

## Poststructuralism in International Relations

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**Abstract:** This paper examined Post- Structuralism within the context of International Relations, despite the fact that, post-structuralism actually give a number of general and constructive puzzle which can be administered in other to approach the study of international politics in a different directions. This paper structured as follows; Introduction, which covered pre-amble and general insight of post structuralism, the emergence of post structuralism which highlighted the development and assertion of structuralism and post structuralism in International relations. This paper further analyses the consequences and prospect of post structuralism in International relations and scholarly argument from Walker R.B.J in one hand and Campbell David in the other hand in regard to post structuralism in international relations and finally, conclusion was extracted. From the foregoing argument, it can be clearly agreed that, both David Campbell and Walker R.B.J. conceive the same view that, our political imagination restricts us from understanding our contemporary situation. Upon all, post structuralists consider interpretation and representation are indispensable and unavoidable when it comes to engaging both the domain of international politics and the field of international relations.

**Keywords:** Poststructuralist, Consequences, Emergence, International Relations.

### I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examined post structuralism within the context of International Relations, which has some variations from the most other system of International Politics because it does not see itself as a theory, or school which produces a single account of its subject matter. Post structuralism is an approach attitude that pursues critique in particular ways. Because it understands critique as an operation that flushes out the assumptions through which dominant understandings have come to be. Post structuralism considered critique as an inherently positive exercise that establishes the conditions of possibility for pursuing alternatives. It is in this context that post structuralism make other theories of international relations one of its objects of analysis and approaches those system with meta-theoretical question designed to expose how they are structured [1]. Post structuralism found itself marginalized within international relations, that is large because those critical of it have misunderstood many of its central claims and have been anxious about the effect of following its meta-theoretical questioning to its logical conclusion [1].

The term post structuralism refers to a political, literary, expansion of continental philosophy that developed and emerged at the second half of the twentieth century in other to enable certain developments in analytic philosophy. The post structural approach is known for its efforts to offer a authentic review and updating of traditional concepts in classical philosophy and it makes use of the Linguistic turn. As the term post structuralism suggests, its representatives have been formed especially through critical discussion with some scholars such as Ferdinand DE Saussure (1857-1913), Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009), and the so called Russian formalists, among the most crucial representatives of post structuralism scholars such as Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998). Though many of the representatives are with the French backgrounds, their theories have had influence all over the World, most especially in the areas of language, ethics, literary and gender studies [2].

What really separate structuralism from post structuralism was that, some base their work on discourse analysis and others combine critical theory with psychoanalysis. Their approaches varies because some proceed historically while some hermeneutically. If there is a basic subject matter that connects these authors in addition to their use of the linguistic turn, it is the influence of phenomenology as found in the works of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), [3].

Therefore, this paper was divided into the following subheadings; introduction, the emergence of post structuralism, consequences and prospect of post structuralism in international relations, arguments and conclusion

## II. THE EMERGENCE OF POST STRUCTURALISM

Post structuralism developed in France around 1960s as an ideology criticizing structuralism. According to J. G. Merquior, (1987: 230) observed that “the love hate relationship with structuralism developed among French thinkers in the. The period was a turning point of political chaos, students and workers revolt against the state in May 1968, which caused the downfall of the French Government. At the same time, the support by the French Communist Party (FCP) for the oppressive policies of the USSR countries to popular disillusionment with orthodox Marxism” [4].

Post structuralism proves a means to balance this criticism, by analyzing the underlying principles of many western traditions. Two key personalities in the early post structuralist were Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. In a 1966 lecture “titled, sign, and play in the discourse of the Human Sciences”, Jacques Derrida presented a thesis on an apparent some disagreement in intellectual circle. Derrida explained this event as a “decentering” of the former scholarly space. Instead of development or difference from an identified Centre, Derrida described this “event” as a kind of “play” [5].

Although Barthes was initially a structuralist, at the 1960s, he strongly favored post structuralist views. In 1967 Barthes published “the death of the author” in which he publicized a metaphorical event: the “death” of the author as an original sourced of meaning for a given text. Barthes argued that any literary text has different meanings, and that the author was not the prime source of the work verbal content. The ‘Death of the Author’, Barthes maintained was the birth of the reader’, as the source of the spread meanings of the text [6].

The scholar of post structuralism like, Derrida and Foucault did not form a self-conscious group, but each reacted to the traditions of phenomenology and structuralism. Phenomenology, often associated with two German philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, disagreed previous systems of knowledge and attempted to examine life ‘just as it appears’ as phenomena, both movements rejected the ideas that knowledge could be centered on the human knower and sought what they considered as more secure foundation for knowledge [3]. In phenomenology, this foundation is experience itself, in structuralism, learning is discovered on the ‘structures’ that make experiences (phenomenology) or systematic structures (structuralism) is impossible. This difficulty was not meant as a weakness, but rather as a cause for strength [5].

## III. CONSEQUENCES AND PROSPECT OF POST STRUCTURALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This stage assesses the consequences of post- structuralism approach in international relations theory. The stage one assesses how post structuralism undermines the foundation of ‘reality’, the second assesses the potential for the emancipation of marginalized disciplines and finally exploring the broader implications of post structuralism’s critique on the constitutive element of international relations.

Post structuralism disagreed with positivist principles to international survey and work out that sources for knowledge exist. Thus, the first consequence of post structuralism’s critique results in the foundations claims of theory being questioned. Ashley, in his essay, refers to theory as a ‘roaming about who is committed to nothing other than a speculative and mobile will to boundary’. This figure seeks to secure itself on a metaphysical plain as opposed to post structuralism which locates theory at a ‘negative’ depriving the modern theorist of metaphysical ground’ [7]. For almost forty years, positivism has been the ‘Gold Standard’ against which all principles has been measured, influential respond to can be studied as a result of ‘commitment to the natural science’ [8]. This has gave chance to contemporary discourse of a metaphysical plain, a highest academic platform, from which to describe and understand ‘reality’ while commented transforming the discipline into an ‘historical, universalized dogma’ [9].

Post structuralism represents a type of behavior rather than a set of ideas; it is a process of questioning and self-questioning, a concern for all things that make up our understanding of our universe and an appreciation of how inseparable these things are [10]. Rather than accepting that the international system consist of a strict set of ontological assumptions or as Waver argues ‘mechanical gives’, such as the state, gender or class, post structuralism seeks to promote an ‘emphasis on the cultural coloring of international systems and general radical interest in rethinking the basic categories of the international system’ [11].

Post structuralism does not seek to established theory, rather it ‘understands that critique is an operation that flushes out principles and is an inherently positive exercise’ [1]. At this point, looking at how Ashley attack upon neo-realism, argues that

for the purpose of theory, the state must be treated as not a problem, an entity whose existence can be treated as given. For the drifting to secure himself in anarchy he must assume the existence of a sovereign voice, yet this is not necessarily a sound voice as over time it has changed from God to the State [12].

This necessity for a sovereign is deliberated by some intellectuals that 'acknowledging uncertainty defer questions of meaning in favor of pressing on to investigate 'serious' question of international relations while referring to the sovereign [11].

Building on absent foundations of ideas and the ways in which contemporary discourse can relegate through an active ignorance of unsettling inconsistencies, modern discourse can monopolize its position through the perpetuation of inside/outside relationships. To expose the 'regimes of truth' there must be an understanding that theory relies on an appeal to different relationship [1]. The dichotomies utilized by contemporary discourses places competing terms in hierarchical opposition, 'where one term is privileged as a higher reality, a regulative notion and the other term is understood only in a imitative and negative way, as a lost to live up to this model [13].

The academic discipline procedure of creating territory and contrast in relationship is practiced in other to confirm the actual of the inner and 'essential part of our contemporary understanding of political space' [14]. For example, a principles to geopolitics which show how the universal is disciplined into the 'developed and poor countries, North and South, State and State. It is through post structuralism's supremacy over the metaphysical plain of knowledge loses legitimacy. Once the assurance in the timelessness of realism, the open minded of liberalism and the class competition of Marxism has been cracked, it is only with an active practice of ignorance that the World will function in the same involuntary in the long run, disciplined manner [15].

#### IV. ARGUMENTS

This paper considered two ideas in regard to post structuralism in international relations which have undermined the rationalist-positive reliance on philosophical realism and made explicit the political character of these assumptions. The focus is, inter alia, the political character of representations of reality and concepts that they take for granted like State [16].

This line of ideas relies on Foucault's view of archaeology and genealogy as well as view on mystical foundations of authority. Relating these views to international relations has implied the questions of ethical constitution of international relations as a realm where there is no place for morality making obvious that, this is a historically contingent conception infused with politics [14].

The second stage, post structuralist writers have questioned the sovereign subject and therefore, the ethical subject. Conventional accounts of ethics in international relations are seen to 'depend on the idea of a prior and autonomous sovereign subjectivity deploying either a supposedly universal moral code or muddling through their situation in order to achieve what might be thought of as the best possible outcome [17].

Post structuralist idea undermines the autonomous and pre-social subject. It then finds inspiration in Levinas and Derrida's thought on how identity and subjectivity is relies on difference from the other wherefore we are what we are, only because of our relations with others. In this process 'intrinsically bound together in an ethic of responsibility without ontological detachment clauses and it became impossible to free myself by saying 'it is not my concern'. There is no choice for, it is always and inescapably my concern' [18]. From the point of Molly Cochran's who assess post structuralist ethics and her argument is that, post structuralist thought in international relations retains ideas of universalism and foundations that otherwise are criticized. Indeed, even though these ideas are qualified versions, they seem integral to speaking of ethics [18].

The argument in respect of Walker point of view who considered international relations theory as does not help us to understand politics. Rather, it is an expression 'of the limits of the contemporary political imagination when confronted with persistent claims about and evidence of fundamental historical and structural transformations' [14].

The issues here in bracket contains two components of Walker's concern, that international relations theory functions as a historically contingent limit to what they consider possible and that this limit makes people fail in understanding the contemporary world. He separates our situation from the means they use to grasp it, and notes a mismatch between the two. New conditions warrant a rethinking of settled categories [14].

The same argument applies to ethics, what is ethically possible in international relations is limited by our political imagination and prevent us from responding to a necessity of ethical deliberations on a global scale that is stronger than ever. But the literature of normative international relations ignores these limits and thus does not 'take the difficulty of speaking about ethics

in the modern world seriously enough' [14]. The result is rather stale debate and more importantly, these limits are concealed in two different ways; one, Walker argues that normative international relations assumes that international relations is separable from ethics since ethics can solve political problems. This obscures how international relations is already ethically situated through 'accounts of ethical possibility' which limits our political imagination. Two, Walker argues that normative international relations or politics works as 'a repository of principles awaiting application'. This also limits all possible ethical principles already known and obscures how ethics is an ongoing historical and political practice [14].

Walker argues, in his critique of normative international relations that the reliance on the principle of state sovereignty impedes people from speaking of ethics in international relations in a way that corresponds to the contemporary situation. This then calls for rethinking of ethics in international relations, something that is considered rather urgent. At historical juncture where temporal accelerations can no longer be captured in spatial categories and this destabilizes the old categories. In other words, people seem to find themselves in the position of Machiavelli (Ibid: 62).

They emphasize on the need to rethink political community, but Walker himself is not all that specific about what this might mean. Nevertheless, it is clear that this involves moving beyond the confines of the cosmopolitan-communitarian debates. For example, he argues that a 'busier intersection between ethics and international relations is no indication of an escape from the routines through which attempts to speak of ethics are either marginalized or trivialized. These routines emerge from the way claims about ethical possibility are ready constitutive of theories of international relations'. Furthermore, it is rather obvious that Walker aims for an ethics that is not bound by the spatial limits of state sovereignty. This is seen in his claim that contemporary conditions 'will amplify the claim that a more universalistic account of human community is now called for' (Ibid: 79).

Campbell in his own point of view shares the concern of Walker that our political imagination restricts us from understanding our contemporary situation. His focus is however not on the principle of state sovereignty, but on identity. For instance, in national deconstruction he claims that the prevailing conceptions of identity made the west fail in their responses to Bosnia. Campbell's argument is informed by Derridean thought on the identity difference problematic and thus sees identity as performatively constituted in relation to difference [14].

Campbell's work is thus indicative of the trajectory for a more appropriate ethics that Walker sets out. Indeed, he wants to move beyond seeing states as the only possible political community. Campbell has also voiced a critique that is highly similar to that of Walker by criticizing the idea of a distinction 'depend on the notion of a prior and autonomous sovereign subjectivity whether it be the individual, the state or some other corporate actors' (Ibid: viii).

Campbell aims to go beyond these problems by establishing an ethos, implying that it is weaker and not as fixed as an ethics that is supposed to be more in line with what contemporary world politics demands. In that way, he also wants to prove that those who criticize post structuralism for relativism and nihilism are wrong by showing how this literature carries an affirmative ethos (Ibid: 20).

Campbell develops on his principles of affirming alterity in "Why fight", albeit in a slightly different context. Here he argues that the context of 'millennial chaos' cannot be captured in the 'conventional political architecture and discursive resources of international relations' and they fail to respond to crises such as those signified by names like 'Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Afghanistan and Sudan' [19]. Campbell admits that his position makes it difficult to formulate any hard and fast rules. Indeed, this would contradict much of his reasons and his basic assumptions. However, he argues that this weaker principle provides a certain direction to decisions which 'can better enable responses to disasters' [19].

Therefore, the paper is useful to international relations scholars/students, foreign policy makers, public and private organizations, civil society organizations and individuals.

## V. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing argument, it can be clearly agreed that, both David Campbell and Walker R.B.J. conceive the same view that, our political imagination restricts us from understanding our contemporary situation. Upon all, post structuralists consider interpretation and representation are indispensable and unavoidable when it comes to engaging both the domain of international politics and the field of international relations.

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