

## REFURBISHING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AS A SOCIOLOGY OF ELITES. A RATHER PERSONAL ACCOUNT AT THE CENTENNIAL OF THE DOMAIN

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### **Abstract:**

*A newcomer amongst social sciences, International Relations has been constantly inhabited by soul searching or tried to balm inner feuds while vying for public relevance. Remembering the centennial of the domain and the dual starting points, namely the creation of a university chair in Aberystwith, Wales and the founding of CFR-Council for Foreign Relations in the USA, this article tries to chart a way forward for IR. The answer advocated here is the refurbishment of the domain as sociology of the elites (but not necessarily for the elites) as against the classical manner centred on theories and different paradigms. Such argument is supported not only by the perusement of literature but also by classroom experience.*

**Keywords:** *International relations theory, schools, theories, elites.*

### **Introduction**

According to the over spoken conventional hagiography, the year of 1919 saw the creation of the first International Relations Chair at the University of Aberystwith, Wales. In that very same year, over the Atlantic, one witnessed the founding of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), now matured to be one of the most diversified meeting points for discussing international affairs. Both events boded well with the idealist albeit clumsy efforts made by President Woodrow Wilson to fit on tracks the League of Nations, the institutional tool to end all wars and scale down any looming conflicts through arbitrage.

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All of the above came to mend the cataclysmic event which was the First World War, gruesome testimony to what inflamed nationalism can perpetrate using the ambitus of industrial age. Fast forward to the present age when we celebrate 100 years of IR literature, the domain has grown from the shadows of predecessor sciences crafting an autonomous methodology of its own, displaying intellectually consummating inner feuds and recovering after soul searching turning points. However, such autonomisation was not always for the better of the social science universe as a whole, rather was similar to a huge glacial broken from Antarctica only to melt in the solitude of wayward waters (Anievskaya, 2014; Zarankol, 2019, p. 1-16). For the differences between history and IR as well as about the reproaches made by historian to IR scholars see Ashworth (June 20, 2012) and George (May 19, 2013).

Only loosely tied to other sciences like history, sociology, philosophy, and so on, it is the argument of the present article that IR goes in circles having difficulties and being opaque to the outsiders who do not possess IR professional background or training. In order to mend such predicament, we propose here that the IR domain is retooled as sociology of the elites. The proposition given here combines reading, writing as well as teaching different IR seminars over the span of four years at both undergraduate and MA level.

This article entails two parts: the first one summarises the introductory narratives in IR theory, whereas the second part ponders on the potential meaning of an elite-centred sociology and how the latter might serve better the educational process. The last part hosts the conclusion.

### **From classical debates to an ad hominem historiography**

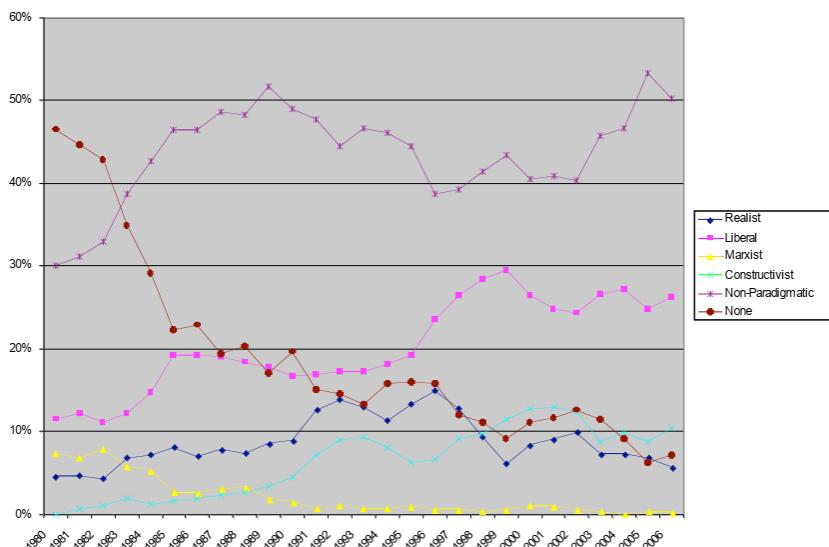
Each student coming to the field of international relations is served with a narrative based on dualities: the first one captures the distance between the historical founding moment and the historiographical one, namely the 1648 Westphalian Peace Treaty to end the Thirty Years War and 1919 which laid the first brick at the foundation of the discipline. Westphalian Treaty (or treaties, to be fair) has been read as the birth of the modern nation-state invested with sovereignty. Since that moment on, the interdiction to interfere in the

domestic affairs of another political unit stood as an ethical and juridical ideal for the manner in which states dealt each other, even though the practical conduct fell short from it (Krasner, 1999; Joffe, November-December 1999; Karp, 2008). 1648 Westphalia remains a potent label even though it has been increasingly criticised and put under scrutiny in recent decades (Osiander, 2001). As to 1919, it was construed as the moment when the first chair or international relations was created at Aberystwyth, Wales, in Great Britain.

Apart from the considerations sketched above, the dynamics of the domain is narrated as a succession of pivotal quarrels called debates: the second historical episode and also the locus of the **first academic debate** speaks about realists and idealists (or wishful thinking liberals; both labels are seldom levelled) of the 1920s and 1930s, in itself a demythicised restatement of Cain slaying the bona fide Abel. The former group, namely the realists were equipped with a philosophic pessimistic outlook on human nature advocated balancing Hitler, whereas the latter's philanthropy and belief in the Society of Nations rendered them impotent witnesses of doom. Such descriptive Manichaeism is present in Henry Kissinger's writings. His personal account on diplomacy is construed between two clay figures – on the one side there is Theodore Roosevelt with his rugged lucid realpolitik, on the other looms Woodrow Wilson, the ex-cathedra utopian. (Kissinger, 2007, p. 25-47; Kissinger, 2015, p. 198-218) Fast forward we reach the Cold War, another manicheist laboratory where the real-life clash between the West and Soviet Communism is mirrored by neoliberals or institutional liberals (both labels conflated) and neorealists or structural realists. More scientific than their earlier versions, both parties dress the garb of behaviourism and draw heavily from mathematics and cybernetic models. This episode is personalised: in one corner there is the couple Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye Jr., emphasizing interdependence and soft power as supplements to the classical will to power (Keohane and Nye, 2009). On the other side one can count on Kenneth N. Waltz, the father of neorealism who depicts international politics as an extrapolation of the homo oeconomicus, with states running their affairs dispassionately, frequently calculating profits and costs - a more sober image than Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans

Morgenthau's fallen and sinful individuals. Once reaching this point, the account takes into consideration other streams of thought like neomarxism, constructivism, Johan Galtung's and Kenneth Boulding's peace theories (Patomaki, November 2001; Beriker, July 2008; Whitehead, August 30, 2013; Soursa, 2018) – a drive towards multiversity at the same time with the post-1970 international system moving itself from bipolarity towards multipolarity.

The late 1990s and early 2000s debate whether there is or should be any ongoing debate. The awareness that multiple lenses are available on the table and should be alternatively put on is acknowledged even by recent strands of realists in the ilk of Stephen M. Walt. Moreover, even though many lament the ongoing hegemony of realism, "in reality realism shows up as the dominant paradigm in less than 10% of books and journal articles" according to a 2008 survey (Sharman & Weaver, 7 April 2011, p. 14). Its decline correlates with the emergence of a plural landscape in which not only realism is in decline and constructivism on the rise, but theoretical work also gains more weight (at least according to a survey of English language literature):



**Figure 1:** Percentage of Articles by Paradigm, 1980-2007 (Source: Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, Tierney: August/ September 2007)

The lists with the most valued scholars also reflect plurality of allegiances with different schools:

Rank	Names	Responses	Percent
1	Robert Keohane	422	56
2	Kenneth Waltz	311	41
3	Alexander Wendt	248	33
4	Samuel Huntington	155	21
5	John Mearsheimer	138	18
6	Joseph Nye	125	17
7	Robert Jervis	113	15
8	Bruce Bueno de Mesquita	109	14
9	Bruce Russett	83	11
10	Robert Gilpin	78	10
11	Peter Katzenstein	69	9
12	Stephen Krasner	68	9
13	James Rosenau	60	8
14	John Ruggie	49	7
15	Michael Doyle	42	6
16	James Fearon	41	5
17	Immanuel Wallerstein	31	4
18	Robert Cox	28	4
19	Hans Morgenthau	27	4
20	Francis Fukuyama	26	3
21	J. David Singer	21	3
22	Stephen Walt	19	3
23	Jack Snyder	17	2
23	Robert Axelrod	17	2
23	Stanley Hoffmann	17	2

**Table 1:** The lists with the most valued scholars  
 (Source: Peterson, Tierney, Maliniak, January 2005, p. 19)

Another more recent reference to consider is Teaching, Research & International Policy (TRIP). According to TRIP 2014, the most

influential figures were: 1) Alexander Wendt (47.1%); 2) Robert Keohane (32.13%); 3) Kenneth N. Waltz (27.55%); 4) John Mearsheimer (24.05%); 5) Joseph Nye Jr. (21.97%); 6) Samuel Huntington (21.14%); 7) Barry Buzan (13.51%); 8) James Fearon (11.88%); 9) Stephen M.Walt (8.49%); 10) Martha Finnemore (7.82%) (MetaIndex, 2014).

The diversification of the scientific picture appears to be similar in present French IR academia as one can see below:

	Constructivism	English School	Feminism	Liberalism	Marxism	Realism	Political sociology	Institutionalism	Other paradigm	I do not use paradigmatic analysis
All	22	4	2	15	4	16	**	**	15	22
United States	20	2	2	20	2	16	**	**	12	26
France	24	2	0	7	2	23	6	2	8	24

**Table 2:** Theoretical leanings of French IR scholars (according to TRIP 2014) (Source: Cornut, Battistella, 2013, p. 303-336)

Another study made by Sherman and Weaver entails, among others, that book editors channel authors towards 'telling a story' likeable by the public rather than pursuing a tight theoretical framework interesting for fewer readers (Sherman and Weaver, September 2011, p. 16).

Even those debates (especially the first interwar one) most probably did not exist; they stuck with us and are repeated almost each time by the introductory classes in IR (Ashworth, 2002; Wilson, 2012).

Given the above, we can ask ourselves whether our present age is also fractured by other meaningful debates, albeit smaller in scale. Perusing literature, three ersatz debates can be listed according to our view:

- one between IR theory understood as systemic outlook and foreign policy analysis (FPA). This strand might be a response to the outcry of policymakers that IR scholars are not relevant enough and remain entrenched in the confines of a medieval quarrel of Universals (see here Guzzini, 2007; Kertzer, Tingley, 2018, p. 21-23; as, 2018).
- another debate is about whether IR still remains an American science (to quote Stanley Hoffmann's 1977 interrogative article (Hoffmann, Summer, 1977, p. 41-60; Walt, Spring, 1998, p. 29-32 and 34-46) or has become a widespread phenomenon. Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver have teamed up with several ethnic non-Western authors to try to grapple some answers on the topic (Buzan, Acharya, 2010). This one might have the best chances to be upgraded to a full-fledged mainstream debate for decades to come and bear the most fruitful consequences (either a North-South synthesis, similar to the neo-neo synthesis present in Keohane's late 1990s writings, either some sort of compromise between 'Northern' and 'Southern' researchers).
- the third polemic, spilling over the boundaries of IR into online punditry sets the contest between globalists and nationalists. It is not necessarily a Methodenstreit<sup>1</sup>, a squabble regarding the best way to be scientific and more about political stance. It goes beyond the scope of this article to ponder whether this third polemic is an updated avatar of the pros and cons of the Washington consensus in the 1990s.

A *nota bene* should be added in order to emphasize that many scholars swing between various research agendas or maintain an agnostic stance with regard to all schools as the TRIP surveys in recent years have shown.

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<sup>1</sup> Methodensreit or the battle of methods in English was a polemic started in the 1880s between the disciples of the German historical school and those of the Austrian one like Carl Menger, each maintaining different premises about the manner in which markets were born and whether they were based on universal or cultural, contextualised laws.

Cutting across the structure of the debate, there is the notion of authorship. Vying for influence beyond the wall of academia, many figures write regularly on blogs or maintain a constant presence in the press. Stephen Walt, Daniel Drezner, Tom Ricks, Fareed Zacharia, Joseph Nye disperse their ideas about the burning matters of the day and some of them have achieve celebrity status. They themselves orbit around the elites and the institutions they often write about. A special mention deserves Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer along with their vitriolically controversial "Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy". After a tortoise apparition, the book has been frequently read in antisemital key and drew into polemics senior figures like Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Alan Derschowitz, Tony Judt and others (Mearsheimer, Walt, 2008; Rabinovich, 2008; Schouten, 2009; Spitzer, 01 April 2013; Sperber, 2015). Moreover, the two author abovementioned have been pinned down to this book (and for this book) and finally embraced their controversial new public personas. However, only a handful of readers did noticed in their writing on the Israel lobby a departure from the orthodox realist view of the state as a unified actor and a movement towards a pluralistic view, even though an unpolished one, all at the same time with the couple descending from the ivory tower towards journalism (The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy: Roundtable Review, 2007, p. 6-7)

In post-communist Romania, IR literature boomed vigorously at least in quantitative terms. As a means to celebrate freedom and put communism in brackets, an intellectual spree of translations nourished a plethora of articles and books all eager to catch up with the Western market of idea. Here, like elsewhere, international relations have become both an etymological label showing one's cosmopolite spirit whilst being in touch with present times. Earning an IR diploma at the individual level, or guesting an IR & European Studies chair at the university level spelled the promise of success in the public eye. Perhaps the very word 'international' compensated, somewhere deep inside, for all those years when ordinary Romanians were not allowed to travel freely abroad.

And also like elsewhere, the IR domain developed a two-layered aspect. The upper, most sophisticated one deals with Western theories

and scientific peculiarities in the field. The lower, let us call it the 'layman level' displays a journalistic demeanour, feeding an eager and over politicised public. The pundits who animate this intellectual sphere are separated into three categories:

1. a narrow group of academics skilled in English and dedicated to scientific rigour who prefer to publish rare qualitative papers. Many of them are youngsters in their 20s and 30s pursuing a PhD degree but the age cap goes even further (the stratum is also to be found at the aforementioned point No.2);

2. journalists who write open editorials and are constantly in the limelight. Their ideological proclivity vary much from right to left (rightists display the gamut between moderately towards staunchly pro-Western attitudes (<https://inliniedreapta.net/>; Lăzescu, April, 14, 2021; Critic atac, 3 aprilie 2020,) whereas leftists are critical to what they consider to be the unfair capitalist geopolitical and capitalist word order);

3. a variety of academics who write for both kinds of public and are more or less part of technocracy. Otherwise put, they might very well be academics, political figures, political consultants, diplomats, employees working for think tanks all vying for influence and acknowledgment. Here the list comprises, but is not limited to, names such as: Valentin Naumescu, Vasile Dîncu, Daniel Dăianu, Ioana Petrescu, Iulian Chifu, Iulian Fota, Ştefan Popescu, Armand Goşu, Ovidiu Raeţchi, Ţerban Cioculescu. (Naumescu, 09.03.2021; Naumescu, 06.04.2021; Naumescu, 26.04.2021; Dăianu, 2009; Dăianu, Dec, 10, 2018; Petrescu, 2016; Petrescu, October 27, 2019; Petrescu, October 7, 2021; Chifu, December 22, 2017; Chifu, Frunzetti, 2018: 7-19; Fota, July 12, 2019; Fota, January 16, 2020; Popescu, 21.01.2020; Popescu, 17.02.2020; Raeţchi, 2020; Raeţchi, August 15, 2020; Raeţchi, August 30, 2020; Cioculescu, 2007; Cioculescu, 2010; Cioculescu, March 9, 2015)

More often than not, the bibliographic references employed in Romanian IR debates are connotative for the latecomer status, even though it would be highly unfair to draw hasty conclusions as many researchers display acquaintance with the most sophisticated perspectives generated by the international academic journals. However, both IR introductory classes and students nauseatingly

revolve around a handful of thesis like Hans Morgenthau's power politics, Kissinger's diplomacy, Huntingtonian clash of civilisations frequently pitted against Fukuyamist end of history or Joseph Nye's soft power – the latter concept being elevated to a seemingly UNESCO world heritage status. Unfortunately, this focus on over celebrated books and scholars correlates with ignoring other fruitful references or even secondary writings of the abovementioned authors (Following class intercourse or the coordination of different dissertation, the author's account found very few discussion on let's say Morgenthau's 1946 *Power politics vs scientific man*; Huntington's pioneering book on military sociology – the 1957 *Soldier and state* or Fukuyama's later works on political science<sup>2</sup>). Not to mention that only a couple of those names are still present in Peterson, Tierney and Maliniak (2005) study or in the following contemporary TRIP surveys. It appears that the sociologic structure of the debate features a prestige-centric quality, with the IR public being passionate about high-profile celebrities (Dizikes, January 27, p. 2014)<sup>3</sup>. What we see here is the Matthew effect at work (Dizikes, January 27, p. 2014).

From here on, the present author has noticed a difference in preferences. Whereas teachers working for civil universities and (seemingly) without ties to political figures embrace critical theories (constructivism, feminism, postcolonialism), those working in military universities or with military background, or politically engaged, tend towards methodological conservatism and display a penchant for realism.

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<sup>2</sup> About the fixation with Fukuyama's end of history thesis his presence in the references of different open editorials and academic articles: (Rusu, 2010, p. 421-432; Barbu, 23 June 2014; Andreeșcu, Summer 2020, p. 189-204; Atudorei, 2020, p. 148-152)

<sup>3</sup> Another proof of such prestige based on structure dialogue is the fact that less known or not yet translated authors from the same universities or schools of thought are not discussed. Namely, I have not seen discussions on the work of Andrew Moravcsik or Anne-Marie Slaughter, even though both wrote high-quality papers and Slaughter was associated for the most part of her career with Princeton University and also served as president of the American Society of International Law, Princeton being the same university of Gilpin, Nye, Keohane. See her page at the New America Foundation, <https://www.newamerica.org/our-people/anne-marie-slaughter/>. Other names that are not associated with Princeton and Harvard or even come from outside IR like James Fearon, Peter Turchin, Jan Morris, get rare accolades, if any.

Setting together the American and Romanian landscapes makes a poor and insufficient case for generalisations; at best, it provides a starting point for a study about the spread of ideas between centre and periphery. However, this is beside the point, as our argument is not aimed at a new international relations grand theory but at a better manner to teach the existing ones. Both the American and the Romanian IR epistemic communities (so as to restrict ourselves, but we could very well add others) possess features that make them favourable for the sociology of elites. The chapter below will make the case for this.

### **The sociology of elites – the bridge gaper inside and outside Academia**

Created as an autonomous domain dedicated to study the occurrence of warfare and subsequently its prevention, the new inchoate science of IR carried within it domestic fistfights stemming from the very vagueness of the name and therefore of its boundaries. International relations theory, geopolitics, security studies, later on European studies, global studies (Koos and Keulman, 2019, p. 327) and, last but not least, military sciences, all monikers that reflect a rather prescientific demeanour in Kuhnian terms. If one adds to the list the latecomer *intelligence studies*, the task of semantically ordering these disciplines grows even more difficult. Not only the name, but the object of study is plagued by connotative issues. Do we study relations between nations (people-to-people) or between nation-states (meaning G-to-G matters and thus we focus more on institutions and political matters)? Never truly settled, the discipline went forward and the progress meant increasing the aperture to include more and more items on the research agenda (Koos and Keulman, 2019, p. 3-4). With the increase and diversification, come pros and cons. On the pro side: plurality is to be welcomed in any scientific endeavour as competition provides a dynamic check-and-balance against the habit of the mind to settle with easy stereotypes and moncausal explanations. On the con side: running after many rabbits at the same time might consume one's resources while ending up nowhere. This shortcoming becomes a problem when it comes to reproducing elites. Who should bear the task

to prepare new people and what should they be instructed in? If we are to speak about the university chairs in IR & European Studies, one has to answer several questions:

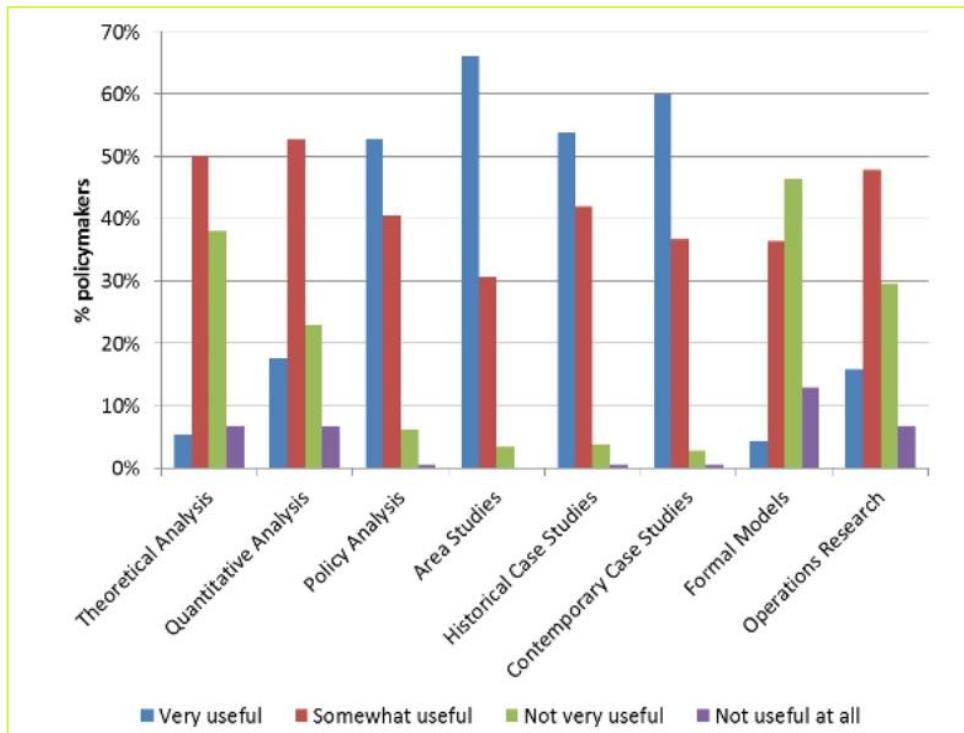
- how can one trim the diverse agenda in a short span of time (one semester class) and make sense of each issue?
- if one decides to toss away some issues while privileging others (let's say focus on the balance of power over international aid or vice versa) how does one establish criteria?
- taking employment into account, what are the institutions the future graduates are preparing for: the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the European Commission, the UN, different think tanks?

The easiest response, as experienced by the author, is a classic introductory course centred on the great debates, as explained just above. All in all IR remains auto referential and prepares students to become future professors and researchers rather than diplomats. At the undergraduate level, these details may not be important, but at the MA level, where a professor has to speak to a heterogeneous public, the challenge grows. In an MA classroom, the same message is delivered to freshly graduate students, many possessing diplomas in social sciences as well as to older listeners, who come from other domains, perhaps motivated by re-professionalization. For the first category, the professors' discourse seems redundant, uttering a Deja-vu,<sup>4</sup> while the second category one gets an avalanche of new things they may not relate to<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> From the author's experience, many MA students are former undergraduate who continue at the same university so as to get a master degree. One of the reasons for such continuity is the fact that they are already familiar to most of the topic to be discussed as well as with their professors, so it is easier in this way.

<sup>5</sup> Usually, MA classes take place in the afternoon, when the audience has finished the daily working program. Unfortunately, post 17:00 hours people are tired, eager to go home to their families and justified their unaccomplished tasks for the seminars either invoking the short time span, either the volume of new knowledge.



**Figure 3:** Desch's viewpoint on the field

(Source: Avey and Desch, 13.03.2014)

This comes in a time when several voices accuse the IR community of indulging in a "cult of the irrelevant". According to Michael Desch who coined the expression, scholars in the field have entrenched themselves in methodological intricacies and therefore, cut themselves from the attention of those in power.

Desch's viewpoint may not be shared by everyone, but the bone of contention between practice and school remains, nonetheless (Drezner, 20 Feb 2014).

Given all of the above, teaching international relations as the sociology of elites can provide a common ground for: 1) the different types of students attending classes; 2) bringing academia and policymakers' closer.

Recasting IR in the mould of elite sociology becomes possible because of three reasons:

A. On the one hand, we live in a far more volatile world and institutions account for only a part of the explanation. Both average people who migrate (internally and internationally) and highly educated people who go from one job to the other create a more individualist picture. On the other hand, we live in a more diverse and unequal world than ever before. Even though globalisation lifted tens of millions out of dire poverty, it has also elongated the pyramid of income and created an international group of extremely wealthy people. Such contrast usually falls under the concern of political science and economics and much less under security studies and IR. However, recent decades have shown how financial predicaments and structural wrongs in a society can create upheavals with military and geopolitical consequences.<sup>6</sup>

The 2008 crash, quickly followed by the Arab Spring, demonstrated the long-lasting effects of unchecked financial problems. Since that moment, high profile documents, or public figure taking position grew. In February 2014, James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, presented the U.S. the annual Worldwide Threat

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<sup>6</sup> Even though the security-prosperity nexus rose to the attention after the Cold War, especially for those engaged in post-war reconstruction or employed in one way or another in the problematique of UN (Human Security Now, 2000; Colletta, September 14, 2003), the two fields, security and prosperity are treated differently, each in a different box. Among the efforts to blend them in a unified analytical product we list two such endeavours:

a. "Rebuilding America's Defences", co-authored by a plethora of authors associated with the Washington based neoconservative think-tank on the eve of 9/11, stands among the few non-Marxist papers which considered how the contrast between the haves and the have not is a factor influencing strategic issues (Rebuilding's America's Defences, September 2000)

b. In 2003, the same year when the United States led coalition toppled Saddam Hussein, a little known paper written by the Russian born historic and mathematician Peter Turchin analysed the future of the Saudi nation. Focusing on the looming public debt and the growing number of the Saudi ruling family, Turchin predicted a major crisis should the structural predicament were not dually solved (Turchin, Grinin, Korotaev, 2006). Even though the monarchy survived its inner feuds all these years, 1) this was one of the few recent analysis to marry economic and security issues, and 2) he came very close towards predicting the Arab spring which was caused by similar underneath causes like those anatomised by Turchin.

Assessment of the intelligence community; along usual perennial threats (rogue states, terrorism, cybercrime etc.) growing inequality was also mentioned (Sandhu, 2006; Seaver, September 1, 2015). A more volatile world, like the one we seem to be living in, is described more by process and less by structure. Elites, be they political, economic and even cultural become the intermediate factor blending the two categories. An elite centred sociology might cluster under its grasp many other topics which are usually taught separately thus highlighting a red thread easier to understand by the students. At the same time, such an approach could also prove useful for intelligence studies by bringing them closer to the IR mainstream and fill the hiatus James Der Derian was talking about at some point (Der Derian, 2002; Der Derian, 2009; Matey, May 2005; Tănase, 2015, p. 142-146; Sam, fall 2018).

B. Elites amidst conflicts of interest. The last decade saw the public space rattled by a cascade of scandals with political elites in their midst. From the arrest of Dominique Strauss-Kahn in May 2011, continuing with the Panama papers (perhaps the largest of them all) and ending with Trump-Biden-Ukraine affair one can ask if all these remain disparate events exploitable for media sensationalism or reveal deeper patterns. Could they be considered a struggle between the style of a neopatrimonial class and the constraints of the Weberian bureaucracy requesting the clear separation of private and professional roles?! Whether the claim is valid or not, it might serve as the starting point for an IR course.

C. IR literature has moved from the institutionalism of the 1970s-1980s to approaches more sensible to methodological individualism: constructivism, discourse analysis, area studies, rational actor theory, discourse analysis, network analysis. In one way, the discipline goes forward by moving back from Kenneth Waltz's 1979 *Theory of International Politics* to his 1959 *Man, State and War*, where the individual level is taken into account (Waltz, 1954/2001). Otherwise put, IR has moved unintentionally closer to becoming the sociology of elites!

The design of a class or even an entire IR curricula based on the sociology of elites need not start from scratch; it should rather build on the work already done by several authors:

- Henry Kissinger's successive books about diplomacy stretch a line from biography towards autobiography. Written in Carlylean terms<sup>7</sup> with focus on the figures of brilliant diplomats who struggled to push through le raison d'état, Kissinger oeuvre evolves up until he adds his own deeds to that lineage. Combining academic with controversial public persona, the former US state secretary compels us to assess the optimum distance IR should have towards policymaking so as to remain a dispassionate science.<sup>8</sup>

- Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, professor at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (<https://research.vu.nl/en/persons/bastiaan-van-apeldoorn>) is associated with the so called Amsterdam school<sup>9</sup>. His research about transatlantic elites charts the career pathway of many high profile US technocrats and policymakers such as Condolezza Rice and Robert Gates. Writing from an economic materialist perspective, Apeldoorn's analysis entails the promise than can be developed further. (Apeldoorn, de Grraf, 2014, p. 29-55; Apeldoorn, 2014; Apeldoorn, 2016; Apeldoorn, 2018, p. 113-131)

- James Der Derian, professor at the University of Sydney embeds dresses research themes in postmodern garb. His abbreviator notion called MIME-net opens the traditional statist black box to investigate the relationship between media, the entertainment industry and the military-industrial complex. A neighbour, ancillary notion apart from MIME is what Der Derian calls "virtuous war". A play on words combining virtuality with virtue, virtuous warfare describes what other authors' identify as post heroic conflict – a manner to defeat your

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was a Welsh historian and polymath associated with the Grand Man Theory – according to which history is written by great personalities, therefore historiography should follow suit and disregard other factors shaping the events. Less remembered is his penchant to see individuals instead of masses (Rumpca, 1988; Sherman, 2010). It remains to be seen if an elite-centric IR theory will resurrect Carlyle's methodological legacy or not.

<sup>8</sup> For associations between Henry Kissinger, diplomacy and Thomas Carlyle style of historiography see: (Weisberger, June 20, 1974; Starr 1984; Hughes, 2006; Singer, April 26, 2007; May 11, 2020) For praises and controversies surrounding the former top diplomat see apart from the sources quoted above: Thomas Meaney, *The Myth of Henry Kissinger*, *New Yorker*, May 11, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> For details about the Amsterdam School do see: (Apeldoorn, 2004, p. 110-112; Jessop, Sum, 2017, p. 342-354; Jessop, 2019).

enemy from afar using the latest of technologies. Short of soldiers and with low tolerance towards causalities, affluent (usually) Western nations prefer to fight asymmetric hostiles via drones and satellite guided missiles. (Der Derian, 2000, p. 771-788)

- Chrystia Freeland's *Plutocrats* volume is a sociologic travelogue which combines face-to-face interviews and statistics to capture the league of the 1%-ers (Freeland, 2012). Although not an IR book per se, it calls for reflection about the extent to which massive economic inequalities bear impact on politics. The work done by Freeland is far from solitary. Aware or unconscious heir to Thorstein Veblen's Conscious consumption and C. Wright Mills Power elite theories, several others have found in writing about present rising inequalities a meaningful pursuit (Haseler, 2000; Nowell, 2004). Also, Freeland, a journalist turned minister in Justin Trudeau's government provides a second example about combining writing with practice, apart from Henry Kissinger's earlier one.

- Andrés Solimano, Chilean US educated author, has also written several papers on the mobility of elites and completes Freeland research interest (Solimano, Avanzini, 2010; Solimano, 2014).

- Lisa Dellmuth is Associate Professor of International Relations at Stockholm University and her research interests grapples with the "legitimacy and redistribution in global governance, with a particular focus on the European Union"; she has also led a 5-year research project about climate governance and is involved with different journals. She wrote several articles about the manner in which elites engage in public communication when dealing with international organisations (Dellumuth and Tallberg, 17 February 2020).

- Inderjeet Parmar, professor at the University of London, wrote intensly about the network between scholars and epistemic communities (Parmar, 2004; Parmar, 2012; Wertheim, Tournès, Parmar, November 2018, p. 727-733; Bhatnagar, 2021), a type of inquirer useful for the self-reflection of IR caught between spectatorship and performative action engaged in policymaking.

- International law is another strand amenable to be studied from an individual/elite-centred perspective. The progress of international legislation meant the growing dehyphenation between

citizenship and moral responsibility. Whereas the Westphalian model in its stance did not allow any arbiter beyond its authority, today there is mounting pressure for the return of neomediavalism with regard to international relations so as to legally punish individuals charged with crimes against humanity. Expanding the effort made by the Nürenberg tribunal, this change aims to restore justice in dossiers like the civil wars in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda or Sierra Leone. Judith Armatta or Simona Tuțuiianu are among the authors requesting changes in the Westphalian perspective so that governments should become more morally responsible with regard to their subjects wellbeing. (Armatta, 2010; Tuțuiianu, 2007, p. 69-72; Tuțuiianu, 2011)

Now that we have highlighted the potential roots of an elite-centered educational program, we are left with the design per se. Two ideal paths will be pondered in what follows:

- a) a professor-centred class;
- b) a student-centred class.

The first term of each case makes the rules and charts the way forward. According to the first possibility, the syllabus must begin with a very thorough definition or acception about what the elite is. In the second scenario, the definition is loose enough to have a starting point, but the meat on the bone remains within the obligation of the classroom. Once established, it shall be tested all across the semester against different case studies. A sub scenario to this (called b.1) asks the classroom to be divided into several teams (the number allowing) with each of the teams generating a definition of its own. Thus, seminars will become a Darwinian laboratory for competing views giving the attendants a wider space for manoeuvring.

We can imagine a second hybrid sub scenario (called b.2) in which the professor shall provide a pivot definition and the classroom shall be invited to come up with its own alternative definition(s).

This method is inspired by a workshop held by Randy Pherson and was used by the author several times during seminars with senior students. In their cases, the method was especially successful when trying to define hybrid warfare or when crafting a country brand. Such approach allows improvisations. For example: during one seminar, the author saw a student who was reading Immanuel Kant and asked him

to use Kantian terminology for the task prior assigned to his team. Even though as first the students seemed aloof and absent, he found the exercise fruitful.

Scenario a) bodes well to a class full of beginners, either at the undergraduate or at the MA level. Starting from the premises that they do not possess strong opinions about IR, nor extensive knowledge on the literature in the field, it is recommended that the syllabus provide strong and clear guidance from the start. Otherwise, if they had already attended an introductory course, then scenario b) comes in. This latter matter can aid in dealing with students who are intelligent, bookish albeit rebel and individualistic.

Bellow we chart the structure of a course with seven lectures and their subsequent seminars:

Lectures:

- I. Introductory class. Different definitions of elites: Pareto, Michels, John A. Hobson, Antonio Gramsci, C. Wright Mills, Robert Dahl, William Domhoff, the Amsterdam School. The necessity of an elite focused IR.
- II. Plutocracy and democracy. International growth of inequalities and impact on politics and social phenomena. The rise of anti and alter globalist movements.
- III. The EU as test-case for an elite focused IR. National elites and eurocrats in pushing forward the maintenance of the Union.
- IV. Euro-American transnational class. The reproduction of elites on both sides of the Atlantic.
- V. Post-soviet elites. Personal and institutional bonds between the Russian Federation and the former Soviet republics.
- VI. International organisations and the role of elites.
- VII. The growing role of high profile individuals in shaping the global agenda.

Seminaries:

1. Readings from different thinkers on power and elites:  
- Charles Wright Mills. (1960). *The Causes of World War Three*, Balantine Books;

- Roberto Michels. (2001). *Political parties. A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracies*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul, Batoche Books, Kitchener;

- G. William Domhoff, Who Really Ruled in Dahl's New Haven?  
[https://whorulesamerica.ucsc.edu/local/new\\_haven.html](https://whorulesamerica.ucsc.edu/local/new_haven.html)

- Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, and Naná de Graaff. (2014). Corporate elite networks and US post-Cold War grand strategy from Clinton to Obama, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 20(1) 29–55;

- Mikael Rask Madsen. (2016). Transnational Fields and Power Elites: Reassembling the International with Bourdieu and Practice Theory, *iCourts Working Paper Series*, No. 46.

2. The importance of studying whether the super-rich are only a statistical group or really represent a self-aware group reinforced by personal bonds:

- Chrystia Freeland. (2012). *Plutocrații. Ascensiunea noilor superbogați ai lumii și declinul tuturor celorlalți*. Polirom, București.

Given the fact that the Canadian writer employees as theoretical background Alfred Marshall and Robert C. Merton, it might be of service some papers of them.

3. The EU – an evolving construct bustling with people and institutions

- Walter Carlsnaes, Helene Sjursen and Brian White (eds.). (2004). *Contemporary European Foreign Policy*, Sage Publications, London, California;

- Asle Toje. (2009). *Strategic Culture as an Analytical Tool History, capabilities, geopolitics and values: the EU example*, in *Western Balkans Security Observer*;

- Niilo Kauppi, Mikael Rask Madsen (eds.). (2013). *Transnational Power Elites: The New Professionals of Governance, Law and Security*, Routledge.

It can further be discussed whether the EU represents a win-win set-up or a win-lose core-periphery project blaming Western countries for losing the colonial empires. The discussion can be nourished using articles from the Romanian press and commenting on them.

4. Meeting points and collective habits of elite reproduction across the Atlantic

- Stephen M. Walt. (December 1, 1998). *The Ties That Fray: Why Europe and America are Drifting Apart*. In *The National Interest*;
- Andrés Solimano and Diego Avanzini. (2010). *The International Circulation of Elites: Knowledge, Entrepreneurial and Political*, World Institute for Development Economic Research, Working Paper No. 113.
- 5. The Russian world – real affinities or just common interests?
- Vladimir Gel'man, Inessa Tarusina. (2000). *Studies of political elites in Russia: issues and alternatives*. In *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, No.33, 311–329;
- Diana Digol. (March 2007). *Emerging Diplomatic Elites in Post-Communist Europe*, Thesis submitted for the assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political Science and Social Sciences at the European University Institute;
- Alexander Nikitin. (February 2007). *The End of the 'Post-Soviet Space'*. The Changing Geopolitical Orientations of the Newly Independent States, Chatam House;
- Martin Müller. (2009). *Making Great Power Identities in Russia. An Ethnographic Discourse Analysis of Education at a Russian Elite University*, Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien;
- Horak, Slavomir. (2012). *The elite in post-Soviet and post-Niyazow Turkmenistan: does political culture form a leader?* In *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 20, no. 4;
- Dr. David Lewis. (2016). *The 'Moscow Consensus': Constructing autocracy in post-Soviet Eurasia*. The Foreign Policy Centre, May 24, 2016;
- Akbar Valizadeh, Shiva Alizadeh. (winter 2019). The Socialization of Post-Soviet Elites and Russia's Regional Hegemony, *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal*, Volume 24, Issue 104, 154-186.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Müller is probably the most appropriate to be studied under the logic of the course as he depicts an inside study of MGIMO, the Russian institute bent on preparing the future political bureaucrats and which counts among the alumni not only high-profile Russians, but also policymakers from other Central and East-European countries. The article of Valizadeh and Alizadeh was written in Persian and read using Google translate. Its presence here can be explained by the desire to guest not only pieces written in universal languages, but also narrow vernacular ones and thus as an invitation for those students who possess skills in rare languages to come forward and enrich the seminars.

## 6. International organisations – between a life of their own and the resources given by national governments

- John J. Mearsheimer. (Winter, 1994-1995). The False Promise of International Institutions. In *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 5-49;
- Catherine Welch, and Ian Wilkinson. (5-7 September 2002). "The political embeddedness of international business networks", Competitive paper presented at 18th Annual IMP Conference, Dijon;
- Catherine Welch, Rebecca Marschan-Piekkari, Heli Penttinen, Marja Tahvanainen. (2012). *Interviewing elites in international organisations: a balancing act for the researcher*. <http://observatory-elites.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Interviewing-elites.pdf>
- Mikael Rask Madsen and Mikkel Jarle Christensen. (26 October 2016). *Global Actors: Networks, Elites, and Institutions*, Oxford Research Encyclopaedia. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-9>
- Henning Schmidtke. (2019). Elite legitimization and delegitimation of international organizations in the media: Patterns and explanations, *The Review of International Organizations*, 14:633–659.

## Concluding remarks

Since the beginnings of the first chairs of International Relations, the domain has grown diverse and eclectic, both on the side of the offer, as well as on the consumer. After a century of soul searching and bouncing between scientific endeavour, counselling princes and outright engaging politics, it is possible that the domain has lost its unity due to too much unbridled diversity. Starting from the lack of a unique name of the field to the diversity of those teaching it and the dissimilarity of the students, we witness a proteic stage where one is not such the actors follow the same script or at least the same language. The catechism of teaching IR following a presumably taxonomy of feuding schools remains relevant for the scholars, but not to the multifarious candidates who usually enrol IR classes with vague but glamorous expectations about a future diplomatic career or else. Blending study with the experience of teaching, this article suggests crafting IR more like an elite centred sociology more than a paradigm-centred one.

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