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## Pluralising International Relations with the Global IR Agenda

**Abstract:** How global is International Relations really? The discipline of International Relations (IR) has long been criticised for its Eurocentric foundations and perspectives. At the International Studies Association (ISA) Convention in 2014, the ISA President, Amitav Acharya, promoted the novel Global IR agenda. Constituted of six dimensions, the Agenda seeks to globalise the IR discipline. This article will first define International Relations, linking a broad definition to the root of Eurocentrism within the discipline. It provides three reasons as to how Eurocentrism remains a problem for the IR discipline. It will then outline the six dimensions of the Global IR Agenda: (i) pluralistic universalism; (ii) a grounding in world history; (iii) integration of Western and non-Western theories; (iv) integration of regionalism and area studies; (v) renouncing of exceptionalism; (vi) and recognising multiple forms of agency. A brief evaluation of the Agenda suggests there are at least five potential obstacles for Global IR. The objective of this article is to promote the Global IR Agenda in its attempt to make the IR discipline more inclusive for ideas, scholars, and regions.

**Eurocentrism in International Relations**

There are three arguments to suggest that IR is a Eurocentric discipline: (1) its imperial origins in nineteenth-century Europe; (2) the prevalence of the myths of 1648 and 1919 which suggest European superiority of ideas and concepts; (3) the application of Western theories on a universal basis and ignoring local divergencies and interests. There is some literature which assesses American dominance over the IR discipline, however, that is not the focus of this article as it is another issue entirely (Hoffman, 1977:41). This article primarily seeks to promote the need for the Global IR Agenda by providing evidence of continuing Eurocentrism within the IR discipline and furthering the case of how and why the Agenda should be implemented into mainstream IR, such as by introducing undergraduate students to Global IR within the first year of their degrees (Powell, 2019:12).

How International Relations is defined as a disciplinary field is evidence of its parochial Eurocentric focus. The discipline is often defined as having a focus on war, states, and international anarchy (Jackson and Sørensen,2013:33; Kayaoglu, 2010:193). It has unacknowledged origin roots in nineteenth-century imperial Europe (Acharya and Buzan, 2019:49; Kayaoglu, 2010:194). When European states began to establish their empires across the globe, the discipline of International Relations began to forge with the specific focus of empire construction and maintenance. In addition, the infamous 'standard of civilisations' was constructed and used as a determinant by European states to declare which states were worthy and which were not, of joining Europe's society of states – that is a collection of Western European states bound by the norms of territorial sovereignty and non-intervention (Kayaoglu, 2010:194). Thus, the IR discipline, in its mainstream form, has its origins in a racist and superficial ideal of the human race which capitalised on empire construction (Acharya and Buzan, 2019:38). It is important to understand what IR is about as a field because the topics of mainstream IR – states, war, and empires as a form of political organisation – originated with European empires in the nineteenth-century and only in the twentieth century did the focus of the discipline begin to shift to humanitarian concerns.

IR is Eurocentric because of its disciplinary origins in imperial Europe but its Eurocentric tendencies are supplemented with the myths of 1648 and 1919 (Carvalho, et al. 2011:755). It is these dates that mainstream IR uphold as the keys to Europe's superior history. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War of Europe and helped to formulate what we now know as the sovereign nation-state. This unit has now swept across the globe, leaving no area unaffected. After establishing the Westphalian state model in the seventeenth-century, Europe claimed superiority over other regions, for its invention (Kayaoglu, 2010:194). The myth of 1919 advocates the disciplinary origin of IR with the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth University in Britain. With this momentous occasion, IR was born with the ultimate noble goal of understanding war to prevent it (Carvalho, et al. 2011:746; Hobson, 2012:133). The myth of preventing war is only one side of the story. Concurrently, a wave of anti-colonial revolts was threatening to tear down Europe's empires. It is argued that the real focus of IR in 1919 was to stop Europe's empires from collapsing but this is not what is presented to students of IR (Hobson, 2012:134; Powell, 2019:8).

The well-known theories of IR – Realism, Liberalism, and the English School – are presented as being universal in nature, despite having their origin in, and only applying to Western Europe. These theories advocate that Europe has perfected political organisation with the state and thus no other contributions to IR theorising are necessary (Acharya and Buzan, 2010:21). When undergraduate students are first introduced to theories of IR, they are taught about Western theories, but they are not taught of theories with origins in China, India, Africa, Latin America or anywhere else (Powell, 2019:12). How can a student be expected to understand the construction of the world with such a limited toolkit of analysis? To have a global understanding of the world, a greater diversity of theories is required for a deeper comprehension of international relations. There are a plenitude of national and regional schools and approaches to IR that are not yet included in mainstream IR (Tickner and Waever, 2009).

Three reasons have been provided which suffice to explain how Eurocentrism has distorted the IR discipline. This context is important for understanding why Global IR is necessary. For a subject that specialises in understanding international systems, the Eurocentric metanarrative has prevented any realistic or truthful understanding of the modern international system whilst also 'privileging certain theoretical perspectives' and ignoring others (Powell, 2019:8). Furthermore, students of IR are not taught the reality of the racist and unjust origin of mainstream IR (Kayaoglu, 2010:195; Powell, 2019:8). The Eurocentric framework has not allowed for a healthy discussion regarding world order and alternative worldviews; thus, it has prevented IR from becoming a truly insightful discipline about the construction of world order.

**The Six Dimensions of Global International Relations**

The Global International Relations Agenda was advocated in 2014 by Amitav Acharya at the annual conference of the International Studies Association (Acharya, 2014:647). The International Studies Association (ISA) is an organisation that promotes communication and research between scholars from around the globe in the field of IR. Thus, it is the perfect arena to make progress on such a novel idea. Acharya's primary goal is to make IR more inclusive and pluralistic (Acharya, 2014:657). Moreover, the Six Dimensions should act as broad guidelines for anyone who seeks to bring positive change to IR. The Six Dimensions which constitute the Agenda consist of: (i) pluralistic universalism; (ii) a grounding in world history; (iii) integration of Western and non-Western theories; (iv) integration of regionalism and area studies; (v) renouncing of exceptionalism; (vi) and recognising multiple forms of agency (Acharya, 2014:649).

Mainstream IR is founded upon a monistic universalism (Acharya, 2014:649). This entails that European ideas and history are universal, whilst the existence and importance of non-European histories is discredited. This is abundantly clear in the construction of IR textbooks; namely, the significant attention given to European history and the lack thereof on the history of other regions (Powell, 2019:12). According to Acharya's Global IR agenda, a more inclusive discipline should be founded upon a pluralistic universalism, which acknowledges the existence of multiple points of origin of International Relations around the

globe (Acharya, 2014:650). This first dimension serves as a basis for the other dimensions because the entire discipline needs to be pluralised. There should be no limits to diversity in academia. Recent scholarship has declared pluralism to be, 'the most promising strategy for furthering research and the production of knowledge' within IR (Kratochwil, 2003:126). This refers not only to a theoretical expansion of thought but a geographical expansion with the incorporation of more scholars from the Global South and underrepresented areas (Eun, 2016:6). It is important for IR to develop a pluralistic foundation because this reflects the realities of the world and the people within it. The reality is that there are 'multiple foundations' of IR around the globe, established at different points throughout time (Acharya, 2014:650). Mainstream IR remains Eurocentric by only discussing one pinpointed origin in Europe in the seventeenth century.

Global IR should be grounded in world history. This requires acknowledgement and representation of both European and non-European histories, including the voices and ideas such histories include (Acharya, 2014:650). Global IR seeks to understand and map out all possible histories, rather than presenting one local history as being universal, as in the current Eurocentric form of the discipline (Acharya and Buzan, 2019:303). This dimension is part of a larger project on world or global history (Naumann, 2019:336). The first step is to eradicate the idea that the history of Europe is in anyway superior. Students of IR should be taught the histories of multiple regions simultaneously, through themes: political organisation, war, civilisation, cross-cultural integration, to name a few. Like the study of regionalism, scholars should work towards teaching and learning of histories in a comparative respect. Every region and civilisation have certain events which help to outline their international relations and that is what should be taught. A perceived challenge to this dimension is defining 'global' or 'world history' (Naumann, 2019:338). There is no one universal history that sums up humanity. There are multiple overlapping regions with diverse and unheard histories regarding their own sphere of international relations (Tickner, 2011b:5).

To understand the global development of international relations, theories have to be formulated in order to develop patterns of analysis and understanding. Mainstream IR is dominated by theories that were formulated in nineteenth-century Europe in application to European societies and international relations; namely, Realism and Liberalism. They have been applied on a universal basis to other regions and societies without enough consideration of local divergencies. In some cases, scholars of the Global South have applied Western theories to local cases, however, in other cases, completely new theories have been constructed to understand and formulate local conditions. Referring back to the first dimension, it is important to recognise and respect the diversity in theory formulation and application.

Undergraduate students are often introduced first and only to Western theories of IR (Powell, 2019:1). Again, the question is raised, how are students expected to understand the construction of order on a global scale with such a limited toolkit of analysis, that only applies to a few states in the West? A novel attempt has been made to collect a global account of IR scholarship by Arlene Tickner and Ole Waever (2009) but few other attempts have been made since. The book covers IR scholarship from Latin America, South Africa, Africa, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Southeast and South Asia, Iran, the Middle East, Russia, as well as, East and West Europe (Tickner and Waever:2009:4). To reconstitute a pluralistic

discipline, students should be taught about ideas and theories from all over the globe, specifically, the national and regional 'writings of classical political, military, and religious figures, thinking' as well as 'the work of Asian scholars who have applied Western IRT to local contexts' (Acharya and Buzan, 2007:287). This is how future scholars become more knowledgeable about local interests and ideas from other regions.

Global IR 'integrates the study of regions, regionalisms, and area studies' (Acharya, 2014:649). This is an opportunity to broaden the focus of International Relations and introduce students to concepts bigger than the state. The name 'Global IR' might appear to encompass only a global perspective and dominate the various regional perspectives, but the Agenda seeks to do the opposite. It aims to give regional actors a louder voice in IR. In addition, Global IR attempts to make mainstream IR less theoretical and more practical (Acharya, 2014:650). A notable study on the importance of regions summarised: 'no serious engagement with the comparative study of global processes can avoid the specificities of place, time and cultural form' (Appadurai et al, 1997:1). As a topical issue for Global South scholars it is important that Western scholars pay more attention to the power dynamics that affect the Global South. Regions are important actors on the global stage regarding the international political economy, contested borders, and global governance. By neglecting the study of regionalism and regional actors, mainstream IR neglects a critical component to what is happening in international relations, leaving scholars and students unprepared for changes in the world.

Acharya (2014) states that 'cultural exceptionalism and parochialism' must be avoided in the formulation of a Global IR (Acharya, 2014:650). In academia this can refer to theories and ideas; but it also refers to nationalities and the possibility of ethnocentrism, as has been seen with the case of Eurocentrism (Acharya, 2014:648). In this case, European IR, which has become mainstream IR, has judged other cultures and their ideas on the basis of evolution of European culture and disregards anything that is not founded on European ideas. Kayaoglu (2010) argues that European ethnocentrism has been upheld through the maintenance of the Westphalian narrative by IR scholars. Only when the foundational myths are removed from the discipline, will an inclusive and global discipline begin to shape itself (Kayaoglu, 2010; Tickner, 2011b:5). A pluralistic outlook must ensure equality in diversity. No theory or culture should become so dominant that other theories or cultures are disregarded. European exceptionalism still exists arguably because European states have held the upper hand over the international system. With the changing role of the state and rising influence of developing countries in the Global South, this power dynamic is significantly changing. With this change, the field of IR must adapt.

Finally, Global IR recognises multiple forms of agency (Acharya, 2014:651). Looking back to the nineteenth-century and the creation of a European international society, European states denied agency to non-European states and entities (Acharya and Buzan, 2019). Non-European societies were not deemed worthy to have entry into Europe's civilisational and cultural fortress. It has only been with the waves of decolonisation throughout the twentieth century, that former colonies have reclaimed their agency on the foundation of sovereign nation-states. According to Acharya (2014) agency exists in much broader forms than this one example (Acharya, 2014:651). Other examples are ideational agency and normative action (Acharya, 2014:652). Ideational agency is an alternative conception to material

agency. It refers to abstract ideas and theories regarding perspectives of the world and how order is shaped by various actors. Normative action refers to how local and regional actors create norms or react to norms created by other actors. One example is how recently developed states have responded to the norm of Westphalian sovereignty (Acharya, 2014:650). Nevertheless, there are multiple so far misunderstood actors of change and agency within the field of IR.

## Challenges for the Global IR Agenda

Thus, we have the six dimensions of the Global IR Agenda, however, there are at least five perceived challenges to achieving this transformative turn for IR. These are (i) defining regions; (ii) dominance of the English language; (iii) institutional bias; (iv) new forms of exceptionalism; (v) and creating an overwhelming discipline.

Acharya (2014) uses the phrase 'regional worlds' to encapsulate the complexity and autonomy of regions, such as Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East (Achara, 2014:647; Halliday, 1989:42). There are overlapping security, political, economic, and cultural relationships that have the potential to constitute a region. There is no simple understanding of what a region is and there never will be because of the dynamic and everchanging relationships between states and non-state actors. At present, there are scholars working independently on power dynamics within their own regions, however, more comparative work on regions would be more effective in pursuance of a more global IR. The ISA is a key actor in furthering research and discussion between scholars on regions and areas. Following on from Acharya's guidelines, the understanding of a region needs to be taken on a case by case basis rather than a one-definition-fits-all situation, in order to understand the diversity that exists within and between regions (Acharya, 2014:650).

The English language connects most of the Western world and thus creates a route through which to discuss IR (Freidrichs, 2004:8; Acharya and Buzan, 2007:297; Acharya, 2016:12). This barrier needs to be broken down, from both sides, in order to increase the number and influence of exchanges regarding IR scholarship. Translation of key influential texts is one obvious answer. IR began to develop as a field in Japan in the late nineteenth century and an influential text was published in 1893 (Acharya and Buzan, 2019:55). There is also the famous Sun Tzu and the *Art of War* from China. Whilst undergraduate students of IR are first taught about the development of Western international theory, moving through Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Marx, which have all been translated into English, a selection of other non-Western names could be added to the list with the aim of making any introductory course a more global introductory course (Powell, 2019:12).

The publishing aspect of IR as an institution is dominated by Western voices. This is exemplified by two factors. The first is the low number of publications found by non-Western scholars in mainstream IR journals, including the *Journal of International Affairs* and *World Politics* (Aydinli and Matthews, 2000:290). In a study of seven US-based IR journals, 15.25% of contributions came from outside the US and 3.28% came from outside the West (Aydinli and Matthews, 2000:293). The second fact is the lack of non-Western scholars on editorial boards of the same journals (Acharya, 2016:12). If IR journals aim to represent

the diversity within the field, then they should seek to diversify their scholarship and editorship. One suggestion could be to use quotas to ensure a certain number of publications are written by scholars from outside of the West and a certain number of non-Western scholars are seen on editorial boards of journals; thus, more perspectives can be integrated.

There is a risk that development of national or regional schools of IR could lead to a new form of exceptionalism (Acharya, 2014:651). Mainstream IR is founded on the belief of European exceptionalism, but Global IR must be based on equality of diversity, to avoid one nationality or school of thought becoming too powerful and dominant (Acharya, 2014:651). One component of cultural exceptionalism is the enforcement or belief in so-called universal values. For Europe, this was the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state. For China, these values are justice and equality (Zhang, 2011:309). It is important that present IR scholarship does not lead down any path of exceptionalism.

Whilst Global IR may not seek to change the focus of IR, it seeks to integrate more perspectives; with more perspectives comes an increase in the list of potential matters for the IR discipline. The last critical expansion of IR in the 1980s introduced gender, race, and the environment to the agenda. Pluralising the discipline involves adding regionalism and potentially the study of civilisations amongst other matters that might not yet be known by Western scholars. Nevertheless, there is a risk of the IR discipline becoming overwhelming and unnavigable.

**The Future of the IR Discipline**

This article has sought to discuss and evaluate the novel attempt to reshape the International Relations discipline with the Global IR Agenda. This approach is formulated of six dimensions which each in their own way seek to pluralise the discipline by removing the Eurocentric biases that have for so long distorted the discipline, and by building more ideas and voices from non-Western sources of knowledge. Only with all voices heard can the discipline truly understand the world and formulate theories about world order. Moreover, to make IR more inclusive, it needs not only to bring in more voices and ideas from the Global South, but to disassociate itself from the distorting Eurocentric myths of 1648, 1919. These myths glorify European history and theories and neglect to represent the importance of other regions. Whilst these Eurocentric myths arguably form the foundation of the mainstream IR discipline, the six dimensions of Global IR should be used as a new foundation in replacement of the Eurocentric metanarrative.

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