Introduction

This Introduction starts by setting out the questions and rationale behind the writing of this book. The second section looks at the payoffs that we see our approach offering for both international relations (IR) theory generally, and English school theory in particular. The last section summarizes the rest of the chapters in the book.

1 Rationale

What exactly is meant by phrases such as 'international society at the global level' or 'global international society' (GIS)? The assumption and rationale of this book are that the answer to this question is far from clear. And without being able to specify the composition and characteristics of GIS in some concrete way, it is not really possible to answer questions either about how GIS was and is composed and whether it was and is getting stronger or weaker. The so-called English School (ES) of international relations can be said to have a de facto copyright to the term *international society*, but arguably this overall question about the composition of GIS is of importance to all other approaches to international relations, as well to other social science disciplines dealing with social relations at a planetary scale. Everyone needs to be able to specify what the 'whole' is that we attempt to discern when we adopt a global social perspective. That goes for ES scholars, globalization scholars, sociologists and the like. This is not to say that answers to this question are entirely missing at present, but that they are often vague, implicit and scattered. Let us begin by outlining the tentative ES perspective on GIS.

GIS comes about as the outcome of the ES's international society expansion story, whereby what starts as a European social form expands to global scale. It does so mainly through processes of colonization and decolonization (the Americas, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Middle East), but also through socialization and competition (Russia, the Ottoman Empire) and encounter and reform (Japan, China, Iran). After the Second World War and the major round of decolonization that followed

it, these processes resulted in a GIS based more or less on the European *Westphalian* model of sovereign equality amongst all states, albeit with the longstanding 'legalized hegemony' of the great powers still embodied in the P5 arrangement of the UN Security Council.

So far, so good. We find the basic force of the expansion story persuasive, and accept that its outcome was indeed a GIS that is a meaningful global social structure, and therefore an important part of the landscape of IR. But that is when the questions start. Mainstream ES writing tended to take this 'thin' GIS as given, and then worried about its cohesion (the 'revolt against the West' by the new third world members) and its normative evolution (mainly in terms of liberal political values such as democracy and human rights). The classical ES did not interest itself much in the possibility of regional international society, even though it grew up while two such examples were in plain sight. The Soviet challenge offered both an alternative regional form and a challenge to the Westphalian format on a global scale. And the European Community (EC) showed a clearly emergent regional differentiation. Neither did the ES pursue the idea strongly latent in 'the revolt against the West', and later in the postcolonial and *dependencia* literatures, that there were deep and significant differences of type amongst the states-members of GIS, and a clear continuation of the core-periphery structure set up during the colonial era. This latter blindness was intensified by the ES's disinclination to engage with the economic dimension of GIS, other than a rather vague commitment to the idea that development would even things out within some politically acceptable timescale. It was hard to avoid the conclusion that just as neorealism's concept of bipolarity served the interests of the two superpowers by privileging their position as an exclusive club of two, so GIS served the interests of the West by covering up both the violent and exploitative relationships of the colonial era that gave birth to it, and the ongoing inequalities that dominated much of its contemporary operation. Moreover, classical ES writers had no teleological view that GIS would inevitably get stronger. As mentioned previously, they feared that expansion/decolonization had weakened the cultural coherence of GIS by diluting the previously dominant Western element. But how could one assess the validity of this claim, or indeed, of its reverse? By what criteria could one understand whether GIS was getting stronger or weaker?

So the ES expansion story, to us, gives rise to a package of questions about the composition of GIS that includes the issues of the characteristics of units, hierarchy, spatial differentiation, strength/weakness and cultural coherence. Conveniently, these issues are also what animate key debates within other IR paradigms, as well debates within the other

social sciences. IR realists are majorly concerned with states as core units, sociologists with hierarchy and the strength/weakness of society, anthropologists with cultural coherence and probably all three with spatial differentiation. And, of course, some of these interests overlap. It therefore seemed to us that this package of questions, and the ES angle, provided a useful starting point for an attempt to clarify how we can think about GIS or, if you prefer the noncopyright label, the 'social whole' from a global perspective.

At this stage, the reader is probably wondering what we can bring to the table, how we can leverage our previous research to help answer the overall question about the composition of GIS and whether it is getting stronger or weaker. Five strands of work are relevant in this respect.

The first strand is Buzan's work on interaction capacity (Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993; Buzan and Little, 2000). Interaction capacity is a way of looking at international systems in terms of their carrying capacity for information, goods and people, and the speed, range and cost with which these things can be done. Interaction capacity determines how loosely or tightly international systems are integrated, and consequently how weakly or strongly the neorealist logics of socialization and competition can work. This work was not initially inspired or framed by ES thinking about GIS. But eventually it led in that direction, and amongst other things it raised Buzan's consciousness about both how systems could be internally differentiated, and what the criteria might be for assessing whether a system was strong/thick or weak/thin, and indeed, whether strong/weak and thick/thin were the same, or different, or different but correlated.

The second strand is work on regional international societies. Buzan was already attuned to the regional level from his work on international security (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). From an early point in his late 1990s project to reconvene the ES, regional international society was a particular target. The most obvious opportunity was to build bridges between the ES and those studying the European Union (EU), for what was the EU if not an unfolding case study of the most solidarist international society ever attempted. Lacking the requisite knowledge himself, Buzan encouraged others to look into this (Diez and Whitman, 2002; Riemer and Stivachtis, 2002). And thinking that this was probably the most fruitful way of unpacking GIS, Buzan partnered with Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (2009) and Yongjin Zhang (2014) to pull together in-depth studies of two other possible regional international societies: the Middle East and East Asia. Both of these cases proved to be more difficult and less conclusive than the EU one. The Middle Eastern study underlined the dramatic differences between the postcolonial weak states in that region

and the strong states in the core. It showed some significant signs of a regional societal structure, but it was difficult to put clear boundaries around this. There were indeed several possible boundaries, and these were shaped as much by the transnational and interhuman domains as by the interstate one. The East Asian study underlined both the difficulty of putting boundaries around a regional international society and the powerful and pervasive influence of what were essentially core–periphery dynamics of how local states accepted or challenged the institutions of what Buzan and Zhang referred to as 'the Western-global international society'. These projects, and some others on Latin America (Merke, 2011), suggested that while there were indeed significant elements of international society on the regional level, this was not the only, or perhaps even the best, way of unpacking differentiation within GIS. An interest in regional international society is what initially brought the two of us together. As a history student at the University of Copenhagen in the early 2000s, Schouenborg had been drawn to Buzan's work and decided to pursue a doctorate at the London School of Economics (LSE) with a thesis exploring Scandinavia as a regional international society, which was later published by Routledge (Schouenborg, 2013). This work pushed the research agenda forwards by further investigating how regional international societies could be differentiated from the larger GIS, what constituted them, how they expanded and what held them together. A notable contribution was the first sustained empirical investigation of the concept of binding forces that Buzan had introduced in his 2004 book. This concept is discussed further later in this Introduction.

The third strand is Buzan's work on primary institutions (PIs) (Buzan, 2004a; 2014). By setting up primary institutions as a social structural way of analysing GIS, this work provided the tools for comparing and differentiating international societies across time and space. It was this toolkit that was applied to the regional case studies on the Middle East and East Asia. While discussion of primary institutions is well developed for the interstate domain, almost nothing has been done to think about how to identify social structures in the transnational and interhuman domains.[1] All of these concepts will also be more thoroughly explained later in this Introduction.

The fourth strand is Buzan's work on differentiation theory with Mathias Albert (Buzan and Albert, 2010; Albert and Buzan, 2011; Albert, Buzan and Zürn, 2013). This came about when Albert noticed

[1] For first attempts at doing this, see Davies (2017) and Buzan (2018a).

a potential isomorphism between what the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998) was calling *sectors* and his interest in sociological theories of functional differentiation. Sectors were about analysing securitization logics within economic, political, military, societal (identity) and environmental domains. Functional differentiation, particularly in the work of Luhmann on which Albert was focused, had a seemingly parallel set of what it labelled *function systems*. Although not originally linked to Buzan's work on the ES, this work on differentiation theory opened his mind to thinking more deeply about the composition of social wholes, and the ways in which social structures could be both defined by, and compared on the basis of, how they were differentiated. Differentiation theory began to merge with his thinking about primary institutions, which also took sectoral/functional forms. Functional differentiation likewise had a major impact on Schouenborg's thinking about international society and primary institutions. Following Buzan's lead, he developed a functional typology for theoretically differentiating between primary institutions (Schouenborg, 2011; 2013). This typology was later refined and tested on a crosscultural and transhistorical sample of societies (Schouenborg, 2017). The guiding ambition was to allow for unbiased comparisons between modern international societies and international societies in the more distant past.

The fifth strand is Buzan's work on the expansion and evolutions stories (Buzan and Little, 2009; 2014; Buzan, 2010a; 2012; 2014). This work raised his consciousness not only about the processes by which contemporary GIS was formed, but also about the critical literature around the expansion story, and its Westcentric character. Amongst other things, this engagement led him to start thinking about the making of GIS in terms of two abstract models. The monocentric model, in which one subglobal international society overawes and absorbs the rest, points to a core–periphery legacy. The polycentric model, in which various subglobal international societies expand and interact until they form a global one, points towards regional differentiation.

These five strands of work have offered pathways into formulating the initial question about the composition of GIS, and they have also familiarized us with a diverse set of literatures that have bearing on this question. This book is mainly about pulling these literatures together to achieve a new synthesis, and in the process to think systematically through the issues in the previously outlined package of questions. That inevitably means that the literatures outside IR, with which we are only superficially familiar, receive more limited attention. However, we do consider it

a distinct advantage to be able to clarify the ES and IR perspective on the composition of GIS, which can then act as a foundation for a more qualified crossdisciplinary dialogue. For there are, of course, partial answers outside IR to the what-is-GIS-question. A lot of this literature seems to have been partly inspired by the need to capture the contested phenomenon we today label globalization. Appadurai (1996: 33; see also 2013), for example, has introduced five different kinds of global flows: (a) ethnoscapes; (b) mediascapes; (c) technoscapes; (d) financescapes; and (e) ideoscapes. Similarly, political scientists Held et al. (1999: 16–17) have talked about flows and networks of interconnectedness. Castells' (1996; 1997; 1998) impressive work on a theory of the network society is in the same genre. The world society work of the so-called Stanford School (Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer, 2010; Navari, 2018) is another complementary perspective that moreover shares its core concept with the ES (although with a significantly different meaning). Going further back in time, Wallerstein (1974; see also Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1997; Hall et al., 2011) and Mann (1986; 1993; 2012; 2013) have also in their separate ways offered concepts suitable for capturing global social structure. These perspectives point in quite different directions from the ES's conception of global social structure, and none appears to directly address whether that structure, however defined, is getting stronger or weaker.

We believe it is a propitious time to reflect on the question of the composition of GIS. The ongoing shift in power and authority from the West to the rest, changes in the global political economy and what that will mean for the previously Western-dominated global institutions and indeed order have made the task of understanding the fundamental structure of GIS all the more urgent. While not always adopting this specific language, it appears to be a common preoccupation of policy makers and scholars (e.g., Acharya, 2014) to formulate opinions about the potential weakening or strengthening of GIS (the weakening camp seems to be in ascent). Much of this debate in IR is, however, implicitly or explicitly, framed in terms of hegemonic stability theory. In other words, it assumes that hegemons generate international orders, and that as hegemons decline so do the orders they create. Our approach is more in tune with Keohane's (1984) insight that social institutions have strength and staying power separate from hegemons. In other words, social orders have normative and institutional structures that can and should be assessed in their own terms. But how can this be settled? What should we look for and which criteria should be applied? This book is our contribution to putting this debate on a stronger footing.

2 Aims

Our general aim is to address all those in IR (and beyond) who are interested in the composition and structure of the international system/society. There is some tendency to differentiate the ES, on the one hand, from realism and liberalism, on the other, by attaching an 'international society' label to the former, and an 'international system' one to the latter two. But while it is alluring in some ways to make the differentiation between system (physical, mechanical) and society (social, and under endless reproduction and reconstruction), this separation has always been false. As Onuf (2002: 228) astutely pointed out, even for realists, 'sovereignty is the only rule that matters for the constitution of anarchy'. Thus even realism depends on a social construction, for if the rule of sovereignty was not there, the 'system' would not be anarchic. As Bull (1977: 233–81) explained long ago, there are many other forms that the world political system could take, and may take in the future. Both the ES and constructivists (e.g., Wendt, 1999) have established that the international system is an inescapably social structure, and that social structure cannot exist apart from the mechanical interactions that define systems. Within the ES, there is a substantial body of thought that rejects the system/society distinction altogether, essentially seeing a range of types of international society (for a summary of that debate, see Buzan, 2014: 171–2).

If one accepts that system and society are two sides of the same coin, then the enquiry we make here speaks to all those in IR who want to understand the system/society nexus. In part, this is therefore a general theoretical contribution applicable to all times and places where there is 'an international' to be studied.[2] But its main empirical focus is on the formation and structure of the contemporary GIS. Once the conflation of system and society is accepted, and sovereignty recognized as a social institution rather than a permanent fixture, then the apparent permanence of 'anarchy', so beloved by realists, evaporates. Sovereignty/anarchy becomes just one social choice amongst many. On that basis, the key ES question about how strong or weak an international society is, and in which direction it is moving, ceases to be a concern only of those focused on international society, and also becomes a central question for those who prefer the 'international systems' label. Those primarily interested in international systems have not paid much attention to the strength/weakness of systems as such (Buzan and Little, 2000). They have focused

[2] On the concept of 'the international', see Rosenberg (2013; 2016).

on the distribution of power within the system, and the stabilities/instabilities of that, rather than on the underlying system itself, which is either taken as given or assumed to be a permanent condition.

The constructivist norms literature has also, somewhat surprisingly, not given much thought to what the social whole is that we encounter at the global level and the strength/weakness of this social structure. Wendt (1999) is more or less the only one who has adopted the holistic or global perspective with his ES-inspired discussion of different cultures of anarchy. There is an implication in Wendt that his Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian types of international society represent a spectrum of weaker-to-stronger, but his thinking is so infused with normative preferences for more liberal values that it is difficult to disentangle the two lines of thought. The early constructivist scholars who focused on the development and spread of norms (e.g., Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999) were generally not concerned about the social whole, but sought to explicate how, mostly 'nice' (meaning Western and progressive), norms were successfully promoted by activist 'norm entrepreneurs' and gradually internalized by states. When later work put an emphasis on norm contestation (Wiener, 2004; 2014), selective and mediated adoption of norms by states in non-Western regions (Acharya, 2004; 2011) and direct opposition in the form of 'norm antipreneurs' (Bloomfield, 2016; Bloomfield and Scott, 2017), there was still little in the way of sustained reflection on what the aggregate social formation was/is and whether contestation led to its weakening or strengthening. At most, this literature appeared to talk about antagonistic normative communities (Bloomfield, 2016: 320, 331), without sufficiently specifying the boundaries, conceptual and geographical, of these phenomena.

Liberal institutionalist approaches view GIS much more in terms of secondary institutions (regimes and intergovernmental organizations [IGOs]) than primary ones. Like constructivist approaches, they are also infused with preferences for liberal/Western values, and in addition carry the burden that they are often highly US-centric in their concerns. Liberal institutionalists seem more worried about the impact of US decline on a US-centred world order, and the consequences for the US of it disengaging from supporting that order, than they are about GIS itself. This attitude is very clear in recent works such as Ikenberry (2009) and Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth (2012–13), which seem to be aimed mainly at keeping the United States in play as the leader of a liberal world order, not least by pointing out all of the advantages that it accrues from being leader. In an earlier round of declinism, Keohane's (1984) classic *After Hegemony* could be interpreted as saying that world

order was stronger with a hegemon in play, but once established, might survive as a system of rules even after the hegemon had declined. This literature reflects the influence of hegemonic stability theory (Gilpin, 1981; 1987), and carries the implicit hypothesis that GIS is stronger with a hegemon than without, though disentangling this from the particular interests of the hegemon itself, in this case the United States, is not easy.

But while mainstream liberal institutionalism offers only thin insights into the structure of GIS, there is a promising literature emerging on thinking about the linkages between primary and secondary institutions (Spandler, 2015; Navari, 2016).[3] Here the main focus is on how to think about primary and secondary institutions together, with each constituted by and constitutive of, the other. Primary institutions set the framework for secondary ones, but secondary institutions are not just expressions of primary ones. They are also places where primary institutions are reproduced and practiced, and where their meanings and practices are developed and evolved. Few secondary institutions would be structured as they are without the primary institution of sovereignty, and primary institutions such as development, the market and environmental stewardship would not mean what they now do without the extensive debates and negotiations around them that took place in secondary institutions. Exploration of this theme is still at an early stage, but its development seems very likely to throw useful light on how we understand the structure and evolution of GIS.

With all of this in mind, our main aims for this book are to contribute to IR theory along the following lines.

- We want to add to the consciousness within IR that much of its theory is abstracted from (mainly Western) history, and that IR theory and world history are in important ways co-constitutive (Buzan and Lawson, 2018). We do this by relating the ES's historical analysis, particularly its expansion story (Bull and Watson, 1984a; Buzan and Little, 2014; Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017) to its structural one. Linking these two shows how the process of formation that led to the contemporary GIS has led to a variety of structural legacies both for the states forged in this process and for GIS as a whole. These legacies drive a set of significant differentiations of state type and of geography, status and function within GIS, that are important components of any structural understanding of GIS.

[3] Tonny Brems Knudsen and Cornelia Navari are also working on a book on this topic: *International Organization in the Anarchical Society*.

- These differentiations provide specific taxonomical tools for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of GIS, and indeed international society at any level, which has become an urgent issue as the West loses the dominant global position it has enjoyed over the past two centuries, both in its ability to generate and exercise power and authority and in its control over the agenda setting and rule making for GIS. As the West goes into relative decline, it will become increasingly important to be able to understand how and why GIS is getting stronger or weaker. To do this, we take a close look at the composition and structure of the contemporary GIS, developing four ideal-type models of it: *like-units*, *regional/subglobal*, *hierarchy/privilege* and *functional differentiation*. We assess how well or badly these models capture the units, structures and binding forces of GIS.
- Through these models, we provide links to the literatures in both the ES and IR more generally, about both hierarchy and hegemony and functional differentiation within the anarchical society. Amongst other things, we cast some light on how to link the transnational and interhuman domains to the interstate one, and for the ES and IR theory, how to relate the ES's core concept of primary institutions to the IR 'institutionalism' that focuses on secondary institutions (intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and regimes).
- We aim also to provide a wider range of systematic criteria for comparative and evolutionary studies of international societies.

Our focus in this book is on social structures. We do not cover the dramatic increases in the physical interaction capacity of the international system that have been extensively documented elsewhere (Buzan and Little, 2000; Buzan and Lawson, 2015a).

It is also a book prioritizing the analytical over the normative. As ES scholars, we represent a marginal position in this respect. Most writers in this tradition, past and present, have had a normative focus, often inspired by political theory. Generally, they have concerned themselves with the 'is' as a bridge to reflect on the 'ought': how to achieve a better international society or how to move beyond it to a better alternative. We, by contrast, are only focused on the 'is'. This is emphatically not because we conceive the analytical and the normative to represent two fundamentally incompatible intellectual projects. Rather, we see them as highly complementary. Clarifying what 'is', to us, seems to be an indispensable move in contemplating what 'ought' to be and how best to get there. With this book, we do not claim that a strong international society is necessarily normatively better than a weak one; we aim for as detached and analytical a perspective as possible. But for those mainly interested in

the normative project of promoting a better and stronger international society (or, like the Brexiteers, a 'better' but weaker one), we think that such a project would be greatly enhanced by being able to first specify what comprises international society and how to assess whether it is getting stronger or weaker. We see better/worse as a distinct, though sometimes overlapping, question from weaker/stronger. By focusing on the latter question, we hope to deliver one possible point of departure for those interested in more normative projects. Buzan's 2004 revision of ES theory and the normative/analytical distinction was already 'rather radical', according to his own assessment as well as that of others (Buzan, 2004a: 228; Williams, 2011: 1237), and in this book Schouenborg may have radicalized Buzan even further! However, in one sense, at least, our project does stay true to the heritage of one of the ES 'founding fathers'. Hedley Bull also had a penchant for going back to first principles to rethink and shed new light on the complex problems thrown up by contemporary world politics (Howard, 2008: 127), and in this book we fiercely pursue that agenda. Last but not least, in the course of our argument, we also engage the traditional ES debate between solidarists and pluralists, and we believe we offer several novel additions and clarifications to it.

3 Summary of Contents

Chapter 1 argues that international society at the global level is inadequately theorized. It sets up a differentiation approach as a way to rectify this shortcoming and applies that both to the units that comprise the membership of GIS and to the structures of GIS itself. It also considers how to theorize the binding forces that hold social structures together. This two-level framework of differentiation – of the types of members, and of the substructures – of GIS, alongside the issue of binding forces, forms the basic approach of the book.

Chapter 2 focuses on how the formative process of GIS over the past few centuries explains the differentiation we find both among states and within GIS. The formative process is framed in the form of two general models: *polycentric* (where several separate civilizational cores merge into a single international society) and *monocentric* (where one local civilizational core rises to dominate all the others). The monocentric model is the one that fits most closely with the expansion story, and the chapter explores four submodels within that of how both the states and some of the other substructures of GIS came into being: *unbroken creation*, *repopulation, colonization/decolonization* and *encounter/reform.* The analysis concentrates on how these models generated marked differentiations

amongst the types of states that became members of contemporary GIS and sometimes distributed these differences in patterned ways.

Chapters 3 through 6 build on the theory and history in the first two chapters to set up four ideal-type models of contemporary GIS: 'like-units', regional/subglobal, hierarchy/privilege and functional differentiation. Each of these chapters sets out the assumptions of the model and gives a short sketch of how the world looks through the lens of the model. This is done in both static (what the GIS looks like now) and dynamic (how has history unfolded to bring us to where we are) modes. On this basis, we set out the criteria within the model by which one might judge whether an international society viewed in these terms is getting weaker or stronger. The chapters then turn to a critical assessment of the model, asking how well or badly it captures the units, the structures, and the binding forces of GIS.

Chapter 7 combines these four ideal-type models into an attempted representation of the contemporary GIS in all of its complexity and contradiction. It starts by attempting to allocate the relative weight of the four component models across four historical eras from classical times to the present. It then turns to the question of whether, and in what ways, GIS is getting stronger or weaker. This is done by aggregating the criteria for this identified in the four models and asking how this complex and often messy GIS is evolving, and how its different layers play into each other in co-constituting ways.

Chapter 8 explores the implications of this framework for both English School and IR theory and reviews how well or badly we fulfilled our opening aims and why, and what research agenda thereby unfolds.