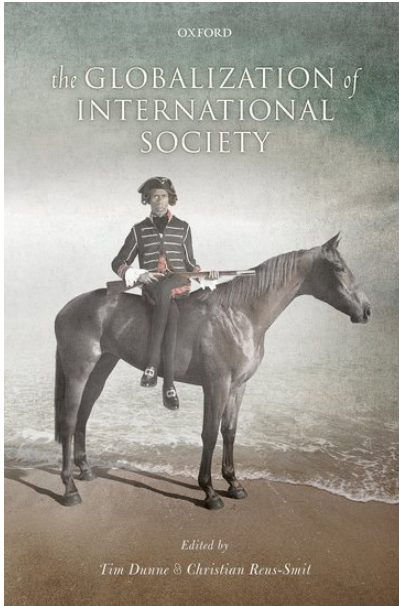


UDC 316.32:327(049.3)
<https://doi.org/10.22182/spt.1622017.6>
 Manuscript received:
 Accepted for publishing:
 Book review

Serbian Political Thought
 No. 2/2017,
 Year IX,
 Vol. 16
 pp. 91-94

Mladen Lišanin¹
 Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade



Tim Dunne & Cristian Reus-Smit (eds.) *The Globalization of International Society*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017.

A study written by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, and published in 1984 under the title *The Expansion of International Society*, remains an intriguing read and a point of vivid discussion among contemporary International Re-

lations scholars. Authors such as Iver B. Neumann and Filip Ejdus are among those who have significantly contributed to the ongoing reassessment of this magnum opus of the English School in IR at the beginning of the 21st century. Tim Dunne and Cristian Reus-Smit, along with a large group of collaborating contributors, now present us with the ultimate anthology of new readings of Bull's and Watson's study, called *The Globalization of International Society* and published by the Oxford University Press. Drawing a lot from Bull and Watson, the editors have aspired to create a "book that aspires to make two important contributions to the renewal of a 'global IR'. First, it is a collection of revisionist arguments about a classic book in the field that was too narrow and ethnocentric in its reading of 'the expansion' process, and that conceived of the system/society boundary in ways that limited its sociological imagination. Second, becoming 'global IR' requires critical engagements with the disrupters that now challenge the society of states: the contests over the limits of sovereignty in relation to cosmopolitan conceptions of responsibility; disputes over procedural justice in a post-Western

¹ Research Associate
 mladen.lisanin@yahoo.com

world; concerns about the failure to achieve racial and gender equality; and the disruptive power of digital communications” (p. vi).

According to the editors, the Bull & Watson volume was “largely a story of Europeanization”, rather than expansion. Contrary to such a notion of expansion of international society, Dunne and Reus-Smit with their collaborators largely reject the Europe-centric bias of the original authors, as well as their linear understanding of the process. The very title of the edited book – the globalization of international society – is how Dunne and Reus-Smit are aspiring to reassess the issue of widening and broadening of the state system/society. States are still seen as central actors, but, just like their contemporary environment, they are themselves a lot more flexible in this capacity.

In the introductory section, which precedes nineteen chapters on various topics, written by some of the most reputable authors working within or around the English School of IR, the editors identify four key ways their pattern differs from that of Bull & Watson (pp. 5-7):

1) By revising the conceptual apparatus of the original authors, most notably as it pertains to the core notions of ‘system’ and ‘society’;

2) By conceiving of the evolution of international society as globalization rather than expansion (which presupposes the understanding of globalization in the context of spreading of the institution of the sovereign state, and of a set of distinctive social relationships among these states);

3) By breaking with Bull’s and Watson’s treatment of the globalization of international society as a rational, even ordered, process; which would encompass rational responses by states to external imperatives and an additional practical problem of incorporation for European states; and

4) By viewing globalization as an ongoing process, not realized in its final form at a particular moment in time.

Dunne and Reus-Smit give the original authors credit for recognizing the unique phenomenon of international order and posing the right questions, rather than providing satisfactory explanations. In hindsight, of course, Bull’s and Watson’s concepts and findings could be discredited by contemporary authors with more or less success, but it is a lot more honest, academically speaking, to reassess their volume by observing it within the original context, while properly utilizing over 30 years of new-acquired knowledge.

In *The Globalization of International Society* largely succeeds in contesting the materialist foundations of previous scholarship on the topic, without dismissing it entirely. Regarding the issue of power, they seek to “move beyond” the structural treatment of it, thus recognizing the specificities of international contestation and all the subtlety with which the current international society tends to expand. They tend to “treat international society as a particular kind of governance assemblage, characterized by distinctive norms and practices, but embedded within, and constituted by, the broader social universe of the world political system” (p. 36). Although many of the previous concepts are seriously contested, they are also largely built upon. The editors and the contributors did exactly this, through four parts of the volume that are to be found between the introductory and concluding remarks.

The first of those (the second part overall) is entitled “Global context” and deals predominantly with the emergence of sovereign states system in the period from fourteenth to seventeenth century, by conceiving of the world as multi-ordered, and exposing its economic, cultural and political interactions and practices. This is where they try to curb Bull’s and

Watson’s statement that non-Western societies were drawn into the European-generated international order largely on voluntary basis. The section encompasses contributions from Andrew Phillips, Heather Rae, Hendrik Spruyt and Neta C. Crawford.

Part III (“Dynamics of Globalization”, with contributions by Richard Devetak & Emily Tan-nock, Jennifer M. Welsh, Paul Keal, Jacinta O’Hagan and Yong-jin Zhang) addresses the fact that privileging the European dimension of the emergence of global sovereign order is “radically insufficient”, due to lack of understanding of the critical role of exogenous forces and their boundaries. Many of Bull’s and Watson’s basic concepts are thoroughly contested here; particularly their understanding of linearity and rationality of international society’s expansion, as well as Bull’s too narrow definition of war – which has unjustly excluded many important historical episodes from the original analysis. Part IV deals with the “Institutional Contours” of today’s “universal” international society. Barry Buzan, Ian Clark, Gerry Simpson, Mark Beeson & Stephen Bell, and Hun Joon Kim grasp the critical issues of sovereignty, hegemony, as well as legal and economic structures within current international society.

The editors' research pattern here rests upon Reus Smit's old differentiation between three levels of institutions which comprise the architecture of international society: constitutional, fundamental, and issue-specific – with the latter being particularly neglected by the classical English School authors.

The fifth part (“Contestation”) has the purpose of trying to make up for Bull's failure to adequately grasp the full scope, nature and effects of various forms of challenging of Western-dominated international society, by moving beyond his “circumscribed” understanding. Sarah Teitt, Ian Hall, Audie Klotz, Ann E. Towns and Lene Hansen present some of the attempts to reconceptualize the notion of sovereignty and the challenges posed to it by considerations that include issues of race, gender, communications and emancipation in general. Contestations to Western-led expansion of international society are seen here as being an “engine of international societal development”, which is itself a radical contestation to Bull's and Watson's classical design.

A detailed reassessment of the classical English School volume by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson was largely overdue. In that sense, *The Globalization of International Society* could prove to be an

important missing link between the classical English School and some of the contemporary pillars IR theory, especially those from the reflectivist and critical fields. Indeed, the editors explicitly state that their intention has not been to ground an entirely new theory of international politics, but to widen and deepen the grasp of the English School by addressing some conceptual and historical issues that have unjustly remained unaddressed. Although the discourse occasionally abandons the realm of what is traditionally considered English School (by largely omitting most of its “realist” elements in favor of a more constructivist and/or critical approach), this volume is without any doubt to be considered one of the corner stones of the School's development in the 21st century – and thus represents an invaluable material for the entire IR community.