

Global IR and Western Dominance: Moving Forward or Eurocentric Entrapment?

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Audrey Alejandro, *Western Dominance in International Relations? The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019, 208 pp., £115 hbk).

Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin, eds. *Widening the World of International Relations: Homegrown Theorizing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, 252 pp., £115 hbk).

Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, *Re-Writing International Relations. History and Theory Beyond Eurocentrism in Turkey* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 128 pp., £75 hbk).

Yongjin Zhang and Teng-Chi Chang, eds. *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations: Ongoing Debates and Sociological Realities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016, 276 pp., £37.99 pbk).

Abstract

Over the last decade, a call for decolonisation has challenged IR scholarship. The call has advocated for the need to decolonise the epistemology and ontology of the discipline, critically engaging with the legacies of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy in global power relations. Parallel to the decolonial project, a call to globalise International Relations has been made by well-known scholars in recent years predominantly through the Global IR project. In this review essay of four books I briefly engage with the debates around Global IR and its critics drawing on a decolonial perspective. On the one hand, I discuss the potentialities and limitations of historiographical deconstruction as a methodological tool, raising issues with the current silencing of the ‘present’ due to the continued coloniality of knowledge. On the other hand, I delve into the wide range

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of possibilities that a serious and critical commitment to diversifying the discipline of IR might bring to academics in the so-called non-West/Global South. I analyse current critiques of Global IR considering them necessary though, in some cases, agents for the reification and silencing of the interests of the non-West/Global South. I argue that, whilst coloniality operates in multiple ways, decoloniality is also a project that surpasses the ideal total exteriority as imagined through the West/non-West dichotomy.

Keywords

global IR, Eurocentrism, decolonial IR

Relaciones Internacionales Globales y Dominación Occidental: ¿Avance o entrapamiento eurocéntrico?

Resumen

Durante la última década, la disciplina de las Relaciones Internacionales ha sido retada por un llamado a su descolonización. Se ha abogado por la necesidad de descolonizar su epistemología y ontología, que le lleve a comprometerse críticamente con los legados del imperialismo, el colonialismo, el racismo y el patriarcado en las relaciones globales de poder. Recientemente, paralelo al proyecto decolonial, reconocidos académicos han hecho un llamado a globalizar las Relaciones Internacionales. En este ensayo bibliográfico, presento brevemente los debates sobre las Relaciones Internacionales Globales y sus críticos partiendo desde una perspectiva decolonial. Por un lado, discuto las potencialidades y limitaciones de la deconstrucción historiográfica como una herramienta metodológica, planteando cuestiones como el silenciamiento del 'presente' vinculado a la continuidad de la colonialidad del saber. Por otro lado, indago sobre el amplio campo de posibilidades que podría traer para los académicos del llamado no-Occidente/Sur Global un compromiso serio y crítico para diversificar la disciplina de las Relaciones Internacionales (subjetivamente y materialmente). También, analizo las críticas actuales a las Relaciones Internacionales Globales considerando estas como necesarias aunque, en algunos casos, agentes de la reificación y silenciamiento de los intereses del no-Occidente/Sur Global. Mi argumento es que mientras que la colonialidad opera en distintas maneras, la decolonialidad es también un proyecto que sobrepasa el ideal de la exterioridad total como es imaginada a través de la dicotomía Occidente/no-Occidente.

Palabras clave

relaciones internacionales globales, Eurocentrismo, relaciones internacionales decoloniales

Global IR et la domination occidentale: marche en avant ou piège de l'eurocentrisme ?

Résumé

Au cours de la dernière décennie, un appel à la décolonisation a remis en cause les recherches dans le domaine des relations internationales. Il plaide pour la nécessité de décoloniser l'épistémologie et l'ontologie de la discipline, en revenant de manière critique sur l'héritage de l'impérialisme, du colonialisme, du racisme et du patriarcat dans les relations de pouvoir sur le plan mondial. Parallèlement à ce projet de décolonisation, d'éminents chercheurs ont appelé, ces dernières années, à mondialiser les relations internationales, essentiellement dans

le cadre du projet Global IR. Dans cet essai critique, je reviens brièvement sur le débat que suscite ce projet et sur ses critiques, qui s'appuient sur une approche décoloniale. D'une part, je discute des potentialités et des limites de la déconstruction historiographique en tant qu'outil méthodologique, en soulignant les problèmes que pose l'impasse faite sur le présent, en raison de la persistance de la colonialité du savoir. D'autre part, je me penche sur le vaste éventail de possibilités qu'un engagement sérieux et critique en faveur de la diversification de la discipline des relations internationales apporterait aux universitaires dans les régions dites non occidentales/du Sud global. J'analyse les critiques actuelles du projet Global IR et les considère nécessaires même si, dans certains cas, elles contribuent à réifier et passer sous silence les intérêts des régions non occidentales/du Sud global. Je démontre que, bien que la colonialité se manifeste sous de multiples aspects, la décolonialité constitue aussi un projet de dépassement de l'idéal d'extériorité totale tel qu'il s'exprime dans la dichotomie Occident/Non-Occident.

Mots-clés

global IR, eurocentrisme, IR décoloniales

Introduction

Since its establishment as a discipline, International Relations has reproduced itself by either silencing or expropriating knowledge production at the margins of the 'self', that is, by articulating and re-articulating what decolonial thinkers have called the coloniality of knowledge.¹ Following Anibal Quijano's early works on 'coloniality',² and 'coloniality of power',³ decolonial thinkers have defined coloniality of knowledge as the epistemic violence perpetrated at the 'encounter' with the 'other',⁴ producing what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called 'epistemicide'.⁵ This practice is based on the invisibility, denial, silencing, expropriation, and extraction of non-Western knowledge, and is upheld by claims of the rationality of the 'first' modern subject, the '*ego conquiro*'.⁶ For decolonial thinkers, the modern/colonial system is nurtured by the West's

1. See Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Nepantla* 3, no. 1 (2000): 533–80; Santiago Castro-Gómez, 'Ciencias sociales, violencia epistémica y el problema de la 'invención del otro'', in *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000), 145–62; and Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
2. Anibal Quijano, 'Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad', *Perú Indígena* 13, no. 29 (1992): 11–20. Published 15 years later as 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 168–78.
3. Anibal Quijano, 'Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social', *Journal of World Systems Research* 11, no. 2 (2000): 342–86.
4. Enrique Dussel, 1492: *El encubrimiento del otro. Hacia el origen del Mito de la Modernidad* (La Paz: Biblioteca Indígena, 1995).
5. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Para descolonizar Occidente. Más allá del pensamiento abismal* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO-Prometeo Libros, 2010).
6. Dussel, 1492, 40.

epistemic privilege that has dichotomised categories as rational/irrational, modern/traditional, progressive/backward.⁷

For IR, however, although some of the problematic colonial and imperial practices within the discipline's epistemology and ontology, such as positivism, Eurocentrism and state-centrism, have been criticised since the reflective turn,⁸ the subject of knowledge production (I/Self/Being) remains centred in a specific locus of enunciation: white, male, Western. The four books reviewed in this article demonstrate that while there is an agenda to globalise the IR discipline, much remains to be done to deconstruct IR's Eurocentric narratives and to widen theoretical possibilities beyond the West.

Two main issues are addressed in these works that could be taken as points of departure for a seriously global and critical IR agenda. First, the continuous deconstruction of history, theory and knowledge production as a way to both de-Westernise inquiries and topics and de-reify the spatio-temporal ordering of events. The fixation on the West's spatio-temporal experience has constrained historical narratives, limited to a set of events ordered to satisfy Western imaginaries of their dominance and agency over the 'rest'.⁹ Even when acknowledging mistakes, guilt, and good intentions, these imaginaries are still self-centred. Either as the saviour or villain, the I/Self/Being within the historical narratives of mainstream (and not so mainstream) IR is constructed from and with Western epistemic privilege.¹⁰ Conversely, deconstruction from the margins, as a critique to epistemology and to historical narratives that do not benefit from Western epistemic privilege, and that emerge from the periphery, may not only question the subjective and material processes of knowledge/narrative production. It may also put at stake the relevance of universalised conceptualisations about the state, civil society, democracy, peace, development, etc. by claiming an ontological turn that draws on a practice of 'strong objectivity' emerging from and as body politics.¹¹

7. Ramón Grosfoguel, 'The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-knowledge* 11, no. 1 (2013): 73–90.

8. James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro, eds., *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (New York: Lexington Books, 1989); Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker, 'Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990): 259–68; Andrew Linklater, 'The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Point of View', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21, no. 1 (1992): 77–98; Mark Neufeld, 'Reflexivity and International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 1 (1993): 53–76; and Hilbourne Watson, 'Theorizing the Racialization of Global Politics and the Caribbean Experience', *Alternatives* 26, no. 4 (2001): 449–83.

9. Zeynep G. Çapan, *Re-Writing International Relations: History and Theory Beyond Eurocentrism in Turkey* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 53–65.

10. Audrey Alejandro, *Western Dominance in International Relations? The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 3.

11. Sandra Harding, '"Strong Objectivity": A Response to the New Objectivity Question', *Synthese* 104, no. 3 (1995): 331–49.

Secondly, to globalise IR, it is important to move beyond deconstruction and also explore theoretical approaches from the margins – either if these margins are considered as a ‘total exteriority’ regarding the West, or considered as ‘non-West/Westernised’ margins.¹² The books reviewed in this essay explore the limits and potentiality of ‘homegrown’¹³ and ‘local’¹⁴ theorisation in Turkey, Brazil, India, Japan, Iran, China, and South Africa. These works engage critically with the presence of Eurocentric imaginaries that have limited and influenced knowledge production in these spaces. Drawing on different strands of critical scholarship – predominantly poststructuralist and postcolonial – these works approach narratives and theorisation beyond the West.

In *Re-Writing International Relations: History and Theory Beyond Eurocentrism in Turkey* (2016), Zeynep Gülşah Çapan considers the following questions: How does Eurocentrism move in and out of IR using Eurocentric historical narratives as a tool? And how is Turkey’s international experience limited by narratives upholding an idea of Turkish exceptionalism centred on its relationship with the West? From a similar perspective, in *Western Dominance in International Relations: The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India* (2019), Audrey Alejandro asks: ‘What are the conditions of the internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India and what do these empirical findings tell us about the Eurocentrism of the narrative of Western dominance?’ Similarly, ‘does the narrative of Western dominance reproduce the Eurocentrism it denounces, and, if so, what would a non-Eurocentric narrative about the internationalisation of IR “in the Global South” look like?’¹⁵

Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin edit and organise the topics addressed in *Widening the World of International Relations: Homegrown Theorizing* (2018) into three categories. Firstly, a series of chapters addresses the ‘debates on the desirability and viability of non-Western perspectives in IR’.¹⁶ On the one hand, desirability reflects a

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12. By non-West/Westernised I refer to scholarship developed at institutions in the Global South which practise Western knowledge production frames but still contribute interesting approaches from a diverse positionality.
 13. Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin define homegrown theorising as ‘original theorizing in the periphery about the periphery’. For the authors, ‘theory [. . .] should propose a relationship between at least two concepts’. ‘[T]o be *original* at least one of these concepts must be either novel or redefined’. ‘[T]o be homegrown, it should be based on indigenous idea and/or practices’. See ‘A Typology of Homegrown Theorizing’, in *Widening the World of International Relations: Homegrown Theorizing*, eds. Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 15–16.
 14. By ‘local’ (‘traditional’ or ‘national’, as used in different instances) Audrey Alejandro’s interlocutors refer to ‘(1) theories developed in other disciplines, (2) theories developed outside academia and (3) pre-colonial literature’. In Alejandro, *Western Dominance in International Relations?* 26. As well, ‘local’ may be understood as non-Western theorisation and approaches – for instance, Confucianism – as presented in different chapters of Yongjin Zhang and Tengchi Chang, eds., *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations: Ongoing Debates and Sociological Realities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
 15. Alejandro, *Western Dominance in International Relations?* 13.
 16. Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin, ‘Introduction: Widening the World of IR’, in Aydinli and Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations*, 4.

'consensus' on the need to encourage homegrown theorisation in IR if the 'global hegemonic structure of the discipline [that] pushes periphery scholars to be consumers of theory, rather than producers of it'¹⁷ is to be overcome. On the other hand, although there is no single formula to make homegrown theorisation viable within the process to globalise IR theory production, the authors encourage participation in academic processes such as workshops on theory-building,¹⁸ and also, to establish more dialogical scholarship and collaborations.¹⁹ Secondly, this book includes diverse research that takes into account the 'challenges and potentials of the local disciplines'²⁰ in Iran, Japan, China, and South Africa, and asks which are 'the specific agendas that built on the indigenous traditions'.²¹ Thirdly, the volume introduces 'three attempts to original homegrown theorising',²² aiming to be useful for approaching different contexts. Finally, *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations: Ongoing Debates and Sociological Realities* (2016), edited by Yongjin Zhang and Teng-chi Chang, brings together multiple perspectives on the state of the art of IR in China, whilst also outlining homegrown theories that discuss Chinese perceptions of the global order, China's role in it, and the future of the discipline from this distinct perspective.²³ Although the authors of this volume share the critique of Western hegemony over the discipline, their proposals on what should be China's role in addressing a non-Western IR is much more diverse, including hybridity with Western perspectives, and 'traditional' non state-centric approaches.

In this review essay, I discuss how these books propose interesting theoretical tools for the deconstruction of IR's narratives and theorisation, and for the globalisation of IR theory and its potential to decolonise the discipline. In different ways, although not always explicitly, these books raise a series of critiques to the continuation of the coloniality of knowledge in IR – invisibilisation, denial, appropriation, IR provincialism, Western dominance, etc. To these critiques, I add that the materiality of the coloniality of knowledge, as it intersects with Eurocentrism and racism in the academic field, is a major stumbling block for – but do not erode the potential for – decolonisation. As coloniality is heterarchical, so too is resistance, critical decolonial thinking, and decolonisation. Therefore, there are multiple ways, neither simple nor total, to move beyond the colonial entrapment of knowledge production in IR.

17. Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin, 'A Typology of Homegrown Theorizing', in Aydinli and Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations*, 16.

18. As suggested in Knud Erik Jørgensen, 'Would a 100 Global Workshops on Theory Building Make a Difference?', in Aydinli and Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations*, 41–58.

19. Deniz Kuru, 'Homegrown Theorizing: Knowledge, Scholars, Theory', in Aydinli and Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations*, 59–79.

20. Aydinli and Biltekin, 'Introduction', in Aydinli and Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations*, 5.

21. *Ibid.*, 5.

22. *Ibid.*, 6.

23. Zhang and Chang, *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations*.

Deconstruction as a Tool and a Limitation

Almost four decades ago, reflectivist approaches in IR led to different (although entangled) turns in the social sciences in general, and particularly in IR such as the historical turn, the epistemic turn, the ontological turn, the emotional turn, among others.²⁴ The books reviewed either engage with the historical turn or introduce an epistemic turn by contributing to the discussion of Global IR.

In *Re-Writing International Relations* (2016), Çapan engages in a critical deconstructivist methodology by analysing the links between history and IR. Çapan provides a useful definition of history, an engagement with historical narratives, and the power/knowledge relation embedded in the 'reconstruction' of the past. The author argues that history is not the telling of a story about the past, but the retelling of a story of the past. Because of such epistemic limitations, every retelling is an ideological construct that draws on the questions raised from the/a present. As Çapan argues, 'the past is not lived in narrative form; it is written as such'.²⁵ Therefore, writing history serves as 'a series of discourses that work to define, categorize, periodize, limit, silence and make the past intelligible'.²⁶ Moreover, following Michel-Rolph Trouillot influential work *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (1995),²⁷ Çapan reminds us of how the hegemonic historical narratives also produce a hierarchised relation between the one 'Great Story', for instance, the French Revolution, and the story within that 'Great Story', the Haitian Revolution.²⁸ In this sense, either the subjection of a non-Western event to the West's historical narratives or silencing this story – as it seemingly lacks authentic theoretical substance to rethink the emergence of the international system by mainstream historical and IR approaches – demonstrates how mainstream scholarship is built on the reproduction of coloniality of knowledge.

24. William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006). David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro, eds., *Moral Spaces, Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and Politics of Identity*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); David Campbell, 'Global Inscription: How Foreign Policy Constitutes the United States', *Alternatives* 15, no. 3 (1990): 263–86; David Blaney and Arlene Tickner, 'Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017): 293–311. Tamara Trowsell et al., 'Recrafting International Relations through Relationality', *E-International*, 8 January 2019. Available at: www.e-ir.info/2019/01/08/recrafting-international-relations-through-relationality/. Last accessed: May 5, 2019; and George E. Marcus, 'The Place of Emotions in International Relations Scholarship', *E-International Relations*, 2 October 2013. Available at: www.e-ir.info/2013/10/02/the-place-of-emotion-in-international-relations-scholarship/. Last accessed: May 5, 2019.

25. Çapan, *Re-Writing International Relations*, 19.

26. *Ibid.*, 19.

27. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

28. Çapan, *Re-Writing International Relations*, 25.

To this, I would add that the power of narrative and the power of representation in IR have not only silenced the past but also silence the present. While the historical turn constitutes an important critique that opens researchers' curiosities to search for (or create) 'different' narratives, draw on concepts that were left at the margins, and prioritise the work of authors outside of the canon, reference to their 'marginalised' contemporary colleagues' work has been quite limited.²⁹ As research conducted by Peace A. Medie and Alice J. Kang reveals, Global South scholars (that includes 77 countries) represented roughly the 3% of the articles published in peer-reviewed European and US journals from 2008 to 2017.³⁰ The authors also underline that 'even when South-based scholars publish in journals based in the North, they still remain on the periphery' while 'articles published by [for instance] Africa-based scholars are less likely to be cited'.³¹ Medie and Kang mention different reasons that may explain this underrepresentation, for example, lack of funding for research, heavy teaching load, etc. However, I consider that this underrepresentation, especially when it comes to citations, has also to do with some critical Global North scholars' expectations of a radically different homegrown theorisation in the Global South, and for the epistemic practice of only re-visiting/citing authors or theories silenced in the 'past'. I consider that this silences the 'present' since it reproduces the idea that, to Western eyes, contributions at the margins only emerge from a sort of 'petrified' past or 'exotic' present.

In this sense, a committed epistemic turn would also imply different research practices, teaching, and writing that recognise the richness of engaging in debates with lesser-known scholars from the Global South, regardless of whether or not these scholars are proposing radically critical ideas as defined by critical scholars from the Global North. As I argue, it is also Eurocentric to only recognise authors from the Global South when they represent what scholarship from the Global North portrays as critical scholarship that can 'exoticise' the discipline. This implies a practice of essentialisation of those on the 'margins' who are expected to represent the 'other' by mainstream imaginaries. As Çapan summarises, 'the purpose is not to add the non-West into the present 'archive of Western academy, for that is the continuation in the intellectual sphere of imperial expansion and colonial rule', but rather 'the purpose is to undermine the security of an epistemological cartography that quarantines legitimate knowledge production of modernity to one (idealized) geo-cultural site'.³²

29. I am strictly referring to researchers and scholars from the Global South established at academic institutions, not to 'otros saberes' as indigenous knowledge which is also under debate, however, related to the idea of epistemic extractivism and expropriation.

30. Peace A. Medie and Alice J. Kang, 'What Can Be Done about It', *The Conversation*, 29 July 2018, p. 1, Available at: <https://theconversation.com/global-south-scholars-are-missing-from-european-and-us-journals-what-can-be-done-about-it-99570>. Last accessed: June 6, 2019.

31. *Ibid.*, 3.

32. Çapan, *Re-Writing International Relations*, 94. Citing Robbie Shilliam, 'The Perilous but Unavoidable Terrain of the Non-West', in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought. Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2011), 24.

In this sense, while deconstruction has been a useful tool to critically engage the mainstream history of IR, and its Eurocentric epistemic foundations, it is necessary to move from the critique of coloniality of knowledge to the multiple possibilities of decolonisation. The possibilities for a holistic perspective of the world that allows for ethical global and decolonial conversations, however, has been constrained by coloniality – of power/material; of knowledge/epistemic; of being/ontological – as a main gatekeeper.

Once we engage in moving beyond deconstruction, it is necessary to ask what is the purpose of history in ‘our present’? Or expressed differently: what is the purpose of historical narratives in the present? For whom are we narrating? These questions call for a political statement. It is not only that as researchers or scholars we are neither neutral nor objective, but furthermore, our decision to participate in certain debates is political. Academia is not an abstract space, but a series of institutions – universities, journals, academic conferences – shaped by the coloniality of knowledge where the how we know, and what we know is always contested by different narratives, confronted with material circumstances, personal relationships, and the emotional involvement of subjects. This preoccupation with whom we write for takes me to a critical engagement with the current debate on Global IR, its potentialities and its limitations.

Demanding Global IR and Criticising the Demand for Global IR: the Continuation of a Eurocentric Monologue

There has been growing interest in pluralising the topics, theories, and voices within IR. This interest emerges from a shared preoccupation with claims for the pluralisation and decolonisation of the discipline,³³ that have also taken form in different publications such as the ‘Worlding Beyond the West’ series,³⁴ and ‘Kilombo: International Relations and Colonial Questions’ series.³⁵ As another initiative for this pluralisation, Amitav Acharya brought the term ‘Global IR’ into an institutional setting with the ISA Annual Convention in 2015 on the topic: ‘Global IR and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies’. For Acharya, the Global IR project constitutes an ‘aspiration for greater inclusiveness and diversity in our discipline’,³⁶ which means that ‘[t]he challenge is not just to make the study of IR ‘safe’ for diversity but also be enriched by that diversity’.³⁷

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33. See Branwen Gruffydd Jones, ed., *Decolonizing International Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); Meera Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue . . . But Can We Change the Subjects? A Typology of Decolonising Strategies for the Study of World Politics’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 781–803; Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought*; Melody Fonseca and Ari Jerrems, ‘Pensamiento decolonial: ¿una ‘nueva’ apuesta en las RRII?’, *Relaciones Internacionales* 19 (2012): 103–21; among others.
 34. Series edited by Arlene Tickner, David Blaney and Innana Hamati-Ataya, for Routledge.
 35. Series edited by Mustapha K. Pasha, Meera Sabaratnam, and Robbie Shilliam, for Rowman & Littlefield.
 36. Amitav Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 649.
 37. *Ibid.*, 656–7.

An example of this engagement with IR's diversity around the world can be found in the books edited by Yonghin Zhang and Teng-Chi Chang, *Constructing a Chinese School of International Relations* (2016), and Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations* (2018), both published through the series 'Worlding Beyond the West'. Both volumes demonstrate that diversity is much more complex than a West/Non-West division, and goes beyond diversity as reflected by a mirror of the West. There is diversity within diversity. This diversity might be 'critical' or not, and imbricated with 'local' theorisation or not. For instance, L.H.M. Ling explores the idea that a Chinese School of IR might even be considered an oxymoron since 'what is "Chinese" is not "IR," and what is "IR," is not "Chinese"'.³⁸ For Ling, not only is it complicated to situate a Chinese understanding of the global within an ideal IR school (as a coherent body of scholarship) but furthermore, in geographical terms, the idea of what a Chinese theorisation would be is limited since it builds from the Westphalian fixation on the territory and national notions.³⁹ Nevertheless, the edited volume, rather than preventing the possibility of diverse Chinese narratives on the global, delves into Chinese ideas on relationality (following or inspired by Confucianism, and Daoism) and how they could transcend national/local boundaries.

As part of their final thoughts, Aydinli and Biltekin underline the difficulties – but not impossibility – of the Global IR project when it attempts to account for theory and knowledge production beyond the West/Global North. The editors acknowledge that homegrown theorisation beyond the West is not necessarily at the epistemic and ontological margins of mainstream or critical theories from the West/Global North. It may reproduce similar frameworks, methodologies, and inquiries to Western scholarship, and not necessarily refer to epistemic difference.⁴⁰ To be sure, this reflects how diverse and complex may be the theorisation taking place in the non-West/Global South, and how this may differ from the West/Global North's expectations of purely 'marginal' theories. However, we should also raise the questions: What is theorisation from the non-West/Global South? Who has the epistemic privilege to define it? Aydinli and Biltekin argue that "thinking about the world" is not dichotomous to "theorising the periphery".⁴¹ The authors argue that the fact that intellectuals in the Global South engage in 'local' (rather than domestic) political processes provides them with the empirical tools and 'intellectual/affective environment' needed to provide 'distinct conceptualisations'.⁴² As I consider, although positionality alone does not provide legitimacy to speak for, within a Eurocentric discipline such as IR, it may provide interesting accounts (radically different or not) of global politics.

Both books contribute to widening the horizons of the discipline. As I argue, it is crucial to promote voices coming from the non-West/Global South whether or not they give a completely non-Western account of a particular topic, or whether or not they draw

38. L.H.M. Ling, 'What's in a Name? A Critical Interrogation of the "Chinese School of IR"', in Zhang and Chang, *Constructing a Chinese School*, 17.

39. *Ibid.*, 18.

40. Aydinli and Biltekin, *Widening the World*, 226–9.

41. *Ibid.*, 228.

42. *Ibid.*, 228.

on 'homegrown' or 'local' theorisation to develop their analysis. This is a step towards globalising and/or decolonising IR.

Critiques of Acharya's Global IR proposal pointing towards its limitations, its conceptual pertinence and its Eurocentrism, have been raised in a number of ways that are worth unpacking. Firstly, its shortcomings as a solely epistemic turn avoiding the ontological turn have been underlined by David Blaney and Arlene Tickner who argue that it is critical to engage in ontological discussions if one is to diversify the discipline in 'good faith'.⁴³ From another perspective, Karen Tucker advocates that current debates for the pluralisation and diversification of the discipline may assume a deeper engagement with the concept of coloniality since it has tended to be analysed as an 'abstract, undifferentiated system of racial and epistemic domination'.⁴⁴ A materialistic engagement with coloniality requires us to move beyond this idea of an abstract structure of power towards the analysis of its multiple interactions with a capitalist political economy.⁴⁵ Following Tucker, I argue that coloniality of knowledge is imbricated in the Western economic domination of the non-West/Global South, and that has to be taken into account when approaching non-Western/Global South scholarship.⁴⁶ The material legacies of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy, are crucial for the reproduction of the coloniality of knowledge. Without a critique on the material inequalities in global higher education, critical attempts to study Global South scholarship are incomplete and underestimate the importance of economic gatekeepers.

In *Western Dominance in International Relations? The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India* (2019), Alejandra undertakes insightful research to deconstruct the narrative of Western dominance.⁴⁷ By developing a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research methodology, which includes interviews with scholars from Brazil and India at different career stages, Alejandra critically addresses two central Global IR arguments. Firstly, the idea that the lack of internationalisation of the discipline in the non-West/Global South is the result of Western dominance over theories, topics, and representation. Secondly, that this Western dominance creates gatekeepers who restrict access to the discipline for scholars from the non-West/Global South. In her findings, Alejandra also shows that the issue with diversity or anti-hegemonic discourses within Global South scholarship is much more complicated. Firstly, because these scholars often choose not to delve into local theorisation, and thus lack anti-hegemonic or alternative

43. David Blaney and Arlene Tickner, 'Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR', 294. The term of 'good faith' is used by the authors following Helen Verran, 'Engagements between Disparate Knowledge Traditions: Toward Doing Difference Cooperatively and in Good Faith', in *Contested Ecologies: Dialogues in the South on Nature and Knowledge*, ed. Lesley Green (Cape Town: HPRC Press, 2013), 141–61.

44. Karen Tucker, 'Unravelling Coloniality in International Relations: Knowledge, Relationality and Strategies of Engagement', *International Political Sociology* 12, no.3 (2018): 216.

45. *Ibid.*, 215–32.

46. This is also part of an ongoing collaborative research with Ari Jerrems on the coloniality of International Relations and the international political economy of higher education.

47. Audrey Alejandra, *Western Dominance in International Relations? The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

narratives.⁴⁸ Secondly, because they opt for different professional practices (including foreign policy analysis) that are not considered critical by Global North critical scholars.⁴⁹ And thirdly, because Western dominance narratives do not often consider the diverse methods of internationalisation upheld by Global South scholars as critical, local or alternative sources of theory; therefore, it ends up cancelling their agency, and victimising this 'other'.⁵⁰

Alejandro seeks to illustrate that the narrative of Western dominance reproduces the same Eurocentrism that it denounces. Her findings show that her interlocutors in Brazil and India are not necessarily interested in developing local theories. Similarly, the themes they choose are more related to the comparative advantage presented to them as experts on specific topics – either related to national programmes or international networking – than to a Western agenda. And also, that although the lack of demographic diversity in conferences is linked to economic limitations – with the negative consequences that this may have on networking, and participation in workshops that could lead to collaborative publications – the lower number of Brazilian and Indian scholars publishing in Global North journals is not explained by the Western dominance narrative or gatekeeping practices. Rather, as suggested by Alejandro, it is explained by the fact that only a few of those interviewed have sent articles to IR journals in the West/Global North.

It is possible to understand Alejandro's findings within a broader critique of Eurocentrism that argues that the discourse of Western dominance, and the power/knowledge that this discourse reproduces, is a Western creation that continues to neglect agency of the non-West/Global South. For Alejandro, the current IR discourse of Western dominance – mostly addressed by critical theorists drawing on poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and subaltern studies – is created in the centre and expanded to the margins giving conceptual and discursive tools to the oppressed so they can understand the oppression they are suffering. Alejandro calls for a de-reification of meta racialised/ethnic/geographical dichotomous categories as West/Non-West or Global North/Global South. Alejandro also argues for a diversification of the discipline that does not victimise or deny agency to the 'other'.

As a young scholar from Puerto Rico, which I consider part of a form of Westernised/Colonised Global South, I may agree with Alejandro's critique of the victimisation and cancellation of agency that a homogenised and totalised idea of Western dominance reflects. However, I consider that her research reproduces coloniality in other ways. Firstly, by keeping the economic limitations and material conditions that are at stake in the countries studied as secondary issues, the author dismisses the coloniality of power, its material implications in the everyday life of academic paths and choices, and the politics of resistance and survival of many scholars in the Global South. To raise this issue is not to victimise the 'other', but to acknowledge the complexity of the relations of power that we are all embedded in. Secondly, coloniality is perceived in the very organisation of the book. The organisation of an argument responds to the political act of choosing a discursive order. The discursive order in this case is for the North, using the information

48. Ibid., 24–50.

49. Ibid., 51–76.

50. Ibid., 77–104.

obtained to corroborate a hypothesis. Questions and conversations that provide the information to sustain the author's argument, in a North-North debate on Western dominance, are addressed to conclude that the Western dominance discourse lacks empirical evidence.⁵¹ If the author had addressed issues regarding material and subjective constraints in more depth (for instance: low salaries; nonexistence of possibilities for sabbaticals; national funding programmes that guide research agendas; government plans to meet westernised standards; limited access to archives; the impact of colonialism, and neoliberalism in these academic instances, the sense of inferiority, among other issues), and how these have shaped the internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India, a more complex picture would have emerged; one that shows how narratives, perceptions and materiality are entangled. For example, when Alejandro underlines that 'foreign scholars use traditional sources of theorisation while these are being neglected in Brazil and India [and therefore] this challenges the idea of an imposed censorship',⁵² she is not taking into account the epistemic (subjective and material) privilege that a foreign scholar might have in the Global South. To be a foreign scholar that researches and writes drawing on 'traditional' or 'non-Western' theories is, sometimes, an embodied dispositif of the White/Western (and often male) epistemic privilege.

Although the author delves into reflexivity in a very interesting and committed manner, I consider that reflexivity is not only to situate ourselves or to take into account the experiences of the 'other' but also to recognise the limitations of the questions we ask and the potentialities of what cannot be spoken. These limitations are evident in Alejandro's analysis of the 'contradiction' 'demonstrated' by Indian and Brazilian scholars regarding the perception/reality of Western dominance gatekeepers. Using a TRIP survey, Alejandro asked if 'The discipline of International Relations is a Western dominated discipline'. The results show that in Brazil and Taiwan this statement is unpopular, while in India, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom it is very popular.⁵³ According to Alejandro, this survey, together with the interviews, demonstrated that the narrative of Western dominance is rather marginal in Brazil, while, in India, it 'is not so much socially localised, as it is a product of the situation of utterance. [Since] the same Indian scholar would adopt or not the narrative of Western dominance depending on the topic of the conversation, the audience, and the institutional context'⁵⁴. Alejandro continues her analysis noting that '[i]n each case, the narrative was not supported by first-hand experience'.⁵⁵ Then Alejandro explains that she 'asked for details about the type of experiences that led to adopting this perspective', that it is the Western dominance narrative, however, [t]he interviewees could not provide evidence supporting this statement'.⁵⁶ I consider that in a way, this analysis obliterates the author's claim for reflexivity since it underestimates the relevance of perceptions, emotions, experiences, and silences which are part of critical – often feminist – reflexivity methodologies.

51. *Ibid.*, 158.

52. *Ibid.*, 29.

53. See Figure 4.1, *Ibid.*, 122.

54. *Ibid.*, 123.

55. *Ibid.*, 123.

56. *Ibid.*, 123.

To contrast perceptions with evidence, as Alejandro does, in my opinion, subscribes to a Eurocentric research methodology in which the perception of the subject under research is cancelled out when it does not meet the evidence. To engage with their perceptions would have put the needs of those scholars at the centre, instead of reproducing epistemic and ontological extractivism to be part of a North-North 'critical' debate.

I can not help but conclude my analysis of this book with a personal experience. If I were the scholar interviewed in Alejandro's research, I would have also contradicted myself. My perception and evidence would not have matched. Empirically speaking, I can say that the few times I have submitted an article in English I have been published. That will be the evidence, the visible. However, this gives no account of the complexities of the coloniality of power, of knowledge, of being that surpasses the evidence. What is visible, the evidence, does not narrate the stress I am under while reading, thinking, and writing in English for an English speaking/Global North audience. The preoccupation that I might not be entirely understanding what has been said, that my critique is out of context, or is affected by emotions and positionality that condition my argument. That does not give an account of the time lost in translating words into Spanish to understand what I am reading, or the colleagues I need to ask for help so I can be 'part' of the Anglocentric IR scholarship. Furthermore, this coloniality poses limitations to delve into 'local' theorisation. It is also manifested in the lack of funding for archival research and fieldwork, as it is also present in the perception of Western dominance even if authors from the non-West/Westernised Global South do not necessarily understand themselves – myself – as a victim. Sometimes, some things, have no words, no evidence, and that does not make them less real. That is not measurable.

The different entanglements of the coloniality of knowledge affect theory, knowledge production, and access for Global South westernised scholars. Nonetheless, its epistemic violence becomes even more explicit when it occurs within those 'margins'. For instance, with the re-production of coloniality within Latin American and Caribbean post-colonial societies through epistemic extractivism upheld by westernised/Global South scholars towards indigenous communities, or through the violence of ontological translation into a Spanish/Mestizo/Modern imaginary. As I have argued through this review, a claim for a Global IR may depart from a critical understanding of the complexities of those margins, the avoidance of totality, and the eschewing of silencing.

Final Reflections

The books reviewed highlight the challenges of engaging in a historical and epistemic turn in IR. Whilst the debates on Global IR might be reduced to the 'how to' globalise IR or the 'how to' avoid Eurocentric paternalistic practices, I consider that to globalise IR it is necessary to understand the diversity and complexities within those 'margins', and specially to not define for the others the idea of critical or local theories or inquiries. As suggested by Blaney and Tickner a pluralisation of IR in 'good faith', or 'doing difference differently' 'requires more than engaging across perspectives on a single world; [but] also to envision mechanisms for a cosmopolitics practices both as diplomatic relations between worlds and collaborative revealing of knowledge that decolonises

science'.⁵⁷ Therefore, coloniality of knowledge, power/knowledge regimes, or Western dominance still require continued criticism and reflection if this pluralisation of IR in 'good faith' is to become one of the multiple possibilities to decolonise the discipline. Decolonialities (in plural) are a multiplicity of political projects that relate to each other when acknowledging the centrality of race and racism in the articulation of global power relations (that includes the academy), the continuities of the imperial/colonial legacies (subjectively and materially) and its capacity to re-articulate through multiple layers of Global North/Global South relations. It is necessary to understand Global North and Global South as complicated categories that serve as tools to explain positionalities within power relations, but that must not be reified, essentialised nor generalised.⁵⁸ As revolutionary as it is, decolonisations (in plural) are permanent transformative and heterarchical non-linear processes.⁵⁹ Therefore, decolonisation may not have a single definition; instead, it may be manifested through critical epistemic (and ontological) practices. As deduced from the provocative literature reviewed in this essay, scholars engaging with decoloniality must keep questioning the purpose and political engagements of their narratives if the discussion aspires to move beyond Eurocentric entrapment.

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57. Blaney and Tickner, 'Worlding, Ontological Politics', 310.

58. As for 'West/non-West', see Pinar Bilgin, 'Thinking Past "Western" IR?', *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 5–23.

59. See Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', 533–80; and Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).