## Aff

Many more aff answers (defenses of realist/liberal/western IR scholarship) can be found across other camp files, especially the various K answer files put out by the other seniors lab!

### Critiquing Western Scholarship Fails

#### Sweeping critiques of Western colonialism buttress the status quo.

Vickers, 20—Professor of Comparative Education at Kyushu University (Edward, “Critiquing coloniality, ‘epistemic violence’ and western hegemony in comparative education – the dangers of ahistoricism and positionality,” Comparative Education, 56:2, 165-189, dml) [gendered language modifications denoted by brackets]

The central flaw in the argument advanced by the CER authors stems from an apparent lack of awareness of contemporary scholarship on the comparative history of imperialism and colonialism. Criticism of the Eurocentric assumptions that inform much mainstream social science is certainly warranted, as is critique of the excessive influence exerted by institutions such as key journals based in North America or Europe. However, when critical arguments rely on selective and historically flimsy claims for the uniquely colonial quality of modern Western culture, the risks are twofold: firstly, and fundamentally, actually to sustain or reinforce Eurocentrism by deflecting the critical gaze from non-Western societies and the patterns of oppression (‘colonial’ or otherwise) therein; and secondly, by the same token to weaken or discredit the case for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to the comparative analysis of education.

The empirical and theoretical flaws of this approach are intertwined with the problematic language in which its arguments are typically couched. Historical and anthropological scholarship on East Asia and other regions amply demonstrates that colonialist or neo-colonialist attitudes and strategies of domination are not and have never been a Western monopoly. But decolonial theory posits the more or less uniform victimhood of non-Western ‘others,’ deriving claims for the moral superiority of ‘authentically’ indigenous perspectives. Debating the validity of such claims is complicated by an emphasis on ‘positionality.’ Readers are exhorted to judge an argument less by standards of evidence or logic (often portrayed as camouflaging a Western ‘will to power’) than on the basis of the writer’s self-identification or ‘positioning.’ The language of ‘epistemic violence,’ ‘secure spaces,’ ‘epistemological diffidence,’ ‘border thinking’ and ‘location’ suggests an image of the critical scholar as revolutionary guerrilla, valiantly sniping at Western hegemony from his or her [their] marginal redoubt. In so far as this reflects a desire for a more just, tolerant and sustainable society – one that values diversity as a resource for mutual learning – it is admirable. However, if we seek to combat oppression, in the educational sphere or beyond, it is incumbent on us to pick our enemies, and our language, carefully. Aiming a blunderbuss at the supposedly illegitimate or self-serving ‘universalism’ of ‘modern Western social science,’ while ignoring how calls for indigenisation and ‘authenticity’ are used to legitimate highly oppressive regimes across Asia and elsewhere, is to risk undermining those universal social and political values (freedom of expression, civil liberties, rule of law) upon which critical scholars themselves rely.

An embrace of ‘opacity’ or ‘epistemological diffidence,’ advocated by several of the CER contributors, threatens to be similarly self-defeating. While they share an admiration for the Argentine theorist of ‘decoloniality,’ Walter Mignolo, the work of his brilliant compatriot, the writer, poet and essayist Jorge Luis Borges, is far worthier of attention. Borges’ famous fondness for ‘labyrinths’ and the paradoxical was combined with a sharp eye for gratuitous obfuscation and circumlocution (see, for example, his story The Aleph, in Borges 1998, 274–286). Offering his own critique of the fashion for opaque jargon in mainstream social science, the émigré Polish sociologist Stanislav Andreski wrote acerbically that ‘one of the pleasures obtainable through recourse to confusion and absurdity is to be able to feel, and publicly to claim, that one knows when in reality one does not’ (1974, 95). ‘Opacity’ in imaginative literature may intrigue or entertain, but in interpreting and explaining unfamiliar societies, cultures and education systems, comparativists especially ought to write in clear, accessible language. And while all social scientists can understand the lure of the sweeping generalisation, we should generalise with extreme caution, especially when categorising large swathes of humanity.

Borges’ earliest collection of stories is entitled A Universal History of Iniquity. This appeared in 1935, when there were already rumblings in both East and West of the conflict that would soon engulf Eurasia. Implied in his title was a truth painfully obvious to many contemporaries: that iniquity is indeed universal. The conflicts of the mid-twentieth century starkly illuminated another truth: that iniquity in the modern world, especially (though not only) that associated with totalitarian societies, often consists in essentialising and de-humanising ‘the other’. Hannah Arendt – a thoroughly Eurocentric thinker, but one who addressed, in ‘totalitarianism,’ a theme with global ramifications – wrote of how, through ‘the murder of the moral person in man,’ totalitarian systems transform their citizens into ‘living corpses’ capable of any outrage (2017, 591). But ironically, in the very act of attacking essentialism as applied to ‘non-Western’ cultures, the CER contributors propagate an essentialised view of ‘the West’ itself. Iniquity in the form of coloniality is in their account attributed solely to Western modernity. This view is both inaccurate and dangerous.

The irony in this approach extends to the attribution of agency. Claims to champion the dignity of subaltern, ‘non-Western’ actors are in fact undermined by assertions of their uniform victimhood. This reproduces the very Eurocentrism that ‘decolonial’ scholars quite rightly seek to challenge. In fact, privilege and victimhood have many dimensions, by no means all traceable to the ‘phenomenon of colossal vagueness’ that is colonialism (Osterhammel 2005, 4). One group or individual can plausibly be portrayed as victim, or perpetrator, or both, depending on context and perspective. Were post-war German civilian refugees from Eastern Europe, or Japanese civilians fleeing Manchuria, victims or perpetrators? Or today, is a privately-educated, English-speaking, upper-caste South Asian scholar more accurately to be seen as privileged or under-privileged, in terms of access to power (‘epistemic’ or otherwise) within South Asia or the global academy? ‘Location’ or identity are not reducible to neat labels or discrete categories. As the Anglo-Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah emphasises, according dignity and agency involves recognising that our identities are not just socially given, but also actively chosen. Culture is ‘a process you join, in living a life with others,’ and ‘the values that European humanists like to espouse belong as much to an African or an Asian who takes them up with enthusiasm as to a European’ (2018, 211). The same applies with respect to value systems we have reason to regard as iniquitous, such as those associated with colonialism or neoliberalism.

What, then, are we to make of the traction that totalising anti-Westernism appears to be gaining within the CIE field? On one level, this may tell us more about the state of campus politics, and politics in general, across contemporary America and the broader ‘Anglosphere’, than about the wider world. The worldview that the CER contributors espouse, even as they strain at the shackles of Western epistemology, is redolent of America’s peculiarly racialised identity politics. And notwithstanding claims to marginal positionality, the increasingly widespread currency of such arguments in North American and Anglophone CIE circles reflects their status as an emergent orthodoxy that in key respects mirrors the very ethnocentrism it rejects.

Although the ideas in the CER special issue are presented as challenging both the scholarly mainstream and a wider neoliberal or neocolonial establishment, the seriousness of this challenge is doubtful. Exhortations to embrace ‘opacity’ or to ‘think otherwise’ in the name of ‘contesting coloniality’ imply no coherent programme, and suggest an overwhelmingly negative agenda. Meanwhile, far from risking ostracism, the contributors can expect warm endorsement of their views from regulars at the major international conferences. For many in the CIE community in North America and beyond, sweeping critiques of Western ‘hegemony’, ‘coloniality’ and so forth hold a strong appeal; it is those seeking to question the balance or accuracy of such theorising who risk opprobrium. As Merquior wrote of Foucault, Derrida and their postmodernist or ‘deconstructivist’ followers, their ‘skepsis’, ‘highly placed in the core institutions of the culture it so strives to undermine,’ has come to constitute an ‘official marginality’ (1991, 160).

The potential – and actual – consequences of this are troubling. Takayama et al call for the WCCES in particular to embrace the agenda of ‘contesting coloniality,’ but one conclusion to be drawn from recent events is that this is already happening, with damaging consequences for civility within the Comparative Education field, and for the wider credibility of its scholarly output.15 Reducing scholarship to the projection of the scholar’s own positionality can only lead to fragmentation and irrelevance. To quote Merquior again (paraphrasing Hilary Putnam), ‘to demote rationality, in a relativist way, to a mere concoction of a given historical culture is as reductionist as the logical positivist’s reduction of reason to scientific calculus’ (160). What he calls the ‘Elixir of Pure Negation’ (159) is an intoxicating brew, but it is unlikely to inspire coherent or constructive contributions to addressing the pressing problems of our age: climate change, poverty, inequality and the ethical crisis that underpins them all.

Indeed, it is very likely to do the opposite. The neoliberal cadres of the OECD or World Bank, along with nationalist autocrats from Beijing to Budapest, will be more than happy for ‘critical scholars’ to fulminate against a vaguely-defined ‘West’ while embracing ‘epistemological diffidence’ (Takayama, Sriprakash, and Connell 2017, S18). As one critic of ‘postmodernism’ has put it, the promotion of ‘epistemological pluralism,’ combined with rejection of any ‘settled external viewpoint,’ means that, ‘so far as real-life ongoing politics is concerned,’ postmodernists, along with de-constructivists, decolonialists and their ilk, tend to be ‘passively conservative in effect’ (Butler 2002, 61). If ‘decoloniality’ promotes a balkanisation of the Comparative Education field into identitybased cliques that prize ‘opacity,’ the risk is that in practice this will only serve to buttress the status quo.

### IR Good---Long

#### \*\*\*Note while prepping: the un-underlined part of this cites Henry Kissinger, who is not the most savory character. The neg may point this out. However, Ettinger (in my opinion) isn’t endorsing Kissinger, just quoting him to say that IR education matters, so if evil war criminals think IR research is important, that's a reason we should learn how it works!

#### Researching and debating IR teaches critical inquiry that spills out beyond the classroom—it’s not inevitably elitist or Eurocentric.

Ettinger, 20—Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Carleton University (Aaron, “Scattered and Unsystematic: The Taught Discipline in the Intellectual Life of International Relations,” International Studies Perspectives (2020) 0, 1–24, dml)

The first benefit is generating a well-trained pipeline of future IR scholars and practitioners. Today’s students are the scholars and practitioners of tomorrow, and sparking curiosity in students, especially undergraduates, has the potential to rejuvenate the field from within. As Hagmann and Biersteker (2014, 292–293) argue, IR scholars should “take a more direct interest in how world politics is explained to students in everyday schooling practices.” This is eminently sensible. International relations’ preoccupation with “the cult of research intensivity” (Nossal 2006, 737), and to a lesser extent political practice, misleads the professoriate into believing that the very people who sustain universities as institutions and who are the future of the discipline—student subscribers—can be ignored. It has also led the IR professoriate to undervalue the contribution that the taught discipline makes to disciplinary renewal through the training of international relations’ next generation.

For future practitioners, whether in government or elsewhere, an IR education provides the conceptual architecture needed to make decisions about policy and its place in the world. In his memoirs, Henry Kissinger emphasizes this point: “The convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue in office. There is little time for leaders to reflect” (as quoted in Desch 2019, 153). While Kissinger is talking about the highest level of elected office, it is equally true that policymakers throughout government come in equipped with the intellectual capital and technical skills learned in the classroom (Biswas and Paczynska 2015). For future scholars, early lessons have downstream effects on the very content of IR knowledge. After all, the classroom is where IR theory gets reproduced “for the first time” to future generations of IR scholars. As Newsom (1995, 64–65) put it, “[t]eachers plant the seeds that shape the thinking of each new generation; this is probably the academic world’s most lasting contribution.” It is also a place where the durability and centrality of the field’s major theories are reinforced as a matter of course and not necessarily for the better (Vitalis 2015, 6). Early undergraduates carry the assumptions they are taught throughout their undergraduate and graduate careers, and beyond. A discipline that cannot connect with students or is inward-looking and esoteric risks putting off its next generation. Thus, the classroom needs to be treated with greater regard as a site of knowledge production and dissemination in the intellectual life of the field. In this sense, curiosity can be provoked among students that may continue beyond an undergraduate career. Take, for example, the observation of one student on her intellectual awakening in the classroom:

Despite a Eurocentric and male-dominated ethos, what ultimately convinced me to stay in IR was my exposure and inability to detach from what was first described to me as the politics of the “postcolonial.” A lecturer holding up a roughened paperback copy of Edward Said’s 1979 acclaimed work Orientalism originally introduced me to postcolonialism…Hearing Said’s words being reiterated back to me in my predominately white and conservative-leaning lecture theater was a defining moment in my education. Orientalism provided an experience that I could finally connect with: one where political power was not about who had the most weaponry or democracy, but instead about who held political control over the reality of the racialized person (Abu-Bakare 2017).

The moment captured in this tableau is the intellectual awakening that is possible when pedagogy is carefully considered. From the student perspective, well-taught courses prepare them better for the next stage in their education, starting with superior foundational training at the early undergraduate levels and progressing to improved research capabilities and substantive knowledge at the higher undergraduate levels, and then to advanced skills training in graduate school. Well-trained cohorts coming up the ranks will be highly proficient in a wider range of IR topics, theories, ideas, and methods and will be well prepared to make the jump to fluency. Similarly, future practitioners will be equipped with superior substantive and technical training. This is especially true with “experiential learning.” Done in purposeful ways, learning through experiences outside the classroom generates employable skills for students.

Social and Institutional Context of Teaching and Disciplinary Reproduction

Directly related to the question of the future of international relations is the social context of teaching and the discipline’s reproduction in the classroom. IR scholars must recognize that the IR classroom is the site of ideational preferences, clashes of favored or disfavored paradigms, of personal authority, generational difference, social privileges, and prejudices. At every point in professional international relations, there are implications for how knowledge is produced, taught, and passed on (Ettinger 2016; Colgan 2017; Fattore 2018; Knight 2019). Indeed, the intellectual output of IR scholars does not exist independent of the lived context in which it is produced. Gaining insight into the social context of international relations’ taught discipline can help begin to correct the pathologies that are affecting the way the next generation of IR scholars are being taught right now and how future scholars and practitioners will be taught next year and beyond.

It begins by addressing the social identity of the instructor and how it contributes to the reproduction of IR knowledge. After all, the instructor does not speak from a position of nowhere and an account of IR pedagogy should address the personal features of the instructor, her place within the discipline’s division of labor, and its effect on the delivery of course content (Biswas and Deylami 2017). For international relations especially, it is the site of entrenched male and Euro-Atlantic dominance with cascading implications within the classroom and beyond. The 2014 TRIP survey shows that the global IR professorate is two-thirds male (Maliniak et al. 2014). In the United States and British IR “core” and in the Anglo “noncore” (Cox and Nossal 2009), the professoriate is overwhelmingly white and male. Australia is 72.11 percent male and 76.87 percent white. Canada is 70.83 percent male and 83.4 percent white. The United Kingdom is 64.83 percent male and 85.23 percent white, while the United States is 68.33 percent male and 85.21 percent white non-Hispanic. New Zealand, a slight outlier, is 81.82 percent male but only 34.78 percent identifying as NZ European (Maliniak et al. 2014). Given what has been shown about the American dominance of the discipline, the insularity of national IR communities, and the gender gap in citations, it is reasonable to conclude that the bulk of the most influential IR scholarship is produced and disseminated by white men in the West (Maliniak et al. 2018; Maliniak et al 2013).

Understanding this relationship can improve IR pedagogy by recognizing how diverse student populations interact with an overwhelmingly white Euro-Atlantic intellectual tradition and by remedying some of the attending limitations such as geohistorical narrowness, state-centrism, epistemological positivism, and phallocentric authorship (Fonseca 2019). In this regard, the taught discipline of international relations should be intellectually responsive to a diversifying discipline and to a diversifying student population. Such circumstances call for a broader approach to teaching courses in a field whose heavy Euro-American centrality can alienate students when their backgrounds are not reflected in the course material. This is not simply a matter of curriculum design that tries to mirror or “look like” the students (Appiah 2019, SR7). Rather, it is one that balances disciplinary foundations with broadened ontological scope of what “matters” in IR in order to generate betterinformed teaching. It is widely recognized that international relations is a very traditional field of scholarship, but this should not preclude perspectives beyond the canon or case studies from outside the empirical mainstream. More ambitious and, especially, diverse content helps adapt teaching to changing student audiences. This is especially true at the undergraduate level. What is important to avoid is the “pipeline problem” that has discouraged women and minorities from progressing through the scholarly ranks in STEM fields (Brown et al. 2016; Branch 2016). By the same token, bringing more and more diverse young students into the discipline of international relations and encouraging their growth can bear intellectual fruit down the line. At very least, we avoid artificially restricting the development of the next generation of scholars.

By no means is this a call to jettison the classics. To the contrary, the field’s canon is irreplaceable as a foundation, as the intellectual inheritance of the present, as the prevailing ideas of foreign policymakers, and as points of disagreement for critical traditions. However, the scope of IR pedagogy can be expanded to make it relevant for a twenty-first century classroom. Primarily, this means expanding the theoretical and empirical scope of international relations beyond its traditional Eurocentric and male-dominated parameters (Acharya 2016). This is discussed below. Granted, there will be no singular population to which an IR curriculum will be pitched. Variation in student population profiles based on race, gender, class, geography, and other identity markers complicate the decisions that an instructor has to make. The point is that there are intellectual gains to be had when the taught discipline takes seriously the social context of international relations’ disciplinary reproduction. With a more diverse pedagogy in place, it is possible that, with more eyes on the subject matter and more minds from different backgrounds at work, the IR classroom can generate greater interest in fundamental theoretical questions for the next generation of scholars to solve.

Institutional context of teaching matters too. The vast majority of IR practice takes place in university institutions. Therefore, the material institutional setting must enter in as a condition of international relations’ intellectual life. Consider first, the matter of basic institutional survival. In an era where public universities around the world face funding problems, there are immediate economic imperatives for taking the taught discipline of international relations seriously. In the short term, survival in unforgiving economic times requires student enrollment and retention (Conley 2019). Systematic accounts of US undergraduate enrollment since the Great Recession of 2008 show majors in the “traditional disciplines” declining by 21 percent (philosophy) to 30 percent (history). Political science and international relations fare less badly, declining “only” by 11 percent and 15 percent over ten years (Schmidt 2018). Put differently, the classroom is on the front line in the battle for resources. Student recruitment and retention are essential to the economic viability of academic departments including political science and international relations. Turning students off the subject matter through an unreflexive pedagogy, boring classes, or mediocre lecturers has real economic implications for the future. Without students prepared to part with tuition dollars, or governments prepared to unlock activity-based funding, no department can thrive, even with a roster of productive researchers. Concretely, this means no new hiring and reduced budgets— a recipe for contraction. In this context, the systematic neglect of the classroom by IR stocktakers is entirely inexplicable given the parlous financial state of most public universities. Trends in expanded enrollment compound or create new problems. Universities that pack classrooms with hundreds, if not thousands, of more students—many of whom are international and pay exorbitant tuition fees—put revenue generation above pedagogy (Schulmann 2019).

The disciplinary division of university labor must be factored into an understanding of the context of IR teaching and its implications for the intellectual life of international relations. In this sense, debate about the taught discipline must grapple with question of resources, division of university labor, teaching assignments, pressures of the tenure track, the precarity of contract faculty, and other aspects of university governance as conditions that influence the classroom. One of the most striking trends in university governance is the increasing role of contingent instructors. In the United States, some 73 percent of instructional positions were nontenure track in 2016 (AAUP 2018). This is consistent with longer-term trends. The percentage of postsecondary instructional positions filled by contingent faculty increased from 57.6 percent in 1995 to 71.6 percent in 2011. In that time, the number of full-time tenure-track positions increased by 10 percent while the number of full- or part-time contingent positions doubled (GAO 2017, 8–9). This is not to say that contingent faculty are worse teachers, but the contingent nature of the work creates impediments to teaching. Fewer institutional resources, the constant need to reapply for jobs, and the need for part-time work outside the university are all matters that detract from time dedicated to students, improving pedagogy, or learning new content. Downstream, the design of an IR class or the delivery of an IR curriculum may not be nearly as effective as it could be.

Intellectual Reflection and Renewal from the Inside Out

Taking teaching seriously as part of the intellectual life of international relations can lead to intellectual renewal and self-reflection for individual professors and for the discipline as a whole. At the individual level, teaching has the ability to catalyze an intellectual renewal in the mind of the individual professor. The intellectual challenges of the classroom can provoke new avenues of research for the instructor. The classroom is a much more permissive intellectual environment than academic publishing. It affords the professor a degree of freedom to explore topics, ideas, and arguments, outside of their research expertise. Making use of the opportunity to teach beyond one’s comfort zone permits thinking out loud, working through ideas, and entanglement in analytical puzzles. Doing so is demanding, and it is much easier to fall back on existing teaching content. But an ambitious teaching agenda can lead to new research questions, new and unexpected intellectual horizons, and better background context for existing expertise. Indeed, there is truth to the aphorism that there is no better way to learn than to teach.

This kind of renewal turns on the “eureka” moment when research ideas flows directly from classroom activities. A more systematic approach to renewal that is less reliant on serendipity begins by asking discipline-wide questions. The first is this: what is the purpose of teaching international relations? It is a variation on a core concern to the discipline and one that remains unresolved (Dyvik, Wilkinson, and Selby 2017)? Is it for disciplinary self-reproduction, to train future practitioners, or more broadly, citizens and knowledge workers in the twenty-first century economy (Darling and Foster 2012; Szarejko and Carnes 2018; Zartner et al. 2018)? Arriving at an official “purpose” for international relations is probably pointless, and it is best left to the decentralized community of scholars to decide. IR scholars have debated this question widely within the published discipline but far less so in the taught discipline. This is a shame because the answers matter for the nature of the design of individual courses and entire degree programs.

Just like the published discipline, the taught discipline is radically decentralized in universities around the world, subnational variations, department-level programs, and individual scholar’s preferences. Thus, it is incumbent on individual professors to give an answer in their own teaching programs. At the individual level, answering the question about the purpose of teaching international relations should outfit students with an answer to what they are about to encounter and why this topic, course, or degree program is worth pursuing. Students, especially early undergraduate students, need to know why they are about to be presented with the complicated theory and obscure events that are core (or peripheral) to the IR discipline. Answers are generously supplied in the introduction chapters to IR textbooks but the suite of options betrays a lack of focus that is symptomatic of the wider field (Albert 2010). However, this permissive intellectual environment is beneficial for wide-ranging intellectual pursuits, teaching styles, and pedagogical agendas. It may, though, come at the cost. The institutional underpinnings of the discipline—faculty administrators, editorial boards, funding agencies, hiring committees, and so on— may end up doing as much to shape the boundaries of the discipline as the substantive output (Albert and Buzan 2017, 908). The alternative, though, is subjecting intellectual and academic freedom to an institutionalized orthodoxy. In teaching, decentralization may be intellectually permissive but may come at the expense of disciplinary coherence.

This concern, though, may be overstated. TRIP data on curriculum design gives an indication of the competing and sometimes overlapping pedagogical priorities among the IR professoriate. In a question on introduction to IR classes, respondents were asked whether their introductory courses are designed more to introduce IR scholarship within the discipline or to prepare students to be informed about foreign policy and international issues. The result favors a mix of both with 80.83 percent incorporating scholarship and issues in some balance. The remaining 19.17 percent come down in favor of one to the exclusion of the other. At the master’s level, the ratio is a bit narrower (73 to 27 percent) but still overwhelmingly embraces a mixture of academic scholarship and international issues (Maliniak et al. 2014). Respondents are a bit more divided on what undergraduate courses should be mandatory in an IR program. They overwhelmingly agree (73.25 percent) that IR theory should be a required subject. However, they differ on other options. The next most popular candidates for a required course are international/global political economy (45.37 percent), international security (38.87 percent), and research methods (35.22 percent), followed by international organizations (27.59 percent), comparative foreign policy (22.86 percent), home country foreign policy (19.95 percent), international law (19.85 percent), diplomatic history (19.11 percent), and international economics (15.17 percent) (Maliniak et al. 2014). The point is that resolving what IR teaching is supposed to accomplish is hardly settled, but there is some convergence on certain issues.

So, what then, is the purpose of teaching international relations? Ultimately, it is up to the individual instructor to answer and to enact a program accordingly. But it is up to the community of scholars to debate. It may well be that the enormous variation in the purpose of teaching international relations and the radical decentralization is an inescapable feature of the taught discipline. Though IR teaching may be wildly divergent around the world, there is always some purpose to it, and, however defined, this is an intrinsic feature of an international relations education. Here, Cox’s (1981, 128) famous admonition that “theory is always for someone and for some purpose” serves as the anchor concept for such pedagogical framing. It frames IR theories as political things and not just abstractions to be memorized or an analytical template to be applied uncritically. Similarly, it helps to frame thematic and empirical cases in the classroom so that course material is not merely a reflection the professor’s unexamined preference. In the classroom, it is up to the professor to articulate. Beyond the classroom in administrative meetings, academic conferences, and in print, it is up to the field to debate.

The next question asks what is the proper scope of IR teaching? This question has also been asked before of the field but not directly about the IR classroom (Albert and Buzan 2017, 898). The answer to this question connects different themes of this article: intellectual rejuvenation and disciplinary renewal, diversity, and the future of international relations as an intellectual project. In substance and in design, the scope of IR teaching should embrace pluralism in paradigm, empirical remit, and criticism. A great deal has been made of pluralism in international relations (Levine and McCourt 2018; Eun 2016), but pluralism in the taught discipline is far different from pluralism in the published discipline, where differences accrue over the merits of accumulation and diversity. Here, the scope of possibility in the classroom is far more intellectually permissive. Teaching international relations can be theoretically and empirically promiscuous. It can respect the canon, its inner logic, and its external life, as well as contemporary alternatives (Ferguson 2015). This is an “integrative pluralism” (Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013, 416) that embraces diversity as a means of “providing more comprehensive and multidimensional accounts of complex phenomena” and a pedagogical engagement with the world that includes, but hardly limited to the Euro-Atlantic theater, that has dominated generations of IR thinking (Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013, 416).

Pedagogical pluralism in international relations flows from intuitions about balancing theory and empirics, the canon and its alternatives, being current while eschewing presentism, being “useful” without being instrumentalist, and drawing on instructor expertise without being constrained by the hyperspecialized knowledge attendant to the published discipline. Of course, this is easy to say. But operationalizing these intuitions into a pluralistic teaching program is much more difficult. Complicating the matter is the relative absence of explicit theoretical guidance for making IR pluralism work in the classroom. The insights of proponents of a “Global IR” can help, including some critiqued above for their neglect of the classroom. In particular, Acharya and Buzan’s (2019, 300–308) program for developing a Global IR provides concrete steps toward curriculum design as much as is does for research.

Regarding the IR theoretical parts of their program, Acharya and Buzan (2019, 301) say that Global IR respects existing theories while “giving due recognition to the places, roles, and contributions of non-Western peoples and societies,” which entails “pluralization within theories, rather than just between them.” There are issues here. First, pluralization between theories requires expanding the remit of IR theory beyond the grand IR paradigms to include non-Western contributions to international thought (Acharya and Buzan 2010; Acharya 2011). But this is not easy. Tickner and Wæver (2009) make it clear that Anglo-American IR looms impossibly large around the world. Without jettisoning this intellectual inheritance, Thinking International Relations Differently (Tickner and Blaney 2012) provides a route to pluralism. That volume interrogates alternative meanings to some of international relations’ central concepts—security, state, sovereignty and authority, globalization, secularism, religion, and the international. A professor committed to this kind of pluralism can expand the conceptual vocabulary of international relations in a way that encourages undergraduate conversancy in multiple IR vernaculars within and beyond the Anglo-American core.

There is also the matter of what do with the existing, Western-centric canon. Acharya and Buzan (2019, 301) also say that a global international relations would subsume rather than supplant existing IR theories and methods. The purpose here is not to displace Western-dominated IR knowledge but to situate it within the global context. This is an entirely attainable objective for an IR theory instructor. IR teachers should have full command of some IR theories while being conversant in nearly all anyway. Integrating a fuller slate of intellectual content into teaching IR theory permits a cognitive pluralism that is rarely available in the published discipline. The point here is that teaching narrowly and to the expertise of professors may suit their interests, but it puts blinders on the students. Upper-year and graduate studies can explore specific pathways, but only after international relations’ map has been presented. This likely means instructors must venture out of their preferred intellectual comfort zones and teach to their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Doing so, however, requires breaking through disciplinary walls and should not be underestimated. It requires breadth of knowledge, disciplinary literacy beyond the scholar’s training, and language skills (usually beyond English) that can take many years to develop, while the imperatives of the published discipline stress specialization.

Regarding the empirical subject matter, a pluralistic IR agenda would ground its empirics in world history rather than just Western history (Acharya and Buzan 2019, 301) This is demanding on an instructor whose subject-matter expertise will be narrow (by dint of academic training) and whose time will be short given other professional and personal commitments. Without considerable effort, this is more of an ideal than a reality. But a good start would be to follow Acharya and Buzan’s (2019, 303) admonition to integrate the study of regions, regionalism, and area studies into the curriculum. In particular, this means offering case studies, examples, and illustrations drawn from parts of the world outside the Euro-Atlantic zone. To this we can add Buzan and Lawson’s (2015) case for expanding the temporal remit of international relations to the nineteenth century. This would break free of the apocryphal founding myths (Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011) and temporal myopia of the orthodox discipline (Buzan and Lawson 2014) in order to draw upon a richer and more global context for the emergence of the modern world. A worldly curriculum will likely begin rather thin, but over time become much deeper and more inclusive. Perhaps more attainable in the short-term is a pluralistic pedagogy that recognizes multiple forms of agency beyond the state and material power. Such an approach would entail a pedagogy addressing a diverse constellation of actors in world politics that offers a faithful representation of an overwhelmingly complex environment without reducing it exclusively to a handful of Western powers.

### IR Good---Short

#### Researching and debating IR teaches critical inquiry that spills out beyond the classroom—it’s not inevitably colonial.

Ettinger, 20—Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Carleton University (Aaron, “Scattered and Unsystematic: The Taught Discipline in the Intellectual Life of International Relations,” International Studies Perspectives (2020) 0, 1–24, dml)

Taking teaching seriously as part of the intellectual life of international relations can lead to intellectual renewal and self-reflection for individual professors and for the discipline as a whole. At the individual level, teaching has the ability to catalyze an intellectual renewal in the mind of the individual professor. The intellectual challenges of the classroom can provoke new avenues of research for the instructor. The classroom is a much more permissive intellectual environment than academic publishing. It affords the professor a degree of freedom to explore topics, ideas, and arguments, outside of their research expertise. Making use of the opportunity to teach beyond one’s comfort zone permits thinking out loud, working through ideas, and entanglement in analytical puzzles. Doing so is demanding, and it is much easier to fall back on existing teaching content. But an ambitious teaching agenda can lead to new research questions, new and unexpected intellectual horizons, and better background context for existing expertise. Indeed, there is truth to the aphorism that there is no better way to learn than to teach.

This kind of renewal turns on the “eureka” moment when research ideas flows directly from classroom activities. A more systematic approach to renewal that is less reliant on serendipity begins by asking discipline-wide questions. The first is this: what is the purpose of teaching international relations? It is a variation on a core concern to the discipline and one that remains unresolved (Dyvik, Wilkinson, and Selby 2017)? Is it for disciplinary self-reproduction, to train future practitioners, or more broadly, citizens and knowledge workers in the twenty-first century economy (Darling and Foster 2012; Szarejko and Carnes 2018; Zartner et al. 2018)? Arriving at an official “purpose” for international relations is probably pointless, and it is best left to the decentralized community of scholars to decide. IR scholars have debated this question widely within the published discipline but far less so in the taught discipline. This is a shame because the answers matter for the nature of the design of individual courses and entire degree programs.

Just like the published discipline, the taught discipline is radically decentralized in universities around the world, subnational variations, department-level programs, and individual scholar’s preferences. Thus, it is incumbent on individual professors to give an answer in their own teaching programs. At the individual level, answering the question about the purpose of teaching international relations should outfit students with an answer to what they are about to encounter and why this topic, course, or degree program is worth pursuing. Students, especially early undergraduate students, need to know why they are about to be presented with the complicated theory and obscure events that are core (or peripheral) to the IR discipline. Answers are generously supplied in the introduction chapters to IR textbooks but the suite of options betrays a lack of focus that is symptomatic of the wider field (Albert 2010). However, this permissive intellectual environment is beneficial for wide-ranging intellectual pursuits, teaching styles, and pedagogical agendas. It may, though, come at the cost. The institutional underpinnings of the discipline—faculty administrators, editorial boards, funding agencies, hiring committees, and so on— may end up doing as much to shape the boundaries of the discipline as the substantive output (Albert and Buzan 2017, 908). The alternative, though, is subjecting intellectual and academic freedom to an institutionalized orthodoxy. In teaching, decentralization may be intellectually permissive but may come at the expense of disciplinary coherence.

This concern, though, may be overstated. TRIP data on curriculum design gives an indication of the competing and sometimes overlapping pedagogical priorities among the IR professoriate. In a question on introduction to IR classes, respondents were asked whether their introductory courses are designed more to introduce IR scholarship within the discipline or to prepare students to be informed about foreign policy and international issues. The result favors a mix of both with 80.83 percent incorporating scholarship and issues in some balance. The remaining 19.17 percent come down in favor of one to the exclusion of the other. At the master’s level, the ratio is a bit narrower (73 to 27 percent) but still overwhelmingly embraces a mixture of academic scholarship and international issues (Maliniak et al. 2014). Respondents are a bit more divided on what undergraduate courses should be mandatory in an IR program. They overwhelmingly agree (73.25 percent) that IR theory should be a required subject. However, they differ on other options. The next most popular candidates for a required course are international/global political economy (45.37 percent), international security (38.87 percent), and research methods (35.22 percent), followed by international organizations (27.59 percent), comparative foreign policy (22.86 percent), home country foreign policy (19.95 percent), international law (19.85 percent), diplomatic history (19.11 percent), and international economics (15.17 percent) (Maliniak et al. 2014). The point is that resolving what IR teaching is supposed to accomplish is hardly settled, but there is some convergence on certain issues.

So, what then, is the purpose of teaching international relations? Ultimately, it is up to the individual instructor to answer and to enact a program accordingly. But it is up to the community of scholars to debate. It may well be that the enormous variation in the purpose of teaching international relations and the radical decentralization is an inescapable feature of the taught discipline. Though IR teaching may be wildly divergent around the world, there is always some purpose to it, and, however defined, this is an intrinsic feature of an international relations education. Here, Cox’s (1981, 128) famous admonition that “theory is always for someone and for some purpose” serves as the anchor concept for such pedagogical framing. It frames IR theories as political things and not just abstractions to be memorized or an analytical template to be applied uncritically. Similarly, it helps to frame thematic and empirical cases in the classroom so that course material is not merely a reflection the professor’s unexamined preference. In the classroom, it is up to the professor to articulate. Beyond the classroom in administrative meetings, academic conferences, and in print, it is up to the field to debate.

The next question asks what is the proper scope of IR teaching? This question has also been asked before of the field but not directly about the IR classroom (Albert and Buzan 2017, 898). The answer to this question connects different themes of this article: intellectual rejuvenation and disciplinary renewal, diversity, and the future of international relations as an intellectual project. In substance and in design, the scope of IR teaching should embrace pluralism in paradigm, empirical remit, and criticism. A great deal has been made of pluralism in international relations (Levine and McCourt 2018; Eun 2016), but pluralism in the taught discipline is far different from pluralism in the published discipline, where differences accrue over the merits of accumulation and diversity. Here, the scope of possibility in the classroom is far more intellectually permissive. Teaching international relations can be theoretically and empirically promiscuous. It can respect the canon, its inner logic, and its external life, as well as contemporary alternatives (Ferguson 2015). This is an “integrative pluralism” (Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013, 416) that embraces diversity as a means of “providing more comprehensive and multidimensional accounts of complex phenomena” and a pedagogical engagement with the world that includes, but hardly limited to the Euro-Atlantic theater, that has dominated generations of IR thinking (Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013, 416).

### Integrative Pluralism

#### Judge the debate through a lens of integrative pluralism—putting theories into conversation through evidence comparison and the burden of rejoinder opens space for marginalized perspectives. Centering debate on the explanatory power of competing worldviews reinforces academic exclusion.

Wight, 19—Professor and Chair of Government and International Relations in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Sydney, Australia (Colin, “Bringing the outside in: The limits of theoretical fragmentation and pluralism in IR theory,” Politics, Vol 39, Issue 1, 2019, dml)

Pluralism for the sake of pluralism seems to lead to an incapacitating relativism, or what Yosef Lapid (2003) calls a ‘flabby pluralism’. A better term might be disengaged pluralism. No claim or viewpoint would seem to be invalid, and theorists are free to pursue their own agenda with little or no contact with alternative views. This is a disengaged pluralism because there is no attempt to specify the relationships between theories or to examine one’s own theoretical position in the light of alternative views. The absence of an agreed unity of method would also entail that the standards by which the various theories are to be judged would be internal to the theory (Jackson, 2011; Smith, 2004). This would be a disengaged form of pluralism with each theoretical perspective legitimating its claims solely on its own terms and with little reason to engage in conversations with alternative approaches. It is the kind of pluralism that finds its political expression in apartheid. Despite the intense theoretical debate that followed the ‘third debate’ (Waever’s ‘fourth’), IR now seems to have settled into an uneasy truce based on theoretical pluralism/fragmentation. Indeed, in some respects, the validity of the ‘ism’s’ themselves have been called into question (Lake, 2013). Analytical eclecticism (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010) now seems to be the mantra of the day. The question remains as to whether we simply embrace this fragmentation or attempt to work towards a more coherent view of global processes. My own view is that we should attempt to move towards a position that I will term ‘integrative pluralism’ (Mitchell, 2003). Integrative pluralism is not an attempt to forge competing knowledge claims into one overarching position that subsumes them all. It is not a form of theoretical synthesis (Kratochwil, 2003), nor is it a middle ground that eclectically claims to take the best of various theories to forge them into a ‘grand theory of everything’ (Wendt, 1999). Integrative pluralism accepts and preserves the validity of a wide range of theoretical perspectives and embraces theoretical diversity as a means of providing more comprehensive and multi-dimensional accounts of complex phenomena. This is not a suggestion that a summation of the various theoretical claims will produce a complete account; we could not know when any account was complete. Moreover, engaging in integrative pluralism carries risks, and some theories may not survive. In the course engagement, some theories may ultimately be rejected, and others may undergo substantial change and modification; hence, it is not a form of relativism. Which theories contribute to our overall stock of knowledge and which fall by the wayside, however, is not an issue that can be resolved solely in the heat of metatheoretical debate. The ultimate test of integrative pluralism will be practice, but this is a practice that cannot even begin unless we have some sense of its problems, possibilities and practicality. Current theoretical debate in the discipline does not seem conducive to this discussion and theories seem to function as identity markers within a social system suffused by battles over resources and power. Understanding the different forms of pluralism is essential in terms of opening up space for global voices to enter the IR conversation. If mainstream, mainly Western, dominated IR theory struggles to listen to alternative voices from within its own limited inter-paradigmatic frameworks, then there is little chance that it will be open to non-western voices. In addition, if non-western global voices enter the terrain on the terms already set by the fragmentation of the ‘isms’ then opportunities for serious dialogue will be limited. Given the potential for non-western voices to reconfigure IR theory along new and interesting lines, it would be a disaster if those voices adopted the frameworks that have stymied serious cross theoretical debate thus far. Indeed, the current theoretical landscape that confronts new entrants to the discipline might be one factor that increases their exclusion. Those global voices will have a greater potential of not repeating the mistakes of the past if they have a sophisticated understanding of the structural configuration that has produced ‘isms inertia’. Getting around the current theoretical impasse will require an explanation of how it arises and an account of the limits, problems and potentials of theorising in IR. I suggest four main factors help explain theoretical fragmentation in the discipline. First is ontology. The contemporary international political system is best understood as a complex open system, which displays ‘emergent properties’ and degrees of ‘organised complexity’. Because all human systems have this form, they require a plurality of explanations to deal with phenomena at differing levels, and the complex differentiation of causal mechanisms within levels. Since theory is a process of abstraction, and since we cannot isolate particular mechanism in the manner of some of the natural sciences, then some form of theoretical pluralism is necessary and to be expected. Yet some of the natural sciences face a similar situation and have not regressed into a state of rampant theoretical fragmentation. So, complexity is not a sufficient explanation. Second, is the academic division of labour, which compartmentalises knowledge into zones of expertise, which in turn, structurally impedes the development of interdisciplinary research needed to explain complex systems. Third, is the structure of IR as an academic discipline, which using a framework developed by Richard Whitley (1984), I characterise as a ‘fragmented adhocracy’. Whitley views reputation as the currency of an academic discipline. A fragmented adhocracy is marked by a low degree of reputational interdependency between competing research groups, with few organisational impediments regarding the choice of theoretical framework, research methodology or even core problematic. As a consequence, the research activity within the field proceeds in an arbitrary, incoherent and at times ad hoc manner, with few sustained attempts to integrate new research with the existing configuration of knowledge. In such an intellectual structure, the potential for integrative pluralism is low. The fourth reason, however, is the most important, the most problematic, and I suspect the most difficult to change. This is the issue of epistemology, and in particular disciplinary accounts of its place in the practice of science. My argument here is simple: The way IR currently understands the issue of epistemology, is confused, incorrect and a severe barrier to serious debate across differing theoretical perspectives. I refer here to the widespread view that positivism, postpositivism, rationalism, constructivism, feminism and postmodernism, for example, are epistemological positions. For instance, according to Markus Kornprobst: The deepest and most consequential disagreements in the field are epistemological. Both the so-called ‘third debate’ (Lapid, 1989) between positivists and postpositivists and the ‘communicative stasis’ (Lapid, 2003: 130) that has succeeded it, speak volumes about the divisiveness of assumptions on how to produce knowledge. (Kornprobst, 2009: 87) And for Steve Smith: the key difference between rationalist and reflectivist approaches is that, broadly speaking, rationalist accounts are positivist, whereas reflectivist approaches oppose positivism … for now it is enough to note that the central differences between rationalist and reflectivist accounts are epistemological and methodological, and only secondarily about what the world is like (ontology). (Smith, 2010: 5) This account treats the debate between positivists and postpositivists as a debate between competing epistemologies. This is an error; positivism is not an epistemology but a philosophy of science. Moreover, the idea of a ‘feminist’ epistemology or a postmodern epistemology makes no sense. At best we might talk about feminist methods or postmodern methods. However, to ask of a positivist for example, ‘how do you know X’, and to receive the reply ‘because of positivism’ is not an epistemological position it is a statement of identity. As John Gunnell (1998: 7), argues ‘epistemology, properly construed, is I will maintain a post-hot enterprise contingent on substantive theory and scientific practice’. Yet rarely, if ever, are we told why the differences between positivism and postpositivism are legitimately treated in epistemological terms? Never is it explained why epistemologies cannot be integrated and/or combined; apart that is, from vague allusions to incommensurability (Wight, 1996). This is to misuse and abuse the term epistemology. It is a misuse and abuse of the term because epistemological positions do not operate as the a priori discontinuous and discrete entities this view suggests. I take it as given that the argument about complexity is a given. Likewise, the adverse effects of the academic division of labour in terms of impeding interdisciplinary work are not in doubt. Hence, the article will concentrate on the relationship between current understandings of epistemology and the structure of IR as an academic discipline. These two aspects are mutually reinforcing. Current understandings of epistemology in IR reproduce the disciplinary social structure, and the disciplinary structure reproduces the current understanding of epistemology. Before proceeding, however, a clarification on the issue of science. My position is based on what is known as scientific realism (Psillos, 1999). According to scientific realism, there is no such thing as the scientific method that can be applied in all domains and across all subject matters. Science is not one thing it is many. There is no one scientific method, and each science needs to orientate its methods according to the specifics of its object domain. How we study sub-atomic particles will require different methods to how we study human societies. For the sake of expediency, I will merely define science as the attempt to come to understand and/or explain the chosen object domain through systematic and critical inquiry.

### No Prior Questions/Root Cause

#### Sweeping theories can’t explain policy decisions—if they can, then our framework link turns their offense.

Rose, 21—editor of Foreign Affairs (Gideon, “Foreign Policy for Pragmatists,” Foreign Affairs, March/April 2021, dml)

Theories of history, fundamental beliefs about how the world works, are usually assumed rather than argued and rarely get subjected to serious scrutiny. Yet these general ideas set the parameters for all the specific policy choices an administration makes. Know an administration’s theory of history, and much of the rest is easy to fill in.

There are a lot of possible theories of history, but they tend to fall, like Bush’s and Trump’s, into two main camps: optimistic and pessimistic. Thus, the Clinton administration followed its own version of happy directionality—think of it as Bush with less muscular Christianity. And there have been earlier believers in Trump’s dark and stormy night, as well.

Unfortunately, given the stakes of the question, no one really knows whether the optimists or the pessimists have the better case. Political theorists have fought about that for centuries, with neither side winning. A few generations ago, modern social scientists joined in, generating and testing lots of theories in lots of ways, but still, neither camp bested the other. And then, in the last few years, history got interesting again and erased some of the few things the scholars thought they had learned.

As individuals, presidents have had strong views on these matters. As a group, they have not. American foreign policy is notorious for its internal tensions. Its fits and starts and reversals do not fit easily into any single theoretical framework. Yet this pluralism has proved to be a feature, not a bug. Precisely because it has not embraced any one approach to foreign policy consistently, Washington has managed to avoid the worst aspects of all. Blessed with geopolitical privilege, it has slowly stumbled forward, moving over the centuries from peripheral obscurity to global hegemony. Its genius has been less strategic insight than an ability to cut losses.

By now, it seems fair to say that the debate between the optimists and the pessimists will never be settled conclusively, since each perspective knows something big about international politics. Instead of choosing between them, the new administration should keep both truths in its pocket, taking each out as appropriate.

Learning in U.S. foreign policy has come largely across administrations. President Joe Biden’s goal should be to speed up the process, allowing it to happen within an administration. Call it the Bayesian Doctrine: rather than being wedded to its priors, the administration should constantly update them.

The way to do so is to make theorists, not principals, the administration’s true team of rivals, forcing them to make real-world predictions, and to offer testable practical advice, and then seeing whose turn out to be better in real time. In this approach, searching intellectual honesty is more important than ideology; what people think matters less than whether they can change their minds. Constantly calculating implied odds won’t always win pots. But it will help the administration fold bad hands early, increasing its winnings over time.

### Rejecting IR Fails

#### Rejecting IR scholarship as praxis creates openings for far-right cooption. There is no single disciplinary impulse within IR.

Michelsen, 21—Department of War Studies, School of Security, King’s College London (Nicholas, “What is a minor international theory? On the limits of ‘Critical International Relations’,” Journal of International Political Theory, Vol 17, Issue 3, 2021, dml)

The problem of synthesis stalks all self-defining Critical approaches to IR. Defining the terms of reference for intellectual dissidence in relation to IR’s ‘disciplinary crisis’, as the poststructuralists did in viewing critique as a function of disciplinary marginality, created conditions ripe for viewing any competitor theory as problematic to the degree that they can be deemed insufficiently minor (Whitehall, 2016). The idea that critique necessitates moving ‘beyond IR’ as an inherently majoritarian project has become a widely expressed trope. The result is that Critical IR theorists now engage in increasingly virulent disagreements over the political and ethical implications of disciplinarity itself. In perpetual abeyance, claimants to Critical IR become hostages to a continuous risk of being exposed as insufficiently pure of the (modernist, racist, colonial, patriarchal, heteronormative, positivist, capitalist) traces of ‘the major literature/discipline’. At the same time, Critical IR scholars who advocate for a disciplinary exit in search of ‘more Critical’ inter-disciplines have found themselves wrestling with the charge of pre-judgement: Since they appear to know what ‘Being Critical’ will look like after de-disciplinarisation, critique takes the form of testing whether other scholars meet these pre-given criteria (Holden, 2006; Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2020).

This stream in contemporary IR scholarship ignores the manners in which minor theories, far from tending towards alliances, are often set to contradictory political and ethical purposes. And that the visions of world politics created by scholars ‘moving beyond’ disciplinary IR can be just as problematic as visions already settled within the discipline. Contemporary political and social movements borrow intellectual resources from various (once or still) minor theoretical traditions in IR to think against a ‘Globalist’ world order, incorporating the Gramscian position that ‘politics is downstream from culture’, the ideal of a transgressive emancipatory identity, and the critique of neo-colonialism (Love, 2017; Nagle 2017). The philosopher Alain De Benoist wrote his manifesto for the New Right in the year 2000 with the aim of challenging the oppressive implications of major international theories, especially Liberalism, borrowing widely from resources of minor intellectual critique (de Benoist and Champetier, 1999). This theory is marginal in disciplinary IR, but influential amongst populist politicians like Putin, Trump, Orban, Salvini and Le Pen, as well as online communities of Race Realists, western chauvinists, and white nationalists. It proposes that Liberalism destroys the autonomy of ethnicities and cultures, and that the history of the west has been one of ongoing cultural as well as political colonialism. De Benoist’s argument is that the project of decolonisation is incomplete, and continues through international aid and UN-led Liberal paternalism.

The answer proposed by the New Right is to restore a truly independent status to diverse cultures and indigenous world-views in International Relations, and suggest that people belonging to these ‘birth-cultures’ must actively work towards their national and cognitive emancipation from all the baggage of Liberal modernity, if necessary, through violently closing borders. The New Right claims its intellectual marginality vis-à-vis Liberalism or Globalism (understood as the ideological representative of modernism in international thought) is a marker of its virtue. The New Right is not, however, widely viewed as a ‘Critical ally’ of Decolonial IR theory.

A claim to minor theoretical status is also visible amongst reactionary theorists of gender, including online groups of men’s rights activists, western chauvinist militias like the Proud Boys, or traditionalist ‘family values’ movements (Nagle, 2017). These groups develop an operative concept of the radical intellectual margins as central to their understandings of critique, and of the emancipatory relationship which their critique has to hegemonic theoretical frameworks that they perceive as oppressing them: Liberalism or ‘Cultural Marxism’ (Nagle, 2017). These actors see their critiques of what they term ‘gender ideology’ as part of a necessary escape from the straightjacket of modernist categories, currently hegemonic in contemporary academia. In other words, the belief that transgressive or marginal theory is emancipatory has diverse advocates, whose antimodernism or anti-hegemonism comes with divergent attitudes to gender, race, culture, economics, social, political and international organisation.

The sociological implications of this point were anticipated, but not fully developed, by Katz (1996: 488), who noted that:

‘talk of exclusion can lead to an unsavory hierarchy of marginalization – a kind of competitive victimology – and even to the cul-de-sac of an essentialist identity politics. Notions of exclusion are all about, one might even say tautologically about, position, and if we are not careful they can lead to relativist accounts that offer little of practical value. And they can be disingenuous – proclamations of exclusion by scholars who are quite included’.

The historical moment facing critique calls us to recognise that minor theories infer no allied ethics or politics. There is no cohesive and abiding sovereign ‘logic of modernity’ that forms the superstructure of disciplinary IR, and gives assurance that the postdisciplinary avant-guard will share an understanding of virtue. The romanticism characteristic of self-describing Critical intellectual cultures that arose in IR in the immediate Post-Cold War context must now be reconsidered. Many of the same intellectual tools are now being effectively mobilised by reactionaries, racists and gender absolutists. Contemporary reactionaries have read their Deleuze, their Gramsci, their Derrida and Foucault (see Land, 2012), and they are cognisant of the discursive logic and rhetorical power of, for example, concepts of exclusion, identity, precarity, marginality, hegemony, the avant-guard, victimhood and indigeneity (see Michelsen and De Orellana, 2019).

The challenge facing scholars in IR who seek to write in the service of vulnerable groups, like migrants lacking a safe home state, those who do not fit with heteronormative gender roles, or the victims of racism, is that their reactionary theoretical interlocutors have recognised the power in claiming to be uniquely reflexive critics, intellectually marginal vis-à-vis dominant theoretical assumptions about IR. The category ‘Critical IR’ provides no tools by which to counter these relativistic arguments. In this context, the belief that ‘Being Critical’ requires a minoritarian exit from disciplinary IR may be a distraction from developing methodologically and epistemologically rigorous critiques, that can be communicated as such. Faith in the emancipatory intellectual margins brings to mind Latour’s (2004: 225) worry that self-describing ‘Critical’ scholars today are like ‘those mechanical toys that endlessly make the same gesture when everything else has changed around them’.