BOOK REVIEW

John McClintock, The Uniting of Nations: An Essay on Global Governance
3rd ed. revised and updated,
P.I.E. Peter Lang, Brussels, 2010, 349 pages, ISBN: 9052015880

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In times of widespread dissatisfaction with the management of the international system, the United Nations is likely to become the main target of criticism. By and large, it has failed to deliver on the promises made in the wake of World War II, and it does not show any convincing sign of recovery. For those who argue that it has been too ambitious, the solution is quite straightforward: less international organisation and, of course, no supranational governance. Others, who may deplore the fact that the UN is fundamentally unable to bring about a genuine "uniting of nations", could be tempted to look elsewhere for inspiration. John McClintock is a writer who is definitely looking for more supranationalism. And he has no need to look too far away from home: the experience of the European Union, he argues, can be used to create a new World Community that would help nations solve some of their most pressing issues.

Coming from a writer with a solid theoretical background and a notable working experience in the EU institutional system, the book is bold and provocative. Its target audience is not limited to the academic circle, and perhaps that is why it is not a prominent presence in the scholarly debates. John McClintock would rather speak to the larger audience, and foster bold, unconventional attitudes. The third edition, here under review, was published at a time of great financial turmoil on the world economic stage. Disappointment with the UN is not at all surprising, but the EU itself was raising causes for concern. Can it still provide a model for the rest of the world? McClintock's answer is positive: yes, it can.

He does not advocate an automatic and uncritical extension of the logic of shared sovereignty – the defining feature of the EU – to the global system. The Global Community he envisions would rather be a coalition of regional organisations, growing from the European Union model, which is by no means perfect, but has so far proved its worth.

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On the other hand, his pessimism toward the UN is matched by his lack of confidence in the capabilities of the current regional bodies. What is needed, he thinks, is a process of simultaneous integration at both the global and the regional levels. Non-European member-states would share the European experience and would consequently be better prepared and willing to share sovereignty with their neighbours, thus creating new regional organisations. "It is unlikely . . . that countries would see reason to refuse to form regional communities, since they will only be sharing with each other what they are prepared to share anyway with countries from other regions" (p. 193). Mike Corner, who authored a review of the book for *International Affairs*, pointed out that a simultaneous creation of the regional and the global body is central to McClintock's argument: "The danger is avoided of regional unions emerging first and forming competing power blocs that do not make the world any safer".[1] On the other hand, the representation of the regional groups is essential for preserving the functionality of the global body, since the decision-making authority would be almost certainly paralysed in an organisation with two hundred or so member-states.

The basic question is: why would the states share their sovereignty with anybody, anyway? This leads us to the core of McClintock's normative reasoning: ". . . Some of us are acting in a manner that is, in the broadest sense of the word, anti-social. Herein lies the origin of the global problems" (p. 73). The solution to this is the introduction of norms of conduct, preferably laws, since they are much more reliable than moral principles. In order to enact laws, however, a collectivity should set up a governing body with sovereign powers, endowed with political legitimacy.

Hobbes, Grotius, Locke, Rousseau and Kant are all mentioned among the sources of inspiration, and McClintock also admits that he has drawn on the contributions of several schools of thought in the contemporary discipline of International Relations.

> *International law and the power of states are strong themes in my diagnosis of why the present system of global governance is dysfunctional. My suggestion that states share sovereignty within a global community reflects my belief that the behaviour of states is determined by their context – this being the central proposition of the constructivist school. But I am of the view that if the world is going to proceed down the path to greater peace and order, the most fruitful route is for countries to work together on specific, practical issues. This is the doctrine proposed by the functionalist school (p. 35).*

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[1] Corner, M., untitled review, *International Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 6, 2008, pp. 1212-1213.

This combination will probably expose the argument to several lines of criticism, such as the Realist claim that nothing significant would change in the international system as long as it remains anarchic – that is, unless the pooling of sovereignty is replaced by the establishment of a genuinely sovereign world government. This would lead us once again to the well-known debate between Realists and their more optimistic opponents. But this need not concern us here. The author suggests that a Global Community based on the pooling of sovereignty would provide governance and enact law without being a (global) government. The world it might embody would still be anarchic, though governed by strong and, to a certain extent, binding rules.

A fundamental issue relates to the conditions a state must fulfill in order to join the world union. McClintock argues that failing states would not qualify, because they would not be capable to apply the law of the Union. However, they might be admitted after completing a process of internal consolidation, during which they would be assisted by the Community. Such states, as well as those who do not want to join, would also benefit from the "Do not harm" principle that inspires the foreign policy of the Union: their opinions would be heard within a special committee established precisely in order to ensure that the Union's policies do not harm non-members. This body will add to the core institutions of the Community, which reflect the separation of powers principle and largely replicate the EU model. There would be a bicameral legislature representing both the citizens and the interests of the regional communities and other member-states. The executive and the judiciary would also mirror the European Commission and the European Court of Justice, respectively.

The provision against the failing states is basically the only barrier to accession. Although there seems to be a strong Kantian influence on this whole project, McClintock does *not* limit the membership to democratic states.

> *I believe that it would be inappropriate to impose further conditions on membership, not least because the decision as to whether a country met a particular condition may be very tendentious (Is country X really a democracy? Is country Y economically developed?) Furthermore, there would be a question as to who would be entitled to make the judgement . . .* (p. 191).

However, according to his recommendations, before a state should apply for membership, it should ensure that "its citizens are fully aware of the implications of membership, that the issue is properly discussed within

civil society and that the state arranges for its citizens to express their opinions on membership in a referendum" (*Ibid.*). These are only recommendations, not constraining conditions, and they might be met by what John Rawls would call "decent consultation hierarchies", but one cannot help noting that such political acts can be imagined only in a regime that comes fairly close to the threshold of democracy. Indeed, if the lack of free elections is the main issue, then one might expect that participation in the community would help its institutionalisation and would bring about full-fledged democracy.

This leads to an important question: would the Global Community work effectively if there were significant differences among its members, in terms of political regime? And would the democratic member-states be willing to share sovereignty with a state in which the elite deprives its citizens of their rights? McClintock seems to imply that such issues would not prevent the enlargement of the Community, nor its day-to-day operation. Indeed, his two case studies – a Food Security Community and a Community for Climate, Energy, and Prosperity – are not particularly sensitive to this type of domestic regimes. However, according to the functionalist logic, the expansion of cooperation might eventually reach more problematic fields, and then domestic politics would become more salient.

John McClintock's work is an ambitious and unconventional piece of international theory. It amounts to an important drive against resignation[2] in front of the challenges we all face in the era of globalization. He reminds us that normative political theory can go beyond the boundaries set by academic conventions and open new avenues for thought and action. Skeptical critics may conclude that such an entreprise is just old-school idealism or utopianism in a new outfit. There will be, however, many sympathetic readers that would see in such a project an opportunity and a promise, an idea whose time has come.[3] They would think that surrendering to cynicism is a self-defeating strategy. As for international theory, it should not be confined to problem-solving or promoting incremental reform. It can do much more.

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[2] Gippner, O., „Coalition of the Sovereign" (review), *Indigomag*, no.2, spring, 2008, p. 10, available at *www.indigomagazine.eu/download.php?file=indigo_2_en.pdf*
[3] Corner, M., *op. cit.*, p. 1213.