The post-1945 international order is in crisis. The rules, norms and institutional practices that evolved after the Second World War to limit conflict and facilitate cooperation are struggling both to meet their original briefs and to adapt to new challenges, from the most fundamental task of preventing destabilizing uses of force to addressing global climate change. Existing diagnoses attribute this crisis to some combination of geopolitical power shifts and flagging US/western leadership, the overextension of the ‘liberal’ order to encompass states of different political forms and cultural complexities, and the rise of illiberal domestic political figures who champion exclusivist nationalism and challenge what is perceived as elitist ‘one world’ globalism. There is a critical dimension of the current crisis that such perspectives overlook, however. At multiple levels, the order is being challenged by claims of justice. The post-1945 international order is condemned for its economic inequalities, social hierarchies, institutional unfairness, intergenerational inequities, historical injustices and, accentuating all of these, its normative and epistemic biases: the privileging of western—often ‘white’—values and knowledge systems.

While most contemporary scholarship ignores this tangled yet fundamental relationship between (in)justice and (dis)order, this has not always been the case. In the 1980s, Hedley Bull famously worried that newly independent ‘Third World’ states would have little commitment to an unjust western-centred international order. He noted that the order that evolved after 1945 is a result of the combination of practices and visions of ‘open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, democratic community, progressive change, collective problem solving, collective sovereignty, [and] the rule of law’: see G. John Ikenberry, Liberal Leviathan: the origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 2. A significant debate surrounds whether the order that evolved after 1945 ought to be described in these terms, when in the past 80 years such an order might have been ascendant, and whether it ever encompassed the globe. On this contention, see David A. Lake, Lisa Martin and Thomas Risse, ‘Challenges to the liberal order: reflections on international organization’, International Organization 75: 2, 2021, pp. 225–257; T. V. Paul, ‘Globalization, deglobalization and reglobalization: adapting liberal international order’, International Affairs 97: 5, 2021, pp. 1599–1620. Because of these ongoing debates, we prefer to focus on the post-1945 international order, acknowledging that at key points, and in key ways, it has exhibited recognizably liberal institutional features. We leave it to our contributors to draw these features out when and if they are significant to their arguments about the politics of justice. See e.g. the articles by Hitomi Koyama, and George Lawson and Ayşe Zarakol in this issue for more specific views on how liberalism creates its own particular claims of justice.
order, and he reversed his earlier position to argue that the order would erode if these justice claims were not met. In the 1990s, debate about humanitarian intervention pitted those who held that international order depended on robust norms of non-intervention against others who held that injustices, such as ethnic cleansing and genocide, were a threat to international peace. In the 2000s, while policy-makers (and most commentators) cast global terrorism as an immoral and illegal threat to national and international order, others counselled attention to the justice claims animating such violence, if only better to grasp its logic and rhetorical appeal. And in the same period, scholars probed the implications of globalization for the relationship between order and justice and reflected on the then ascendant ‘solidarism’.

In none of these contexts, however, were the justice-based challenges to international order as diverse or multilayered as they are now. Current demands for fair distribution, institutional fairness and restitution for historical injustices are taking new forms, and intersecting with new claims for social recognition, epistemic equity, and the fair distribution of benefits and burdens to future generations. Moreover, such justice claims today are animating struggles not just internationally, but also domestically and transnationally.

This special section of *International Affairs* seeks to map and explicate the polymorphic politics of justice that is currently challenging the post-1945 international order. This introductory article serves several purposes. We begin by reviewing past debates about justice and order in world politics, highlighting their neglect of polymorphic justice claims. To fill this gap, we then develop a typology of contemporary justice claims, differentiating between recognitional, institutional, distributive, historical and epistemic, and intergenerational claims. While literatures exist on each of these kinds of justice claims, and these are addressed by our contributors in their articles, we have derived these types not from existing bodies of theory but from the contemporary politics of justice itself. In this respect, our typology seeks to capture the spectrum of claims currently mobilized to challenge the post-1945 international order. Our goal, however, is not just to distinguish these distinct kinds of justice claims. In our final section, we argue that these justice claims are also intersectional, multiscalar and multivocal. Past debates over whether order or justice should take priority were overstylized and simplistic: they took struggles over justice to be singular (or perhaps dyadic), ignored links between seemingly unrelated justice claims, assumed that the relevant politics of justice occurred principally at the interstate level, and missed the diversity of claimants implicated in the global politics of justice.

The ambition of this special section on injustice and disorder is to be comprehensive, addressing a wide range of justice claims; substantive, examining the mobilization of such claims in diverse issue areas, from economics and development to climate change and race; multiscalar, considering the politics of justice at national, international and transnational levels; and multidisciplinary, drawing perspectives from International Relations (IR), international law and sociology.

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and from outside academia. Our pursuit of comprehensiveness is reflected in the broad coverage of the articles in the issue, which deal in turn with recognition, distributive, institutional, historical and epistemic, and intergenerational justice. We return to these categories later in this introduction.

Past debates

In what follows we adopt a relatively minimalist but nevertheless institutional conception of international order, a conception employed, in one form or another, in most of the existing IR literature. There are scholars who deny or downplay the institutional character of such order, arguing that international orders are simply unintended consequences of political struggle, and to the extent that they are bound together by rules and norms, these reflect nothing more than the power and interests of dominant states; but they are in the minority. A more common view follows Bull in conceiving of international orders as institutionalized arrangements of sovereign states, in which institutions such as sovereignty, international law and diplomacy help realize ‘the elementary [...] goals of the society of states’. This understanding of international order is echoed by a wide range of authors, albeit with different emphases and inflections. For this special section, we favour a broader institutional conception of international order—one that drops the emphasis on sovereign states. In this view, international (or ‘world’) orders should be conceived as large-scale configurations of political authority, which might be imperial, suzerain, heteronomous, sovereign or some combination of these. One advantage of this conception is that it accommodates a key aspect of change in the post-1945 international order: the shift from a world of empires to a world of sovereign states. Many of the justice claims besetting the present order—whether they be about recognition, distribution, or history and knowledge—have their roots in this transition. As we shall see in our discussion of institutional justice, it is useful to think of the institutions that structure international orders in general, and the post-1945 order in particular, as falling into three nested categories: constitutional, fundamental and issue-specific.

Mirroring this broad conception of order, we adopt a similarly broad view of justice. As Michael Sandel has argued, questions of justice ultimately concern how a society ‘distributes the things we prize—income and wealth, duties and rights,

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5 See e.g. Ikenberry, Liberal Leviathans; Janice Bially Mattern, Ordering international politics (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005); Bentley B. Allan, Scientific cosmology and international orders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
powers and opportunities, and offices and honours. One advantage of Sandel’s conception is that it includes a broad range of goods that require just distribution: rights and powers, as well as income and wealth. We want to push this point even further, however. Questions of justice also concern how the most fundamental of social goods are distributed: in particular, the nature of social membership itself. Justice is not only about how goods are distributed among a society’s members, but about who is recognized as a member in the first place. This concerns not only the recognition of contemporaries—other humans affected by our actions today—but more provocatively, as several of our authors emphasize, future generations as well. By extending our conception of justice to include how social membership is accorded, we are deliberately seeking to encompass both narrower ideas of ‘justice as distribution’ and ideas of ‘justice as recognition’. We readily acknowledge, however, that for some scholars this broadening of the concept of justice will remain insufficient, and that the focus on distribution and recognition, however expansively conceived, leaves key dimensions of justice out of consideration.

In IR, much of the debate on the relationship between order and justice in world politics has built upon Bull’s writings, which offer one of the most sustained meditations on this theme. Bull saw the relationship as one of fundamental tension. He differentiates between ‘interstate justice’ (‘the moral rules held to confer rights and duties upon states and nations’, such as rights to sovereignty or self-determination), ‘human justice’ (‘the moral rules conferring rights and duties upon individual human beings’, such as human rights), and ‘cosmopolitan justice’ (‘the common ends or values of the universal society of all mankind’). While Bull rejected the stark realist view that the anarchical nature of international relations made justice impossible, he still concluded that none of these forms of justice could be realized effectively in an international order founded on a society of sovereign states. For Bull, cosmopolitan justice is inherently revolutionary, as it can be achieved only by transcending the society of states. Human justice can be realized only ‘selectively and in a distorted way’ in a society of sovereign states, as the pursuit of values such as human rights challenges the order’s cardinal principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, and non-aggression. Even interstate justice, which centres on the rights and duties of sovereign states, must at times be compromised to preserve the society of states.


10 See e.g. articles by Robyn Eckersley and Sandeep Sengupta in this issue.


13 Bull, *The anarchical society*.


Given this fundamental tension between order and justice, Bull’s initial position was that order should take priority, a view shared by a wide range of scholars. Order in social life, he writes, ‘is desirable because it is the condition of the realisation of other values. Unless there is a pattern of human activities that sustains the elementary, primary and universal goals of social life, it will not be possible to achieve or preserve objectives that are advanced, secondary or the special goals of particular societies.’ This was not his final position, however. Shortly before his untimely death, he reflected on ‘Third World’ struggles for justice, which wove together calls for sovereign rights, self-determination, racial equality, economic fairness and cultural liberation. Reversing his original argument, he concluded that meeting these justice claims was essential to the preservation of international order. ‘It is not credible’, he wrote, ‘that such an order can be sustained unless states of the Third World, representing as they do the majority of states and the greater part of the world’s population, believe themselves to have a stake in it.’ Injustice can be corrosive to order in the long run.

Bull’s understanding of the vexed relationship between order and justice in world politics has been highly influential, in part because it resonates with arguments made elsewhere, most notably in the writings of political theorists such as Michael Oakeshott. The idea that one has to pick either order or justice has also structured the enduring, if now highly ritualized, debate between pluralists and solidarists in the English School. The former see international society—and the order it constitutes—as a ‘practical association’ in which norms that facilitate coexistence take precedence over principles of justice, especially human or cosmopolitan principles. The latter contest this view, arguing that the stability of international order depends on international society responding to justice claims.

Bull’s framework has also conditioned debate about the value and application of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), with advocates arguing that cardinal norms of the contemporary international order—particularly sovereignty and non-intervention—should, under certain conditions, be compromised in the name of human justice, to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide in particular. Critics respond, however, that unless the threshold for its application is set very high, the principle of R2P threatens to undermine the norms that sustain international order.

17 Bull, The anarchical society, p. 93.
19 Bull, Justice in international relations, pp. 32–3.
22 The best example of such work is Nicholas Wheeler, Saving strangers: humanitarian intervention in international society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
Of course, these debates do not exhaust discussions of justice in international relations. Important recent work has sought to move beyond the traditional emphasis on economic distributive justice, making the case for a focus on ‘global political justice’, which concerns ‘the justice of specific political practices and institutions, and the normative standards by which they are regulated’. Other significant work has sought to challenge the ‘Keynesian–Westphalian frame’ that has artificially separated the domestic and international as distinct normative realms, with their own peculiar logics and politics of justice. In a highly globalized world, it is argued, this separation has broken down. Justice claims, in such a world, are no longer just about ‘first-order’ questions of substance—redistribution, recognition etc.—they are also about ‘second-order’ questions such as: ‘What is the proper frame within which to consider first-order questions of justice?’ While these innovations inform much of what comes in this article and in other contributions to this special section, this literature seldom addresses the relationship between order and justice per se, leaving Bull’s conventional framing largely intact. Notable attempts have been made to problematize (even transcend) the order/justice antinomy, yet it remains sticky. It finds expression, for example, in current claims that the post-1945 international order is in crisis because after the Cold War the United States and its western allies overreached themselves, pursuing human justice through the promotion of human rights, R2P and democratic change at the expense of more fundamental norms of coexistence. The question then is how to conceptualize order and justice together.

Improving on current debates

Most attempts to explain the crisis of the post-1945 international order ignore the justice dimensions of this crisis. Yet simply invoking the conventional rendition of the order/justice problematic as described in the previous section would be insufficient, as it evinces several significant limitations.

First, the traditional view about the tension between order and justice is inherently conservative: it treats justice claims as either a challenge to an extant order (the normative value of which is assumed) or as something to be accommodated if the order is to be preserved. Yet historically the politics of justice has played a powerful role in constituting or transforming international orders: orders later deemed by leading parties to be inherently valuable, worthy of unquestioning

27 Fraser, ‘Reframing justice in a globalizing world’, p. 254.
29 Jennifer Lind and William C. Wohlforth, ‘The future of the liberal order is conservative: a strategy to save the system’, Foreign Affairs 98: 2, 2019, pp. 70–81.
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defence. Second, the conventional understanding treats the salient imperatives of justice as singular, not multiple and intersecting. By and large, authors focus, at particular historical junctures, on economic redistribution or atrocity prevention or cultural recognition, even if the connections between these are readily acknowledged. Bull’s later work is distinctive in this respect, as he recognizes the multidimensional nature of the ‘Third World’s’ justice claims, which, as we have seen, encompassed sovereign equality, self-determination, racial justice, economic fairness and cultural liberation. Third, along with this narrow reading of the imperatives of justice, there is an associated tendency to see the claimants of justice as a monolithic block, not plural or diverse. For all his emphasis on the multidimensional nature of justice claims, Bull read agency in this narrow way, attributing the salient demands for justice to an undifferentiated ‘Third World’. The claims to justice that challenged the formerly western international order emanated from a single source, invested with a single identity and a singular set of interests.

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Historically, world orders have taken many forms. If we conceive of them broadly as large-scale configurations of political authority, as we proposed earlier, then today’s global order of sovereign states is historically rare. In the past, most world orders have been imperial, suzerain, heteronomous, or some combination of these. And the post-1945 international order has itself been reconfigured over time, shifting from a hybrid sovereign–imperial order to today’s universal system of sovereign states, governed by liberal international institutions and arrangements. Regardless of their form, however, international orders all generate social, political, economic and cultural hierarchies, and thus spawn justice claims, as actors highlight injustices and call for just change. The nature of these claims varies from one order to another, in line with the distinctive hierarchies and patterns of inclusion and exclusion manifested by each order. This section sets out six kinds of justice claims that now challenge the post-1945 international order, all emerging from its distinctive structure, practices and history: recognitional, distributive, institutional, historical, epistemic, and, finally, intergenerational.

The mobilization of these diverse and intersecting justice claims poses a profound challenge to the post-1945 international order. As is widely recognized, all political orders depend on legitimacy: on the conversion of might into right.


32 Bull, Justice in international relations, pp. 2–5.

33 See e.g. Zarakol, Before the West.


35 Reus-Smit, Individual rights and the making of the international system.
political power into political authority. Such legitimacy can rest on many things, from the ideological drapery in which it is clad, be that divine right or liberal individualism, to its effectiveness in delivering public goods, such as security and economic growth. But if international orders are institutional structures, as we have argued, then their perceived justice is fundamental to their legitimacy. As John Rawls famously argued, ‘justice is the first virtue of social institutions’, because such institutions distribute the most basic social goods, from wealth to membership. Not surprisingly, the practices of justification that are used to legitimize an international order invariably appeal to its inherent justice, among other things. Claims that the post-1945 international order has advanced the recognition and protection of human rights is a case in point, as is the claim that the order’s commitment to free markets has raised aggregate wealth globally. The opposite side of this, however, is that claims that an order is unjust constitute fundamental challenges to its legitimacy, especially when such claims are effectively mobilized, take multiple forms, and intersect in crucial ways. This greatly complicates, if not impedes, the processes of justification required to ensure an order’s legitimacy and thus its stability.

Recognitional justice claims

As discussed previously, considerations of justice cannot but attend to the fundamental issue of social recognition. To ask who deserves justice in any society and of what kind is to ask who is worthy of recognition as a member of that society. This is not just a matter of who counts as a unit of distribution, as recognition has significant psychological value. Constructivists have long argued that actors forge their identities in social contexts. Indeed, Wendt famously defines social identities as ‘sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking into account the perspective of others . . .’. This means that actors’ identities are dependent, in a deep and profound way, on social recognition. As Honneth puts it, ‘one cannot conceive of oneself as a unique and irreplaceable person until one’s own manner of self-realization is recognized by all interaction partners to be a positive contribution to the community’. Such recognition is far from a given, however. Societies of all kinds distribute membership—and hence recognition—exclusively and unevenly, generating claims of recognitional injustice and struggles to alleviate these.

The question of membership in the modern international order has always created justice claims based on recognition grievances. There are many recognition-based justice claims in the international order, but a couple of them are

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38 On the nature of these processes of justification, see Markus Kornprobst, ‘From political judgements to public justifications (and vice versa): how communities generate reasons upon which to act’, European Journal of International Relations 20: 1, 2014, pp. 192–216.
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especially resonant in contemporary world politics. On the one hand, there are those claims that stem from an objection to the existing (informal) social hierarchies that constitute the backdrop of the modern international order. Groups mounting such claims usually have formal membership in the order, but they nevertheless feel misrecognized. On the other hand, there are justice claims from actors left out of the formal membership framework partially or altogether. Let us take each in turn.

It is now well documented that since at least the nineteenth century the international order has functioned on the back of not only political and economic hierarchies, as discussed above, but also of social hierarchies between the West and the non-West, which have often taken the shape of racial, civilizational or cultural rankings. The nineteenth century was a pivotal moment in the creation of modern international order, not least because economic indicators in ‘the West’ clearly surpassed those of Asia for the first time. Equally important, however, was the emergence during the long nineteenth century of a particular social hierarchy that would characterize international relations for the next century and beyond. In this dynamic, ‘the West’ (however it was understood at the time) came to be seen as the centre of the international order and its political, economic, cultural and social standards came to define what was seen as ‘normal’. Those who fell short of these expectations were stigmatized, initially formally via the ‘Standard of Civilization’, which deprived states that were not considered ‘civilized’ of equal legal recognition, but increasingly informally: ‘modern vs backward’, ‘developed vs developing’, etc. Stigmatization differs from simple discrimination or exclusion, and a crucial component of stigma is its internalization by the stigmatized actor. Once stigma is established, the options open to stigmatized actors are limited: they can try to correct their stigma or to embrace it, but both choices are essentially reactions to stigmatization and usually leave the social hierarchy intact.

Stigmatized actors cannot help but react to their stigma, for two reasons: first, stigmatization presents an existential recognition problem: stigmatized actors are, by definition, recognized as ‘less than’ the norm. Second, lack of recognition (or lack of equal recognition) has material consequences: for example, stigmatized actors in the international system have had fewer rights and economic protections than ‘normal’ actors. Thus, stigmatization is nearly impossible to ignore and often ends up creating recognition-based justice claims.

For this reason, many non-western states joined the modern international order (either during the Cold War or in its immediate aftermath) not because they embraced its principles or believed its self-description, but rather because

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41 Ayse Zarakol, After defeat: how the East learned to live with the West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
43 Even ‘non-western’ was in some ways (or was perceived as such by many) a pejorative category until recently.
they saw it as the inner circle of the international system, with special rewards and privileges for its members, as well as freedom from stigmatization. Because the appeal of the modern international order was about status, liberal norms or rules were not always internalized, and the resentment provoked by having to emulate festered beneath the surface, made increasingly acute by the fact that nominal acceptance into the club did not deliver full recognition and respect (even in the case of Japan). The post-1945 international order should be understood against this historical background. Formal 'standards of civilization' based on race, religion or culture may have been long abandoned, but many non-western states and peoples continue to feel misrecognized in our order, as second-class actors in a liberal order that claims to have objective metrics for inclusion and recognition. Two things are simultaneously true: states complaining about misrecognition often fall short of such objective metrics; and at the same time, they would not be fully recognized as equals even if they did not, as liberalism has never managed to fully shrug off its association with the West as a cultural grouping. This tension creates manoeuvring room for anti-liberal leaders such as Putin, Orban or Erdoğan, who mobilize such recognition grievances to make justice claims against the post-1945 international order and the West. Just to give one example among many, in justifying his invasion of Ukraine to his domestic audience, Putin kept pointing to the double standards of the international community and the West.

These are not the only recognition-based justice claims, however. In addition to states that claim misrecognition based on social hierarchies between the West and the rest, there are also actors and groups within the modern international order who point to the injustice of their non-recognition as sovereign. These groups find injustice in the fact that the international order is organized around nation-states. Many terrorist organizations recruit followers by advocating alternative forms of political organization in world politics, most commonly religion. Groups such as Islamic State and Al-Qaeda argue not just for religious rule but for political organization on religious lines: the umma (community) rather than the nation. But it is not only terrorist organizations and extremist religious groups that find the nation-state itself unjust. In the modern international order, there are still many actors who consider other forms of political organization more legitimate, either because they embrace another traditional form or because they think alternatives serve the future better. Among the former, Indigenous activists around the world lobby for recognition of the value of their longstanding world-views and communities. Among the latter, anarchists and libertarians imagine a world without nation-states, a longstanding dream finally made feasible by advances in technology.

The complex expressions of recognitional justice claims in today's international order are explored in this special section by two articles. The first, by Barak Mendelsohn, focuses on jihadist notions of divine justice and argues that some recognitional justice claims emanate from an entirely different understanding of order and different moral judgements about whether equality is always desira-
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ble. The second, by George Lawson and Ayşe Zarakol, argues that liberalism in particular opens itself up to recognitional justice claims animated by a charge of hypocrisy because of what it promises but cannot deliver.

Distributive justice claims

Distributive justice in principle can be conceived very broadly, making the case (as we did at the outset of this article) for the fair allocation of a wide range of social goods, from wealth to recognition. It is common, however, for discussions of distributive justice to be focused more narrowly on material resources. Lamont and Favor identify three axes on which such discussions pivot. These concern (1) the goods to be distributed, (2) to whom they should be distributed and (3) the principles on which distributions ought to be made. Most discussions of distributive justice are concerned with the distribution of a narrow range of material goods, principally economic wealth and natural resources. At the global level, distributive justice is concerned with ‘the moral evaluation of the distribution of wealth in the current world order’. Understood in this way, distributive justice claims have a long history in the modern international order, and even if they have been overshadowed since the end of the Cold War by other justice claims discussed below, they still resonate with many groups around the world. These justice claims focus more on the material provisions of the international order and the uneven ways in which they are distributed, usually having to do with both legacies of imperialism and colonialism, as well as the exploitative nature of postcolonial economic relations and/or capitalism.

Distributive justice claims had their ‘banner moment’ during the Cold War, when the language of class conflict occupied a bigger role in public discourse. The 1970s especially were a watershed decade in this regard. This was when the Cold War went from being just a competition between the First and Second Worlds and many started worrying about the Third World’s stakes in world politics. We have already referred to Bull’s changing views over this period. Others had similar concerns, especially because it was becoming clear that decolonization was no panacea by itself to the problems of underdevelopment in this part of the world. Barbara Ward, a noted political economist, observed that the expectations of Rostow’s modernization theory were not to be met in ‘the South’, and warned of a possible confrontation between the ‘developed’ and the ‘developing’ peoples if certain problems were not addressed. It was also in this period that critiques of modernization theory in the form of dependency theory and world systems

theory made real headway in both academia and policy circles.\textsuperscript{50} By casting the problem of underdevelopment in relational terms, such accounts turned problems of distribution into justice claims, sometimes involving calls for compensation. After all, if the North (rather than Southern backwardness as modernization theory would posit) was responsible for the underdevelopment of the South, then justice would require that the North help the South.

Starting in the 1960s but especially in the 1970s, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Non-Aligned Movement increasingly pushed for redistributive measures in world politics. This culminated in a series of proposals under the heading of the ‘New International Economic Order’ (NIEO) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1974. Proponents of the NIEO argued for an overhaul of the rules of trade and the international monetary system in favour of ‘developing countries’. It also called for technology transfer from the North to the South as a compensatory measure. Another idea was for ‘developing countries’ to strengthen cooperation among themselves to replace colonial interdependencies. These ideas did not bear much fruit beyond the 1970s, however. The neo-liberal turn in western capitals in the 1980s following the economic crises at the end of the 1970s gave rise to the Washington Consensus, which promoted free markets and free trade as solutions to the problem of underdevelopment around the world. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the remaining motivations to address such justice claims with any urgency in the 1990s.

The narrative of the past two decades about ‘the rise of the rest’ may also partly explain why we do not see distributive justice claims expressed as forcefully in international politics as they once were. Especially after the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, the BRICS\textsuperscript{51} idea exerted quite a hold on the global imagination. The brand helped attract foreign investment and made it easier for BRIC and second-tier BRIC-like states to borrow money, which was then invested in domestic and foreign spending in ways that would enhance these countries’ ‘rising’ image, attracting even more investment. In the meantime, western capitals were looking for ways out of their own malaise. Much of this was hype,\textsuperscript{52} but some of the growth in the rest is real, especially in places such as China. In a world where non-western or global South countries have real economic power, redistributive justice claims need reformulation. In fact, it may be more common these days to hear the argument that the non-West has the right to development at whatever cost (usually to climate and environment) than the claim that the West owes the rest technology transfer or material aid. The major exception to this rule has to do with demands around vaccines and other medical technology. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been some distributive justice claims about distribution of vaccines and anti-viral medication to the ‘developing’ world.


\textsuperscript{51} Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa.

\textsuperscript{52} Ayşe Zarakol, ‘‘Rise of the rest’’: as hype and reality’, \textit{International Relations} 33: 2, 2019, pp. 213–28.
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Interestingly, at present such claims are more likely to be made with appeal to the self-interest of the ‘developed’ world (i.e., in stopping the spread of the disease in the long run) rather than as something owed to the recipients.

Issues of distributional justices are addressed in this special section by two articles. Şahan Savaş Karataşlı argues that the United States was unique after the Second World War in adopting a goal for ‘developing’ countries to ‘catch up’, but that ultimately the order it fostered ended up reproducing hierarchies of wealth and power. This process was far from accidental; every time countries of the global South sought to close the distributional gap, those attempts triggered a crisis of US hegemony which pushed elites to reassert Northern dominance. Arnulf Becker Lorca highlights the vast gap that now exists between the distributional priorities of the global South, which live on in its diplomatic practices and priorities, and the near-total lack of interest on the part of Northern states in distributional justice.

Institutional justice claims

The distribution of social goods—narrowly or broadly conceived—always occurs within institutional contexts: frameworks of rules, norms and decision-making practices, formal and informal, that determine how distributive decisions are made and executed. Yet it is common in scholarly accounts of justice for these institutional contexts to be either assumed or bracketed. Indeed, some of the most famous theories of distributive justice do this explicitly. John Rawls built his theory on two assumptions: that it applied only to ‘a closed system isolated from other societies’, and that it assumed a particular institutional setting—the ‘basic structure’ of a ‘modern constitutional democracy’. Neither of these was the subject of his theory, which focused on distributions within this institutional framework. Many have criticized how narrowly Rawls and others have conceived this framework, confining it to sovereign states. But, as Terry Macdonald and Miriam Ronzoni argue, most explorations of global distributive justice also neglect the institutional framework in which such distribution can, or should, take place. Because of this lacuna, Macdonald and Ronzoni advocate a focus on ‘global political justice’, which subjects to normative scrutiny ‘the fundamental constitutive features of the political order itself—the set of practices and processes that constitute its basic institutions and social fabric’.

Accusations of institutional injustice, and calls for just institutional change, have occurred at three levels of the modern international order: at the levels of underlying constitutional norms, fundamental institutions (or basic institutional

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practices), and issue-specific institutions, or ‘international regimes’. The first of
these comprises the order’s underlying organizing principles, which have changed
dramatically over its history. From a hybrid order that combined sovereignty in the
European core with empire abroad, the order evolved over the course of the twen-
tieth century into a universal system of sovereign states. In the immediate aftermath
of the Second World War empire was still hailed as a ‘sacred trust’, but by 1970 its
institutional injustice was formally acknowledged in UN General Assembly Reso-
lution 2621, which declared that ‘the continuation of colonialism in all its forms and
manifestations is a crime’. 60 Yet although sovereign self-determination was seen as a
just response to this crime, the institution of sovereignty has itself been accused of
injustice. For Indigenous Peoples, in particular, the institutionalization of today’s
global order of sovereign states saw the denial and destruction of their ancient
forms of political community and organization. 61 In addition to these foundational
constitutional norms, the modern order has also been structured by fundamental
institutions, in the form of the basic institutional practices states employ to facilitate
coexistence and collaboration. Prominent among these are the paired institutions
of international law and multilateralism. And while both are commonly seen as
progressive features of a ‘liberal’ international order, they have also been criti-
cized for embedded injustices. International law has been challenged as a biased,
Eurocentric institution, deeply implicated in the imperial practices that seeded the
modern order. 62 And multilateralism is criticized for its false promise: for the way
ostensibly equal institutions have been distorted by unequal representation (e.g.
the UN Security Council) and unfairly weighted voting rights (e.g. the IMF and
the WTO). The third level of the international order’s institutional architecture
comprises international regimes, or issue-specific institutions. Concrete enactments
of international law and multilateralism, these institutions are created by states to
address functional challenges, from managing the world economy to combating
climate change. Like the fundamental institutions of international law and multilat-
eralism, the proliferation of these institutions is often seen as an integral feature of a
‘liberal’ order. They too have been challenged for their injustices, however. Notable
here are criticisms of the International Criminal Court and the Rome Statute that
undergirds it. Although instituted to address international criminal injustices, the
court is criticized for manifesting ‘the inability of international criminal law to
challenge the persisting power inequalities and address the structural injustices of
the international order’. 63

The contribution to this special section by Terry Macdonald illuminates key
aspects of these contemporary international institutional injustice claims and

59 This typology of institutions follows Reus-Smit, The moral purpose of the state, pp. 12–15.
60 United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/2621: ‘Programme of action for the full implementation of the
Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples’.
62 Antony Anghie, Imperialism, sovereignty, and the making of international law (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2005).
63 Sergey Vasiliev, ‘The crises and critiques of international criminal justice’, in Kevin Jon Heller, Frederic
Megret, Sarah Nouwen, Jens Ohlin and Darryl Robinson, eds, The Oxford handbook of international criminal law

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possible ways of answering them. Drawing on claims articulated by real-world global justice activists, Macdonald argues for a normative theoretical critique and reconstruction of the idea of pluralist legitimacy for institutions—and the replacement of the familiar liberal internationalist model with a more complex variant of global pluralist legitimacy. Focusing on the global institutional injustices that persist as legacies of European colonialism, Catherine Lu advances a ‘tragic’ conception of justice, which sees in the contemporary crisis of the post-1945 international order openings for injustices to be debated and redressed.

Historical and epistemic justice claims

The construction of international orders generates historical injustices, and over time these injustices can inspire revisionist politics and fuel conflict and change. Pluralist scholars of the English School argue that a world organized into sovereign states is the best way for peoples with different purposes and of different cultural complexions to ‘rub along together’. But not only does today’s global system of sovereign states exist in the shadow of a prior world of empires, which generated multiple, as yet unresolved, historical injustices; the construction of the global sovereign order itself entailed multiple injustices, as also discussed in the previous section. In her historical sociology of the relation between state formation and forms of ‘pathological homogenization’, such as ethnic cleansing and genocide, Heather Rae struggles to find any states not forged through such practices. We should not be surprised, then, to find historical injustices prominent in today’s polymorphic global politics of justice, with significant implications for relations between justice and order. Following Duncan Ivison, we define historical injustices as ‘those harms or wrongs committed by individuals, groups, or institutions against other individuals or groups who are now dead, but whose descendants live today. And by “descendants” … [we] mean not only individuals, but various groups made up of individuals who identify with a collective identity (embodied in various institutions and practices) that has persisted through time.’

Four kinds of historical injustice claims currently challenge the post-1945 international order. The first, as indicated above, relate to the order’s not too distant imperial past. These always involve claims about the structural and physical violence and exploitation that attended European imperialism, and about specific practices of domination, from slavery to unequal treaties. It is argued that the current order would not have come into being without imperialism. The second concern the persistence through to the present of neo-imperial structures and practices, not the least of which are structurally embedded economic inequalities.

66 Mayall, World politics, p. 29. See also Jackson, The global covenant.
67 Heather Rae, State identities and the homogenisation of peoples (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
and racial hierarchies. The third relate to the violence and discrimination that attended processes of sovereign state formation. This includes the ethnic cleansing and genocide that accompanied state formation in the metropole, as well as the injustices of colonial state-building, especially those committed against Indigenous Peoples. It also includes injustices associated with postcolonial state formation, such as the violence that attended the partition of India and the killing of millions of communists in the rise of the ‘New Order’ in Indonesia. The final kind of historical injustice claim focuses on the development of the post-1945 international order, and how practices and institutions of global governance have eroded national identities and sovereignties. The rise of such claims shows how the post-1945 international order is challenged not just by historical injustice claims originating in the age of empire but also from the one-worldism that attends liberal global governance.\footnote{Ellen Berrey, ‘When liberal states bite back: the micro-politics of culture’, in Phillips and Reus-Smit, eds, \textit{Culture and order in world politics}, pp. 159–81.}

Historical injustice claims are inextricably tied to constructions of the past: to how histories of social and political change are written and memorialized—by whom, for what purposes, and with what emphases. That the writing of history is an interpretative act is now well recognized. As E. H. Carr put it, history ‘is like a sack—it won’t stand up till you’ve put something in it’.\footnote{E. H. Carr, \textit{What is history?} (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 11.} When it comes to historical injustices, this point is especially charged, as what goes in the historical ‘sack’ affects the recognition and redress of such injustices. Historical injustices are thus deeply entwined with questions of epistemic justice: with what counts as fair knowledge of the past. Historical and epistemic justice claims have to do with how history is experienced, taught, remembered, memorialized. As such they are very closely linked with recognition-based justice claims, often made manifest in justice grievances against the very social hierarchies that shape the modern international order. And they are just as likely to be misused by anti-liberal leaders to mobilize resentment against the West. An overarching claim in this sphere is that the history of world politics and international relations is produced and reproduced in a Eurocentric or western-centric way, with spillover effects in international law. In other words, it is possible to think of recent attempts to ‘globalize’ humanities and social sciences (including IR) as responses to justice claims about our international order and the stories we tell about it. But there is an even more specific way in which historic and epistemic justice claims are made manifest in international law, and that is in the dual claim that the victimhood of westerners gets undue attention compared to that of non-westerners (Ukraine vs Ethiopia), along with the culpability of non-westerners compared to westerners (Turkey, Japan vs Belgium).

Questions of historical and epistemic justice are taken up here in two articles, by Hitomi Koyoma and by Meera Sabaratnam and Mark Laffey. Addressing the historical injustices associated with Japanese imperialism and how it is remembered, Koyoma argues that while the remembering of such injustices is transnational in scope, this sits uncomfortably within an American-led order that has
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compartmentalized the pursuit of justice within particular states.\textsuperscript{71} Sabaratnam and Laffay advance the concept of ‘complex indebtedness’ to capture both the uneven material dynamics of the modern international order and the demands for epistemic justice that have arisen from the configurations of indebtedness produced by imperialism and settler colonialism.\textsuperscript{72}

**Intergenerational justice claims**

Compounding all the justice claims discussed in previous sections is the fact that there is also an ‘intergenerational’ dimension to justice. Janna Thompson argues that a ‘polity’ is, by definition, an intergenerational community: it ‘is a political society that persists through time and across generations’.\textsuperscript{73} While she focuses principally on national polities, her claim about their intergenerational quality applies more broadly, even to the more amorphous global polity. Her central point is that a polity’s members live within institutional frameworks, economic systems, and natural environments bequeathed to them by past generations. They make decisions about the distribution of benefits and burdens between the contemporary young and old. And the actions of today’s members have implications for the well-being of generations long into the future. This entanglement of people today in webs of intergenerational cause and effect raises profound questions of justice. ‘People are born into a previously existing society,’ Thompson argues, ‘and acquire a legacy of entitlements and obligations from the past … When they grow up they acquire in turn responsibilities for younger and unborn generations, and … for discharging the historical obligations of their community or society.’\textsuperscript{74} Debates about intergenerational justice concern the nature and extent of these entitlements and obligations.

As this discussion suggests, intergenerational justice claims look to the past, the present and the future. Since we have already considered questions of historical justice above, we will focus here on intergenerational claims that address the present and future. While many justice claims have intergenerational dimensions, the two areas where this aspect really comes to the fore are climate change and social welfare.

Intergenerational justice claims are most visible in climate activism, which happens to be driven by youth activism. The globally best-known climate change activist, Greta Thunberg, was only 15 years old when she came to be the face of the movement. The organization she founded, Fridays for Future, includes many other youth activists and is partnered with UNICEF. Extinction Rebellion UK explicitly includes intergenerational claims in its manifesto: ‘Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great, said Mandela. History is calling from the future, ...

\textsuperscript{71} Hitomi Koyama, ‘Supposing the moral state: Japan and historical justice under liberal internationalism’, *International Affairs* 99: 1, 2023, pp. 181–99.


\textsuperscript{74} Thompson, *Intergenerational justice*, p. 3.
a hundred years from now … This is the time. Wherever we are standing is the place. We have just this one flickering instant to hold the winds of worlds in our hands, to vouchsafe the future.\(^75\) The general claim in climate change activism is that youth now and future generations are paying and will pay for the mistakes of past generations, and that justice can only be attained by making sacrifices now to ensure well-being in the future.

Intergenerational justice claims are also found in discussions of social welfare policies, which overlap with distributional justice claims. Even though many of these discussions are usually conducted at the domestic level, for example, concerning questions around whether pensions or the health-care expenses of retired people should be supported by younger generations, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many such discussions to the international level. Globally, management of the COVID-19 threat for older generations has required great sacrifices—especially in the realm of education—from young people and children. While these sacrifices were made willingly in the majority of countries, not everyone considers the intergenerational consequences just. On the flip side, some countries put only the elderly under heavy COVID-19 restrictions, creating justice claims in the other direction.

Our contributors address both the forward—and backward—looking dimensions of intergenerational justice. Robyn Eckersley argues that all political orders, especially the post-1945 international order, have had disordering effects on the environment, most dramatically through climate change. These effects produce structural injustices that have profound generational consequences.\(^76\) In a complementary article, Sandeep Sengupta shows how past efforts to address justice claims, including those made in the name of future generations, have been almost completely set aside in current international climate negotiations.\(^77\)

**An intersectional, multiscalar and multivocal politics of justice**

A key feature of the polymorphic politics of justice that currently besets the post-1945 international order is not just that it involves a variety of justice claims, it is that these claims intersect in significant ways, manifest at different scales, and are pursued by diverse claimants. In this final section, we seek to map this more complex contemporary politics of global justice, giving greater form to its polymorphic nature.

When we describe today’s multiple justice claims as ‘intersectional’ we mean that they relate in ways that produce *compound* justice challenges. The idea of ‘intersectionality’ emerged to capture the unique forms of discrimination and disadvantage experienced by people whose social locations, identities, and lived experiences straddle dominant, single-dimension categories of discrimination. In her seminal articles on the topic, Kimberle Crenshaw argues, for example, that:


\(^76\) Robyn Eckersley, ‘(Dis)order and (in)justice in a heating world’, *International Affairs* 99: 1, 2023, pp. 101–19.

\(^77\) Sandeep Sengupta, ‘Climate change, international justice and global order’, *International Affairs* 99: 1, 2023, pp. 121–40.

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Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women’s experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences to Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women.78

Given this, Crenshaw concludes that ‘because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated’.79

This idea that there are compound forms of discrimination—or, to put it differently, forms of injustice—that exist at, and are products of, the intersection between single categories of discrimination is critically important for understanding today’s polymorphic global politics of justice. Crenshaw, and other theorists of intersectionality, focus on the compound discrimination experienced by individuals in particular subject positions: black women, for example. This is true also for the compound injustices besetting today’s international order: they are criticized principally, though not exclusively, by actors who experience different forms of injustice simultaneously. Intersections exist between all six of the forms of justice/injustice discussed above: indeed, a six-by-six matrix could be drawn mapping these intersections. It is sufficient here, however, to highlight the intersections between recognitional justice/injustice and the other types.

As explained above, distributional injustices often flow from recognitional injustices, where actors’ access to fair distributions of material goods are obstructed by their social exclusion or liminal social standing. Indigenous Peoples experience precisely this kind of intersectional injustice, as did colonized peoples in their struggles for sovereign recognition and self-determination. Similarly, institutional injustices—especially those relating to the modern order’s constitutional norms and fundamental institutional practices—are also entangled with recognitional injustices. The institution of sovereignty, like that of empire before it, is not just a principle governing the spatial distribution of political authority, it is also about the social allocation of authority, which is ultimately about recognition and non-recognition. Fundamental institutions, such as international law and multilateralism, are not just regulatory practices, they are constitutive: they give (and deny) actors legal and political standing. In short, they are recognitional practices. Given these intersections between distributive, institutional and recognitional injustices, it is not surprising that historical and epistemic injustices are so commonly infused with recognitional content. Indeed, some of the most prominent justice claims today are animated by historical injustices that were not just about material and institutional discrimination and domination but fundamentally about non- or misrecognition. This is true for a broad range of historical justice claims, from the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement to China’s

79 Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex’, p. 140.
appeals to redress for its ‘century of humiliation’. Finally, intergenerational injustices are inextricably tied to questions of recognition. This is true not only for injustices that connect present to past generations, but also for questions of justice that connect today’s living generations—the old and young, for example—and those that connect present with future generations. All of these involve the recognition, or non- or misrecognition, of the moral standing of particular generations: their status as bearers of rights and/or obligations.

In addition to being intersectional, today’s polymorphic politics of justice is multiscalar. We mean more by this than the simple proposition that justice claims are manifest at multiple levels of global politics (local, national, international, and transnational), a proposition we readily accept. Multiscalarity, as understood here, has a relational quality, in which the politics of justice at one level conditions the politics of justice at other levels. Moreover, through this ‘interactive multiplicity’ the multiscalar politics of justice helps to constitute these very levels. Historically, for example, anti-colonial struggles against the injustices of the institution of empire were critical in shaping today’s international ‘level’, and this reorganization of political authority provided the framework for the pursuit of the redistributational claims of the NIEO. Today, the multiscalar nature of justice claims is a defining feature of the global politics of justice. This is true of campaigns for racial equality, economic redistribution, domestic and international institutional change, the redress of historical injustices, and climate justice for future generations. This multiscalar character of contemporary justice campaigns is evident in both progressive and conservative movements. Black Lives Matter is at once a national and a transnational movement, and right-wing campaigns to protect supposedly threatened traditional nations from ‘one world’ global governance are as transnationally networked as they are locally anchored.

This last point highlights the multivocal nature of today’s global politics of justice. As we have seen, Bull’s analysis of the justice challenges facing post-decolonization international society focused on a single, monolithic justice claimant: the ‘Third World’. More recent accounts in IR of the global politics of justice have broken with this state-centric framing, emphasizing the agency of ‘transnational advocacy networks’ in promoting human rights protections. This focus on the single issue of human rights has served, however, to narrow the range of actors implicated in the global politics of justice, bringing champions of human rights into focus as concern with the ‘Third World’ fades from view. Yet a critical feature of today’s polymorphic global politics of justice is the sheer number and diversity of claimants, a product in part of the multiscalar nature of such politics.

82 Rita Abrahamsen, Jean-Francois Drolet, Alexandra Gheciu, Karin Narita, Srdjan Vucetic and Michael Williams, ‘Confronting the international political sociology of the new right’, International Political Sociology 14: 1, 2020, pp. 94–107.
current international order is challenged by claimants addressing diverse injustices, from structural racism and institutional exclusion to economic inequality and environmental irresponsibility. For Bull, responding to the ‘Third World’s’ discrete set of justice claims held the promise of securing international order, as the monolithic postcolonial world was given reason to accept its rules, norms, and practices. The multivocal nature of today’s justice claims greatly complicate this challenge of legitimating the order’s institutional architecture.

**Conclusion**

It is commonplace to argue that international orders rest not only on order-sustaining configurations of material power—most commonly the primacy of a leading state—but also on legitimacy, the perception on the part of relevant constituencies that an order’s norms, practices and leadership are on balance good and right. Most of the literature in this area focuses on the procedural legitimacy of decision-making processes within international institutions and/or on the efficacy of authoritative decisions and ordering practices, their ability to generate desired outcomes. Far less attention is given to the relationship between an order’s legitimacy and its perceived justice or injustice. It is this connection that ultimately concerned Bull when he worried that the systematic injustices of the order created by and for the West would undermine its legitimacy and, in turn, stability. In seeking to draw attention back to this connection between justice and order, we have argued that today’s post-1945 international order is challenged by a complex, polymorphic politics of justice. Not only are claims of recognitional, distribu- tional, institutional, historical, epistemic and intergenerational injustice being mobilized, these are in important respects intersectional, multiscalar and multivocal. To the extent that the current order is in crisis, this polymorphic politics of justice adds a hitherto underappreciated complexity to this crisis, gnawing away at the order’s legitimacy from multiple directions.

Several of our authors propose ways to address particular aspects of the current global politics of justice, but our goal for the special section as a whole is more modest: namely, to encourage a new wave of research on the relationship between justice and international order and offer a preliminary framework for thinking about this relationship. It is clear, however, that at least two questions will merit attention in any new wave of scholarship. The first concerns the relative priority of different kinds of justice claims: are some more fundamental or foundational than others? Readers may have already observed that an implied but undeveloped prioritization informs how we have presented the different forms of justice. We have argued, for example, that in any political order the distribution of material goods depends on prior patterns of recognition. The second question concerns whether all justice claims merit attention and need addressing for the viability of the current international order to be protected. Nowhere above do we argue that all claims have to be addressed: indeed, it goes without saying that some justice claims have been used in service of very problematic acts, as in Russia’s

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invasion of Ukraine. It is also true that even as justice claims are intersectional, multiscalar and multivocal, they are also sometimes at irreconcilable odds with each other and cannot be simultaneously accommodated even if there were the desire to do so. For example, accommodating intergenerational justice claims about climate change may add to the recognitional and distributional grievances of non-western states. The principal goal of this special section is to underline the fact that the post-1945 international order cannot be analytically or normatively decoupled from the notions of justice associated with it (and the ways in which it falls short of its own justice claims), and that addressing these questions of priority and merit is critical to engaging with current relations between order and justice. The bottom line is that if the crisis of the post-1945 international order is to be addressed, justice claims and grievances need to be in the picture as well.