
BOOK REVIEWS

Dylan Kissane, *Beyond Anarchy: The Complex and Chaotic Dynamics of International Politics* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2011)

Emilian Kavalski,
University of Western Sydney

It seems that despite the transformations in world politics in the last two decades, the realist paradigm still continues to provide the main framework for the understanding and explanation of international relations. Tracing its origins (at least) to the writings of Thucydides, realism has long been perceived as the cornerstone of the discipline. The stature of the realist tradition has allowed it to dominate not only the ivory towers of the academy, but also the bunkers and boardrooms of applied foreign policy making. Thus, despite the search for alternatives, realist theory continues to provide both a point of reference and a benchmark for such explorations. Dylan Kissane's study, however, emphasizes that the stature that realism has acquired is unfounded. He meticulously goes on to debunk the very foundations of realist thinking – the belief in an anarchic international system, in the awareness that this it merely offers a simplified representation of reality.

Thus, by drawing a detailed genealogy of the 'limitations of anarchy' (p. 151), Kissane proceeds to unravel the fallacies of the realist narrative of international affairs. For him, the flaw in the realist's assumptions is the failure to acknowledge that the parsimony offered by the concept of anarchy comes at 'too high a cost to analytical and theoretical utility' (p. 259). Most commentators would have been satisfied to stop here and draw a conclusion that realism is obsolete – and, in fact, many have done just that. Kissane however takes the road less travelled and constructs an alternative explanation of global politics which recognizes their full complexity. Complexity here is not an accidental word. On the contrary, it is a conscious choice which inscribes Kissane within the small, but resilient (and growing) cohort of analysts that employ the frameworks of complexity thinking to both theorize world affairs and inform policy-making.

A number of commentators have noted that the the pervasive randomness of global life has made the climate of post-Cold War interactions distinctly uncertain. Rather than a transitory stage, the persisting dynamism, unpredictability, and change of international politics has puzzled both popular and policy considerations. This has ultimately challenged the dominant frameworks for the study of world politics. It is in this setting that commentators have advocated the infusion of international relations theory with the conjectures of complexity thinking. Kissane's book provides a much needed framing of the complexity alternative to realist thinking.

His analysis presents in an accessible (yet critical) manner the conceptual and methodological innovations prompted by the application of complexity thinking to international relations. In fact, as the book indicates, Kissane's analysis probably provides probably one of the more coherent 'explication[s] of a theory of international relations based upon an assumption of complexity in the place of anarchy' (p. 23).

The complexity research program charted by Kissane intends to rectify conventional analyses of international relations by identifying 'the complexity and unpredictability of the international political system while leaving the possibility for emergent behaviors to be identified, correlated with system states and for the analyst to identify *probable* among the infinite number of *possible* futures' (p. 230). In this setting the study develops four distinct hypotheses to test the application of complexity thinking to the study of international politics. Firstly, complexity suggests the impossibility of prediction, especially of predicting long-term developments. Secondly, assumptions about world affairs resting on a sub-set of actors' motivations and actions does not offer a valid representation of the reality of international relations. Thirdly, just because sometimes relations between actors appear stable, should not occlude that more often than not interactions are contingent and non-linear. Fourthly, changes in the dynamics and behavior of global life can occur both gradually and abruptly.

Thus, it is in the process of testing these hypotheses that Kissane demonstrates the full potential of the complexity turn to simultaneously refocus the content and context of both the study and practice of global affairs. His analysis makes explicit that 'while international relations studies persist with the notion that the international system is anarchic when, it would seem, there is at least a chance that it may be something else' the disciplinary purview is unlikely to change. Thus, 'without a new paradigm, international relations will continue to misdiagnose the past, hampering its own ability to explain the present, and, one day, predict the storms which sweep the system as we know it today' (p. 266).

In this way, Kissane makes an important first step in insightfully outlining a complexity approach to the study of international relations. Significantly, his perceptive overview indicates that the application of complexity thinking has important implications for the understanding of agency and structure in world affairs. At the same time, the analysis does not shy away from the challenging conceptual, methodological and policy issues attending the complexification of the study and the practice of international relations. One wishes he had spent more time on detailing the complexity alternative; but it is hoped that his next book will do just that. It is expected that it will be eagerly awaited by both students and scholars of international relations. For the time being, however, Kissane has provided them with plenty of food for thought in his extremely erudite and

thoughtful study of the 'complexity' of the complexity paradigm in world politics 'beyond anarchy'.

Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Mano Gabor Toth
University of Cambridge

In her first and very promising book Monika Nalepa presents an entirely new approach to the study of lustration policies in Eastern Europe. The starting point of her enquiry is a simple but intriguing thought: during negotiated transitions, promises of amnesty (i.e. not holding the former political elite accountable for their past actions) made by the opposition are not credible. On the basis of this observation, she identifies three puzzles which constitute the backbone of the book. "Why did opposition parties keep their promises of amnesty? Why and when were those promises broken? Why did the successors of former autocrats break them?" (p.4)

With respect to the first puzzle, she questions the viability of many other explanations referenced in the literature relying on game theoretic models. She demonstrates that a basic model of pacted transitions can only give insufficient answers to the questions above. The simple argument is that the peaceful nature of regime change rests upon the promise of the opposition which guarantees immunity from prosecution to former autocrats who, in exchange, allow free and fair elections to be held. However, as Nalepa explains, such promises are simply not credible because once the opposition ascends to power, nothing prevents it from adopting harsh transitional justice measures. Thus she outlines her own "skeletons in the closet" model as a more informative alternative. In her view, the long tenure of communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe has enabled autocrats in most countries to infiltrate the underground opposition with their own informers. As dissidents were mostly uncertain about the gravity of this problem, the asymmetric information at the roundtables about the identity of these informers and about their level of infiltration was an important bargaining chip in the hands of the well-informed autocrats. The informers are the skeletons in the closet of the opposition and their existence makes the adoption of lustration particularly harmful to the dissidents themselves, which in turn ensures the credibility of the promise of amnesty. She illustrates the different equilibria of this game by the cases of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland using evidence from archives, analytic narratives, and data aggregated from numerous elite interviews.