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Frontmatter
More information

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.

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European conquest and the rights of indigenous peoples
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92 *Susan Sell*
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The globalization of intellectual property rights

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

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States in the global economy
Bringing domestic institutions back in

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(List continues at the end of book)

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Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

To Richard Little

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More information

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978-0-521-83348-6 - From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation
Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83348-6 - From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation
Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-83348-6 - From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation
Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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

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CAMBRIDGE

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Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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 solidarism, 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

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Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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 Mosegaard 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.

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Frontmatter
More information

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

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Frontmatter
More information

List of abbreviations

ISA	International Studies Association
MFN	Most Favoured Nation
Montreal Protocol (1987) to the Vienna Convention for Protection of the Ozone Layer (1987)	
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
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and Kyoto Protocol (1997)
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

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Frontmatter
More information

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.

Montreal Protocol – (1987) to the Vienna Convention for Protection of the Ozone Layer (1987)

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)

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Barry Buzan
Frontmatter
More information

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

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