Questioning the Logic of International Relations: (neo)-Realist Theory, War and Globalization

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ABSTRACT

Academic disciplines have planet-like qualities to them. Like planets in a galaxy they revolve around pathways that engender routine and sometimes predictable outcomes. These are made possible by domesticated modes of academic analyses, knowledge construction, production and "truth" verification. Academic disciplines also privilege topics, questions and frames by which to ascertain what is worthy of intellectual inquiry. In sum, they are bounded by worldviews, theories and epistemic structures into which current and future generations of students are socialized. Overtime, academic disciplines become fossilized or insulated to maintain a distinct interest and purpose. That is, they become fiercely defensive sub-systems that seek to blunt criticism or sometimes absorb challenges into its logic. In this paper, I argue that International Relations Theory (IRT), and more specifically realist/ neo-realist perspectives are deeply implicated in the violence and injustice that permeate relations between countries, communities, peoples, cultures, and religions of the world. And, its sub-discipline, International Political Economy (IPE) has similarly contributed to a process of "globalization" that favors the rich and like realist theory uses war and violence to maintain itself. Together, they have constructed a global political economy that is deeply colonial and predicated on age, a youth-driven culture, class, gendered and racialized hierarchies and disparities.

Introduction

International relations theory (IRT), and Euro-American theories, in particular, having been born in the inter-war years of World War I, and World War II, are predicated on a Hobbesian "state of nature" presumption. In doing so, IRT has succeeded in constructing an image of a discipline and a world whose logic is driven by the quest for "power" against a backdrop of "self-help," "anarchy," and a conflict-prone, survival-based international system. Accordingly,

"states" become the most important actors in a "state of nature" political environment where rational political actors struggle over "power" in pursuit of national security interests.

In this paper, I argue that IRT, and more specifically realist/ neo-realist theories are deeply implicated in war, violence and injustice. And, that war and violence against formerly colonized and now marginalized peoples in the global economy remain distinct attributes of international relations - even international law is implicated in this campaign (Jeng 2012: 24). I also argue that international political economy has similarly contributed to a conceptualization and process of globalization that favors the rich and likewise uses war and violence to maintain itself. Together, they have erected a political-economic edifice predicated on age, a youth driven consumer-culture, class, gendered and racialized hierarchies and disparities.

Scholars of IRT, I contend, must rebuild/ re-conceptualize IRT to embrace at its core the quest for social and economic justice and an epistemology/ ontology that gives voice to the voiceless. In other words, listening to native, as well as other silenced voices, without mythologizing or essentializing a constructed "other" not only offers us a critique of realist and neo-realist theories of IR but helps frame an alternative discourse that contradicts realist claims concerning survival, anarchy, and conflict as constitutive of international relations (Chowdhry and Nair 2002: 27). Consequently, IRT must recognize its elitist, classist, racialized, gendered and colonial dispositions and question a system-wide logic that makes male domination and violence against women possible. This has resulted in contemporary forms of resistance, and recovery that include the "One Billion Rising" protests, anti-globalization protests, as well as other forms of agency and resistance expressed peacefully and through oppositional political violence, worldwide. To a large degree these alternative voices and visions proceed from postcolonial perspectives. Coates argues:

> Out of the struggles of peoples from diverse backgrounds, in diverse geographical and diverse political situations- a new discourse of oppression was born. This new discourse cannot be subsumed into a single monologue, but is indeed a discourse of many voices and, thus, visions. On one side, this vision is born out of an attempt to understand the diverse histories of postwar anti-racist and post-colonial movements. These revolutionary discourses, generated by the oppressed themselves, articulated an anti-racist -anti sexist perspective that viewed racism and sexism as intricately interwoven by race and gender as essential aspects of being. This particular discourse linked the struggle to class based struggles. (Coates 2013:1).

IRT and IPE have been particularly dismissive of these discourses and where it paid attention, it was to assess them for their lack of theoretical and empirical rigor. For the most part, these discourses were dismissed for being purely driven by ideological considerations, and as a result contributed little to the study of IR and IPE. Informed by the Behavioral movement of the 1960s, many scholars in IR and IPE emphasized a search for patterns to highlight differences and to discover similarities (Feste 1994:43). Thus, Behavioralism and its proponents employed the quantitative approach or "scientific method" to arrive at verifiable, falsifiable and ultimately generalizeable conclusions and findings.

Rather than an emphasis on moral prescriptions or policy recommendation, scientific inquiry sought to explore, describe, explain and predict events in the world through properly gathered and widely supported empirical evidence- using correspondence with the "real world" as the ultimate test of any proposition (Feste 1994: 43). Consequently, students of IRT that utilized the "scientific method" to study global political and economic relations, for the most part, did not focus on women or investigate the gendered, racialized, classist and colonial structures of world politics and its oppressive effects. Rather, the focus and pride of place in political science and IRT, in particular, remained *power*, *rationality*, a *self-help* international system in a "state of nature" and anarchical political landscape. In this dog-eat-dog political environment self-interested *unitary* states pursued national security goals.

It is argued that IRT's emphasis on the aforementioned social constructs of international politics (*Power*, *rationality*, *self-help*, *anarchy*, *unitary state*, and *security*) legitimize violence, war, domination and control of the constructed "other." These so-called attributes of the international system were and are also closely tied today to the systems of neo-colonial oppression in that they silence even erase social and political organizations and narratives of the colonized (Beier 2002: 83).

This has to do, in part, with the low representation of women, Hispanic, black and other groups in the academy, generally, and in international relations, specifically. And even where representation of these groups and women increased marginally in recent years in the U.S., many because of training or quest for recognition and a conscious effort not to rattle the cage remain (ed) trapped in dominant and not dissenting theories and methods of inquiry (Feste 1994: 51).

Paradoxically, the behavioral revolution of the 1960s coincided with the rise of feminism, the modern civil rights movement in the US, as well as Africa's decade of independence. Publication of Betty Freidan's *Feminine Mystique*, Malcolm X's autobiography and works by other black activists that included W. E. B. Dubois, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi- all precursors of the 1950s and 1960s anti-colonial revolutions never attracted the attention it deserved in IRT. Rather, IRT was concerned with and or engaged in violently containing or suppressing these movements and ideas.

IRT's fixation on order in an anarchical system, especially in distant colonial or semi-colonial outposts where "anarchy," obtained contributed in no small measure to the Cold War, the Algerian War of independence, Vietnam and formerly held Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique. These wars would persist into the so-called post Cold War era to implicate IRT, as a status-quo theory concerned primarily with control, domination and use of war and violence to maintain socially and economically constructed hierarchies.

Almost forty-five years ago, Roy Preiswerk had noted:

> It is as legitimate and necessary today to study race as a distinct factor in international relations as it has been in the past to isolate other basic forces which determine the behavior of groups and result in conflict (Persaud 2002: 56).

Since then analysis of race had been increasingly broadened to include problems of gender, identity, culture, ethnicity, and even nationalism. What appears to unite these perspectives, among others, is their emphasis on their social construction. Yet Western Feminist, and orthodox IR scholarship, as well as other critical approaches in IRT have also been critiqued in as far as they articulate a particular cultural perspective, and as a result become important planks of Western hegemony. Another connective tissue in recent scholarship is the broad-based attack on essentialism, foundationalism, universal rationality and epistemic hegemony in IRT (Persaud 2002: 57).

Coates sums it well when he said:

> An alternative vision was articulated by both feminist and activists, again born from and within the anti-colonial and civil rights movement which were just the opposite. According to this discourse, race and gender based cultures were created by groups in their efforts to resist and counter racism and sexism. Hence, these cultural forms were

central in combating the negative identities and realities constructed by racist and sexist epistemic processes. These alternative models provided stigmatized groups vehicles for recreating social relationships and social identities that served as buffers to the harsh realities of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, Jim Crow, and segregation (Coates 2013:1).

In sum, academic disciplines, like theories, are lenses or frames that provide scholars a means by which to make sense of the world or construct it. Academic disciplines also suggest ways of organizing data, topics- topics such as family, power and equality. These are defined and situated differently relative to other topics and relative to their centrality or distance from key concerns of the discipline (Wilson and Frasure 2007:7). To a large degree, Sociology and Anthropology focus on group dynamics, whereas Psychology focuses on the individual just as political science focuses on power, the state and not so much on youth. Allow me to address the issue of youth since it is an important part of the proceedings.

IRT and IPE subsume youth within categories that include but not limited to workers, soldiers and students. Why is there not a youth focus in IRT? After all, given IRT's focus on the causes and consequences of war and since it is the youth rather than the old that are warriors, understanding their location in the armed forces (and informed by race and gender concerns) and their output of violence must be carefully analyzed. This is because it is typically the young, poor, and less educated who flock to the lower ranks of the armed forces not your well-to-do, educated and of higher socio-economic standing. It is this demographic and poor youth, in particular, that are more likely to face combat, die or sustain harrowing lifetime injuries.

Questioning the Logic of IPE and Globalization

It is in the economic sphere and more specifically in IPE where youth as a category are deemed important. First, as workers, consumers of goods and services; second as producers of fashion; and thirdly, as symbols of all that is desirable in a consumption-youth driven global capitalist economy. It is the youth in countries like Bangladesh, India, and China that toil at sweatshops at slave-wage rates to produce the Nike shoes, banana republic, and Gap clothing that their wealthier counterparts in the West and elsewhere wear, and in doing so, help sustain high profits margins for these companies, Wal-Mart and companies like them.

It is the youth and young women, in particular, who work the Economic Processing Zones (EPZs) of Latin America and the Caribbean and who are routinely subjected to sexual assault and violence. It is older men sex traffickers that prey on innocent young girls, women and boys in cities throughout the world. It is young women from Colombia who transform from being workers in flower shops and factories into drug-mules (carriers) by swallow pellets of cocaine which they excrete, sanitize and deliver to consumers through middlemen in the US. It is young girls and women the world over like Malala from Pakistan who suffer unthinkable violence for simply wanting an education, or sexually violated for wearing a dress. It is also innocent young girls who are routinely circumcised in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The logic of patriarchy that privileges males over women, rape and other forms of physical and psychological violence, must be questioned and halted. I suggest that these are not separable from economic and cultural globalization.

Yet it is also the youth that inspired and continue to inspire social change in society. Take "Occupy Wall Street," the Anti-globalization Movements, for example. It was the young who openly began conversations on the negative effects of hyper-globalization, greed, endemic inequality, violence and war, just as their earlier counterparts did against the Vietnam War, the Gulf Wars and others like them. These wars, in later decades would be justified on the basis of Huntington's "clash of civilization" thesis.

The questions we must raise and hopefully answer are: how sustainable is the underlying and overt logic of a global capitalist economic that is predicated on war, race, class and gender inequality? How much longer must the logic of globalization require the routine sacrifice of the young to the gods of war in order to maintain high profit margins and economic hegemony? Young people the world over continue to question and problematize a process of globalization that favors the rich and marginalizes the poor. It is the youth who remind us of income inequality and the increasing concentration of wealth generated by market exchanges and the need for governments and institutions to address redistribution of wealth, resources and opportunity (Sobel 2013: 9).

In this so-called liberalized global economic environment, it is transnational corporations that have come to dominate global commerce. The 500 biggest of these TNCs have a combined income of over 15 trillion dollars, while daily currency flows easily exceed 2 trillion. The impact of these exchanges is that the economic prosperity of all countries more than ever is

heavily dependent on what they import and export, the flow of investments in and out of these countries, and exchange rates of currencies (Rourke 2008: 3).

Economic globalization, according to the "Washington Consensus" is a tidal wave that potentially lifts all countries into prosperity. When countries reform, i.e., restructure their economies to enhance comparative and competitive advantage, reduce trade barriers, devalue currencies, remove subsidies and increase exports against a backdrop of privatization, and a minimalist state system, they stand to prosper. There is little evidence to suggest that "conditionalities," led to improved economic policy or performance. Rather, they have had adverse economic and political effects the consequences of which include indebtedness, dependency, unemployment and capital hemorrhage (Stiglitz 2006: 46).

Economic globalization with its tremendous potential for good, and it has been good for some, has been hijacked to serve special interests. It professes an "End of History" ideology that rationalizes a global, as well as national economic systems that are driven by hyper consumerism, hegemonic control, and unequal exchange. It is maintained by a strategy of divide and rule, war and violence, especially against those who oppose it (I will return to this theme later). Rather than interdependence, it has increased dependency; rather than development, globalization has deepened the divide between the North and the South, as well as restructured poverty to transcend the traditional North/South divide into a new Global North and Global South configuration.

Rather than the peace dividend expected after the Cold-War, globalization has inspired war and violence, captured best by the current campaigns of the "war on terror," which proceeds from ideological justifications provided by some scholars of IRT including Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations," and notions of the "West against the Rest." Today, Islam has emerged as the only transnational force able to resist America's homogenizing power on a global scale (Baker 2012: 519). Thus, Liberal theories of IPE, as well as theories of international relations are complicit in the construction and justification of current and past global political orders.

Yet concerns over globalization extend beyond its economic consequences. War, the global "war on terror," and the surge in violence against women, as well as prostitution, human-trafficking, and domestic work may very well represent the underbelly of economic globalization. Together, they represent a prominent feature of globalization, as well as the commodification and racialization of women's bodies (Agathangelou 2002: 143). Thus, the

sexual labor and use of women's bodies and their violation cannot be viewed in isolation from the global political economy and responses against it. Yet in spite of the increase in the global sex trade and tourism, the two major schools of IPE, Liberal internationalism and Gramscian political economy, by focusing on the upper circuits of the global economy, similar to Realist theory's focus on the state, have ignored the movements of female workers and their relationship to international tourism, military bases worldwide, and capitalism (Agathangelou 2002: 143).

Questioning IRT/IPE and the "War on Terror"

The First and Second Gulf Wars against Iraq in early 1991 and in 2003 were efforts at reasserting U.S. hegemony in the region, even if the more obvious outcome was access to Middle East oil (Ssenyonga 2009: 36). The "war on terror" indeed represents continuity in the post- 9-11 era of insidious and ubiquitous war machinery in which so-called terrorists and innocent civilians are killed, sometimes by remote-controlled drones- some call it collateral-murder. The 9-11 attacks, unconscionable as they were, have been used to redefine U.S. foreign policy along neoconservative lines. The Bush policies emphasized unilateralism, unlimited objectives and the transformation of U. S. foreign policy strategy into global political-military imperialism (Janowski 2008: 39).

  While President Barak Obama has softened both the conduct, if not the content, of U.S. foreign and military policies, his deployment of drones, and Guantanamo Bay's (GITMO) continued use as a detention facility for so-called "terrorists," points to the continuity and preservation of the Bush policy, specifically, and Western policy, generally. It is, therefore, important to understand that the "war on terror" is seen by many in the Muslim world, as part and parcel of a hegemonic global political economy infrastructure- a realization of the "West against the rest," thesis, generally, and the "West against Islam," specifically. It should be noted, however, that President Obama's decision to end the Iraq war, and his exit strategy in Afghanistan by way of gradual troop withdrawals to culminate in the end of the war in 2014, is a bold attempt at reigning in U.S unilateralism and unlimited objectives under his predecessor.

  While communication technologies have had a tremendous impact on economic globalization- global trade, financial and currency transactions, as well as income inequality,

concerns have also arisen over its other non-economic outcomes. One such outcome is globalization's potential of homogenizing identities and cultures worldwide. The spread of major U.S. food chains, music, fashion, movies and English, in sum, American capitalism and culture, has produced two outcomes. The first is outright resentment and rejection of American culture because of its assumed de-culturalizing and corrupting effects on cultures and peoples. And, the second is one of embrace of these same American cultural artifacts. Thomas Freidman captures this phenomenon well:

Globalization in so many ways is Americanization; globalization wears Mickey Mouse ears, it drinks Pepsi and Coke, eats Big Macs, does it computing on an IBM laptop and Windows 98. Many around the world can't get enough of it, but others see it as a fundamental threat (Ssenyonga 2013: 34).

Dubbed American cultural imperialism, these reactions are clearly in response to the unprecedented export of American culture worldwide. The backlash has been tremendous and ranges from bans on English words in the French Language, as well as limited airtime devoted to American music, to violently targeting Americans and anyone perceived to symbolize "Western values." The violent attack against Malala, the young school girl from Pakistan for simply advocating girls' education, to acts of violence against Christians by Boko Haram (Western education is evil) in Northern Nigeria and other forms of oppositional political violence in the Middle East, are cases in point. These acts of violence, in particular, are perhaps the most obvious manifestations of deep-seated resentment against globalization and arise, in part, from U.S. economic dominance, as well as its foreign policy.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that resentment against U.S. economic hegemony and cultural imperialism is limited to religious zealots in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The "Occupy Wall Street Movement," as well as the numerous demonstrations waged by anti-globalization protesters against globalization at G-8 meetings; the apparent loss of American prestige and resentment against Americans, in general, among U.S. strongest allies in Europe, especially during the Bush era, and the War against Iraq, suggest that these perceptions of American imperialism are real. Jack Lang, a former French minister of culture warned: "the disappearance of languages and cultural forms is the great risk today. Diversity threatens to be replaced by an international mass culture without roots, soul, color, or taste" (Sobel 2013: 8).

Another aspect of American cultural imperialism that has also generated resentment, especially in Muslim-majority states, and to some degree in countries where Christians form part of a complex, and sometimes tense religious mosaic is the ubiquitous growth and increasing presence of Christian churches, missionaries, faith-based NGOs, and televangelists. What is perceived as a constant barrage of activity to "save" non-Christian "heathens" from their ungodly religious practices through Jesus Christ, as the only "savior," is deeply troubling even among liberal Muslims and traditionalists. Yet ironically, the quest to convert non-Christians is occurring at a time when there is a raging "war on terror" in which Muslims and Muslim countries are targeted for attack, demonized and constructed as the new "enemy." The convergence of these anti-Muslim/Islam waves is seen in the wider *Ummah* as calculated.

Today, in fact, there is a visceral association between Islam and Muslims, on one hand, and "terrorism/ terrorist," on the other. And, while both President Obama and his predecessor, President George W. Bush have argued to the contrary, the reality of U.S. and Western attacks on Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the saber-rattling/ chest-pounding that greeted Iran's nuclear program, is not lost on many Muslims. The less well-known cases of Muslim attacks in India, Thailand, Philippines, and Myanmar (Burma) add to the perception of a global "war against Muslims."

In the same vein, the U.S. is a secular state and a country with deeply enshrined constitutional principles, that include the "separation of church and state," and a tradition and practice of religious freedoms and tolerance. These deeply held American freedoms complicate U. S. relations abroad partly because many Muslims and Muslim-majority states do not subscribe to the separation principle or worldview. Thus, commercial media creations in the U.S. or the West, in general, that are seen as denigrating Islam and its Holy Prophet, Muhammad, are misconstrued as part and parcel of U. S. policy, specifically and U.S. cultural imperialism, generally. Therefore, perceived U.S. Government inaction, over and beyond condemnation, may well have added fuel to smoldering fires that accompanied the violence.

What is clear from this brief discussion is the fact that the U.S. is the single most dominant hegemonic power on the global stage even if other sites of power like the EU, China, India and Brazil exist. U.S. military might, economic dominance, political democracy, its communication conglomerate giants, as well as its iconic cultural institutions that include the Oscar Awards, the Super Bowl, its great institutions of higher learning, represent the most visible signs of American "hard" and "Soft" power. Primarily shaped by the U.S, following the

end of World War II, these economic and political features are what have shaped this stage of contemporary globalization.

Therefore, the Americanization of globalization and American values, in particular, during the 20th and in the early decades of the 21st centuries, are the source of admiration, imitation (the highest form of praise), and resistance. At the same time U.S. economic power has also generated unprecedented wealth, improved lives, reduced economic and cultural barriers, optimism in American democratic ideals, traditions, and practices, as well as a belief in a better future.

Concluding thoughts

I want to close by briefly suggesting that the understandable fascination or revulsion with and against American-led globalization is not new or unique in the history of human affairs (Sobel 2013: 9). Significant cross-border economic cultural exchanges have existed for many centuries. Muslim control of the Arabia Peninsula, Islam's spread into Andalucía to Central Asia, Africa, to name a few, was a form of globalization in itself. The spread of Islam and Arab-led globalization had both good and not so good political, economic and other consequences just as American-led globalization does today. In the West, the Dutch became the first commercial and financial hegemon in the 1600s. They propelled the expansion of global trade and market exchange making Amsterdam the international financial center just as New York is today (Sobel 2013: 8).

Britain and London would replace the Netherlands and Amsterdam as the center of global economic interaction by the 1700-1800s. In subsequent years, and lasting over a century, Britain dominated the seas and succeeded in building a vast global empire. The British at the time, like Americans today were loved, feared and resented. British hegemony would fall, in part, because of overreach, internal economic dislocation, and challenges to its economic dominance by no other than the U.S., and the rise of nationalism in its colonies. And from the ashes of the British Empire was born U.S. hegemony of the early 1900s to now.

Therefore, the mixed responses to a U.S. led globalization, is neither new nor unexpected. They are outcomes of systemic forces that are not inherent to America or Britain and yet still, American culture, per se, but are part and parcel of a capitalist logic that thrives on unequal

exchange, power asymmetries, incentives, rewards and sanctions that include war and violence. A less obvious plank of the infrastructure of hegemony and globalization are the cultural artefacts and ideology, more importantly, to rationalize and provide cohesion, manufacture consent (Chomsky, 2003) for the status-quo. Euro-American theories of IR arose just around the 1900s as the U.S. ascended to global prominence to make sense of its new role in the world.

Theories of liberal political economy are not any different. They are part and parcel of the infrastructure of American-led globalization following World War II just as earlier rationalizations of the "White-man's burden," made popular by Kipling were spurred by Darwin's "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest." These ideologies were used to justify and legitimize enslavement of Africans and others deemed less human. These theories were inspired by philosophers like Hegel, who like Fukuyama spoke of the "End of History" (Saine Aidoo, Hess 2012).

In sum, theories of IR and IPE are for a purpose and for someone (Cox 1981). The epistemological questions that spawn topics and issues they privilege, i.e., the quest for knowledge driven by the "scientific method" to explain, possibly predict, and I might add, "control" are not foreign or extrinsic to the system's logic for preservation of domination. Indeed, they help regulate, silence, absorb, normalize or neutralize counter-hegemonic narratives and movements deemed threatening to the very existence of the system itself. To this end, state typologies in political science and their economic counterparts that rank countries according to reified economic indicator ensure hegemonic stability, order and predictability. For the most part, "knowledge" production is often driven by these power dynamics - thus the power and knowledge nexus. These often are the basis for academic journal rankings and who gets published in these academic outlets will often depend on how closely the topic(s) and discourses support, to some extent, the dominant frames of a discipline.

In sum, young people throughout the ages serve as the warriors and sacrifice life and limb in defense of states. Yet it is also youth who also serve as agents of change, the moral compass of nations through their agency to recover and widen political and economic spaces and discourses through protest, oppositional violence and self-immolation. The Arab-spring was to a large measure set alight by the courageous defiance of a young man against a repressive state and regime in Tunisia. This act of ultimate resistance was to have a contagion effect that was to engulf North Africa, and the Middle East, the consequences of which are still being felt today.

The implication here is that in both mature capitalist democracies and less democratic and impoverished economies, social policies, some by design or neglect or both, have systematically excluded the poor and young. As a result, young people are overwhelming represented in sex work, human trafficking, and suffer disproportionately from personal violence, unemployment and imprisonment (Sallah 2007: 25). Recent killings in Newtown, Connecticut, as well the raging war between rival Black gangs in Southside Chicago, rapes in India, Congo, Russia, South Africa , and racial harassment of black students in British schools call for urgent policy initiatives to arrest this pandemic (Rupra 2007: 100).

Theories of world politics are not isolated from these events and must engage institutionalized, "state violence," against gendered, racialized, colonized and semi-colonized, as well as advocate for the passage and strengthening of existing laws to curb domestic violence. Equally of importance is the need for IRT and IPE to recognize that peoples, cultures and communities situated in past European and American empires have their own histories and traditions of socio-political organizations and inter-national interactions, which predate the advent of the European colonial state. Thus, the continued and particularly distorted representation in IRT and IPE of these peoples and cultures make both complicit in colonial erasures (Beier 2002: 82).

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