

Book Review

New Perspectives on the International Order: No Longer Alone in This World

Bertrand Badie,

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The “West and the Rest” relationship – intended as the interplay between Western and non-Western countries – has always attracted a great deal of attention from academic and political observers. If one is completely new to this debate however, at first glance, broad concepts such as “civilization” or “empire”, which are equally well known in Western and non-Western cultures, may seem to be the mainstream subjects of such research. Bertrand Badie, in *“New Perspective on the International order: no longer alone in this world”*, does not focus on trans-cultural notions but specifically refers to the concept of International System, which mainly embodies Western historical experiences, and, meanwhile, is the cornerstone of the International Relations (IR) discipline. The author investigates on how Western countries as a group reached their global hegemony and why the West is indeed declining from within by losing its grip on the very same environment which was set up by the West for the West.

Bertrand Badie is Emeritus Professor of the Centre de Recherches Internationales (CERI) at SciencesPo Paris, France. His research interests range from the Sociology of the International Relations, to Multilateralism and Human Rights. Thanks to his knowledge of Persian and Arab languages and cultures, he has been able to integrate throughout his career the Western perception of IR with non-Western perspectives, which clearly stands up in this book.

In their seminal work *“Contracting states: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations”*, Cooley and Spruyt sustain that countries’ international status is the product of constant bargaining among states with the aim of redistributing political power among themselves. Badie starts from this point and argues that Western countries ruled the world as an “oligarchs’ club” (p.1) continuously reshaping the international order when needed, under the golden rule “sharing when you must, excluding when you think you can” (p.15). Western predominance, therefore, did

not result from one political entity's will to be a hegemon such as for the British, German or Russian empires, but arose from the interconnectedness between several actors who mutually recognized each other as part of the same international community. Evidently, Badie sharply integrates Kenneth Waltz's Neorealism and Hedley Bull's English School and puts them into historical perspective. Through this approach, Post-Cold War international instability is due to the awakening of the Non-Western powers who have been excluded from the Western-centric international community for centuries and who are nowadays refusing to be labeled as "second rank" (p.10) powers.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, chapters 1 to 3, sets up the theoretical background for the following analysis and aims to historicize the concept of the International System. The central chapters, 4 and 5, have the aim of "exploring the new world" (p.53) that has emerged from the illusion of US hegemony, and consider rising international powers and recently independent countries in detail. Finally, chapters 6 and 7 analyze the US and France's reactions to the "newcomers" (p.68).

The first section consists of a well-articulated effort to address historically fundamental IR paradigms, such as Order, Hegemony, and the Balance of Power, through which the current common perception of the world passes. Badie argues that "Global Order" is indeed ideologically grounded on historical exceptions rather than on "regular" historical events. The Westphalia treaty, even though it aimed to marginalize Imperialism, allowed "the temptation of empire" (p.3) to endure and to spread globally through Colonialism. The Cold War, too, was "an accident of history" (p.19), as never before had there been a worldwide diarchic polarization in which the rest of the states forcibly aligned with two superpowers. Badie creates a *fil rouge* between the G20 and the 1815 Concert of Europe along which an aristocracy clearly stood out as the undisputed holders of political power. Directly opposed to this elite, a "dissenting discourse" (p.29) vastly spread around the globe evolving from embryonic groups such as the mid-'20s Pan-Asian or Pan-Islamic fronts to the more articulated Cold War-style "non-aligned movements". Considering a long period of time, the author depicts historical events with the intent of showing how two alternative narratives, the dominant and the excluded, have always been face-to-face.

Since the aftermath of the Cold War, such dialectic interplay seems to have put more and more pressure on the Western oligarchy. Globalization has reduced the importance of statehood while reinforcing the power of individuals by giving them a "truly international status" (p.42). According to the author, Western oligarchy nowadays is no longer besieged by states but by people who, as emerged in the 2011 Arab Spring as well as in the 1999 Seattle demonstration at the WTO summit, can exploit "a public forum" (p.46) to blame the West for any global in-

justice. Contemporary “Westernophobia” (p.46) is very different from previous non-Western political claims since it is occurring in an inter-social rather than inter-state scenario. Very interestingly, the first section of the book argues that the understanding of International Relations nowadays requires the use of new terms, notions, concepts and analytical categories in which a “Sociology of International Relations” should integrate old schools of thought such as Liberalism or Realism. Even more relevantly, however, Badie suggests a reversed vision of international disorder to the reader. Opposed to the mainstream description of instability as resulting from an anarchic International System, the author instead looks at the overabundance of political actors as the main source of disorder. Instability does not result from the lack of one unquestioned power, but from the presence of “7 billion potential” (p.38) leaders. Rather than anarchic, the post-Cold War international scenario resembles more closely to, in the Greek historian Polibius’ words, an ochlocracy, or in modern terms, *mobocracy*, where anyone could rule.

In the central chapters of the book, the author tries to understand how, as US supremacy turned out to be a mere illusion, non-Western powers showed a strong desire to be self-ruled and transformed what should have been a unipolar world into a multipolar one. Badie mainly focuses on non-Western global contenders: Russia, China, the BRICS and the EU are all addressed with a brief paragraph each. He argues that although these powers followed autonomous patterns of development, they all wished to play a more active role in international politics. The most prominent arguments, however, are concentrated in the fifth chapter, dedicated to the most war-torn and unstable areas. The author predominantly focuses on the Middle East, which is used as a good example of broader trends that manifested throughout the world. As they are victims of neocolonialism, client-oriented policies and decolonization failures, these weak states demonstrate how “no one knew how to open the door to the newcomers in a suitable way”. (p.76) This is almost certainly the strongest point of the entire work. Badie, through an acute historical analysis, *de facto* reverses Tilly’s theories by sustaining that nowadays conflicts are not the result of competing powers anymore, but “proceed entirely from weakness” and are essentially “matters of society” and not of governments. (p.84) Post-1989 wars predominately took place in a “world where power has become powerless”. (p.85) In a final theoretical twist, however, the author is able to show how these “outsiders” are extremely strong in shaping the contemporary world order. Through their endemic weakness, non-Western states are indeed able to destabilize the strongest countries’ agendas as proved by the almost-two-decade-long US engagement in Afghanistan or Iraq. The “power of the weak” (p.85) is the force of relegating the more powerful to be reactive, or more simply, is making “first rank” powers no longer capable of autonomously holding the reins of the International Politics.

The final section of the book considers in detail US and French reactions to the non-Western states who rose up after the Cold War. Focusing on G.W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump administration, Badie reflects on how the US passed from the willingness to rule the world by forcing the newcomers to join Western values via hard power tools, to the Trump-style protectionism for protesting against globalization as harmful to national interest. Although predominantly descriptive, chapter 6 is extremely coherent with the book structure since it updates the theoretical background that was introduced in the initial chapters by analyzing US behavior. Chapter 7 sheds light on French foreign policy from the end of the Second World War in a fresh way. Recalling Gaullisme's ideological fundamentals, the analysis predominantly focuses on how the international arena has affected French international behavior since the aftermath of the Second World War. To face its downgrading from being an imperial power to being dependent on US aid, France has tried to distance itself from Washington and Moscow by asserting itself as the leader of non-aligned countries. Badie argues, however, that the openness to the South of the World and notably to Africa was an effort to regain momentum within the international arena rather than to welcome the newly-born states to the control room of international politics. France, in a very old-fashioned *realpolitik*, wished to be recognized as the front-runner of a third block to regain its status within the *ivy league* of states. Therefore, the "French grandeur" (p.106) did not pursue the redistribution of international power as it might have seemed at first glance, but instead sought to concentrate power within the "Western family" again by framing a "French-style Neoconservatism" (p.118).

The major weakness of Badie's book is that it sometimes underestimates the complexity of some concepts and might result repetitive in some points. In chapter 3, although it has the pivotal role in explaining some of the book's crucial arguments, the notion of "*glocalization*" is just mentioned briefly without further explanation, thus making the argumentation generally hard to understand. One may expect more attention to be paid to the local-global nexus, which is not intuitive even for an expert. Furthermore, the initial pages of chapter 4, dedicated to US foreign policy, seem redundant and could have been more explanatory if merged with the contents expressed in chapter 6, which looks closely at the very same notions in a sharp and detailed style. Finally, in the second part of chapter 4, the analysis of the rising contenders to Western oligarchy considers EU, Russia, China and the BRICS. By providing detailed examinations of Beijing and Moscow, *de facto* the author breaks up the notion of BRICS, originally including these very same countries. To some extent, this is an understandable choice, but, similarly, the reader might expect a few words about India too or, alternatively, an explanation of why this nation did not deserve an ad-hoc paragraph, as China and Russia did, despite its leading role in Asian Politics. There are many references to New Delhi

diplomatic initiatives, but this is insufficient.

Overall, this book is a remarkably powerful effort to tread carefully on concepts that had already been researched in detail such as Globalization and Power, Sovereignty and Imperialism, without ever ending in trivial or banal conclusions. Coherently, the research is principally grounded on secondary literature and is limited to a pure qualitative methodology. In fact, the main strength of the work is its ability to propose fresh arguments by exploiting a strong interdisciplinary approach. A wise mix of IR and History, combined with scrupulous references to even seemingly insignificant historical events, gives the reader a brilliant and innovative portrait of how international instability has changed throughout the decades. Moreover, Bertrand Badie, moving on from classic IR disciplines such as Neorealism, Liberalism or the English School, touches on the crucial notions of the most recent IR schools of thought such as the Global South or Global Justice theory, sowing the seeds for further research. IR and History scholars, in particular those interested in the convergence between IR and History or International historians, would benefit from reading this book. Students with a strong background knowledge of IR would find this work very useful too. It might provide as well a good read for diplomatic staff due to the detailed analysis of the role of society within the modern international scenario and of the so-called Track II diplomacy.

Bio

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