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8-2 Locating IR Theory: Identity and Level of Analysis

Unveiling the ‘International’: Process, Identity and Alterity

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Process-based approaches avoid ontological consideration of social entities as substances, avoid epistemological reification of social entities or phenomena into static units and, on the contrary, integrate the idea of change into their whole conceptualisation of the social world. Finally, process-based approaches also aim to endogenise social phenomena theoretically in order to have a better understanding of their complexity. In sum, the key ideas of process-based approaches basically lie in the prioritisation of process over substance, relation over separateness, and activity over passivity. Starting from this position, the aim of this article is to offer a more concrete approach to a specific dimension of the ‘international’ by focusing on the identity–alterity nexus. It will be shown how the spatial understanding of the ‘international’ still characteristic of most contemporary IR theories is at odds with issues about the identity–alterity nexus that is partly constitutive of the ‘international’, which rather than being thought of as a spatial dimension should be thought of as a process in itself. The French ‘veil affair’ will be presented as an example to highlight the limits of our current spatial perspective about the ‘international’.

Introduction

Processual approaches to international relations are relatively new within the discipline of International Relations (IR).² This newness actually reflects the recent attempts to articulate explicit process-based conceptions of the ‘international’ more than the uses of process thinking *per se*.³ Indeed, many of the post-positivist approaches, among which may be more particularly post-structuralist approaches, have offered implicit process-based approaches to the ‘international’ by underlining the role of material and ideational practices as constitutive of the latter rather than

¹ I would like to thank Matteo Gianni and Alexander Wendt for conversations that have helped shaped the ideas behind this article. I would also like to thank Fiona Adamson and David Blaney for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article.

² Following the now established convention, I will use by convenience the idiom ‘IR’ to designate the discipline of international relations. I would like to note at the outset, however, that I consider international relations to be primarily a field open to interdisciplinary exchanges rather than a circumscribed discipline.

³ See, for instance, the landmark essay by Richard K. Ashley, ‘The Poverty of Neorealism’, in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 290–2.

focusing on the effects of behaviours by and on state-units through their interactions. Explicit attempts to provide process-based approaches to the ‘international’ are attempts to situate these practices in a more meta-theoretical framework and have already called to the fore a variety of non-exclusive paths: whether a ‘pragmatist’ one, inspired mainly by the works of John Dewey and Arthur Bentley and contemporary expressions such as in the work of Mustafa Emirbayer; a ‘sociational’ path, along the lines of Georg Simmel’s work; or a ‘dialogical’ path inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin’s work.⁴ All these paths are more or less influenced by ‘relational’ sociologists spanning from Norbert Elias to Andrew Abbott, including authors such as Pierre Bourdieu, Margaret Somers and Mustafa Emirbayer.

All these different authors have underlined that process thinking has the advantage of ontologically avoiding considering social entities or concepts as substances (e.g. power is not something one possesses but a constellation of relations in which one is enmeshed in), epistemologically avoiding reifying social entities or phenomena into static units and, on the contrary, integrating the idea of change throughout one’s conceptualisation of the social world (e.g. states are not functionally equivalent units inter-acting in an established system but rather particular social entities whose transactions constitute this system). Finally, it is also about theoretically endogenising social phenomena to obtain a better *sociological* understanding of their social complexity. In sum, the key ideas of process-based approaches basically lie in the prioritisation of process over substance, relation over separateness, and activity over passivity. Starting from this position, this article will consider the ‘international’ as a process in itself and not as a territorially (de)limited space. This spatial understanding of the ‘international’, prevalent in IR, has had a limiting effect on our ability to

⁴ See, Lars-Erik Cederman and Christopher Daase, ‘Endogenizing Corporate Identities: The Next Step in Constructivist IR Theory’, *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 1 (2003); Xavier Guillaume, ‘Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002); Xavier Guillaume, ‘Reflexivity and Subjectivity: A Dialogical Perspective for and on International Relations Theory’, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 3, no. 3 (2002); Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, ‘Relations before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 3 (1999).

conceptualise how the ‘international’ is constituted by and constitutive of a myriad of phenomena, spanning from nationalism to asymmetric conflicts.

While it will be beyond the scope of this contribution to offer a comprehensive understanding of the ‘international’ as a process, it will nonetheless try to offer a more specific approach to a particular dimension of the ‘international’ by focusing on the identity–alterity nexus. Indeed, whereas most attempts in IR to present explicit process-based approaches have tended to be rather general in their scope, this article focuses on the concept of identity and its necessary relational link to alterity.⁵ By focusing on this specific dimension, the ambition is to show how limited we are by a spatial understanding of the ‘international’ when we are trying to make *sociological* sense of a variety of phenomena that often would otherwise be discounted as outside the scope of IR. This article thus first presents a general approach to process philosophy and then moves on to address the question of the identity–alterity dimension of the ‘international’ within a process-based approach. Finally, an empirical illustration, the French ‘veil affair’, is discussed in order to show how this seemingly domestic event, if one follows a more spatial understanding of the ‘international’, can actually be understood as fully participating in the ‘international’, if one follows processual approaches.

Process Philosophy

⁵ I understand alterity to simply mean other self-understandings/representations in regard to a specific self-understanding/representation. The concept ‘identity’ itself is highly problematic as it refers to a very wide range of referents and conceptions. I take as a principle that ‘identities’ are socially constructed in their ‘trans-actions’ (more on this below) with alterity; see, Xavier Guillaume, *A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations: Politics of Alterity in Japanese History* (Geneva: University of Geneva, 2006); Guillaume, ‘Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity’. Privileging the term alterity over difference is also to reflect on the fact that difference implicitly or even explicitly refers to a ‘concrete’ other possessing an existential reality. However, this would completely occult the fact that an ‘identity’ can be constituted in relation to a certain temporality or, also, *vis-à-vis* imagined others.

One of the clearest expositions of a general approach to process philosophy and processual approaches is to be found in Nicholas Rescher's work.⁶ According to Rescher, the idea of process is best understood as a *categorical concept*, 'one that provides a thought-instrument for organizing the knowledge afforded us by our experience of the world's course of events'.⁷ As mentioned above, the key idea of a process-based approach basically lies in the prioritisation of process over substance, relation over separateness, and activity over passivity. A first step to defining what a process is *in abstracto* can be made with Rescher's synthetic characterisation of the latter as 'an actual or possible occurrence that consists of an integrated series of connected developments unfolding in programmatic coordination'.⁸ A process, therefore, expands Rescher, 'is a coordinated group of changes in the complexions of reality, an organized family of occurrences that are systematically linked to one another either causally or functionally. ... Processes are correlated with occurrences or events: Processes always involve various events, and events exist only in and through processes'.⁹

What this definition fundamentally stresses is the *ever ongoing series of events and/or occurrences* that are constituting a process; thus, when looking at identity as a process, identity should be seen as a superordinate process composed of an ever ongoing series of smaller subordinate processes (events, occurrences).¹⁰ I will return to this distinction below. What Rescher's definition, however, overemphasises is the sequentiality of process to the point that 'a reader might reasonably assume that what

⁶ Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Nicholas Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). While it is often assumed that process philosophy is a synonym of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy and its followers, it should not, however, lead to the conclusion that process philosophy is to be reduced to the latter as to do so would limit the potential of a general approach to a specific author or articulation. Patrick Jackson and Dan Nexon's 'Relations before States' provide an extended and rather similar account, yet less critical, of Rescher's reading of process philosophy.

⁷ Rescher, *Process Metaphysics*, 34.

⁸ Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 22.

⁹ Rescher, *Process Metaphysics*, 38. The notion of causality here has to be taken rather abstractedly and should not be set in relation to a General Linear Reality model dominant in 'positivist' social sciences as depicted by Andrew Abbott; see Andrew Abbott, 'Transcending General Linear Reality', *Sociological Theory* 6, no. 2 (1988).

¹⁰ See Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 30–1.

[Rescher] means by this claim is that the stages of a process are ordered *linearly*.¹¹ It need not be so, a process can indeed be constituted by a series of relations between events or occurrences that are not necessarily linked programmatically (linearly), in the sense that only the actuality of such events or occurrences would fulfil the categorial determination of a process. To conflate processes with linearity would actually hamper the move to process-based approaches dramatically as linearity has deeply influenced inter-actionist views, to use John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley's categorisation, of the social world.¹² Indeed, such perspectives rely heavily on the idea of 'general linear reality' to make sense of the social world thus allowing them to assume that it,

consists of fixed entities (the units of analysis) that have attributes (the variables). These attributes interact, in causal or actual time, to create outcomes, themselves measurable as attributes of the fixed entities. ... An attribute's causal meaning cannot depend on the entity's location in the attribute space (its context), since the linear transformation is the same throughout that space. For similar reasons, the past path of an entity through the attribute space (its history) can have no influence on its future path, nor can the causal importance of an attribute change from one entity to the next. All must obey the same transformation.¹³

¹¹ John W. Lango, 'Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy (Book Review)', *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 32, no. 4 (1996): 690.

¹² Inter-actionist perspectives are considering that 'thing is balanced against thing in causal interconnection'; see John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, 'Knowing and the Known', in John Dewey: *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991 [1949]), 101. As Mustafa Emirbayer has noted, according to these perspectives, 'the relevant action takes place *among* the entities themselves. Entities remain fixed and unchanging throughout such inter-action, each independent of the existence of the others'. In other words, they participate in a 'variable-centred approach' to social life; see Mustafa Emirbayer, 'Manifesto for a Relational Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (1997): 285–6, original emphasis.

¹³ Abbott, 'Transcending General Linear Reality', 170.

To a certain extent, then, to give way fully to linearity would reduce trans-actionist¹⁴ approaches to self- and inter-actionists accounts of the ‘international’ or, more particularly of the identity–alterity nexus¹⁵. Hence, in a series of relations between events a, b, x, y , and z , it does not follow that the sequence $\{a, x, z, b, y\}$ has to be ordered in that specific way or that each element should appear in the sequence at all for them to constitute a specific process. From this follows a second remark in relation to Rescher’s definition, namely that for him stages in a process are connected by a programme (a rule, law, or principle) while it can be argued that ‘the stages of a process might be connected by means of relationships that they have with one another, relationships that are concrete and particular ... Moreover, there might be processes that are random and disordered, and yet later stages might emerge from earlier ones by means of relationships that are concrete and particular’.¹⁶

The nodal point of these remarks is to highlight an apparent tension existing in process philosophy between the nomographic dimension implied by the fact that a process is a *general category* applicable to a set of events or occurrences (i.e. identity as a process) and the idiographic dimension of each specific processes by which the general category is identified as such (i.e. the particular and concrete relations and processes *one* identity possesses constituting it as a process). In other words, the category of process can represent both generalisable patterns of connected developments *and* sets of particular instantiations embedded in clusters of smaller processes. We will say that the former are superordinate processes (such as ‘identity,’ the ‘state,’ or the ‘international system’) and the latter subordinate processes (such as, accordingly, ‘citizenship,’ ‘sovereignty,’ or the ‘state’).¹⁷ What determines

¹⁴ See Dewey and Bentley, ‘Knowing and the Known’, 101–2. According to Emirbayer, trans-actionist approaches are approaches for which ‘the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction. The later, seen as a dynamic, unfolding process, becomes the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements themselves’; see Emirbayer, ‘Manifesto for a Relational Sociology’, 287.

¹⁵ Self-actionist approaches are approaches in which ‘things are viewed as acting under their own powers’; see Dewey and Bentley, ‘Knowing and the Known’, 101.

¹⁶ See Lango, ‘Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy (Book Review)’: 690–2.

¹⁷ In turn, these subordinate processes might be superordinate in relation to other events, occurrences or relations. For instance, citizenship might be seen as a superordinate process composed of

superordinates or subordinates is fundamentally dependent on the *problématique* chosen by the researcher in her questioning of the social world. Subordinate processes are clusters of processes which define the appearance of the superordinate process and the category of process it belongs to. Identity, then, is instantiated as a category, a superordinate process, through its particular history, the (sub)processes that *an* identity can be categorised by, that is ‘by the temporal structure of its descriptive unfolding across time’.¹⁸ That is to say that an identity is neither fixed in time (a substance owned of some sort) nor is the reflection of a deterministic pattern all identities might have to follow.

This is certainly what the philosopher Dorothy Emmet meant when she defined a process as a ‘continuant with an internal order and a direction of change’.¹⁹ The term *continuant* is key here as for Emmet it allows the substantialist rendering of words such as *substance* or *entity* to be avoided.²⁰ W. E. Johnson defined a *continuant* as ‘that which continues to exist throughout some limited or unlimited period of time during which its inner states or its outer connections may be altered or remain unaltered’.²¹ To understand an identity as a *continuant* is especially enlightening from a processual perspective. In effect, this allows identity to be seen as a process both stable in time (it continues through time) and changing (it is an ever ongoing event that might simply reproduce itself or might evolve in one way or another according to this ‘direction of change’).

The ‘international’ as process: the identity–alterity nexus

Most conceptualisations of identity in IR have a strong spatial component, often leading them to fail to comprehend an identity’s historicity and temporality as well as

subordinates such as politics of recognition or other forms of institutional acts participating in the constitution of citizenship as a process.

¹⁸ Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 26.

¹⁹ Dorothy Mary Emmet, *The Passage of Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

²¹ As quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

its constructedness.²² Approaches for which those dimensions matter have also often failed to go beyond a spatial conceptualisation of identity by relying strongly on a pervasive dichotomy in IR between corporate and social identities²³ that fundamentally are reflective of a spatial conceptualisation of what the ‘international’ is.²⁴ The use of these categories basically relies on taking sovereignty as the defining criteria determining the ‘international’ by marking it as being outside the state; in other words, the ‘international’ is the space within which therefore defined agents are *inter-acting* with one another. However, as R. B. J. Walker has noted, ‘state sovereignty expresses an historically specific articulation of the relationship between universality and particularity in space and time’, affirming ‘a specific resolution of philosophical and political options that must be acknowledged everywhere and sets clear limits to our capacity to envisage other possibility’. Moreover, while state sovereignty reflects the practices of states it has mistakenly been taken as their essence, as what they are and, from the analyst’s perspective, as the ‘silent condition guaranteeing all other categories’.²⁵

Temporality itself in IR is generally spatialised. To take but one example, alterity is generally conceived as distance within a specific time continuum as is shown, for instance, in theories of development or modernisation and in the impact they had on IR theories considered within their disciplinary boundaries.²⁶ Moreover, there seems to be a consensus among IR theories that collective political identities have to be correlated with the emergence and crystallisation of state territoriality while this is empirically not necessarily the case as, for instance, national identities can often be

²² See John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (London: Routledge, 1998), 22.

²³ See Alexander Wendt, ‘Collective Identity Formation and the International State’, *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994), Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁴ See Guillaume, ‘A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations’, and Himadeep Muppidi, *The Politics of the Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

²⁵ R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 176–7. See as well the contributions in Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁶ See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), ch. 1, Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (London: Routledge, 2004).

shown to have predated the spatial location of the state, its territorialisation.²⁷ As much as the ‘international’ is customarily understood within IR as a ‘where’ (de)limited by state sovereignty (a particular, i.e. western, story), this spatial comprehension also (de)limits the forms of intelligibility by which the analyst can apprehend events or phenomena. In the end, international relations become what happens outside the state, what is happening at the liminal space between states, or what is happening across states, *trans*-nationally. From a processual perspective, not only does IR seem to be quite parochial (i.e. western) in its spatial construction of the ‘international’ but it also seems to be prone to what Norbert Elias called ‘process-reduction’, that is to say a movement by which the ‘possible separation of interrelated things into individual components – “variables” or “factors” – without any need to consider how such separate and isolated aspects of a comprehensive context are related to each other’ is made possible. Moreover, ‘[a]t all events, the relationship appears to be an afterthought, an addition, tacked on later to intrinsically unrelated and isolated objects’.²⁸

So how can we consider the ‘international’ from a processual perspective? The ‘international’ can be considered as a superordinate process defined by a cluster of subordinate processes. In other words, the ‘international’, rather than being somewhere clearly delimited by the boundaries of sovereign states, is constituted by and constitutive of the material and ideational practices of a variety of social agents.²⁹ What matters then is to analyse those practices to make sense of the ‘international’ as a process. Indeed, the subordinate processes constituting the ‘international’ are multiple and various, and while they can analytically be distinguished they are intimately enmeshed together in a web of tightly interwoven relations. It is thus crucial to note that any rendering of the ‘international’ can only be partial in its scope and problem-oriented; that is to say that the place of the ‘observer’ is determinant in detailing what processes are at stake according to a certain *problématique* of the

²⁷ See Peter Sahlins, ‘The Nation in the Village: State-Building and Communal Struggles in the Catalan Borderland during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, *The Journal of Modern History* 60, no. 2 (1988).

²⁸ Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 112–16.

²⁹ On boundaries as processes, see Andrew Abbott, ‘Things of Boundaries’, *Social Research* 62, no. 4 (1995).

‘international’ and why.³⁰ These subordinate processes could, for instance, be characterised by two overlapping nexuses – cooperation-conflict and identity–alterity³¹ – within which more precise subordinate processes can be identified and analysed. For instance, the identity–alterity nexus can be deconstructed into several processes such as politics of alterity, identity politics, securitisation, politics of redistribution, politics of recognition, and so on, which themselves are to be deconstructed into several processes. What is crucial, however, is to restate the importance of the *problématique*, for it is only through a *problématique* that processes can be delimited properly; analytically, there are no ‘processes’ outside their relevance within a *problématique*.

Now, to turn to the identity–alterity nexus more concretely, one has to consider how we can think about identity from a processual perspective. First, I have already hinted that an identity can be considered as social continuant. To represent an identity categorially as a series of events means that an identity possesses a certain internal order composed of actual or possible occurrences, that is a series of subordinate processes, as well as a direction of change which can simply tend to its ongoing maintenance or, more radically, its transformation. Stability, therefore, should not be seen as an equivalent to stasis as it is the result of a direction favouring the maintenance of a certain identity.³² To define identity as a social continuant naturally brings to mind the idea of performativity.³³ As a superordinate process, an identity can be performed through time so as to provide it with a(n) (artificial) boundary, a(n) (assumed) fixity, a sense of ‘naturalness’. It can also be performed in a way that transforms an identity into a different one.

³⁰ See Didier Bigo and R.B.J. Walker, ‘International, Political, Sociology’, *International Political Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2007).

³⁰ Indeed, one nexus is not exclusive of the other while they are not necessarily linked together analytically. Some analysis might want them to overlap as is the case of critical IPE, which defines IPE as ‘a particular cultural form characterised by an ongoing attempt to mediate the opposition between the principles of equality and social hierarchy and between identity and difference through the staging of competitions’; see Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 130.

³¹ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 11.

³² See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Cynthia Weber, ‘Performative States’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27, no. 1 (1998).

One advantage of looking at identity through this ‘narrative prism’, in the words of Margaret Somers, is that it ‘provides an opportunity to infuse the study of identity with a relational and historical approach that avoids categorical rigidities by emphasizing the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space’.³⁴ An identity is then to be understood as ‘plotted’ through a multitude of commitments and identifications³⁵ that basically give the structures and the horizons by which individuals, groups, societies, politics or, to categorially group them, social continuants determine what the good is, what should and should not be, what should be done and how, or with or to what or whom one should be associated or opposed. These different identities, whatever the ‘level’ at which they are situated, are not equivalent to one another; indeed they tend to be hierarchically articulated in the functioning of a variety of factors, whether they be cultural, societal, contextual, or whatever else.³⁶ There are ‘evaluative criteria’ allowing one to see if some of these are felt as contingents, to the extent that they are circumstantial, or whether some others, however, might be felt as hypergoods.³⁷ Hypergoods³⁸, as Charles Taylor defined them, are ‘goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about’.³⁹

Within the field of international relations, for which collective identities are most salient, a collective identity, then, is determined in a specific context by the actual networks of relations in which it is set as a peculiar hypergood *vis-à-vis* not only other potential hypergoods (whether internal or external to the community through which this identity is expressed) but also more circumstantial identities. As I have argued

³³ Margaret R. Somers, ‘The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach’ *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994): 607.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 616–17.

³⁵ See Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 22–3, Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity, Ethnonationalism in Comparative Perspective* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 3–8.

³⁶ Somers, ‘The Narrative Constitution of Identity’: 617.

³⁷ It should be noted, however, that the idea of a hypergood should not be seen as a return to a substantialist view of identity. A hypergood is a horizon which might determine, influence or override other horizons which do not have this capacity, in return, for this hypergood.

³⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 63.

elsewhere, an identity is in a *dialogical trans-action*⁴⁰ with alterity, that is to say that an identity's boundaries, as a social continuant, are the reflection of the interweaving of its expression, its contextuality and its relations to other social continuants, to sets of events and phenomena.⁴¹ From a processual point of view, then, three dimensions are especially important for assessing an identity's specificities, its emergence, its performance and its transformation: its *expressivity*, 'how' it is performed; its *contextuality*, 'where' and 'when' an identity is performed; and its *relationality*, in regard to 'whom' it is articulated or not.

If an identity's constitution, performance and transformation are always dialogically linked to other identities or social events, the characterisation of these links can be made sense of once one conceptualises them as continuous relations, a continuous 'dialogue', between a multitude of social continuants. However, to establish which social continuants are determinant for, say, a specific 'national identity', and how, it will be crucial to concentrate on how the latter is expressed, through which self-representation; we should thus pay attention to a 'national identity's' scope, style and content. This is where subordinate processes play their most important analytical roles as they allow for a deconstruction of a complex superordinate process into a set of clearly identifiable and definable processes indicating how a community is actually expressed and performed. As Benedict Anderson indeed rightfully noted, '[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the *style* in which they are imagined'.⁴² These subordinate processes are thus a way of knowing how a 'national identity' is imagined and in which context, and *vis-à-vis* to whom it is so, as well as how these 'whom' are indeed understood and represented. Dominant narratives within a community might structure not only how this 'national

³⁹ A distinction is to be made between *dialogic* and *dialogical* approaches to 'identity'; while the former refers to the idea of dialogue as an exchange between interlocutors and concentrates on the normative problem of reciprocity and recognition, the latter is to be situated ontologically before these important concerns as it primarily focuses on the characterisation of the processes, the trans-actions, constituting, performing, and transforming an identity in its necessary relations to alterity; see Guillaume, 'A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations'.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Guillaume, 'Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity'.

⁴¹ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ext edn (London: Verso, 1991), 6, emphasis added.

identity’ might be shaped but also what are the symbolic resources at hand for such a ‘national identity’ to be performed, maintained or transformed.⁴³

These symbolic resources, as well as the social agents in the capacity to mobilise, alter or contest these resources, are to be ‘situated’ both diachronously and synchronously within their contexts of expression. These contexts, in the same way that Michael Mann defined a society, can be regarded as ‘multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power’.⁴⁴ A polity, therefore, is not so much a locus as a network, a bundle of processes.⁴⁵ From a process-based perspective, power here is not to be understood as something one possesses so much as a relation emerging ‘out of the very way in which figurations of relationships ... are patterned and operate’.⁴⁶ Power is thus both reflecting the relative position these social agents relationally entertain and the constitution of these social agents’ identity.⁴⁷ What a process-approach help us to do then is to grasp complex configurations of power relations from which an ‘identity’ emerges, is performed or is maintained.⁴⁸ Many of these configurations would otherwise go amiss from a spatial conceptualisation of the ‘international’ and identity because either they would be categorially ruled out – as belonging to an inside outside IR’s scope – or would be subjected to a form of ‘process-reduction’, which Elias warned us against some 30 years ago. The following illustration will try to show how a seemingly ‘domestic’ event, the French ‘veil affair’, which would be cast as belonging to France’s corporate dimension, is actually revealing the ‘international’ from the perspective of the identity–alterity nexus when one is intrigued by the processes by which a collective political identity might be formed, performed and transformed.

⁴² See Xavier Guillaume, ‘Misdirected Understandings. Narrative Matrices in the Japanese Politics of Alterity toward the West’, *Japanstudien: Jahrbuch des Deutschen Instituts für Japanstudien* 15 (2003).

⁴³ As quoted in Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *Politics: Authority, Identities, and Change* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 32.

⁴⁴ See Elias, *What is Sociology?*

⁴⁵ Emirbayer, ‘Manifesto for a Relational Sociology’: 291.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques: sur la théorie de l’action* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 53-57, Peter Digeser, ‘The Fourth Face of Power’, *The Journal of Politics* 54, no. 4 (1992), Michel Foucault, ‘Le sujet et le pouvoir’, in *Dits et Ecrits, 1976–1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001 (1982)).

⁴⁷ See Guillaume, ‘A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations’.

Unveiling the ‘international’

In regard to understanding what the ‘international’ is and how it is produced, the French ‘veil affair’ and the related issue of French citizenship would normally either be discarded altogether as pertaining to France’s corporate identity, and thus not belonging to the ‘international’ as a space, or this event would still be considered alongside the inside/outside dichotomy thus being subjected to a form of process-reduction. Indeed, whether totally or partially, these two positions will be rather oblivious to the place the French ‘veil affair’ holds in the process of the constitution and performance of a collective political identity, which itself cannot be understood solely either as something pertaining to an inside *or* an outside. In IR, questions of ‘identity’ and ‘citizenship’ are generally situated *among* states, or in relation to an ‘inside’ (the citizens) and outsiders of the sovereign state (say immigrants), and not so much participating in processes related to the governing of ‘a large, culturally diverse and interdependent world population’, by which a population, however stratified, is divided ‘into a series of discrete sub-populations’ through which the dominant collective political identity is set in relation to, and often against, differentiated loyalties without and within the polity.⁴⁹ Processually, then, citizenship should rather be considered as a web of symbolic representations defining who, how and why one should belong to an imagined social and political community.⁵⁰

This is even more important when one considers that citizenship is a core element defining modern nation-states as polities and, as noted, participates fully in the dialogical trans-actions constituting, performing or transforming collective political identities for citizenship structures both vertical and horizontal relationships citizens hold within and without these polities.⁵¹ Thus, to comprehend the ‘international’

⁴⁸ Barry Hindess, ‘Divide and Rule. The International Character of Modern Citizenship’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1998): 67.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Ibid, Engin F. Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Ruth Lister, ‘Citizenship and Difference: Towards a Differentiated Universalism’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (1998).

⁵⁰ See, Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, *Citizenship and Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), Gérard Noiriel, *État, nation et immigration: vers une histoire du pouvoir* (Paris: Belin, 2001), 188–90.

from the perspective of the identity–alterity nexus one cannot simply discard altogether this dimension for being ‘domestic’ or cannot consider it solely within its ‘domestic’ framework and limit its conceptualisation of citizenship to a formal understanding, that is to say as a set of rights and duties structuring the relation between individuals and the state. By formal, I also mean that the defining criterion that is used to analyse citizenship lies ‘outside the activity’ of citizenship itself, ‘before it begins or after it ends’.⁵²

Moreover, contemporary nation-states are all confronted with a double movement regarding citizenship, and hence their articulations of collective identities: a pluralisation and a fragmentation.⁵³ Indeed, nation-states are not only facing ‘the institutions of global regimes of governance (and their accountability) that redefine the rights and obligations of citizens as members of nation-states’, they are also challenged by a ‘pluralization of identities, the decline of master narratives, fragmentation of worldviews and localization of critiques’, resulting, for instance, in new social movements grounded on consumerist, ecological and gender issues. Moreover, nation-states are not only facing the challenges of information technologies, whether as new forms of political and social mobilisations or as new forms of governmentality; they also have to grapple with alternative, and sometimes competing, forms of loyalties related to postcolonial, diasporic and urban identifications often in contraposition to a more national form of collective political identity.⁵⁴ Synthetically, to paraphrase Engin Isin and Patricia Wood, the question now is ‘how to imagine [an ‘international’] in which sovereignty is intersecting, multiple and overlapping’.⁵⁵

This is exactly the kind of global context in which the French ‘veil affair’ is to be located and that makes it a relevant event to our understanding of the ‘international’ as process, from the angle of the identity–alterity nexus. The French ‘veil affair’

⁵¹ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 59.

⁵² See Isin and Wood, *Citizenship and Identity*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 155–60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

participates in the articulation of a collective political identity which cannot be comprehended outside its relations with alterity both within and without the polity. Indeed, the French ‘veil affair’ is revealing of a specific (dominant) French national identity that is posited against specific demands of recognition, which acknowledgement would, by and large, be considered as a significant transformation of this national identity in giving way to a more ‘multiculturalist’, that is to say less ‘republican’, self-understanding/representation of what ‘Frenchness’ could be. These alternative self-understandings/representations are not only linked to actual *French citizens’* demands for recognition of their cultural specificities (e.g. being Muslims) but also should be recast, in order to gain a fuller comprehension of the processes at work, to the more general context of North and Sub-Saharan African immigration in France, France’s historical, political and economic involvement with these regions, as well as the very strong social problems in highly urbanised suburban France where a majority of these migrant populations are located. One should also not forget the threat of Islamic terrorism since the early 1990s. From the perspective of the identity–alterity nexus, if one takes a spatial understanding of the ‘international’, this French example could easily be dismissed as essentially a matter related to France’s ‘corporate identity’. Yet, even to understand it as a ‘corporate identity’ case requires inclusion of France’s ‘social identity’ as a former colonial power, as ‘the country’ of human rights and social integration, and as a model of cultural and social integration in a plural Europe. As the French ‘veil affair’ shows, however, these spatial categories become empirically so fluid that their analytical disjuncture seems at odds, thus giving process-based approaches a rationale for being considered over a more substantialist comprehension of the ‘international’.

Having situated the ‘international’ background, if one could say, of the French ‘veil affair’, it is now important, from a processual perspective, also to situate this event in more specific contexts of expression of subsequent formulations of a French national identity through the questions of multiculturalism and *laïcité* (laity) in regards to French citizenship. First, it is important to note in terms of both context and expressivity the place of the ideas of *la République* and *laïcité*. Both these have been present for long period of times in post-revolutionary France’s polity. Yet, this long-

term presence should not hide the fact that both ideas were/are actually determined by their contexts of expression; *la République*, for instance, is a contingent idea because its own evolution within the French polity informed different and competing articulations of a French national community during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵⁶ Indeed, in regard to the *problématique* of multiculturalism in France, it is essential to understand the place of *la République* in the formation, performance and transformation of a French national identity. Diachronically, on the one hand, the ideal of a republican public space and respect for ‘republican values’, especially as expressed in the idea of citizenship, were elements providing an apparent continuity, since the revolutionary period, in the constitution of a national community.⁵⁷

Synchronously, on the other hand, France faced continuous discontinuities in terms of its constitution as a horizontal political community. In terms of the *problématique* of multiculturalism, we can see two tensions running across post-revolutionary France; tensions that were informed by the ideal of republicanism acting as an essential political repertoire. First, as shown in Pierre Rosanvallon’s *Le modèle politique français*, the French political system can be said to be structured through a tension between a universal tendency represented by a ‘political culture of universality [*de la généralité*]’ – privileging the general will, the common good, a horizontal unity, the absence of ‘interface’ between the individuals and politics, and the procedural regulative power of law over deliberative politics –, and the particularistic tendencies reflected in civil society.⁵⁸ Second, as highlighted by Gérard Noiriel’s study on the impact of immigration on France’s conception of its national community, one can see a tension between a more universalistic conception of nationality embedded in the republican ideal, thus recognising the heterogeneity of the nation, and a more particularistic conception which, without necessarily opposing itself to *la République* (sometimes quite the contrary), affirmed the homogeneity of the nation. France’s nineteenth- and

⁵⁵ See Wolfram Kaiser, ‘Vive la France! Vive la République? The Cultural Construction of French Identity at the World Exhibitions in Paris 1855–1900’, *National Identities* 1, no. 3 (1999), Noiriel, *État, nation et immigration*, Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français. La société civile contre le jacobinisme: de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

⁵⁶ See Noiriel, *État, nation et immigration*, ch. 4.

⁵⁷ Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français*.

twentieth-century conceptions of the nation were, and still are, actually moving from one conception to the other.⁵⁹

The recent questions relating to the place of *laïcité* in France's *République* in reaction to the 'veil affair' have strongly highlighted this tension between particularism and universalism in the ways in which the French authorities have dealt with it.⁶⁰ In this case, *laïcité* was clearly perceived as participating in the definition of what the French national community was supposed to be. In the terms of a *Report to the President of the Republic* issued by a commission of experts on the question of *laïcité*, 'laity is not only a rule of the institutional game, it is a foundational value of the republican pact allowing accommodating a life in common [*un vivre ensemble*] and pluralism, diversity'.⁶¹ Hence, explicit and implicit references to republican ideals were used in the public spheres by numerous social agents – the state, intellectuals, mass media, and so on – to legitimate a certain vision of French citizenry/national identity which can only be understood in the dialogical performance of this dominant self-understanding/representation against what were depicted as communitarianism (*les communautarismes*), different and/or alternative self-understandings/representations seen as threatening this dominant one.⁶² Moreover, the French model of citizenship and integration was presented favourably in comparison with other models, such as the Dutch one, at the European Union level, even implicitly suggesting that the French model based on *laïcité* could be seen as an example for other countries to follow since it was noted that most countries in Europe, after erring in the void of

⁵⁸ Noiriel, *État, nation et immigration*.

⁵⁹ See Matteo Gianni, 'I limiti del repubblicanismo francese come modello di gestione del multiculturalismo', Unpublished Manuscript (2004).

⁶⁰ Bernard Stasi, *Commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République. Rapport au Président de la République* (Paris: La Documentation Française/lesrapports.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/BRP/034000725/0000.pdf, last consulted 05/18/2007, 2003), 36. It is also interesting to note that non-institutional production emerging from the public sphere was institutionalised by the French polity's apparatus. Indeed, it is interesting to note the place intellectuals took in the public debate, and in the justification of politics of alterity, both before and, interestingly, after the publication of the *Report to the President of the Republic*, which outlined different possible actions that the French government could undertake in face of religious demands for recognition; a report in which those same intellectuals were participating as contributors and interlocutors.

⁶¹ See Matteo Gianni and Xavier Guillaume, 'Unveiling Citizens: Veiling Democracy?' (forthcoming).

multiculturalism (as a policy), were now getting back to a ‘more voluntarist integration policy’.⁶³

One of the striking features of the French ‘veil affair,’ when one is to look at the ‘style’ by which a French collective political identity was articulated, was that the political answer to this event came through a law against ostentatious religious symbols in the public school almost unanimously voted for by the French parliament.⁶⁴ This law was clearly cast by institutional actors and perceived by the public as a law against forms of communitarianism, perceived un-republican ideologies. These ideologies were seen as potentially threatening the sheer fabric of French society and its ability to foster a ‘common life’ among a variety of communities and collective identities through *laïcité*, which articulates ‘national unity, the *République*’s neutrality, and a recognition of diversity’.⁶⁵ Yet, what is really striking is that the law itself is normatively at odds with basic republican ideals that value deliberative processes and a continuous negotiation of the public good among citizens.⁶⁶ This legislation is a style of expression of the current dominant French national identity that is crucial in the present context of France’s relation to both its migrant populations *and* those of its national citizens who might possess or wish to express alternative self-understandings/representations. Indeed, it is casting as un-republican, and thus un-French, those who express, at least in the public sphere, ideas in contraposition to a law, even though persons or groups targeted by the law might not hold positions hostile or even in opposition to *laïcité per se*, as a recent study has shown.⁶⁷

⁶² Stasi, ‘Commission de réflexion sur l’application du principe de laïcité dans la République: Rapport au Président de la République’, 32–6.

⁶⁴ See ‘Loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics’ (www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENX0400001L, last consulted 05/18/2007).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁴ See Matteo Gianni, ‘The Democratic Integration of Difference: Reflections on the Paradoxes of the French Republican Model of Citizenship’, (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ See Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj, *Rapport au politique des Français issus de l’immigration* (Paris: CEVIPOF, Sciences PO, 2005).

As a form of expression, the law can be seen as a form of closure to alternative self-understandings/representations within the French polity, with the imaginable consequences this might have on those whose difference is being othered through that medium.⁶⁶ It is thus to be placed in the more general context of illiberal security practices of liberal democratic states which are participating in a globalisation of not only the construction and management of security threats⁶⁹ but also contemporary forms of securitisation of collective political identities.⁷⁰ In the ‘veil affair’ case, it is interesting to note the institutional production, such as laws or official reports, can be seen as participating in successful ‘speech acts’ at the governmental level having possible effects upon the public sphere in formatting and framing practices of security that shape the ‘style’ in which the French political community is imagined. To pay attention to the French ‘veil affair’ is to pay attention to certain processes participating in the formation, performance and transformation of collective political identities that pertain to liberal political regimes, now dominating the ‘international’ defined spatially; thus, it is also about looking at how these regimes are participating in the definition of not only their own polities but also the ‘international’ as a social space defined by their practices.

Finally, as any polity is the result of particular relational settings *vis-à-vis* ‘internal’ and/or ‘external’ as well as concrete and/or imagined alternative self-understandings/representations, a processual approach to international relations is thus an attempt to transcend the artificial divide between the external realm of international relations *and* the internal realm of domestic politics. This is done partly by paying attention to the relations a particular ‘collective political identity’, to continue our example, might have *vis-à-vis* alternative ‘identities’, that is how different loyalties are played out through different expressions. The concept of relationality here underlines that social continuants are not self-contained, but are defined by their

⁶⁶ For a similar argument through the analysis of national myths see Arash Abizadeh, ‘Historical Truth, National Myths and Liberal Democracy: On the Coherence of Liberal Nationalism’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2004).

⁶⁷ See Centre d’études sur les conflits (ed.), *Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes: The (In)security Games* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006).

⁶⁸ On securitisation, see Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CA.: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

extrinsicism. Social continuants' identities are an extrinsic property in the sense that they are dependent 'wholly or partly on something other than that thing',⁷¹ or in other words, 'they are not self-contained because entities are what they are partly in virtue of their relations outside of themselves'.⁷² In our example of the French collective political identity, one has to understand it as participating in a continuous process of identification of what *it* itself is *vis-à-vis* alternative understandings and representations which transcend the inside/outside divide. These 'identities' might be situated in space or in time, in conjunction or in contraposition; all is a matter of their contextual valence.⁷³ Indeed, this specific collective political identity might, depending on the context, face differentiating understandings or representations of what it should be (say a form of republicanism open to the recognition of minority groups through differentiated rights) or even opposing ones located 'inside' the polity but whose comprehension cannot be exempted from their relations to movements, ideas, people often situated 'outside' the nation-state. Moreover, the articulation of this collective political identity cannot be put away from it in relation to other collective political or other forms of collective identity that are participating in its formation, performance and transformation.

Conclusion

All in all, processual approaches can be understood in reference to the idea of 'scheme of intelligibility', that is to say 'a matrix of operations permitting to inscribe a group of facts within a system of intelligibility'.⁷⁴ As a scheme of intelligibility, we have seen that processual approaches to the 'international' in particular are less interested in 'why' *problématiques* rather than 'how' *problématiques* because process-

⁶⁹ David Weberman, 'Cambridge Changes Revisited: Why Certain Relational Changes are Indispensable', *Dialectica* 53, no. 2 (1999): 140.

⁷⁰ David Weberman, 'Heidegger's Relationalism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2001): 109. For a discussion of the distinction between identity as an intrinsic or extrinsic property of a social continuant and its implications for IR theory, see Guillaume, 'A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations'.

⁷¹ See Ole Wæver, 'European Security Identities', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34, no. 1 (1996).

⁷² Jean-Michel Berthelot, *L'intelligence du social: le pluralisme explicatif en sociologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990), 23.

orientated analysis's main onto-epistemic goal is to depart from self- and inter-actionist perspectives which are now still dominating IR as a discipline. The previous sections showed how one can see processes as participating in a 'system of intelligibility' of the identity–alterity nexus. An identity, a specific self-understanding/representation, was presented as a 'social continuant', as a series of ongoing events and/or occurrences plotted through a multitude of commitments and identifications that basically give the structures and the horizons determining what the good is, what should and should not be, what should be done and how, or what or whom one should be associated with, distinguished from or opposed to.

What process-based approaches in IR provide is a fitter way to not only understand a series of phenomena challenging our spatial comprehension of the 'international' but also provide a tool for theorising this 'international' as a series of complex and varied processes in itself, both constituted by and constitutive of these phenomena. As mentioned, it is commonly held, whether implicitly or explicitly, that the 'international' is a (modern) place, a 'where' that we have to observe in order to understand or explain it. This 'where' has been defined by its organising principle, sovereignty, thus (de)limiting its space at the interface among states-actors. The 'international', however, is more likely to be a process constituted of a multitude of subordinated processes. From the latter perspective, the French 'veil affair' is not to be seen, as would usually be the case in IR, as something outside the 'international', but, on the contrary, as a participating in processes of collective identity definition and performance deeply embedded in the 'international' as a process, for it enhances our understanding of the French polity as one trans-acting between other forms of identifications informed by alternative modes than the nation-state form and this most notably when one is considering the issue of multiculturalism.

Indeed, this case is clearly participating in one of the multiple processes constituting the 'international' that is in itself a superordinate process composed of a complex and varied series of subprocesses which can at least be compartmentalised into the two main nexuses structuring our efforts to comprehend the political and sociological constitution of the 'international'. The French 'veil affair' should be

considered as fully part of our *problématisation* of the ‘international’ as a process for it reflects relationships of power in the constitutive attempt to perform a specific collective political identity, representing a specific polity, involving not only globalised phenomena (immigration, culturally informed social movements, minority rights issues, and so on) but also key contemporary issues, such as multiculturalism, that are fundamental to the comprehension and furthering of our understanding of the processes constituting the ‘international’ today.

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