

" A POLITICO-SOCIOLOGY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS? WHAT ELSE? "

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ABSTRACT:

The concept of "international" has been eroded in the process of transnationalization and what has been realized of globalization at least in the last two decades of world politics. On the other side of the coin especially in core societies, an internationalization of social processes has emerged as a product of this phenomenon. Consequentially just as sundry international factors have begun to influence domestic politics through various and diverse interest groups, the same is true for decisions made by individual governments. In the scope of this political transformation, classic epistemological tools and concepts are not likely to suffice in understanding and interpreting the world phenomena. If the world is going through a process where social forces and determinants incrementally tend to resemble those of a holonomic "global" society, world politics can be better understood with the application of theories, methods and academic praxis employed by social science and social theory.

During the years of heated debates on methodological issues in social science, International Relations (IR) theory, safe in the haven 'realism' provided, spent its time attending limited issues with limited instruments; unperturbed by the tumults of epistemological difference and conflict. For at least half a century, the discipline has enjoyed a methodological and philosophical homogeneity and lack of dissent unequalled in any scientific endeavour since scholasticism. At this junction, 'international relations' theory, just as all the rest of the spectrum of social sciences, is in the process of getting more deeply involved in a clash of paradigms which all sciences must accept as a norm of maturity. Considering that a growing share of the discipline's literature in the last two decades aims to bridge the hiatus between the philosophy and sociology of science and IR, we might be optimistic. By claiming its share of the epistemological heritage and wealth of other sciences, the sheer 'discipline' faces the chance to mature into a 'political sociology'. But it still has to confront the tempo-expansive (spread in time) vistas of alternative paradigms: different perspectives of reality which link social relationships and processes with every dimension of human life and experience.

Methodology figures in the equation here again, because the point of reference for deciding even what constitutes social reality is inevitably theoretical. Based on the Enlightenment philosophy's partitioning of social reality into three spheres: the state, the market and the civil society; the social sciences originally were constructed around this distinction. To each of these spheres corresponded a 'discipline': economists studied the market; sociologists the civil society; and political scientists the state. Political science, of which IR is generally considered a part, is perhaps the youngest member on the genealogical tree of social sciences. International Relations (IR), simply said to be the study of political interaction among sovereign "states" owes its survival for half a century as an academic endeavor to three principal phenomena: The post Westphalian modern system of states, the positivist scientific ideology-paradigm of modernity and American hegemony, the "world order" of the modern capitalist world system. As such, it has been the discipline of a particular era in the political history (and sociology) of the world and has served to answer specific questions within a specific set of problems generating from a specific problematic of a specific actor: Namely, it has concerned itself with the premises of American world politics, its process of establishing and managing

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a global hegemony and attending to the complications arising thereof. Mainly, IR has been in Robert Cox's (1992: 445,446) classification, a problem solving "practice".

It must be noted that the use of the term "science" has been eluded in the above paragraph. For, although, since Hans Morgenthau it has had aspirations for and claims to being "scientific", IR has rather fallen short of its ambition. This shortcoming can, to a large extent, be attributed to a poverty of competing and contradicting theoretical or paradigmatic stances in the discipline. Born of a pragmatic need to provide knowledge, or process information for a working hegemony of a capitalistic world system, IR has mostly been satisfied in adopting the pseudo impartial, pseudo objective methodology of positivism, which, since August Comte (and even before), has been the crypto-ideological and unofficially official scientific outlook of the modern world system. Only in the last few decades, in fact, running parallel to the gradual luxation of the Westphalian international system and the transmogrification of the mode of domination in world politics into a "structural" hegemony, in tandem with a shift in world economy toward transnationalisation, or toward so called 'globalisation' has a need emerged among students of international relations for contexts of knowledge which could emancipate world political thinking from the confines of positivist - realism geared only to solve the problems within the framework of a world system slowly slipping into being arcane. Called critical approaches under a blanket name, the new theories range from Frankfurt School critics to post modernists; yet their combined challenge has still a long way to travel before dethroning positivist-realism as the paradigm in IR (Bostanoglu, 1998a).

The concept of "international" is modern by nature, because the phenomenon of so-called sovereign nation states within an interstate system is typically modern. As is known, sovereignty is the state's claim to the interstate system that no other state in the system has the right to exercise any authority within its boundaries which (therefore) must necessarily be clearly defined and legitimated within the system. The concept of sovereignty allowed the centralised nation states of Europe a respite to gain strength from their weakness and a minimally institutionalized interstate system took over a century to take corpus at Westphalia in 1648. The process corresponded historically to the genesis of the modern world system and this political system of sovereign states within an interstate system, both wielding an intermediate, rather than absolute degree of power, suited the capitalist entrepreneurs perfectly (Wallerstein, 1997a). History shows that the modern state has been rather adaptable in its organisation it proved it could make adaptive transformations when under pressure. However, changes in constitution came about discreetly in individual states and spread in the interstate system, whereas the specific nature of "globalisation" forces a systemic and systematic simultaneous coevolution metamorphosis of more than a few states and principally, the core states of world politics (Bostanoglu, 1998b). The general idea of 'globalisation' foresees a loss of autonomy and authority by the state caused by the increased vigor of world market forces whose "disciplining force of international competition" is expected to have "considerable beneficial effects on future public policy". Whether an established fact, a process in the making or modern fiction, globalisation has become the key perspective in looking at world affairs at the end of an arduous century. The essence of globalisation is that states have, although reluctantly; "relinquished" some of their decision making powers, not to a higher authority but in a process where interests have become impossible to define rel-

ative to national boundaries. Within a systemic whole, states no longer take place as the sole actors of the world political scene, but as units trying to adapt to a new, globalizing structure. What is of concern here is that, the theoretical scope of classical IR hardly does suffice in understanding and explaining the phenomena in a world where the Westphalian definition and concept of the state has undergone a vast transformation; hence the need for and cause of the emergence of new paradigms.

The "new" scientific approaches to world politics have little in common except categorically contradicting the tenets, assumptions, postulates and methods of modernist, i.e., positivist science, and its extension in IR, (classical and neo) realism. Hence their blanket dubbing as post modern, anti or post-positivist and critical (see : Cox,1987). The attack on positivism focuses mainly on its crypto-ideological and pseudo-scientific character, manifest in an unspoken acceptance of the current socio political status quo as given norm and its technical dependency on empirical methodology of observation and measurement in the generation of knowledge. Knowledge and its production are made into subjects of critical theories in IR. (Ashley,1984, Bostanoglu, 1998a; Sargut,1994).

The two targets of the post positivist outlook on the theory of IR, transnationalisation and epistemology converge over the contention that present day realist methodology is not equipped to penetrate the phenomenology of socio-political transition. This is a time of uncertainty, bifurcations at such points inherently lead to indeterminate outcomes, because as opposed to times of the normal development of a system when large inputs have small outputs; small inputs yield large outputs at bifurcations (Wallerstein,1997b). On the contrary, the belief in certainties is a fundamental premise of modernity and positivism as the science of modernity, dwells only in certainties. It is Cartesian - Newtonian in nature, assuming that objective universal laws exist governing all natural phenomena and they can be applied with certainty to social incidents as well with duly applied techniques. Newtonian epistemology ignores the flow of time and the changes it incurs are skilfully swept under the rug with generalizations or universal laws that defy any particular significance to time and place except as measurable and controllable variables. Given the same conditions, the same causes will produce the same results here and now, in the past or in the future. This reversibility freezes time as the dimension of uniqueness of experience analysis becomes atemporal and where social phenomena are in question, ahistoric. Yet, historical transformations can hardly be understood without a frame of analysis that relates their time-and-space-specificity to the flow of Time capitalised. Locked in a time perception frozen at the historical period of the Westphalian order of "sovereign states", positivist IR theory, namely, realism reflects the Newtonian tendency to differentiate, divide and simplify phenomena (Prigogine,1993). The new views on the other hand, are called science of complexity, partly because they argue that Newtonian certitudes hold true only in very constrained, very simple systems, but also because they argue that the universe manifests the evolutionary development of complexity, and that the overwhelming majority of situations cannot be explained by assumptions of linear equilibria and time-reversibility. Another conclusion is that in human social systems, the most complex systems in the universe, therefore the hardest to analyze, in periods of transition, it is not certain that even fundamental changes will occur although it is quite possible that they will

(Wallerstein, 1997b).

This renders possible to understand, if not accept, the mainstream scientific obsession with the state as the unit, and as a natural conclusion of such fragmentary logic, fierce competition among the units striving to maximise their interests. The realist paradigm of international relations implicitly relies on ontological dichotomic opposites as functional instruments of analysis (Bostanoglu, 1997: 59-60). As can be observed in Samuel Huntington's controversial end of century vision : The apostle of realism is loath to abandon the dichotomic thinking process and seeks new potential "polar others" now that the Soviet empire is dissolved.

The piercing trajectory of the time arrow brings the crucial element of relativity into the coevolution of the world system relative to all its elements. Explaining a system which operates under the influence of many deep lying factors, ranging from transnationalised capital, trade and information to non-governmental organisations defending the rights of polar animals, all of which contribute to the general aura of uncertainty and unpredictability, escapes the fixed mechanistic grasp of positivist - realist perceptions, which, in their persistent ignoring of the temporal character of world political events prefer to explain new dynamics relying on arcane conceptualisations of anarchy-prone rivalry among sovereign states. The atemporal, "here and now" approach of mainstream political science to the problem of the state has led to its reification as an eternal entity, frozen in time rather than flowing with it.

That its paradigmatic validity has come to be questioned is no coincidence; the emergent world political atmosphere has opened up new spheres of conception in "IR", or interactions within the interstate system of Westphalia, which can no longer be gauged by the conventional methods of analysis so securely established in the old pattern of relations that belong to a former pattern. As Hegel said, thought never generates in vacuo: Theory is necessary because, even the point of reference for deciding what constitutes social reality is inevitably theoretical. Mere observations of phenomena, distended from their historiogenesis may lead (or mislead) scholars into incomplete representations of of the social reality they scrutinise. Theory functions as the cognitive system of the society in determining and conceptualizing the experiences lived (noeses), as well as the probabilities of experience (noemasis). It systematizes not only the probable and possible answers but also the questions (problems) which may be defined in relation to the particular time and space of the experiences, and the structural continuation of their intersubjectivities upon the arrow of time . The essence of sociality is historicity. The transformations of post-scholastic Europe have resulted in questions and problems unanswered by the previously valid theological-metaphysical paradigms and the study of both nature and society as subjects independent from celestial decrees. And how we perceive is often a key to how we think; corollarily, what we perceive is in tandem with what we think. Perceptions of a new world order, or "new" perceptions of a world order have long been posing questions that theory poor IR has few answers without repeating its basic dogmas.

A third characteristic of classical IR theory is its Americanism. It emerged as a discipline; usually subordinated to political science in true positivist fashion of divisive

specialisation, following the emergence of the U.S. as a "world power" after the II. World War. The realist mentality of simplifying history is manifest even in the suggestion that "isolated" America opened up worldwide after 1945. Have to note here that, theories of "isolationism", either overlook or ignore the evidence that America aimed to be and soon became a world power from the start. Isolationism translates rather as a reluctance to become involved in the blood drawing competition for dominance the European powers waged for centuries. The U.S. expelled them from its sphere of influence in its own continent, and also openly competed with them in China and the Pacific and even beat them to the opening up of Japan. In the aftermath of the War, the physical and economic ruin of Europe afforded the U.S. an unchallenged entry to Europe and its affairs. The postbellum structuration of world politics was largely machinated by the policies dictated by the exigencies of the US. However, this does not mean that history of the last half century was "blueprinted" by the US. Rather, when the intentional failed to determine, the US was best placed to react to changes at points of uncontrollable complexities resembling Bénard' s instabilities.

In other words, the US is the engineer of the hegemonic world system. Within this global structure US predominance has largely been due to its capacity to at least exert influence on the premises and guidelines of "international behavior". Unlike previous patrons of the international system, Spain, Holland or Britain, America' s hegemony has relied not on power alone but also on a consensus it could generate among participants of the international arena as the *primus inter pares*. The US was able persuade its "associates" that its supremacy is in the interest of all concerned. The scientific study and theory of IR attended to the precesses and problems of this world dominance through consent. However, in true positivist fashion again, it concentrated on the empirical qualities and quantities of the U.S. hegemony, mainly, power. According to positivist IR theory, power originates from resources, or is "power from". Yet, as has been noted by now, power is not bombast and it is not an unlimited authority. It is manipulative and is measured by results. Power is about getting one's way. Power is a relational element, rather than capabilities and property accumulations of persons or states. Power, within the social processes of transnational relationships, or, "power over", can affect outcomes quite differently from its rawer form (Strange, 1996: 23-25, Wallerstein 1997a). It is this less empirical aspect of it, "power over" which is the tool of American world politics, the prop of its hegemony yet which has been overlooked by positivist IR. Indeed, the rise of European (especially German) and Japanese economic might has been misinterpreted by realist theory as a collapse of American hegemony, in the aftermath of the defeat in Viet Nam. Yet, the economies of both Europe and the Orient in today's mold of intertwined and "de-nationalised" capitalism stand to gain far more by continuing their competition with the U.S. in hegemonic tandem upkeeping the collusion that is essential in the complex counterdependency of a global world economy; which on the eve of a new millennium, advocates new dictates for survival to states. In these circumstances, the thesis that American hegemony is on the verge of collapse appears as a question of paradigmatic stances rather than established fact. In other words, it appears to be a methodological rather than political conclusion. In fact, America' s predominance is already metamorphosized with the transnationalization of capital and the complex notion of

power into a "structural hegemony". (Bostanoglu, 1998b)

The positivist paradigm has erred where it attributed the state the same keynote role in the analysis of hegemony which is central to the understanding of the emerging global(ised) political economy. The classical view of hegemony as the dominance of one state over others is too narrow to explain the evolution recent interdependencies underlying the process of so called globalisation. Hegemony is not a simple order among states achieved by domination; rather, it represents a structure which, around a typical mode of production in a world economy, allows a multitude of social, economic and political forces to work at once and has the power to influence subordinate modes of production. It revolves around universalised values and norms which both derive from and lend credibility and legitimacy to the "order" it has established. It is this intersubjectivity that gives meaning to the general rules of action and behaviour. For the constituent elements of the world system, the states, institutions, non state entities, and social forces, the structure they interact within is at least partly a means of satisfaction. Hegemony relies on consent in intrastructural relations, power, its coercive element, is mostly latent.

Within this systemic whole, states do not take place as the sole actors of the world political scene as assumed by positivist IR theory but as adaptable and adaptive components of the global structure and in the process of transnationalization, the concept of "international" has become eroded. On the other side of the coin especially where core societies are concerned an internationalization of social processes has emerged as a product of globalization. Consequentially just as sundry supranational factors have begun to influence domestic politics through various and diverse interest groups, the same is true for decisions made by individual governments. In the scope of this political transformation, classic epistemological tools and concepts are obviously not likely to suffice in understanding and interpreting the global phenomena.

If the world is going through a process where social forces and determinants incrementally tend to resemble those of a holonomic "global" society, world politics can be better understood with the application of theories, methods and academic praxes employed by social science and social theory. Thus, "international" affairs of governments will be attended to as what they really are; an element in the whole of social noemesis and noesis and hence a subject not of a discrete and isolated discipline but of the critical social sciences; mainly, sociology. In the light of pluralism in theoretical approaches, truth is 'spread' before the scientist, not merely via empirical observation and experiment, but also with its temporal dimensions involving transformation and uncertainty; whose analysis rejects restriction to a monopoly of aesthetic perceptions, control and prediction only. The positivist criteria of scientific knowledge are no longer acceded to be adequate in understanding the machinations of our world, both in natural and social spheres. Contemporary findings of physics have shed a light on theoretical and epistemological debates; and an expanding agreement is observed in the social sciences on a requirement for creating new conceptual frames of reference. Hence, the goal should be to integrate 'social' and 'international' theory, to transcend their limitations and to illuminate the present global transformation.

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