the English School.

Mark Klamberg, proposing a sociological approach to international law, combined the study of the content of international rules with their influence on the course of international relations with the principal aim to discover why these rules actually affect states behavior (Klamberg, 2015). Despite the title of his volume *Power and Law in International Society*, there is scarce discussion of what the international society may mean or entail. The main concern converges, however, with the central research question posed by the classical English School: How is it possible to have binding rules among states without any central authority on the international level? (Klamberg, 2015, p. 4). A number of other legal scholars have approached international society as a framework provided by international law (Tourme-Jouannet, 2013). More critically leaning authors challenged the neutrality of positive international law and explored its functions in safeguarding the West's primacy in international politics at the expense of non-European actors (Anghie, 2005).

Contradictions: The Ontological Status of International Society

One of the rarely acknowledged but central problems in the international society scholarship is the lack of agreement as to the ontological status of the society of states. Partly a result of inconsistencies in classical writings and partly the consequence of an ever-growing research agenda, international society tends to be presented as an ideal type, as an analytical framework or as a fairly adequate depiction of reality.

Manning and Bull constructed the idea of international society in a somewhat contradictory manner. It was to be an ideal type, to which any system of states might approximate. At the same time, however, it was a concept read from the practice of states (Linklater & Suganami, 2006, p. 53). In Bull and Watson's volume, international society was presented as an existing phenomenon with global reach and universal acceptance. Bull's initial outline of a framework in 1977—that is, a way of looking at and evaluating the world—became equated with empirical reality (Bull & Watson, 1984, p. 8).

Some scholars have approached international society as actually existing and, as such, amenable to empirical study: the historical work of the English School presented this society as emerging from and replacing international anarchy. According to functionally based accounts, the current international society is an outcome of purposive activity on the part of states as well as a conscious effort undertaken with a goal of establishing international order (Buzan, 1993, p. 327). Other scholars have claimed that international society is a normative framework. This camp is further divided into those claiming it is a framework that actually exists and those viewing it as an ideal beyond reach but worth attempting to attain. The third

camp has approached it as an analytical framework (i.e., as a device aiding the study of international politics and broadening our understanding of it). In addition, these three strands are not neatly delineated in academic works.

From Jackson's perspective, international society is a "moral and legal framework" (Jackson, 2000, p. 39). He depicted international society as "basically a normative framework by reference to which foreign policy, diplomacy, the threat or use of armed force, and other international activities are to be judged" (Jackson, 2000, p. 31). For Clark, international society is a political framework but one that allows for the application of "constitutionally mediated" norms (Clark, 2005, p. 7). In his other writings, Clark presented international society in terms of "historically changing principles of legitimacy" (Clark, 2005, p. 7). In Grader's analysis of the English School's scholarship, she pointed out that various authors differ as to their conceptions of international society. She noted that it was metaphysical for Manning and it was empirical and normative for Bull, while others, such as Northedge, would opt for a system rather than a society of states (Grader, 1988). In a reply to Grader's criticism, Peter Wilson argued that international society is ideational and norm-based for both Manning and Bull (Wilson, 1989).

Another aspect that has arisen concerns the relationship between the idea of international society and these aspects of international politics that can be considered social. The English School has claimed to share a number of concerns with constructivism (Dunne, 1995b; Reus–Smit, 2002). Constructivists have even been criticized for their unreferenced rediscovery of inputs that the English School made a decade earlier (Hurrell, 2007a; Suganami, 2001, p. 5).

The point of convergence between the English School and constructivists is the agreement regarding the existence of a social dimension to international politics (Reus-Smit, 2009). The *social dimension*, however, tends to be interpreted in various ways in writings on international society. To some, it denotes the fact that international society is not a given but has been constructed by states and, as a result, forms a structure that contains the behavior of states through institutions and practices (Dunne, 1995a). Others have claimed that intersubjective knowledge and social relations among actors constitute international relations (Towns, 2010). This ambiguity notwithstanding, the prevalent supposition is that international relations take place in a social setting co-constructed and mutually intelligible to those involved. The idea of international society has been thought of as a possible "baseline for international theory" on the grounds that there exist intersubjective understandings of rules that constitute international society (Mayall, 1978). For IR constructivists, such as Nicholas Onuf, the international legal regime occupies a central place and is the defining feature of international society. However, from their perspective, the presence of legal rules needs to be supplemented by informal rules or "rules of the game" (Onuf, 1994, p. 15). Both constructivists and English School authors discussed international society in relation to regime theory. For Onuf, international society is a particular type of regime: it is "nothing more than an inclusive regime, within which are nested all international regimes, themselves constituted from the relations of states and other well-bounded regimes" (Onuf, 1994, p. 9). Buzan (1993) argued that regime theory and international society belong to the same tradition but had been separated by the peculiarities of academic discourse (Buzan, 1993, p. 328).

Several scholars have taken up the request, originating most often from the constructivist side of academia, for more clarity about the defining features of system, society and community (Dunne, 2008; Hurrell, 2007b; Linklater & Suganami, 2006, p. 103). However, due to ontological challenges, no conclusion has been reached. Moreover, the drive to establish IR as a discipline and later to claim the English School as a legitimate subfield of inquiry have contributed to a forced unification of thinking on international society and to the dismissal of rather than a deeper engagement with the problems international society poses as an analytical framework.

Despite its contradictions, the tendency to legitimize rather than criticize the status quo in international politics and commend it under the banner of order, the idea of international society and especially the English School's elaborate discussion of its parameters have contributed to the development of IR theory. One of the chief inputs was that IR subject matter should be conceptualized in broader terms and should include social bonds between states, built on their common interests and encompassing norms and rules as well as institutions. In addition, the idea of international society helped emphasize the need for historical contextualization in the study of international politics and to counter the narratives and interpretations relying on power-political models of interstate relations on the one hand and idealistic accounts of a world government on the other. The English School's most recognizable contribution to IR theory is the proposition that the international system cannot be discussed solely in material terms. It also cannot be exclusively looked at through an idealist lens. The idea of international society is supposed to provide the "third way" between realism and idealism/liberalism. While realism made conflict the major feature of international politics and idealism/liberalism focused on co-operation, international society was supposed to encompass elements of both conflict and co-operation (Bellamy, 2005). Though power still remains an important element, common norms and institutions have a significant role to play in structuring relations between states.

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