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Review of Viola, L.A. (2020) The closure of the international system: how institutions create political equalities and hierarchies

Newman, A.; Debre, M.; Naylor, T.; Regilme, S.S.; Viola, L.A.

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[H-Diplo Roundtable XXIII-49 on Viola. The Closure of the International System](#)

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H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIII-49

Lora Anne Viola. *The Closure of the International System: How Institutions Create Political Equalities and Hierarchies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781108482257 (hardback, \$99.99).

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Introduction by Abraham Newman, Georgetown University

The decline of the International Liberal Order (ILO) has become a major research agenda in International Relations.^[1] From the rise of autocratic great powers to anti-democratic populist movements within democratic societies, scholars have identified a series of outsider challenges and challengers.

More recent scholarship, however, has turned instead to the internal contradictions and tensions within the order itself, which have the potential to undermine it. Work by Zoltán I. Búzás, for example, has highlighted its racist underpinnings,^[2] while research by Henry Farrell and myself concludes that the open information systems developed globally to manage digital technology have

generated new vectors of attack on the liberal order.^[3] While a significant body of literature has been devoted to the self-reinforcing mechanisms,^[4] which propel the ILO forward, this body of work suggests, by contrast, how it may contain institutional seeds that produce self-undermining properties.

Lora Anne Viola's book, *The Closure of the International System: International Institutions and the Creation of Equality and Hierarchy*, makes a major contribution both in terms of its sweeping historical narrative and its clear and concise theoretical perspective. The central point is that access connotes power and political players will fight to control it. Liberal impulses to expand transparency, participation, and membership engender reactionary forces, which seek to maintain their authority. As a result, international institutions that are based in norms of equality simultaneously include norms of inequality. Rather than viewing these as opposing forces or substitutes for one another, Viola argues that they are part and parcel of the same set of political processes.

The Closure of the International System makes three key moves. As described above, it argues that equality and inequality are mutually constitutive. The United Nations is structured both by the principle of one-member-one-vote and the hierarchical power of the security council. Viola argues that the very move to open up membership drives incumbent players to push for special privileges and thus inequality accompanies efforts to expand access. Second, the book suggests that inclusion in these liberal bodies generates a disciplining function, which can marginalize difference and diversity. Rather than emphasizing the liberational power of participation and transparency, Viola suggests that inclusion risks homogenization and sameness. Third, and finally, the manuscript flips the script on the function of such international organizations (IOs). Where much research on IOs emphasizes their potential to provide collective goods that solve collective action problems, Viola argues that IOs often create club goods. Yes, the International Monetary Fund offers loans to mitigate liquidity issues. But the decision regarding to whom and how much get meted out are made by a select few and to a select few. IOs become an instrument "for maintaining control over valuable collective resources by systematically restricting access to them..." (11). In this way, Viola reasserts the role that power plays in the distribution of global governance solutions. Overall, the book makes a powerful case for a reassessment as to how scholars conceptualize debates over access to and equality in the international system. At the same time, it makes clear that procedural rules over membership and participation in international organizations can have very significant consequences.

Debre, Naylor, and Regilme offer a vibrant discussion of the book's merits and suggest an important research agenda, which carries forward from the book. First, as Debre and Naylor suggest equality in the international system can be seen as something that is part of a process of contestation rather than a tautological trajectory. Here research follows President Barack Obama's summation of the 2016 election, "We zig and zag, and sometimes move in ways that some people think is forward and others think is moving back."^[5] Incumbent players (domestic or international), who feel threatened by institutional access, will seek to redefine the rules of participation so as to protect their interests and maximize their power. As several of the discussants suggest, this opens an opportunity for more dialogue between researchers who are studying international politics and those involved in polarization at the domestic level. Scholarship on national democratic backsliding may, for example, also be useful for those working on IOs. There also could be important interactions as electoral

reforms at the domestic level, which seek to elevate incumbent interests, may also be used to influence international agendas. As scholars open up the black box of the state, these processes will not simply be contained within domestic politics but span them. Cliff Bob, for example, has demonstrated that right wing groups have collaborated and coordinated across international institutions to promote anti-liberal political preferences.^[6] Ultimately, reactionary forces may seek to work at the international, domestic, and transnational levels. More theory will be needed to assess when they do this and what may account for their success or failure.^[7]

A second strain of research concerns the dynamics of assimilation and resistance. Much of Viola's work focuses on how liberal institutions may constrain actors and stifle diversity. But it is also important to consider the ways in which objects of liberal pressures may adapt or even reshape the liberal order itself. Here, Debre, Naylor and Regilme offer a number of fruitful paths forward. On the one hand, recent research suggests that the Global South has played a more significant role in shaping the liberal order.^[8] In this way, it may be viewed more as a co-constitutive player. On the other hand, work by Lorian Crasnic, demonstrates how smaller states may deploy a range of resistance strategies as they face pressure to conform.^[9] The discussants call for similar work examining the limits of assimilation as well as more attention to the politics of those outsiders (particularly from the Global South) who seek to engage with and transform the international system.

Finally, the conversation calls for more attention on what is to be done and what might be the alternative. At its most basic level, Viola's argument highlights the tensions and often overlooked power dynamics involved in liberal politics. Highlighting and being aware of them is important in its own right. At the same time, following such a critique to its extreme may produce a governance paralysis, fearing that new reforms may generate new inequalities. While the discussants do not have an easy answer to this dilemma, it is clearly one that deserves our urgent attention.

Participants:

Lora Anne Viola is Professor of Political Science at the Freie Universität Berlin and Chair of the Politics Department at the Freie Universität's John F. Kennedy Institute. She received her PhD and MA degrees from the University of Chicago and her BA from Columbia University. In addition to *The Closure of the International System*, she has a forthcoming book titled *Trust and Transparency in an Age of Surveillance*, and is co-editor of *Historical Institutionalism and International Relations: Explaining Institutional Development in World Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Her research has appeared in academic journals such as *International Studies Quarterly* and *Review of International Studies*. Her work has been the recipient of numerous awards, including ECPR's Hedley Bull Prize, ISA's Chadwick Alger Award, ISA's Diplomatic Studies Best Book Award, and APSA's Alexander George Award.

Abraham Newman is Professor of Government and the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. His research focuses on the politics generated by globalization and is the co-author of *Privacy and Power: The Transatlantic Struggle over Freedom and Security* (Princeton University Press 2019), which was the winner of the 2019 Chicago-Kent College of Law / Roy C. Palmer Civil Liberties Prize, the 2020 International Studies Association ICOMM Best Book Award,

and one of Foreign Affairs' Best Books of 2019, co-author of *Voluntary Disruptions: International Soft Law, Finance and Power* (Oxford University Press 2018), author of *Protectors of Privacy: Regulating Personal Data in the Global Economy* (Cornell University Press 2008) and the co-editor of *How Revolutionary was the Digital Revolution* (Stanford University Press 2006). He has published over forty peer-reviewed articles in journals including *Comparative Political Studies*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, *Nature*, *Science*, and *World Politics*. His article, "Weaponized Interdependence," won the best article in security studies from the International Studies Association.

Maria Josepha Debre is a Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer at Potsdam University at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences and an Associate Research Fellow in the research project "Who Gets to Live Forever? Towards an Institutional Theory of Decline and Death of International Organizations" at Maastricht University. She received her Ph.D. from the Free University Berlin and has been a Fox International Fellow at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Centre for International and Area Studies at Yale University. Debre has published on Regional and International Organizations, authoritarian resilience, and democratization in the *European Journal on International Relations*, *Democratization* and *Contemporary Politics*.

Tristen Naylor is a Fellow in International Relations at the London School of Economics. He is the author of *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20* (Routledge: 2019).

Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr. is tenured University Lecturer in International Relations and Human Rights at the Institute for History, Leiden University in the Netherlands. He is the author of the forthcoming book, *Aid Imperium: United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia* (University of Michigan Press), co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Human Rights at Risk: International Institutions, American Power, and the Future of Dignity* (Rutgers University Press), and co-editor of *American Hegemony and the Rise of Emerging Powers* (Routledge, 2018). He holds a joint PhD in Political Science and North American Studies from the Freie Universität Berlin, and he previously studied at Yale, Osnabrück, and Göttingen. He is the 2019 Inaugural Winner of the International Studies Association's Asia-Pacific Best Conference Paper Award.

Review by Maria Debre, Potsdam University

Is global governance becoming more democratic and inclusive, or rather more hierarchical? The question has become a point of growing debate in current literature on international institutions. Liberal institutionalist see international organizations increasingly embracing democratic norms and processes^[10] and becoming more inclusive to non-state transnational actors.^[11] This perspective is contrasted by critical theorists who argue that global governance is inherently hierarchical, with power inequalities and systems of social status and roles embedded in institutional structures and political practices.^[12]

In her book, *The Closure of the International System*, Lora Anne Viola provides an argument for the

middle ground: while the international system and its institutions have become more inclusive over time and have expanded to a set of more diverse actors, it continues to both exclude some actors and introduce hierarchy between admitted members. According to this *closure thesis*, the development of the international system has to be viewed as a constant process of social closure and narrowing, whereby allowing for more equality always necessitates the introduction of further inequality.

Viola's argument hinges on three core claims: that equality and hierarchy are interdependent forces that have to be studied in unison in order to explain the development of the current international system and its institutions (21); that expansion of social systems and inclusion of more social actors necessarily requires homogeneity and thus social exclusion of and closure to outsiders (27); and that states create hierarchies by restricting access to common goods through international institutions (32).

Viola's argument employs Weberian notions of social closure in community building to argue that the international system has systematically expanded its community by assimilating willing actors into a set of allegedly universal norms and thereby closing its gates to alternative political options. Only those actors that have been defined as "like kind" (77) because they befit common Eurocentric ideals of political authority have been allowed into the club, which remains closed to other forms of political authority. The United Nations may have expanded its ranks to include all sovereign states as formal members, but it also excluded non-state actors and unrecognized states from participation in the process. While formal equality within the international community has thus increased, the international system has simultaneously created hierarchies towards those diverse actors that have been left on the outside.

International stratification and hierarchies, as Viola further lays out, are achieved by two central mechanisms: the granting of membership rights (or what she calls "categorical inequality") and procedural decision-making powers (or "gradated inequalities") (73). To preserve privileged access to resources - to those protections provided by international law, to the benefits associated with membership in international organizations (IOs), as well as to economic and social goods resulting from interaction with other like units - powerful club members usually define who is in and who is out and who gets to share a piece of the pie. Thus IOs, contrary to common wisdom, do not in fact provide public goods, but rather club goods that are only accessible by those privy to membership. However, sometimes normative and functional pressures force even closed clubs to change their terms of accession, becoming more inclusive in the process. Once the international system consisted only of European empires, but decolonialization has opened up membership to a diverse set of states that are united by the common denominator of sovereignty.

Viola cautions that granting membership to more actors has not simply increased equality as liberal institutionalist and constructivist might have hoped for. This is because greater numbers also increase diversity and bring aboard new distributional challenges that endanger the social and economic status of incumbent members. To protect their privileged position, incumbent powers will likely respond by tweaking decision-making procedures in their favor, putting conditionality clauses on membership to minimize diversity, or by forming exclusive sub-clubs that monopolize policy making. Consequently, even the in-group is subject to political stratification and hierarchy over time as the international system turns more inclusive. Expansion and hierarchy thus become intertwined forces in Viola's sociological-historical account of the foundation and development of the current

international system and its institutional arrangements.

Viola's clear theoretical argumentation is supplemented with rich historical accounts that include an impressive time-scale tracing the development of the early diplomatic system in modern Europe, international law, and the current system of intergovernmental organizations. In each case she masterfully shows how diplomatic practice, the definition of sovereignty rights, and membership in intergovernmental organizations have been causal mechanisms of social closure. The three empirical chapters thereby provide a detailed story forming a coherent picture: forced to open their ranks to more actors demanding access to the international club, the originally powerful members have sought to limit expansion by defining narrow categories of membership. They first did so with the use of permanent resident ambassadors establishing closed diplomatic networks starting in the early Italian republics, and later through the use of a definition of sovereignty rights that excluded most of the world as colonial dependencies. Viola rounds up the empirical part of the book with a chapter depicting the institutional arrangements found in intergovernmental organizations as a direct consequence of the efforts of Western powers to preserve their status through assimilation, hierarchical decision-making rights, and the formation of exclusive sub-clubs.

While Viola makes clear in her introductory chapter that this is not a book dedicated to normative theorizing about the merits and drawbacks that are attached to the current state of equality and hierarchy in the international system, one still wonders where she would land on some of these core dilemmas. We already see increasing normative pressure put on international organizations to allow participation of non-state actors,^[13] and we will likely see more opening up to diverse actors ranging from regional groupings such as the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the African Union, to transnational firms, or professional networks. Informal cooperative agreements are on the rise^[14] because they are often more flexible and efficient when it comes to decision-making and policy implementation. Why wouldn't one want these non-state actors as formal members in the club? While decision-making might be more difficult with more diverse actors involved, solutions to core international issues from fighting poverty to mitigating climate change would also become more effective if those who work in the field are given an equal seat (and voice) at the table. With sub-clubs and hierarchical voting arrangements stalling decision-making on important issues in the United Nations Security Council or the World Trade Organization, why wouldn't one argue for an overhaul of current institutional arrangements that protect the powers of those that have been on the winning side of a war fought 70 years ago? If equality and inequality are equal forces that drive development of the international system, where might we find the pareto-optimal solution to design the club and its membership rights?

This last point also draws parallels to core questions discussed in the institutional design literature. Liesbet Hooghe, Tobias Lenz, and Gary Marks, for instance show how community and thus common identity between "like kinds" is related to varied design elements, from membership size, to policy scope, or contracting. Where trust is high between members of the in-group, contracts can be more flexible and open and policy portfolios more dynamic because preferences are more likely to align. Membership enlargement, however, is rare and will only be achieved if new units assimilate to normative community standards. In contrast, task-specific organizations will rally around a stable set of policy tasks and have highly specified contracts to deal with heterogenous preferences, but can accommodate a high number of members in exchange. Viola formulates similar expectations. To

manage diversity, incumbents will resort to “assimilative multilateralism” (84) – hard conditionality clauses that ensure homogenous preferences among the in-group, such as conformity with the EU’s *acquis communautaire*, which denotes the entirety of EU laws and regulations. Where assimilation is unlikely because there are too many members with divergent preferences, incumbents will only open their clubs if they can establish preferential voting systems (“hierarchical multilateralism,” 85) or exclusive sub-clubs (“exclusive multilateralism,” 85).

The question if there is an optimal solution between inclusion and exclusion is left unanswered. Instead, Viola draws a picture of persistent system closure which has left us in a state where Western powers would rather defend their privileged status instead of allowing meaningful reform and giving a voice to those emerging powers that demand not only formal equality status as sovereign states, but also the accompanying decision-making powers. Differentiation and social categorization are perhaps part of human psychology, and will thus be impossible to eradicate or at least to ignore as constitutive elements of social ordering, as Viola envisions in her concluding remarks.

There were two elements I would have liked to read more about in this book. The first concerns the question of how political change and contestation from within the in-group changes internal stratifications and institutional arrangements. While the theory chapter deals largely with usurpation by outsiders demanding both access to the club as well as redistribution of goods as the main explanatory factor of institutional arrangements, the possibility of endogenous change is only addressed in passing. Considering the growing literature on politization and contestation of global governance as inevitable outcome of increasing authority of global governance,^[15] should we expect a similar theoretical link between inclusiveness, closure, and internal contestation? Does more inclusiveness naturally trigger backlash effects among citizens and political elites of the established systems that fear redistribution of rights and economic benefits? Even if inclusiveness is managed according to the three response strategies outlined by Viola, it can never fully avert some loss to the new in-group members. Britain left the European Union in part because its citizens feared a loss of jobs and opportunities to citizens from Eastern European member states, even though the UK had been granted many of exceptions intended to manage redistributive effects from enlarged EU membership.

Indeed, one wonders to what extent the hypothesized responses that powerful states employ to manage diversity in the face of more inclusiveness might all eventually backfire. The EU’s eastern enlargement is the quintessential example of forced assimilation of formerly autocratic regimes to liberalism. But identity requires internalization of norms and values, which is, at its heart, a voluntary process that cannot be forced. The results are visible now, with the internal contestation of institutional arrangements and core norms that make up the European identity.

Second, I would have liked to have read more theorizing about the interactions between the out-group and in-group, but especially about the structuration within the out-group. In Viola’s account, the out-group consists mostly of disparate actors on the periphery that seek entrance into the Western-dominated international system and its institutions. Sometimes, these actors coordinate in order to make their demands more effective such as when the G77 states would band together to demand equal standing in the wake of decolonialization. However, this account leaves out the many ways in which the alleged periphery has formed alternative systems to organize relations amongst

themselves, thereby competing with the Western dominated order. The Cold War was essentially the height of a development, whereby two international clubs with differing normative cores defining very different types of inclusion criteria competed for members to join their clubs, and for their clubs to define global governance standards. Centuries before, the Chinese Silk Road spread throughout Eurasia, thereby establishing a network of cultural and diplomatic exchanges rivaling that of the European powers' diplomatic ties. Today, a multitude of Regional Organizations regulate relations among geographically and culturally proximate states around the globe,^[16] while increasing regime complexity has given rise to counter-institutionalization by states that have relinquished their efforts to change Western dominated institutions.^[17] Instead, China, is attempting to develop an alternative club to U.S.-dominated institutions with their 'One Belt One Road Initiative', while newly established development banks in the Global South intend to further boost independent South-South development cooperation. In the spirit of true 'Global International Relations'^[18], more consideration for these multitudes of ordering systems that have existed historically outside the Western core could have made Viola's account more inclusive.

Finally, Viola's historical account forced me to start thinking about potential future developments of the international system and how recent events might influence this trajectory. Given that the impetus of powerful members to cling onto their powers and defend the closed club against institutional reform is too high, Viola does not endorse the liberal institutionalist belief that a reform of core institutions like the UN Security Council, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank is possible. Rather, she predicts even more fragmentation of multilateralism, with decision-making moving to exclusive sub-groups like the various G groupings. But what does her argument entail, then, when it comes to the fate of global democracy and liberalism? Given current challenges to democratic governance from within former bastions of liberalism, and the withdrawal of the U.S. hegemon, will the liberal international order crumble because fragmented sub-clubs can no longer defend liberal ideals on a global scale? Will autocratic regimes manage to put enough pressure on the current global order to affect a redrawing of inclusion criteria away from liberal ideals?

Considering that my review has included more questions than critique, it is clear that Viola has written a thought-provoking book recasting global governance as consistently shaped by the forces of inclusion and exclusion. Her account should thus be a must-read for those who are interested in current debates on the fate of the global liberal order and its core institutions. It offers important answers to the question of why reform of these institutions is so difficult to achieve.

Review by Tristen Naylor, London School of Economics and Political Science

I am delighted to see another contribution to the development of social closure theory in IR. There is much to laud in Lora Anne Viola's book- she provides a well written, expansive intervention that significantly broadens the empirical basis upon which closure theory rests, ultimately arguing that equality and inequality coexist as central dynamics in ordering the international system (5). Viola also makes some novel conceptual moves; her linking of closure theory to the analytical distinction between public, private, and club goods, for example, is a useful addition, particularly given her stated aim to use closure theory to improve institutionalist perspectives (10-11, 60-64). Similarly, the distinction between categorical and graduated inequalities (23) and the three strategies of closure

responses available to insiders – assimilative, hierarchical, and exclusive multilateralisms – are likewise valuable conceptual contributions (84-86). What Viola has produced in these respects sets the stage for profitable further scholarship.

All told, Viola presents an excellent analysis of the ways in which superiorly positioned actors – the ranked insiders of clubs in a stratified international order – exercise closure against ascendant outsiders/inferiors so as to protect their privileged positions and the monopolised advantages afforded to them. Viola also deserves praise for detailing closure processes and strategies across a range of cases and a breadth of history- this is an empirically rich book evidencing a great deal of work to put it together.

There are, however, shortcomings. I will focus the bulk of my attention towards them because, while praise is affirming (and much deserved in this case), constructive critique is of greater academic utility. I hope my comments are taken in that light.

There are problems where closure theory links up with Viola's meticulous empirical work. One major limitation is that the argument's focus is almost entirely on superiorly positioned insiders and their closure moves. Surprisingly absent is the other half of the closure equation: the strategies of inferiorly positioned outsiders. The usurpatory dimension of social closure – outsiders' strategies to challenge their marginalisation and win a share of the privileges from which they excluded – while noted briefly in the book's theoretical chapter, largely disappears in the theory's empirical elucidation (80-81).^[19] What are the strategies that outsiders/lessers use to try to overcome their exclusion? And is extant closure theory as it appears in Neo-Weberian scholarship sufficiently well developed and correctly articulated to capture the range of strategies exercised in the international domain?^[20] Without answers to such questions, we are not only left with a partial account, but agency is denied to this set of actors in the closure game. In the author's account, the power to ascribe identity and achieve position is solely the preserve of ranking insiders. This misses some of the most interesting phenomena and dynamics that a closure lens allows us to see, chief among them that the moves outsiders make to overcome their positioning in part serve to reproduce and perpetuate the stratified order in which they find themselves disadvantaged.^[21] Stratification is not just a result of the closure strategies of superiorly positioned insiders.

There is also an assumption that outsiders necessarily want to get into privileged groups (27,80). While this is true in many cases, it is not so in all, notably in some significant instances. As Viola details, the G7 is indeed a paradigm case for examining closure in the contemporary context, but not all outsiders want(ed) in. China, most notably, has never had any desire to join this club of rich, Western-oriented economies. While membership would have granted access to monopolised privileges, it would have come at the cost of China's losing the identity and status of being the leader of the G77 and to some extent would have undercut efforts to elevate the G20 to supplanting the G7 as the top table of economic governance. Indeed, there are incentives to achieving exclusive club membership, but a robust analysis entails accounting for the broader status game in play, which the author explicitly decides not to examine (22).

These shortcomings lead the work to inadvertently reproduce hallmarks of the Eurocentric literature

that the author criticizes (36-37). Viola's stated aim for her work to move away from the Eurocentrism that plagues traditional "expansion" narratives is necessary and important, but its execution here is ultimately undercut by the book's conceptual underdevelopment of power and agency. An added value of closure theory is that it affords visibility and agency to those disadvantaged within - or occluded from - any particular system, being one reason among many that it was adopted by sociologist Frank Parkin in his seminal text, *Marxism and Class Theory*.^[22] Despite Viola's stated intention and despite the theoretical emphasis that closure theory's neo-Weberian innovators like Parkin, Raymond Murphy, and Randall Collins bequeathed, the agency of the marginalised and occluded ends up largely erased from view.^[23] Closure theory can help overcome IR's endemic Eurocentrism, but it can only do so if both sides of the closure game are accounted for- the strategies of outsider and insiders alike.

The book misses an opportunity to take stock of the current state of closure scholarship in IR and substantively advance its theorisation. An explicit aim of the book is to develop "the closure thesis," a curious objective given that others have already done so (8, 10, 43).^[24] While the book does mention a few works on closure in IR, it does so in a cursory way that suggests that the development of closure theory in IR is mostly untilled ground. There is indeed much scope to further develop closure theory, but it is problematic to suggest that this is a theoretical *terra nullius* to the extent the author implies. When existing closure scholarship in IR is noted, it is in a limited way. Edward Keene's pioneering work is acknowledged,^[25] but his work explicitly developing closure theory in IR receives less attention than his earlier, more English School-oriented work.^[26] Similarly, Marina Duque and Ayşe Zarakol's engagements with closure theory are acknowledged, but only briefly (in the case of Duque, only in the footnotes).^[27]

The book would have profited from a more thorough engagement with the existing closure literature, as there are some omissions and misreadings. To point to one notable example, Viola labels Keene's argument "naïve" in its assumption that individualist closure is meritocratic because in such a system social mobility is greater (66). Keene, however, does not make this argument. In fact, Keene makes the exact same point as Viola about credentialist societies failing to be genuinely meritocratic further on in the very article that is cited as evidence for his apparent naivete.^[28] As Viola notes (echoing Keene), individualist credentials are merely *ostensibly* fairer. Ostensibly is the operative word- the game is rigged and the means by which it is are hidden. For what it's worth, I too have previously made this point.^[29]

An objective of Viola's is to tie closure theory to the literature on hierarchies in IR (71-73). This is unquestionably a fruitful direction in which to travel, strengthening both closure theory and hierarchies scholarship. Peculiarly, Carsten-Andreas Schulz's path-breaking research on this front is unacknowledged.^[30] This is unfortunate because it misses an opportunity to pick up where Schulz left off and further develop the symbiotic relationship between these two literatures.

This holds true for another of Viola's main aims, which is to apply closure theory "to sovereignty and

membership in the international system or its institutions” (25). She states that the failure to use closure theory in this way “has been a missed opportunity” (25). As with hierarchies and closure, Viola is absolutely right that these phenomena are ripe for analysis by way of closure theory, but mistaken to assert that this has not been done before.^[31] Had the book dealt more extensively with the extant literature it again could have built on previous work and could have made substantive theoretical strides that match its empirical advances.

Some of the arguments in the book accord closely with elements of my own, uncited writing. I found it impossible not to nod in enthusiastic agreement throughout much of this book, not least because of many similarities with my own earlier research on certain topics - the drawing of a distinction between primary and secondary closure rules (28-29, 39),^[32] the identification of sovereignty as the primary closure rule in the international domain (25, 58),^[33] sovereignty’s effect on the position of civil society actors in global governance (7),^[34] the homogenisation of international society (10, 33, 37),^[35] the centring of stratification in the conceptual framework (22-26),^[36] the need for a critical study of the G7 and G20 (209),^[37] and the use of closure theory as a corrective to the English School’s “expansion” thesis were, among other elements, quite familiar (26-27, 52-60).^[38]

None of this is meant to take away from the merits of this book, particularly Viola’s novel conceptual and empirical contributions. The book is primed to play a role in closure theory’s promulgation, and I hope that scholars looking to further advance the theory and find new applications for it will find it useful.

Review by Salvador Santino Fulo Regilme Jr., Leiden University

Does the expanding scope of membership in international institutions mean increased democratization in global governance? Lora Anne Viola’s *The Closure of the International System: How Institutions Create Political Equalities and Hierarchies* offers a compelling critique of the so-called ‘expansion thesis,’ which underscores the increasing inclusiveness and democratization of the practices and structures of global governance and international institutions.^[39] Viola’s analysis is motivated by two contrasting perspectives in the scholarly literature on international institutions. Whereas the liberal approach or the ‘expansion thesis’ underscores the increasing number of international institutions and the expanding geographical membership of international clubs, the critical strand of the literature emphasizes the diverse forms of hierarchical and stratification logics and practices in global governance.^[40] Notwithstanding the growth of international clubs, the critical view contends that stratification and hierarchies persist in terms of material endowments, social identities, diplomatic practices, and institutional structures amongst various state and non-state actors.

In redress of this impasse between the liberal and critical views, Viola develops what she calls as the

closure thesis, which maintains the fundamental coexistence of institutionalized equality and stratification in global governance and its constitutive institutions. The thesis is based on three fundamental premises concerning the ontological nature of equality/inequality as well as the international system. The first contends that equality and inequality mutually constitute each other, considering that the invocation of equal categories logically requires the implication of the excluded units, thereby engendering the dual process of differentiation between insiders and outsiders. The second premise pertains to the historical evolution of the international system, which is underpinned by the mechanics of ‘narrowing’ or ‘closing’ amongst insiders and outsiders in a given governance arrangement. Despite her acknowledgement of the increase in the number of sovereign states as legitimate actors in the international system, Viola notes that the diffusion of *liberal* norms facilitated the *illiberal* dismissal and suppression of particular types of diversity in terms of belief-systems, cultural norms, political practices, and social identities.

Defying the mainstream view that international institutions generate global public goods,^[41] the third premise clarifies instead that such institutions provide club goods that are by nature exclusionary and rivalrous. The highly selective provision of club goods demonstrates the concrete distributive consequences of participation in and exclusion from international institutions as well as the intersubjective politics of differentiation and recognition that the contemporary international system has engendered thus far. For example, by joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), member-states expect to benefit from supposedly obtaining non-discriminatory, most-favored-nation status access to the markets of all 164 member-states, thereby increasing opportunities for market expansion, capital growth, and profit increases for economic actors of a given member-state. This access to all WTO member-states’ national markets is considered a club good — a privileged benefit that can only be enjoyed by legitimate members, while non-members are concurrently excluded from access to such markets. Club goods, as an analytic concept, could also be deployed to understand the concrete political consequences of diplomacy and international law. In international development, for instance, the post-9/11 global war on terror enabled the dramatic increase of United States foreign aid to willing state allies that were interested in adopting militarization as the core policy response against all forms of political opposition.^[42] In exchange for their support, U.S. allies in the war on terror receive foreign aid, which consequently means that non-allies were excluded from the provision of aid as a club good, while the Bush administration systematically delegitimized unsupportive states as pariahs in the post-9/11 international community. Thus, for Viola, international institutions (and their instruments such as international law and diplomatic practices) are tactics of social closure, which, in effect, legitimize the conferral of intersubjective rights and the distribution of material resources to particular kinds of actors, while also discriminating non-members.

There are two important substantive claims that constitute Viola’s closure thesis. First, the formulation of terms and categories of membership in a particular international institution impacts the contentious, conditional, and intersubjective processes of inclusion and exclusion amongst various actors. Second, these processes of categorization and differentiation consequently deprives non-members of particular rights and privileges that are only available to members. Amongst institutional members, however, further categorizations and hierarchies provide justificatory foundations for differential enjoyment of rights, privileges, responsibilities, and authority.

Viola has produced one of the most theoretically sophisticated scholarly works on global governance

and international relations (IR) theory published in the last decade. One of the major strengths of this book pertains to its ability to clearly lay out the historical evolution of state conceptions over time, including states as sovereign persons, territory-based organization, and more recently, as a nation-based organization. The chapters provide a compelling discussion of how those evolving state conceptions mirrored the changing conceptions of which particular actor can be constituted as a legitimate unit in global politics. Viola's analysis demonstrates excellent mastery of distinctive literatures in historical sociology, global governance, European history, and economic theory, while using such a mastery in order to build a synthetic argument that posits how the global order has been underpinned by mechanisms of social closure. For Viola, the proliferation of international institutions in recent decades has generated club goods, which members enjoy (albeit differentially, considering hierarchies in particular global institutions such as the United Nations), while concurrently excluding non-members.

Viola's closure thesis builds from the insights derived from club goods theory and neo-Weberian perspectives. She skillfully deployed historical evidence from early modern Europe and the early expansion of international law to demonstrate various practices of social closure, with particular attention to secondary tactics of exclusion based on race, culture, religion, and other identity-based markers as benchmarks of economic modernization. Such markers, as embedded in international law and diplomatic practices, facilitated the formation of colonies and market liberalization in the international system. Viola's closure thesis displays remarkable explanatory power for scholars' understanding of contemporary global shifts in the international system. Specifically, the continuing expansion and increasingly diversified range of members and participants in the United Nations motivates traditionally powerful states to create various incentives to repress the demands of smaller states, while creating barriers to democratize the distribution of club goods amongst members.

In the final section, Viola offers an alternative vision for the future of the global order: namely, political inequalities could be addressed through the radical redistribution of material resources *and* the elimination of exclusionary categories that are used for rights legitimation. Those proposals are indeed promising, but they raise very important questions concerning how those conditions could emerge in the global system.

The first puzzle refers to the global conditions as well as mechanisms that could advance equitable distribution of material goods amongst diverse political communities worldwide. Could a radical material distribution take place within a state-based international system? Could such a radical transformation only take place because of large-scale violence as in the case of a systemic global war? It appears that radical redistribution could take place through radical changes in the domestic political economy of key states in the Global North, including the major economies in the Global South, such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia. A radical transformation in the political economy of the most systemically important countries could trigger adoption by other states and social movements elsewhere, thereby consolidating the groundwork for equitable distribution of resources worldwide. Moreover, global governance on trade and international development requires radical restructuring in ways that eliminate asymmetric and unfair rules and practices that systemically favor countries in the Global North. [\[43\]](#)

The second puzzle pertains to the elimination of discriminatory rules and practices of identity

recognition and distinctions amongst human individuals. As a meta-language, human rights discourses—as morally appealing tools that can be used to rally support from a wide range of political communities — are prone to powerful actors’ weaponization in the service of sinister political aims.^[44] It is therefore unwise to rely solely on moralistic language (without collective mobilization in support of radical distributive politics) in order to reduce stratifications in the global order. Perhaps the establishment of a global state and the elimination of territorial borders could, in the long-term, diminish perceptions of hierarchical distinctions amongst human individuals as long as material inequalities are radically addressed. If there is hope on this front, individual states as well as global governance institutions must support transnational and domestic social movements that champion the common dignity of the human person, regardless of one’s socio-economic background or other identity-markers.^[45]

The third puzzle concerns the applicability of the closure thesis in illustrating the governance dynamics of pre-colonial societies in many parts of the world that now constitute what we call as the Global South. Can Viola’s closure thesis explain the political dynamics, for example, of the Majapahit Empire in Southeast Asia (1293-1300s), or even the pre-colonial Chinese dominance in Southeast Asia, when tributary trade, imperialism, and tutelage thrived^[46]? Does the closure thesis help us enrich our understanding of imperial arrangements before European colonialism in the American continent? Considering that Viola primarily focused on the European experience and the modern international system, it is unclear if the social closure dynamics and the club goods theory could also explain many other forms of governance systems beyond Europe, especially pre-colonial forms of political arrangements in Pacific Asia, Africa, and the American continent.

In sum, *The Closure of the International System* is an excellent piece of IR scholarship with many merits. Using positive theory, it provides a convincing discussion of the historical evolution of the international system, which has demonstrated persistent patterns of social closure and expansion. Deploying normative insights, the book’s concluding section outlines a promising and broad vision of a prospective world order based on material and social equality. Indeed, Viola has provided a fresh perspective of the political logics that drive the contemporary international system and its constitutive international institutions. At a time when IR scholarship has privileged “simplistic hypothesis testing,”^[47] Viola’s book showcases the promise of ‘grand theorizing’ as an endeavor that is still worth pursuing both for current and future scholars of international institutions.

Response by Lora Anne Viola, Freie Universität Berlin

It is immensely gratifying to know that *The Closure of the International System* is being read and well-received, and so I’m pleased to have been invited to this roundtable review and welcome the opportunity to engage in a discussion about its core arguments. I thank Abraham Newman for taking the time to write a thoughtful introduction and I especially appreciate the careful attention the three reviewers, Maria Debre, Tristen Naylor, and Salvador Santino F. Regilme, Jr., have devoted to reading and responding to the book. The reviewers graciously note the contributions of the book and also provide stimulating comments for thinking about the implications of its arguments and

omissions, which I pick up and expand upon in this response.

The Closure of the International System is concerned with two related questions. First, what explains the persistent coexistence of political equality and inequality in the international system? More specifically, why and how do institutions produce relations of equal *and* unequal political authority? I take the position that answering this question has everything to do with understanding dynamics of institutional membership and the allocation of rights, which requires us to answer a second question: how do international institutions adjust to changes in the number, diversity, and relative power of system members over time? The book is primarily concerned with the design of international institutions and the distribution of political authority.

The book develops a novel two-step argument that I label the “closure thesis” (8, 26-34) to explain how institutions create both equalities and inequalities through a constitutive and a causal logic. The closure thesis contends that the primary function of international institutions is to provide club goods, to provide rules that regulate which actors will have access to collective goods, and to facilitate incumbent member control over those rules of exclusion. Institutions allocate political rights by socially constituting some actors as rights-holders and others as outsiders with no rights to access and exert political control over common goods. Institutional rules rationalize categorical distinctions and practices of in/exclusion that, in turn, create a formal equality for “insiders” and a formal inequality between “insiders” and “outsiders.” Because membership boundaries provide incumbents with exclusive access to certain collective goods, they have incentives to maintain exclusive boundaries. For both functional and normative reasons, however, institutions periodically come under pressure to add new members. This leads to my causal claim that an increasing number of more heterogeneous members imposes costs on incumbent privileges and creates incentives for incumbent members to implement new modes of exclusion through institutional design strategies that gradate political rights among members. I call these strategies assimilative, hierarchical, and exclusive multilateralism. In other words, inclusion rarely goes hand-in-hand with greater equality but generates incentives for institutionalizing political inequality.

The title, *The Closure of the International System*, suggests a direct engagement with, and critique of, what has been called the “expansion thesis” in international relations, as well as a reference to Max Weber’s idea of social closure, which I combine with the economic idea of club goods to develop the “closure thesis” as an alternative take on the expansion thesis.^[48] In his review, Tristen Naylor critiques the book for insufficiently engaging existing social closure literature, especially his own work.^[49] Although both Naylor’s book and my own work borrow neo-Weberian ideas on social closure to explain patterns of exclusion, our respective arguments display fundamental differences. Naylor’s book, like much of the recent literature on hierarchy, is focused on social status and social rankings, commonly understood (following Weber) as a matter of social honor and prestige.^[50] *The Closure of the International System*, in contrast, is not concerned with social status but with the distribution of political rights, which are understood as participatory rights—who belongs?—and procedural rights—what are their decision-making powers? Whereas the literature’s focus on social status emphasizes stratification based on social identity and collective norms over stratification based on material conditions,^[51] my closure thesis explicitly re-connects the social and the material to

show how social claims about belonging and authority are ultimately anchored in claims to property. In my argument, closure rules are socially constructed primarily as a means of competing over property and property rights, rather than foremost as a struggle over social status per se.

To join the social and material, I connect the sociological idea of closure and the economic theory of club goods, and this is another of the book's contributions to existing social closure theory and to recent scholarship on hierarchy. Building on economists' insights, I question the public goods assumption underpinning much of the global governance literature, showing how it obscures the ways in which institutions intentionally delimit the scope and content of the "public," such that the degree of "publicness" of collective goods is endogenous to the rules and design of institutions. Going beyond the commonly metaphorical use of the term "club,"^[52] I argue that international institutions construct property rights in order to preserve restrictive access to common goods, which are made exclusive and partially rivalrous. This claim is what provides the motor of my causal argument. Moreover, it sheds light on institutional design choices by discussing the conditions under which incumbents seeking to limit the consequences of including heterogeneous members will pursue strategies of assimilative, hierarchical, or exclusive multilateralism.

With respect to the relationship of social closure theory to the expansion thesis, my argument also introduces important differences. For instance, what Naylor characterizes as my misunderstanding of the argument Edward Keene and he make is actually a substantive disagreement. The closure arguments made by both Keene and Naylor depend on the distinction between collectivist closure mechanisms (ascribed criteria based on group characteristics, like gender, race, religion) and individualist mechanisms (based on credentials in principle achievable by all), arguing that these imply different systems of stratification since the latter are amenable to social mobility and the former are not. They argue that individualist criteria are more achievable and "make it harder to transmit privileges across generations," thereby making it harder to preserve exclusivity and stratification.^[53]

From the perspective of *The Closure of the International System*, there are two problems here. First, as I indicate in the footnote cited by Naylor, the very distinction between collectivist and individualist rules of closure is problematic.^[54] Both terms obscure the underlying structural conditions that lead to the social creation of allegedly inherent attributes (such as race) or that mis-place the onus of achievement onto the individual (e.g., by emphasizing effort and merit over structural constraints). As a number of political philosophers have argued, it is not at all clear that "skills" or "effort" operate differently from "birth" or "race" in reproducing inequalities.^[55] Critics have long argued that meritocracy has no special claim to egalitarianism and that individualist, not just collectivist, credentials are tightly linked to inequality. In the argument of my book, this is due to the common material and strategic dynamics that underpin the social construction of exclusion criteria. In other words, I question the conceptual and empirical validity of the distinction between collectivist and individualist closure systems altogether.^[56]

A second reason that maintaining a distinction between collectivist and individualist closure is problematic, is that it too readily implies an historical progression from one set of criteria (that

prevent social mobility) to another set (that enable social mobility), while the incompleteness of this progress is used to explain remaining inequalities. Indeed, Keene argues that over time, international clubs have moved from being based on collectivist identity claims (e.g. the “family of civilized nations”) to individualist forms of closure (e.g. the EU or G20), and that this “leads to greater possibilities for what we might call ‘social mobility’ in international society” including the breakdown of privileges within international fora and even an increase in egalitarianism.^[57] Keene does acknowledge that in practice the equalizing effects of individualist closure criteria may be hindered by those who wish to maintain their privileges and we should “keep a careful eye” on this.^[58] Nevertheless, he argues, there is change over time as individualistic forms of social exclusion based on property and credentials make it “much harder to exclude” and “in general the society is likely to be more fluid, in the sense of easier mobility between social strata” because “the system is not designed to protect the privileges of a particular group.”^[59] Similarly, Naylor argues that closure rules are predominantly open and individualist in nature, with status competition “a relatively meritocratic one with relatively fluid social mobility.”^[60] But, he notes, because we empirically still observe exclusions and stratifications, there must be something else at work to hinder social mobility, what he calls “mobility dampeners.”^[61] Individualistic or meritocratic-based rules may in practice be only “ostensibly achievable” because the hurdles to achieve them may be set high, credentialism may be unevenly applied, or pragmatic considerations may create roadblocks.^[62] In other words, the problem is not with the system, but with the hurdles that rig the system in favor of the already privileged. This is what we can call an aspirational critique of inequality; if we could only remove the hurdles and mobility dampeners, then we could finally achieve equality and inclusion.

This is exactly the type of argument that *The Closure of the International System* contests, namely that stratification and inequality are institutional malfunctions, the result of failures to fully live up to the principles of egalitarianism, liberalism, democracy, or meritocracy. *The Closure of the International System*, in contrast, shows that preserving privileges is precisely what the system is designed to do, and this dynamic is what creates both the political equalities and inequalities that we observe. But note that the closure thesis does *not* seek to seize the middle ground between theories that view the system as moving towards greater equality and those that see perpetual hierarchy, as Maria Debre suggests in her review. The argument explicitly cautions against settling for the Goldilocks position that there are sometimes relations of equality and sometimes of hierarchy, depending on when and where we look. Instead, the constitutive and causal arguments of the closure thesis shed light on the ways in which inequality and equality can mutually be the political effect of practices of exclusion and subordination. Equality and inequality are not antithetical but constitutively and causally interlinked. This is also the reason why the book cautions against the progressive narrative implied by the expansion thesis that, little by little, the system is becoming more open and egalitarian. The closure thesis suggests that when we take as a reference point the entire range of potential political actors—individuals, civil society groups, religious communities, indigenous communities, non-governmental organizations, private firms, and so on—it brings into focus the ways in which international institutions (diplomacy, law, and international organizations) have historically worked to narrow and homogenize the numbers and types of legitimate political actors who are equal rights-holders internationally.

If, as the closure thesis argues, inclusion and exclusion, equality and inequality, are not oppositional but mutually implicated, then, as Debre recognizes in her review, the urgent political questions become what is the optimal balance between inclusion and exclusion, where do the lines get drawn, who are we excluding, which actors can be legitimately given different rights, and based on what criteria? *The Closure of the International System* cannot directly answer these questions because there is no a priori way to define the optimal balance and the book does not offer a normative theory to guide such judgments. Here the contribution of the book is simply to move away from thinking that the pursuit of equality is sufficient to mitigate inequality and to suggest the need for a societal debate that considers who is being excluded and unequalized whenever we include and equalize, and on what basis those judgments are societally acceptable.

All three reviews correctly note that *The Closure of the International System* does not present the perspective of the “Global South.” It is reasonable to ask whether the book should have included the perspective of “out-groups” or “non-Western” states, and whether not speaking on their behalf denies their agency. Aware of my own subject positionality and knowledge limits, I self-reflexively do not aim to adopt the perspective of “non-Western” states or the tokenism that including a few such examples often risks. As the introduction to the book makes clear, its contribution is not that it “brings in” “non-Western” perspectives, but that it offers an internal critique of the idea of Western universalism and progress.^[63] Consistent with my argument that it is insufficient to measure “expansion” by the number of states now included in international institutions, I align myself with the argument that Eurocentrism is not only a problem of geographic representation, but also an epistemological one.^[64] In this sense, the book is part of a critique of Eurocentrism as “a paradigm for interpreting a (past, present and future) reality that uncritically established the idea of European and Western historical *progress/achievement* and its political and ethical *superiority*.”^[65] *The Closure of the International System* seeks to shed further light on the parochialism of claims to universality and the progressive narrative of modernity that underpins international institutions and their study. That being said, it is most certainly imperative to study the international relations of non-Western and precolonial societies in their own right and to complement the “insider” view with non-member conceptions of the international.^[66] In his review, Salvador Santino Fulo Regilme, Jr. asks whether the closure thesis works beyond Europe, and whether it can be applied, for instance, to pre-colonial non-European societies or to imperial arrangements that preceded European colonialism. This is an important question and would be an opportunity to extend or revise the argument; as it stands, though, the question is beyond the scope of the closure thesis’ claims, which in the book are limited to the institutions that developed within the European states system over the last several centuries.^[67]

This is not to say, though, that the institutions I focus on are not shaped by interactions with non-members; indeed, the closure thesis is premised on the significance of out-groups for shaping institutional strategies. In this regard, Debre raises two important questions related to the dynamics of change and the interaction of out- and in-groups. First, she asks about the possibility of endogenous change; i.e., how contestation within the in-group affects the institutionalization of

inequality. Here I agree with Debre that the same dynamic that characterizes the insider/outsider boundary can be seen internally. The two-step closure thesis contends that greater inclusion of more diverse actors tends to import and internalize the struggle over political rights, with incumbents seeking institutional arrangements that gradate rights and those with unequal rights seeking to usurp or enter those arrangements. This is, for example, my interpretation of why we should understand the G20 not as an expansion of the G7 but as a way to restrain more universal bodies like the IMF. This leads to the second point Debre raises about the structuration of the out-group. The closure thesis argues that a combination of normative change and functional exigencies drive moments of institutional inclusion of outsiders. How the out-group organizes itself and what its preferences are is an important point that the book does not directly theorize. The empirical account, however, does point to coalition-formation and counter-institutionalization as important tools available to out-groups for challenging existing institutions and achieving alternative goals (see Chapter 5 and its account of the New International Economic Order and the G77). This might, as Debre implies, include creating alternative systems altogether. Nevertheless, the argument of the closure thesis suggests that the concentration of power and the institutionalization of privilege among incumbents makes this an asymmetrical struggle.

This brings us, finally, to the larger question that both Regilme and Debre raise, and that is: What is to be done going forward? Both conclude their reviews by asking about the future implications of the closure thesis, especially regarding the future of liberal norms, equality, and global democracy at a time when these appear to be challenged. As Regilme notes, the concluding chapter of the book suggests that relaxing categorical distinctions and promoting material redistribution might be two ways of loosening the grip of the closure thesis' constitutive and causal arguments, but the book does not offer prescriptions on how these two things can be achieved in practice. Regilme points to geopolitical upheaval—like large-scale political violence—or radical reorientation on the domestic level as two possible roads to change. Of these two, I think we are in the midst of a re-thinking of neoliberal globalization and its implications for domestic and global inequalities. Given the critiques of the current order coming from both the political left and right, and from established powers and rising powers, Debre wonders whether the current order will crumble and whether existing inclusion criteria will move further away from liberal ideals. The closure thesis, of course, cannot answer this. But the book does implicitly put normative value on pluralism and diversity, and to this end, current challenges to liberal ideals might be seen as an opportunity to open discursive and political space for unsettling existing distributions of resources and rights and to re-evaluate the ways inequalities have been institutionalized in the present system.

Notes

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— For one example, see the contributions to the International Organization special issue on the topic, David A. Lake, Lisa L. Martin, and Thomas Risse, "Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on International Organization," *International Organization* 75:2 (2021): 225-257.

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— Zoltán I. Búzás, "Racism and Antiracism in the Liberal International Order," *International Organization* 75:2 (2021): 440-463.

[3] _____ Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "The Janus Face of the Liberal International Information Order: When Global Institutions are Self-undermining," *International Organization* 75:2 (2021): 333-358.

[4] _____ See, for example, Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order," *Review of International Studies* 25:2 (1999): 179-196.

[5] _____ President Barack Obama, "Statement by the President," November 9, 2016. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/11/09/statement-president>.

[6] _____ Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[7] _____ Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, "The New Interdependence Approach: Theoretical Development and Empirical Demonstration," *Review of International Political Economy* 23:5 (2016): 713-736.

[8] _____ Marcos Tourinho, "The Co-constitution of Order," *International Organization* 75:2 (2021): 258-281.

[9] _____ Lorian Crasnic, "Resistance in Tax and Transparency Standards: Small States' Heterogenous Responses to New Regulations," *Review of International Political Economy* 29:1 (2022): 255-280.

[10] _____ Alexandru Grigorescu. *Democratic Intergovernmental Organizations? Normative Pressures and Decision-Making Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Tanja A. Börzel and Vera van Hüllen. *Governance Transfer by Regional Organizations: Patching Together a Global Script* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Jofre Rocabert, Frank Schimmelfennig, Lorian Crasnic, and Thomas Winzen, "The Rise of International Parliamentary Institutions: Purpose and Legitimation," *The Review of International Organizations* (November 15, 2018). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-018-9326-3>; Thomas Sommerer and Jonas Tallberg, "Diffusion across international organizations: Connectivity and convergence," *International Organization* (November 15, 2018), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000450>.

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[12] _____ E.g. Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, "Hierarchies in World Politics," *International Organization*, (July 15, 2016), DOI: doi:10.1017/S0020818316000126; Marina G. Duque, "Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach," *International Studies Quarterly*, (April 5, 2018), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy001>; Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Michael Zürn, *A Theory of Global*

Governance, Authority, Legitimacy, and Contestation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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____ Jonas Tallberg, Thomas Sommerer, Theresa Squatrito, and Christer Jonsson. *The Opening Up of International Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107325135>.

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____ Oliver Westerwinter, Kenneth W. Abbott, and Thomas Biersteker, "Informal Governance in World Politics," *The Review of International Organizations* (June 6, 2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-020-09382-1>; Felicity Vabulas and Duncan Snidal, "Cooperation under Autonomy: Building and Analyzing the Informal Intergovernmental Organizations 2.0 Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* (October 1, 2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320943920>.

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____ Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane. "Contested Multilateralism." *Review of International Organizations* (March 23, 2014). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-014-9188-2>.

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____ See: Parkin; Randall Collins, *The Credentialed Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); Raymond Murphy, *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

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___ Parkin.

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___ Parkin; Collins; Murphy.

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___ Keene, "Social Status, Social Closure, and the idea of Europe as a 'Normative Power'," 948, 953-954.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 23-24, 27-28, 64-67.

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___ Schulz, "Hierarchy, Salience, and Social Action."

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 10, 26, 54.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 4-5, 53-60.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 7, 57-59.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 53-55.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 5, 10, 19-33.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 2-3.

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___ Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 11-13, 54-57.

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___ Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Alexandru Grigorescu, *Democratic Intergovernmental Organizations?*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jonas Tallberg and Anders Uhlin, "Civil Society and Global Democracy: An Assessment," in Raffaele Marchetti, Daniele Archibugi, Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, eds., *Global Democracy: Normative and Empirical Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 210-32, here, 228.

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___ Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status. Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press); Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*, 21.

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___ Robert Keohane. "The Demand for International Regimes," *International Organization* 36:2 (1982): 325-355; Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Joanne Gowa, "Rational Hegemons, Excludable Good, and Small Groups: An Epitaph for Hegemonic Stability Theory," *World Politics* 41:3 (1989): 307-324; Kenneth Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

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___ Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr., *Aid Imperium: United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in*

Post-Cold War Southeast Asia (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, in press); Regilme Jr., "A Human Rights Tragedy: Strategic Localization of US Foreign Policy in Colombia," *International Relations* 32:3 (September 2018): 343-365.

[43] _____ Thomas Pogge, "Recognized and Violated by International Law: The Human Rights of the Global Poor," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 18:4 (December 2005): 717-746.

[44] _____ Clifford Bob, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Regilme Jr., "Constitutional Order in Oligarchic Democracies: Neoliberal Rights versus Socio-Economic Rights," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* (May 2019). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872119854142>.

[45] _____ Regilme Jr., "The Global Politics of Human Rights: From Human Rights to Human Dignity?" *International Political Science Review* 40:2 (2019): 279-290; Matthew Weinert, *Making Human: World Order and the Global Governance of Human Dignity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

[46] _____ David C. Kang, "Stability and Hierarchy in East Asian International Relations, 1300-1900 CE," in Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230591684_9.

[47] _____ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing Is Bad for International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19:3 (Sept. 2013): 427-457. DOI: [10.1177/1354066113494320](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113494320).

[48] _____ By the "expansion thesis" I mean not only the arguments made by Bull and Watson in *The Expansion of International Society*, but also the general claim present in almost all IR theoretical traditions that the globalization of the international system has been a process of international institutions expanding geographically from a European core to become more inclusive and even more egalitarian over time. Even as there is growing acknowledgement of the Eurocentric, coercive, and violent history associated with European "expansionism," contemporary IR literature, as Acharya notes, is still prone to the narrative of universality and the assumption of progress over time. Amitav Acharya, "Global Governance in a Multiplex World," *Robert Schuman Centre for Advances Studies Research Paper*, No. RSCAS 2017/29 (2017).

[49] _____ Tristen A. Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20* (London: Routledge, 2019). Regrettably, Naylor's book was released and came to my attention only after my manuscript was complete. But Naylor does not cite or discuss my own contributions to this literature where I develop important parts of my argument

and which significantly predate his own. See, e.g., Lora Anne Viola, *Governing the Club of Sovereigns: Inequality and the Politics of Membership in the International System* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Political Science, 2008); Viola, "Stratificatory Differentiation as a Constitutive Principle of the International System," In Mathias Albert, Barry Buzan, and Michael Zürn, eds., *Bringing Sociology to International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 112-131; Viola, Duncan Snidal and Michael Zürn, "Sovereign (In)equality in the Evolution of the International System," in Stephan Leibfried, Evelyne Huber, Matthew Lange, Jonah D. Levy, Frank Nullmeier, and John D. Stephens, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Transformation of the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 221-236; and, more recently, Viola, "'Systemically Significant States': Tracing the G20's Membership Category as a New Logic of Stratification in the International System," *Global Society* 34:3 (March 2020): 335-352. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2020.1739630>.

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___ See, for example, Edward Keene, "Social Status, Social Closure and the Idea of Europe as a 'Normative Power'," *European Journal of International Relations* 19:4 (June 2012): 939-956. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354066112437768>; Marina G. Duque, "Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach," *International Studies Quarterly* 62:3 (September 2018): 577-592. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy001>; Paul Musgrave and Daniel Nexon, "Defending Hierarchy from the Moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic Capital and Political Dominance in Early Modern China and the Cold War," *International Organization* 72:3 (May 2018): 591-626. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000139>; Deborah Welsh Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

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___ Keene, "Social Status," 946.

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___ See, e.g., Naylor, *Social Closure*, Chapter 2.

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___ Keene, "Social Status," 941. See also Naylor, *Social Closure*, 24, 26-27.

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___ The distinction is first introduced and subsequently critiqued by neo-Weberian scholars. For a discussion, see Viola, *Closure of the International System*, 66 and the related footnotes 95 and 97.

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___ Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017 [1958]); Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit* (New York: Farrer, Straus, Giroux, 2020); David Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019). We can add to this the problem that the very notion of social mobility is itself vague and, according to Rebecca Hickman, even incoherent. Rebecca

Hickman, *In Pursuit of Egalitarianism and Why Social Mobility Cannot Get Us There* (London: Compass, 2009).

[56] _____ Introducing an additional intermediate category of “ostensibly achievable” exclusion criteria, as Naylor does, does not overcome this problem. Naylor, *Social Closure*, 63.

[57] _____ Keene, “Social Status,” 953.

[58] _____ Keene, “Social Status,” 954.

[59] _____ Keene, “Social Status,” 948, also 952.

[60] _____ Naylor, *Social Closure*, 4.

[61] _____ Naylor, *Social Closure*, 5.

[62] _____ Naylor, *Social Closure*, 63.

[63] _____ For excellent recent research on the international system from anticolonial/non-European perspectives, see e.g., Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Hendrik Spruyt, *The World Imagined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[64] _____ For this point see Silvia Rodríguez Maeso and Marta Araújo, *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Zeynep Gulsah Capan, “Decolonising International Relations?,” *Third World Quarterly* 38:1 (January 2017): 1-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1245100>.

[65] _____ Silvia Rodríguez Maeso, and Marta Araújo, “Eurocentrism, Political Struggles and the Entrenched Will-to Ignorance: An Introduction,” In Silvia Rodríguez Maeso and Marta Araújo, eds. *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 1-22.

[66] _____ Pinar Bilgin, "How to Remedy Eurocentrism in IR? A Complement and a Challenge for 'The Global Transformation'," *International Theory* 8:3 (October 2016): 492-501. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971916000178>.

[67] _____ For scholarship that studies system dynamics outside of Europe and in comparison with Europe see, for example, Spruyt, *World Imagined*, or Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).