Can Political Science Stand the Test Of the Eclecticism Of International Relations? The Case Of France

Matthieu Chillaud
chillaud@gmail.com
Postdoctoral researcher (Mobilitas grant MJD 25), Institute of Government and Politics (Tartu – Estonia)

Madrid, XXII\textsuperscript{nd} World Congress of Political Science, 8-12 July 2012.

Section
The Study of Political Science as a Discipline

Panel
The Fragmentation of Political Science as a Discipline

The place of international studies within French political science sometimes fuels hallway, end-of-conference or hiring-committee conversations. But this topic usually only mobilizes unwavering or blasé supporters or, at best, gets passing condescension from some understanding friends; more often, [the International Relations researcher] earns only the disregard of colleagues devoted to less odd fields of research\(^1\).

François Constantin, \textit{Le monde existe, nos instances d'évaluation scientifique l'ont peut-être rencontré}, 1999.

Has the die been cast? Is there anything to add to François Constantin’s rather blunt but certainly accurate assertion? Arguably, it is worth expounding on a problematic issue which has hitherto stimulated only incomplete and biased interest\(^2\). We postulate that the place of International Relations (IR) in the field of French political science clearly makes no exception to the iron law according to which ‘maverick’ disciplines struggle to find a proper, acknowledged place in the galaxy of scholarly sciences\(^3\). This identity issue is so elusive that presenting a paper on the state of IR in France to international scholars, particularly in

\(^1\) Free translation by the author for: ‘\textit{La place des études internationales au sein de la science politique française alimente parfois les conversations de couloir, de fin de colloque ou de commission de recrutement de chercheurs. Mais ce sujet ne mobilise en général que des adeptes inébranlables ou blasés, ou au mieux bénéfice de la condescendance passagère de quelques amis compréhensifs; le plus souvent, il se perd dans l'indifférence de collègues voués à des domaines de recherche moins étranges}’.

\(^2\) The literature which deals with this issue is usually made by academics which are both judge and party.

\(^3\) By an odd happenstance, the writing of this paper is concomitant to current affairs related to this problematic issue. Alain Bauer, a criminologist who worked in Sarkozy’s entourage, recently succeeded in making criminology acknowledged as an autonomous and distinct discipline, obviously thanks to his political connections. Even if most French academics, vehemently hostile, squawked, criminology is nevertheless to become a scholarly field of research recognised as such. Even if this is not the place to pursue the debate, the comparison with IR may not be irrelevant.
a panel called ‘the fragmentation of political science as a discipline’, turns out to be of great pertinence for us. To put it bluntly, the question to be asked is whether political science can pretend to have a monopoly over IR. The affiliation of IR with political science in the Anglo-Saxon world goes back to the works of the Founding Fathers of realism. Hostile to idealism and extremely critical of the disciplinary eclecticism which prevailed during the inter-war period, they argued that only political science had the necessary epistemological tools for understanding the world as it is and not as it should be (Vennesson, 1998: 181-182). Nevertheless, in France, IR did not take hold very firmly. It was quite a bit later that a generation of political scientists began using social science methodologies that were destined to liberate the discipline from public law. Even so, at least until the beginning of the 1960s, IR was still a virgin field within political science. Initially, approaches to IR were separated from political science and were strongly dominated, instead, by law and history. Even now, the issue is not really settled. Moreover, there is a consensus regarding the problem of the compartmentalization of IR largely shared by all French scholars interested in IR, notwithstanding their disciplinary origins. In France, IR suffers unmistakably from a disciplinary identity problem. Not only is the monopoly over the field of IR research contested, but also for political science, IR seems to be only its poor relation. Bogged down in parish-pump quarrels and personal disputes, French IR scholars admit this and sometimes even bemoan the lack of open-mindedness, but even so, some of them are deeply reluctant to accept dialogue and contradiction with their colleagues from other disciplines (and even sometimes from the same discipline). IR scholars still have problems forming associations on the national scale and even if this is changing, the parish-pump quarrels continue to hinder the emergence of a homogeneous community. In any event, this situation does not facilitate attempts to ‘deghettoize’ the French IR community, which is marked primarily by its inward-looking character. It is true that there was reluctance in the community of IR scholars, having almost shut itself off from the rest of the world, to follow the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ mainstream in the field of IR. If this is less true nowadays, IR theory still has trouble finding favour among French scholars.

The aim of this paper is neither to settle the issue between the different ‘schools’, nor to complain about the state of IR⁴, but simply to present and assess the difficulties of IR existing as a field of research in the galaxy of social sciences. Of course, there will be a ‘spill-over’ effect: we may also touch upon the difficulties of political science in general. Mapping the state of IR requires us to first present some peculiarities of the French system (I). Our thesis – that, due to its cross-disciplinarity, IR has problems fitting (solely) into political science – requires analysis of the nature and the content of this multi-faceted field of research (II).

**SOME PECULIARITIES OF FRENCH IR**

IR in France presents some features that remain elusive to outsiders in many respects. First of all, it is worth noting that, whereas the American mainstream was the reference point for IR in many countries, it took time before French academics gave up their self-centered perspective. Meanwhile, other disciplines, mainly history and law, annexed the academic field of IR. This has had consequences on the current, odd status of IR in the field of social sciences (1). In addition, the lack of acknowledgement of IR scholarship is fuelled by the question of its utility and its relevance in the ‘real’ world (2). Furthermore, the

---

⁴ The author of this article spares a thought here for the francophone British IR scholar A.J. R. Groom. In his presentation titled *International Relations in France: the European and Global Context* during the *Université d’été de relations internationales* which took place near Bordeaux in June 2010, he mentioned that he was always amazed to see French scholars self-flagellating when they analyse the state of IR in their country.
issue of publications, which concerns not only IR as such, tends to stimulate a ‘process of self-reproduction’ of French weaknesses (3).

**French IR against the current**

It has unquestionably become a cliché that the discipline of IR, as such, is definitively American. **Stanley Hoffmann** says as much in the title of his seminal article: *An American Social Science: International Relations (1977)*. As early as 1956, the Franco-German scholar **Alfred Grosser**, in a famous article in the *Revue française de Science politique*, posed the question of whether the study of IR was specifically American. Whereas French universities, in the 1950s, showed strong circumspection at the hands of this new ‘discipline’ coming from the US, advocates of a historical perspective on the study of IR tended to disqualify IR theory as ‘a smoke screen’ (*Duroselle, 1979*). *Gareau (1981: 791)*, for his part, argues that ‘France seems never to have been much impressed by American scientism or the discipline’s movement toward autonomy’. **Jörg Friedrichs** and **Ole Wæver**, both insightful observers of national peculiarities of the discipline, talk bluntly about the French IR community’s (2009: 263) ‘academic self-reliance in the face of American intellectual hegemony’. **Smouts** confirms that by arguing that ‘Mainly, the discipline of international relations in France remained dissociated from issues which were debated in the Anglo-Saxon world in the same period’ (2002: 84). IR was almost a closed book for the French, who were sceptical, impervious or bluntly indifferent to what might happen in the US, and the price of this independence was near-isolation in relation to the American community. The French discipline of IR seemed to be at a greater distance from the Anglo-American mainstream than any other Continental European community of scholars (Friedrichs, 2004: 29). To be sure, Raymond Aron [1905-1983] and his disciples, such as Stanley Hoffmann and Pierre Hassner, were well-known in the *hexagone* as well as abroad. Nevertheless, they seem to be the exception which proves the rule. This brutal assessment would also be true in other French-speaking countries, such as Switzerland and Canada, where references to French scholars of IR are rare (Constantin, 2002: 90). **Friedrichs and Wæver** (2009: 263) note additionally that the ‘distance is reciprocated by the Anglo-American mainstream and by most Western European Communities of International Relations scholars’. Pursuing this assessment, they mention Didier Bigo as an exception; Bigo ‘became in one decade the second most visible French scholar abroad (…) Bigo became a leading European player in the emerging field of critical security studies and securitization theory (…) partly as an outgrowth of active participation in the ISA journal International Political Sociology’. While they are right in arguing that Bigo is well known abroad, they forget to mention that he is somewhat at the periphery of the French community of IR scholars. Describing Bigo’s works, *Wæver (2012)* even talks about the so-called ‘Paris School’. This term conveys an impression of strength, yet this ‘school’ coming down to Bigo and his Ph.D candidates. His *Centre d’Études sur les Conflits* is almost a one-man enterprise. His work, including his journal *Culture et Conflits*, has had a limited influence in France. It is probably because Bigo works extensively in English with foreigners and scholars evolving outside French academia that he is known abroad. Moreover, it seems that certain French authors or ‘intellectuals’ are better known

---

5 The very stimulating book *International Relations – Still An American Social Science (2001)* is telling. The very few references to French IR are made by (once again) the francophone British IR scholar **A.J.R. Groom** (157-163).

6 Free translation by the author for: ‘Pour l’essentiel, la discipline des relations internationales en France est restée déconnectée des débats qui agitaient le monde anglo-saxon à la même époque’.

7 In French, *l’hexagone* refers to the European mainland of France, which has a vaguely hexagonal shape.
abroad than among the French themselves. For instance, Foucault’s work has stimulated research in some IR theories, especially in critical approaches, whereas in France he remains marginal in the work of IR scholars.

Besides the fact that IR does not constitute a distinct field of study, its affiliation with political science took time to be established. Even now there remains some reluctance to admit this. IR draws on certain scholarly disciplines and creates some subfields in connection with specialists who are still considered to represent their original discipline. How can we explain this compartmentalization?

IR began to mushroom in the UK and especially in the US just after the First World War, with the aim of stimulating research in the wake of Wilsonism. The agenda was to find a cure for the pains contracted during the First World War. It was the halcyon era of ‘liberal internationalism’. Nevertheless, as the League of Nations failed in its mission of pacification, realism began to replace liberal interventionism, thanks to the work of thinkers such as Carr [1892-1982] and Morgenthau [1904-1980]. Political realism went along with the near elimination of the concept of IR as a subdiscipline of law. Nothing on this scale occurred in France. Quite the opposite! Friedrichs (2004: 30) notes that, in the 1940s and 1950s, some scholars were confident that French expertise, with its solid roots in diplomatic history and international law, was better equipped to build up a coherent IR theory than Anglo-American social sciences. Step by step, IR was gradually established in France as a sub-discipline of political science during the academic reforms of the 1960s, but ‘few scholars opted for political science to guide their scholarly production. The large majority continued to borrow their theoretical wisdom from the establishment academic backgrounds of international law and diplomatic history’. At theoretical, and even empirical, the bulk of French IR was impervious to the feuds which took place in America. There were, however, some attempts to give IR its spurs. Raymond Aron, a pioneer in that regard, published Paix et Guerre entre les nations in 1962. Nevertheless, this was more of an essay than a manual. Marcel Merle [1923-2003] published La vie internationale in 1963, and afterwards Sociologie des relations internationales (1982).

8 See, for instance, the contributions in the forum dedicated to Foucault and IR in the review International Political Sociology (2010). Broadly speaking, the philosophers who became so influential in Anglo-Saxon social sciences had little impact on IR scholarship in France itself.

9 Let’s not forget that political science – including IR – is taught in two kinds of institutions. The first, comprising the nine Instituts d’Études Politiques (IEPs), constitutes the most prestigious institutions of graduate education and research in French political science. IEPs which are considered to be Grandes écoles (literally ‘Great Schools’) are higher education establishments outside the mainstream system of public universities. Unlike French public universities, which have an obligation to accept all candidates in the same academic field, the selection criteria of Grandes écoles are competitive. The most prestigious IEP is the one in Paris (Sciences po Paris). Semi-autonomous public establishment, it arose from the old École libre des Sciences politiques in 1945. Afterwards, eight other IEPs were created. These institutions with selective recruitment are relatively independent in comparison with the universities to which they are administratively attached. The other type of institution where teaching takes place is the faculties of law, in which there are some law curricula but also often political science curricula (usually on the master level). This dates back to 1954, when a national regulation introduced political science as a compulsory discipline. Note that in law curricula (which usually also include courses in other social sciences, such as sociology and political science), IR courses are usually run by lawyers, whereas in political science curricula they are run either by lawyers or political scientists. What is really odd in the French system is that political science is not exclusively taught in either IEPs or faculties of law.

10 We are extremely well informed about the various disciplines which dealt with international issues during the interwar period, thanks to the chapter by Pierre Renouvin in the fascinating book edited by UNESCO in 1950 (pp. 579-585). This book is a real mine of information on the institutionalisation of political science all over the world.


12 He had defended a doctoral dissertation in law on the Trials of Nuremberg. See Badie and Pellet, (1993).
4\textsuperscript{th} edition 1988\textsuperscript{13}. Step-by-step manuals integrating debates on major IR theories were published\textsuperscript{14}. Some of these were written by academics coming from the galaxy of Sciences po and CERI (Centre d'Études et de Recherche internationale)\textsuperscript{15}. Originating from inside political science, this trend transposed its methods and approaches from the national to the international level. It is worth mentioning Badie and Smouts (1992, 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition 1999; 2000), Smouts (1998) and the launching of the review Culture et Conflicts by Bigo (Smouts, 1995: 111-115). Other work was conducted in the framework of realism and strategic issues. The main advocate of this approach is Jean-Jacques Roche (1994, 8\textsuperscript{th} edition 2010; 2001). Dario Battistella published a very stimulating manual (2003, 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition 2009), which comes from his teachings at Sciences po Bordeaux. Josepha Laroche, professor of political science at La Sorbonne, espouses a sociological approach to IR, chiefly from the perspective of international political economy (2000). Pascal Vennesson (1997; Caplow and Vennesson, 2000) take an interest in military sociology. Frédéric Ramel and David Cumin (2002, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition 2010) published an interesting book Philosophie des Relations internationales. Thomas Lindemann (2008) is almost certainly the only scholar in France to work exclusively on constructivism, a research agenda neglected by most French researchers. Saurugger (2009) from Sciences po Grenoble wrote what is probably the first manual to make the link between theory and European Union studies.

The issue of the utility of IR

Professional outlets for students or specialists in IR (theory) may be problematic to find. To begin with, while it is not atypical to change positions (academic, political advisor or official, pundit, journalist, etc.) on a regular basis in numerous comparable countries, in France the compartmentalization is firmly established in the culture. It is extremely rare (though not non-existent) for an academic to have a position in the upper levels of administration, or vice versa. As Jean-Jacques Roche emphasises, there is an absence of links between the highest political functions and scholars in IR; consequently, academic expertise is bound to stay confined to its own sphere (Roche, 2002: 101). Indirectly, this has the consequence that most scholars, in their ivory towers, are barely aware of the professional realities of the non-academic world, and are unable to support their students in pursuing non-academic career paths. It is detrimental, then, that outlets for IR scholars in the academic world are extremely limited. Those who have completed a doctoral dissertation in political science marked IR and have the good luck to be hired are not even guaranteed IR teaching, insofar as the allocation of lecturing tasks still depends on factors that are not always rational. Thus, some political scientists are forced to teach courses in public law because their institution already has enough courses in political science, even while some IR courses may be run by lawyers without any expertise in political science of IR. Jean-Jacques Roche, one of the most famous French IR scholars, reports, not without irony, that when he was hired at Sciences po Grenoble, his IR profile was not really considered to be an asset. This is why he was asked to teach comparative institutions rather than IR (Roche, 2002: 104).

\textsuperscript{13} It was probably because Marcel Merle assumed his role of ‘creator’ that he was willing to see his book as an essay rather than a manual. (Merle, 1982: XIV).

\textsuperscript{14} As we shall see later, there have been a myriad of manuals on IR since the 1970s. Nevertheless, very few of them integrate the problematic of IR theory.

\textsuperscript{15} CERI is a research center in political science with strong links between IR and area studies, and between domestic political systems and the sociology of international ones. The meaning of its earlier acronym was Centre d’Études des Relations internationales. To stress the complementarity between IR and comparative political sociology, it was eventually decided, in 1976, to change the name to Centre d’Études de Recherches internationales, with an alteration of ‘Relations’ to ‘Recherches’ (research).
To pose the question of whether IR is useful is also to question the utility of IR theories. If the student wants to become a pundit or a journalist, does (s)he really need to be good at IR theory? And even if he wants to become a researcher in a think tank, does he need to know theoretical traditions and currents of thoughts in IR? Besides, all French think tanks carry out policy-oriented research. IR theories may be accused of not responding to the demands of the paymaster, increasingly seeking immediate results. As meager as it is, public financing remains crucial, as it can provide a basis for research which does not respond *stricto sensu* to the typical demands of clients. The problem is that France, unlike other countries, has no endowments that could stimulate research by measures exempted from taxation. In contrast to other comparable countries, like Britain and Germany, this dearth of powerful endowments to stimulate research is extremely detrimental to the development and strengthening of an already fragile discipline (Hubert-Rodier, 2007; Chillaud, 2009: 247). It would be dangerous to conclude that, as IR theory cannot demonstrate its economic value or potential, it is bound to be confined to a secondary role or condemned to disappear. As far as high civil servants are concerned, chiefly those who work for the Quai d’Orsay, they do not see the point of theory. International issues are still seen, to a certain extent, as being a state prerogative. Hence, French diplomats – who are usually described as being obsessed with logic and principles at the expense of practical results – often try to be their own theorists, which leaves little room for academics normally fulfilling that role in other fields (Chillaud, 2009: 244). Most courses taught at the École Nationale d’Administration (ENA) only deal with theory at the margins (Friedrichs and Wæver, 2009: 267). Yet, as argued by Stephen Walt (1998: 29), theory is important even for policymakers and practitioners: ‘Those who conduct foreign policy often dismiss academic theorists (…), but there is an inescapable link between the abstract world of theory and the real world of policy. We need theories to make sense of the blizzard of information that bombards us daily’. The problem is comparable in media. The pundit is asked to enlighten the public. He must be clear and should avoid jargon; failing this, his toolbox of theories may become mumbo jumbo to the general public. In such a context, ‘empirical-descriptive’ approaches may match what is expected of the media better, even though this work has no conceptual content. In all events, as Friedrichs and Wæver (2009: 263) note, public intellectuals tend to be more visible in the French media than IR scholars. France has a long tradition which may take foreigners aback: the active political role of the ‘intellectuals’. French intellectuals have been expected to intervene in the political debates of the day, and have considered themselves to be entitled and obliged to.

---

16 There are three major French think tanks (*Institut français de Relations internationales*/IFRI, *Fondation pour la Recherche stratégique*/FRS and *Institut de Relations internationales et stratégiques*/IRIS) to which one may add a research center integrated into the military administration (*Institut de Recherche stratégique de l’École militaire*/IRSEM) and another one which depends on the *Centre national de Recherche scientifique*/CNRS, the *Centre d’Étude de Recherches internationales*/CERI. If the latter is certainly the most open to theories (see, for instance, Ariel Colonomos’ work), this is probably because it belongs to the CNRS (a state organ) and as such it does not fear the paymasters’ vagaries.

17 We might point out, nevertheless, that some significant French academic institutions were set up thanks to American foundations. For example, the prestigious *La Maison des Sciences de l’Homme* was mainly financed by the Ford Foundation. Let’s also mention the *Fondation nationale des Sciences politiques*, which was financed *inter alia* by the Rockfeller Foundation.

18 Even in the US, the problem is similar. In a *Washington Post* column (2009), Joseph Nye has lamented the growing gap between theory and practice in the field of IR. ‘Scholars are paying less attention to questions about how their work relates to the policy world, and in many departments a focus on policy can hurt one’s career. Advancement comes faster for those who develop mathematical models, new methodologies or theories expressed in jargon that is unintelligible to policymakers’. One of the reasons is that there is a persistent chasm between what ‘suppliers’ of social research offer and what the prospective ‘users’ of this research seek.
Very frequently, this extends beyond debate to action. For instance, the ‘philosopher’ Bernard-Henri Levy (who is not an academic) has played a significant role in pushing President Sarkozy to intervene in Libya. It would be almost unthinkable for a standard academic scholar – as brilliant and diplomatic as he may be – to bear a similar role of the Prince’s adviser. In any case, his political theories would likely have less effect than any kind of alleged philosophical theories.

The issue of publications

When it comes to publications, IR in France suffers from the same impairments as political science, but undoubtedly to a greater extent. Several peculiarities pertain to the French system. Here we list at least three which are closely connected.

First, unlike most other countries, there is no acknowledgement of the system of peer-review. In this regard, a weird hybrid system has established itself. Other than a handful of journals, no academic journal uses the peer-review system. In loco, most of them use the concept of ‘Comité de lecture’ or ‘Comité de rédaction’ in order to give a scientific veneer. In principle, the system is the following: when someone submits a paper, the director or the editor of the review will choose someone within the comité or will give the paper to all the members of the comité. The standard of anonymity may or may not be respected. After a rigorous reading (in principle), some amendments will be proposed. Reality is a bit more complex and departs from this theoretical procedure, in the sense that very few journals in fact use this system. It is usually the editor who will decide whether an article is accepted or not. It seems that most ‘scientific’ journals take advantage of the great confusion between the English expression ‘peer-review’ and the French ‘comité de lecture/rédaction’. As all journals have a ‘comité de lecture’ and/or a ‘comité de rédaction’ on the second cover page, all of them pretend to use a scientific method in selecting articles. Blind reviews by academic peers is similarly lacking in academic books. While there is undeniably a significant production of books in international relations (atlas, manuals, theses, etc.), there is no scientific counterweight, mainly because they are very rarely peer-reviewed. Certain publishers saturate the markets of books with rather disreputable scientific content. This is usually the case when the cover of the book presents the author as a ‘géopoliticien’, a catch-all expression which has the sole advantage of being a selling point. The absence of peer-review system does not mean that the baby should be thrown out with the bathwater. There may be some excellent books, but the conditions in which they have been published do not grant them a priori scientific credibility.

This leads us to a second peculiarity: in France, it is extremely rare to find French publications in English. Speaking of publications by French scholars about EU integration, Andy Smith (2000: 663) argues rightly that ‘the low visibility of French political science in international publications and debates about the EU can, of course, be partially explained as a problem of language. There is no getting away from the fact that until very recently most French lecturers and researchers have been remarkably slow to publish and present their work in English’. The problem is not the language per se – even if only French-speakers can access this literature – but rather a true lack of credibility, a discipline,

---

19 We might mention inter alia the Revue française de Science politique, Critique internationale, Culture et Conflit, Revue d’Étude comparative Est/Ouest, Politique européenne. The journal Politique étrangère has adopted a hybrid system. Some of the articles are selected through a process of peer review, others are not.

20 The author of these lines has edited a book published by a very famous French publisher well known to churn out academic books. It was quite surprising to hear the director of the series telling him that he read the book after it was published, sic!

21 A basic explanation may lie in the cost of publishing. In France, it is rare for universities to take care of the publication of doctoral dissertations, and if new doctors want to publish, most of the ‘serious’ publishers ask for at least 2,000 euros.
especially concerning IR, usually being assessed according to international (essentially English-speaking) criteria rather than national ones. For that matter, it is probably because of the linguistic discongruence that the system of peer-review is not acknowledged. In any case, French scholars, unlike their colleagues in other countries, seem not to be concerned by the law of necessity, ‘publish or perish’. In addition, their participation in international conferences is not necessarily an advantage for their career. This situation is truly problematic and is an obstacle to the deghettoizing of French IR. Thirdly, it must be acknowledged that the lack of interest in IR theory is reflected by an absence of journals especially dedicated to theory. While there are some sporadic articles on IR theory, they will be next to more empirical articles. Observe also that some significant contributions to IR theories have been published not in IR reviews, but in the Revue française de Science politique (Aron, Hoffmann, Duroselle, etc.) The oldest IR review is Politique étrangère launched in 1936 in the framework of the Centre d’Étude de Politique étrangère, which became the Institut français de Relations internationales in 1979. Nowadays, it defines itself as a policy oriented journal. In 1991, Pascal Boniface, in the framework of the Institut de Relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS), launched the journal Relations internationales et stratégiques, which later became La Revue internationale et stratégique. Despite a rather provincial image at the outset, it is now considered to be an important journal in the field of IR, even though sometimes the authors’ profiles may not be very academic. An interesting initiative was launched in 2000 with the Annaire français de Relations internationales, run at first by Jean-Jacques Roche and Serge Sur, and afterwards by Serge Sur alone, following a personal dispute between the two of them. It publishes around sixty papers a year by a wide range of

22 There is an excellent synthesis on this issue by D’Aoust (2012: 120-131).
23 Ole Wæver’s studies on the national peculiarities of IR are not comprehensive, of course, because he does not speak French (or because publications in France are not in English). Moreover, if he overestimates the influence of Didier Bigo, it is because the latter is one of the only French scholars to publish in English.
24 The author of these lines, who does not work in France, always has numerous problems knowing what to tick off in the electronic CV of the faculty where he works. A publication which is prestigious in France may barely merit the label of scientific publication abroad.
25 During his presentation entitled L’approche française des RI during the Université d’été de relations internationales (June 2010), Bertrand Badie said that when that he tried to launch a new journal in IR, his project received harsh reception among his colleagues, who did not like the idea that their works could be filtered by the peer-review system (sic!). It would be interesting to carry out a thorough study on the problematic issue of publication and advancement in academic careers. It seems it is thanks to their extremely protected status that French academics can possibly pursue a career without being obliged to publish. Jobard’s study (2010: 117-133), which concerns only researchers from the Centre national de Recherche scientifique, offers a few comments to add to the discussion.
26 Ole Wæver (1998: 699) notes that at the European meetings of International Studies Association, the flagship organization of IR scholars, ‘the biggest contingency is the British, with Scandinavians second, Germans third, and the French as well as various East Central and Southern Europeans making up small groups that add up to a third of the attendance’.
27 Let’s point out the existence of an extremely interesting journal Le Trimestre du Monde which has unfortunately disappeared. This journal dedicated three of its issues to IR theory: Le trimestre du monde, Les théories des relations internationales à l’épreuve des faits, n°15, 3ème trimestre 1991; Le trimestre du monde, Théorie et pratique de la décision internationale, n°23, 3ème trimestre 1993; Le trimestre du monde, Les relations internationales: les nouveaux débats théoriques, n°27, 3ème trimestre 1994.
28 Moreover, the first to host papers in IR was precisely the Revue française de science politique (founded in 1951). Libia Billordo (2005) notes that IR, among all the sub-fields of political science, is the third, in terms of amount of papers, in the ranking after political sociology and comparative politics.
29 Set up by Thierry de Montbrial who was previously at the head of the Centre d’Analyse et de Prévision within the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
30 Among the authors, we find, beside ‘real’ academics, some journalists, political leaders, civil servants, association or NGO leaders, etc.
31 Serge Sur has also edited the bi-monthly review Questions internationales since 2003.
contributors, all in line with IR. Among the few journals that are willing to accommodate papers with a more theoretical perspective are Critique internationale and Cultures et conflits. The first one is edited from within the IEP of Paris and the second is edited by Didier Bigo within the Centre d'Étude sur les Conflits. Nevertheless, their editorial doctrines are different. Contributions in Critique internationale are characterised by a certain eclecticism, insofar as they are drawn from the social sciences (political science, sociology, history, economics, demography, anthropology) and related disciplines (law and political philosophy). This reflects the transdisciplinary spirit of the research agenda of CERI32. There is also the interesting review Politiques européennes33, a journal which accommodates high quality articles (in French and in English) related to the European construction. We must also include journals in geopolitics, such as Hérodothe, Outre-Terre and Géoéconomie, and in strategy, like Stratégique and Défense nationale.

In addition, the question of the scientific acknowledgement of journals has recently been relaunched. The Agence d'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement supérieur (AERES), created in 2007, has tried to construct a system of classification with a list of scientific journals for each section of the Conseil national des Universités34 (CNU), ‘the aim being to set in order to facilitate the action of reviewers according to minimal criteria’ (Maillard, 2012). Thunderous protests from the community of political scientists against the criteria of assessment (see Communiqué de presse en date du 14 octobre 200835 of the French association of political science in which it ‘questions the criteria initiated’) led to a softening of methods but not of the principle of a list36. Note that this list jumbles together all kinds of reviews in political science, regardless of their subdisciplines. Additionally, some prestigious reviews of IR are not listed37. Others, just as significant (from the perspective of the author of these lines), are named in the lists of other disciplines38. This demonstrates not just the complications for IR of positioning itself in the galaxy of social sciences but also the problems of meeting international rankings and the lack of acknowledgement for ‘big’ international reviews39.

32 An email of Laurence Louer (02/08/2011), the editor of Critique internationale drew our attention to the fact that ‘Critique internationale is neither a review of IR nor a review of area studies. It is a multidisciplinary review which deals with international politics, in the meaning of countries other than France (articles dealing with aspects of domestic politics and international relations from other countries)’. [Critique internationale n’est ni une revue de RI ni de area studies: c’est une revue multidisciplinaire qui traite de politique internationale, au sens des pays autres que la France (articles portant sur des aspects de politique intérieure et de relations internationales des pays étrangers)].

33 It is worth noting that this review, despite its ‘provincial’ image, makes serious use of the peer-review system.

34 The CNU, which is made up of academics, is the state organ in charge of accreditation for Ph.D scholars who intend to continue in the academic world just after they defend their doctoral dissertation. Without the ‘passport’ granted by the CNU, it is not possible to apply for a position in a university or in an IEP. The CNU is divided into groups of sections. There are as many sections as there are disciplines. The one in charge of political science is section 04.


37 Such as Politique étrangère, on the basis that it is not run by ‘real’ scholars from universities. Other journals in English are also absent, like Cooperation and Conflict, ranked 24 out of 73 in International Relations and 54 out of 141 in Political Science by the 2010 Journal Citation Reports and the Journal of International Relations and Development ranked 47 out of 73 in International Relations and 93 out of 139 in Political Science by the same reports.

38 For instance, in the public law list (Annuaire français de Relations internationales) or in the geography one (Hérodothe).

39 It would be interesting to carry out a study on the amount of publications of French political scientists – IR scholars included – in English-speaking journals. While this is not the place to pursue the debate, it is regrettable that for French academics, publishing in ‘big’ English-language journals is not always ‘academically profitable’ in spite of an official discourse which suggests the contrary.
THE UNCERTAIN PLACE OF THEORY AND THE ELUSIVE BALANCE BETWEEN ECLECTICISM AND SYNCRETISM

Because IR is a crossroad discipline (1), the blurred definition of its disciplinary borders has consequences on the identification of its proper field of study (2).

International relations at the crossroad of other disciplines

Several disciplines can claim the paternity of IR: history and law in particular, to which we may also add geography. In regard to sociology, it is probably the discipline closest to political science.

The leading lights of the French school of IR history were Pierre Renouvin [1893-1974] and his disciple Jean-Baptiste Duroselle [1917-1994]. In their *Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales* (Duroselle and Renouvin, 1964), both tried to transcend the limits of traditional, atheoretical French scholarship. They used their encyclopaedic knowledge to overcome the limitations of incidental history and the factual features of traditional diplomatic history. To that end, Pierre Renouvin formulated some general propositions about the interaction between the ‘deep forces’ of history (i.e. geographic factors, demographic conditions, economic forces, financial issues, national feeling including nationalism and pacifism) and the activities of statesmen. The history of IR now sought to replace the history of diplomacy (Duroselle, 1952 and 1956). According to Renouvin, traditional diplomatic history, which settled for describing relations between states from a purely political angle – i.e. interactions between statesmen – was indeed oversimplistic (Duroselle, 1975). Renouvin and Duroselle were both dubious about the actions of political scientists. They saw them as a sort of ‘illusionist’ using a nebulous vocabulary, unconcerned by empirical realities. ‘The expression ‘theory of international relations’ enjoys a certain prestige since it entails that some initiates know the secret of things and inhabits a congenial sort of twilight zone favourable to the most abstruse interpretations’ (Duroselle, 1992: 17). Duroselle warned about ‘the return in force of the scholastic that we thought dead, which consists in seeking the truth not in phenomena or events, but in the writings of gurus’ and against ‘the abuse in the reification of concepts: too many researchers think they have made a discovery when they construct concepts. Most of them find there only the possibility of concealing the vacuum with a thick cloud of woolly words’ (quoted by Merle, 1983: 406). If relations between historians of IR and political scientists of IR are peaceful nowadays, there still remain some after-effects.

Josepha Laroche (2004: 210-211) argues that because history of IR was predominant in France, it contributed to constructing a representation of IR characterised by ‘an exclusive predominance granted to the diplomatico-strategic dimension; a postulate that there would be a watertight compartment between the domestic and the international; the methodological refusal to grant to the analysis the proper place of non-state actors and

---

40 Free translation by the author of the original: ‘L’expression ‘théorie des relations internationales’ jouit d’un certain prestige car elle laisse supposer que certains initiés connaissent le secret des choses et elle baigne dans un agréable clair-obscur propice aux manipulations les plus obscures’.

41 Free translation by the author of the original: ‘le retour en force de la scolastique on croyait morte et qui consiste à chercher la vérité non dans les phénomènes ou les événements mais dans les écrits des grands maîtres penser’ et contre ‘l’abus dans la réification des concepts: trop de chercheurs croient qu’ils font une découverte lorsqu’ils fabriquent des concepts. La plupart n’y trouvent que la possibilité de voiler le vide par un épais nuage de mots inintelligibles’.

42 We point out that at least one scholar – Thomas Lindemann – has succeeded in his conversion from historian of IR to politist of IR. See his very interesting chapter on the links between history and IR (2004).
economic phenomena\textsuperscript{43}. These features, according to the same author, are also found within international public law. International law ‘sees international relations exclusively as interstate relations; overestimates the state and diplomatico-strategic relations; grants legal norms an excessive effectiveness and regulatory capacity, to say the least; to the contrary, it is unaware of the existence and the decisive weight of numerous other actors – those chiefly without legitimacy, such as mafias – which nevertheless have a decisive impact on international relations’\textsuperscript{44}. It is true that, as shown in the first part of this paper, IR was extremely influenced by the work of lawyers\textsuperscript{45}. But is this really so important? Moreover, even the politist Marie-Claude Smouts (1987: 281) notes that ‘the line between the development of contemporary international public law and international politics is blurred, and the contribution of French legal scholars to the understanding of international relations has not been insignificant’. For instance, the famous lawyer Georges Scelle [1878-1961] went beyond international law stricto sensu in his analysis of the international society. In the US, prominent IR scholars were originally lawyers (Wright, Morgenthau, etc.). Nevertheless, the problem may not be the paternity of IR per se, but rather the dynamics of self-reproduction between academics belonging to the same discipline. Thus, Smith notes that (2000: 666) ‘French political science emerged in the 1950s and 1960s essentially as a complement to, rather than as competition for, the teaching of public law. Many of its founding members had been trained as lawyers, and most of them continued to conduct their research and teaching in the formalist style of their forefathers’. Additionally, the international law tradition tends to describe international institutions chiefly atheoretically. This is reflected by the content of numerous books in IR published by lawyers\textsuperscript{46}. We may add to this the conflict between law on one hand and, on the other hand, political science, which seeks to progressively emancipate itself from...law\textsuperscript{47}.

\textsuperscript{43} Free translation of the author for: ‘la prédominance exclusive accordée à la dimension politico-stratégique; le postulat qu'il existerait un cloisonnement étanche entre l'interne et l'international; le refus méthodologique de conférer dans l'analyse toute leur place aux acteurs non étatiques et aux phénomènes étatiques’.

\textsuperscript{44} Free translation of the author: ‘appréhende les relations internationales exclusivement comme des relations inter-étatiques; survalorise l'État et les relations diplomatico-stratégiques; prête aux normes juridiques une efficacité et une capacité de régulation pour le moins excessive ; a contrario, il méconnaît l'existence et le poids déterminant de quantité d'autres acteurs – ceux notamment dépourvus de légitimité comme par exemple les mafias – et qui exercent pourtant un impact déterminant sur les relations internationales’.

\textsuperscript{45} We are well informed about the first steps of IR teachings – in fact, international law teachings – in France just after the Second World War thanks to the amazing report made by Manning (1954) entitled The University Teaching of Social Sciences. International Relations.

\textsuperscript{46} See, for instance, Colliard (1956), Zorgbibe (1975) and Huntzinger (1987). Note that their approach to studying IR was different. Claude-Albert Colliard, professor of law at La Sorbonne, published Institutions Internationales in 1956 (re-edited 10 times, 1995). His book, which is extremely descriptive, grants no place to theories. Only classical realism finds favor with Charles Zorgbibe, who is sceptical about theories. Jacques Huntzinger, who used to be professor at Nanterre, is a real maverick since, in spite of his qualities as a lawyer, he tends to find little to choose between history and law in IR. A very interesting work on the link between IR and international law is made in the book Droit international et relations internationales (Société française de Droit international, 2010), published after a colloquium in 2008 dedicated to this issue.

\textsuperscript{47} There was unquestionably a strong influence of lawyers on IR, but it might be a mistake to overrate their influence on the institutionalisation of political science. See the very interesting interview with George Lavau in the political science journal Politix (1989: 133). To the question ‘How do you explain that it is so often said that political science has shaped its identity against law? (‘Comment expliquer alors que l'on dise aussi souvent que la science politique s'est construite contre le droit?’), he responded: it is Maurice ‘Duverger who had an interest in spreading this idea (...) he was interested in creating his ‘kingdom’ within faculties of law, in spreading the idea that it was really from constitutional law and political institutions and against a law background that political science shaped itself, whereas historically this was largely wrong’ (‘Duverger avait intérêt à répandre cette idée-là (...) il avait intérêt à créer son ‘royaume’ à l'intérieur des facultés de droit, à

Can Political Science Stand the Test Of The Eclecticism Of International Relations? The Case Of France 11
Nowadays, while the affiliation of IR with political science is widely accepted in universities, there are still some ‘pockets’ here and there where legal or historical traditions are present, even to the point that IR courses are run by lawyers.

While the association between geography and political science is quite old — though the draft has not taken well\textsuperscript{48} — the tie between geography and international relations has been rather marginal, though not missing entirely. Jean Gottmann [1915-1994] published \textit{La politique des États et leur géographie} in 1951. The work of Jacques Lévy (1991 et 2000) and Michel Foucher (1991, 1997 and 2000) must also be mentioned. Gérard Dussouy, previously teacher of geography in high school, later professor of political science at the University of Bordeaux (after having written a doctoral thesis on the link between geography and IR, 2001), has recently published a treatise in three volumes on geopolitics (2006, 2007 and 2009). Nevertheless, it is Yves Lacoste who is considered the pioneer of the French school of geopolitics. Originally coming from the radical left and a specialist of underdevelopment, Yves Lacoste shocked a number of his peers by publishing ‘\textit{La géographie, ça sert d’abord à faire la guerre}’ (‘The main use of geography is in warfare’)\textsuperscript{49} in 1976. That same year, he established the French geopolitical journal \textit{Hérodote}. His first publications received a frosty reception, even (and particularly) among his colleagues on the left, most of them fearing a rehabilitation of Nazi \textit{Geopolitik}. In the first issue of \textit{Hérodote}, bearing the subtitle ‘\textit{Stratégies, Géographies, Idéologies}’, he did not even use the word ‘geopolitics’. Lacoste (1996) justified this ‘omission’ in the following terms:

\begin{quotation}
\textit{in 1976, there was absolutely no way to make any references to geopolitics (…) in the West, as in the East, this term was synonymous with a reference to Nazism, that is to say, the opposite of our opinions. We could not imagine that seven years later, at the end of 1982, Hérodote, without changing its orientation, would bear the subtitle ‘Review of geography and geopolitics’. One can assess (…) the speed of this change (…) that of a large portion of the general opinion. The latter has adopted the word ‘geopolitics’ without any concern as to its dark historical origins}.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quotation}

The violence of the arguments within the academic community following Yves Lacoste’s publications led to an extremely rare sanction: in 1980, the minister of research Alice Saunier-Seîte — who was originally a geographer — decided to demote him from Professor to \textit{Maître de Conférences} (Associate-Professor/Docent)\textsuperscript{51}. Although his work is indubitably of high quality, he is considered to be a maverick in the French IR community even now.

Apart from an exclusively theoretical approach, or a purely historical perspective, the sociology of IR sees international facts as social facts. The first scholar to point out the link

\[\text{répandre l'idée que vraiment c'était à partir du droit constitutionnel et des institutions politiques et contre le droit que la science politique s'était construite, alors qu'histoivement c'était largement faux}.\]

\textsuperscript{48} It is worth mentioning André Sigfried [1875-1959], who was among the founding fathers of political science in France and a disciple of the famous French geographer Paul Vidal de La Blache. His major book, \textit{Le tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest} (1913) was a geographical and sociological explanation of electoral behaviour that set the foundation for political science.

\textsuperscript{49} His research trip to Vietnam in 1972 had a strong influence on his work; he was deeply convinced that only the association between physical geography and human geography could lead to a better understanding of the conflicts in Vietnam.

\textsuperscript{50} Free translation of the author: ‘\textit{en 1976 il n’était absolument pas question de faire référence à la géopolitique (…) à l’Ouest, comme à l’Est, ce terme était alors synonyme de référence au nazisme, c’est-à-dire l’inverse de nos opinions politiques. Nous ne nous doutions pas que sept ans plus tard, fin 1982, Hérodote sans changer d’orientation, prendrait comme sous-titre revue de géographie et de géopolitique}. On peut mesurer (…) la rapidité du changement (…) celui d’une grande partie de l’opinion. Celle-ci a adopté le mot géopolitique sans se soucier de ses sombres origine historiques’.

\textsuperscript{51} The anecdote is described by Minassian (2010).
between IR and sociology was Jacques Vernant [1912-1985], in an article entitled Vers une sociologie des relations internationales (1952) in the review Politique étrangère. Though it remained relatively unnoticed – probably because the author, the general-secretary of the Centre d’Étude de Politique étrangère, was considered a maverick in the academic world – this article deserves credit for being the first to emphasize the importance of IR being composed, first and foremost, of ‘social facts’. ‘Events or IR are in an environment, namely international society (...) The international society is, doubtless, a specific form, but it is not radically heterogeneous from societies in general’.

Raymond Aron also espoused a sociological approach to IR. Defining sociological history as the ‘indispensable intermediary between theory and events’ (1962: 26), Aron argued that a social theory of IR had to be equidistant from general theory and atheoretical historical scholarship. He had a decisive influence on major research in IR, yet he represented a minority trend in French sociology, probably because he was more influenced by German (Weber) than French sociology (Durkheim). His method, that of ‘historical sociology’, was to broaden and systemise the traditional approach of diplomatic history (Aron, 1963).

However, it is Marcel Merle, author of Sociologie des relations internationales, who is considered to have ‘created’ the discipline of IR in universities. He was the first scholar to create a new subject, almost ex nihilo, apart from the more ‘empirico-descriptive’ ones taught so far. ‘It seems that sociology applied to the study of international relations can help by projecting a systematic perspective on a lot of confused events and phenomena which cannot be properly understood if studied separately’ (Merle, 1982: 3). According to two scholars from IEP, Marie-Claude Smouts and Bertrand Badie in their book Le retournement du monde. Sociologie de la scène internationale (coming originally from their teaching at Sciences po), sociology is the best means to reconstruct theoretical frameworks (1992: 19; 2000: 93)

There is a need firstly to reconstruct knowledge, since the contemporary international order is constantly moving away from classical paradigms. Beyond the realist models, which postulate exclusive state sovereignty, or organicist models, which give in to the illusion of the a priori integration of international systems, the sociology of international relations has a duty to reconstruct its theoretical framework. This can be achieved by drawing on new horizons opened up to it by advances in internal sociology, comparative politics and the study of transnational flows’

The role of sociology in IR, for them, is to make conceptual sense of the international realm and events within it, simultaneously redefining and improving the concepts used, rather than finding generalities or contextualizing universally applicable logic (Leander, 1997: 165).

Didier Bigo, who launched the review Culture et Conflit in 1990 (Smouts: 1995) succeeded Marie-Claude Smouts’ teachings at Sciences po. He has promoted an approach to IR which aims to blur the internal and external sociology; he calls this ‘international political sociology’.

Frédéric Charillon and Guillaume Devin, also from...
Sciences po, should also be mentioned. Both took an interest in the sociology of international relations. The former became interested in foreign policy in the framework of political sociology (2002), whereas the latter wrote an interesting short book Sociologie des relations internationales; (2007; 3-4)

by constructing a large enough framework of analysis, the aim consists in emphasising continuities and discontinuities in the mode of actions, constraints and dynamics that actors contribute to creating but into which they are also, more or less involuntarily, taken. That is the perspective proposed here under the name of ‘sociology of international relations’, but which could be called ‘world politics’ or ‘international politics’ elsewhere.55

In addition, in France there is a strong tradition of area studies being closely linked to IR. Smouts (1987: 283) sums it up as follows: ‘Country or regional specialists who use the methods of political science to analyse the political nature of societies other than French society are considered – perhaps mistakenly – to be International Relations scholars and are grouped in the same research centres as those who are interested in phenomena reaching across national boundaries’. According to Friedrichs (2004b: 32), this is probably because of France’s colonial past. It is, moreover, the reason why considerable research on development (Feuer and Cassan: 1995) and on humanitarian issues (Ryfman: 2002) has been conducted in France. A significant number of IR scholars took a particular interest in the Third World. As in all social sciences, some socialist authors have tried to use Marxist tools in their works. The theory of imperialism, research on the relation between underdevelopment and the export of raw materials or dependence on foreign capital have led some academics to take interest in international economic exchanges and relations between political forces on which they depend (Deriennic and Moi, 44). Some politically engaged theories of IR mushroomed in the 1970s. The pioneer in that regard was Pierre-François Gonidec, professor at La Sorbonne. He attempted to introduce the political ideology of orthodox Soviet Marxist-Leninism into the study of IR (Gonidec, 1977). Edmond Jouve also dedicated most of his work to the Third World. The Third World has seen the looting of its resources substituted with political subordination. Jouve was the first of many authors to apply neo-Marxist notions like néo-impérialisme, échange inégal, développement inégal et développement du sous-développement (Jouve, 1992). In fact, Third-Worldism was an ideology aiming more to promote the interests of former colonised countries than a rational doctrine. The existence of French ‘sovietology’ (Mink, 2002) should also be mentioned, which may have voiced criticisms, questioning whether the field was perhaps too politically committed.

While this Marxist approach was quite significant, surprisingly, neither peace research nor conflict resolution met with any major success. However, it is worth mentioning Gaston

55 Free translation of the author for: ‘En bâtissant un cadre d’analyse suffisamment large, l’objectif consiste ainsi à souligner les continuités et les discontinuités dans les modes d’actions, les contraintes et les dynamiques que les acteurs contribuent à créer mais dans lesquels ils sont également plus ou moins involontairement pris. Telle est la perspective proposée ici sous le nom de ‘sociologie des relations internationales’ mais qui pourrait s’intituler ailleurs ‘world politics’ ou ‘international politics’”

56 A small but very telling detail is that Edmond Jouve, supervised the doctoral thesis of the daughter of Gaddafi until recently.
Bouthoul [1896-1980], creator of the term ‘polemology’, a neologism meaning the ‘science of war’ (from the Greek ‘polemos’ and ‘logos’). He wanted to promote a new discipline aiming to prevent war via a more profound understanding of its causes (Bouthoul, 1991). Rather critical of peace researchers whom he suspected of being excessively value-loaded and action-oriented, Bouthoul argued that it was necessary to leave aside considerations of values. His institute, the Institut français de Polémologie (IFP), was set up in 1945 in his small Parisian flat, and in fact remained a one-man-venture until 1965. Actually, his project to create a new discipline met with a harsh reception in universities. Neither Marxist nor completely in line with the orthodox sociological approach, he remained at the fringes of universities, as many ‘handicaps’ kept him from taking up an academic career. In spite of strong intellectual debate following his numerous publications, his project did not survive his death in 1980.

Last but not least, it is imperative to mention strategic studies and other ‘sub-fields’ of IR. From the 1950s, teaching, research and publications in the area of strategic studies began to increase in significance (Romer, 2002), but their significance declined concomitantly with an acknowledgment of the broader agenda of security studies. Hervé Coutau-Bégarie [1956-2012], political scientist and historian, was at the origin of the renaissance of ‘strategy’ as a discipline. He published a monumental treatise on the subject (Coutau-Bégarie, 1999; 7th edition, 2011), inter alia. It is regrettable that his work, despite its remarkable quality, is marginal in the French scientific field.

IR is therefore at the crossroad of a set of disciplines; nobody questions that. Serge Sur (1995: 41) talks about ‘methodological pluralism’. Different approaches will be used depending on the object of study.

For describing the shaping of contemporary universal society, we shall take advantage of history; for outlining bases of the international legal system and the main relations between states, a legal method will be used; we shall refer to institutional analysis for showing the functioning and the role of international organizations or state organs which operate in foreign relations; geography, physical or human, enables the understanding of certain constraints of security or some elements of a State’s power; sociology helps to assess the nature and homogeneity of groups, national or sub-national.\(^{57}\)

For Roche (2001: 5), ‘international relations stems from both history and law. It is also at the confluence of philosophy and sociology and hence integrates an increasingly significant economic dimension. Its development is fuelled by successive borrowings.’\(^{58}\). If this eclecticism is widely accepted, the fact remains that there is an issue: one one hand, interdisciplinary is promoted by everyone – notwithstanding their original discipline – but on the other hand, political scientists (probably because they tend to jealously guard their own specificities and prerogatives) may pretend that only their discipline has the necessary epistemological tools to conduct IR, arguing that too much eclecticism can only result in shapeless syncretism. If a scholar who is not a political scientist by background decides to engage in IR, s/he may decide to give up the initial discipline and convert to political

---

\(^{57}\) Free translation of the author for: ‘pour décrire la formation de la société individuelle contemporaine, on tirera profit de l’histoire ; pour exposer les bases du système juridique international et les principales règles des relations entre États, on utilisera une méthode juridique ; on se référera à l’analyse institutionnelle pour rendre compte du fonctionnement et du rôle des organisations extérieures ou des organes États qui interviennent dans les relations extérieures ; la géographie, physique ou humaine, permet de saisir certaines contraintes de sécurité ou certains éléments de puissance d’un État ; la sociologie aide à mesurer la nature et l’homogénéité des groupes nationaux ou sous-nationaux’.

\(^{58}\) Free translation of the author for: ‘Les relations internationales dérivent de l’histoire et du droit. Elles se situent également à la confluence de la philosophie et de la sociologie et intègrent désormais une dimension économique de plus en plus prépondérante. Leurs développements se sont nourris d’emprunts successifs’.

Can Political Science Stand the Test Of the Eclecticism Of International Relations? The Case Of France

15
science. If not, the problem may arise that neither colleagues in political science nor the administration will accept the scholarship quality of the IR scholar based in political science but not abiding by the rules of the discipline. For political scientists, the issue is to know how far IR can borrow from other disciplines, while remaining in the field of political science, whereas for lawyers, historians, geographers, sociologists, etc., the issue is to know how far they can pretend to conduct IR research without being suspected by political scientists of conducting some kind of ‘adulterated’ science\(^{59}\). We may add to this the ‘parish-pump quarrels’ between academics\(^ {60}\). Constantin (2002: 91-92) sums up the problematic issue in the following way:

The current situation results, first of all, in the history of a subject planned in certain curricula of universities; and like all subjects, international relations has been the object of covetousness, provoking its appropriation by fraternities or parishes who claim the monopoly of useful knowledge and attempt to neutralize, or even excommunicate, all applicants not acknowledged by the inner circle, according to power struggles between faculties, if not between colleagues. While it is beyond question to argue that there is history, law, economics, geography, philosophy, sociology (which has begun to be acknowledged), anthropology (which has not yet achieved legitimacy), not to say psychology and even psychoanalysis of international relations, none of these approaches could pretend to have the key to understanding the subject.

\(^{59}\) This identity trouble is fuelled by the odd system of the Conseil national des universités (CNU). From a strictly legal perspective, all theses – whatever their discipline – can be qualified by any kind of sections. In addition, a qualification granted for a section is worth legally for a qualification granted by all the sections. Nevertheless, this is evidently a legal fiction. Because of the scarcity of positions, the candidate will have no chance of being hired if his qualification does not match the discipline of the position. It is technically possible for a non-politist to be ‘accredited’ by the section in political science. The doctrine of section 04 (Conseil national des universités, section 04, 2011), accepts for qualification theses which are not political science theses, if three conditions are met. Firstly, ‘beside the excellence of the dissertation’, it must deal with subjects of direct interest to the discipline of political science. Secondly, the Ph.D, through the doctoral dissertation and scientific articles, must show that s/he masters ‘tools and methods of research of the discipline. He must demonstrate his capacity to mobilize the scientific literature and theories used in political science’. Thirdly, ‘the presence of a politist among the members of the jury’ is essential.

\(^{60}\) The author of these lines spares a thought here for two academics, Jean-Jacques Roche and Serge Sur, for whom he has respect and even admiration. Jean-Jacques Roche, quite well-known for being rather ‘hard-hitting’ for defending political science of IR, had decided to work with Serge Sur, a lawyer who does IR research, in order to set up the Annuaire français de Relations internationales. The honeymoon did not last. After a violent argument, Jean-Jacques Roche walked out, closing the door on further collaboration. Since, he has said to whoever might be interested in hearing him that Serge Sur – because he is a lawyer – cannot properly do IR. One must acknowledge that it is quite difficult to make the distinction between hard feelings and differences in terms of epistemological approaches to IR. See the introduction to the first issue of Annuaire français de Relations internationales (Roche and Sur, 2000: V-IX) in which the two academics seem to be on the same wavelength. These accusations of usurpation were also made in another context. During the CNU 2010/2011 campaign of accreditation, one of the candidates was reproached by one of two reviewers for not having made a good doctoral dissertation in political science because his supervisor (Serge Sur) was a lawyer. Furious, the latter published an open letter (Sur, 2011a) and article in the French newspaper Le Monde (Sur, 2011b). Indeed, this issue seemed to take the shape of personal settling of scores. It was true that beforehand the same reviewer, member of the committee of the agence d’évaluation de la recherche et de l’enseignement supérieur (AERES, 2008) had recommended the closure of Serge Sur’s research center on the grounds that a lawyer could not fairly lead a center which conducts research in the field of IR (since, according to him, only political science can pretend to have a monopoly over IR). If there is no legal hindrance for a professor of public law to supervise Ph.D candidates in political science, it is ‘on behalf of deontological grounds that the CNU demand that supervisors be politists’. (Sadran: 2012).

Before the introduction of the agrégation of political science in 1973 which constituted de jure the autonomy of political science, academics wore two hats: public law and political science. They could supervise doctoral dissertations in either of the two disciplines. Therefore, there was no question about it.
Basically, the pernicious effect comes from the fact that for immediate consequence, practises favouring only one approach have to forget globalism and the complexity of the subject of study.\textsuperscript{61}

The variety of disciplinary fields dealing with international issues prevents the setting up of an autonomous discipline which would claim privilege over this object of study however still elusive. IR has been unable to construct scholarly knowledge with discrete boundaries and, as nature abhors a vacuum, academics from all kinds of disciplines put forward the propinquity of their expertise, in order to appropriate a fragment of the field of IR and proclaim themselves specialists of IR. We return to our initial problem: is it possible to be a specialist of IR without being a political scientist? The question may be in the identification of the gap between theory and reality that leads to the issue of the utility (or futility) of the theorisation of IR.

From empirical description to abstruse conceptualization

‘Policy-oriented scholars conduct empirical work or policy work without feeling an obligation to explicitly engage theory or justify themselves by pointing to theoretical implications. French IR theory is probably even more removed from policy than in most other countries’. Friedrichs and Wæver’s assertion (2009: 267-268) brings us (the French) painfully back to Earth. Why are so few French IR scholars seduced by theories?\textsuperscript{62} In any event, this ‘atheorism’ is a strong peculiarity of France. Ole Wæver noted, in his seminal article about the development of IR in America and Europe in the journal International Organization (1998: 709), that ‘most French IR scholars do empirical or policy work without the obligation felt by American scholars to locate themselves theoretically or to justify an article by referring to theory implications’. For his part, Jean-Jacques Roche (2006: 987) notes that there is indeed an abundant literature on IR:

work on international relations displays much heterogeneity between strictly empirico-descriptive approaches and approaches conceptualized to the extreme, where the discussion about instruments eventually outweighs the analyzed object. Between these two extremes, an abundant literature has mushroomed – an abundance witnessed by numerous manuals – dealing foreign policy as well as ‘common goods’, power as NGOs, producing crisis models or making an inventory of diplomatic vocabulary.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{61} Free translation of the author for: ‘La situation présente résulte d’abord de l’histoire d’une matière prévue dans certains programmes d’enseignement supérieur ; et comme toute matière, les relations internationales ont fait l’objet de convoités entraînant, au gré des rapports de force entre facultés, sinon entre collègues, leur appropriation par des confréries ou des chapelles qui vont revendiquer le monopole du savoir légitime et s’appliquer à neutraliser, voire à excommunier, tout prétendant non reconnu par le cénacle. Si l’on ne peut contester le fait qu’il existe une histoire, un droit, une économie, une géographie, une philosophie, une sociologie (qui commence à être reconnue), une anthropologie (dont la légitimité n’est pas encore acquise), sinon une psychologie et même une psychanalyse des relations internationales, aucune de ces approches ne saurait prétendre posséder la clé de la compréhension de l’objet. Sur le fond, l’effet pervers vient de ce que de telles pratiques privilégiant une seule approche ont pour conséquence immédiate de faire perdre de vue la globalité et la complexité de l’objet’.

\textsuperscript{62} Jean-Jacques Roche, both actor and observer of IR teaching in France, has bemoaned the lack of interest in theories for a long time. See in particular the introduction of his book Théorie des relations internationales (1994: 7-19). Let’s notice moreover that this small book is probably the first one made by a French academic about the issue of IR theory. Dario Battistella, in his book, Théories des relations internationales (2003: 11) makes the same observation. ‘Neither International Relations, nor theories of international relations seem to find favour in the eyes of the French university’.

\textsuperscript{63} Free translation of the author for: ‘Les travaux de relations internationales présentent une très grande hétérogénéité entre des approches strictement empirico-descriptives et des approches conceptualisées à l’extrême, où la discussion sur les instruments finissent par l’emporter sur l’objet analysé. Entre ces deux
Nevertheless, in this literature, the room for theories is extremely tight. The problem is that the atheoretical French culture leads to ‘simple scholarly position papers, without method, which just shape sparse information on the basis of a plan aiming to demonstrate the anticipated conclusion’ (Roche, 2006: 990). Already in 1982, the political scientist Dominique Colas, in a report for the Minister of Research, wrote that ‘in the field of international relations and problems of strategy, one notices an obvious poverty (…) in the development of conceptual frameworks and models of intellection’.

Excessively abstruse? Useless? Just hair-splitting quarrels among erudite scholars? It is not rare to hear, among pundits, students and even scholars that theory is a waste of time (a ‘smoke screen’ according to Durosselle). For others, theory is an unwelcome ‘must-do’ activity (once lectures on IR theories are over, one hurries to forget them). Questions like ‘Why theory?’ pop up very frequently.

Mocked for their incomprehensible jargon, IR theories are often the laughing stock of sceptics. Unconvinced by the answers proposed by a very few political scientists in favour of IR theories, some scholars continue to have a disparaging attitude toward IR theory, though on a different scale, and may even accuse the zealots of being pedantic. Those who carry out IR according to the ‘empirico-descriptive approach’, defining themselves as ‘pragmatists’, set out to analyse particular situations in a concrete way. Even among those who disparage their colleagues for conducting empirico-descriptive IR, there is no consensus as to the existence of an IR theory as such, even if the existence of conceptual tools to analyse IR is generally accepted. Thus Raymond Aron had to admit the impossibility of discovering a general theory of IR (Aron, 1967). Espousing a sociological approach to IR, – his definition of historical sociology was the ‘indispensable intermediary between theory and the event’ – he argued that a social theory of IR has to be equidistant both from general theory and from atheoretical historical scholarship. Marie-Claude Smouts (2002: 85) also acknowledged that there was no such theory; according to her, a theory of IR did not exist: ‘I am extremely sceptical about a theory of IR. If there were one, we would know it’.

A set of reasons may explain the disinclination of IR scholars to use theory. Let’s acknowledge, first, that French scholars seem to be faithful to their traditions, so well described by Galtung in his seminal article dedicated to intellectual style in the world (1981: 817-856). He suggests that the French style may care more about form than content; the power of the Gallic (French) style of ‘conviction is due less to logical structure than to a certain artistic quality that Gallic social-science prose very often possesses, particularly when spoken and written by its true master’. It likes the use of ‘bons mots,
If one takes for granted Galtung’s suggestion that the French are keener to stress the importance of form than of content, one may easily understand why the empirico-descriptive lens seems to be ‘enough’ for understanding IR\(^{68}\). In his very interesting doctoral dissertation dedicated to the state of IR in France, Henrik Ø. Breitenbauch (2008) suggests that the French conception of legitimate scientific expression, qualified of ‘literary Cartesianism’, values theory but takes its own forms. The mode of reasoning would be fundamentally different from the American research article format, in which theories are implemented more logically.

**Conclusion**

The slightly quaint perfume emitting from French IR (system teaching, research and even publication) flabbergasts those who take an interest in the state of non-American IR. For that matter, the most radical of them could argue, *reductio ad absurdum*, that there is no IR in France. If the field of study labelled IR is a kind of discipline defined by its own theories, knowledge of ‘its theories’ is thus a precondition for being acquainted with the discipline. But as there is no theory, and therefore logically no knowledge of these theories, there is no IR. Blunt and provocative, this reasoning – which is in fact a syllogism – should be kept in perspective and reframed according to the following observation. As

---

\(^{68}\) Pursuing his reflection, Galtung (1985) argued after having attended a colloquium at La Sorbonne, that he was struck ‘by the lack of theory. By that I simply mean two things: that some concrete stands are taken, something is held to be either true or false or more or less valid, and that something is then explained in the light of some general principle, axiom or some other statement of the same kind. There is some kind of logical interconnection between premises and conclusions. The interconnection is made transparent. Outsiders are invited to enter the theoretical construction and inspect it not only by admiring from outside but by exploring it from the inside. “But you could have also drawn another conclusion”; “why do you use those premises when other premises would account equally well for the phenomenon” would be the typical reactions of a critical or exploratory nature. If no such structure is presented, however, no such commentary can follow because there is nothing clear to react to”. 

*Can Political Science Stand the Test Of the Eclecticism Of International Relations? The Case Of France*
we have seen, more and more scholars are willing to use theories in the formulation of their problematic issues. Additionally, it would be unfair to assume that they start from scratch. As we have seen, there have been some theorists. France is not a totally ‘theory-free zone’. The problem is that the stiff competition and the salient corporatism between academics particularly penalize the visibility of the work of those who pretend that it is necessary to use theory in the field of IR research. Compared to other sub-fields of political science (comparative politics, political sociology, public policy, political ideas, political theory, etc.), IR is the field of research which borrows most from other scholarly disciplines. In addition, administratively, it overlaps two different disciplines: political science and public law.\textsuperscript{69} It seems that IR in France suffers from the complex of Janus, the Roman god with two faces, a difficulty contracted in the 1950s, whereas political science, barely established, failed to integrate IR in its epistemological wing. Its two faces are, on one hand, a multidisciplinary approach in which political science would be of equal value with law, history, geography, etc. and, on the other hand, a multidisciplinary approach in which political science would supervise the other disciplines. Each of those who espouse either the first approach or the second one will do their utmost to defend ‘their’ fiefdom and denounce the ‘sham’ of the advocates of the other approach. And even political scientists of IR, trying to defend ‘their’ own paradigm, spar between them. To that we may add the irrational behaviour of the administration who does not facilitate the durability of ideas, propositions and even initiatives for rationalizing IR studies\textsuperscript{70}. The regularity with which the political authorities, as well as IR scholars, blame the system of research and teaching of IR or propose solutions to gather efforts made here and there is only equalled by the consistency of doing almost nothing\textsuperscript{71}.

As things stand at present, France could hardly integrate the international ‘main stream’. While this would be a deplorable prospect, it is to be hoped that, under the challenges of globalisation and attempts to bring together European curricula, theories in IR will be considered to be valuable. The more theory is used, the less IR will suffer from identity problems.

Bibliography


\textsuperscript{69} Detail not innocent: on the webpage of the political science section of the CNU, the description of the keywords are: Sociologie politique, Politiques publiques, Relations internationales, Analyse comparée des systèmes politiques, Philosophie et idées politiques, Théorie politique (http://www.cpcnu.fr/section.htm?numeroSection=04). On the public law section, they are: Droit administratif; Droit constitutionnel; Théorie du droit et histoire des idées; Droit international public et relations internationales; Droit communautaire et européen; Finances publiques et droit fiscal (http://www.cpcnu.fr/section.htm?numeroSection=02).

\textsuperscript{70} For instance, two ad hoc commissions – the so-called Heisbourg Commission (2000) and the report Bozo-Andrêani (2005) – had made interesting recommendations, but none of them have been implemented.

\textsuperscript{71} Still, initiatives for federating IR academics, notwithstanding their disciplines, exist. Let’s mention the creation in 2009 of the ‘Association des Internationalistes’ (to which the author of these lines belongs) which is to become a member of ISA. See http://www.association-des-internationalistes.org/ Other initiatives have unfortunately been short-lived. Dario Battistella from the IEP of Bordeaux organized the ‘Université d’été des Relations internationales’ in June 2010, a very interesting event (which the author of these lines also attended) which was to recur on a yearly basis. In spite of an obvious success, an ukase from the administration decided not to continue.
Can Political Science Stand the Test Of the Eclecticism Of International Relations? The Case Of France

Can Political Science Stand the Test Of the Eclecticism Of International Relations? The Case Of France

- Gottmann, Jean (1951, reedited in 2007), La politique des États et leur géographie. Paris: CTHS.
Phone interview with Jacques de Maillard, member of the AERES Commission, 02/01/2012.

Email with Pierre Sadran, former president of the CNU, 02/01/2012.