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17 An 'ation' not a 'nation': the globalisation of world politics

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During the Cold War mainstream theories contented themselves with the knowledge that world politics was synonymous with international relations. Theories of international relations, as the name implies, presuppose nation states to be the locus of the world's political power and authority. From this it elegantly follows that the study of states and relations between states was a necessary and sufficient basis for understanding and explaining world politics. In short, world politics amounted to the study of inter*national* political processes. The backdrop of the Cold War gave these theoretical insights practical emphasis. The existence of two world powers standing on the brink of mutual annihilation underscored the idea that states constituted the most powerful actors on the world stage. The conclusion of the Cold War ushered in a period of uncertainty and conjecture about the nature and meaning of world politics (see for example Cox *et al*., 2000). A voluminous literature appeared purporting to reflect the essence of the nascent post-Cold War order. This ranged from the liberal triumphalism trumpeted by Fukuyama's (1992) 'end of history' thesis to Huntington's (1993) prophecy about an impending 'clash of civilisations' and those who foresaw the arrival of a 'new medievalism' (Ruggie, 1993; Cerny, 1998; Kobrin, 1998). Though these accounts propounded radically different views of the new world order they nevertheless shared a common theme. Namely that the image of a world of states inadequately captured the intricacies of world politics in a post-Cold War environment. In particular, the adoption of the state and the states system as the basic framework for inquiry produced an unnecessarily restrictive conceptualisation of world politics that squeezed out consideration of non-state forms of power and authority. It was against this backdrop that commentators began to contemplate the impact of 'the globalisation of world politics' (Baylis and Smith, 2001).

The implications of globalisation for the theory and practice of world politics is the subject of intense debate. Differing interpretations of the terrorist atrocities of September 11, 2001 provide a clear illustration of this continuing controversy. For many, the events of September 11 were symptomatic of the profound transformations in world politics stemming from globalisation. These authors suggested that globalisation had diffused power

away from states 'empowering individuals and groups to play roles in world politics – including wreaking massive destruction – that were once reserved for governments of states' (Nye, 2002, x; see also Keohane, 2002). Others were more conservative. They claimed that there is little evidence to support the assertion that globalisation has led to any fundamental reordering of the global political system and, if anything, the terrorist attacks and their aftermath have served to vindicate more traditional state-centred understandings of world politics (Gray, 2002; Waltz, 2002). This chapter argues that globalisation does have important ramifications for the way we think about and study world politics. The central contention is that the novelty of globalisation, whether it is used to describe a process or to connote an end condition, derives from its designation as an '*ation*' not a '*nation*' (Woodward, forthcoming). This is not just a semantic subtlety but is emblematic of the way in which globalisation has challenged the disciplinary trajectory of world politics. Whereas 'international' perspectives are imbued with the assumption that world politics is the exclusive province of the nation state, globalisation as an 'ation' makes no prior hypothesis about the main actors or the dominant patterns of world politics, enabling us to think of world politics in a more inclusive manner. As Baylis and Smith (2001, p. 2) put it, world politics viewed through the lens of globalisation 'is meant to denote the fact that our interest is in the politics and political patterns in the world, and not only those between nation-states'. States remain crucial but ultimately represent just one, albeit important, thread in the fabric of world politics. For this reason, states are a necessary but not sufficient focus for those seeking to understand world politics under conditions of contemporary globalisation.

World politics as international relations

The dominant theoretical approaches to international relations proceed from the premise that world politics is organised around the system of states first formalised by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Embedded into these theories is a political geography which divides the world up into hermetically sealed parcels of land, each governed by a sovereign body wielding absolute and exclusive authority. Political power and authority are predicated on conceptions of place, and conceptions of place are dictated to an overwhelming extent by the territoriality of the state. In this way the state monopolises power and authority in the world political system. As Walker (1995, p. 29) observes 'because states are, other forms of politics cannot be… it is not possible to make claims about *world* politics, except as a way of describing *relations* among states' (emphasis in original). This is not to say that non-state actors were ignored entirely. Theories of international relations acknowledged that other actors including international institutions and multinational enterprises participated in world politics. However, it was thought

that the overarching framework provided by inter-state relations determined the behaviour of these actors (Waltz, 1979). To borrow an analogy from Kenneth Waltz (1979, p. 94) while states scripted and acted out the main contours of the drama, non-state actors were the supporting cast working within the play's main narrative.

In the 1970s and 1980s it became increasingly obvious that certain aspects of world politics, particularly those pertaining to the management of the global economy, were becoming less susceptible to interpretation by approaches which emphasised an exclusive focus on inter-state relations. Scholarly apprehension about the potential shortcomings of analyses that overlooked or marginalised the role of non-state actors stimulated a series of theoretical innovations. Work on transnational relations (Keohane and Nye, 1972; Strange, 1976), interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 1977) and international regimes (Krasner, 1983) all assigned a more prominent role to non-state actors. These ideas appeared to convey a more complex image of world politics, where outcomes were mediated by a variety of different types of actors. However, beneath the surface these theories clung to the belief that states continued to be the major sources of power and authority. Non-state actors were invariably seen as truncating, conditioning or contributing toward state action. That is to say they were important only to the extent that they shaped the preferences of states and hence inter-state relations, denying them the ability to possess or exercise authority in their own right.

These theoretical innovations were important to the extent that they revealed underlying concerns about the deficiencies of state-centric approaches and expanded world politics' empirical terrain to encompass more detailed consideration of non-state actors. Nevertheless the value of these theories was compromised because of their reluctance to seriously challenge international relations' epistemological and ontological foundations. This did not disguise the fact that many commentators doubted whether a model of international relations was capable of offering a comprehensive explanatory framework for understanding world affairs.

The globalisation of world politics

The debate on globalisation has largely been conducted between two diametrically opposed schools of thought. Conventional wisdom informed by what Held *et al*. (1999, p. 3) have labelled the 'hyperglobalisation thesis' maintains that globalisation has diffused power and authority away from the state to regional, global and private actors. Scientific advances in communications and technology have permitted political, social and economic processes to be organised on a global scale generating alternative forms of social organisation which are seen to be progressively displacing the state. The state, far from being the principal source of political power and authority, is

portrayed as a peripheral actor on the global stage. This has devastating consequences for theories of world politics founded on the principle that states are the main actors. If the state has ceased to be the sole or the main 'structure of authority' (Rosenau, 1997) then studies of inter-state relationships are unlikely to tell us much about contemporary world politics. Those adopting a more 'sceptical' (Held *et al*., 1999, p. 5) stance on globalisation have challenged these assertions. Sceptics accept that the world is becoming more integrated, but that these changes are superficial. Firstly, they point to the fact that current levels of interconnectedness are not unprecedented and that therefore we cannot be said to be living in an environment which is qualitatively different from the past. Secondly, they argue that the evidence points not to globalisation but to intensified *internationalisation* (Hirst and Thompson, 1999). This careful use of language infers that the majority of the world's political interactions continue to be between states, allowing them to argue that globalisation is a myth, the state is unmolested, and that it should continue to form the primary focus for those engaged in the discipline of world politics.

The perspectives of the hyperglobalisers and the sceptics are now widely regarded as epistemologically and empirically suspect. From a methodological standpoint the state and globalisation are inaccurately presented as competing forms of social organisation engaged in a zero-sum battle for power and authority in world affairs where any advance for the forces of globalisation is automatically assumed to weaken the authority of the state (Clark, 1999). This overlooks the reality that many of the trends discussed under the rubric of globalisation are sanctioned and enthusiastically supported by states. Empirically speaking it is difficult to sustain the position implied by the sceptics that nothing is changing in world politics. Equally it is difficult to sustain the hyperglobalisers' position that globalisation has swept away states and the state system.

The obsession with the effect of globalisation on the state's power and authority has deflected attention away from the more complex transformations of power and authority wrought by contemporary globalisation. The real significance of globalisation for the study of world politics lies in its specification as an 'ation' not a 'nation'. Most writing on globalisation now concludes that the state endures as a significant actor but that at the same time authority is more diffuse. The 'ation' suffix suggests that authority is not monopolised by the state. World politics can no longer be viewed as a world of states but is instead a vibrant mosaic of ceaselessly changing authoritative actors that includes but is not reducible to the state. The clear, straightforward and parsimonious conceptualisation of world politics offered up by international relations perspectives is being supplanted by a vision of the world political system that is messy and 'turbulent' (Rosenau, 1997). Using these

observations the remainder of the chapter will advance three related propositions regarding the way we conceive of and study world politics as an 'ation'. Firstly, states continue to form an integral part of our physical and imagined landscape and so states and inter-state relations form a proper avenue of inquiry for those seeking to explain and understand world politics. Secondly, scholars of world politics should be sensitive to the redefinition of the role of the state and its impact on the way that inter-state relations are conducted. Finally, while states are still important, world politics is constituted by a plethora of other actors, and consideration must be given to how non-state structures of authority contribute to world order.

World politics as an 'ation'

The state has proved to be a remarkably robust and successful method of organising political space but this has not prevented periodic consideration about its impending or actual demise. The onset of the nuclear age had paradoxical implications for the power of the state. On the one hand nuclear weaponry was the means through which states could produce massive destruction and as such represented a potent symbol of the state's enduring power and authority. On the other hand, states were vulnerable to destruction from nuclear warheads owned by their enemies. States were effectively rendered obsolete because they could no longer fulfil their basic function of guaranteeing the security of their citizens through maintaining their territorial integrity (Herz, 1957). Subsequent events have shown this to be a spectacular miscalculation. The state has not only survived, it has positively flourished. Over the past 40 years over 100 new sovereign states have come into existence sponsored largely by decolonisation and, more recently, the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Given the rapid expansion in the number of states plus the many nationalities who aspire to statehood it seems unrealistic to forecast the disappearance of the state in the near future. The real debate is not whether the state will persist but about what roles it will play in world politics.

Most authors now assert that despite the intensification of globalising tendencies the system of sovereign states is still one of the dominant patterns of world politics. These bilateral and multilateral interactions and the treaties, institutions and organisations arising from them provide the 'scaffolding' (Brenner, 1999) on which globalisation depends. If anything globalisation has forced states to increase the intensity and the frequency of their contacts as they grapple with urgent new problems arising out of globalisation including the environmental degradation, financial crises and instability and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In many areas the power and authority of the state is paramount and international relations tend to predominate. If one takes the example of security, the world's flashpoints of

conflict are normally the result of, and resolved by, state mediation. Notwithstanding the emergence of terrorist organisations and worries about their ability to acquire and deploy weapons of mass destruction or disruption,[1] the fact remains that they are peripheral actors. They are no match for the state in terms of their ability to finance and sustain violent conflict. Moreover their involvement in world politics tends to be transient. They drift in and out of world politics rather than constituting the overarching set of political relationships. In other areas such as the politics of the global economy and the environment the state's grip on power and authority is perhaps more tenuous. Nevertheless vast swathes of economic activity are governed, nominally at least, by intergovernmental arrangements, most notably by international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. Similarly global environmental governance has been marked by a growth of international law and regimes (Young, 1997).

However, the state is not a static entity. There are many who argue that states and inter-state relationships are undergoing profound upheaval. Some observers believe that the traditional conception of the state as a unitary body is outdated. They believe that the state 'is disaggregating into its functionally distinct parts'. In turn these distinct parts – including government departments, regulatory agencies, executives and legislatures – are 'networking with their counterparts abroad, creating a dense web of relations that constitutes a new, transgovernmental order' (Slaughter, 1997, p. 184). In other words alternative forms of inter-state consultation now supplement traditional inter-state bodies. This phenomenon can be seen across a wide range of fields but is has arguably proceeded furthest in the field of global financial governance. Since 1974 the Basle Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS), composed of officials from the central banks and main regulatory authorities of the so-called Group of 10, has promulgated broad supervisory standards designed to promote best practice and improve the quality of banking regulation. Similar bodies exist for the regulation of the securities industry (the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (IOSCO)) and the insurance sector (the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS)).

Finally it is now widely recognised that inter-state relationships are enmeshed in much broader patterns of world politics. Two things are worth noting about non-state actors in contemporary world politics. Firstly there are a lot more of them. The growth of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) is indicative of the explosion in the total number of non-governmental actors. In 1996 there were 5472 INGOs, over 30 times the number that existed in 1909 (Held *et al.*, 1999, p. 53). Secondly, and more importantly, scholars of world politics are no longer seeing non-state actors as mere adjuncts to the state system but to be the possessors of political power and authority which supplement and on occasion supplant the author-

ity of the state. A number of volumes have recently been dedicated to assessing the role and the extent of private and non-state structures of authority in world politics (see for example Cutler *et al*., 1999; Higgott *et al*., 2000; Ronit and Schneider, 2001). The general consensus is that private and non-state structures of authority in world politics have neither been dormant nor insignificant but the novelty in the current epoch is in the breadth and depth of their influence. The surveys also signify that there are very few aspects of world politics that have not been penetrated by alternative structures of authority and where such authority does not operate. Private arrangements now govern significant portions of global affairs from the Internet and telecommunications through to insurance and pharmaceutical and chemical safety standards. Non-state organisations have thrived in part because of the emergence of global issues and problems that states and their various collaborative institutions have proved ill-suited or unwilling to deal with. There are areas of global politics that are governed largely by private structures of authority. The esoteric and arcane world of financial markets has proved to be a fertile area for the growth of private authority. This is exemplified by the politics of developing standards for accounting and auditing, something that has been brought into sharp relief following the recent corporate scandals in the United States. International standards have been almost entirely developed by the International Accounting Standards Board and its predecessor, the International Accounting Standards Committee. However, areas where private authority is dominant are still the exception. In most cases states share the stage with non-state actors, with world order being shaped by a morass of authority structures. For example an inter-state body, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), is at the forefront of efforts to combat money laundering. However FATF is now augmented by a series of initiatives launched by the private sector, most notably the Wolfsberg Anti-Money Laundering Principles launched in 2000 by 11 leading international private banks in conjunction with Transparency International (an INGO).

There are a great number and diversity of authoritative actors in world affairs. States retain their status as critical structures of authority in world affairs but we inhabit a world where 'international' no longer embraces much of what transpires across national boundaries (Rosenau, 2000, p. 171) and where many of the world's political problems are resolved by a multitude of authoritative actors.

Conclusion

Globalisation as an 'ation' is fundamentally altering the way world politics is conceived. For many years the state was held to be the main structure of authority in world politics. Analysts earnestly believed that the door to the mysteries of world politics could be unlocked by probing states and their

interactions. This image of world politics was increasingly at odds with how many people viewed and experienced the world. The early literature on globalisation was insufficiently nuanced, advocating the need for either wholesale change or essential continuity in our understanding of world politics. More recent literature emphasises that globalisation points to aspects of both continuity and change in world politics. There are many areas of world politics, such as in the military domain, where states persist as the pivotal structures of authority and where inter-state relations do largely account for the outcomes that are observed. At the same time there are other areas, such as the economy and the environment, where state authority is contested, compromised or gradually evaporating and where the slack is being picked up by structures of authority from beyond the state system. Unlike 'national' approaches to world politics the 'ation' approach views states as just one set of coordinates that should be used to plot patterns of power and authority; they should not define the map. We ought to be suspicious of approaches that certify inter-state relations to be the totality of world politics.

Finally, and on a more cautious note, the recognition that world politics is more complicated than state-centred analysis insinuates is only a first step. Theories of world politics that are capable of reflecting and deciphering the puzzles posed by our global age remain in their infancy. The challenge confronting scholars is to refine these theories to enable us to better understand world politics as we move forward into the twenty-first century.

Note

1. The idea of 'mass disruption' refers to the use of tactics designed to cripple the communications and logistical infrastructure upon which modern societies depend (Homer-Dixon, 2002). Weapons of mass disruption might include unleashing computer viruses, attempts to interfere with the production and distribution of energy supplies and the contamination of water supplies.

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