



International Relations
A brief journal analysis
2008-2012
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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



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Introduction

While its name might suggest otherwise, the discipline of international relations is in fact one of the most western of the social sciences. The core of the scholarship comprises of the study of the interaction between nation states, the latter itself a European concept. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia constitutes a turning point when the concept of sovereignty came to define the nature of world politics – i.e. the right of a sovereign to exercise their authority within the borders of the state.

Today, while international relations are concerned with much more types of agents and entities than just the state, the concept is still the pillar of the scholarship. Furthermore, the field is generally dominated by white, Anglo-Saxon, male authors. Therefore, it becomes pressing to determine the particular traits of various schools of thought. Are they all following the same pattern or can we find interesting exceptions to the rule?

For the purpose of this exercise, I have selected *International Relations* (IR). This peer-reviewed journal is based at the University of Aberystwyth, Wales, and has been running since April 1954. Having started as a biannual publication, it was re-launched by Michael Cox in 2001 and it now runs four editions each year (March, June, September, and December), with peer-reviewed research articles, review essays, interviews, debates and forums, as well as special editions.¹ Its publisher is SAGE Publishing Ltd.

As a self-described “explicitly pluralist peer-reviewed journal, favouring variety in both subject-matter and method,” it “welcomes articles from all perspectives and on all subjects pertaining to international relations including law, economics, ethics, strategy, philosophy, culture, and the environment, in addition to more mainstream conceptual work and policy analysis.”² It is an ambitious project which aims to overcome the pitfalls of other journals which are perceived as either sectarian or simply too limited in their scope.³

In the following pages I intend to examine these claims for the brief period of 2008-2012, and see whether it is a reflection of stated goals. In particular, I will examine the journal’s institutional background and advisory board, the authors contributing articles, the various themes and topics one can find in the journal, with a more in-depth look at one of the special issues dedicated to the contributions of Kenneth Waltz to the discipline.

¹ <http://ire.sagepub.com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/content/17/1/5.full.pdf+html> Cox, Sept. 2003, *International Relations*

² <http://ire.sagepub.com/>

³ http://www.uk.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?prodId=Journal201567&ct_p=manuscriptSubmission&crossRegion=eur#tabview=aimsAndScope

Institutional background and advisory board

Aberystwyth University

Aberystwyth University has one of the oldest departments of International Politics in the world, established in 1919 by David Davies as a memorial to those students who fought and died in the First World War, and has ever since reflected major international developments. Its goals and mission have changed since 1919 when the department started as a vessel for idealistic thought: the search for justice through “lasting security, a lasting prosperity, and a lasting peace” was the animus of the world’s first chair in international politics (named after US president Woodrow Wilson). A first major source of tension came with E.H. Carr, the fourth Woodrow Wilson professor, whose realism “heaped scorn on liberal ‘utopianism’ in stressing the paramount importance of power, so much so that it was at odds with Davies’ original vision for the chair.”⁴

The department has changed along with both the world and the discipline of international relations. Among its accomplishments, the official page boasts its 1956 awarding of Elizabeth Joan Parr with a PhD, “at a time when the study of international relations was dominated almost exclusively by men,” as well as a reputation as the UK’s “leading centre of excellence in theoretical explorations of international relations, with contributions made in the areas of Critical Theory, English School/international society, post-structuralism, historical sociology, and normative approaches to international relations.”⁵

From the same page we learn that *International Relations* is the David Davies Memorial Institute’s flagship journal, and one among several journals edited by the department of International Politics at Aberystwyth (*Contemporary Wales*, *Intelligence and National Security*, *Kantian Review*, *Medicine*, *Conflict and Survival*).

In light of this brief overview of the institutional setting in which the journal is produced, we can formulate a few basic questions which would warrant inspection. The first would be whether the journal reflects the mission statement of the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth. Furthermore, we shall analyze the gender gap in the number of scholars published from 2008 to 2012. Finally, the impact that the journal has had can show whether Aberystwyth truly is the UK’s “leading centre of excellence (...)”

⁴ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/about/>

⁵ Ibid

Editors and advisors

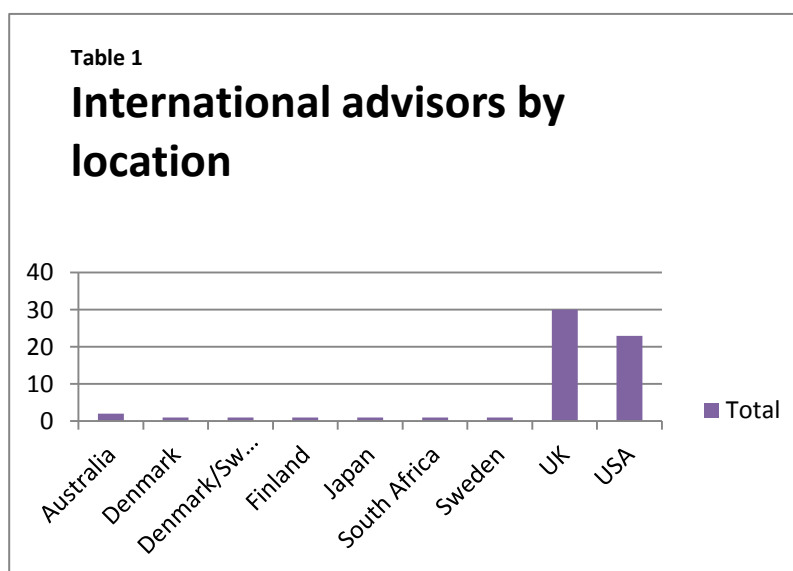
The journal is run by editors Ken Booth and Michael Foley. Ken Booth⁶ is a Senior Research Associate at the Department of International Politics, former E.H. Carr Professor and Head of Department. He was previously an editor for *Review of International Studies*, and is currently on the International Editors' Board of seven journals in total. According to the university website, his main research areas in the past range from strategic studies and nuclear weapons to human rights and human security. Currently he is involved with work on critical theory, realism, and terrorism.

Michael Foley is the current Head of Department and Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth.⁷ A reviewer for *THE*, *International Affairs*, *Millennium*, and the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, and editor for *Journal of American Studies*, he is currently researching various topics related to political leadership. Like Booth, Foley shows considerable interest in the theory of international relations.

Furthermore, associate editors Carl Death and Milja Kurki (Aberystwyth) and Michael Bain round up the editorial team. It seems important to note here that, even if Michael Bain is officially listed as from the National University of Singapore, he was formerly located at Aberystwyth, and was Deputy Director of the David Davies Memorial Institute for International Relations at the same university.⁸ Thus, from an institutional perspective, the editorial board seems homogenous.

In addition, the official website of the publication lists its 'international advisors,' among which we observe some of the staple names in the field of international relations, such as

Chris Brown, Robert Keohane, Michael Cox, or John Gaddis.



⁶ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/staff/academic/kob/>

⁷ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/staff/academic/mof/>

⁸ <http://ap3.fas.nus.edu.sg/fass/polbww/>

Looking at the location of their institutions, we notice a large disparity between UK/US based contributors and those based anywhere else. A total of 61 names include 30 from the UK and 23 from the US, with only two Australian-based contributors in third place and the rest of the advisors coming from institutions in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Japan, and South Africa (table 1).

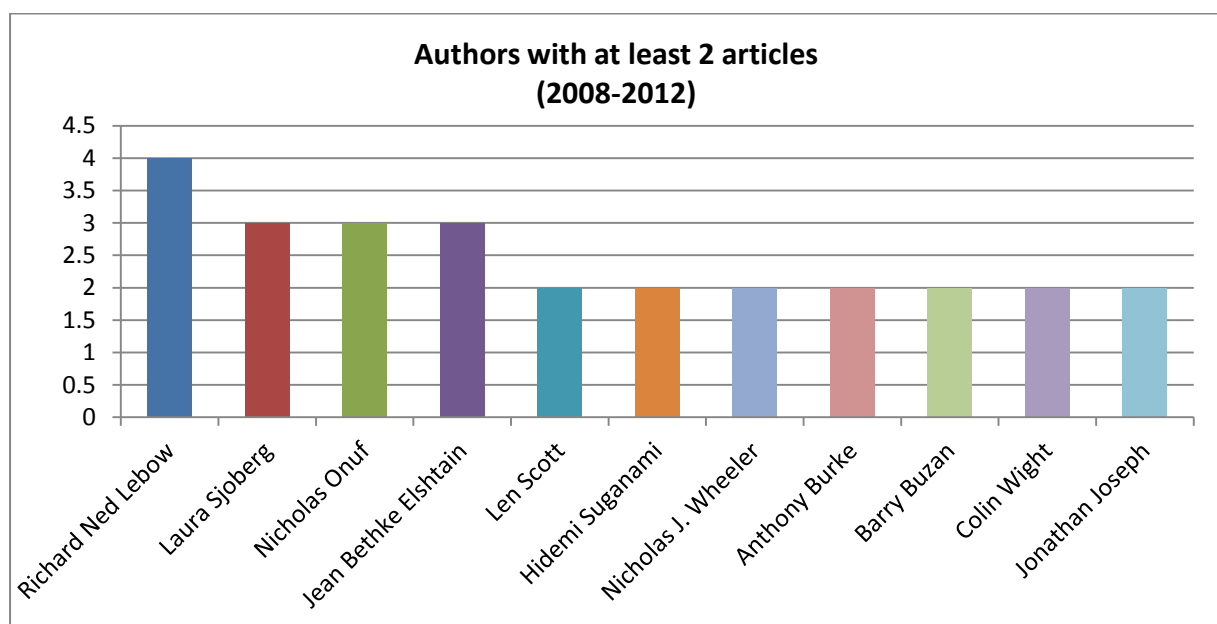
The distribution of advisors by institution also reflects an Anglo-American dominance. The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is represented by 6 scholars, followed by the University of Oxford with 4, and the University of London, Kings College London, Cambridge, Chicago, Dartmouth, and Princeton each with 2. The other institutions all have one scholar each on the advisory board.

Furthermore, we take note that the advisory board of the journal is overwhelmingly male, with only 8 female authors (13%).

So far, the journal presents itself as a typical publication in the field, displaying the defining characteristic of being the work of mostly male, Anglo-American scholars. In the following lines we shall look at whether the pattern is also found in the authors writing the papers

Authors

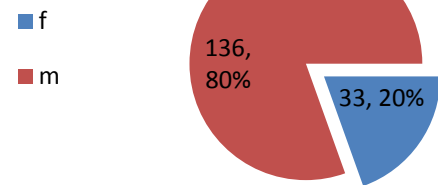
If one were to make some further judgements about the journal based on the wider IR field, one could expect it to be dominated by men; specifically, men from Western, English-speaking universities.





Looking at the authors published in the five year timespan, we notice that out of the 11 who have written at least two articles, 9 are male authors. This should not come as a surprise if one is familiar with the broader field of IR, which is still overwhelmingly dominated by men. As one might expect further, the overall number of women contributing pales in comparison to that of men –

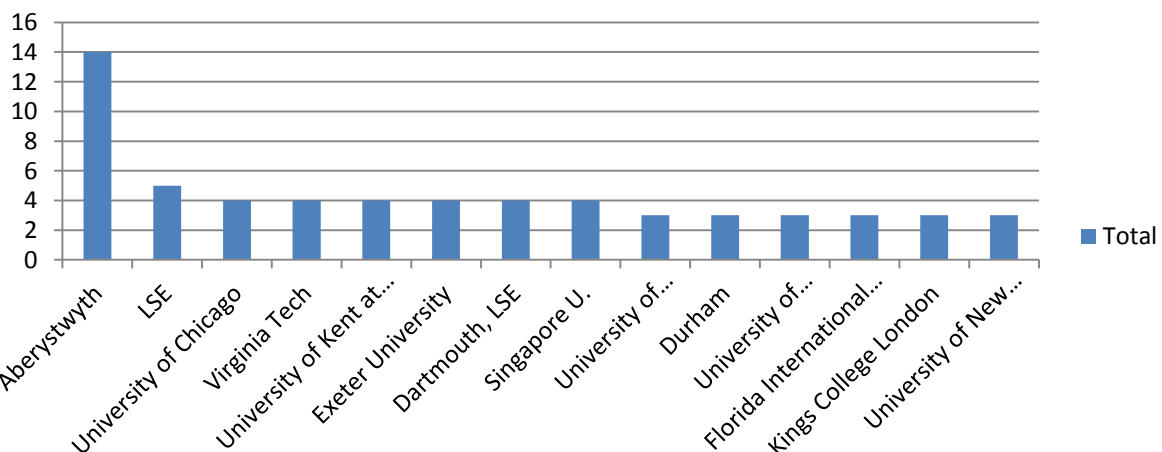
**Authors by gender
(2008-2012)**



only 1 in 5 are women. Richard Ned Lebow (Dartmouth University and LSE) has published 4 pieces in the 2008-2012 period (including in an edition dedicated to his own cultural theory of international relations), followed by Laura Sjoberg (Virginia Tech University), Nicolas Onuf (Florida International University), and Jean Bethke Elshtain (University of Chicago).

Moreover, a look at the total number of articles sorted by the author’s institution reveals a stunning disparity between those located in English-speaking countries and all the rest. Aberystwyth University leads the pack with 14 articles published, once again giving away the homogeneity of the journal’s editorial board. Out of the remaining 13 institutions represented by 3 or more articles in the 5 year timeframe, only the University of Singapore

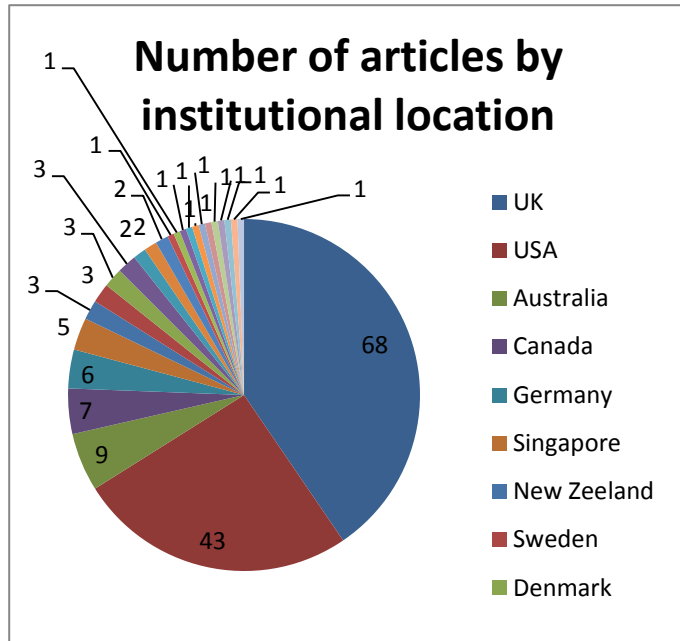
**Number of articles by author's institution
(2008-2012)**



stands out as coming from a non-English background. Even then, as has been noted before, there is a strong enough connection between Aberystwyth and Singapore that we might conclude that English-speaking countries hold a monopoly on this journal.

The number of articles by institutional location reveals a very similar situation, with the UK, USA, Australia, and Canada holding nearly 2/3 of the total number of articles.

Collecting information about the authors' place of birth or nationality proved to be difficult. However, it is important to note that, at least considering the etymology of the various names, there is considerably more diversity to be found at an individual level. Unfortunately, our analysis cannot make any certain claims on this point.



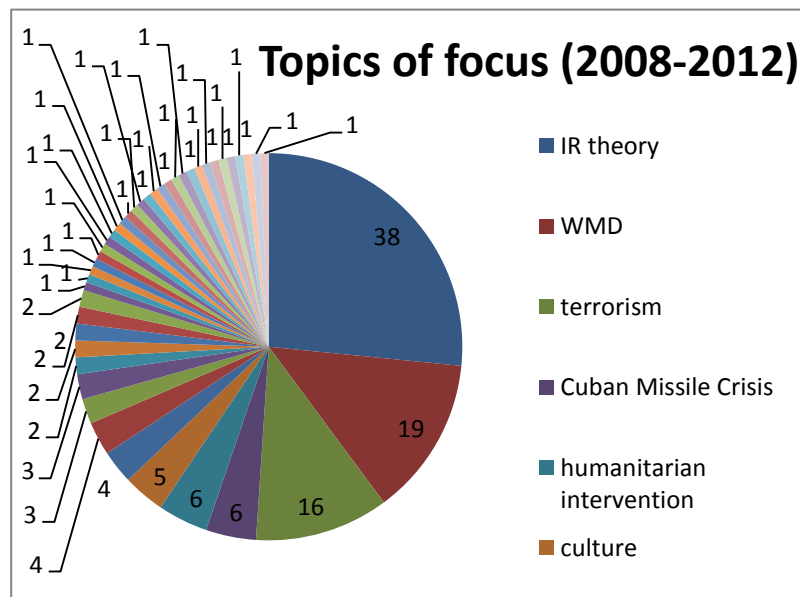
Finally, while few authors come from outside the academic environment, it

is relevant that the journal would seek those points of view. Des Browne from the House of Lords, Lorna Arnold as a former civil servant and diplomat, or Andrew D. Brunatti as an analyst for the federal government of Canada, to name three, all share their experiences and insight. Thus the gap between theory and practice is further bridged.

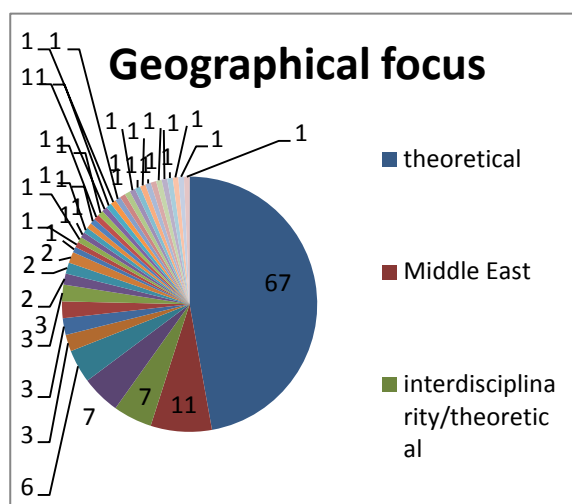
Themes, trends, and topics

A grand total of 143 articles are part of our analysis. 27% of them have a distinctly theoretical approach to their subject of choice, confirming that the journal, as well as the editors, takes a keen interest in international relations theory.

The rest of the articles may also discuss theory to a certain extent, but focus on empirical research and applied IR.



Looking at the geographical focus of the articles, the purely theoretical scope of the journal is once again revealed, 47% of articles referring strictly to matters of international relations theory, without focus on specific cases. Otherwise, the rest of the articles do not display any significant bias towards US/European matters. However, because of the role of the US in the world, for example, many articles will invariably lead to a discussion of



American role or interests. For example, the special edition on a nuclear-free Middle East will contain many references to what the US should, could, and would do. This does not place the focus on the US, but rather highlights the importance of great powers in international relations.

In the period of time analyzed there were a couple of special features worthy of scrutiny:

- 22(3): *The Concept of a WMD-Free Zone*

An initiative of SOAS' Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy centered on disarmament and globalization, dealing with one of the most pressing matters in international politics today – nuclear and other WMD in the Middle East. The discussion revolves around a proposed “Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone” and touches on subjects ranging from the mechanisms which would enable the existence of such a zone to theoretical approaches and critical analyses. The debate comes at a time when tensions regarding Iran’s nuclear ambitions were beginning to escalate; furthermore, Israel’s arsenal and the India-Pakistan tensions add to the feeling that these discussions should be more prevalent in the specialized literature.

Intriguingly, this edition features the highest concentration of authors from outside universities – half of the 14 total authors. Most notably, Gareth Evans opens the issue with a piece on humanitarian intervention. Evans is one of the ‘fathers’ of the responsibility to protect concept, and was affiliated with the International Crisis Group at

the time of publication. Other contributions come from the GLORIA Center in Israel, Greenpeace, VERTIC, or, in the case of Bannet Ramberg, former US officials.⁹

○ *22(4): The John Herz Centenary Edition*

This issue marked 100 years from the birth of IR scholar John Herz, most notably known for the formulation of the concept of security dilemma. The papers in this issue deal with the whole of John Herz, discussing both the man and his ideas. Topics tackled include his time as a scholar, as part of the Office of Strategic Services, and his relevance today – i.e. nuclear security, the realism vs. idealism debate, international law, identity etc.

In addition, several issues include forums or roundtables where certain selected topics are debated and discussed. March 2009 offers three forums in a single edition. The first is ‘Bridge-building and terrorism’ and asks what can be done to reduce international terrorism through non-violent means. The discussion touches on various themes such as terrorism as a cultural phenomenon, the role of women in the practice of terrorism

The second, ‘The limits of bridge-building,’ discusses the limitations of such means from an interdisciplinary perspective (critical studies, feminism etc.) The third roundtable of the issue is a symposium on Richard Ned Lebow’s theory of International Relations and is entitled ‘Actors, Motives, and Politics among Nations.’

The roundtable in 25(2) entitled ‘Between the Theory and Practice of Democratic Peace’ reinforces this reader’s impression of the journal as deeply concerned not with only the theoretical side of international relations, but also with the connection between the world and this vast body of scholarship which is often blamed for being too detached from reality. The roundtable is a result of the 2010 International Studies Association Convention in New Orleans, which set out to assess the current state of divide between theorists and practitioners. The Democratic Peace thesis was chosen as a focus due to its ‘seemingly narrowing the gap between policymakers and academics’.¹⁰

The September 2012 issue is guest-edited by Len Scott (Aberystwyth) and is solely dedicated to a discussion about the Cuban Missile Crisis, approaching the subject from a historiographical point of view. It begins with an interrogation whether studying the Crisis is still a worthwhile thing to do, or whether we have learned all we can from it. Other articles

⁹ <http://www.vertic.org/>

¹⁰ <http://ire.sagepub.com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/content/25/2/147.full.pdf+html>

approach the crisis from the British or Russian point of view at the time, describe the ‘myths and essences’ of the crisis, or provide insider accounts which bind history and memory.

The roundtable discussions help contribute to the idea that academic work is a process of constant negotiation and debate and, more importantly, tie the discipline with the practice of international relations. This adds in turn to the impression that *International Relations* is indeed a crucial publication which attempts to solve the core problems of the field.

Virtually all authors published in the period of 2008 to 2012 have a background in politics and/or international relations, possibly casting doubt over the claims of interdisciplinary scholarship. However, we should also notice a strong effort to combine various perspectives and methods, such as the March 2009 issue which dealt in-depth with what contributions interdisciplinarity can make to the study of international affairs, or the special issue on the Cuban Missile Crisis which employs very different perspectives. Overall, classical IR analyses are complemented by ideas of international law, sociology, cultural studies, ethics etc.

Journal impact

According to the Thomson-Reuters citation rankings for 2011, *International Relations* has an impact factor of 0.533 and is ranked 41 out of 81 journals in the International Relations category. Other ranking systems, such as SCImago, cover the journal most recently from 2007, and place it on the 43rd position in first-rank journals out of a total of 60 (238 overall).¹¹ The SCImago Journal Rank Indicator (SJR) “expresses the average number of weighted citations received in the selected year by the documents published in the journal in the three previous years;” *International Relations* holds a 0.433 SJR, compared to the 2.526 rating of the #1 ranked journal for 2011, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and 0.343 by *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, the lowest ranked journal in the top tier of the ‘Political Science and International Relations’ category.

Kenneth Waltz special issue¹²

Volume 23, numbers 2 and 3 (June and September 2009), of *International Relations* mark the anniversary of two of the most important books in the field, namely Kenneth Waltz’s *Man*,

¹¹ <http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=3320>

¹² Kenneth Waltz, born June 8, 1924 passed away on May 13, 2013.

The State, and War (1959) and *Theory of International Relations* (1979).¹³ The issue aims to reevaluate the claims made by Waltz, who is hailed as perhaps the most important IR scholar of the past century. The two part special issue will be analyzed in more depth in the following lines, the reason for choosing it being the heavily theoretical papers it contains. After all, both the Aberystwyth IR department and the journal take pride in being at the forefront of theory development, hence our need for assessment.

John J. Mearsheimer's description of Waltz as 'the King of Thought' lends the name for the special issue: "The King of Thought: Theory, the Subject, and Waltz." The first part is subtitled 'Perspectives on Structural Realism' and focuses on structures and states, and human nature. The second part, 'Realism and World Politics,' focuses on political ideas, war and security, and 'the subject, the international, and the world'.¹⁴ The papers contained were presented and discussed at a conference held at the University of Aberystwyth in September 2008, in which academics ranging from students to IR personalities (including Waltz himself) took part.

In his introduction to the June edition, Ken Booth explains that the theoretical work done for the journal and conference came at a time when "international news headlines were dominated by stories describing severe global and regional challenges" such as the crisis in Georgia, the global financial crisis, or a new bloody episode in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With the gap between theory and practice perennially evident in the discipline of international relations, Booth is confident that, at least for the purpose of this edition, theorists have had a sense of 'the real world sitting on their shoulders'.¹⁵ As he puts it¹⁶, using the framework of Kenneth Waltz 'stops us from being irrelevant,' in the sense that much of the work done in the field of IR, while of some importance, does not address the key problems the world is facing today; the structuring of the special issue consists reflects this point of view that theory should be connected to reality, and the papers invariably use Waltz's writings.

Therefore, the conference's aim was to revisit some of the most important debates sparked by Waltz's two keystone books, rather than being merely of eulogizing Waltz. There have been other important conferences for the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth, as Michael Foley reminds the readers in his introduction to the September

¹³ <http://ire.sagepub.com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/content/23/2/179.full.pdf+html>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkV_NR9-5bo

edition. The 1969 50th anniversary conference brought together icons of IR such as E.H. Carr, Charles Manning, and Hans J. Morgenthau, and the ensuing publication saw contributions from Hedley Bull, Michael Howard, and many other important figures. 1994 marked the 75th anniversary of the Department, and that year’s conference brought together leading scholars in IR from both the US (e.g. Richard Ashley, Cynthia Enloe, Stephen Krasner) and Europe (e.g. Barry Buzan, Andrew Linklater, Ole Wæver), with the UK being most heavily represented.

What we notice is that throughout its existence, *International Relations* has been in the enviable position of hosting some of the most important names in the scholarship of IR, which in turn reinforced its status as a leading publication. We can thus deduce with a certain degree of accuracy that this special issue centered around Kenneth Waltz (and with a contribution by the author himself) also helps consolidate the status of the journal. But what about the content of the papers? The special issue consists of 18 articles, a total of 20 authors, and an introduction for each of the two numbers written by Ken Booth and Michael Foley, respectively. All the papers published are theoretical and invariably relate to Kenneth Waltz’s works.

issue	Name	Article Title
23 (2)	Nicholas Onuf	Structure? What Structure?
	Ole Waever	Waltz's Theory of Theory
	Georg Sorensen	'Big and Important Things' in IR: Structural Realism and the Neglect of Changes in Statehood
	John J. Mearsheimer	Reckless States and Realism
	Chris Brown	Structural Realism, Classical Realism and Human Nature
	Neta C. Crawford	Human Nature and World Politics: Rethinking 'Man'
	Jean Bethke Elshtain	Woman, the State, and War
23 (3)	Michael Foley	Bringing Realism to American Liberalism: Kenneth Waltz and the Process of a Cold War Adjustment
	Michael C. Williams	Waltz, Realism and Democracy
	Daniel Deudney	Left Behind: Neorealism’s Truncated Contextual Materialism and Republicanism
	Hidemi Suganami	Understanding Man, the State, and War
	Richard Ned Lebow	Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory
	Benjamin Valentino	
	Cornelia Beyer	Hegemony, Equilibrium and Counterpower: A Synthetic Approach
	Nicholas J. Wheeler	Beyond Waltz’s Nuclear World: More Trust May be Better
	Barry Buzan	Waltz and World History: The Paradox of Parsimony
	Richard Little	
	Ian Clark	How Hierarchical Can International Society Be?
	Andrew Linklater	Human Interconnectedness
Kenneth N. Waltz	The Virtue of Adversity	



Out of a grand total of 67 articles focusing primarily on IR theory in the period examined, 18 can be found in the Kenneth Waltz special issue, representing just slightly over 1 in 4.

While not a debate or a single topic, this special issue reveals that the concern for theoretical discussions in the field of international relations is indeed paramount for the Department at Aberystwyth.



Discussion/conclusion

There are several points of interest derived from the brief analysis of *International Relations* over the course of five years.

The first striking feature is a perennial problem in the field of international relations, namely the large disparity between male and female contributors. The journal falls within the average boundaries of IR scholarship in this regard. It also relies heavily on contributions from institutions in English-speaking countries.

The second feature is the heavily theoretical approach the board of editors takes in discussing international relations. Just as the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth greatly values theoretical work, the journal is a reflection of the same values and principles. As pointed out before, the vast majority of articles published either focus exclusively on theoretical matters, or at the very least they provide a solid theoretical foundation to the analyses put forward. The editors' interest in matters of theory is well known, therefore the claim made that Aberystwyth is a center of excellence for theoretical progress seems to be upheld by its journal *International Relations*.

The interdisciplinary character of the publication is sometimes put aside, such as the Kenneth Waltz issue which tackled Waltz's theory from a rather classical standpoint. However, with special issues also dedicated to the idea of interdisciplinary scholarship, it is clear that the editors are interested in the latter.

Lastly, striving to combine theory with practice is what distinguishes this paper from others of the same profile. The institutional legacy, as stated before, demands it: the very department of International Politics at Aberystwyth being born out of the sorrow and grief felt after the First World War, it has always sought to further theoretical development in IR for the benefit of practical matters. In other words, it is motivated by a certain degree of idealism which wants to secure a more just international environment.

In conclusion, *International Relations* is one of the more solid journals in the field, both in terms of its impressive history and of its impact and ranking. A top-tier journal edited in a department with almost a century of tradition, it continually manages to attract the major names in IR, and fulfills its mission statement.



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10. The Verification Research, Training and Information Centre, available at <http://www.vertic.org/>