

Hierarchies in World Politics

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Edited by Ayşe Zarakol

'It remains deeply perplexing that the rise of a cottage industry on hierarchy in world politics has yet to diffuse into the broader IR community. Hopefully, then, this superb volume, which contains some of the leading voices on international hierarchy, might help to light the fire of a revolutionary transformation of the theoretical and empirical foundations of the discipline that have for far too long been taken lazily for granted.'

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AYŞE ZARAKOL is University Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow at Emmanuel College. She is author of *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge, 2011).

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Globalising processes are gathering increased attention for complicating the nature of political boundaries, authority and sovereignty. Recent examples of global financial and political turmoil have also created a sense of unease about the durability of the modern international order and the ability of our existing theoretical frameworks to explain system dynamics. In light of the inadequacies of traditional International Relations (IR) theories in explaining the contemporary global context, a growing range of scholars have been seeking to make sense of world politics through an analytical focus on hierarchies instead. Until now, the explanatory potential of such research agendas and their implications for the discipline went unrecognised, partly due to the fragmented nature of the IR field. To address this gap, this ground-breaking book brings leading IR scholars together in a conversation on hierarchy and thus moves the discipline in a direction better equipped to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Ayşe Zarakol is a University Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow at Emmanuel College. She is the author of *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge, 2011).

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Editor's Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is the product of many conversations among IR scholars who have not (entirely) given up the dream of overcoming the fragmentation of the discipline. It is our hope that thinking about hierarchies in world politics opens up underexplored avenues of research and thus helps bring the discipline into the twenty-first century. Reorienting the IR conversation to the concept of hierarchy also links previously disconnected clusters of scholarship around common questions, as opposed to various '-isms'. What first had started out as an ISA working group around this idea led to two more workshops. I would like to thank the International Studies Association (ISA), the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, the Jacobs Chair of Social Sciences at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), the Cambridge Humanities Grant Scheme and the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge for funding and hosting these meetings.

There were also individuals without whose generous intellectual and logistical support the project would never have survived: Michael Barnett, David Lake and Jack Donnelly. Michael Barnett is in many ways the godfather of this collaboration: it was on his suggestion that the first working group on hierarchies was organised. He continued to play a key role with his guidance. David Lake almost singlehandedly made the project possible by first agreeing to attend the first ISA working group and then funding the first workshop in UCSD. His willingness to seriously engage with *all* kinds of IR scholarship and his generous mentorship of young scholars make him truly a role model for our discipline. Jack Donnelly is the contributor every collaboration of this sort needs: he kept all of us alert with his interlocutions and thus took some of the editing burden off my shoulders. Every chapter in the book is better as a result of his feedback. I am also grateful to the other contributors in the book for their dedication to the project over the years: Rebecca Adler-Nissen, Alex Cooley, Andrew Phillips, Vincent Pouliot, Laura Sjoberg, J. C. Sharman, Sarah Stroup, Shogo Suzuki and Wendy Wong. It truly was a privilege to work with such a group of scholars at the top of their game, who not only

contributed some of the best examples of their research to this book but also helped improve the other contributions through substantive engagement with each other's approaches.

Many others have been involved in previous stages even though their work is not represented in this book: Anna Agathangelou, Tarak Barkawi, Charlotte Epstein, Evelyn Goh, Jonathan Havercroft, Kristen Hopewell, Naeem Inayatullah, Mark Laffey, Jenny Lobasz, Xavier Mathieu, David McCourt, Dan Nexon, Ben O'Loughlin, Alex Prichard, Bahar Rumelili, Mark Salter, Ann Towns, Karyn Wang and Yuan-Kang Wang. The project has benefitted greatly from their contributions to the conversation. The same applies especially to Janice Bially Mattern. But for her involvement, the hierarchies project would not have even started.

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Theorising Hierarchies

An Introduction

*Ayşe Zarakol**

Globalising processes are gathering increased attention for complicating the nature of political boundaries, authority and sovereignty. Recent global financial and political turmoils have also created a sense of unease about the durability of modern international order and the ability of our existing theoretical frameworks to explain system dynamics. In light of the insufficiencies of traditional International Relations (IR) theories¹ in explaining the contemporary global context, a growing number of scholars have been seeking to make sense of world politics through an analytical focus on hierarchies instead.² Until now, the explanatory potential of such research agendas and the implications for the discipline went unrecognised due to the fragmented nature of the IR field.

Hierarchies, understood broadly as any system through which actors are organised into vertical relations of super- and subordination, have long been of interest to social scientists, including in IR.³ In recent years, however, IR scholarship concerned with hierarchies has expanded considerably. Building upon economic, sociological, legal, philosophical and

* Some sections of this chapter borrow from Bially Mattern and Zarakol (2016). This introduction and the conclusion have also benefitted from the comments of Michael Barnett, Jack Donnelly, David Lake, Daniel Nexon, Ann Towns, George Lawson, Patricia Owens, Kamran Matin, Ole Jacob Sending, Maria Birnbaum, Halvard Leira and Einar Wigen, as well as the questions of many others to whom versions of this chapter were presented at the European International Studies Association (EISA, Sicily 2015), the University of Sussex and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

¹ Some have described (and others have lamented) this as evidence of the 'end of theory' in IR. See the special issue of *EJIR*, especially Mearsheimer and Walt (2013).

² Hierarchies themselves are not new phenomena in world politics, but recent developments in the system have drawn the attention of *more* scholars to hierarchy.

³ See e.g. Lake 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Nexon and Wright 2007; Donnelly 2006; Cooley 2003, 2005; Keene 2002; Hobson and Sharman 2005; Hobson 2012; Wendt and Friedheim 1995; Simpson 2004; Anghie 2005; Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth 2007; Bowden 2009; Lebow 2008; Zarakol 2011; Buzan and Lawson 2015. There are also approaches that never conceded the anarchy assumption to begin with: for example, world systems theory (e.g. Frank 1978; Wallerstein 1974, 1984; Arrighi 1994), uneven and combined development (e.g. Rosenberg 2013; Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015) and post-colonial (see e.g. Grovogui 2006; Darby and Paolini 1994; Chowdhry and Nair 2004; Barkawi and Laffey 2006).

historical insights about the intertwined logics of formal equality and vertical stratification, researchers across the spectrum of theoretical and methodological commitments have undertaken inquiry into the effects of ranked differentiation among actors on the political dynamics of issues such as global governance, economic relations and security. This scholarship is diverse, but it also converges on two insights: first, that hierarchies are a ubiquitous feature of international (i.e. inter-state) politics and, second, that they generate social, moral and behavioural dynamics that are different from those created by other arrangements. In short, hierarchies matter in distinctive ways for world politics.

We owe the close association of IR and anarchy to neorealism. In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz posited that '[i]n defining structures, the first question to answer is: What is the principle by which the parts are arranged?'⁴ and that 'domestic systems are centralized and hierarchic', whereas 'international systems are decentralized and anarchic.'⁵ From these postulates he derived a number of other components, e.g. that 'the units of an anarchic system are functionally undifferentiated'⁶; that 'in anarchic realms, like units coact'⁷; that 'so long as anarchy endures, states remain like units'⁸; and that 'like units work to maintain a measure of independence and may even strive for autarchy.'⁹ Though Waltz was not, by any means, the first¹⁰ scholar to make the argument that international relations was characterised primarily by its anarchic nature, he did make the statement more definitively than most and had a strong influence in this regard on the generations of scholarship that followed him¹¹: 'Before 1979 three-fifths of the books use "anarchy" or "anarchic" three or fewer times. After 1978 four-fifths use these terms 10 or more times ... A sharp transition occurs around the publication of Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*.'¹² According to Donnelly, the subsequent success of the anarchy concept in IR can be explained in reference to three factors: its association with structural realism, which offered the promise of an elegant systemic theory of international politics; its appeal to rationalist approaches as a starting assumption; and its presentation 'as an analytically neutral demarcation criterion'.¹³ Again in Donnelly's words: 'By the mid-1990s, anarchy had become "naturalized" across much of the discipline; treated as a taken-for-granted foundational assumption. Neorealism and neoliberalism, the leading research programmes of the era, even incorporated anarchy into the IR orthodoxy that no contrary evidence or argument can be permitted to challenge.' To this day,

⁴ Waltz 1979, 82. ⁵ *Ibid.*, 88. ⁶ *Ibid.*, 97. ⁷ *Ibid.*, 104. ⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰ See Donnelly (2015a) for an overview of pre-Waltz usages of the concept in IR.

¹¹ Schmidt 1997, 40. ¹² Donnelly 2015a, 394–5. ¹³ Donnelly 2015a, 402.