

Part I

Introduction

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48497-8 — Culture and Order in World Politics
Edited by Andrew Phillips , Christian Reus-Smit
Excerpt
[More Information](#)

1 Introduction

Andrew Phillips and Christian Reus-Smit

The early twenty-first century has seen renewed concern over the relationship between cultural diversity and international order – concern fuelled by four intersecting trends. The first is the rise of non-Western great powers, who many fear will seek to overturn the ‘Western’ order, propagating their own distinctive values and practices.¹ The second is the advent of highly fractious forms of transnational identity politics. Whether conceived around religious, racial, or civilizational affinities, these exclusivist identities challenge both universal, cosmopolitan identifications and the nation-state’s claim to priority over citizens’ allegiances.² The third is the rise of Western nativism, which conceives cultural diversity as a threat to civic unity and domestic order, and views liberal internationalism and the order it supports with suspicion, if not outright hostility.³ The fourth is the global refugee and migration crisis. While animating, on the one hand, renewed humanitarian consciousness and action, this multifaceted crisis has unsettled broad-based support for national models for governing cultural diversity and prompted a far-reaching securitization of migration issues.⁴ For many these trends raise the spectre of a culturally fragmented globe, one that lacks the cultural consensus needed to sustain international order in general, and the Western liberal order more specifically.

Concerns about diversity and order are not new to international relations (IR). Indeed, fears about the weakening of Western cultural influence have animated the field from the outset. In the United States the fear was racial: that an international order based on white supremacy was threatened by rising black consciousness and African-American critiques of the global colour line.⁵ In Britain fears were cast in civilizational terms (even if race was never far below the surface). The modern international order had distinctive Western-civilizational foundations, it was argued,

¹ Jacques 2012; Ren 2016; Serfaty 2011; Gray and Murphy 2015.

² Bhatt 2012; Kepel 2017. ³ Milacic and Vukovic 2017; Crothers 2011.

⁴ Huysmans 2006. ⁵ Vitalis 2015.

and the decolonization of Europe's empires threatened to undermine these foundations. Against this background, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* was but a restatement of old, well-rehearsed themes, and current anxieties echo these themes in the context of new intersecting trends. These anxieties have not gone unanswered, though. Institution-
alists have long argued that an international order based on sovereign equality, non-intervention, and self-determination can accommodate peoples of diverse cultural complexions: indeed, they claim that this is precisely what this order was designed to do, emerging as it did from Europe's religious wars. Liberals go further, arguing that the modern 'liberal' order is 'open and rules-based,' admitting states of all cultures, requiring only that they prosecute their interests within an agreed framework of institutional rules and procedures.

These contrasting positions find expression well beyond the academy, in media commentary and the pronouncements of policy makers. Liberal political leaders are urgently extolling the virtues of the rules-based international order, imploring China and other rising non-Western powers to live and act within the rules, hoping that the order can accommodate not only conflicting interests but also contrasting values. We must 'renew the international system that has enabled so much progress,' President Barack Obama told the United Nations, as 'humanity's future depends on us uniting against those who would divide us along the fault lines of tribe, sect, race, or religion.'⁶ Others, meanwhile, are already sounding the order's death knell. How, Henry Kissinger laments, 'can regions with such diverse cultures, histories, and traditional theories of order vindicate the legitimacy of any common system?'⁷ Writing for Sydney's Lowy Institute, Anthony Bubalo and Michael Fullilove have warned that we 'need to get used to the idea that as new countries rise, the rules of the international game will not always be made by us, or by people like us.'⁸

This book, and the trilogy of which it is part, challenges the terms of this debate.⁹ Undeniably, questions of cultural diversity have assumed an uncomfortable new prominence in world politics. Yet the culturalist side of the debate cleaves to a conception of culture long discredited in specialist fields such as anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology – a conception that sees cultures as primordial, unitary, internally coherent, and bounded. And if this view does not hold in smaller-scale social contexts, it is ill-suited to understanding the relationship between cultural diversity and international order. Similarly, the institutionalist

⁶ Obama 2014. ⁷ Kissinger 2014, 8. ⁸ Bubalo and Fullilove 2014.

⁹ The first volume in this trilogy is Reus-Smit 2018a.

alternative bears little scrutiny. As we shall see, institutions play an important role in structuring cultural diversity, but they do not remove cultural issues, practices, or politics from the international arena, pushing them down to the domestic level. Rather, international institutions organize cultural difference, generating hierarchies and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Overall, mainstream debate in IR conceives cultural diversity in either of two ways: as something subversive of international order, or irrelevant to it. This restrictive framing ignores the complex ways in which cultural diversity has historically been deeply constitutive of international orders and remains so today.

This debate, and its problematic yet frequently articulated poles, is the product of a host of factors, not the least being the legacy of civilizational and racial conceits from the age of empire and, simultaneously, the overconfident translation of liberal ideals of the national polity into the international arena. It has been aided, however, by an extraordinary lack of engagement between IR scholars on the one hand, and specialists on culture (and cultural diversity) on the other. With notable exceptions, IR scholars have written as though anthropologists and sociologists had nothing to say about culture after the 1950s, repeating time and again outmoded notions of cultures as coherent, unified, tightly integrated, neatly bounded, and strongly constitutive. And even when newer understandings took root in the neighbouring subfields of political theory and comparative politics, IR was fallow ground. Cultural specialists have done little to bridge the divide. While anthropologists, cultural studies scholars, and sociologists have stepped beyond the local and national to address questions of globalization, they have shown little interest in the relationship between culture and international order per se. Historians, by contrast, have done much to illuminate this relationship, but have left largely untouched the conceptual and theoretical issues that animate much IR scholarship.

This book seeks to transcend this disciplinary divide, bringing into conversation contributors from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to consider anew the relationship between cultural diversity and international order. It is the product of a deliberate exercise in intellectual engineering, in which we brought together some of the world's leading scholars of international order with eminent writers on cultural diversity, and asked them to read each other's work and to write chapters that bridged the divide. The result is a unique interdisciplinary dialogue, one that challenges the most taken-for-granted assumptions about culture and order, and yields a new, empirically informed account of this complex relationship. Its interdisciplinarity has two dimensions. Among the IR scholars, we included authors whose work already evinces interdisciplinary reach,

even if not to the study of culture specifically. These scholars brought to the conversation established records of engagement with history, sociology, law, and political theory, and special interests in gender, race, religion, hierarchy and order, and world cultural heritage. It is the second dimension of interdisciplinarity, however, that lifts the book out of the ordinary, especially for a work in IR. Integral to the project have been the contributions of leading sociologists, lawyers, historians, and political theorists: Ellen Berrey, Ann Swidler, Arnulf Becker Lorca, and James Millward.¹⁰ The work of Swidler and Millward has been foundational to contemporary debates about culture (in sociology and Chinese history respectively), and Berrey's and Becker Lorca's writings are at the cutting edge of ethno-sociological and international legal research on cultural diversity.

The benefits of such interdisciplinarity have been twofold. First, there have been the conceptual and theoretical pay-offs. As explained in Chapter 2, we enlist two key insights from specialist fields: that culture is always heterogeneous and contradictory, and that social institutions – themselves cultural artefacts – play a key role in patterning culture. Moreover, institutions do not just order pre-existing cultural forms; they interpellate them, bringing them into existence as actors tailor their identities, normative priorities, and cultural practices in response to prevailing institutional incentives, models, and scripts. Second, stepping outside the disciplinary confines of IR has brought significant empirical benefits. Traditionally, arguments about cultural diversity and international order have drawn on European historical experience, then generalized from a single (often poorly understood) case. By contrast, we have been able to situate a revised understanding of the European case within a broader array of cases: namely, the Ottoman and Chinese orders. Interdisciplinary engagement has also exposed how culture and order relate at levels normally ignored by IR scholars. Berrey's chapter on the anti-Agenda 21 movement in the United States brings to the fore how domestic cultural contestation is shaping the United States' orientation to the liberal international order. Swidler's chapter turns our gaze in the opposite direction, highlighting the transnational cultural politics that is generating a global order, above and beyond the more narrowly conceived international order.

As previously noted, this is the second volume in a trilogy on cultural diversity and international order. The first volume – Reus-Smit's *On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference* – clears

¹⁰ Anne Norton played a key role in the early stages of project but was unable, for personal reasons, to provide a chapter for this final volume.

the theoretical terrain for the project, and sets out, in preliminary form, an alternative framework for understanding diversity and order.¹¹ IR is not known for its analyses of culture. The assumed primacy of material factors, and a preference for rational actor explanations, has discouraged cultural analysis, with culture commonly portrayed as conceptually ambiguous, empirically intangible, and causally unquantifiable. Yet IR scholars of diverse theoretical persuasions make cultural assumptions all the time, and the most prominent of the field's theories – including realism and rational choice – make arguments about culture, however well or ill developed. *On Cultural Diversity* excavates these arguments, showing that despite their different theoretical commitments, IR scholars return time and again to the same outdated conception of culture, where cultures are treated as coherent entities, clearly bounded and well integrated, and constitutive in effect. Expressed in realist, English School, constructivist, and rational choice theories, this *default conception* of culture has long been rejected in specialist fields, criticized for exaggerating the boundedness and integration of cultural forms, ignoring their heterodox and contradictory character, and neglecting the relationship between power and culture. These criticisms are particularly damaging to culturalist accounts of international order, challenging the very idea of unified cultural contexts on which they depend. Building on more recent insights from anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology, Reus-Smit offers a new account of how cultural diversity and international order relate, one that takes heterogeneous cultural contexts as given, focuses on the legitimation challenges that accompany order construction in such contexts, and highlights the role that institutionalized 'diversity regimes' play in organizing cultural complexity.

The interdisciplinary collaboration that produced this volume unfolded while *On Cultural Diversity* was being written, and the two shaped each other in important ways. While the latter is primarily concerned with excavating and critiquing how culture has been understood in IR theory, the alternative perspective Reus-Smit sets out was deeply influenced by this volume's interdisciplinary discussions. At the same time, however, Reus-Smit's framework provides the rudiments on which the argument advanced here builds. Key aspects of that framework remain largely unchanged: the assumption of existential diversity, the proposition that cultural heterogeneity poses particular legitimation challenges for order building, and the argument that all international orders evolve diversity regimes that simultaneously meet these challenges while structuring

¹¹ Reus-Smit 2018a.

patterns of contention and struggles for recognition. *Culture and Order in World Politics* goes well beyond these rudiments, though. It advances new arguments about the multiscalar nature of diversity regimes, how they change in relation to legitimation crises, the dynamics of cultural interpellation and counter-interpellation, and the impact of the centralization or diffusion of political authority on the exclusiveness or inclusiveness of diversity regimes. It also adds empirical weight and nuance to what was essentially a theoretical argument. Thanks to our contributors, we can now see the nature and workings of diversity regimes in the Ottoman, Chinese, and modern 'liberal' orders. And we have new insights into the paired dynamics of cultural constitution and contestation in the key areas of religion, gender, law, and global cultural heritage. Several things emerge with considerable clarity: that the organization of diversity is a generic practice, common to all international orders; that diversity regimes have taken many historical forms, and that the Westphalian solution (so trumpeted by liberal pluralists) is but one example, best understood in comparison; and that the centralization of political authority – whether in an imperial court or in processes of sovereign state formation – is all too frequently accompanied by the institution of more exclusive diversity regimes and attendant practices of cultural homogenization.

Our argument proceeds from foundational assumptions about culture, cultural diversity, and political order. Instead of treating cultures as homogeneous, tightly bounded, stable, and sharply differentiated systems of meaning and practice, we see culture as constructed, heterogeneous, contradictory, fluid, and near impossible to isolate into discrete units. This view of culture is predominant in the social sciences and humanities beyond IR, and reflects this volume's interdisciplinary foundations. We treat cultural diversity as overwhelmingly the norm rather than the exception, and hold that it is an inescapable background condition that shapes the emergence, institutionalization, and, above all, legitimation of all stable systems of power and authority. Moreover, we assume that for would-be order builders – local and international – cultural diversity acquires its political salience via active institutional mediation. Political orders, at all levels, do not grow organically out of a pre-existing monolithic cultural consensus. Nor do they rely on a spontaneous correspondence between existing systems of authority and conducive patterns of cultural difference. Instead, order builders self-consciously organize and institutionalize diversity in ways that make cultural difference legible and controllable, and that reconcile the recognition claims connected to authorized forms of cultural difference with existing structures of power and privilege.

While these assumptions obtain across all forms of political order, we are concerned here with how cultural diversity relates to *international* order. In Chapter 2, we define international orders expansively, as ‘systemic configurations of political authority, comprising multiple units of authority, arranged according to some principle of differentiation: sovereignty, heteronomy, suzerainty, empire, or some combination thereof.’¹² This definition is sufficiently broad to accommodate a wide range of international orders, including the heteronomy of early modern Europe, the suzerainty of Qing China, and the sovereignty of the late modern order. And in emphasizing questions of political authority, it brings to the fore the nexus between legitimation and the organization of cultural diversity that lies at the heart of our argument. We argue that international orders are structured in significant ways by institutionalized practices that Reus-Smit has termed ‘diversity regimes’, the central role of which is to connect the organization of diversity to the legitimation of power. These regimes perform three legitimating functions. They enable order builders to assert a modicum of control by mobilizing preferred meanings and identities, while limiting the scope for cultural innovation by subaltern actors who might otherwise seek to challenge an order’s legitimacy. They also enable order builders to narrate their own identities and locate themselves within the cultural terrain they seek to organize. And, finally, privileging certain forms of meaning and axes of identification, diversity regimes help to generate the common knowledge needed for social coordination, an essential priority of any system of rule.¹³ In all of this, diversity regimes do more than license and constitute certain cultural forms and expressions; they also sublimate, suppress, subsume, or otherwise erase others, thus sowing the seeds for cultural and political contestation.

As the following chapters show, diversity regimes shape the dynamics of contestation in two key ways. First, they exert immense productive power through a bundle of processes we term ‘interpellation’. They do so by recognizing certain forms of cultural expression and identification across authorized axes of differentiation, while also sidelining alternative forms of cultural difference that do not map onto these prescribed parameters. This differentially empowers actors who can mobilize around recognized forms of collective identity, while disempowering those who cannot. It also exerts a profound influence on the strategies of recognition actors employ, encouraging them to craft these strategies to resonate with authorized modes of identification and cultural

¹² Ibid., 194. ¹³ Ibid., 209.

expression. Second, because diversity regimes create cultural and political hierarchies, and institute systems of inclusion and exclusion, they can inspire grievances that cannot easily be accommodated within the terms of the existing order. Exercised by these grievances, dissatisfied actors will often articulate forms of cultural difference, construct new collective identities, and assert novel claims to recognition that clash with authorized axes of cultural difference. For the sake of consistency, we characterize these practices as ‘counter-interpellation’, and see them as a key force generating contestation within international orders (and, in turn, their occasional transformation).

The institutional organization of cultural diversity is thus integral to the constitution of international orders and to the patterning and dynamics of contestation within them. Our contributors show this across a range of historical cases, but our argument has particular relevance for today’s modern ‘liberal’ international order. In contrast to culturalists, we deny that cultural diversity is a new affliction of the modern order: heterogeneity has been an enduring condition of its evolution. And in response, the modern order has developed successive diversity regimes, from the post–World War I licensing of ethno-nationalism in Europe and civilizational hierarchy abroad, to the post-1970s embrace of universal sovereignty and international norms of multiculturalism. It is against this background that current cultural contestation should be understood. We argue, however, that to properly understand the dynamics of current struggles we must acknowledge the unique, multiscalar configuration of the contemporary international order. The order, as conventionally understood, exists at the interstate level, in the dense network of institutions constructed to limit conflict and facilitate cooperation. It is here that the principal norms of the prevailing diversity regime exist. With the globalization of international society, however, the sovereign state has become a key locus for the organization of cultural diversity. Added to all of this, the scope of the global governance challenges facing humanity has spawned the development of transnational social networks and processes, informed by a global institutional imaginary. These global strata of the contemporary international order rest on solidarities that can abrade sharply against those of established nation-states. Because of the multiscalar character of today’s international order, some of the most salient axes of contestation are now playing out not simply between states, but at the intersection of the domestic, interstate, and global domains.

Culture and Order in World Politics is divided into four main parts. Part I introduces the volume and sets out its central argument. Part II examines two historical international orders (the Chinese and Ottoman), exploring