From International to World Society?

Barry Buzan offers an extensive and long overdue critique and reappraisal of the English school approach to International Relations. Starting on the neglected concept of world society and bringing together the international society tradition and the Wendtian mode of constructivism, Buzan offers a new theoretical framework that can be used to address globalisation as a complex political interplay among state and non-state actors. This approach forces English school theory to confront neglected questions both about its basic concepts and assumptions, and the constitution of society in terms of what values are shared, how and why they are shared, and by whom. Buzan highlights the idea of primary institutions as the central contribution of English school theory and shows how this both differentiates English school theory from realism and neoliberal institutionalism, and how it can be used to generate distinctive comparative and historical accounts of international society.

Barry Buzan is Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and a Fellow of the British Academy. He is the author, co-author or editor of over fifteen books and has published widely in academic journals.
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: 95

From International to World Society?

Editorial Board
Steve Smith (Managing editor)
Thomas Biersteker Phil Cerny Michael Cox
A. J. R. Groom Richard Higgott Kimberley Hutchings
Caroline Kennedy-Pipe Steve Lamy Michael Mastanduno
Louis Pauly Ngaire Woods

Cambridge Studies in International Relations is a joint initiative of Cambridge University Press and the British International Studies Association (BISA). The series will include a wide range of material, from undergraduate textbooks and surveys to research-based monographs and collaborative volumes. The aim of the series is to publish the best new scholarship in International Studies from Europe, North America and the rest of the world.
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: 95

95  Barry Buzan  
From international to world society?  
English School theory and the social structure of globalisation  

94  K. J. Holsti  
Taming the sovereigns  
Institutional change in international politics  

93  Bruce Cronin  
Institutions for the common good  
International protection regimes in international society  

92  Paul Keal  
European conquest and the rights of indigenous peoples  
The moral backwardness of international society  

91  Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver  
Regions and powers  
The structure of international security  

90  A. Claire Cutler  
Private power and global authority  
Transnational merchant law in the global political economy  

93  Patrick M. Morgan  
Deterrence now  

92  Susan Sell  
Private power, public law  
The globalization of intellectual property rights  

87  Nina Tannenwald  
The nuclear taboo  
The United States and the non-use of nuclear weapons since 1945  

86  Linda Weiss (ed.)  
States in the global economy  
Bringing domestic institutions back in  

85  Rodney Bruce Hall and Thomas J. Biersteker (eds.)  
The emergence of private authority in global governance  

84  Heather Rae  
State identities and the homogenisation of peoples  

(List continues at the end of book)
From International to World Society?

English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation

Barry Buzan
To Richard Little
Contents

List of figures and tables xi
Preface xiii
List of abbreviations xv
Glossary xvii

Introduction 1

1 English school theory and its problems: an overview 6
   English school theory: a summary 6
   World society, and the problems and potentials of
   English school theory 10
   The main areas of weakness in English school theory 15
   Is English school theory really theory? 24

2 World society in English school theory 27
   The intellectual history of world society within English
   school thinking 30
   The pluralist–solidarist debate 45
   Conclusions 62

3 Concepts of world society outside English school
   thinking 63
   IR writers with a sociological turn: Burton, Luard and
   Shaw 66
   Sociological conceptions of world society 70
   Global civil society 77
   Conclusions 87

4 Reimagining the English school’s triad 90
   State and non-state 91
Contents

Physical/mechanical and social concepts of system 98
Society and community 108
Individual and transnational 118
Conclusions: reconstructing the English school’s triad 128

5 Reconstructing the pluralist–solidarist debate 139
What type of values, if shared, count as solidarist? 143
Does it make any difference to solidarism how and why any given values are shared? 152
What does ‘thickness’ mean in terms of type and number of values shared, and type and number of people and/or states sharing them? 154
Conclusions 158

6 The primary institutions of international society 161
Definitional problems 163
The concept of primary institutions in English school literature 167
Hierarchy and functionalism within primary institutions 176
The range of institutions and the types of international society 190
Conclusions 195

7 Bringing geography back in 205
Exclusive globalism is not necessary 207
Unwarranted pessimism 212
Understanding the interplay among the interhuman, transnational and interstate domains 217
Conclusions: a vanguard theory of international social structures 222

8 Conclusions: a portrait of contemporary interstate society 228
A snapshot of contemporary interstate society 231
Looking back: what changed, what didn’t and why? 240
Driving forces, deeply rooted structures and contradictions 249
Conclusions: where to from here? 263

List of references 271
Index 284
Figures and tables

**Figures**

1. The classical ‘Three Traditions’ model of English school theory  
   *page 9*
2. The ‘Three Traditions’, first revision  
   98
3. The ‘Three Traditions’, second revision  
   109
4. The ‘Three Traditions’, third revision  
   133
5. The ‘Three Traditions’, fourth revision  
   159

**Tables**

1. Candidates for primary institutions of international society by author  
   174
2. The nested hierarchy of international institutions  
   184
3. Contemporary international institutions  
   187
4. The primary institutions of eighteenth-century European interstate society  
   242
Preface

This book started conscious life when I decided in the late 1990s to attempt a reconvening of the English school. Much of its agenda is already visible in a paper I wrote for the public launch of that project at the BISA Conference in 1999, and subsequently published in the *Review of International Studies* as part of a forum on the English school. That paper opens many of the criticisms of the English school classics, and some of the suggestions as to how to develop and apply the theory, that are followed up here. This book has deeper roots both in my earlier attempts to link English school ideas to American IR theory, which I extend here, and in my world historical writings with Richard Little, which point strongly towards the English school as an excellent site for developing grand theory. Its particular genesis was a growing feeling that a lot of the problems I saw in English school theory hinged on the concept of world society. World society occupied a key place in a triad alongside international society and international system, but was the Cinderella of English school theory, attracting neither consistent usage nor, and in contrast to international society, any systematic attempt to explore its meaning. The vagueness attending world society seemed to underpin a lot of the problems in English school theory about pluralism and solidarity, and how to handle the cosmopolitan and transnational aspects of international life. This dissatisfaction led me to apply for ESRC funding to look into world society. I originally offered an article, but as I dug into world society it quickly became obvious that I was writing a book, and that it would have to take on the whole body of English school theory. In that sense, writing this book has reminded me of the process of writing *People, States and Fear* twenty years ago – indeed, this book could be titled *Peoples, States and Transnational Actors*! Then I was trying to understand the concept of security, and had to follow the threads wherever
Preface

they led without knowing what the whole thing would look like. Now I have pursued the threads opened by world society, and ended up focusing on institutions and the general theoretical framework of English school thinking.

I would like to thank the following for comments on all or parts of earlier versions of this work: Mathias Albert, William Bain, Chris Brown, Bruce Cronin, Thomas Diez, Tim Dunne, Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, Stefano Guzzini, Lene Hansen, Andrew Hurrell, Dietrich Jung, John Keane, Morten Kelstrup, Bob Keohane, Anna Leander, Richard Little, Lene Moesgaard Madsen, Ian Manners, Noel Parker, Nick Rengger, John Ruggie, Brian Schmidt, Gerry Simpson, Hidemi Suganami, Ole Wæver, Adam Watson, Nick Wheeler, Richard Whitman, and several anonymous reviewers for the ESRC. My special thanks to Richard Little, Ole Wæver and the late Gerry Segal. Without my extensive collaborations with them I would never have learned half of the things I needed to understand in order to write this book. I dedicate it to Richard Little, who as well as being a good friend, has accompanied me on much of my intellectual journey towards the English school, and who has played a big role in the success of its reconvening.

I am grateful to the ESRC (award no. R000239415-A) for funding a two-year teaching buyout which enabled me to focus on this project, and to the University of Westminster, and then the London School of Economics, for giving me leave. I am also grateful to the late and much lamented Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) for funding both my presence there, and a regular seminar at which many drafts related to this book received incisive criticism.
Abbreviations

ASEAN  Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIS    Bank for International Settlements
BISA   British International Studies Association
CEO    Chief Executive Officer
CITES  Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
COPRI  Copenhagen Peace Research Institute
CSD    Centre for the Study of Democracy
ECPR   European Consortium for Political Research
ESRC   Economic and Social Research Council
EU     European Union
FIDE   International Chess Federation
FIFA   International Federation of Football Associations
GATT   General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCS    Global Civil Society
IAEA   International Atomic Energy Agency
IBRD   International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, aka World Bank
ICC    International Criminal Court
ICJ    International Court of Justice
IGO    Intergovernmental Organisation
IMF    International Monetary Fund
INGO  International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPCC  Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPE    International Political Economy
IPSA   International Political Science Association
IR     International Relations
List of abbreviations

ISA International Studies Association
MFN Most Favoured Nation


NAFTA North American Free Trade Association
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OIC Organisation of the Islamic Conference
PKO peacekeeping operation
QUANGO quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation
TNA transnational actor
TNC transnational corporation
UN United Nations
UNGA United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US United States
WHO World Health Organisation
WSRG World Society Research Group
WTO World Trade Organisation
Glossary

*Binding forces* – coercion, calculation, belief

*Interhuman society* – social structures based on interactions amongst individual human beings, and in this book referred to as *first-order societies*, and mainly manifested as large-scale patterns of shared identity

*International society* has two meanings in this book:

1. The classical English school usage: is about the institutionalisation of shared interest and identity amongst states, and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of IR theory. I call this *interstate society*

2. A more specific meaning developed along the way in this book to indicate situations in which the basic political and legal frame of international social structure is set by the states-system, with individuals and TNAs being given rights by states within the order defined by interstate society

*Interstate society* – see *international society* definition (1)

*International system* – refers generally to the macro side of the interactions that tie the human race together, and more specifically to the interactions among states. Its usage in classical English school thinking is close to that in realism, being about power politics amongst states within a political structure of international anarchy.


*Pluralism* – defines *second-order societies* of states with a relatively low degree of shared norms, rules and institutions amongst the states, where the focus of society is on creating a framework for orderly coexistence and competition, or possibly also the management of collective problems of common fate (e.g. arms control, environment)
Glossary

Primary institutions – the institutions talked about by the English school as constitutive of both states and international society in that they define both the basic character and purpose of any such society. For second-order societies such institutions define the units that compose the society

Secondary institutions – the institutions talked about in regime theory are the products of certain types of international society (most obviously liberal, but possibly other types as well), and are for the most part consciously designed by states

Second-order societies – those in which the members are not individual human beings, but durable collectivities of humans possessed of identities and actor qualities that are more than the sum of their parts

Solidarism – can be used as a synonym for cosmopolitanism, but in my usage defines international societies with a relatively high degree of shared norms, rules and institutions among states, where the focus is not only on ordering coexistence and competition, but also on cooperation over a wider range of issues, whether in pursuit of joint gains (e.g. trade), or realisation of shared values (e.g. human rights)

State – any form of post-kinship, territorially based, politically centralised, self-governing entity capable of generating an inside–outside structure

The three domains – interstate, interhuman and transnational society

Transnational society – social structures composed of non-state collective actors

Vanguard – the idea common to both military strategy and Leninist thinking that a leading element plays a crucial role in how social movements unfold

World society – has two meanings in this book:

(1) the traditional English school usage takes individuals, non-state organisations and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and puts transcendence of the states-system at the centre of IR theory

(2) the usage developed in this book labelling situations in which no one of the three domains or types of unit is dominant over the other two, but all are in play together