



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is There a New International Relations Theory?

W. Andy Knight

*Institute of International Relations,
University of the West Indies*

Abstract: *This article offers a critical and wide-ranging review of extant theories of International Relations (IR). It suggests that, despite the ubiquity of the field and the abundance of research that has been undertaken over the past century, there remains a need for IR to accept and integrate new ways of thinking if it is to grapple successfully with emerging global challenges and also remain relevant to practitioners. In this spirit, some components of a more holistic way of understanding IR are suggested, and this in turn hints at a new agenda for research and practice with broader relevance.*

Keywords: IR Theory, Diplomacy, States,

We all engage in theorizing, whether we think so or not. Theories serve a purpose. They help us simplify and clarify the reality of the material world and help us make sense of that world. There is a real historical world in which things happen; and theory is made through reflection upon what has happened. But theory feeds back into the making of history when those who make history (e.g. diplomats and politicians) begin to consciously think about what they are doing. Without the use of theory to guide our thinking process we can become overwhelmed by the abundance and proliferation of facts and data stemming from the complex world in which we live.

As Stephen Walt puts it: 'We need theories to make sense of the blizzard of information that bombards us daily.'¹ Theories allow us

to order and systematize the multiple, and at times, confusing facts and news items thrown at us each and every day as we watch TV, read the newspaper, or examine scholarly journals and books. All theories are rooted in time and space. When circumstances change, so too will theory. The resilience of dominant theories is generally attributed to their ability to make sense of contemporary issues. When a theory can no longer explain what's going on, the tendency will be to abandon that theory and try to find better explanation.

Theories are abstraction of reality. No one theory can actually provide the full picture of our material world. At best, each theory offers only an impartial picture of global politics. To illustrate this, permit me to quote John Godfrey Saxe's (1816–1887) poetic version of a famous Indian legend, which you might have heard in a variety of versions, about the encounter of six blind men with an elephant. It goes something like this:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
'God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!'

The Second, feeling of the tusk
Cried, 'Ho! what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me `tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!'

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up he spake:
'I see,' quoth he, 'the Elephant

Is very like a snake!

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
'What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain,' quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!'

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: 'E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!'

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope.
'I see,' quoth he, 'the Elephant
Is very like a rope!'

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

The moral of this legend, as it applies to IR theories, can be summed up as follows: each individual theory cannot hope to offer anything more than a glimpse of perceived realities of what goes on in the relations between states and other actors on the global stage. But if we are willing to consult with each other about our individual perceptions of the real world, we may collectively come close to understanding that reality. Having provided my basic assumptions about theory, let me now take you on a guided tour of existing theories of IR.

EXISTING IR THEORIES

IR theories are relatively new; although IR theorists have a tendency of extrapolating from the works of ancient writers such as Thucydides, Mo-Ti, Mencius, Confucius, or Kautilya in their attempts to conceptualize, describe and understand the interactions between actors that accrue from warfare, diplomacy, the balance of power, economic exchanges and the like. But in reality, IR as a self-conscious scholarly discipline has only existed since the late 1930s.

Utopianism and Realism

The first, so-called, theoretical debate in IR was between idealist and realists. E. H. Carr's pivotal contribution to this debate was a book he titled *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. In it, Carr devastatingly ripped apart 'idealism/utopianism' -- the dominant mode of thinking about IR during the inter-war period. In its place, Carr posited a new theory of realism. Carr writing in the late 1930s characterized idealism as 'bankrupt', 'sterile', 'glib', 'gullible', and 'a hollow and intolerable sham.'² This devastating critique of idealists was prompted by the failure of the League of Nations to live up to its mandate of saving the world from another major war like World War I, and by the fact that idealism no longer seemed capable of explaining real world events of that time.

Carr berated distinguished proponents of the idealist view of world affairs, such as Arnold Toynbee, Leonard Woolf, Robert Cecil, Norman Angell, John Dewey, and President Woodrow Wilson, to name a few. And, what was so wrong with idealism?

Well, idealists believed in the progress, free will, reason, the primacy of ideas, and the malleability and essential goodness of human nature. They believed that morality was absolute and universal and that politics could be made to conform to an ethical standard. They felt that war had become obsolescent and that growing interdependence in the globe would render war obsolete. They assumed that there could be a harmony of interest between states which would allow them to cooperate with each other rather than engage in conflictual relations. They advocated disarmament, collective security, world government, open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, the spread of democracy, the abolition of alliances, decolonization, self-determinism, the rule of international law, and the necessity of international organizations.

While idealism is not a singular school of thought, what held the various idealists' theoretical positions together was 'the assumption that conscious, progressive change is possible in international relations.'³

In decimating idealism, Carr offered a paradigm shift in the form of realism. Some scholars argue that what Carr did was to essentially create a straw man (idealism) in order to be able to tear it down and promote his own view of the world. But his world view, realism, at the time seemed to provide a better explanation for what was going on in the world. What Carr saw was a world in which states were the most important actors; each state was constantly seeking to enhance and maximize its power; the struggle for power led to violent clashes and wars; human nature was essentially evil; international organizations, law and morality could not be expected to constrain states' behaviour; and, the only respite from war lay in the balance of power and in the formation of alliances.

Scholars like Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer built on Carr's state-centric realism paradigm believing that the international system is governed by anarchy, meaning that there is no central authority, and that states in pursuit of their self-interest would be in a continual struggle for power. Realism also posited that states could not rely on other states to guarantee their survival. Waltz pushed the realist theory even further with his structural realism. In essence, he argued that the anarchic structure of the international politics forced states to act in the way they do.

Liberal Theories

Almost all other theories of IR can be seen as a variant of either utopianism or realism. So, for example, Liberal theorists generally dispute realists and neo-realists assumptions that deficiency in human nature writ large, or the structure of the international system, leads to aggression and war. Instead, liberal theorists begin with the assumption that aggressive instincts of authoritarian leaders and totalitarian rulers lead to war, and that liberal states, which usually have democratic or republican governments (and are founded on such principles as freedom, equality, civil liberties, respect for private property, free trade, and elected representation), are fundamentally opposed to war. As such, liberalism presents a strong challenge to the various strains of

realism and, at the same time, has much in common with utopian/idealism.

There are other variations on liberal theory, which help to debunk realism. For instance, Functionalism appeared as an explanation of the development of co-operation among Western European states after the Second World War. In an effort to account for the extensive range of co-operative endeavours adopted by previously hostile and competing states, functionalist theories identified the manner in which interactions in non-sensitive areas could develop patterns of co-operation among states. These co-operative experiences would, in the view of functionalists, spill-over into other areas leading to a more inclusive set of co-operative measures and a wider collection of states.

Functionalism and Neo-Functionalism

David Mitrany, a proponent of functionalist theory, outlined his perspective in the book *A Working Peace System*. He saw functionalism as a method for circumventing the state and argued that functionalist activities would overlay political divisions with a spreading web of international interactions leading eventually to a gradual, but inevitable, replacement of states by rendering 'frontier lines meaningless.'⁴ Functionalism gained popularity after 1945, and particularly in response to developments in Europe and especially the formation of what has become the European Union (EU).

The theoretical work by Karl Deutsch and Ernst B. Haas, among others, refined the functionalism of Mitrany and emphasized that such factors as the growing patterns of communications, trade flows and other economic activity could play a role in modifying the security concerns of states.⁵

While some have criticized liberalism as being too general, complex and wide-ranging in scope to be a useful theoretical guide in explaining global politics, it has become evident, particularly since the end of the Cold War, that this paradigm may provide a better and more accurate reflection of the very complex, plural and messy world in which we live. Indeed Michael Mandelbaum has argued that the development and expansion of liberal principles and practice define much of global politics over the past century.⁶ As Zacher and Matthew correctly notes, while the complexity of liberalism may 'undermine theoretical parsimony,' the reality is

that 'if the world is not simple, thinking it is simple does not enhance intellectual understanding.'⁷

Marxist Thought

In most IR classes these days, Marxist thought is not as prevalent as realist, idealist or liberal theories. Certainly, traditional IR theorists seldom engage in serious discussions of Marxism, particularly since the fall of the Soviet Union. Mainstream and popular newspapers and television channels usually do not devote much time to analyses of Marxism either, let alone employ it to analyse world events. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that Marxist conceptions of the world and of global politics, more specifically, require the kind of serious analyses that cannot be reduced to sound bites.

According to Hobden and Jones, Marxist theories 'aim to expose a deeper, underlying – indeed hidden – truth, ' i.e. that the familiar events of world politics – wars, treaties, international aid operations, etc. – all occur within structures that have a tremendous influence on those events. Those structures are the structures of the global capitalist system.⁸ Karl Marx began his analysis of capitalism with the assumption that history is progressively unfolding toward the establishment of Communism (an ideology based on the notion that society can be organized without class distinctions) and that capitalism would be the last stage to be reached before the unfolding of a communist system. By capitalism, Marx was referring to an exploitative system of private ownership of capital that depended heavily on market forces to regulate the distribution of goods and that exploited workers in the process. His revolutionary economic theory posited that the history of societal relationships was one dominated by class struggle; something that was evident not only at the domestic level but also at the international level.⁹

Marx did not write much on the subject of international relations per se, since the discipline of IR really did not exist at the time when he was writing. However, some of his journalistic articles touched on elements of what we would call today international politics. In fact, it would be quite accurate to say that even though Marx's work may have been largely ignored by scholars during his lifetime, his entire body of work has had an incredible influence on the thinking of many scholars in the twentieth century whose research work focused on the dialectical

and exploitative processes of capital. Many developing world scholars embraced the Marxist theory of IR because it helped them to explain the subordination of their states and people to those in the Metropole.

Theories of Imperialism and Dependency

Marxist theory influenced Lenin's theory of imperialism, world systems theory as well as dependency theory.¹⁰ These theories offered a strong contrast to modernization theories which essentially argued that there were stages of economic growth which all states would have to go through in order to reach an advanced stage of development.¹¹ The Dependency School in particular presented an alternative perspective to modernization theories by suggesting that the capitalist world economy ensures the 'underdevelopment' of peripheral countries and, indeed, requires that those countries remain in such a state.¹²

One of the earliest dependency theorists was Paul Baran (1910-1964) who argued that due to existing class structures in both rich and poor countries, it was simply not in the interest of the dominant classes to promote industrialisation in the Third World (the underdeveloped world). Because industrialisation did not yet exist to any significant degree in those countries, it was the local feudal aristocracy, merchants, money-lenders, and a small number of local manufacturers who benefited greatly from abetting core-based capitalists in exploiting poor countries. Furthermore, it made no economic sense for the bourgeoisie in rich countries to encourage, willingly, international competition by helping the Third World (the Global South) to develop.¹³

Dependency scholars like Raúl Prebisch and André Gunder Frank basically argued that metropolises (or the core countries) will continuously extract surplus value from satellite (or peripheral) areas.¹⁴ However, he also noted that this exploitive relationship did not exist solely between rich and poor countries, but also existed within both poor and rich countries. So, for instance, a metropole (urban centre) in a Third World country would exploit local satellites (rural areas) and, in turn, metropolises in industrialised countries would extract surplus value from those metropolises in the Global South until the process ended in the ultimate centre of the system – the United States. Other dependency theorists of note include Fernando Henrique Cardoso

(who became the President of Brazil from 1995-2003) and Enzo Faletto.¹⁵

But Cardoso, writing in the 1970s, criticized dependency theorists for their tendency to treat the Third World as a homogenized space. He stressed that every individual country should be examined in terms of its specific socio-historic context, including its particular class makeup, level of industrialisation, and geographical factors. In short, he believed that the extent of the dependency of periphery countries on the core would, in fact, vary from country to country. Furthermore, empirical evidence supported his position. Since the 1950s, some countries (e.g., Taiwan and South Korea) had managed to achieve significant industrial growth.¹⁶

Post-Dependency and World Systems Theory

This fact caused some developing world scholars to question some of the underlying assumptions of traditional dependency theory and forced them to revisit and rework the theory. One can label these theorists as 'post-dependency' theorists.¹⁷ Some post-dependency theorists argued that instead of moving to socialism and cutting all ties with core countries, Third World countries could embrace liberal democracy and try to integrate into the global economy as a strategy for moving out of underdevelopment. Indeed Cardoso pursued this strategy when he moved into the practice of politics as the President of Brazil in 1995.

Another important departure from dependency theory can be found in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein.¹⁸ In fact, Wallerstein developed his own influential IPE paradigm called 'World Systems Theory.' World systems theory does have some things in common with dependency theory. According to both positions, all politics take place within the framework of a global capitalist economy, whether the politics occur at the international or domestic level. Also, states are not the only actors of importance on the global stage. Social classes are also important and so are regional groupings of states.¹⁹

But what distinguishes world systems theorists from dependency theorists is that the latter begin their analysis with individual countries and move up to the international system (therefore the unit of analysis for dependency theorists remain the individual nation-state and the class structure within it), whereas for the former the unit of analysis is the world capitalist system

(and one moves down from this level to study individual countries). This has important implications for the way one studies IR because everything that occurs in and between states is understood as having an effect on the system as a whole. This is one of World Systems theory's greatest strengths and weaknesses; it at once allows for a very comprehensive explanatory lens while at the same time provides little room for political (individual or collective) agency.

Wallersteinian world systems theoretical approach is decidedly historical, in that it locates the emergence of the world system in Europe around the sixteenth century, or the era defined by the rise of capitalism. This world system expanded to the entire globe as a result of colonization, with the initiator of this expansionary process being capitalism. But given the dynamics of history, the social institutions that emerge from this world system do not remain static. They are constantly changing – adapting to new conditions. So, Wallerstein, taking into account the changes he saw in the world system, advanced the notion of another world economic category, the 'semi-periphery', which operated alongside the core and the periphery.

The semi-periphery zone is key to explaining the reproduction and continued stability of a system defined by exploitation and increasing disparities in wealth. While the core is still understood as the zone that accumulates wealth at the expense of the periphery, the semi-periphery is considered at a mid-level of development in terms of economic and agricultural production, infrastructure, and state apparatuses. The semi-periphery thus acts as a middle man between the core and periphery. Countries located in the semi-periphery benefit from trade with the core – thereby exhibiting some of the characteristics of the core. But they are also exploited in many ways, similar to countries that are part of the periphery.

Furthermore, contra dependency theory, some world system theorists suggest, like certain post-dependency theorists, that all states have the potential of moving upwards in relation to their structural hierarchical position in the global economy (and, of course, to move downwards as well). In other words, theoretically, semi-peripheral states can become core states, and peripheral countries can move into the semi-periphery. This potentiality creates a situation where states (in particular those in the semi-periphery) are in constant competition with each other, and thus

may have an interest in supporting the existing dominant system because of the potential to benefit there-from.²⁰

Thus, the semi-peripheral states in the world system help reproduce the extant system while acting as a buffer against the anger and revolutionary sentiment that might emanate from the periphery. Some Marxian theorists would say that the semi-periphery acts similarly to the domestic middle classes within Western industrialised societies: because they have so much to lose if the status quo is seriously challenged (and the working class has very little or nothing to lose), the middle class will try to prevent any possibility of a genuinely popular revolution.

CRITICAL THEORIES

There are essentially two branches of critical theories. The first are those that essentially deconstruct the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions of all social phenomena, particularly those associated with traditional IR, but do not promote 'reconstruction' or strategies for improving the situation. The second are those that not only deconstruct but also have the normative goal of emancipation and of the radical transformation of existing conditions. Let's deal with both of these in turn.²¹

Post-Modernism

In political philosophy, modernism is associated with a group of theorists – such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Rousseau, Locke, and Mill – who wrote during a socio-historic period known as 'the Enlightenment'. Enlightenment scholars believed that human reason could be used to combat any form of ignorance, superstition, and tyranny and that it would be a vehicle for building a better world. Generally, the enlightenment has been characterized by the unflinching belief that through our own capacity to reason we can arrive at the 'truth' and in so doing rid the world of all irrational ideas. Those scholars of the enlightenment period came to accept certain ideas as 'givens'.

Some of those ideas are:

- history is progressive and moving toward an end or telos. This position is known as a metanarrative because it posits an overarching and unifying connection between historical developments;

- the state is the most reasonable form of political association and is in the best position to ensure the polity's security and socio-cultural growth;
- nature is understood to exist for humans to own, use and exploit; and,
- development is conceived as the exploitation of nature for increased wealth and well-being of society.

The enlightenment is essentially 'euro-centric' in that it emerged out of a specific socio-historical context centred in Western Europe. These ideas were then universalized through colonization and militarization. Much of traditional IR theory (utopianism, liberalism, realism, Marxism) can be considered 'modern' -- as products of the enlightenment.

Post-modern theorists deconstruct much of what modernists have come to accept as 'givens'. While it has only been since the mid-1980s that post-modern approaches have been utilized within the sub-discipline of IR, post-modernism has been an influential school of thought for over 25 years within the social sciences. This social theory was developed by post-war French philosophers who essentially rejected the philosophy of existentialism and were critical of any scholarship that claimed to have direct access to the 'truth' in human affairs.

While there are different strands of post-modern thought, Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of this theory is accepted by adherents of all of the various stands. To be post-modern, in his words, is to exhibit 'incredulity towards metanarratives'.²² Richard Ashley, one of the leading advocates of post-modernism, is especially critical of the metanarratives of modernity and the enlightenment and he disputes their underlying premises. He argues that to be incredulous of metanarratives is to be totally sceptical of any knowledge claim that involves grand, all-encompassing theories about the historical record which are usually transcendent in nature and posit so-called 'universal truths'. This would mean, therefore, that post-modernists are quite keen on rejecting not only utopian, liberal and realist theories, but Marxist theories as well. You can find excellent examples of this branch of post-modern theory in the writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among others.

The advantage of taking a post-modern approach to the study of IR is not that it will increase our knowledge and take us closer to the 'truth' but that it will open up our eyes to the fact that there are multiple perspectives on international relations and thus allow us

to view the world through different lenses; open up our ears to hear diverse, sometimes suppressed and silenced, voices that articulate a variety of particular issues and problems; and, force us to be more critical of views, theories, and practices that have become dominant, hegemonic and orthodox (or taken-for-granted). But there are some downsides to post-modern theories. The late James Rosenau identified seven major contradictions in post-modernism.²³ These are:

1. Its anti-theoretical position is in fact a theoretical stand.
2. While post-modernism stresses the irrational, instruments of reason (a tool of the enlightenment) are freely employed to advance its perspective.
3. The post-modern prescription to focus on the marginal is itself an evaluative method of precisely the sort that it otherwise attacks.
4. Post-modernism stresses intertextuality but often treats texts in isolation (out of context).
5. By adamantly rejecting modern criteria for assessing theory, post-modernists cannot argue that there are no valid criteria for judgement.
6. Post-modernism criticizes the inconsistency of modernism, but refuses to be held to norms of consistency itself.
7. Post-modernists contradict themselves by relinquishing truth claims in their own writings.

We can add a few other criticisms of this school of thought:

- a) If, as post modernists claim, all theories are biased, then post-modernism must be considered biased as well. Thus its critique is turned on itself.
- b) Post-modernism tends to degenerate into nihilism – i.e. negativity for its own sake.
- c) Narratives and metanarratives are deconstructed by post-modernists but nothing is constructed in their places.
- d) Post-modernist have no contribution to make to policy. They have ‘become so estranged from the social and political world that they seek to understand.’
- e) Some of the post-modern literature is dense, tautological, filled with obscure jargon, and sometimes completely incomprehensible.

Clearly, not all of these criticisms can be applied to all post-modernists, since there are a variety of nuanced positions within that particular school of thought.

Some post-modern theorists are, however, not only deconstructivists but also emancipatory in their approach to IR, ensuring that voices once silent in the IR literature will be heard. Gender and feminist theorists fall into that category. Mainstream IR theorists have tended to ignore the points of view of women. In large part this can be blamed on the patriarchal and paternalistic approach of theories that focus on relations between states and separate 'public' from 'private' issues. Men have tended to dominate when it comes to inter-state relations. Men have traditionally been considered masters of the public domain, while women were often relegated to the private realm.

Since mainstream IR theories focused on the public realm, women and gender issues were generally treated as outside of the sphere of 'international relations' in those theories. In fact, it is accurate to say that the mainstream IR theorists discriminated against women or shunted their voices to the margins of this sub-discipline of politics; a situation that is gradually being corrected by feminist IR scholars. The majority of these scholars are activists in their demand for equality between the sexes and for equal rights for women. Clearly, their activism is warranted because, despite gender myopia, there is overwhelming evidence that women across the globe continue to be disadvantaged relative to men across a range of statistics.

Some feminists have argued that the very core assumptions of realism reflect a masculine worldview. It is generally assumed by realists that men are natural leaders and that they are better able to make the tough decisions required for the protection of sovereignty, the running of the economy, and the utilization of military force. The impression one gets from most realist IR literature is that women are either incapable of leading and making those 'tough' decisions, or that they are uninterested in such topics. Such stereotypes are no longer valid, if ever they were, thanks to the emergence of feminist and gender IR theory.

Indeed, women are playing active roles in national, regional and international politics. Just look at the number of women state leaders today from Angela Merkel (Germany), to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (Liberia), to Cristina de Kirchner (Argentina) to our own Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

We should note here that IR feminist theory is not a monolithic or unified school of thought. There are, indeed, many different strands of gender and feminist thinking. Steve Smith and Patricia Owens identify at least five such stands: 1) liberal; 2)

socialist/Marxist; 3) standpoint; 4) post-modern; 5) post-colonial. But they all have in common this desire to emancipate women in the context of international relations activities and decision-making and to challenge the dominant position of men in IR.

Like gender and feminist approaches to IR, the green perspective is generally given short shrift in the IR literature. Yet, over the past few decades we have become very aware of how important environmental issues are for many people around the globe. This is most evident in the increased media coverage given to issues such as global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain, and resource scarcity; the growing number of major international conferences devoted to the environment (e.g., the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992); and the importance attached to multilateral agreements dealing specifically with the environment (e.g., the Kyoto Accord).

It is not a stretch to state that a global consciousness has emerged concerning the importance and immediacy of environmental problems. While the scope and legitimacy of these issues are hotly contested, the important question we need to ask is: how does the green perspective affect traditional approaches to studying IR? Thinking green offers a significant challenge to the largely problem-solving theories of mainstream IR. From the perspective of 'green thought', or ecologism, the contemporary state system, the major structures of the global economy, and many of the global institutions are part and parcel of the environmental problem facing our globe. But environmental issues are never simply 'domestic'; pollution knows no political or physical borders (recall the Chernobyl accident in April 1986 and the more recent BP oil spill in the US).

Environmentalists have suggested that we need a theory of IR that stops thinking of sovereignty as an absolute principle, and instead think in terms of globality, regimes and holistic cooperative mechanism to address environmental threats. Whereas the modernist paradigm views development in terms of industrialization and resource exploitation, environmental theorists reject this outright, suggesting that development theory must be rethought to take into account the finite nature of the Earth's resources and the detrimental effects of resource exploitation and industrial production on the environment. Instead, green thinkers promote the idea of sustainable development, or in some cases, zero-growth. In each case, long-

term ecological interests are expected to take precedence over short-term economic and industrial gains.

Among the alternative theories that have emerged since the advent of the more critical turn in IR theorizing, constructivism stands as a particularly important contribution to understanding the complexity of contemporary international relations. Borrowing from sociological theory, constructivism adopts a more interpretive approach to international relations that calls attention to the influence of norms and identities on the behaviour of the various actors who participate in global politics, including states. The inter-subjective character of social reality is neatly captured by one of constructivism's more prominent exponents, Alexander Wendt's phrase 'anarchy is what states make of it'.²⁴

Rejecting the assumed objectivity of global order, constructivists challenge us to accept that the structures that we often assume to be permanent features of international relations are in fact social facts, constructed by individual agents -- a view shared by many post-modernists. Constructivists, however, also acknowledge that such structures while created by agents, in turn shape how these agents subsequently interact with one another:

Constructivists hold the view that the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material; that ideational factors have normative as well as instrumental dimensions; that they express not only individual but also collective intentionality; and that the meaning and significance of ideational factors are not independent of time and place.²⁵

Constructivist theorists also call attention to the importance of identities as a way of determining the interests and likely behaviours of particular actors in the international system.

Ted Hopf notes that 'the promise of constructivism' is not to develop a grand theory of IR but rather 'to restore a kind of partial order and predictability to world politics that derives not from imposed homogeneity, but from an appreciation of difference.'²⁶

CONCLUSION

What I have given you here is a quick tour of the existing theories of the international relations. There is clearly not a singular theory of IR but rather a plurality of theories of IR, some competing with others, some building on the basic assumptions of others and some deconstructing and questioning the relevance of others.

What is clear is that no new theory of IR has yet been established, although there is a need for one. Indeed, contemporary theorizing in IR appears to be static and detached from what I consider to be revolutionary changes that are occurring in the world today. Taking a panoramic view of IR theorizing, my sense is that there is always a lag between real world events and the theories that can explain those events. Not only is the world currently in flux, the relations between states and between states and non-state actors have been increasingly complex.

As I mentioned earlier, when major systemic change occurs and existing theories are unable to explain what is going on, then there is definitely the need for a Kuhnian paradigm shift. What is needed today is a new theory of IR that can grapple with, understand and explain the transformation that is occurring in our world. That theory would have to have certain characteristics:

- 1) It should be a systemic macro theory that can provide a holistic view of the changes that are occurring around us;²⁷
- 2) It should be concerned with the emerging power and the state of US hegemony;
- 3) It has to be able to capture social complexity and exogenous forces;
- 4) It should build on social network thinking which does not treat social interaction patterns as fixed or as given;
- 5) It should have an approach to various forms of governance, from the global to the local;
- 6) It should be able to capture temporal complexity that is normally ignored or swept under the rug;
- 7) It should bring religion back in.

And it should be able to stand outside the prevailing understanding of international relations to critique existing IR theories while at the same time proposing something in their place.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Professor W. Andy Knight is Director of IIR and Professor and former Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. He has had a distinguished career as an academic and scholar in Canada, and he has been named a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada – the highest honour afforded to Canadian academics. He serves as Advisory Board Member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on the Welfare of Children and was a Governor of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) from 2007 to 2012. Professor Knight co-edited *Global Governance* journal from 2000 to 2005 and was Vice Chair of the

Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS). Knight has written and edited several books, book chapters and journal articles on various aspects of multilateralism, global governance and peace, and United Nations reform. His recent books include: *The Routledge Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect* (with Frazer Egerton) - Routledge 2012; *Towards the Dignity of Difference?: Neither 'end of History' Nor 'clash of Civilizations'* (with Mojtaba Mahdavi) – Ashgate 2012; and *Global Politics* (with Tom Keating) – Oxford University Press 2010. His work cuts across international relations, international law and global governance and is known for challenging the embedded orthodoxies of contemporary multilateralism. Email: andy.knight@sta.uwi.edu

NOTES

- ¹ Stephen Walt, 'One World: Many Theories', *Foreign Policy*, Issue 110, Spring 1998, p.28.
- ² Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919 – 1939 – An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1964), 49-118.
- ³ Peter Wilson, 'The Myth of the First Great Debate,' in Tim Dunn, Michael Cox & Ken Booth (eds.), *The Eighty Years' Crisis: International Relations – 1919-1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.10.
- ⁴ David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1966), p.63.
- ⁵ See Karl Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1957); Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: political, social, and economic forces, 1950-1957* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958).
- ⁶ Michael Mandelbaum, 'Is Major War Obsolete,' *Survival*, Volume 40, Issue 4 (1998-99), pp.20-38.
- ⁷ Mark W. Zacher and Richard A. Matthew, 'Liberal International Theory: Common Threads, Divergent Strands,' Paper presented at the 88th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill (September 1992).
- ⁸ Stephen Hobden and Richard Wyn Jones, 'Marxist Theories of International Relations,' in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to World Politics* 5th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.132.
- ⁹ See Karl Marx, *Economy, Class and Social Revolution*, volume 1971, Part 1, edited by Zbigniew A. Jordan (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1971).
- ¹⁰ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1917).
- ¹¹ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
- ¹² Aidan Foster-Carter, 'From Rostow to Gunder Frank: Conflicting paradigms in the analysis of underdevelopment,' *World Development*, Volume 4, Issue 3 (March 1976), pp. 167-180.
- ¹³ Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968).

- 14 Raúl Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems* (New York: United Nations, 1950); André Gunder Frank, *The Development of Underdevelopment* (Monthly Review Press, 1966).
- 15 Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletta, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
- 16 See Fernando Henrique Cardoso, *Charting a New Course: The Politics of Globalization and Social Transformation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield publishers, 2001).
- 17 Paul James, 'Postdependency? The Third World in an Era of Globalism and Late Capitalism,' *Alternatives*, 22 (1997), pp.205-226.
- 18 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789-1914* (California: University of California Press, 2011).
- 19 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 20 See Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).
- 21 Simon Malpas and Paul Wake (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 22 Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).
- 23 James Rosenau, *Global Voices: Dialogues in International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).
- 24 Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, Volume 46, Issue 2, 1992, pp.391-425.
- 25 John G. Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.33.
- 26 Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', *International Security*, Volume 23, Issue 1, 1998, pp.171-200.
- 27 See Mathias Albert and Lars-Erik Cederman, 'Introduction: Systems Theorizing in IR', in M. Albert, L-E Cederman and A. Wendt (eds) *New Systems Theories of World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p.7.