



Critical investigations into the international

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Critical investigations into the international

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The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations, by L.H.M. Ling, London, Routledge, 2014, xviii+217pp., \$155 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-60377-5 / \$45.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-60378-2 / \$45.95 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-315-887-7

International Orders in the Early Modern World: Before the Rise of the West, edited by Shogo Suzuki, Yongjin Zhang and Joel Quirk, London, Routledge, 2014, xviii+214pp., \$135 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-62628-6 / \$135 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-315-88843-9

The Postcolonial Subject: Claiming Politics/Governing Others in Late Modernity, by Vivienne Jabri, London, Routledge, 2013, xii+185pp., \$140 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-68210-7 / \$44.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-68211-4 / \$ 44.95 (ebk), ISBN 978-0-203-11225-0

Claiming the International, edited by Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, London, Routledge, 2013, xiii+239pp., \$150 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-63067-2 / \$39.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-63068-9 / \$39.95 (ebk), ISBN 978-0-203-75836-6

The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics:

Western International Theory, 1760–2010, by John M. Hobson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, xii+393pp., \$103 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-107-02020-7 / \$33.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-107-60454-4 / \$27 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-139-33532-4

International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity, edited by Robbie Shilliam, London, Routledge, 2011, xvi+268pp., \$150 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-57772-4 / \$49.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-52284-7 / \$42.95 (ebk) ISBN 978-0-203-84212-6

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Introduction

This essay borrows its title from James Der Derian's 1995 edited book, *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, where he brought together writings by realist scholars, to highlight the richness and diversity of realism, and critical IR scholars to underscore its limitations.¹ The six books reviewed here offer another round of 'critical investigations' – this time focusing on the *international* in a way that critical IR (defined broadly) has overlooked, however inadvertently.

A caveat is immediately in order: writing from today's vantage point, where critical IR is found wanting as such, one may fail to appreciate the role played by critical scholars in opening up hitherto unavailable 'thinking space' in IR,² which allowed for an array of critical approaches to flourish. That said, it was these very accomplishments of critical IR that rendered visible its enduring limitations in engaging with the international.

But, then, what does it mean to discuss the limitations of IR's engagement with the international? Critics have identified three main aspects:

- Some have focused on the limited number of contributions by authors originating from outside North America and Western Europe, maintaining that 'the problem of *what* kind of theories we use to understand and explain the world of international politics is not divorced from *who* does the theorizing'.³
- Others problematised limited scholarly reflection on the ethnocentric and/or parochial outlook of IR. When a parochial and/or ethnocentric view of the world becomes embedded into epistemology, thereby evading self-reflection, the critics have argued, it has a limiting effect on the study of the international.⁴
- A third group of critics has pointed to the Eurocentrism and/or Westernness of IR as shaping what can/not be said, thereby 'conditioning' IR's 'horizon of alternative'.⁵ 'Eurocentrism' and 'Westernness' are used not merely to point to the institutional origins of IR as a discipline, but to highlight limitations imposed by the reign of 'Western ontology',⁶ and an 'epistemology of distancing' in making sense of others.⁷

Critical IR is considered to have made significant contributions in addressing the first two limitations, while acting relatively slowly in attending to the third one.

What follows falls into two parts. The first introduces the six books under review, all of which, in different ways, highlight (critical) IR's enduring limitations in engaging with the international. The second part locates these books' contributions *vis-à-vis* four contending responses to IR's limitations, namely, 'rethinking IR', 'forgetting IR', 'worlding IR', and constructing a 'post-Western IR'. The concluding section returns to the theme of *critical investigations* to take stock of IR's 'progress'.

A second caveat: throughout the essay, I will follow authors' preferences in use of terminology (West/non-West, colonial/postcolonial, core/periphery). In doing so, I remain mindful of the differences in between, and of individual authors' rationale in choosing one set of terms over another. I am also cognisant of the arbitrariness of what divides 'West' and 'non-West', overlaps between core and periphery, and of the multiple meanings of 'post' in postcolonial.

Six critical engagements

Hobson and the Eurocentrism of IR

The Eurocentrism of IR theory in general and critical IR in particular has been on John Hobson's research agenda for a number of years. In some ways Hobson's 2012 study could be viewed as complementing his 2004 book, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*,⁸ where the author showed the ways in which ideas and institutions that are popularly portrayed as almost exclusively 'Western' achievements were, in fact, products of centuries of give-and-take between civilisations. What has allowed the shared heritage of humankind to be portrayed as 'Western' achievements, and has disallowed challenging such portrayal, argued Hobson, has been a Eurocentric understanding of world history.⁹ Since his 2004 book, Hobson has studied the ways in which IR has been Eurocentric.¹⁰ The 2012 book brings together the insights of these previous studies in a manner that is more comprehensive in terms of both breadth and depth, covering 250 years of IR theory.

Central to Hobson's analysis is the distinction he draws between different kinds of Eurocentrism, showing how IR theory has exhibited one form of Eurocentrism or another. Drawing such distinctions, he maintains, is needed to avoid Edward Said's conflation of Eurocentrism and imperialism in *Orientalism*.¹¹ However, while doing so, Hobson uses 'Orientalism' and 'Eurocentrism' interchangeably, which, in turn, comes across as reducing Said's *Orientalism* to mere anti-Eurocentric critique, while at the same time underplaying Said's critique of 'Westernness'. This is somewhat puzzling in that critiquing the self-serving character of 'Western' IR is central to Hobson's argument in this study.

But, then, is Hobson's argument not another an instance of critical IR insofar as his book highlights the self-serving character of 'Western international theory'?¹² Nevertheless, Hobson's study goes beyond critical IR's contributions by pointing to how it, too, has failed to reflect on its Eurocentric foundations and predilections. Criticisms of critical IR so far have focused on highlighting its failings in terms of accounting for mutually constitutive relations between coloniser and colonised, and pointing to the need to underscore postcolonial subjectivity and agency.¹³ Differently from previous critics, Hobson is interested in scrupulously revealing how *all* IR has been embedded into Eurocentric metanarratives in one way or another, inviting all IR scholars (mainstream and critical) to reflect on their Eurocentric assumptions and categories.

Eurocentrism in the English School

Shogo Suzuki, Yongjin Zhang and Joel Quirk's edited volume offers something slightly different than what its title promises. The volume is less about the international orders that existed in different parts of the world before European prevalence, and more about how Europeans interacted with others 'before the rise of the West'. The book is no less fascinating or valuable for that. The contributors offer rich case studies on Russian–Mongol interactions during Mongol rule (Neumann); the Ottoman Empire's relations with European powers during its rise and decline (Göl); European state and non-state agents' encounters in China (Zhang); Japan's treatment of European actors within its own world order (Suzuki); how the 'first Indian conquest' was brought about through the agency

of British companies and local actors in pursuit of ‘wealth-generating agendas’ (Vignesvaran); how imperial powers, local colonial communities and indigenous polities in the Americas constituted a heterogeneous international society (Jones); and Atlantic slavery as an instance of ‘overlapping and competing interests, calculations and ideologies of multiple actors in Europe and Africa’ (Quirk and Richardson). As such, the volume offers a corrective to the English School’s account of European international society’s encounters with the rest of the world. As emphasised in Little’s concluding chapter (which nicely compares and contrasts the contributions of this volume with Hedley Bull and Adam Watson’s *The Expansion of International Society*¹⁴), the contributors offer significant correctives to some (but not all, insists Little) English School scholars’ neglect of non-European approaches to international order.¹⁵

The volume coheres in a way that remains underemphasised in the introduction and underappreciated in the conclusion. What all contributions share (including those by Neumann, Jones, and Quirk and Richardson, whose arguments remain somewhat marginal to the main themes as outlined in the introduction) is an interest in offering correctives to the centrality to the English School of war and diplomacy as the central mechanisms, and military and diplomats as the central agents of International Society. Arguably, tapping into Jones’ discussions on norms and Neumann’s discussion on learning and hybridity would have allowed the editors to tease out the broader theoretical implications, for the English School, of the rich empirical material and conceptual discussions offered in individual chapters (see below for further discussion).

‘Non-Western’ thinking on the international

‘Why is there no non-Western IR theory?’ was the central question of a volume edited by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan in 2009, exploring the dynamics behind the apparent ‘absence’ of IR theory outside the ‘West’.¹⁶ Robbie Shilliam argues that the question is less about an absence of ‘non-Western’ thought, and more about IR’s obliviousness to ‘non-Western’ thinking. Such obliviousness, argues Shilliam, is rooted in widely held assumptions that IR shares with some other social sciences as to ‘who can “think” and produce valid knowledge of human existence’ (p 2).

Be that as it may, there is no denying that ‘non-Western’ thinking about world politics does not always take forms that are immediately recognisable to students of IR whose training is based on standard textbooks (Pasha describes this proclivity as ‘naturalisation of Western IR as IR’ – p 218). The issue of looking for IR beyond the ‘West’ and expecting it to be accessible through ‘Western’ categories has constituted a challenge to students of the discipline. Shilliam and his contributors take up this challenge and present non-Western thinking on various aspects of modernity, while drawing out implications of such thinking for International Relations. Shilliam’s own contribution identifies ‘inadequacies’ of ‘Western’ thought in accounting for ‘non-Western’ experiences and explores the perils and promises of engaging with ‘non-Western’ thought. What is particularly noteworthy about Shilliam’s contribution is the call to go beyond ‘searching for difference’,¹⁷ and to orientate scholarly efforts towards ‘[undermining] the security of an epistemological cartography that quarantines legitimate

knowledge production of modernity to one (idealized) geo-cultural site' (p 24). In the concluding chapter Pasha returns to this theme when reflecting on the 'perilous task' that the volume has undertaken.

The rest of the volume falls into three parts. In Part I, Aching, Gruffydd Jones and Goetschel look at the ways in which non-Western thinkers writing in response to colonial conditions have engaged with modernity, respectively, in 19th century Cuba, Lusophone Africa, and the 'outside within' constituted by the 'Jewish colony' in Germany. In Part II, contributors focus on how different cultural contexts have engaged with questions of modernity, including the controversial Muslim thinker Sayyid Qutb's ideas on Islamic revivalism through *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty) (Khatab), Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati's attempts to 'both mediate and repel "modernity"' (Matin), the 'reverse Orientalism' of some Asian leaders who deploy 'Asian values' to claim agency in world politics (Nakano), and the poverty of the search for 'IR theory with Chinese characteristics' (Dirlik).

In Part III, authors consider ideas generated by those non-Western thinkers who went beyond their local context and responded to global problems, including cosmopolitanism in slave-holding settings of the Francophone Caribbean (Munro and Shilliam), internationalist nationalism in Nehru's thought (Chacko), and 'human solidarities' emerging in Africa through the rejection of the self and other towards engagement with 'another' (Bogues). As such, it is in this section that Shilliam's and Pasha's call for going beyond 'comparative analyses' and inquiring into 'relationality', 'hybridity', and 'mutual constitution of the West and non-West' comes full circle.¹⁸

To sum up, Shilliam responds to the question put by Acharya and Buzan with another question: 'Why is it that the non-Western world has been a defining presence for IR scholarship and yet said scholarship has consistently balked at placing non-Western thought at the heart of its debates?' (p 2). Shilliam and his collaborators show that the answer to this second question rests in our assumptions regarding modernity and the ownership of ideas and institutions of humankind.¹⁹

Claiming the international

This is the final volume in the 'geocultural epistemologies and IR' trilogy (later renamed 'Worlding beyond the West') originally envisioned by Ole Waever and Arlene Tickner. Differently from the first volume which surveyed IR scholarship in different parts of the world,²⁰ and the second volume which explored different approaches to the main concepts and categories of IR in different places,²¹ this edited volume by Arlene Tickner and David Blaney promises to go further in seeking to 'point to myriad possibilities for alternative worldings that may exist beyond the established boundaries of IR, but also within it, including the very ways in which difference is classified and responded to' (p 5).

Çalkıvık kicks off the discussion in the first part, arguing that endeavours such as this should start by 'unsettling the grounds upon which the disciplinary architecture has been erected' (p 46), while Hamati-Ataya reports upon her own biography as conditioning her IR studies. In the second part Chekuri, Neumann

and Chih-yu explore, respectively, notions of kingship and ethical conduct in the pluralistic moral ontology of pre-colonial South India in the 16th–17th centuries, the coming into existence of the early state through a study of the case of the Rus' Khaganate during the eighth to the 11th centuries, and alternative worldings of China by its peripheries, including Tibet, Mongolia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea and Japan. Altogether these three chapters challenge IR's understanding of the (limits of the) role of morality in state rule, crude assumptions regarding nomadic empires and the 'transition' to sedentary statehood, and uniform narratives on the 'China threat'.

The third part of the book includes chapters that look at indigeneity and IR (Picq), 'grounding' as a 'hermeneutics of the sufferer' offered as an alternative to 'universalisms' (Shilliam), and a Chinese scholar's story of 'discovery' of IR as a discipline (Qin). Qin's interview/chapter offers an exceptionally reflexive account by a scholar who arrived at IR later in his life, embracing it as a 'hobby' and an 'occupation'.

The final part of the volume includes contributions by Phạm and Muppidi, Inayatullah, and Tickner. Pham and Muppidi engage in a critical analysis of portrayals of selves and others in a range of media, including documentaries, biographies and public records. Inayatullah critiques IR writings for distancing the reader from the subject matter, and proposes that IR scholars learn some 'intimacy' as well as 'humility' from literary texts and aim, by way of emancipation, for 'a shift in...consciousness' (p 210). Tickner's chapter on everyday practices and IR concludes the book by exploring ways in which perspectives and experiences of the 'standpoint' of those on the margins can be tapped in making sense of the international.

Tickner and Blaney's edited volume offers a series of contributions that reveal the complexities involved in 'claiming the international' while worlding IR. Those readers who are 'schooled through [IR textbooks] and secured in orderliness' are likely to be haunted by Pham and Muppidi's question: 'would you not be lost and confused when you encounter the unruly, ungrammatical language of bodies, emotions, movements and interactions in the first scene?' (p 183). Worlding IR is a 'perilous' task indeed.

Ling and the Dao of world politics

Lily Ling has been developing the twin themes of 'Multiple Worlds' and 'Worldism' for more than a decade.²² Not to be confused with 'worlding IR', 'worldism', for Ling, is a normative orientation and a method. Worldism is a normative orientation in its recognition of and commitment to 'parity, fluidity, and ethics' and is offered as a replacement for Westphalian 'hegemony, hierarchy and violence'. Worldism is also a method that draws on Daoist yin/yang dialectics and the dialectical dynamics of 'Multiple Worlds' (p 14).

Different from everyday understanding of the term,²³ Ling's notion of 'Multiple Worlds' refers to 'the hybrid legacies produced by subalterns to serve, and thereby survive, generations of foreign occupation by colonizing powers now replaced by multinational corporations' (p 1). As such, 'Multiple Worlds' is a concept that is theorised from colonial and postcolonial experiences, and offered towards understanding contemporary global politics. Put differently,

Ling's book is structured around an alternative method of thinking about the international in a way that recognises and respects different ways of approaching it ('Westphalia World' and 'Multiple Worlds'). It is conceived as a 'means to speak to Westphalia World from a position of parity' (p 2).

Ling illustrates her argument by deconstructing the discourse of the 'China threat' and looking at the dialectics of China's relations with the USA, Taiwan and India. While doing so, she utilises sources beyond critical IR and taps into poetry, cinema and novels. She also offers two plays to summarise and reinforce the book's main themes and arguments.

Arguably Ling's book constitutes an instance of 'non-Western IR theory' that Acharya and Buzan were looking for in their 2009 edited volume. That said, most of the book is uncharted territory for those students of IR whose training is based on standard textbooks and who seek to understand 'difference' through categories familiar to them.²⁴ This is not meant as a criticism but an observation that echoes Siba Grovogui's response to his critics. In answer to those who have challenged him to justify his different readings of the 'canons of Western thought', Grovogui said:

If you spoke my father's language, I would tell you in my father's language, but that is not available to me here, so Machiavelli is a vehicle to talk about something else.²⁵

Readers, beware (to invoke Ling's own caution from another context): In *The Dao of World Politics*, Ling is interested in teaching you her parents' language.

Jabri and the postcolonial subject

(Critical) IR's engagement with postcolonial agency and subjectivity has come under criticism by postcolonial scholars since the 1990s.²⁶ Jabri's study responds to such criticism by offering a way of conceptualising the postcolonial subject's 'constitution as a subject of politics' (p 6). In doing so, Jabri points to and addresses postcolonial scholarship's own limitations in grasping the significance of what she calls the 'declaration of independence' and the 'moment of founding' – borrowing from Hannah Arendt's analysis of the American Revolution and drawing on Edward Said's emphasis on the constitution of political community (pp 6, 26). That she illustrates this elaborate argument by looking at Middle Eastern dynamics in general and the Arab Spring in particular renders Jabri's analysis all the more efficacious.

Jabri begins by highlighting the ways in which popular portrayals of the Arab Spring have focused on domestic dynamics to the neglect of the international.

The prevalent tendency is to see these events as rebellions against tyrannical and dictatorial regimes. Indeed they are reflections of a seemingly widespread expression that fear itself is transcended, so that confrontations between civilians and the security apparatus of the state are the overwhelming feature. However, the reclaiming of the political must be conceived in terms of both local as well as global structures of domination and control and their complex and contingent intersections (p 1).

It is not only popular portrayals but also IR accounts that have overlooked the international in their analyses of the Arab Spring. Needless to say, this is not the first time but is yet another instance of IR's limitations in engaging with the international. Other instances that have been paid limited attention include the colonial and neo-colonial dimensions of the US-led war against Iraq, European Union member states' collaboration with North African regimes in bolstering EU 'security', and the NATO operation in Afghanistan and ensuing drone strikes.²⁷

Indeed, as Siba Grovogui also highlighted in explaining 'the decision of African countries not to endorse the military intervention in Libya', postcolonial actors' practices cannot be understood independently of anti-colonial struggles over Western interventionism and ensuing 'tension that is much deeper and, contrary to punditry, goes to the core of the future of global governance and international morality today'.²⁸ Jabri offers the following answer to IR's limitations in making sense of the postcolonial and the international, as with the Arab Spring. What is needed, she argues, is a framework that 'sees the intersection of past and present, a past lived in the present as well as a present that was always there in the past' (p 1). The rest of the book offers such a framework while illustrating its insights with reference to Middle Eastern dynamics.

Jabri's study goes beyond addressing IR's limitations, but also offers a corrective to aspects of postcolonial approaches to the international. Jabri is critical of the latter for its own limitations in appreciating the significance of the international beyond elucidations of 'simple mimicry'.²⁹ In this way Jabri's corrective does not only recover postcolonial agency, which has been a key concern of postcolonial critics of IR,³⁰ but also inquires into the 'nature' of such agency. What kind of agency is it that is accorded to the postcolonial subject – 'unthinking emulation'³¹ as some analysts grant, or 'claiming the political, the right to politics', as Jabri maintains? That some aspects of such resistance took the form of emulation, argues Jabri, need not lead us to reduce postcolonial agency to the former, but urges us to inquire further into the latter.

Indeed, one of the strengths of Jabri's analysis is in her commitment to 'rethink resistance in terms of the subject's claim to politics, locating this claim in a constitutive relationship with political community, the international, and the cosmopolitan' (p 6). Cosmopolitanism cannot be monopolised by powers-that-be who shape the lives of selves and others through violent and non-violent means (as with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), Jabri maintains. In contrast to such forms of 'cosmopolitanism of government', she offers the 'cosmopolitanism of politics', understood as solidarity between those who claim 'the right to politics'. Looking at *Midan al Tahrir* (Liberation Square) in Egypt, Jabri maintains that:

claiming the right to politics has a materiality of presence and being such seeks to occupy spaces, not in an effort to undo the state, but in the recognition that the state and its machinery is already undone in relation to politics (p 150).

The transformation of a public meeting place into a space where politics takes place has also been observed in Turkey and Ukraine.³² Those protesters who took to Turkey's *Taksim Meydanı* (Taksim Square) in summer 2013 and to

Ukraine's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) in winter 2013–14 would concur with Jabri's analysis. The postcolonial subject of Jabri's study is presently claiming 'the right to politics' at their own *Midan/Maidan/Meydan* – all variants of the Arabic word for 'public square'.

Four contending responses

From the mid-1990s onwards critics have proposed different ways of responding to IR's limitations. In what follows I identify four such responses and locate the six books under consideration here in relation to these responses, namely 'rethinking IR', 'forgetting IR', 'worlding IR' and 'constructing a post-Western IR'.³³

Rethinking IR

'Rethinking IR' refers to the response by scholars who have sought to address IR's limitations from within critical IR, cognisant of the significant ground already covered since the 1980s and the potential for further progress through self-reflection. Indeed, critical IR is widely credited with having responded to the limitations imposed by ethnocentrism and parochialism by inquiring into culture, identity and the role of (and need for) reflexivity. In doing so, critical IR has also rendered the field more 'welcoming' to voices from outside North America and Western Europe. A key role has been played by the journal *Alternatives: Local, Global, Political*, which has been published in association with the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in India. Under Rob Walker's editorship, *Alternatives* has 'sought to promote a wide range of approaches to political, social, cultural and ecological developments, and to encourage more creative and imaginative ways of thinking and acting globally'.³⁴

That said, critical IR has also been criticised for the limitations of its engagement with the international. According to Christopher Jones, simply because authors located outside Western Europe and North America were becoming more visible in IR did not necessarily indicate the 'openness' of the field, insofar as those authors had learned to conform to IR's conventions.³⁵

But why, then, is there such a discrepancy between the self-images of critical IR scholars and their critics; those who celebrate critical IR's achievements in terms of generating 'thinking space', and those who lament its continuing lack of 'openness'? Arguably the discrepancy between these two observations about the state of IR has to do with what is meant by 'openness'. For Jim George, broader 'thinking space' followed the 'breaking down' of the 'three-centuries long intellectual consensus' of IR.³⁶ Christopher Jones, however, called for welcoming 'heterodox or anti-hegemonic wisdom' originating from outside 'the West'.³⁷

Two of the volumes under review could be viewed as contributions to 'rethinking IR' by virtue of wanting to highlight the discipline's Eurocentric limitations while remaining within its purview. Indeed, Hobson's impressive survey and critique of 250 years of Western international theory is less about addressing the limitations of critical IR and more about revealing the Eurocentric limitations of *all* IR. Unlike his some of his previous work, where he inquired into the potential for a non-Eurocentric 'post-racist' IR,³⁸ Hobson's 2012 book leaves the following question unanswered: is there a way of escaping the Eurocentric limitations of (critical) IR?

Suzuki et al's edited volume offers a partial critique insofar as the co-editors forego the opportunity to criticise the English School's account of the 'making' of international society and focus instead on the School's account of the 'expansion' of International Society. Following Sandra Halperin, what renders IR's engagement with the international limited is its students' lack of reflection on how 'knowledges and practices universalized by Europeans...in many cases...neither originated in Europe nor were even part of the European experience'.³⁹ Leaving the English School's account of the making of International Society relatively untouched comes across as a missed opportunity.

Forgetting IR

Roland Bleiker's advice to 'forget IR theory'⁴⁰ could be viewed as the first explicit expression of seeking a way forward not by rethinking IR, but finding another way of producing international knowledge. Critical IR, Bleiker argued, focused too much time and energy on criticising American IR and realism. While this allowed critical approaches to '[explore] the origins of problems, in this case discourses of power politics and their framing of political practice', Bleiker maintained that it also confined them to an agenda set by the mainstream. It is only through 'theorizing world politics without being constrained by the agendas, issues, and terminologies that are preset by orthodox debates', suggested Bleiker, that critical approaches can set their own agenda and move forward.⁴¹

What Bleiker meant by 'forgetting' was 'not a negative process, a neglecting and overlooking, but also a necessary part of our existence, something we often do without being aware of it'.⁴² By reminding ourselves of the availability of forgetting as an everyday tool of the mind, argued Bleiker, we can turn it into 'an instrument of dialogue and inclusion'. Distancing himself from (critical) IR as such, Bleiker called for alternative ways of analysing world politics. One such alternative can be found in Cynthia Enloe's works,⁴³ he argued. Her research '[revolves] around a complete disregard for the established academic canon' but looks into the experiences of women worldwide – experiences that are often overlooked by mainstream IR.⁴⁴

Ling's *The Dao of World Politics* can be located in 'forgetting IR' insofar as she does not spend too many words dwelling on the limitations of the discipline, but seeks a way of responding to such limitations. Further, true to the spirit of 'forgetting IR', Ling's study does not remain within the confines of the research agendas set by mainstream IR. Yet, in a manner akin to Enloe, Ling focuses on pressing issues of world politics, as with sex-trafficking and UN peacekeeping in the Mediterranean, the Asian financial crisis, or China's international relations.⁴⁵ Finally, in response to Bleiker's prompt that 'poetry, disenchanted concepts, aphorisms, and dialogue are only examples of stylistic devices that can be employed to forget, to resist the discursive domination of orthodox IR theory',⁴⁶ Ling offers two of her own plays in support of her argument.

Worlding IR

The notion of 'worlding' was introduced to IR through two different literatures: postcolonial and feminist scholarship. Introducing Edward Said's notion of 'worldliness' to IR audiences, Pal Ahluvalia and Michael Sullivan suggested that

‘worlding’ would offer ‘the beginning of a solution’ to IR’s problems by way of raising ‘awareness of the effects that researchers and their knowledge have on the subjects of their study’.⁴⁷ What Edward Said meant by the ‘worldliness’ of a text, they reminded us, was ‘the un- or non- neglect of other ideologies and experiences’.⁴⁸ Accordingly, IR scholars were invited to reflect on the ways in which scholarship is shaped by their ideologies and experiences.

A second introduction of ‘worlding’ to IR came through feminist scholarship. Jan Jindy Pettman’s book, entitled *Worlding Women*, was one of the first feminist IR monographs, exploring the ways in which IR is gendered. For Pettman, worlding women meant ‘taking women’s experiences of the international seriously’.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding these two early introductions of ‘worlding’ into IR, the notion came to the attention of students of the discipline in the 2000s through the ‘geocultural epistemologies and IR’ project.⁵⁰ In calling for worlding IR, Tickner and Waever’s concern was that, although scholarly ‘critique or lament’ regarding IR being ‘not so international’ was acknowledged, it was not always accepted for lack of evidence (ie data). Finding out about the study of IR and conceptions of the international in other parts of the world was crucial, argued the co-editors, not only because there was a need for evidence beyond the anecdotal, but also because:

when this is done without a concrete study of non-dominant and non-privileged parts of the world, it becomes yet another way of speaking from the center about the whole, and of depicting the center as normal and the periphery as a projected ‘other’ through which the disciplinary core is reinforced.⁵¹

Instead, Tickner and Waever designed their project around the notion of ‘worlding’.

In *Claiming the International*, the ‘Worlding Beyond the West’ trilogy seems to be returning to Edward Said’s notion of worlding, highlighting the fact that we are ‘at once worlded and worlding’.⁵² This is in contrast to the ‘comparative structure’ of the first volume,⁵³ which relied on the feminist notion of worlding (as reflecting on one’s experiences) and looked at the situatedness of IR scholarship in different parts of the world,⁵⁴ thereby failing to reflect on Edward Said’s caution that ‘a single overmastering identity at the core...whether Western, African or Asian is a confinement, a deprivation’.⁵⁵ In *Claiming the International*, ‘worlding’ is once again offered as a postcolonial method utilised to critique the ‘coloniser’s’ ways of representing the ‘colonised’.

Post-Western IR

Calls for constructing a ‘post-Western IR’ have emerged more recently than others as scholars critical of the ‘Westernness’ of (critical) IR have sought to reimagine the field. Writing in the early 1990s, Stephen Chan proposed what he called the ‘multicultural Rashomon paradigm’ for IR. Reminding his readers of Akira Kurosawa’s celebrated film *Rashomon*, which tells its story from several protagonists’ different perspectives without privileging any of their stories or questioning their truthfulness, Chan suggested that the ‘Rashomon condition is the true condition which IR faces’.⁵⁶ The context to Chan’s proposal for a

'multicultural Rashomon paradigm' was also the context in which Bleiker called for 'forgetting IR' (see above). While the source of Bleiker's frustration was mostly to do with getting bogged down in (critical) IR debates, Chan was mainly concerned with the 'Westernness' of IR, which did not allow other voices to be included in the debates (what Jones termed 'openness').⁵⁷

The call for a post-Western IR was also articulated in an article by Peter Mandaville, who viewed the main challenge in terms of 'Western IR's treatment of 'difference', what he labelled 'the ethics of sameness'. The search for 'post-Western IR' then took the shape of a search for 'a rather different way of relating internationally: the ethics of contact and coexistence'.⁵⁸ Presented as such, Mandaville's understanding of 'post-Western IR' was about recovering other experiences, other memories, other ways of relating. The idea was not to move towards 'the supposed common values of humankind (although there may at times seem to exist something like that), or our shared fate, etc' but to advocate the view that 'those best equipped to deal with the coming world will be those who understand themselves to be from nowhere'.⁵⁹

Shilliam's edited volume is another step in this direction in that both the editor and the contributors highlight 'non-Western' others' overlooked presence in IR. The difference between a search for 'non-Western IR' and 'post-Western IR' is that the latter (as articulated by Shilliam⁶⁰) is interested in pointing to 'Western IR's' oversight of the presence of 'non-Western' others, given the constitutive role the latter have played in the shaping of (what are popularly portrayed as) 'Western' ideas and institutions.⁶¹ Indeed, Shilliam identifies the volume's contribution as one of 'explicit and sustained' engagement with non-Western thought in an attempt to 'highlight and explore the *global*, rather than European or Western, context within which knowledge of modernity has been developed'.⁶² Retrieving the global as opposed to merely European or Western context is important, argues Shilliam, in order to understand the dynamics of world politics (and the ways in which we make sense of them),⁶³ which are 'shaped so fundamentally by colonialism and Western expansionism'.⁶⁴

Since the 1990s, Jabri has been an active participant in the debates on culture and IR while cautioning against the culturalisation of others. Her co-authored response (with Stephan Chan) to Martin Hollis and Steve Smith's way of framing critical IR debates on epistemology,⁶⁵ and the co-edited volume (with Eleanor O'Gorman) entitled *Women, Culture and International Relations*,⁶⁶ both constitute early interventions in the debate on the 'Westernness' of IR. By way of drawing on the strengths of critical IR while reflecting on its weaknesses, and by tapping the insights of postcolonial critique while highlighting its limitations, *The Postcolonial Subject* intervenes in the debate on 'post-Western IR' by offering another way of addressing IR's limitations.

Indeed, Jabri's discussion of the 'cosmopolitanism of politics' resonates with Naeem Inayatullah, David Blaney and Peter Mandaville's considerations on 'post-Western IR'.⁶⁷ In calling for a 'post-Western IR', Inayatullah and Blaney emphasise that:

revealing the particularity and parochialism of the West is simultaneously to recover the values and visions of the West (in its numerous guises, both dominant and recessive) as resources. To put it differently, moving beyond the hegemony of the West requires the rediscovery and reimagination of the West.⁶⁸

Exploring the ‘ethical contours’ of ‘post-Western IR’, Mandaville called for rethinking the ‘ethics of sameness’. The search for a ‘post-Western IR’, then, becomes seeking ‘a rather different way of relating internationally: the ethics of contact and coexistence’.⁶⁹ Put differently, while Jabri does not offer her study as a contribution to the ‘post-Western IR’ literature in the way Shilliam does, her analysis addresses IR’s limitations stemming from its ‘Westernness’, while at the same time reflecting on the limits of the postcolonial critique.

Further critical investigations?

Reviewing a similar set of books back in 2010, I noted that more-or-less the same group of authors were contributing to debates on the limitations of IR’s engagement with the international. One difference of this round of *critical investigations* into the international is that the group seems to have grown bigger and more diverse in terms of background, standpoint and proclivity for self-reflection.

Perhaps more significantly, the focus of this round of *critical investigations* is different. Whereas the previous set of studies invited non-Western scholars to report on their contributions to IR, this second round offers reflexive discussions about IR’s limitations in accounting for contributions and contestations by the postcolonial (including but not limited to opening up room for non-Western scholars’ role, recognition of past contributions of non-Western thought and give-and-take between civilisations).

Put differently, what we observe in this second round of critical investigations into the international amounts to a sea-change. The three edited volumes present contributions by a diverse and interdisciplinary group of authors, who report on different conceptions of the international, and offer novel readings of diverse aspects of world politics. The three single-authored books further substantiate my observation regarding a sea-change in that, whereas Hobson offers a trenchant exposé and critique of IR’s Eurocentrism, Jabri and Ling suggest ‘differently different’⁷⁰ ways of doing (critical) IR.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. Der Derian, *International Theory*.
2. George, “International Relations and the Search for Thinking Space.” See also Smith, “Alternative and Critical Perspectives”; and Walker, “Alternative, Critical, Political.”
3. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline*, viii (original emphasis). See also Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory*; Waever, “The Sociology of a Not so International Discipline”; and Jones, “Locating the ‘I’ in IR.”
4. Smith, “The United States”; Booth, “75 Years On”; Alker and Biersteker, “The Dialectics of World Order”; and Biersteker, “The Parochialism of Hegemony.”
5. Pasha, “Untimely Reflections,” 218.

6. Halperin, "International Relations Theory."
7. Inayatullah, in Tickner and Blaney, *Claiming the International*, 155. See also Jones, *Decolonizing International Relations*; Agathangelou and Ling, "The House of IR"; and Grovogui, "Postcolonial Criticism."
8. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*. See also Hobson, "Deconstructing the Eurocentric Clash of Civilizations"; and Hobson, "The Myth of the Clash."
9. Needless to say, IR is not the only social science discipline guilty of Eurocentrism. Consider, for example, the 'Black Athena' controversy. Bernal, *Black Athena*; and Orrells et al., *African Athena*.
10. Hall and Hobson, "Liberal International Theory"; Hobson, "Is Critical Theory always for the White West?"; and Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*.
11. Said, *Orientalism*. For a discussion on Orientalism's enduring influence in Middle Eastern Studies, see Bilgin, "Is the 'Orientalist' Past the Future?"
12. See, for instance, Cox, "Social Forces."
13. Krishna, "The Importance of Being Ironic"; and Pasha, "Islam, 'Soft' Orientalism and Empire."
14. Bull and Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*.
15. We learn from Suzuki's chapter that, while non-European powers (as with their European counterparts) conceived of the international in hierarchical terms, the notion of civilisation that went alongside this conception did not always rest on assumptions of progress (as with European or Chinese perspectives) but sometimes was pluralistic (as with Japan, argues Suzuki).
16. See Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory*. See also Bilgin, "Looking for 'the International'."
17. See also Bilgin, "Thinking past 'Western' IR?"
18. See also Bhambra and Shilliam, *Silencing Human Rights*; and Pasha, "'Soft' Orientalism."
19. Recent revival of interest in 'civilisational dialogue' serves as a reminder that inquiry into non-Western thinking cannot be dismissed as historical curiosity, but is central to our thinking about the present and future of world politics. See Bilgin, "Civilisation, Dialogue, Security."
20. The first volume was reviewed in Bilgin, "Looking for 'the International'."
21. Tickner and Blaney, *Thinking International Relations Differently*; and Tickner and Waever, *IR Scholarship Around the World*.
22. See, for example, Ling, "The Fish and the Turtle"; and Agathangelou and Ling, *Transforming World Politics*.
23. Or the World Order Models Project's conceptualisation of 'many worlds'. Walker, *One World, Many Worlds*. For a discussion, see Bilgin, "Do IR Scholars Engage with the Same World?"
24. See Bilgin, "Thinking past 'Western' IR?"
25. Grovogui, "IR as Theology."
26. See, for example, Krishna, "The Importance of Being Ironic"; and Agathangelou and Ling, "Postcolonial Dissidence."
27. But see Jabri, *War*; Bilgin, "Temporalizing Security"; and Grovogui, "Looking Beyond Spring."
28. Grovogui, "Looking Beyond Spring," 567.
29. Invoking Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.
30. Agathangelou and Ling, "Postcolonial Dissidence"; and Krishna, "The Importance of Being Ironic."
31. For a critique, see also Bilgin, "Thinking past 'Western' IR?"
32. On Turkey, see Batuman, "Occupy Gezi." On Ukraine, see Snyder, "Fascism, Russia, and Ukraine."
33. Let me note that the divides are not always clear-cut. When in doubt, I made decisions based on where I consider the centre of gravity of authors' studies to be located.
34. http://www.sagepub.com/press/2011/april/SAGE_publishingAlternatives.sp.
35. Jones, "Locating the 'I' in IR."
36. George, "International Relations and the Search for Thinking Space"; and George, *Discourses of Global Politics*.
37. Jones, "Locating the 'I' in IR," 108. As *Third World Quarterly* has done, over the years.
38. See, in particular, Hobson, "Is Critical Theory always for the White West?"
39. Halperin, "International Relations Theory," 43.
40. Bleiker, "Forget IR Theory."
41. *Ibid.*, 58.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*; Enloe, "Margins, Silences and Bottom Rungs"; and Enloe, *Maneuvers*.
44. Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn," 524.
45. Agathangelou and Ling, "Postcolonial Dissidence"; Han and Ling, "Authoritarianism"; Ling, "Manly States"; and Ling, "Cultural Chauvinism."
46. Bleiker, "Forget IR Theory," 77.
47. Ahluwalia and Sullivan, "Beyond International Relations," 363.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Pettman, *Worlding Women*, vii.
50. Tickner and Waever, "Introduction."
51. *Ibid.*, 1.

52. Tickner and Blaney, "Claiming the International Beyond IR," ix.
53. Pasha, "Untimely Reflections."
54. Bilgin, "Looking for 'the International'."
55. Said, quoted in Ahluwalia and Sullivan, "Beyond International Relations," 364.
56. Chan, "Cultural and Linguistic Reductionisms," 442.
57. Chan, "Small Revolutions"; Chan, "Cultural and Linguistic Reductionisms"; and Chan, *Towards a Multi-cultural Rashomon Paradigm*.
58. Mandaville, "Toward a Different Cosmopolitanism," 213. See also Pasha, "Western Nihilism."
59. Mandaville, "Toward a Different Cosmopolitanism," 221.
60. Shilliam, "Non-Western Thought and International Relations," 2.
61. See also the discussion on Hobson's book.
62. Shilliam, "Non-Western Thought and International Relations," 4 (original emphasis).
63. Long and Schmidt, *Imperialism and Internationalism*; and Vitalis, "Birth of a Discipline."
64. Shilliam, "Non-Western Thought and International Relations," 4. See also Barkawi and Laffey, "Retrieving the Imperial"; Barkawi and Laffey, "The Postcolonial Moment"; and Shilliam, "What the Haitian Revolution might Tell Us."
65. Jabri and Chan, "The Ontologist always Rings Twice."
66. Jabri and O'Gorman, *Women, Culture, and International Relations*.
67. Differently from Inayatullah and Blaney's, and Mandaville's early considerations, later discussions on 'post-Western IR' have put less emphasis on the 'ethics of coexistence'.
68. Inayatullah and Blaney, *IR and the Problem of Difference*.
69. Mandaville, "Toward a Different Cosmopolitanism."
70. Bilgin, "Security in the Arab World."

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