



World Politics

A Quarterly Journal of International Relations?

Tim Star

This review is part of the Journal Review project of the research-master Modern History and International Relations (MHIR) at the University of Groningen. For more information, visit www.rug.nl/research/MHIR-journalreview



Contents

Introduction.....	1
I Origins and Form.....	1
II Identity	4
III Contents	7
IV Current Debates	10
Conclusion	13



Introduction

Academic life has not been exempted from the digitalization of society. In the age where numbers of printed copies of all kinds of literature are steadily decreasing at the favor of words published in digital form, how do academic journals fare? Do they manage to maintain a distinct identity, or are they settling to become just a source of academic literature scholars can just pick up and discard whenever it suits them, unaffected by the journal's identity and history?

This review will look into the identity and contents of the academic journal *World Politics*. The next section will give a brief overview of the journal's origins, and current form. Section II will dig deeper into the current identity of the journal by analyzing its publications over the past five years, uncovering a problematic ambiguity caused by the journal's aspirations to satisfy scholars of more than one academic field. The third section analyzes the contents of the journal. It will look back farther than just the past five years in order to discover a change in its character. Section IV will investigate the current existence of ongoing debates in the journal for both the field of Comparative Politics and International Relations. Finally, section V will conclude by restating the most important findings and offer a suggestion for improvement.

I Origins and Form

World Politics (WP) was founded shortly after the Second World War in 1948 as a journal for International Relations (IR) and Comparative Politics. For a mere five dollars a year, readers received an entire volume consisting of four issues comprising a total of 573 pages of academic literature with topics varying from balance of power issues to purely domestic politics. At this moment, WP is an A-listed journal ranked very high in the ISI Web of Knowledge Journal Citation Reports for 2009 in both total citations (4th) and 5-year impact factor (5th).¹

Where some journals show involvement with their readers by means of editorial introductions to their issues, or the possibility of commenting, WP makes no attempt to communicate with its readers in a direct manner. The first issue does not contain an introduction or a note from the editors to introduce oneself to the audience, a habit that is maintained until this very day. Words from the editors are a rarity, except when it comes to special issues. Even household changes concerning the magazine itself, like changes in

¹ ISI Web of Knowledge can be accessed at <http://www.isiknowledge.com>.

annotation style or the appearance of the first issue in January instead of October are not always explained or communicated to the reader.²

Apart from the absence of an introduction, the format of the first issue would not serve as a strict blueprint for issues to come. Issues would contain three types of articles, but how many of what type differed with every issue. During the first decades, issues contained a number of research articles that formed the backbone of the journal then, just as they do now. Articles would deal with all different subjects in the field of Comparative Politics and IR. The nature of the articles published in WP varies from comparative historical case studies, to empirical tests based on statistics and from purely theoretical issues to problems of methodology. Although WP contains all types of articles, the statistical method is absolutely dominant when it comes to methodology, sometimes combined with the use of formal models.

Over the years, research articles would grow in length and currently WP has a limit of 12,500 words maximum for research articles, resulting in articles that vary greatly in length somewhere between 25 and 50 pages. Submitted articles will be reviewed by two anonymous referees and by the editors who will respond within four months, unless the contribution is considered inappropriate for publication in WP in which case authors get a notice of withdraw within three weeks.

Authors can submit articles on topics in International Relations and Comparative Politics, but also in national development, political economy, and their related subfields. WP aims to be a scholarly journal which leaves the publication of narratives on current affairs, opinion pieces, and policy pieces out of the question. According to the journal's guidelines for contributors, articles of a strictly historical nature are considered off topic as are articles that explain political theories.³ It is not explained why articles on political theories are not allowed while WP does allow articles on IR theory, as this review will establish later.

Most issues from the earlier decades included one or two research notes. These were pieces written by scholars, concerning the current state of theory and debate of comparative politics or IR in general, or one subfield in specific. In those research notes, scholars could address shortcomings in contemporary theories and debate and suggest directions and new ideas for theoretical development. Although the journal is still open for these research notes

² Starting with the second issue of vol. 61, articles no longer contained complete footnotes within the text, but only shortened footnotes that were accompanied by an extensive list of endnotes. Since 2009, the volume's first issues appear in January as opposed to October, leaving a six month gap between the appearance of vol. 60 issue 4, and vol. 61 issue 1.

³ The guidelines can be found at <http://www.princeton.edu/piirs/worldpolitics-journal/guidelines/guidelines-for-contributors.pdf> (last accessed May 11th,2011).



according to their website, they have gradually disappeared from the contents of WP and are hardly present in the past decade. Currently, the attention WP devotes to theoretical questions is only limited.

From the outset, research articles and research notes were complemented by a number of review articles discussing recently published books in the field of comparative politics and IR. Reviews differed in length also depending on the numbers of books that were under review in a single article, but were generally smaller than the research articles. Some issues contained up to four or five review articles, much more than they do nowadays. Currently, review articles are fewer, but also lengthier. WP does not ask authors to write reviews of recently published literature. Instead, authors are required to take it upon themselves to make a proposal for writing a review article which consequently has to be submitted and reviewed by the editors and other reviewers. This may seem a bit excessive at first, but it must be taken into account that today's review articles are not only lengthier than those that appeared in issues from older decades, but also of a different nature. Review articles appearing in WP are supposed to be more than just a review.

The review articles do not deal with single books, but always have multiple books on the same topic under review. Authors are to make an outline of a few paragraphs, explaining what literature they want to review and how this is of interest for WP readers. WP demands of the author that they do not merely review the books in question, but that they give the reader a greater understanding of the broader themes at hand in the literature. Thereby, current review articles have incorporated to a certain extent the function the research notes used to have in older issues. Reviews in WP are no longer simply a discussion of recently published literature, but are at the same time an inquiry into the current state of being of the (sub)discipline in question and its theoretical developments. The review articles are therefore supposed to be contributing to the academic debate in its own right and not by merely summarizing the literature at hand. Given this greater academic responsibility, it is only fair that the book reviews appearing in WP these days are allowed the same space as the research articles. Book reviews of over 40 pages are therefore not at all uncommon.

Finally, WP offers guest editors the opportunity to compose special issues. Similar to the book reviews, those special issues are based on personal initiatives instead of editorial ones. Although members of the editorial staff are allowed to make proposals as well, they are not allowed to contribute to such a special issue by writing a research article. Because of the external initiative, special theme issues do not appear with any strict regularity, but in general

one appears every four or five years. Authors are allowed to submit a proposal (4,000 – 5,000 words) explaining the relevance and theoretical contribution to comparative politics or IR and containing the contributors and the titles of their essays. Once accepted, all essays will need to be reviewed and approved individually by one editorial and two non-editorial referees in order to be accepted. Once enough – four or five - articles are approved to constitute an issue, the project is accepted as a whole.

Altogether this adds up to a journal with a very inconsistent structure. What type of articles will appear and how many is a surprise with every issue. What is clear however, is that with the publication of less research notes in the past five years, the attention for theoretical questions has been diminished and removed somewhat to the background.

II Identity

World Politics is a part of The Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies and is currently published by Cambridge University Press - which is a bit odd since Princeton has its own university publisher. Based at an American Ivy League school, it comes as no surprise that scholars from American institutes form the majority of the authors. An investigation into the published articles over the past five years (volumes 58-63) learns that over three quarters of the authors featured in WP are connected to American Universities. Looking at the gender of authors, an imbalance becomes apparent that is seen in most academic journals as female authors are responsible for only one fifth of the journal's content.

A closer look also shows that almost one third of the contributors can be related directly to Ivy League universities. This number does not yet include authors who can be related to those schools in the past because they held positions or received their education there. Moreover, a background check on the sixteen current members of the editorial board shows that every single member of the board has either received education, or held a teaching job at Ivy League universities. Notwithstanding the excellence of schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth, such a heavy representation of scholars belonging to such a small academic circle justifies a question of accessibility. To what extent the origins of the submitting authors play a role in the academic content of the journal will remain hard to tell as the submitted articles, review processes and rejection rates are not open for investigation.

A first glance at the cover of WP reading: 'World Politics; A Quarterly Journal of International Relations', might leave one under the impression that this is a journal concerned mostly with IR and that it focuses on the political part of it as opposed to subfields of law and



economics. However, one who expects articles dealing strictly with questions of war and peace, international institutions, and other political issues that cannot be contained by national borders, would be misled. On its website, WP itself ambiguously diverges from its front cover and presents itself as a journal on both comparative politics *and* IR. It shows no aspirations of building bridges and connecting disciplines, but it does aim to satisfy readers on two (sub) disciplines.

Being a journal offering a scholarly contribution in two fields implies that your readers are interested in both fields. For students of IR, articles on comparative politics can certainly be interesting, especially when the issues at hand are able to transcend borders or when they touch upon the dynamics of change. On the other hand, some political articles published over the past five years can be rather boring from an IR perspective. Scholars of IR will generally find they have more interesting literature to read than a 35 page article on the evolution on the Brazilian worker's party. This is not to say that those articles are of no one's interest or that they are of insufficient academically quality, but it does beg the question whether scholars of both disciplines are interested in a journal as a whole, that walks two roads at once, or whether they will merely utilize it for selected articles.

A chronological look through the five most recent volumes of WP, starting with volume 58 (October 2005), will give more clarity about its current identity. The first issue has a neat balance between articles on politics and those on IR. On average this balance between both fields is largely maintained throughout the entire 58th volume, with just two articles more on politics than on IR, and some articles falling in between the two disciplines. In the following year though, the balance starts to tilt somewhat more towards issues of national and comparative politics. The first two issues contain just one research article related to the field of IR. Instead the majority of the articles deal with national institutions and political violence.

The strong representation of political subjects at the expense of International Relations is a trend that continues all the way up until the current issue. Over the past few years, issues of WP have appeared in which the IR component was very hard to find. The last three issues of volume 61 (2009) for example, carry no articles that fall primarily within the realm of IR and neither does the second issue of volume 62, nor the first issue of volume 63. The IR articles that are published use mostly Realist and Liberalist perspectives and show little desire to push the boundaries of IR theory past the established paradigms.

The imbalance between comparative politics and IR is felt mostly in the research articles, as a look at review articles alone shows a roughly even division. Nevertheless, an issue that

contains research articles strictly on Comparative Politics, only to close out the journal with a review on IR literature, does correspond with the goals of the journal stated on its website, and even less with its front cover. As will be discussed later on, the small amount of research articles on IR also impedes the possibility for IR debates to unfold within the journal. Instead of being a journal on International Relations, WP at times looks more like a political journal with a healthy interest in international issues.

Since 2005, the editors have not voiced any explicit opinion within the journal on this perceived imbalance. This comes as no surprise since most of the members of the editorial committee are actually political scientists. Out of sixteen members, only three present themselves as IR scholars, while nine can be considered scholars of Comparative Politics. The others work in other sub-disciplines like Political Violence and Political Economy. The journal's imbalanced content thus corresponds with the composition of the board.

Whether it was one of the reasons for the acceptance of a special issue on unipolarity can only be guessed. Guest editor of this special issue was G. John Ikenberry, a true IR-scholar. He was also responsible for the issues' introduction together with IR-scholars Michael Mastanduno and William C. Wolforth. Both Mastanduno and Ikenberry currently hold positions in the editorial board and the editorial committee respectively. Even though Mastanduno at that time cannot have been an editorial member because he is also the author of one of the articles in the issue, it might be the case that some of the staff members of WP did feel that it was necessary to breathe some new IR-life into the journal by publishing a special issue that would return to 'classic questions of international theory'.⁴

The preference for Comparative Politics over IR, is also reflected in the popularity of WP articles. An overview of the most downloaded WP articles from the library website of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RuG) since 1996, gives nine frequently downloaded articles. Six of those, among which the four most popular ones, are on politics and three are on IR. Of those three, only one is a research article, while all the six articles of a political nature are research articles. Looking at the most cited articles that have appeared in WP according to Google Scholar, articles on political science are once again more popular than articles on IR. Among the articles that have been cited over 250 times, there are nineteen on politics compared to seven on IR.

⁴ G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C. Wolforth, "Introduction; Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences" *World Politics* 61 (2009)1 1-27, 2.

Analysis of the self-citations in the past five volumes leads to a similar image. For every five published articles in a given volume that have most references to back issues of WP, four of these articles are articles on Comparative Politics and not IR. This can indicate that authors of Comparative Politics pieces are more involved with the journal and therefore often refer back to it more often. On the other hand it can also be a reflection of the difference in quality and/or volume of WP articles in the field of IR and Comparative Politics

The ISI web of knowledge demonstrates that, for 2009, there was no significant difference between the number of articles published in political journals and the number published in IR journals in terms of citing articles published in WP.⁵ The top fifty journals with most references to articles published in WP contained about as much journals on IR as on politics. WP articles are thus cited by both academic fields, but the number of citations for political articles is much higher. This difference may again signal a gap in the relative quality between the political articles compared to the IR articles, or simply be a result of their greater number.

Despite its presentation, the journal has much more of a Political Science character than one would initially think. It is run mostly by Political Scientists and the content of the past five years show just a small interest in IR issues. Moreover, the journal is mostly read and cited for its articles on Comparative Politics. A more comprehensive look at its content however, will show that the dominance of Comparative Politics over IR is something of recent times.

III Contents

Despite the long history of political philosophy, political science as an academic discipline was only a few decades old when the first issue of WP saw the light. Its international branch IR was even younger and hardly established as an academic discipline in its own right. Educational institutions focused exclusively on the study of IR were only few in number and some great debates on the nature of the science and theories had yet to be fought. The self explorative nature of IR theory in the decades following WWII is clearly reflected in the contents of the back issues of WP. The current preponderance of Comparative Politics in the character of WP described above, was not established from the outset.

The first issue right away shows an awareness of the difficulties that are part of the development of a new branch of science and a motivation to contribute to the self-

⁵ Based on figures extracted from the ISI Web of Knowledge database.

development of IR as an academic discipline. In “The Scope of International Relations”, a concluding research note taken up in this first issue, Frederick Dunn offers a starting point for the journal to inquire whether IR was worthy to be a discipline on its own and what exactly this discipline would consequently have to entail.⁶ Although the journal’s subtitle gives away its position on the first question, the questions that followed obviously remain and provide fertile ground for future academic thoughts on IR theory.

The article received response throughout the years, for example by Stanley Hoffmann. Ten years after the journal’s foundation, Hoffmann explicitly reacted to Dunn’s research note his article “International Relations: The Long Road to Theory”, wherein he advocates the discipline’s need for a far more systematic approach.⁷ Other articles that have appeared in WP over the years show a continuing occupation with the development of IR as a science as well. Examples are Warren R. Phillips’ “Where have all the theories gone?”, and “Towards Greater Order in the Study of International Politics” by Richard C. Snyder.⁸ These articles show that throughout the first decades, WP was really committed to contributing to the academic development of IR and providing its readers with the necessary theoretical insights, thereby justifying its subtitle.

Another good example of an article that puts forward WP as a journal laying close to the developments in IR theory and debate is Morton A. Kaplan’s “The New Great Debate; Traditionalism vs. Science in International Relations”.⁹ In a reaction to an article by Hedley Bull, published in WP six months earlier, Kaplan calls what would become known as the ‘second great debate’ in IR by its name and takes a firm stand against the traditionalists, who argued that IR should be more of a philosophical, historical science instead of a purely empirical one based on a positivist philosophy.¹⁰ Besides WP’s commitment to IR as a science, this shows that it was possible for authors to respond swiftly to theoretical critiques, which consequentially enabled a lively debate.

Comparative Politics was equally represented in the first decades. Throughout the years, WP has contained many articles on questions of democracy and welfare distribution. At the

⁶ Frederick S. Dunn, “The Scope of International Relations” *World Politics* 1 (1948)1, 142-146.

⁷ Stanley H. Hoffmann, “International Relations: The Long Road to Theory” *World Politics* 11 (1959)3 346-377.

⁸ Warren R. Phillips, “Where Have All the Theories Gone” *World Politics* 26 (1974)2 155-188. Richard C. Snyder, “Toward Greater Order in the Study of International Politics” *World Politics* 7 (1955)3 461-478.

⁹ Morton A. Kaplan, “The New Great Debate; Traditionalism vs. Science in International Relations” *World Politics* 19 (1966)1 1-20.

¹⁰ Kaplan reacted to: Hedley Bull, “International Theory; The Case for a Classical Approach” *World Politics* 18 (1966)3 361-377.

beginning of the 1990's, perhaps instigated by the publication of Mark Lichbach's research article "An Evaluation of 'Does Economic Inequality Breed Conflict?' Studies" political and ethnic violence became more of a topic in the contents of WP.¹¹ This has led to articles on the nature of civil war and manifests itself currently in articles of political mobilization of (Islamic) resistance groups and sub-national political organization.¹²

Browsing through back issues of WP, the majority of the research articles that were published between 1950 and 1990, on both Comparative Politics and IR, are occupied with subjects such as arms races, deterrence, political developments in the Soviet Union, Containment Strategy, Communism, and defense. With the exception of the occasional security dilemma, these issues have disappeared almost completely since the Berlin Wall came down. A 1991 special issue entitled "Liberalization and Democratization in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe" provided an almost symbolic closure on these topics. In an introduction to this special issue, Nancy Borneo, a current member of the editorial board, underlines that such unexpected events fill academics with a certain feeling of amazement, that reflects not only the drama and surprise of the actual events that occur, but just as much the inability of comparative politics and IR scholars to have accounted for these changes.¹³

Having said that however, WP quickly moves on to five new articles that try to explain in hindsight the changes in Eastern Europe without pausing for a moment of self-reflection that exceeds one brief paragraph. Instead, WP wasted no time in dealing with the new situation and pose questions of political transition in post-communist countries. The five research articles in the special issue brought forth a theme that would bear a great presence in the contents of WP for the years to come and that was also continued throughout the five most recent decades. Almost every issue currently features one or more articles dealing with post-communist transition in Eastern Europe, post-socialism in Latin America or so-called 'democracies with adjectives'. Articles on these topics have filled the void left by the end of communism as a serious topic of research articles.

If the academic amazement described by Borneo was honest and true, it would have been proper to reflect a bit more serious on the academic contributions of past decades that

¹¹ Mark Lichbach, "An Evaluation of 'Does Economic Inequality Breed Conflict?' Studies" *World Politics* 41 (1989)4 431-470.

¹² E.g.: Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel?: New Data and Analysis" *World Politics* 62 (2010)1 87-119. Edward L. Gibson, "Boundary Control; Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries" *World Politics* 58 (2005)1 101-132. Kathleen Colins, "Ideas, Networks, and Islamist Movements: Evidence from Central Asia and the Caucasus" *World Politics* 60 (2007)1 64-96.

¹³ Nancy Borneo, "Introduction" *World Politics* 44 (1991)1 1-6.

have devoted so much attention to the political dynamics of the Soviet Union and to comparative political studies of communism. Were all those articles comparing for example the communist parties of different European states of academic value at that time, or was and is WP at some moments a victim of its time and living too much in the current fads and fancies of public opinion?¹⁴ Unfortunately, no real assessment of such questions was made.

A broadened look into the content of WP shows that the journal was much more balanced in the past, and moreover, that it devoted much more attention to IR theory. What has caused this change in focus is not clear. Because of the lack of transparency in the reviewing process, it cannot be established whether the current imbalance is caused simply by insufficient input, or by editorial choices.

IV Current Debates

Given the journal's proclaimed dual identity, a fair look at what debates are currently present in WP should be looking distinctly at developments in comparative political science on the one hand, and in IR on the other hand. The type of theoretical debates as described above for IR are absent in WP because the journal does not publish articles of a political philosophical nature. Why the journal makes this distinction for political theory and IR theory is not clear. Theoretical pieces on IR are allowed in principle, but, contrary to earlier decades, they have not occurred in great numbers over the past five years.

The topics that dominate the comparative political content of the most recent volumes of WP are post-communist democracies, new democracies of Latin America, political mobilization, and political violence. The number of references back to older issues of WP, puts articles dealing with post-communist societies forth as a continuous thread throughout issues. A look into the ISI Web of Knowledge's Journal Citation Report of 2009 shows that WP is one of the most frequently cited journals in the journal *Communist and Post Communist Studies*. WP articles are also relatively often cited by a smaller more specific journal, *Democratization Studies*. This shows that besides WP itself, other are also interested in WP for its contribution on democratization and the transition process of post-communist societies.

These days, the amount of time that passes between article submission and eventual publication impedes the emergence of the kind of debates that occurred in WP during the

¹⁴ E.g.: Thomas H. Greene, "The Communist Parties of Italy and France: A Study in Comparative Communism" *World Politics* 21 (1968)1 1-38.

1960's. Scholars these days are almost forced to build their own theoretical arguments directly into an extensive case study or empirical test. This is what currently happens within the journal as piece by piece authors build on the work of each other to enlarge the understanding of the dynamics of societies in post-communist transition in Eastern Europe.

An article by Joel S. Hellman, published in 1998, was one of the first articles in WP that would receive follow up by other authors on the question of why post-communist countries that started out from similar position have proceeded in such different degree of transitional success. In "Winners Take All; The Politics of Partial Reform in Post-communist Transitions", Hellman gives an economic explanations for the diverging path of the societies in transition explaining that the transition came with substantial societal costs in the form of unemployment, inflation, and decreasing income. High gains however, would be available to a limited small group that would consequently oppose reforms.¹⁵

Contrary to this approach, Jeffrey Kopstein and David A. Reilly argued that spatial and temporal factors deserve more attention in explaining the diverging paths of post-communist societies. In a statistical study published two years after Hellman's article, Kopstein concludes that the transformation of communist states is positively influenced by its geographic proximity to the West, shedding a different light on the explanations of transitional success than mere economic factors.¹⁶

These two articles from the beginning of the 21st century, together with a review article by Wade Jacoby that reviews five publications on the external influence on post-communist transitions, form a core of literature, frequently built upon by WP authors.¹⁷ Valerie Bunce for example, emphasizes the differences between the post-communist developments in Eastern European states and aims to broaden the spectrum toward a question of global democratization.¹⁸ Jason Lyall treats the issue from the perspective of the problem of collective action and Elise Giuliano uses the literature to investigate former Soviet-Union's

¹⁵ Joel S. Hellman, "Winners Take All; The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions" *World Politics* 50 (1998)2 203-234.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kopstein and David A. Reilly, "Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World" *World Politics* 53 (2000)1 1-37.

¹⁷ Wade Jacoby, "Inspiration, Coalition, and Substitution; External Influences on Postcommunist Transformations" *World Politics* 58 (2006)4 623-651.

¹⁸ Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience" *World Politics* 55 (2003)2 167-192. Valerie Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes" *World Politics* 62 (2010)1 43-86.

problems of secessionism, while economists Nölke and Vliegenthart see the emergence of a new type of capitalism in the European post-communist states.¹⁹

The articles mentioned are only a few examples. There are many more articles building on the same literature from WP, but it is beyond the scope of the essay to mention them all, let alone to treat them extensively. It is a pity there is only little direct interaction between authors in the form of theoretical debate with explicit references, but the publication process of WP unfortunately does not allow that. Although the mentioned articles do not add up to a real debate, together they constitute a continuous accretion of literature on a subfield of comparative politics within the journal.

Such a steady build up is much less the case for IR articles. The observed underrepresentation of IR in WP is mainly the cause of that. Published articles on IR are hardly connected with each other by shared subtopics, let alone by explicit intra-journal references. Of course a special issue like the one on unipolarity is highly interesting and offers a great deal of debate within one issue, whether explicit or implicit. The reader interested in IR debates however should not have to be dependent on the appearance of special issues that are published every other five years.

Two interesting articles for the IR reader both happen to be book reviews. The first one is the aforementioned review of constructivist literature by Jeffrey T. Checkel, and the second is an inquiry to regionalism as a central concept in our understanding of IR, by Amitav Acharya.²⁰ Both give a comprehensive overview of new literature in IR that aims to make a significant impact in the study of International Relations. Checkel's review, written a year before the publication of Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Relations*, was very fortunately timed. Unfortunately, both review articles have gotten little to no follow up within WP.

After the publication of Checkel's review, over a decade ago, a search results in a mere two IR articles dealing with constructivism, one of which is Martha Finnemore's contribution to the special issue on unipolarity.²¹ This issue aims to approach the problem of unipolarity

¹⁹ Jason M.K. Lyall, "Pocket Protests: Rhetorical Coercion and the Micropolitics of Collective Action in Semiauthoritarian Regimes" *World Politics* 58 (2006)3 378-412; Elise Giuliano, "Secessionism from the BottomUp: Democratization, Nationalism, and Local Accountability in the Russian Transition" *World Politics* 58 (2006)2 276-310; Andreas Nölke and Arjan Vliegenthart, "Enlarging the Varieties of Capitalism: The Emergence of Dependent Market Economies in East Central Europe" *World Politics* 61 (2009)4 670-702.

²⁰ Amitav Acharya, "The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics" *World Politics* 59 (2007)4 629-652.

²¹ Martha Finnemore, "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be" *World Politics* 61 (2009)1 58-85.

from the perspective of different IR paradigms and was thereby almost forced to incorporate a constructivist approach. Acharya's review has received even less response than the one by Checkel, as no research articles have been published over the past five year, treating any given IR problem from a regionalist perspective.

It can be argued that the review articles that discuss recent literature are pieces that in themselves can come close to a theoretical debate. Although they are written by one (set of) authors and there is no room for comments back and forth, they do provide an overview of the developments on a specific topic. In the process of contrasting and comparing of literature over a period of a few years and sketching the directions it moves, somewhat of a debate can be constructed within the article. Furthermore the review articles are one instance in which the reviewer can explicitly comment on the efforts of his or her colleagues. Without a consequential response however, there really still is no debate. Reading the reviews because one is interested in real theoretical debates, somehow still feels like being forced to read Monday's sports page because the cable company was unable to supply the weekend's live coverage.

Conclusion

World Politics comes across as quite a conservative journal. The journal does not allow for an input by readers, nor does it communicate directly to them through introductions or editorial comments, and its structure is inconsistent. Moreover, the fact that the entire editorial board and a large portion of the contributors can be linked to a small number of elite American institutions give WP a bit of an 'old boys network' image. From an IR perspective, newer progressive theory has no place in the journal and even newer paradigms that have established themselves in the field of IR by now, such as constructivism and regionalism, are paid little attention.

World Politics says it aims to satisfy scholars of comparative politics and scholars of IR at the same time. Because it is hard to say to what extent both are interested in each other's subjects it would be wise to maintain a fair balance throughout the journal. In the early decades of WP this was certainly the case and some highly interesting theoretical debates have taken place, but over the last decade at least, the journal appears to have concentrated more and more on Comparative Politics. This is reflected in the composition of the current editorial board as well as in its content. The attention for IR issues has decreased and IR theory has disappeared from the journal.



Having said that, it must be acknowledged that on occasion, interesting articles do get published every now and then, even if a special issue on unipolarity is what it takes. Of particular interest for IR scholars are the review articles that do not settle for simply discussing a book, but that aspire to expound how multiple works published over few recent years have contributed to the development of a subfield of IR, and that critically discuss the current theoretical shortcomings and future directions for a particular subfield. It is however not necessary for pure IR scholars to keep their fingers at the pulse of WP, because it is not in this journal where actual debates take place.

On the contrary, scholars of Comparative Politics or Political Science can be pleased with the contents of WP. It offers them a wide variety of subject through research articles and keeps them updated recent literature through excellent reviews of literature. Moreover, the journal offers publications concerning the same topics, democratization and post communism in specific, that build on each other throughout its volumes, giving the reader a sense that knowledge is gradually built within the journal. Such a sense is completely missing in the field of IR.

The focus on Comparative Politics is not a problem in itself, were it not for the fact that the journal title itself leads the reader to believe that WP is a quarterly journal on International Relations, while it actually aims to be one on IR *and* Comparative Politics, and while it in reality is a journal on comparative politics, more than on than it is one on IR. In order not to force itself into something it is not, it would be an honest gesture by World Politics to somehow clarify its dual nature on the front cover, which can simply be done by removal of its subtitle. This allows it to be simply a journal on comparative politics that can publish articles on IR every now and then. IR scholars can then turn to the journal on occasion and enjoy a good review or article every once in a while without feeling misled.