1 Introduction
Widening the world of IR

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There are few other disciplines that are more open to fundamental criticism, inter-disciplinarity, and input from non-academic sources than is International Relations (IR). Over the years, various debates, multiple paradigms, a number of new methods and forms of data, as well as the incorporation of input from other disciplines, have given IR a remarkable level of sophistication. This sophistication can best be seen in areas that have been studied the longest, such as interstate relations, decision making processes, material capabilities, alliance patterns, democratic and capitalist peace, and war between major powers. Overall, IR scholars have become more self-reflexive and more aware of the political implications of their work. Despite its long history of exclusively focusing on the major powers in the Western world, IR has also come quite a long way in taking non-Western phenomena as an object of study as well. It has been ontologically “widened” as some formerly understudied—mostly non-Western—phenomena have found their way into mainstream scholarship.

IR’s inclusiveness, however, does not apply to International Relations Theory (IRT), which remains imperfect as a tool for understanding and explaining the newest and often more problematic parts of contemporary IR. Overwhelmed by an expanding ontology, IRT has failed to explain and foresee the most momentous international events of recent decades. Despite the ongoing efforts of IR scholars, one could argue that IR scholarship has never before been left this much behind the actual global affairs that it seeks to explain and is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Consider the surprise over the Iranian revolution, over the irrationality of suicide attacks after 9/11, or more recently, over ISIS’ efficiency. Being under-theorized, such novel phenomena are approached using concepts usually alien to the context, and ultimately unhelpful in understanding or addressing the needs surrounding these issues. The incongruence is not limited to rationalist/positivist IRT, but extends to post-positivist theories. Our supposedly revolutionary new concepts and approaches remain largely insufficient in explaining what happens globally and in offering lessons for improvement.

This paucity cannot be attributed to lack of methodological rigor, a persistent deficiency in reflexivity, apathy toward the human condition outside the West, or a stubborn attachment to pre-defined borders of IR as a discipline. IR has come a
long way in addressing all of the above issues. It is, beyond all, a “theory” problem, i.e., taking alternative meta-theoretical positions or using more rigorous methods cannot fix the inefficiency of the theory to account for contemporary global affairs. It is a problem that can only be addressed by building more relevant theories. For theory to be relevant in accounting for contemporary IR, we argue, it should not only apply to, but also emanate from different corners of the current political universe. The main obstacle for IRT, then, is arguably the exclusion of the periphery from original theory production.

A growing literature points to the conditions augmenting exclusion of the periphery from theory building processes. Despite the general agreement on the need and ongoing efforts to enrich IRT with periphery voices, there is a major divide in terms of how this can and should be done. There are many who suggest building directly on the richness of these periphery lands, their history, practices, and experiences. In *International Relations Theory and the Third World*, one of the earliest collection of works that deal with the incongruence between IRT and the non-Western experience, Neuman explicitly refers to the fact that “theory has never quite been borne out by events in the Third World.” The authors in the volume focus on how Western theories are inadequate in accounting for the Third World events, and what alterations to these theories are needed to remedy this lack. Similarly, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan introduce the reader to non-Western traditions, literature and histories that might be relevant to IR in *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia*. These works argue that a genuine attempt to widen the world of IRT requires periphery voices acquiring their theorizing agency first, and this can only be done if their experience can serve as a source for unique new theorizing efforts and perspectives. They look for knowledge and practice in non-Western settings and assess their potential in offering alternative general frameworks of IR.

Many others, however, think otherwise and argue that the best way is to have periphery IR scholars tackle the primary questions of the core and try to modify, criticize, and improve upon existing theories. This second view is advocated by more positivist leaning scholars, since they see no fundamental difference between theorizing in the core and in the periphery, except in the social and material conditions of scholarship. Hence, their suggestion is to improve those conditions for the periphery scholar. While this last point has also been the concern of many others, it is, interestingly, also the route preferred by advocates of “post-Western” theory, who share an “intuition that greater incorporation of knowledge produced by non-Western scholars from local vantage points cannot make the discipline of IR more global or less Eurocentric.” They usually point to the role of underlying nationalistic ideology in bringing about distinctively “non-Western” theories, and they argue that such endeavors only serve to recreate the relationship between the core and periphery. They warn against...
any project that is self-admittedly “non-Western” but emulates the dominant forms of thinking (including methodology) in the West. This conviction also emanates from a belief in the falseness of the West/non-West dichotomy, hence the preference for the term “post-western.”

Social and material conditions of thinking, teaching, writing, publishing, and disseminating original ideas in the periphery are too fundamental for theoretical innovation to overlook. Yet, an exclusive focus on improving those conditions does not automatically generate veritable theories. First, submerging oneself within core concepts and debates and trying to work from within the system is not particularly viable for periphery theorists. It is extremely hard for the periphery scholar to find a spot for herself/himself within the core theory circles, requiring at minimum a fully Western post-graduate education and training in Western methodologies and language. Socializing into this competitive environment requires imitation and utilization of those core ideas as reference points; for otherwise periphery scholars are regarded as less than competent. Therefore, for the voice of a periphery scholar to be heard in the core debates, whether to criticize or otherwise, they have be fully immersed within that community and forego any periphery perspective.

Second, core theoretical debates are not generally open to empirical input from the periphery. Even when they are, the expectation for periphery-inspired work is that it supports the core theories, rather than amends or corrects them. Thus periphery scholars become “social-science socialized” producers of local data, who are expected to support mainstream theories, and operate as “native informants.” Becoming a “theorist” in the periphery may be seen as prestigious in the periphery, but it means risking “becoming nobody” in the global community. In the rare instances when a periphery scholar nevertheless attempts to “do theory,” their work is likely to be dismissed as not being “theory.” This attitude highlights the dichotomy between “theory” and “local” that is imposed on the periphery scholar. Under these conditions, integrating oneself with the global IRT degenerates into hiring new labor for the same task and the same purpose. Indeed, such a course of action sounds like a perfect recipe for the perpetuation of marginalization under the guise of pluralism, akin to the self-promotion of “ethnic food” or “world music” in contemporary Western societies.

Moreover, empirical record of the integrationists is not very promising either. Attempts by a few very competent periphery scholars to take up the integrationist route have met with little success. For example, Ayoob actually tried to amend realist understandings of security by bringing in input from the Third World, but his ideas did not resonate globally. Similarly, Xuetong’s attempts to revise realism did not lead to substantial debate within the core. Such efforts have not managed to enrich “core” theory with widened perspectives.

This volume has been borne out of the conviction that before trying to cram periphery feet in the core’s glass shoes, the discipline needs to see what those in the periphery themselves have to offer. Over time, we realized that refusing to wear the glass shoes, i.e., declaring that core concepts do not fit in the periphery,
was necessary but doing so does not itself provide a wearable, efficient pair of shoes. Diversity, dialogue, and innovation can only come about when periphery scholars do not just “meta-theorize” but also “theorize.” Therefore, the increasing irrelevance of IRT needs to be addressed by a new form of theorizing, one which effectively blends peripheral outlooks with theory production. We call this form “homegrown theorizing,” i.e., original theorizing in the periphery about the periphery.

It is with the above ideas in mind that we decided to organize a workshop on the topic of homegrown theorizing, which took place in September 23–24, 2016 at Center for Foreign Policy and Peace Research (CFPPR) in Ankara, Turkey. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage independent conceptualization in the periphery and ease the wider dissemination of such scholarly efforts. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the dialogue between the “center” and the periphery, and help transcend the conventional theoretical, methodological, geographical, academic, and cultural barriers between the two. The goal of the workshop was to bring together scholars from different corners of the world to discuss:

- structural factors that define the core-periphery relationship and their effect on IR theorizing;
- original theorizing efforts from the periphery and their contribution to our understandings of contemporary international affairs; and
- ways and strategies of moving forward in overcoming the discrepancies between theorizing in the core and the periphery.

The current volume is the culmination of the above efforts and consists of ten chapters by a select group of scholars, organized into three parts. Considering the level of contestation on the subject, Part I “Homegrown theorizing in perspective” is dedicated to reviewing existing debates about the desirability and viability of non-Western perspectives in IR. The first chapter by Aydınlı and Biltekin proposes and explicates the above definition of homegrown theorizing and offers an overall review of homegrown theorizing attempts so far. It also introduces a typology of homegrown theorizing that may prove useful in providing a guide for IR scholars on how to engage with homegrown theorizing in a more intellectually stimulating manner. The chapter concludes by highlighting a number of critical factors in opening up space for different voices in the world of IR.

The second chapter by Jørgensen questions the basic assumptions about homegrown theorizing found in the literature and suggests institutionalization rather than theorizing as a move forward. It argues that a quantitative increase in the number of non-Western theoretical perspectives may not be sufficient for overcoming the so-called hegemonic structure of knowledge production. Hence, if a distinction between academic domestic and global markets is applied, theory building for a number of domestic or regional markets might impact “consumption” patterns in domestic or regional markets but not necessarily the world
Introduction: widening the world of IR

The first chapter of this part, “Introduction: widening the world of IR,” explores the current status of IR theory and its implications for the discipline. It encourages a broader perspective on the theory of IR, questioning the assumption that IR theory is under American hegemony. The chapter proposes an alternative institutionalization of the discipline by organizing 100 workshops specifically aimed at redefining the (contested) core of the discipline.

In the third and final chapter of this part, Kuru draws lessons for homegrown theorizing relying on a review of the development of the discipline in the West, and warns against some of the traps that theorizing attempts may fall into. Acknowledging a homegrown turn that is currently taking place, Kuru deconstructs the idea of homegrown theorizing by focusing on its constitutive parts, i.e., knowledge, scholar, and theory, while also questioning the differing meanings of homegrownness. Engaging with the pitfalls of Western IR and elaborating on their reasons, the chapter not only explains the emergence of the homegrown turn, but also provides the basis for understanding how scholars doing homegrown theorizing can learn from the (past) mistakes of core scholarship. Dealing with the impact of globalization, Eurocentrism, presentism, and parochialism as main problem areas of (Western) IR, the chapter concludes by providing a list of lessons to be taken into account when doing homegrown theorizing in the periphery.

The second part of the book, “Theorizing at ‘home’,” is composed of four chapters defining the status of IR theorizing in Iran, Japan, China, and South Africa. The underlying point of departure is to reveal the challenges and potentials of the local disciplines in these countries and call for specific agendas that built on the indigenous traditions. In Chapter 4, Moshirzadeh traces the development of Iranian IR where social scientists, including IR scholars, have been called on to develop endogenous/indigenous theories to reflect Iranian/Islamic points of view ever since the emergence of the Islamic Republic in Iran. While this has led some Iranian scholars to develop ideas about international life on the basis of Islamic texts and teachings, the recent changes in core’s level of openness to non-Western voices has rejuvenated such attempts. Based on an evaluation of the structural context, Moshirzadeh suggests that even if theorizing IR from an Iranian point of view is both possible and preferable, there are considerable structural constraints to be surmounted.

In Chapter 6, Kavalski undertakes a similar interpretative journey of China’s IR concepts and looks at the notion of guanxi—one of the two terms that goes into the Chinese phrase for IR (guoji guanxi). He contends that “relationality” renders a more accurate translation of guanxi in English than “relations” and uncovers the practices of “international relationality” as an opportunity to reframe the “international” in the process. He argues that “international” is a codependent space where two or more actors (despite their divergences) can interface into a dialogical community. In doing so, he illustrates how Chinese concepts can inform a novel take on the “international.”
In Chapter 7, Shimizu focuses on the tradition of partly neglected culturalist methodology in Japanese IR, which might have great potential to contribute to contemporary post-Western IRT literature by posing radical questions about the ontology of IR. The chapter starts with genealogical descriptions of the culturalist IRT and its relationship to the mainstream Japanese IR discourses. It then focuses on a particular approach to diplomatic history developed by Iriye Akira, which attempts to historicize Japanese foreign policy by concentrating on cultural relations among nations. Second, it examines the international cultural relations approach developed by Kenichiro Hirano, which is an even more radical departure from the traditional diplomatic history tradition. Finally, he introduces Takeshi Hamashita’s ideas on East Asian history. The chapter concludes by an assessment of the contribution these three perspectives might make to contemporary IRT.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Smith argues that homegrown conceptualizations do not need to be radically different from existing theories to constitute advancement in terms of better understanding IR. In a vein similar to what Aydınlı and Biltekin call “alterative homegrown theories,” Smith suggests that reinterpretations or modifications of existing frameworks is an accepted practice in mainstream IR, where existing theories are constantly amended and revisited. While adaptations by Western scholars are recognized as legitimate and adopted into the canon of theory, this is not always the case with adaptations emerging from outside of the West. This chapter examines three examples of contributions by African scholars. The first scholar, Eduard Jordaan, reinterpreted the concept of “middle power,” arguing that there are specific characteristics that set emerging middle powers like South Africa apart from traditional middle powers. The second, Deon Geldenhuys, developed the concept “isolated states” and generated a novel analytical framework to categorize states based on indicators of isolation. Finally, Smith introduces Thomas Tieku, who draws on the African worldview of ubuntu in calling for the state to be reconceptualized in a collectivist, societal way. She argues that these examples illustrate that there are indeed theoretical innovations emerging from the Global South that are generalizable at the global level.

The third and the final part of the volume, “Innovative encounters” brings together three attempts at original homegrown theorizing, which may potentially be applicable to cases other than they emerge from. Attempting at actual concept production, each chapter in this part, puts forward new concepts and/or novel interactions between those concepts by looking at IR in the periphery. In Chapter 9, Makarychev and Yatsyk sketch out a general approach to using cultural semiotics as a cognitive tool for analyzing IR in general and in the post-Soviet area in particular. The authors discuss how the homegrown school of cultural semiotics, associated with the University of Tartu, can be used to discern patterns in thinking and speech, which can then be relevant to improving the extant IR theoretical platforms such as constructivism and post-structuralism. To do so, they embark on a mission to “translate” insights from cultural semiotics into the language of IR. In other words, they place cultural semiotic knowledge in a
multidisciplinary perspective and look for projections of its concepts into the vocabulary of foreign policy. Ultimately, they use cultural semiotic notions and approaches for problematizing the concept of the post-Soviet with its conflictual split between reproducing archaic policies and discourses, on the one hand, and playing by the rules of the post-modern society, on the other. In particular, they show how cultural semiotics might be helpful in explaining Putin’s discursive strategy, i.e., appropriating meaningful semiotic resources and deploying them in discursive contexts in order to delegitimize the kernel of the Western normative order.

In Chapter 10, Shih compares three distinct schools of thought, the World History Standpoint promoted by the Kyoto School of Philosophy, post-Western re-worlding, and the Chinese balance of relationships—in their shared campaign for alternative IRT and apply their insights to explain foreign policies of Japan, Taiwan, and China with regards to contestation over Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai islands. The World History Standpoint explains how nations influenced by major power politics judge their conditions and rely on combining existing cultural resources to make sense of their place in world politics. It specifically predicts that nations caught between different identities will experience cycles in their IR, nations with an expansive scope of IR or declining from the hegemonic status will adopt balance of relationships, and less influential nations will practically reinterpret hegemonic order to meet their otherwise inexpressible motivations. Accordingly, Japan will be focused upon as an exemplary case for World History Standpoint, Taiwan for re-worlding, and China for balance of relationships. The chapter touches upon theoretical implications of their conflicts.

In Chapter 11, Ersoy engages in what he calls “conceptual cultivation” of “influence.” Warning against an analytical tendency to link a particular set of international phenomena observable in non-Western contexts with a particular native concept, which sometimes forges an exclusive and immutable semantic affiliation between the concept and what it signifies, he argues that such conceptual exclusivity can culminate in prohibitive semantic inflexibility potentially frustrating the progress in homegrown theorizing. Rather than relying on indigenous concepts, like Kavalski or Shih did, he focuses on influence as a ubiquitous word that is yet to be rigorously conceptualized, and a phenomenon in international politics that is yet to be extensively theorized. Finding such a gap, he puts forward a definition for influence and specifications for its different dimensions.

In the concluding chapter, Aydınlı and Biltekin readdress the contested nature of homegrown theorizing and argue that such contestation can prove to be valuable compared to its alternative, a malignant silence and disinterest. Despite the doubts about homegrown theorizing, especially the misgivings related to its divisive and reactionary potential, they suggest that a true widening of IR can only happen if the peripheral subject reappropriates the authority to represent oneself openly. Removing references to “the local,” “the indigenous,” “the non-Western,” and “the homegrown” when describing any style of theorizing may be helpful in camouflaging and finding a place in the core, but they argue that there are a few reasons to keep those references.
We hope the current volume would be of help to those IR scholars, students, and practitioners who would like to have wider perspective in not only understanding but also explaining the world. It not only continues the discussion on non-Western perspectives at the meta-theoretical level (“do we really need homegrown theories?”), or at the very pragmatic level (“what should we do?”), but also offers new conceptual tools to apply to the cases at hand. It is not inconceivable to see, for example, a Ph.D. student writing her dissertation on Turkish foreign policy, using Makarychev and Yatskyk’s proposed framework, or explain cycles in Iranian foreign policy using Shih’s nothingness framework on societies with torn identities. This expectation is supported by an emerging interest in non-Western conceptualizations of IR among graduate programs in universities. The calls for “deparochialization” of political thought has been going on for some time, and the American Political Science Association (APSA) has offered courses and sessions on how to enrich political theory syllabi with “non-Western” content. Similarly, International Studies Association (ISA) Annual congresses have several sessions on non-Western IR. Combined with increasingly vibrant IR communities in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, it is only reasonable to expect the call for a more inclusive IR to gain prominence.

Notes


4 For example, concepts like “small wars” or “proxy wars” are inadequate in terms of representing the experiences of people who actually fought them (Barry Buzan and


8 See for example the two most recent presidential speeches in ISA (T. V. Paul, “Recasting Statecraft: International Relations and Strategies of Peaceful Change,” *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 1, (2017): 1–13; Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 647–59) which are about opening up IRT, the establishment of groups (Global IR Caucus) and journals that specifically seek to bring in more outside-of-the-core voices.

9 Neuman, *International Relations Theory and the Third World*.


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15 Bilgin, “Thinking Past ‘Western’ IR?”


21 See for example, Ingo Peters and Wiebke Wemheuer-Vogelaar’s graduate seminar on “Non-Western Contributions to International Relations Scholarship” at the Frei Universität Berlin (Syllabus available at www.isa-theory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Syllabus_NonWesternIRT_WemheuerVogelaar-Peters_FreiUniversitaetBerlin_Winterterm2012.pdf), or the College of William and Mary (www.wm.edu/offices/itpir/_documents/trip/syllabus-ir-a-global-discipline-wemheuer-vogelaar.pdf). Moreover, some scholars have begun to include a section on non-Western theories in graduate International Relations Theory courses, such as the graduate seminar at International Public Policy at Syracuse University (http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/jbennett/645s09/silly645.html).

**Bibliography**


