

### Rethinking the Multilateral Order Between Liberal Internationalism and Neoliberalism/ Neoliberalisation Processes

Knio, Karim

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Knio, K. (2022). Rethinking the Multilateral Order Between Liberal Internationalism and Neoliberalism/Neoliberalisation Processes. *Politics and Governance*, 10(2), 6-14. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i2.5116>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Article

## Rethinking the Multilateral Order Between Liberal Internationalism and Neoliberalism/Neoliberalisation Processes

Karim Knio

Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands; knio@iss.nl

Submitted: 18 November 2021 | Accepted: 15 February 2022 | Published: 21 April 2022

### Abstract

Discourses on multilateralism and liberal internationalism are replete with warnings about crises. However, theories often only address crises in pragmatic terms, as if they were discreet and isolated phenomena that have little to do with globalized structural tendencies and the specific limitations of knowledge production within the field of international relations (IR). This article initiates a process of reflection on the nature of the crisis of liberal internationalism and the multilateral world order with the help of the pedagogy of crises framework. It identifies the biases contained within IR research and knowledge production as integral to the crises themselves because of the limitations of their engagement with crises solely at the crisis management level. Acknowledging and situating these biases allows us to build a perspective around the notion of *crisis of crisis management*. This perspective entails a combination of the study of liberal internationalism and neoliberalism to better explain the nature and dynamics of the multilateral world order. This endeavour can offer a fresh take on analysing case studies related to developing countries and outlines a critical focus to inform further research. A brief review of the Chilean example is featured to support this argument, as it shows how the processes that unfold within the multilateral world order are articulated within a local context, and also points to the intimate relations between knowledge production and policy implementation. The article demonstrates the impossibility of understanding the multilateral world order without due consideration of the dialectical relationship between neoliberalism and liberal internationalism. Historically, analyses have focused on neoliberalism as something embedded within liberal internationalism while, in fact, processes of neoliberalisation have become a framework of reference in themselves. That is to say, liberal internationalism, and the study of it, are but a few of the elements that comprise contemporary neoliberalism. Given this, it is argued that systematic academic engagement with neoliberalism/neoliberalisation is essential for a proper understanding of the multilateral world order.

### Keywords

commodification; crisis management; developing countries; knowledge production; liberal internationalism; marketisation; multilateralism; neoliberalisation; neoliberalism; world order

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “Developing Countries and the Crisis of the Multilateral Order” edited by Wil Hout (Erasmus University Rotterdam) and Michal Onderco (Erasmus University Rotterdam / Peace Research Center Prague).

© 2022 by the author(s); licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

### 1. Introduction

There is an omnipresent sense of crisis across the liberal internationalism literature that addresses the liberal nature of the multilateral world order (Dunne & Koivisto, 2010; Flockhart, 2018; Ikenberry, 2009; Keohane, 2012; Ruggie, 1982). Authors such as Tim Dunne present a compelling argument outlining the importance of comprehending international relations (IR) literature as an ongoing

illustration of mostly “Westernized” (and US-based) multilateral crises (Dunne, 2010). Even though this literature represents a great advance in demonstrating how crises define liberal internationalism, they do not represent a comprehensive take, as they operate with a limited set of ontological assumptions. This article offers a distinct, systemic approach to tackle the perception and study of crises within liberal internationalism and the multilateral world order literatures, by taking advantage

of ontological and epistemological differences. The pedagogy of crisis framework supports the precise analysis of crisis tendencies and reflexivities as they interact both in and over time to generate new mechanisms or to silence certain understandings. It supports the distinction between *crisis management* and *crisis of crisis management* perspectives and draws attention to various types of learning in relation to crises.

The article demonstrates how current IR understandings of the crisis of liberal internationalism are restricted by a crisis management perspective. It offers an invitation to “zoom-out” of the study of liberal internationalism and transition to a crisis of crisis management point of view that recognizes how liberal internationalism is embedded in neoliberalisation processes, rather than the other way around. While exploring the study of neoliberal phenomena, the term “neoliberalisation” is suggested to differentiate it from “neoliberalism.” The latter implies a static and monolithic object or content, while “neoliberalisation” emphasizes spatiotemporally specific processes of institutionalisation. Advancing this approach, the article calls attention to the dialectical interaction between neoliberalisation and liberal internationalism and urges further research to expose key characteristics of the multilateral world order. Finally, it proposes the complex study of neoliberalism in a manner inspired by Polanyi’s (1944) scholarship on the dynamics of marketisation and commodification. These concepts help with clustering contemporary approaches that deal with neoliberalisation according to their focus, i.e., whether they see it as a process driven by the commodification of marketisation or as a process pushed by the marketisation of commodification.

“Commodification of marketisation” processes are rooted in ideational-material ontological debates where the ideational is seen as inherently semiotic and co-constitutive and the material is acknowledged as both non-discursive and a co-constitutor of meaning” (Knio, in press). Consequently, the commodification of marketisation focuses on the social construction of markets within capitalism (Cahill, 2012). Authors supportive of this approach trace the thickening of unintended, incoherent, constructed, and uneven origins of neoliberalisation processes across time to the contemporary moment. As such, neoliberal policies emanating from these processes become solidified to seemingly embody a unified and a singularly commodified body of regulatory frameworks that span across different institutional landscapes around the world (Brenner et al., 2010). In so doing, the origins of these once historically contingent and relational processes are transformed into being a thing or a commodity of a regulatory transfer in their own right.

Marketisation of commodification processes are rooted in material-ideational ontological debates where respective scholars understand the world as something independent of the mind, asserting that ideas and meanings are based on something (the material) that necessarily precedes their formulation. The ideational

is therefore predominantly treated as being causally and/or relationally constitutive and embedded within the material. Given this premise, neoliberalisation processes here are understood as different marketisation attempts surrounding the commodification problem (land/environment, people/labour, and money) that is inherent to capitalism. Consequently, these systemic and process-based analyses treat capitalism as the central object of investigation wherein the focus is on how different agents marketise the commodification of land/labour and money across the globe.

As the case on Chile will demonstrate, this type of knowledge production is essential for understanding developing country contexts, because they provide new ontologically and epistemologically grounded explanations about why specific neoliberalisation processes played out as they did.

## 2. Multilateralism and the Crisis of Liberal Internationalism

### 2.1. Debates on Multilateralism

Multilateralism was initially understood as an institutional form concerning matters such as international trade arrangements, diplomatic negotiations or issues of international financial traffic, where two or more high-profile parties decidedly enter into a contract-like agreement to find a compromise between their interests. The purpose of this is to determine the parties’ future behaviour and preserve their sovereignty while also demarcating its limits and assuming cooperation and reciprocity between those involved. In the last few centuries, multilateralism, as a preferred form of international interactions was alleged to have become so all-encompassing that the authors began to define the contemporary world order in relation to this single entity, given its position as a distinct feature that sets it apart from previous historical eras (Downs et al., 1998; Nefedov, 2021; Weiss & Wilkinson, 2014). The initiatives that rendered the study of multilateralism relevant came from the need to cover theoretical gaps in world order analysis, as well as from the need to explain the events of the day for the purpose of political justification (Cox, 1992).

It is well-known that classical realism prioritises states as actors and perceives them as holding their own best interests in mind when it comes to international (mainly inter-state) cooperation. Institutions and principles are therefore only one instrument in the great political power battle for hegemony. Based on historic experience, multilateral cooperation is only expected to be temporary and imperfect, destined for expiration because of its inherent definition following the common interests of states (Carr, 2016). Multilateralism in realist and, especially, neo-realist debates is often framed in terms of the hegemonic stability theory and as a dilemma of power distribution (Waltz, 1967). Unipolar

world orders are associated with greater stability in this literature, while multipolarity is seen as a destabilising force. The need for multilateral institutions is taken to be a response to the crisis in the balance of power that follows the decline of a powerful hegemon (Guzzini, 2005).

Liberal institutionalist theories are a wide category of theories that endorse the internationalisation of states and societies (Cox, 1983, 1992). Their emergence reflected the need to consider the phenomena of IR in higher complexity with regards to the problems neglected by preceding theories (classical realism, classical world-systems theory, rational choice approaches, functionalism, and other structuralist theories). They tend to frame multilateralism as an answer to dilemmas related to efficiency and legitimacy in governance. For functionalists, multilateralism represents a new rationality of governance that focuses on substate actors with regional specifications to manage public goods more effectively and address legitimacy issues. It is seen as a more inclusive form of governance that avoids territorial assumptions of sovereignty and links authority to competence in efforts to meet needs (Mitrany, 1976). Neo-functionalism also fostered the hope, that multilateralism would consolidate a new, peaceful, and more integrated world order based on the spill-over effects of regionally organised cooperation (Caporaso, 1998). The belief in the historic necessity of such peaceful integration is somewhat discouraged by history itself. Firstly, higher levels of integration seemed to partially induce violent conflicts and crises from the 1970s onwards. Secondly, there was no other explanation for the “spill-backs” that occur when political leaders decide to withdraw from multilateral agreements and reinforce the territorial concept of sovereignty (Nicoli, 2019).

This wave of questioning led scholars to problematise the complex interdependence and nature of cooperation upon which regime theory and new institutionalist approaches have been built. These revisited the claims of the hegemonic stability theory and also acknowledged the central nature of states, but enhanced these concepts with theoretical innovations such as bounded rationality and a more serious focus on the role of institutions, norms, and rules in considering social change (Finnemore, 2005; Keohane & Nye, 1974). Effective multilateral cooperation might prevent shocking disruptions, they argue, because the accepted norms, rules, and codified processes (even in their imperfection) sustain a predictable and peaceful platform for the communication of interests.

What these theories ignore is the difference between “multilateral institutions” in their historic specificities and the “institution of multilateralism” as an idea. Constructivist research in the early 1980s began to deconstruct traditional IR understandings of power, structural necessities, and historical contingencies to theorise the logic and mechanisms of international organisation. Constructivists combined the subjective and objectified components of multilateralism to indicate the com-

plex relations of knowledge production entailed in multilateralism being a preferred policy choice (Caporaso, 1992; Ruggie, 1992). The first aspect covers the idea of multilateralism, while the second refers to the processes of multilateralisation. Multilateralism emerged as a social fact with positive connotations, which explained its popular domestic support by the US and its allies after the two World Wars, even if certain multilateral institutions failed to achieve their goals. Multilateralisation here refers to a process that is not necessarily linear, as well as to social facts that are liable to change. The fine-grained analysis of Ruggie on this topic is very much celebrated today for a variety of reasons. From this author’s perspective, it is remarkable how Ruggie was able to connect economic, normative, historical, and political factors into his explanation. One of his followers, Helleiner, built upon this foundation to bring attention to the importance of studying neoliberalisation tendencies while considering the aforementioned factors (Helleiner, 2019).

The proponents of the historical-dialectic approach definitely agree on these premises but derive their conclusions from a Gramscian and world-system theory-inspired grounding. Multilateralism is taken to be both an ideology and a strategy of global cosmopolitan elites to sustain their positions at the top of the stratified global society. These elites are understood as benefitting from the expansion of global capitalism and engaged in efforts to persuade the marginalised classes of the benefits of the system (Cox, 1992). The multilateral arena is also taken to be a terrain of struggle for marginalised groups and states on the periphery of capitalist production to ally and campaign for structural change in the world economy.

Mainstream debates on multilateralism have not necessarily addressed these challenges, but over recent decades, institutions and actors associated with multilateralism have begun to lose credibility. Since discussions have historically ascribed the US with a leading role in the perpetuation of multilateralism, recent US foreign policy choices have had a rather devastating effect on optimistically oriented views of the multilateral order. But at least it is acknowledged that multilateral institutions imply the possibility of delivering specific ideological content based on the circumstances of their emergence or the power of actors that represent them, and these circumstances can change once the coalitions that effectively maintained them break down (Cohen, 2018; Ikenberry, 2018).

Mainstream debates on multilateralism today do not necessarily address these latter challenges. Instead, they widen the thematic scope of their explanations of how to solve the problems of multilateral institutions. In so doing, they acknowledge how multilateral institutions transmit specific ideological content (based on the circumstances of their emergence or the actors that represent them), and that these institutions can be associated with exclusivity and a lack of legitimacy (“minilateralism”

debates). Consequently, multilateral solutions to global problems have the potential to cause or escalate crises in the world order (Cohen, 2018; Ikenberry, 2018; Jacobs et al., 2020).

In this vein, the alleged crisis of multilateralism has been problematised either in neorealist-leaning foreign policy terms (Scott, 2013) or in the language of global governance and new institutionalisms, without justifying the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of these approaches (Hay et al., 2020). Advocating for a “new multilateralism” is closely connected to this trend and is concerned with optimising and fixing the existing institutional order without systematically reflecting on its content, history, complexity, and connection to other systems that also comprise the world order (Hampson & Heinbecker, 2011). Clearly there is a need to better understand the perceived crisis in multilateral institutions, the multilateral world order, and the idea of multilateralism. To do so, this article suggests the revision of a closely connected debate in IR with similar dynamics and a focus on crises—liberal internationalism.

## 2.2. *The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism in the Literature*

The content of liberal internationalism as both an approach in IR and a set of norms is usually traced back to the Wilsonian articulation of national self-determination, non-aggression, and respect for international law and sovereignty (Ambrosius, 1991). The peak period of liberal internationalism is commonly seen to be the US-led world order that emerged after the Second World War, which enabled more frequent multilateral cooperation between states around international problems (e.g., economic stability, security). All of this occurred within a thickening structuration process of international institutions that was informed by liberal international norms and rules (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999).

The sustainability of the liberal international order has always been debated. Accounts that forecasted its crises and breakdown have been commonplace since the early 1960s (Bresler, 1973; Egerton, 1983; Mandelbaum & Schneider, 1978; Parsons, 1961; Smith, 1969), and new waves of diagnoses arise every time the US is perceived to be unsupportive of its ideas or institutions. Such instances occurred during the economic and security transformations of the early 1980s, after the War on Terror and after the Global Financial Crisis (Hoffmann, 1995; Hurd, 2005; Spieker, 2014).

The most pessimistic accounts warn that all institutions of the liberal order are in a state of crisis because they are widely perceived as having failed to implement liberalism’s program of equality and freedom, while the shift of power “from the west to the rest” generated a series of institutional crises (Flockhart, 2018). Many explanations take the catastrophic inconsistencies of liberal values and international interventions as a consequence of the contradiction that lay at the heart of the

concept itself rather than an executional or accidental matter (Mearsheimer, 2018). Others see the crises as rooted in the absence of a central authority. For these scholars, liberal international rules and institutions represent an adequate solution to the problem of maintaining multilateral cooperation but lack a centralised body to police these rules and values (Gilpin, 1987; Waltz & Walt, 2018). A pragmatic perspective suggests that the crisis is structurally determined by a “gridlock” within multilateral international frameworks due to their foundational respect for national sovereignty, which prevents their effective operation (Held, 2015).

The most optimistic viewpoints interpret these disruptions as adaptation mechanisms that facilitate multiple equilibria that have led to a more stable and decentralised version of the liberal world order (Keohane, 2012; Keohane & Nye, 1973). For example, the crisis of the latest version of liberal internationalism is taken to have emanated from the inability of American authority to establish peaceful cooperation between states and other actors, but the assertion that there are good ways to repair this issue remains (Ikenberry, 2018).

Others have analysed the historical period of the US-led liberal internationalism, or “embedded liberalism,” as a multilevel composite of economic and political compromises based on domestically and internationally shared meanings and institutions. This system only came to be shaken by the famous denouncement of its purpose by leading Western political figures and their subsequent construction of a new social purpose that demanded the adjustment of political systems based on the economic sphere and those ideas presented in the Washington Consensus (Ruggie, 1982).

Other scholars have argued that the successive forms of liberal internationalism have always been connected to the development and expansion of capitalism since the social forces that control capitalist production are also concentrated in those international institutions that represent and regulate the international arena. For them, crises of liberal internationalism express the conflict between the social forces related to production without necessarily undermining the transnational capitalist system as a whole. This is so because transnational elites have been able to sufficiently convince these varied social forces that liberal internationalism is the only rational organisational principle for international life, which has, in turn, helped them with maintaining their hegemony (Murphy, 2004).

Juxtaposing the literature on the multilateral order with that on liberal internationalism makes it evidently clear that they are both connected by the notion of crisis. With that said, the nature of the crisis can be explained by focusing *outside* of these debates and reflecting on the issue of ontological knowledge production. Dunne and Koivisto (2010) recognised that the cultural particularities of different forms of knowledge production about the crisis of liberal internationalism should not be treated as insignificant afterthoughts but

instead as sources capable of revealing important dimensions about the nature of the crisis itself. The fact that the research has predominantly been led by epistemic communities based in the UK and US has resulted in the research landscape being overwhelmingly comprised of a homogenizing mainstream of favoured approaches. These works problematise the crisis as crisis of authority (US-based approaches) in the system of the international organisation, or as the deformation and legitimacy crisis of liberal internationalism (English School of Internationalists; see Dunne & Koivisto, 2010). As such, the crisis of American research in IR has overwhelmingly failed to recognise its own unquestioned ontological assumptions about the nature and emergence of the world order. That is to say, liberal internationalist IR scholarship has significant limitations in addressing crises related to liberal internationalism. Accounts that problematise the crisis, as the crisis of liberal internationalism, often imply that the contemporary liberal intergovernmental world ordering was the only way that modernity was ever going to be realised, a historical necessity (Dunne, 2010) in which international institutions are free from the specific legacies of empire. Therefore, the problems they encounter are reduced to being matters of implementation rather than ontic articulations of particular political and historical processes (Dunne & Koivisto, 2010).

### 3. Pedagogy of Crises: Framework to Challenge Previous Limitations

Dunne and Koivisto (2010) highlight the limitations of the literature that considers liberal internationalism and the multilateral world order from a restricted perspective given the general neglect of the relationship between liberal international centres of knowledge production and the studied content. These limitations, however, invite us to focus on a variety of previously disregarded fields and debates that approach liberal internationalism from a more systemic perspective. What Dunne and Koivisto (2010) refer to can be described within the pedagogy of crises framework as the “difference between crisis management and a crisis of crisis management.”

Crisis management is an immediate response of relevant actors who use readily available routines and interpretations for interventions that address the symptoms and perceived causes of a particular crisis (Jessop & Knio, 2018). A crisis of crisis management, on the other hand, occurs when the usually employed instruments and tactics fail to eliminate the perceived crisis, or even appear to perpetuate it. A crisis of crisis management can only happen after crisis management has failed.

The pedagogy of crises unfolds when actors try to manage crises, or as they encounter a crisis of crisis management. Learning processes are related to the attempts that gradually expose the real nature of the crisis as understood by involved actors or observers. Different types of learning can occur at different phases of crisis

management and, in some cases, the learning is imperfect or does not happen at all. The absence of reflexive learning in relation to a crisis situation is termed “non-learning” (Jessop & Knio, 2018).

Dunne and Koivisto’s arguments demonstrate the necessity of differentiating between crisis management and crisis of crisis management approaches when researching liberal internationalism. However, they do not explain how it is possible that mainstream IR literature has not considered the crisis of liberal internationalism from a larger number of dimensions and connected it to other debates and challenges after its failure to interpret the shortcomings of the multilateral order and liberal internationalism. They also fail to point out how the crisis of crisis management stuns the relevant actors with shocking confusion when they are lacking proper interpretations and suitable tools for managing the crisis. Based on the state of affairs outlined in the previous sections, it is imperative to identify this vacuum as the crisis of crisis management. More precisely, this entails a challenge to these actors to obtain a new perspective for evaluating the limitations of their previous understandings (Jessop & Knio, 2018).

It might be possible for mainstream IR to have missed the alternative interpretations of the crisis of liberal internationalism because the crisis of liberal internationalism itself is embedded in (the study of) neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, in turn, can influence the contexts in which reflexivities are conditioned. Sometimes the historical and geographical parameters of knowledge-production and policy making can be limiting while, in other contexts, they can be more permissive. Such parameters are the location, traditions, and cultures of epistemic communities, and the research and education outcomes promoted by those who define educational and research policies have strong effects. Key actors in policy making often prioritize the dissemination of certain findings, explanations, and schools of thought over others. Disproportional distribution of support, prestige, and funds across subject areas can seriously skew the type of knowledge that is being produced and the methods of its study.

Neoliberalisation, as a unique set of quasi-universal tendencies, can cause systemic biases in the perceptions of IR scholarship. This might be so because the generative effects and indirect consequences of neoliberalisation are intimately related with all the above-mentioned parameters. Circumstances like these might prevent students of the multilateral world order to ask questions from outside the settings of currently popular approaches, as these questions tend to remain outside of mainstream debates, and it is easy to treat the whole issue as a matter of crisis management and ignore the significant challenge presented by the crisis of crisis management. Unfortunately, this also hinders opportunities for deeper reflection and well-adjusted responses (in which case, we are talking about “non-learning”), as well as the opportunity to identify fundamental aspects of the contemporary world order. Instead, we suggest a

new focus on the study of neoliberalism to highlight the sources of previous biases and refine understandings of the nature of the crisis.

#### 4. Neoliberalism

##### 4.1. *A Necessary Systematic Approach to Explain Liberal Internationalism and the Multilateral World Order*

Neoliberalism was initially conceived to be part of the problem of liberal internationalism since it seemed to be an extension of liberal economic ideas and appeared to aggravate various socio-economic problems rooted in liberalism (Turner, 2008). Although these points are echoed in the present article, especially when understanding the historical roots and chronological timelines of events, it is vital to comprehend how capitalism and neoliberalism relate to liberal internationalism in a systemic way. If we study the relationship between the multilateral world order, liberal internationalism, and neoliberalism from a crisis of crisis management point of view, it becomes evident that while neoliberalism has historically been embedded within liberal internationalism, the present moments shows that the reverse is, in fact, true.

Such a turn only becomes possible after liberalism and neoliberalism are designated as dynamic, connected, and distinct entities with independent rationalities. A Foucauldian perspective sees governmentality in the neoliberal era as indeed different from classic liberal rationality (Duménil & Lévy, 2012). Meanwhile, classic liberalism and neoliberalism both propagate the ideal of rational, utility-maximising individuals, with the former emphasising the spontaneous mechanism of market exchange itself as a driving logic of social relations and the latter idealising competition. Neoliberal governmentality offers a distinct way of being, where discourses on the economy become common sense and all actions are judged according to the calculus of maximum output for minimum expenditure (Read, 2009).

Another way to comprehend the related but distinct connection between liberalism and neoliberalism is through the assertion that, today, neoliberalism accounts for the social construction of markets (Cahill, 2012). While it is connected to liberal ideas from the 19th and 20th centuries, neoliberalism should not solely be understood as the result of the evolution of these ideas, but rather as something that now exists independently from them, a subject in its own right that informs the institutionalisation of markets. To carry the research further, the relative weight and independence of the social construct of neoliberalism should be specified in relation to other institutions and social facts. For example, one could ask whether it has solidified enough to restrict emerging institutionalisation processes, or whether it is malleable and exposed to deconstruction. The crisis of crisis management perspective highlights how neoliberalism not only refers to a contingent economic relation within liberal internationalism, which could easily be

deconstructed by social forces, but also to its evolution into the main organisational rationality that goes beyond markets into every other aspect of social life, and has itself resulted in a reconceptualisation of identity. This statement is based on the acknowledgement, that the processes of institutionalisation are initiated by specific actors and social forces at a specific point in time and space. In the same way, these institutions may erode or evolve in the future, based on the interactions and reflexive processes of the relevant actors.

The turn towards neoliberalism is also underlined by the *thickening* presence of neoliberalism in policies across the world, which are crafted and carried out by specific “thought-collectives” of actors who exert their influence over governments. This process generated a series of neoliberal policies through which neoliberal ideas became normalised and institutionalised to the point that they were no longer being questioned and instead became a default way of policymaking (Dean, 2012). In other words, neoliberal ideas became new common sense within the multilateral order that was connected to liberal internationalism but developed its own policy-shaping capabilities. Carriers of neoliberal ideas can also gradually influence common sense through their infiltration into the most powerful transnational companies (Macartney, 2010). Neoliberalisation refers to the systemic production of geo-institutional differentiation: processes that are patterned, interconnected, contested and unstable (Brenner et al., 2010). All of the above-mentioned contributions conclude that shared meanings and practices can complement neoliberal projects by infusing *common sense* with neoliberal rationality. This, in turn, can blur reflexive capacities while perceiving and conceptualising neoliberalism.

Defining neoliberalism in relation to liberal internationalism and the multilateral order is a complex task, hardly addressed by the literature. It is more common for knowledge about neoliberalism to be analysed along thematic lines, i.e., focusing on comparative case studies of neoliberalism, while neglecting the basis of its ontological dimensions (Castree, 2006).

##### 4.2. *Advanced Study of the Complex, Systemic Processes of Neoliberalisation*

As stated throughout this article, liberal internationalism should be researched via a crisis of crisis management lens, just as much as neoliberalism should be understood as a new relevant field for this task. Previously, neither had been examined from a systemic perspective, which has limited the possibility for well-grounded analyses of the contemporary multilateral order. As demonstrated above, establishing the relations between these fields is a good first step given the need to interrogate contemporary liberal internationalism as something embedded within neoliberalism and not the other way around. The relationship and changing hierarchy between the two constantly shape the multilateral

world order. The present article offers two positions to observe the dialectics of liberal internationalism and neoliberalism—marketisation and commodification.

These notions stem from the Polanyian analysis of markets and commodities, and the ways they relate to other aspects of societal organisation (McIver, 1957; Polanyi, 1944). Commodification refers to a type of market that try to legitimate and normalise the possibility of creating fictitious commodities (land/nature, labour/people, and money).

Markets, meanwhile, are those institutions where trade and interactions take place. Polanyi used these concepts in his historical materialist investigation to identify the contingencies and specificities that resulted in the development of market capitalism. He used the term “embeddedness” to describe how economic institutions became integral parts of a variety of non-economic institutions that originally restricted them. Subsequent Polanyian schools advanced these key concepts to address the dialectics of markets in societies (or polities) and focused on different dimensions of these processes or the relationship between marketisation and commodification itself.

This article offers a way to study the complex system of neoliberalism via the different roles of marketisation and commodification in the development of capitalist societies (Knio, in press). “Commodification of marketisation” refers to the underlying significance of markets as institutionalised ideas, which incentivise, socialise, and normalise the process of commodification as a form of (re)production. For example, this explains how some theories of neoliberalisation rely on this order to explain the dispersion and deepening of neoliberal ideas within capitalist economies and their institutionalisation. The “marketisation of commodification,” on the other hand, refers to the analytical primacy of commodification as an institutionalised form of (re)production, which propels the need for marketisation. This latter cluster of theories demonstrates the advance of neoliberal capitalism in terms of intensifying commodification, a process that then reinforces markets as the primary platforms of exchange.

The value of focusing on an explanation of the dynamics of neoliberalism and liberal internationalism driven by an understanding of either the process of “marketisation of commodification” or the “commodification of marketisation” (based on the ontological position of the authors) is clear when we understand these dynamics as institutionalisation processes. The scientific study of neoliberalisation via the former notion has historically been neglected at the expense of the latter. Over time neoliberalism became the ruling rationality and practice that defines today’s liberal internationalist institutions. The complexity of these processes cannot be comprehended if debates remain at the level of crisis management because those accounts do not feel the need to respond to the ontologically and epistemologically challenging critiques. They have to be seen from a crisis of crisis management point of view wherein their con-

clusions are contextualised via layered analyses rooted in ontology. It is also important for the literature to actively reflect upon its epistemological positions, and such thoroughly grounded positions would certainly benefit from analyses done for and by developing countries. In explaining the various articulations of neoliberalism and liberal internationalism, the primacy of material or ideational factors in the explanation would therefore not be solely dependent on the case studies themselves as it would also be part of a well-justified framework and theory. This will allow us to obtain better insights into the studied countries’ experiences of neoliberalism and liberal internationalism, which opens up a real possibility for better understanding the less represented parts of the multilateral world order.

The historic examples of Latin American countries such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina have been treated as neoliberal laboratory subjects in analyses concerned with the periods before and during their transitions to democracy (O’Donnell et al., 2013). Moreover, the influence of knowledge production on these “experiments” has been present both through and throughout the implementation of policies and laws designed to make their commodities more competitive and their markets more effective. This specific knowledge, with its implicit assumptions, has framed understandings of the internal and external behaviour of their markets. Academic explanations of Chile’s socio-economic inequality have grown in number over recent decades and have tended to adopt either sociological, historical, or chronological lenses (Alexander, 2009; Garretón, 2003; Huneus & Sagaris, 2007). However, analysing the Chilean example from a crisis of crisis management point of view allows us to observe that its neoliberalisation has not only been socio-political or economic in nature, but it is also reflective of wider systemic processes. The roots and implications of the systemic extend beyond the country’s internal dynamics and affect the modes of the multilateral world order. Authors that focus on their narrow area of interest easily can miss or misinterpret systemic properties of the situation (Alexander, 2009; Garretón, 2003; Huneus & Sagaris, 2007). They argue that the protests that arose in Chile from 2019 onwards are merely symptomatic of dynamics specific to the permeation of neoliberalism within Chile, rather than indicative of a systemic crisis in itself that precipitated a significant shift. If we apply a crisis of crisis management perspective, as the author of this article suggests, it becomes evident that there must be a larger systemic grounding wherein local articulations of neoliberalisation can unfold, namely, the multilateral world order which is dominated by the dialectics of liberal internationalism and neoliberalism.

## 5. Conclusions

Classic IR scholarship often problematises the crises of the multilateral world order and liberal internationalism. While these subjects are worthy of study in their own



right, separating them into isolated themes often results in barren explanations that do not respond to endogenous ontological and epistemological challenges. A partial consequence of these unchallenged assumptions is that the necessity of situating analytical subjects within a wider scope of literature is neglected. This article connected the discourses of multilateral world order and liberal internationalism with the central notion of crisis to advocate for a crisis of crisis management perspective in order to transcend these limitations. The arguments laid out in this article lead to the conclusion that contemporary liberal internationalism is embedded within neoliberalism, and that it is insufficient to observe this process from a crisis management perspective that solely focuses on the crisis of liberal internationalism because of the effects that neoliberalisation has on common sense and knowledge production. To overcome this difficulty, this article proposes the systemic research of neoliberalisation through the lenses of the “commodification of marketisation” and the “marketisation of commodification.” Researching neoliberalisation and its embeddedness within liberal internationalism in this way would provide a significant opportunity for the betterment of analyses about these processes in the context of developing countries and for better explanations of the multilateral world order.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Boglarka Vincze, Andrew Dryhurst, and Daniela Horta for providing research and editorial assistance in preparing this article. I also would like to thank the anonymous referees who have made valuable points and suggestions. All misrepresentations and omissions are my own.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

### References

- Alexander, W. L. (Ed.). (2009). *Lost in the long transition: Struggles for social justice in neoliberal Chile*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ambrosius, L. E. (1991). *Wilsonian statecraft: Theory and practice of liberal internationalism during World War I (America in the Modern World)*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Brenner, N., Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2010). Variegated neoliberalization: Geographies, modalities, pathways. *Global Networks*, 10(2), 182–222.
- Bresler, R. J. (1973). The ideology of the executive state: Legacy of liberal internationalism. *Politics & Society*, 3(2), 245–259.
- Cahill, D. (2012). The embedded neoliberal economy. In D. Cahill, L. Edwards, F. Stilwell (Eds.), *Neoliberalism: Beyond the free market* (pp. 110–127). Edward Elgar.
- Caporaso, J. (1998). Regional integration theory: Understanding our past and anticipating our future. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 5(1), 1–16.
- Caporaso, J. A. (1992). International relations theory and multilateralism: The search for foundations. *International Organization*, 46(3), 599–632.
- Carr, E. H. (2016). *The twenty years' crisis, 1919–1939*. Springer.
- Castree, N. (2006). From neoliberalism to neoliberalisation: Consolations, confusions, and necessary illusions. environment and planning. *Economy and Space*, 38(1), 1–6.
- Cohen, H. G. (2018). Multilateralism's life cycle. *American Journal of International Law*, 112(1), 47–66.
- Cox, R. W. (1983). Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: An essay in method. *Journal of International Studies*, 12(2), 162–175.
- Cox, R. W. (1992). Multilateralism and world order. *Review of International Studies*, 18(2), 161–180.
- Dean, M. (2012). Rethinking neoliberalism. *Journal of Sociology*, 50(2), 150–163.
- Deudney, D., & Ikenberry, G. J. (1999). The nature and sources of liberal international order. *Review of International Studies*, 25(2), 179–196.
- Downs, G. W., Roche, D. M., & Barsoom, P. N. (1998). Managing the evolution of multilateralism. *International Organization*, 52(2), 397–419.
- Duménil, G., & Lévy, D. (2012). The crisis of neoliberalism as a stepwise process: From the Great Contraction to the crisis of sovereign debts. In D. Cahill, L. Edwards, F. Stilwell (Eds.), *Neoliberalism: Beyond the free market* (pp. 31–53). Edward Elgar.
- Dunne, T. (2010). The liberal order and the modern project. *Millennium*, 38(3), 535–543.
- Dunne, T., & Koivisto, M. (2010). Crisis, what crisis? Liberal order building and world order conventions. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 38(3), 615–640.
- Egerton, G. W. (1983). Collective security as political myth: Liberal internationalism and the League of Nations in politics and history. *The International History Review*, 5(4), 496–524.
- Finnemore, M. (2005). Fights about rules: The role of efficacy and power in changing multilateralism. *Review of International Studies*, 31(S1), 187–206.
- Flockhart, T. (2018). A multi-order world? *RSA Journal*, 164(3), 26–31.
- Garretón, M. (2003). *Incomplete democracy*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Gilpin, R. (1987). *The political economy of international relations* (1st ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Guzzini, S. (2005). *From (alleged) unipolarity to the decline of multilateralism? A power-theoretical critique*. Danish Institute for International Studies.
- Hampson, F. O., & Heinbecker, P. (2011). The “new” multilateralism of the twenty-first century. Global governance: A review of multilateralism and international organizations. *Global Governance*, 17(3), 299–310.

- Hay, C., Hunt, T., & McGregor, J. A. (2020). Inclusive growth: The challenges of multidimensionality and multilateralism. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1784849>
- Held, D. (2015). Sovereignty, political authority, and gridlock. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 16(3), 414–428.
- Helleiner, E. (2019). The life and times of embedded liberalism: Legacies and innovations since Bretton Woods. *Review of International Political Economy*, 26(6), 1112–1135.
- Hoffmann, S. (1995). The crisis of liberal internationalism. *Foreign Policy*, 1995(98), 159–177.
- Huneus, C., & Sagaris, L. (2007). *The Pinochet regime*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Hurd, I. (2005). The strategic use of liberal internationalism: Libya and the UN sanctions, 1992–2003. *International Organization*, 59(3), 495–526.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2009). Liberal internationalism 3.0: America and the dilemmas of liberal world order. *Perspectives on politics*, 7(1), 71–87.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). Why the liberal world order will survive. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 32(1), 17–29.
- Jacobs, G., Kiniger-Passigli, D., & Likhotal, A. (2020). Redefining multilateralism. *Cadmus*, 4(3), 5–19.
- Jessop, B., & Knio, K. (Eds.). (2018). *The pedagogy of economic, political and social crises: Dynamics, constructs and lessons*. Routledge.
- Keohane, R. O. (2012). Twenty years of institutional liberalism. *International Relations*, 26(2), 125–138.
- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1973). Power and interdependence. *Survival*, 15(4), 158–165.
- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1974). Transgovernmental relations and international organizations. *World Politics*, 27(1), 39–62.
- Knio, K. (in press). Why and how ontology matters: A cartography of neoliberalism and neoliberalizations. *Journal for The Theory of Social Behaviour*.
- Macartney, H. (2010). *Variiegated neoliberalism: EU varieties of capitalism and international political economy*. Routledge.
- Mandelbaum, M., & Schneider, W. (1978). The new internationalisms. *International Security*, 2(3), 81–98.
- McIver, I. M. (1957). Foreword. In K. Polanyi (Ed.), *The great transformation* (p. ix). Beacon Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2018). *The great delusion: Liberal dreams and international realities*. Yale University Press.
- Mitrany, D. (1976). *The functional theory of politics*. St. Martin's Press.
- Murphy, C. (2004). *Global institutions, marginalization and development*. Routledge.
- Nefedov, B. I. (2021). The concept of “world order”: Theories and reality. *Comparative Politics Russia*, 12(3), 21–32.
- Nicoli, F. (2019). Neofunctionalism revisited: Integration theory and varieties of outcomes in the Eurocrisis. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(7), 897–916.
- O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P. C., & Whitehead, L. (2013). *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Latin America* (Vol. 2). JHU Press.
- Parsons, T. (1961). Polarization and the problem of international order. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 6(1), 115–134.
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Beacon Press.
- Read, J. (2009). A genealogy of homo-economicus: Neoliberalism and the production of subjectivity. *Foucault Studies*, 6, 25–36.
- Ruggie, J. G. (1982). International regimes, transactions, and change: Embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order. *International Organization*, 36(2), 379–415.
- Ruggie, J. G. (1992). Multilateralism: The anatomy of an institution. *International Organization*, 46(3), 561–598.
- Scott, D. A. (2013). Multipolarity, multilateralism and beyond...? EU–China understandings of the international system. *International Relations*, 27(1), 30–51.
- Smith, D. M. (1969). Woodrow Wilson and world politics: America's response to war and revolution by N. Gordon Levin, Jr. *The Canadian Historical Review*, 50(2), 209–211.
- Spieker, J. (2014). FA Hayek and the reinvention of liberal internationalism. *The International History Review*, 36(5), 919–942.
- Turner, R. S. (2008). *Neo-liberal ideology: History, concepts and policies*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Waltz, K. N. (1967). International structure, national force and the balance of world power. In J. A. Rosenau (Ed.), *International politics and foreign policy: A reader in research and theory* (pp. 304–314). Free Press.
- Waltz, K., & Walt, S. M. (2018). *Man, the state, and war: A theoretical analysis*. Columbia University Press.
- Weiss, T. G., & Wilkinson, R. (2014). Rethinking global governance? Complexity, authority, power, change. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(1), 207–215.

### About the Author



**Karim Knio** is an associate professor in political economy and governance at the Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is the ISS academic coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus M.A. program in public policy. Between 2014–2019 he was associate managing editor of *European Political Science Review*. His research focuses on the intersection between international political economy, governance and public policy, with a particular interest in literature on varieties of capitalism, variegated neoliberalisations, institutional analysis, politics of crisis management, EU neighbourhood policies, and Lebanese politics.