2 The family of nations

Kinship as an international ordering principle in the nineteenth century

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In this chapter we do two things. First, we trace how international actors themselves for a long time deployed the concept 'the family of nations' rather than the similar concepts we are more used to as International Relations (IR) scholars, like 'international system', 'society', or 'community'. This is important as – despite the historically widespread use relative to 'our' terms – the concept has received scant attention from IR scholars.[1] Second, however, we also indicate how this use is not a coincidence, but is linked to prevalent liberal ideas about empire, civilizational differences and hierarchies. The central contribution of this chapter is that we explicitly link kinship to the exclusionary mechanisms of 'standards of civilization'. Observing that Europe for a long time sought to limit membership in the family of nations based on civilization is not new. However, few studies have sought to link this to kinship. 'Civilized' has trumped 'family' in accounting for the role of the 'family of civilized nations'.

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The use of 'family of nations' as an enabling kinship metaphor emerges at about the same time as liberal ideas took hold in Europe and the USA. The family of nations has some very specific connotations. As is already noted in the literature, kinship metaphors with paternalistic undertones have been used historically to legitimize colonial endeavours and racist international politics. We add to this literature by placing also the uses of the 'family of nation' concept in the context of hierarchical, colonial international politics. The concept depicted a civilizational hierarchy, where everyone could be *potentially* included, but exactly this understanding of inclusiveness – where no one is literally unfamiliar – makes for an efficient power-political legitimizing tool. The concept of a family of nations, we argue, became integral to legitimizing strategies for coercive measures and colonial rule. In short, whilst questioning whether the international is a community or society etc. has made for interesting discussions about the degree of solidarity, tightness of bonds, and communal organization in relations between states, the family of nations – the concept most frequently used – leads our attention to *structural power*, a feature often underplayed in both liberal and English school accounts of international society. In this, we observe, kinship metaphors were not coincidental, but *consequential* for international politics.

We begin by establishing the central use of 'the family of nations' concept in international politics historically, first through an extensive example from

international law in the early twentieth century, and then from the entry of the USA into the family of nations as an archetypical example, followed by their next door neighbours in Latin America. Next, we demonstrate how this kinship metaphor, through links to liberal paternalism, served to legitimize colonial, coercive measures and interventions. We conclude with a section detailing how this liberal kinship logic was institutionalized and embedded in international law.

Tracing the emergence of a largely overlooked concept

Much of the discussion in IR about the nature of the international has been cast in the form of a debate between the proponents of an international system versus those who favor international society. And while this dichotomy may be an oversimplification, the fact remains that discussions about the nature of the international are largely characterized by historical paucity, largely limited to the English School claim about the evolution of the international system into an international society, which may be giving way to an international community (Bull 1977). This is not the place to discuss the role of the international system in IR theory, but generally, the international system provides the anarchical structure to neo-realists and neo-liberals alike, thus partially defining the ontology of the state and its preferences. To English School scholars, the international system is more of a rhetorical device used to demonstrate the existence of an international *society*.

Whilst the international system does have a history, there is debate about how important this history is (see Leira and de Carvalho 2015). To realists concerned with discerning universal mechanisms through which state motives and action are defined, the crucial characteristic of the international system is its immutability. To English School scholars it is precisely the historicity of the international system, or society, which can help understand changing patterns of state behaviour. To constructivists, the historicity of the international system help explain current changes, as well as (in the 1990s) to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of that system and the rules and norms associated with it. Yet, most historical inquiries into the international system have been undertaken by English School-scholars, with Adam Watson, Hedley Bull and Martin Wight figuring centrally. As noted above, to the English School, the key historical change was the move from an international system to an international society. Bull understood this (parsimoniously) as the move from ‘A system of states (or international system)’ where ‘two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another’s decisions, to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole’ (1977: 9–10) to ‘a society of states (or international society)’ which

> … exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.
>
> (1977: 13)

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There has been ample debate in IR about Bull's distinction and whether it is the correct one to make.

The debate seems to have settled on the fact that there is a distinction between the two, albeit not necessarily the distinction Bull suggested. Jens Bartelson, for instance, proposes that an international society exists

> by virtue of being present in the consciousness of agents and can be read off from their practices, whereas the latter, when interpreted in strictly empiricist terms [...] only has to have certain explanatory power in order for us to be able to speak of it as if it did exist.
>
> (1996: 341)

We would argue, however, that such a discussion places too much emphasis on Bull's oft cited definitions, and too little on the historical sensitivity of the text. In fact, even Bull recognized that his definitions lean more towards ideal types than historically accurate descriptions. As he reminds us,

> While the term 'system' was applied to European states as a whole by eighteenth-century writers such as Rousseau and Nettelbladt, it was writers of the Napoleonic period, such as Gentz, Ancillpon and Heeren, who were chiefly responsible for giving the term currency. At a time when the growth of French power threatened to destroy the states system and transform it into a universal empire, these writers sought to draw attention to the existence of the system, and also to show why it was worth preserving; they were not merely the analysts of the states system, but were also its apologists or protagonists.
>
> (1977: 12)

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Bull's discussion underlines two important aspects. First, when inquiring into the history of the international system, it is largely an a posteriori theoretical device. Political actors and commentators before the nineteenth century did not necessarily understand the system in terms of our logic. Second, and following from this, to the extent that international politics before the nineteenth century took place within the framework of a system or society, the workings of such a system and the challenges of times past cannot be directly transposed or compared to our times. Finally, note Bull's own cautionary point: one cannot assume either linearity or historical continuity in the workings of the international system.

Although the dust has largely settled on the debate about system vs. society as two alternative denominations in the IR literature, the historical usage of the terms employed to denote the international show much more variation, and often quite dramatic changes over time. In fact, while the term 'international' emerged around 1780, attributed to Jeremy Bentham in his *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*, it would take about another century for the term 'international society' to get any meaningful traction (Figure 2.1).[3]

On a similar note, while the term 'international system' seems to have emerged not long after the term 'international' was coined, it did not enter common usage until about a century later (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1 Uses of ‘international society’.

Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer.[1]

Note
1 Google Books Ngram Viewer is available at: http://books.google.com/ngrams.

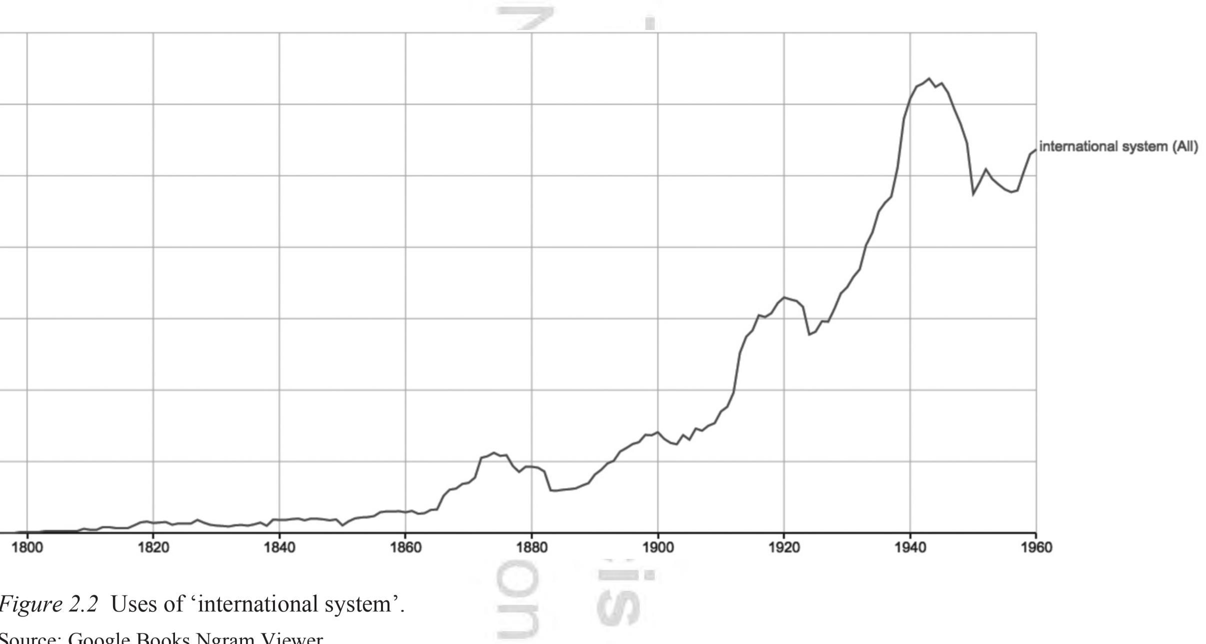

Figure 2.2 Uses of ‘international system’.

Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer.

Yet, as Bentham himself noted,

> The word international, it must be acknowledged, is a new one; though, it is hoped, sufficiently analogous and intelligible. It is calculated to express, in a more significant way, the branch of law which goes commonly under the name of the law of nations.
>
> (Bentham [1780] 1907: 326)

Bentham did not invent a new discipline, nor did he create a new ontology. He offered a new term – which he thought fit better – for an already established field: the law of nations. Nevertheless, nations were understood to conduct their interactions based on common rules and interests, and neither 'international system' nor 'international society' were much in use until International Relations became institutionalized (Knutsen 2008).

Given these points – that we must look at contextual uses of concepts, and that the analytical concepts we use in IR today emerged relatively late – what, then, was the term in use for 'the international' preceding this? What was the international before it became drawn between society, system and community? The answer, we suggest, is kinship. The preferred way describing the international was for a long time a kinship metaphor, the family of nations. In fact, from the coining of the term 'international' in the late eighteenth century and through World War I until the end of World War II, the family of nations was *the most common way of referring to the international* (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). This kinship metaphor is prevalent in other European languages as well.

Yet, as noted, IR scholars give the family of nations cursory treatment and is seldom acknowledged more than in passing. The family of nations, if mentioned, is often treated as a convenient background to the emergence of the modern society of states in conjunction with the discipline of IR in the aftermath of World War I. Little attention has been paid to the concepts used by practitioners and analysts of international politics before the historical emergence of the concepts we use today as analytical tools in IR. While having been recognized as an important trope to define the international, and being referred to in a number of studies, the family metaphor has seldom been the object of scholarly scrutiny. The family of nations is thus relegated to the imperial background which the discipline of IR so eagerly has sought to distinguish itself from (for a discussion, see Andersen 2011; Hobson and Hall 2013; de Carvalho 2015). However, while the use of the term family of nations fell relative to other terms, it remained in current use through the 1950s, and can still be heard in contemporary speeches. This suggests that, for all the debate about society vs. system, IR ought to take a closer look at the kinship analogy. In fact, to international lawyers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was a central term. Writing in 1905, Lassa Oppenheim stated that in lieu of a central political authority, something else unites states into an 'indivisible community': 'For many hundreds of years this community has been called 'Family of Nations' or 'Society of Nations'. (1905: 12). To Oppenheim, the kinship metaphor was not benign. In fact, he

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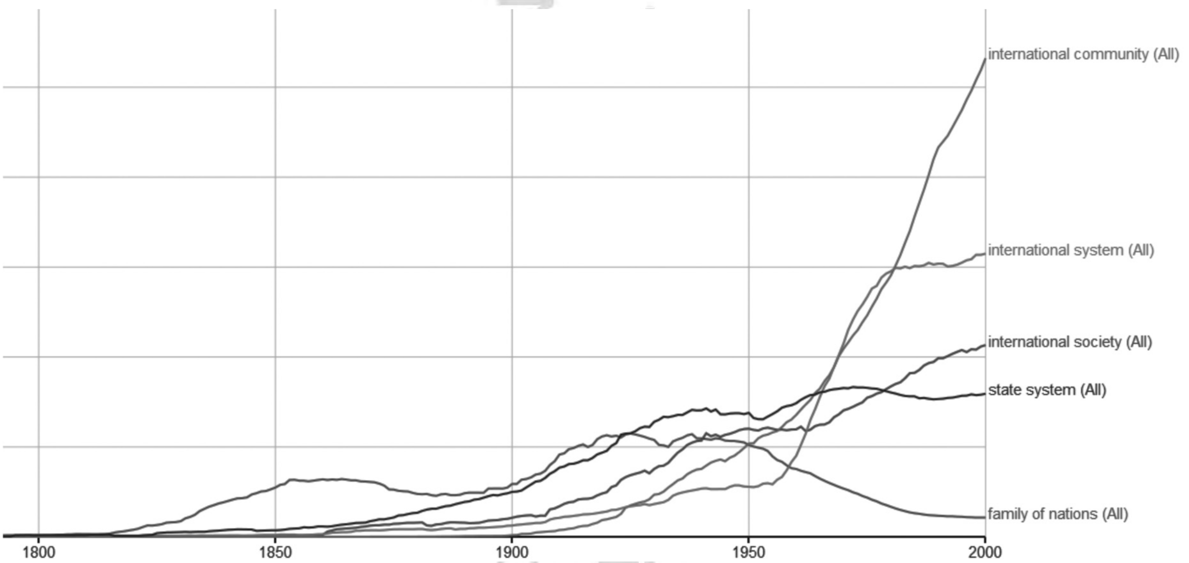

Figure 2.3 Compared uses of concepts, 1800–2000.

Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer.

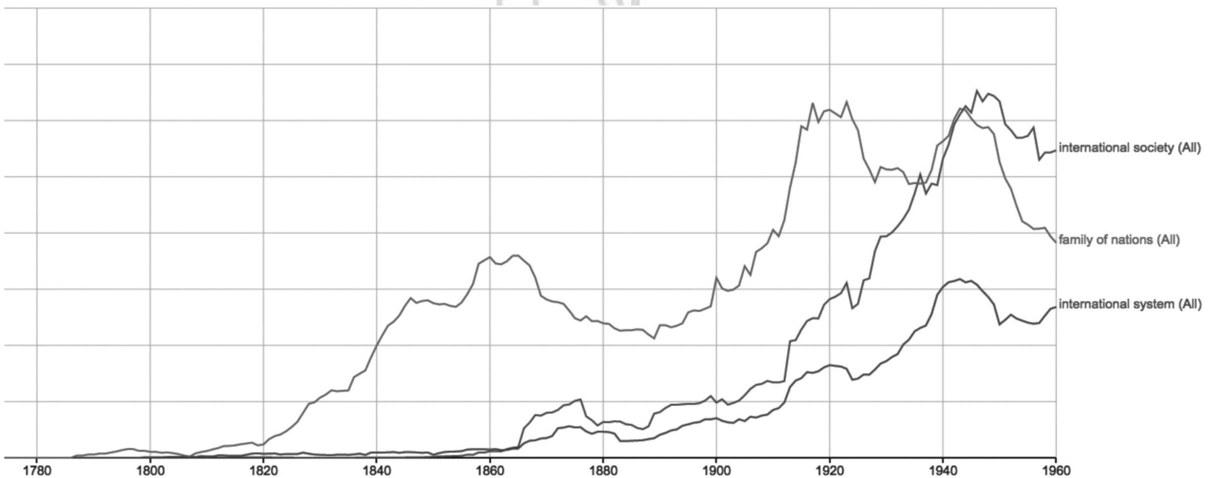

Figure 2.4 Compared uses of concepts, 1780–1960.

Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer.

argued that as opposed to in constantly changing societies composed of individuals,

> the Family of Nations is a community within which no such constant change takes place.… The members of the Family of Nations are therefore not born into that community and they do not grow into it. New members are simply received into it through express or tacit recognition.

Oppenheim expanded on this in the third edition to his Treatise on International Law, which is worth mentioning at length:

> The present range of the dominion of International Law is a product of historical development, within which epochs are distinguishable, marked by successive entrances of various States into the Family of Nations. (1) The old Christian States of Western Europe are the original members of the Family of Nations, because the Law of Nations grew up naturally between them through custom and treaties. Whenever afterwards a new Christian State made its appearance in Europe, it was received into the charmed circle by the old members of the Family of Nations. […] (2) The next group of States which entered into the Family of Nations was the body of Christian States which grew up outside Europe. All the American States which arose out of colonies of European States belong to this group. […] The two Christian Negro Republics of Liberia in West Africa and Haiti on the island of San Domingo belong to this group. (3) With the reception of Turkey into the Family of Nations International Law ceased to be a law between Christian States solely. […] But her position as a member of the Family of Nations was anomalous, because her civilization fell short of that of the Western States. (4) Another non-Christian member of the Family of Nations is Japan. […] Through marvelous efforts, Japan has become not only a modern State, but an influential Power. Since her war with China in 1895, she must be considered one of the Great Powers that lead the Family of Nations […]
>
> (1921: 33–34)

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As we will argue below, this is linked to the liberal point that individuals must have reason in order to enter into contractual obligations. The discourse of a family of nations emerged in legal lingo, concerning the issue of recognition, more than any 'cultural' issue of understanding others – the family, the sphere of the passionate, was stripped of emotions and formalized, in the process being linked to sovereignty.

On the one hand, the concept of a family of nations presupposed internal order and a 'government capable of fulfilling its international obligations effectively […]. On the other hand, the 'stability of the family of nations' relied upon states being 'prepared to cooperate in the moral evolution and social advancement of the whole of society of states' (Higgins 1928: 41). Higgins had

forcefully made the same point in 1914, namely that the family of nations rested upon force being 'the last resort of nations' and the respect of international law. The principle that 'might is right', he argued, would soon show that the 'Family of Nations based upon equal justice and legal equality before the Law of Nations is a useless and unworkable fiction' (Higgins 1928: 135).

Not only did the family of nations rest upon the continuous respect of international law, it was also its necessary condition. As Higgins argued, 'what are the presuppositions on which International Law is based? They are the principles […] that the independent sovereign Powers of the civilized world form a Family or Societas' (Higgins 1928: 135). In international law, these elements were formalized: membership in the family of nations legitimized intervention in the affairs of other states that were deemed 'backward' or unstable. 'Civil disorders' and 'corrupt administration' which made it impossible for those states to fulfil [sic.] their international duties' were used as leverage for placing 'limitations on the internal sovereignty of such states'. As Higgins further elaborated, 'the limitations have been the price which backward states have paid for the privilege of admission into the Family of Nations' (Higgins 1928: 42). Another scholar, Hans Kelsen, emphasized the family of nations as the source of the states' fundamental rights:

> According to a view prevailing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and maintained even today by some writers, every state has – in its capacity as a member of the family of nations – some fundamental rights. These rights are not stipulated by general customary international law or by international agreements […] but originate in the nature of the state or of the international community.
>
> (Kelsen 2003 [1952]: 148–149)

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As Martti Koskenniemi notes, central to this legal view of the family of nations was the understanding of international law as developed by states sharing a legal consciousness: 'The extent of that consciousness marked the sphere of international law's validity; it extended to the family of nations that shared the Christian faith, together with the Ottoman Empire that had been expressly admitted to the family in 1856'. In turn, 'it was this family's legal consciousness that was international law's "source of sources"'. Just as in any family quarrel, then, 'even in war, the social life of the members of the family of nations was supposed to continue' (Koskenniemi 2001: 52–53, 86).

The 'moral character' of states came to be the linchpin of membership of the family of nations; it 'gave the measure whereby their civilization could be measured so as to determine, for example, whether they qualified for entry into the family of nations'. The 'Aryan races', for instance, were often associated with ideas of 'manliness' while other groups, such as Asian states, were compared to 'immature or irrational individuals deprived of legal capacity and […] suffering from a "weakness of spirit" […]' (Koskenniemi 2001: 77–78).

Tracing early uses: the United States as archetype

So far, we have argued that a family of nations, regularly connected to legal literature, was the common denominator for the international before the emergence of our present-day concepts like international system or society. Of particular interest, then, is exactly *when* one first begins to conceive of the international as a 'family of nations'. Reinhardt Koselleck notes that Friedrich Schiller used the kinship metaphor in his inaugural lecture at the University of Jena in 1789: 'Peace is now kept by an ever-armoured war, and the self-love of one State makes it a guardian of the other's wealth. The society of European States seems to have been transformed into one large family' (Schiller in Koselleck 1988: 46). This is the earliest occurrence we have been able to trace. In 1797, also Christophe Guillaume de Koch mentions family in his *Histoire abrégée des traités de paix*. In the later 1817 edition, Koch writes that the political system of Europe engages the different sovereigns of Europe to 'sacrifier au bien général leurs vues personnelles' so that they 'forme, pour ainsi dire, une seule famille' (Koch and Schoel 1817, 3). The terms 'family of states' and 'European family of states' do not seem to appear in print until the early 1800s.[4] This does not preclude prior allusions to kinship, as the term 'family' only gained its current meaning in the 1660s.

After Schiller, however, the references to a family of nations primarily concern the development of the USA. In 1796, in *An Oration, Pronounced July 4, 1796*, we can read:

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> Remote from the theatre of European contests, we may profit by their variances without involving ourselves in their wars. No one member of the great family of nations has a right to interfere in our domestic concerns, or to impose upon us partial, and particular obligations.
>
> (Lathrop 1796: 18)

In the chronology of the concept, also the preceding references concern the USA. In a funeral oration for George Washington from 1803, it was stated that 'The resolve is firm, for the probation is terrible. His [George Washington's] theatre is a world; his charge, a family of nations; the interest staked in his hands, the prosperity of millions unborn in ages to come' (Mason 1803: 232). In 1813, celebrating American Independence, the family of nations is also explicitly connected to civilization:

> We saw our sovereignty and independence not only acknowledged but respected abroad, the hand of every civilized government on the globe extended in friendship, to welcome us to the great family of nations, and our accession hailed as the harbinger of hope to the cause of freedom, throughout the world.
>
> (Mills 1813: 3)

Again, two years later, both the reference and the context are similar: 'After eight years' unparalleled sufferings [...] the other nations of Europe, just

appreciating our enterprise and valor, bid the United States a cordial welcome into the great family of nations' (Leland 1815: 5). Or again:

> The war in which our country is engaged, is a part of the grand scheme of God's Providence, and requires that we consider it, both at it respects this nation in particular, and as it respects the general family of nations.

It emphasized that 'the present war is a trial of our republican institutions' but also that 'the war is a benefit'. For, as it was argued,

> By the present contest, America will acquire a respectable character in the family of nations. She has long been abused and insulted for her peaceful demeanour. The belligerents of Europe acted towards this country, as if it had been denationalized.
>
> (McLeod 1815: 209, 213–214, 217–218)

As concerns Europe, in an address delivered in 1823, we find a longer passage giving context to the 'family of states' with the first explicit mention of the 'family of states of Europe'. Rejoicing that the era of religious wars and the 'territorial war' of colonial expansion were over, it was hoped that the era of the 'wars of ambition' – the Napoleonic Wars – would soon end as well:

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> This war has been followed by a periodical convention of the sovereigns of the principal countries of Europe, and their ministers. At these meetings the great and leading interests of the European family of nations are discussed and deliberated upon, with the professed and declared intention of preserving the peace of society. This is an institution entirely of modern origin. It has no parallel in the history of nations.
>
> (Bigelow 1824: 14)

In both the USA and Europe, these references continue throughout the early 1800s. In the USA, it is commonplace to narrate that country's history as the entry into the family of nations. For instance, in 1828 we find Mr Condict

> tendering our grateful thanks to Heaven for deliverance from servile bondage, and giving us a name and a place in the great family of nations […]. If the rulers of a nation, and those who are the counselors of the rulers, are destitute or regardless of moral principle in their intercourse with the great family of nations, it will prove fatal ultimately to that nation, as the want of policy and wisdom. Public morals and public virtue, are as essential to national happiness and prosperity, as to individuals.
>
> (Condict 1828: 3, 27)

In 1827, the term figures in the Diplomatic Code of the United States of America: 'the editor believes he has performed an acceptable service in the

production of this book; which our elevated rank in the family of nations, and our extensive political and commercial intercourse, with various parts of the world, evidently require' (Elliot 1827: xxi). Such references to 'family of nations' continue beyond the 1830s (see e.g. Gouvernour 1830). The stage was thus set to assess *other* nations becoming independent comparative to the shining success of USA's entry into the family.

Early uses: Latin America joining the family of nations

In the mid-1820s, and following the kinship script in US historiography as sketched above, the term 'family of nations' emerges in accounts dealing with the independence of new states in Latin America. In 1825, a history book about America made a reference to how

> half a dozen independent States suddenly emerging from colonial degradation, take their rank in the family of nations; […] voluntarily establishing free and just governments, founded on the will of the people, and calculated to secure […] independence, liberty, peace.
>
> (Niles 1825)

In US Congressional records, the reference is similar: 'within the last ten years, a new family of nations, in our own hemisphere, has arisen among the inhabitants of the earth' (US Congress 1825: 25).

The independence of Latin American states was even referenced in an oration delivered on US Independence Day in 1825: 'we look with joy to a whole family of nations, which, in this new world, have passed through long and great tribulation, from enslaved and dependent colonies, to sovereign and free states' (Dickins 1825: 13). Simon Bolivar himself refer to a 'family of nations' in his address to the Constituent Congress of Bolivia: 'The accession of a new State to the society of those already existing, forms a just subject of exultation for mankind, as it augments the great family of nations' (Bolívar 1826: 13).

In a telling speech to Congress in 1827, Congressman Henry Clay (1777–1852), who was Secretary of State from 1825 to 1829, asks with regard toColombia; 'Why recognize this republic? Where is the use of it? To be admitted into the family of nations. Tell the nations of the world, says Puyrredon in his speech, that we already belong to their illustrious rank' (Clay 1827: 279). In the same vein, in 1829 William Walton mentions Chile's entry into the family of nations (Walton 1829: 278). Further, with reference to Cuba, Abiel Abbot writes that

> if they should become independent, such is the extent and fertility of the soil, so rich are the productions of the island, so much greater is the attention to education than formerly, and so many the schools setting up, by public and private patronage, that they will have wealth, and knowledge,

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> and population, sufficient to render themselves respectable in the family of nations.
>
> (Abbot 1829: 115)

In 1830, *The North American Review* writes of Mexico that

> [We] shall hail with sincere delight the hour when, emerging from the gloomy cloud, in which she now is, and has long been enveloped, she can assume that station in the family of nations, to which her real importance entitles her.
>
> (*The North American Review* 1830: 154)

The new Latin-American states were, as seen from the USA, following the progressive trajectory that the USA itself followed, namely growing up to become proper family members. Decolonization is a progressive step, signifying the entry into the family of nations based on, and assessed relative to, the US trajectory.

Liberalism, kinship and the unfamiliar

The narrative established above – of nations throwing off the colonial yoke to take their place in the family of nations – taps into a liberal repertoire of ideas about progress and, not the least, coercive paternalism. Such paternalistic thought would be of consequence beyond the early history of the concept's emergence. Gaining independence after colonialism thus meant becoming a member of the family of nations. Then, after the emergence of the family-of-nations concept, and the narrative concerning US and Latin-American progress, what was the status of the *remaining* colonies? Regarding the family of nations, they were still children in need of tutelage. As Mona Domosh has pointed out, 'the family trope legitimizes a view of the 'natural' hierarchy that exists between nations – colonial states are often spoken of as 'children' within the 'family' of nations, while imperial nations are figured as their parental protectors' (2005: 535–536). This was intimately connected to the liberal, colonial gaze.

This is key to understanding what it is that makes the uses of this metaphor consequential for international politics. Crucially, by not paying attention to how actors have been using the kinship metaphor, we miss one indication of a cultural-hierarchical practice of international politics, serving to legitimize power politics of a particular kind – colonialism.

Nele Matz argues that the family of nations allowed European states to circumvent the contradiction between sovereign equality of states and colonialism:

> In principle, a traditional definition of sovereignty and the resulting right to equal treatment contradicts the circumstance that many non-European territories were first colonized and later administered by Mandatories […]. The main reason for denying non-European peoples and their political

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> organization in a certain territory recognition as sovereign subjects of international law was the introduction of civilization as an additional condition for membership in the family of (civilized) nations. By this shift, civilization and membership in the family of civilized nations became the decisive factors for the recofnition of sovereign states; not because the definition of sovereignty was modified but because civilization of society was added as a precondition to be allowed into the family of nations.
>
> (2005: 47, 95)

However, the concept of a family of nations is *inherently* hierarchical, in the form of *paternalism*. Therefore, civilizational hierarchy and a family of nations are not two separate things joining together, but one is premised upon the other: Civilization is not added onto the family of nations concept, but that concept itself rests on a liberal paternalist regime.

Kinship metaphors were therefore essential to legitimize colonial rule. Locke's ideas in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* – that parents should teach *tabula rasa* children to have reason in order to express contractual consent – served to frame Britain, for instance, as the father who should educate those nations that were still in the infancy of the progress of civilization. Freedom requires knowledge and reason. This reason, Locke makes explicit, requires parental interdiction (Mehta 1999: 198). So how was the domain of the family translated to the nation, and then to the international?

The distinction between fathers and monarchs are not so stable or absolute as Locke would have it, and 'by the nineteenth century, the centrality of education, still conceived and expressed in terms of metaphors of kinship, gets projected on a global canvas through the notions of the scales, or grades, of civilizational progress' (Mehta 1999: 199) and, we would add, by the 'family of nations' as a new concept, emerging concomitantly with liberal ideas. In turn, a teleology of progress is intimately linked to paternalism and kinship metaphors:

> The metaphor of kinship has been central to the political ad developmental project of liberalism from Locke onward. It governs the way Locke, Macauley, and Mill conceive of education, which in turn is central and integral to the political agenda of liberty.
>
> (Mehta 1999: 198)

In the remainder of this chapter, we make three interrelated points: first, that liberalism presupposes an existing community before individual freedoms may flourish – in this case a family. Second, that this community is not necessarily exclusive only – it also gains power by being universal and *inclusive*. Third, precisely this made the 'family of nations' a tool for legitimizing colonialism and coercion as 'family business', outside the normal parameters of traditional, interstate power politics.

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Kinship as community

Even for liberalism, some sort of community must exist as a precondition for individual freedoms. On the international level, as demonstrated above, that community in question was regularly presented as the family of nations. The family of nations and other kinship metaphors could have remained somewhat unstated and hidden precisely because of this – the liberal focus on *individuals*. Nevertheless, a community must be present in which individual consensus can operate. Kinship thus becomes a way of differentiating historical trajectories and progress – from children to adults – and thus also of different standards for granting rights to individuals. As Mehta makes the point:

> Notwithstanding the claim that individual consent is the basis of political community, some conception of community must be presupposed or taken for granted as existing prior to the consensual justification of the political community … the differentials of historical development become the justificatory grounds for the differential rights and privileges granted to individuals.
>
> (Mehta 1999: 112)

Christer Jönsson argues that 'one might infer that the current references to brotherhood and family are part of a ritualized diplomatic language rather than a constitutive paradigm, in the same way as diplomats might allude to 'the family of nations' on ceremonial occasions' (Jönsson 2000: 193). However, Jönsson notes that 'the family metaphor derives its strength from its ontological and existential basis in human experience' (Jönsson 2000: 193). Also Daniel Rigney has emphasized how kinship metaphors are often mobilized in political rhetoric 'to strengthen bonds of group solidarity, as when […] diplomats invoke the image of a "family of nations" ' (Rigney 2001: 16). Rorty's reminder is therefore useful in this respect, that our 'identification with our community – our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage – is heightened when we see this community as ours rather than nature's, shaped rather than found, one among many which men have made' – kinship and family metaphors therefore makes the international *social*, and makes it *ours* (cited in Mehta 1999: 42), rather than functional and invisible.

Kinship, inclusion and exclusion

Ronnie Hjorth has pointed out that the family of nations emphasized the exclusionary and hierarchical element of the international. The formal equality of sovereign states, Hjorth argues, must be understood 'against the backdrop of an exclusionary concept of the family of nations'. As he further elaborates, 'the concept of

> a family of nations is exclusionary since some states belong to the family while others do not. The expression is metaphorical, indicating some sort of

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> familiarity among the political communities that count as equals, and indicating something that is not shared by all communities.
>
> (Hjorth 2014: 69–70)

However, that is not the whole story. The liberal concept of a family of nations was powerful also because it was so *inclusive*, albeit conditional in specific ways. Exactly in its inclusiveness – the promise of adulthood – lies its coercive potential as legitimating device.[5]

There is a long-standing tradition of 'discovering' convenient kinship links, e.g. with barbarian tribes, to bring them into the fold – as a way of establishing connections, similarities, and differences (see Jones 1999; Neumann 2012: 24). The kinship ties alluded to in our case, are those between *nations*, and therefore potentially universal – as is liberty and reason – but has to be effectuated through tutelage by the father nations to set the children on the course towards progress and civilization. The logic behind this assertion is again succinctly captured by Mehta, writing that in liberal imperialism

> the political and imperial gaze is never really surprised by the stranger, for he or she is always recognized as that familiar, through deformed, double of which liberalism has spoken in the cold and corseted language of kinship, having substantially eviscerated that language from one of sentiments.
>
> (Mehta 1999: 33)

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That is, through kinship metaphors, the stranger is always potentially familiar, although initially deformed and unreasonable. In short, it is not only about separating 'them' from 'us' by using the concept of a family of nations, but by potentially including everyone. No one is unfamiliar, and a problem of understanding never arises, only one of recognition or not.

What does this tell us about kinship in international relations? Kinship is here used as a way of justifying power and authority over colonies, by its potential inclusivity over time and with progress. However, it requires tutelage to become a member of the family of nations. Because no one is literally unfamiliar, the family of nations therefore may imply the legitimate use of force.

Kinship and coercion

To engage in contractual relationships, individuals need reason, Locke and others had argued. Consent and equality is therefore 'conditional on having reached a stage of historical maturation', and *because* of this, 'liberal imperialism never sees, much less acknowledges, its own coercive efforts' (Mehta 1999: 111). More specifically, by using kinship metaphors drawing on ideas of paternalism and tutelage, imperial and colonial powers could hide the large power differentials from view by presenting them as 'family business', beyond the purview of the political sphere, thus legitimating such power differentials and associated coercive measures.

Because it did not pertain to the political sphere, paternal actions were ‘free from many of the constraints that internally limit the use of power in that sphere’ (Mehta 1999), and consequently, by including nations as potential members of a family of nations, the means to reform the deviants can also be legitimately harsher, as corrective measures and use of power is not happening within the political sphere anymore.

In the case of British imperialism, the superior brute power of the Empire could be overlooked only by ‘imputing to liberalism a fundamental commitment to being paternalistic’ – paternalism ‘was the way the British coed the fact of their superior strength and the belief in their own superiority so as not to have to make a “straightforward assertion of it”’ (Mehta 1999: 197 quoting Stephen 1895). Thus,

> The family, or rather the naturalized version of a particular view of the family, as something starkly hierarchical and governed by a paterfamilias whose authority is not quite political but who has the ‘power of commanding and chastising’ his children is that essential penumbra on which the pure political thought of liberalism relies.
>
> (1999: 33)

The principle of kinship is hierarchical, and trumps other liberal principles. Kinship is the illiberal side of liberalism, concerning time and progress. Kinship, then, is in fact what legitimizes the coercive side of liberal thought – there are communities, not only individuals, and that community was not international society, but a family of nations. The implication of this, in turn, is that there is a clear hierarchy in this community, serving to make the principle of liberty applicable to family members of civilization only (Mehta 1999: 102).

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In sum, the ‘family of nations’ was a liberal concept, where the hierarchical family is the community that can make individuals (individual states) flourish, but after receiving proper tutelage – often on the model of the USA, which, as seen, referred to themselves exactly as a successful example of being included in the family, fulfilling the civilizational parameters.

Conclusions

In the nineteenth century, the ‘family of nations’ was a concept used frequently before our ‘own’ concepts of ‘international society’ or ‘international system’ were established as conventional objects of debate in the discipline of IR, and continued to be deployed in their shadow. In this chapter, we have briefly sought to trace its emergence. This initial exercise served as a launching-pad for a foray into the colonial and imperial history of international politics, allowing us to explore the coercive side of ‘international society’, precisely by pointing to the kinship analogy serving as an enabling metaphor and legitimizing tool for imperial powers. Liberalism’s shadowy side was thus justifying colonialism, imperialism, and coercion by basing it in a community; the family.

Although references to the 'family of nations' have disappeared from scholarly works on international politics and international law over the past 50 years, they still figure in political speech: On 9 November 2001, Romano Prodi declared that 'Europe is not a business: it is a family of nations and peoples who have come together to pursue common goals' (Prodi 2002). And in January 1991, US President George H. W. Bush made reference to how he hoped that in the future, 'Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the family of nations, thus enhancing the security and stability of the Gulf' (cited in Weller 1993: 279).

It is no surprise that – as the graphs presented in this chapter testify to – after wars, the usage of the family of nation concept declines, as whole communities are unsettled. On the other hand, uses of the concept follows the historical trajectory of liberal international thought and, as in the quote from George W. Bush above, promising progress in the future by deploying the harsh, but necessary, means to raise your children, progressing on their path to become reasonable and civilized family members, behaving well at the dinner table of nations.

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Notes

1 Notable exceptions include Edward Keene, who has drawn attention to the term. His focus, though, is more on how the family of *civilized* nations was a group within a broader set of international relations with a shared 'set of values or practices that they defined as "civilized" ' (Keene 2014: 652). The focus thus lies more on the civilization vs barabaric dimension than on the notion of kinship. See also Keene (2002, 2005: Chapter 6). Similar treatments are also found in Alexandrowicz (1967) and Gong (1984). Furthermore, few of these dwell on how the term 'family of nations' emerged and how it developed.

2 For a critical account, see Edward Keene's work referenced in Note 1.

3 All figures have been compiled through using Google Books NGRAM Viewer. While digitalized books through Google Books made this research possible, we have used other available databases to complement our findings (e.g. Archive.org). While our findings may indeed be biased according to which books from the period have been digitalized by Google, it is also a fact that this type of research would not have been possible had it not been for such publications being available in digitalized searchable formats (see Leira and de Carvalho 2016, 2017). All figures are meant as illustrations.

4 According to Google Book's *Ngram Viewer*.

5 Works dealing these mechanisms historically include Zarakol (2011) and Suzuki (2009).

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