

M. J. Balogun

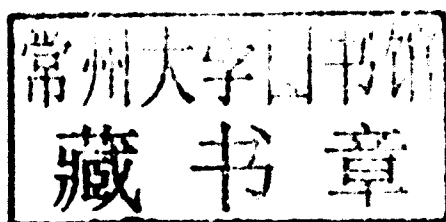
Hegemony and Sovereign Equality

The Interest Contiguity Theory in
International Relations

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in International Relations



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Preface

International relations books targeted at popular or professional readers are not in short supply. Every year, hundreds of titles examining the subject from different angles are turned out by the publishing houses. Complementing books on the theory, history, politics, and conduct of international relations are those focusing on specialized themes—like the law of the seas, nuclear proliferation and disarmament, climate change, globalization, international trade and finance, and terrorism. In light of this apparent glut in the book market, it is fair to ask, what is new that another text intends to share with the reader?

In the language of economics, this book's value-added lies in the attempt made to explore international relations from a new angle—that of states that are not as militarily powerful or economically prosperous as those running the world and thus not getting the attention of scholars. The book proceeds on the assumption that making the study of international relations genuinely *international* entails acknowledging the coexistence of the strong with the weak. Based on this assumption, it develops a conceptual framework which is likely to prove helpful in understanding the conflict and the harmony between and among the various classes of interests—be this the interest of the powerful or of the weak, the interest of the state or of nonstate actors.

In outlining a new theory—the interest contiguity theory—the book begins by identifying broadly three types of interests. The first is the interest of the individual over what concerns him/her and no other person. The second type, besides personal interest, is the interest of the state acting for and on behalf of a *society of individuals*. The third category of interests is that of the international community and/or of rival sovereign states. The book argues that the significance of each type of interest could not be fully comprehended unless and until the *distance or contiguity* between one type and another is analyzed.

To illustrate patterns in the emergence of the various types of interests, the book relies on legend, notably that of Adam, Eve, their offsprings as well as their descendants. It notes, in particular, that in the beginning, nothing mattered to Adam except himself. Before the arrival of Eve, he, by some accounts, had the Garden of Eden all to himself. He could roam the Garden's length and breadth as he pleased, and remove whatever got in his way. If he had foreknowledge of the serpent's plot to get him extradited to the accursed earth, nothing could have stopped him from cutting off the scheming reptile's head and living blissfully thereafter. Adam could

act without answering to anybody, except his conscience and possibly, God—if he really knew Who God is. Adam's simple, carefree life conferred upon him all the rights and no obligations—save the obligations to himself, and for his own survival and well-being.

The situation changed when Eve came on the scene. Instead of worrying about himself, Adam now had to care for, and accommodate the idiosyncrasies of, his new companion. His “theory of individual sovereignty”—if we may call it that—had to be slightly modified to account for the spouse variable. The constraints on Adam's unilateral actions grew as the original First Couple “increased and multiplied.” Population growth necessitated the construction or enforcement of moral codes for the purpose of regulating interpersonal and intergroup relations, and balancing rights with obligations. Even then, and for several millennia, Adam's descendants jealously guarded their individual freedoms. Thus, when population increase in one territory threatened the typical cave man's freedom, he moved with his kinsfolk or “tribe” to another.

The wave of migration continued until almost every inch of space was taken, and there was nowhere else to go. This was the point at which forceful individuals with the power, the resources, and above all, the will to impose order stepped in to regulate the behavior of the embryonic communities.¹ From this early stage to the present, the organized community has had to grapple with questions like the morality of power, why the individual should restrain his natural inclination to be free and instead choose obedience to an external authority, what constitutes the limit of power, and how to respond to the basic human craving for justice.

While the modern state continues to wrestle with the questions, a new type of sovereign has emerged with its own set of demands not only on the state, but also on individuals who had hitherto been under the exclusive control of the state. One question that the book seeks to answer is whether the progression from anarchy or “state of nature,” through the emergence of the nation-state, to internationalism, is a historical accident or an inescapable reality of human evolution. In other words, can Adam's journey toward internationalism be tracked along a predictable historical path, as is done with the deterministic sequences in physics? As argued in the book, Adam's journey from the state of nature through the Westphalia state to internationalism is best understood not as a unidirectional movement, but as a multisided experience.

The interest contiguity theory holds that rather than turning out as a smooth, one-way cruise through history, the humankind's journey from the inception to the present has unveiled broadly three types of interests. The first is the individual interest which, strange as it may sound, tends to be internally contradictory—as reflected in the natural human tendency to vacillate between good and evil, right and wrong. The second is the society's (or “national”) interest which, due to the clash of wills, is even more difficult to harmonize. The third is the interest espoused to justify the establishment and maintenance of supranational institutions.

Though conflicting, some interests are, due to their closeness, more easily reconcilable than others. This is theoretically the case with the interest of the individual vis-à-vis him-/herself, and relative to his/her immediate community. Other interests

are poles apart, and need extraordinary effort to be made mutually compatible. An example is the desire to colonize vis-à-vis the will to resist, or a typical state's (or its citizen's) interest and the "organization interest" pursued by distant international institutions.

In tracing the links between and among the three broad types of interests, this book begins with a brief philosophical excursion, paying particular attention to diverse perspectives on how individuals acquire the knowledge of right and wrong. It then proceeds in Chapter 2 to examine the implications of human knowledge for individual liberty. Against the backdrop to the epistemological and ontological questions raised in the earlier chapters, Chapter 3 examines the contending perspectives on the theory of the state, and in particular, the circumstances under which it is justified to place the interest of society over that of the individual. The focus of Chapter 4 is on the insertion of the supranational governance constant in the sovereignty equation, and on the conflict between idealist and realist explanations for the new order. The adequacy or otherwise of the conflicting explanations of the change (or is it "evolution"?) from anarchy to a "new world order" is the subject taken up in the succeeding chapters.

Besides proposing a new analytical tool for the consideration of and adoption by professionals in the field of international relations, the interest contiguity theory is likely to spark off popular debate on contemporary issues—notably, the role of the superpowers in the maintenance of order, the clash between hegemony and resistance, the scope and limit of the War on Terror, and the choices open to the world in attempts at curbing anarchy and promoting lasting peace. Hopefully, policy makers in different parts of the world would find the options outlined in the book sufficiently pragmatic and useful to be integrated into their global strategic visions.

I am particularly grateful to professional colleagues who offered useful comments on earlier drafts. I must also thank the anonymous reader for his/her favorable comments on the manuscript, but more important, for the helpful hints on changes that I needed to make in different parts of the book. I must, however, accept responsibility for any residual errors.

Newmarket, ON

M. J. Balogun

Notes

1. Among the historic figures behind nations and empires are Hammurabi, the Pharaohs, Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, the Muslim Caliphs, Genghis Khan, the Ottoman sultans, and the Hapsburgs. See Talbot, Strobe, 2008, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster). In Africa, the Mali, Shonghai, Benin and Oyo Empires, as well as the Zulu Kingdom and the Hausa States of Kebbi, Zazzau, and Gobir brought disparate groups under unified rule. The African state builders included Sonni Ali Ber, Askya Muhammadu Ture, Oduduwa, the Alafins, the Obas of Bini, the Jajas of Opobo, Chaka the Zulu, and the great Islamic scholar, Othman dan Fodiyo.

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Part I
Internationalism:
Philosophy and Theory

Chapter 1

The Individual, the State, and International Relations: Toward an Interest Contiguity Theory of Parallel and Competing Sovereignties

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

—US Declaration of Independence, 1776

1.1 Introduction

In the contemporary world, broadly three types of sovereignty exist parallel to one another. These are the sovereignties of the individual over what concerns none but him/her-self, of the nation-state over its territory and people, and of the institutions established to give expression to the will of the “international community,” howsoever defined. The frequent conflict between and among the various types of sovereignty raises a few questions. First, against whose moral standards would the freedom claimed by each type be legitimized? To put it differently, is the right to freedom “God-given,” as argued by the creationists? Or is it a dictate of pure, undiluted reason, as maintained by the Kantians? Does it evolve with society over time, as contended by the social Darwinists, or is it simply fabricated to assert and defend one among competing interests, which is the underlying thesis of Machiavellian realism? Second—and springing directly from the first question—under what circumstances is it justified to subordinate one type of sovereignty to another? Third, how will the boundary between and among the various types of sovereignty be drawn to ensure that each performs only those functions for which it is best suited? Fourth, what checks and balances have been or can be devised to hold each sovereign to account?

In answering the preceding questions, this chapter interrogates three contending theories of international relations—notably, realism with its assumption of power struggle as the harbinger of conflict; idealism that credits reason with the capacity to promote harmony; and Kantian rationalism that makes an even more extravagant claim regarding reason’s tendency not only to banish conflict, but also to promote the emergence of an “international society” in place of parochial nation-states. Departing from the three philosophical traditions, this chapter argues the

proposition that the interests that get served at any particular time are those that are tangible, organized, and, above all, easily reconcilable with their parallels. The chapter then proceeds, in the second section, to focus specifically on the individual, paying attention to his perennial quest for freedom and the obstacles to perfect liberty. In the third section, the chapter interrogates society's (and by implication the nation-state's) claim to obedience as well as to autonomy from external control. The growing tendency toward the externalization (or "internationalization") of the internal effects of human choices is the subject of the fourth section. This section also addresses the question, whether globalization and the ascendant international institutions have displaced the nation-state, rendered it obsolete, and vindicated the Kantian faith in the "international mind."

1.2 Conflict and Harmony in the Quest for Freedom: A Tale of Three Sovereigns

Facing up to the challenge of global security entails reconciling at least three parallel and competing interests—those of the individual, the sovereign state, and the supranational institutions. The interest of the individual is served when s/he enjoys maximum freedom to decide matters which concern her/him and nobody else. The state or "national interest" lies in reconciling, arbitrating, and aggregating contradictory individual interests and maintaining order at the municipal level. The interest of the typical supranational institution or arrangement is not easy to define, particularly, in relation to the two other types mentioned earlier. Although Kant (1724–1804) envisaged the possibility of "pure reason" leading to the emergence of an "international society," individual freewill guarantees that the interests pursued at any one time would be in conflict with one another. If interests clash, it is highly unlikely that minds would come together to form an "international society" of individuals or of states.

This chapter starts from the premise that the individual is the one who knows what serves his/her best interests. However, it acknowledges the possibility—long foreseen by Grotius and latter-day realists—that acting on individual knowledge and intuitions would almost invariably lead to conflicting choices. When wills collide, reason dictates that the contradiction be resolved by an arbiter most familiar with the issues at stake, and—due to the clear and present danger stalking the issues—most interested in how they are resolved. Therefore, instead of expending a disproportionate amount of time and energy searching for the perpetually elusive harmony in interpersonal and interstate relations—as Kantians and idealists are wont to do—the chapter takes conflict as given. However, unlike the power-obsessed realists, the chapter reckons with the probability that otherwise contradictory interests would, because of their relative contiguity, be reconcilable.

The "interest contiguity theory" postulated in the chapter dictates that, barring purely personal questions left to individual conscience, domestic quarrels are best settled by the family or the clan, interclan conflicts by the district or provincial authority, and interprovincial disputes by agencies of the Westphalian state that all

parties *freely and equally accept as legitimate*. At any rate, the interest that gets fully served in any particular situation is the one that is tangible, present, dominant, and organized. This is the case with the interest of the solitary individual in his/her own personal life, as it is with state policies that are *compatible with the aspirations of the people*, the vision that one state shares with others (as in bilateral or multilateral arrangements aimed at combating cross-border crime, environmental pollution, and mutating viruses), and the bureaucratic or broader “organization interest” in supranational environments. The contiguity theory is overturned and its vital message is lost where a distant supranational entity pretends to be better equipped (and more legitimate) to serve purely local interests than the government and/or the people directly concerned.

Undoubtedly, new forms of idealism and realism have emerged with a deterministic view of an expanded and expanding international jurisdiction. The new idealists, in particular, see globalization as fulfilling the Kantian prophesy of the nation-state’s replacement by an “international society.” They, the idealists, contend that as novel and complex challenges unfold, a new order, the supranational state, is bound to supplant the nation-state, just as the latter had replaced anarchy centuries earlier.

For its own part, and despite its suspicion of arrangements that limit state options, the realist strand in the Grotian thought envisages situations under which sovereign states would collaborate for the good and security of the world. International law, institutions, and “morality” also present the Machiavellian realists wide opportunities to bind “rogue states” to a form of global social contract, and to allow states—notably, the powerful ones—to pursue interests deemed strategic.

This raises the question whether the march to global governance is inexorable, and whether this bodes well for individual liberty, for national stability, and for global peace and security. Equally cogent is the question whether a distant and largely unaccountable supranational bureaucracy is to be preferred to one that the citizen sees, relates to, and has ways of holding to account. Above all, if their common hatred of “bourgeois exploitation” had, in a bygone era, failed to unite the workers of the world, globalization theory will be hard put to explain how civic groups, with conflicting agendas, would line up behind a single ideology of global governance.

Neither realism nor idealism has yet provided any satisfactory answers to the aforesaid questions. Machiavellian realists see the international environment as too anarchic to be governed according to the Grotian or any other code of morality. By contrast, the idealists take a wholly positive and, therefore, simplistic view of human nature. Like the Kantian rationalists, the idealists are wont to overstate the human capacity to “reason” and, particularly, the capacity to suppress personal urges for the good of society—national and international.

At the very least, explaining why multiple checks have so far failed to produce the intended balances at the global level warrants that the morality or legitimacy of the power exercised by international institutions be interrogated against the backdrop of parallel and competing interests, notably the interests of the individual and of the sovereign state. In specific terms, the analyst needs to go beyond rhetoric and ask whether the allegiance of the supranational institutions is to the big powers (Wight,

1952), to national governments and/or their citizens (Machiavelli, 1997; Hobbes, 1985; Morgenthau, 1967; Carr, 2001), to the putative “global citizen,” as well as to the nebulous category imaginatively termed “international community” (Kant, 2007), or to international organizations and their gatekeepers (Balogun, 2010). The next section focuses on the individual, a party whose actual or implied consent validates social contracts—local, national, or supranational.

1.3 Individual Freedom: Scope and Limit

A natural human inclination is to be free—free to think, to believe or disbelieve, and to pursue what constitutes his/her best interests. The individual is not true to his/her nature unless and until he enjoys the basic freedoms—notably, those of conscience, thought, association, and action. Relying on his/her senses as a guide, the individual stoutly defends his right to choose “good” over “evil,” right over wrong, and conduct which brings pleasure over that which occasions harm or pain. That human senses sometimes deceive and mislead is beside the point. Whatever the senses tell the individual to be in his best interests will almost invariably strengthen his desire for freedom and determine how far he is prepared to go to assert and defend the freedom.

Human faculties have little or no difficulty understanding what lies within observable time and space. These faculties help the individual make discriminatory decisions on matters affecting them or others brought into direct or indirect relations with them. Thus, the sight welcomes objects and gestures that are deemed pleasant, but not their disagreeable counterparts. The olfactory sense reacts positively to adorable fragrances but recoils from putrid environments. The sense of hearing learns to absorb soft, romantic, and generally pleasing tunes, and to erect defensive barriers when the sound signals (and electromagnetic waves) become louder and less friendly than deemed normal. A situation perceived as congenial is likely to be preferred to a “threatening,” “hostile,” and dangerous one.

If the capacity (as well as inclination) to discriminate between a preferred and a detested state of affairs is part of human nature, we need to ask where this ability or tendency came from. Equally relevant is the question whether sense experience is an adequate guide when searching for answers to life’s complex challenges.

According to subjective idealists, the individual comes into existence already equipped with the consciousness of right and wrong (George Berkeley, Plotinus, Schopenhauer, and Leibniz).

In contrast to the subjective idealists’ position, adherents of the objective school of idealism (Plato, Grotius, Immanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Herbert Bradley, and Hegel) place emphasis on how the mind’s interaction with the observed world assists the acquisition and refinement of human knowledge. The focus on the empirical world accounts for the *realist* influences discernible in the works of objective idealists like Grotius and Hegel. The essence of objective idealism is admirably captured by Oakeshott’s observation on knowledge. According to him (Oakeshott, 1962),