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THE FORUM

Discussion of the Forum

A conversation between Arlene B. Tickner, Andrew Hurrell and Amitav Acharya

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What is the difference that plurality makes to conceiving of international relations?

Arlene B. Tickner

The interrogation of difference and the quest for what it might mean to do International Relations differently have been at the heart of a dissident scholarly agenda within the field for several decades. Various forms of critique rooted in historiography, sociology of knowledge, and approaches such as feminism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, decolonial theory, Black radical theory and indigenous theory have underscored the myopic nature of IR's self-narratives, the negative implications of U.S. and Western dominance, and the link between positivism as the sole gauge of scientific knowledge and epistemic violence. Additionally, the study of scholarship outside the North/West has shed light on the potential mismatch between key concepts, categories and theories, and the lived experiences of world politics outside the core. A shared concern with the marginalization and erasure that are practiced by the discipline has been at the root of most of this work, as have calls for thematic, theoretical and epistemological opening with an eye to making IR more plural, if not more "global".

And yet, as pointed out by nearly all the contributors to this Forum, processes of knowledge production and disciplining within International Relations and more generally, the academy are such that the more we look for difference the more we find "sameness" in local variants of the field, observable in their state-centric, status

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quoist and Eurocentric nature. As argued most forcefully by Krishna and Hamati-Ataya, the global South is no exception in that it too operates as an echo chamber for dominant ideologies.

The question of "why" this is the case is an important one. On the one hand, global political, economic and ideational structures lend themselves to a type of IR worldwide that can hardly be considered alternative. On the other, deeply entrenched disciplinary logics work at cross-purposes to myriad practices of knowing deemed to be beyond the pale of both the field and of dominant understandings of science.

Andrew Hurrell

I would also stress exactly this point. For several of the contributors, the problem is that the socializing pressures of the international political system, international relations as a set of institutionalized practices and narratives, and IR as a site of academic knowledge production have done their job all too well. As Inannna Hamati-Ataya puts it so nicely: "Indeed, the more we search for "difference", the more we find the same IR reproduced everywhere: state-centric, utilitarian; driven by national, regional or international interests formulated and mediated by political and intellectual élites; shaped by dominant ideologies reflecting existing distributions of power, authority and wealth". A very similar point is made by Sankaran Krishna: "... the discipline's statism and eurocentrism do not simply vanish as it spreads to Asia, Africa or Latin America, but is often strengthened". There is also a strong shared sense across the Forum that simply adding in 'new voices' or 'alternative perspectives' does little to solve the problem. This form of 'inclusion' either cements existing forms of exclusion or creates new ones: Global IR in this sense runs the risk of effectively reproducing the very problems that it claims to solve. Audrey Alejandro raises the crucial question: Who gets to be the political and intellectual agent of 'IR diversity management'?

Amitav Acharya

Lately, I have had lots of contact with IR scholars outside of metropolitan areas of the Global South, in my alma mater in Odisha, Ravenshaw University (yes, a still-standing colonial name after the British governor who caused a famine but then did lot of good) India which has a new IR program, as well as regional universities in China, Indonesia, India, Turkey, South Africa. How do they fit within into geo-cultural pluralism? They do not seem to share the same interest as the metropolitan institutions (being 'periphery of the periphery', to use Galtung's term). Yet, the IR community in these countries, as well as we scholars like myself who are positioned in the West (even if originally from a Global South background), or are based in metropolitan centers like Washington, DC, London. Delhi and Beijing seem to set the revisionist agenda for IR. How pluralistic or universal is this?

Is "geocultural" the right word to get at the politically inflected plurality of conceptions of international relations?

Arlene B. Tickner

Interest in the "geocultural" dimension of IR/ir became fashionable in the early 2000's. The term originated largely from sociology of social science and post-positivist theories that both underscored the idea that the social situatedness of knowledge was attributable to the political, social, geographical and cultural environments in which distinct knowers were inserted. By extension, "geocultural epistemologies and IR," a name under which a group of scholars located across the world collaborated for a time—including myself and several other authors in the Forum—were premised on the expectation that particular experiences of the international would expose the field's provincialism, produce a decentering away from its Eurocentric, Northern and U.S. moorings, and provide a broader and fairer picture of global politics.

As suggested previously, exploration of academic practices across a geographical axis has uncovered a fair degree of similarity rather than plurality, given that peripheral, global South or non-Western IR scholarship normally maps onto an already existing global discipline.

A second route, which consists of examining how categories such as the state, order, conflict, security, globalization or the international travel and get rearticulated in distinct geocultural settings, has led to fairly analogous results, particularly when such work is conducted from within IR's own disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, as Seth points out, the fact that the field is anchored mainly in the twin concepts of anarchy and sovereignty reproduces a distorted cartography of the world and knowledge of it, in which self-contained territorial states are at the center, even though culture, territory and modern statehood do not map neatly onto each other anywhere. Echoing this view, Shani too argues that difference and pluralism should not be conceived exclusively nor primarily in terms of the nation-state or "territory" as conventionally understood, suggesting instead that we re-envision worldly affairs in terms of inter-cosmological relations.

The lack of diversity exhibited by most geoculturally based conceptions of International Relations constitutes just one potential shortcoming of this particular strategy for seeking out diversity and difference. However, the contributors highlight several other pitfalls that the push for geocultural pluralism carries, beginning with the risks of essentialism and exclusion, discussed by Krishna and Bilgin, respectively. While the former lends itself to the celebration of nativist forms of knowledge and methodological nationalism, the latter entails assimilation resulting from the inclusion of different ways of knowing and being within the largely tokenist framework of liberal pluralism. Also, when difference and "authenticity" are projected onto the non-West or global South, Alejandro observes the very real risk that the geocultural diversity "solution" to Western/Northern dominance may undermine the very (scholarly) communities that it seeks to emancipate. Eriksson Baaz and Parashar make the further point that by taking Eurocentrism as the anchor to which

postcolonial and decolonial scholars attach, by way of critique, their reimaginings of the global, they too run the risk of reproducing the very hegemony they are trying to undo.

Amitav Acharya

I completely agree with Arlene Tickner here, and if this is how "geocultural pluralism" is defined, I am all for it. It resonates with Global IR, to which she made pioneering contributions, even if she does not use the term.

But I just want to be careful about non weaponizing the "cultural" in "geo-cultural". Sometimes, terms such as "geocultural", or "non-Western" or "Global IR" can be associated with "nativism" and "ethnicism" or "civilizationalism". For instance, Alejandro, in an earlier book, took issue with my invoking of Gandhi and Fanon. I had argued in a 2000 essay that in IR "alienation occurs when one is asked to view the world through a Waltzian, Gramscian, or Foucaldian prism instead of a Gandhian or Fanonian one" (Acharya, 2000, p. 10). Quoting this line, Alejandro wrote, "this posture is not only damaging intellectually, it is also flirting dangerously with ethnicism" (Alejandro, 2018, p. 182). Does by evoking Fanon one become "ethnicist"? If so, then what about post-colonial scholars, who owe so much to Fanon? What then of "geocultural pluralism" or any attempt to draw upon indigenous societies and non-Western thought?

I never thought of Fanon's writings as "ethnicist", or "nativist", a term Alejandro also uses to describe the work of IR scholars in India who draw upon Indian history, both ancient and fairly contemporary. She (mis)labels this as doing "Global IR". In reality, very few Indian scholars use the term Global IR to describe their work, and calling them as such is deeply problematic. Moreover, there is no evidence that all those who use "culturalist" knowledge are working as official mouthpieces or reinforcing academic hierarchies; most do not. And one can find examples of these tendencies in scholars influenced by Western philosophy and ideas.

Those from India (like me) or Deepshikha Shahi who do use Global IR, do so exactly the opposite way than Alejandro's labeling suggests. They explicitly point to and call against exceptionalism. For example, Shahi's edited volume, *Sufism: A Theoretical Intervention in Global International Relations* (2020), takes Sufism not as a "nativist" Indian tradition, but as a transnational movement. In a presentation to American University's Global IR Dialogues on 24 March 2020, she took profound exception to being labeled a "nativist".

I am concerned that even critical and reflexivist approaches such as that of Alejandro's that label that call Global South scholars "nativist" (a term associated with British colonial racism in India) and "ethnicist" may be viewed, despite good work and good intentions, as carrying out but another way of silencing Global South ideas and scholarship of people like Shahi or Navnita Behera, who have drawn on the work of pre-colonial Indian thought in their writings on IR theory.

At the same time, indigenous history is important. We hear much about "decolonizing" IR these days, but one cannot do this without studying the history and

culture of non-Western civilizations. This has been a key argument and goal of Global IR from its inception. As Eleanor Newbigin (2019) argues, decolonizing history (or IR or any branch of social sciences and humanities) means exploring why and how ideas that inform and dominate these disciplines "emerged and continue to shape our understanding of not only the world under European empire, but *also before that*. Indeed, a fundamental part of undoing the blinkers of colonised history is to teach more widely and actively about *attitudes and world views that existed before European empire,* while thinking about why and how these came to be sidelined later on" (emphasis added) (Newbigin, 2019).

Andrew Hurrell

I very much agree with the danger of reinforcing essentialisms. This is the point made in the Forum by Sankaran Krishna, namely 'the risk of celebrating nativist forms of cultural essentialism'. The danger is that the search for 'non-western' ideas and for regional and cultural 'perspectives' on global order has its own limits. Uncovering the culturally specific character of different ways of understanding the world might serve to encourage greater pluralism and reflexivity. But it can also lead to a cultural and regional inwardness that works to reproduce the very ethnocentricities that are being challenged.

But I would also highlight the danger of diverting our attention away from the changing global. The search to understand what is distinctive and different has involved a retreat from the global, or at least a reliance on a thin and one-dimensional characterizations of the dynamics, forces and logics at work at the global level. Given the very power of the global, there are no longer (if there ever were) any non-Western country, regional or cultural perspectives that can be gathered together in any straightforward or unproblematic manner. To this one might add the point made by Audrey Alejandro, namely that academics working outside the Western core do not wish to be viewed simply as the purveyors of culturalist knowledge—not least given the extent to which this move reinforces academic hierarchies.

Now all imaginaries, narratives, and specifications of the 'global' are always going to be partial, contested and problematic. It is clearly the case that Western power was inextricably linked to particular narratives of the global, above all the claim that Europe was the site of a unique universalising modernity that was destined to go global over time. And it is also all too evident that the continued inequalities of knowledge production mean that current and future debates about the global are very likely going to privilege particular voices and sites of power.

But the global is unavoidable, given that there are objectively powerful global and systemic dynamics that are shaping the future of our common humanity: global capitalism, geopolitical conflicts arising from the dynamics of the international political system, ecological change, technological development, and so forth. And to these we might add systemic complexity leading to potential global catastrophic risks. Natural and human systems display high levels of dynamic complexity, characterized by non-linearity, multiple feedback loops and unpredictability. To use the

phrasing of Inanna Hamati-Ataya, we—all we's—have little alternative but to try to increase "our understanding of our conjoined and also synchronous world".

This will certainly involve alternative conceptualizations of the world and of global order. But does it invalidate the field's traditional emphasis on inter-state relations and on international society? There are several reasons why it should not.

The first is that, although the languages of traditional IR sound the same—state, sovereignty, nationalism, self-determination, intervention—the unfolding of a global international society demonstrates that they are not. Concepts never travel unproblematically. There is a great deal of co-constitution and there are many apparently 'external' challenges to western order whose actual character is deeply conjoined—the globalization story is not a neat history of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as Giorgio Shani notes. Sanjay Seth highlights the importance of the move from empire to nation state. But he also opens up a much broader conversation as to why this move is anything but straightforward. On one side, he stresses the importance of empires not nation-states, and Giorgio Shani talks of empires as 'masquerading as nation-states'. I prefer to see the major actors of post-1800 IR as imperial-nation-states followed by hybrid political formations which link hegemonic power with would-be national cores (as in the US, Russia, or China). The changes within and between these polities and the combination of hegemony with inter-state and inter-imperial anarchy—not the privileging of one over the other—open up conceptual and historical richness which undercuts natural homologies. Pinar Bilgin is surely right to argue that geo-cultural pluralism without these complex and inter-locking histories (of both West and non-West, center and periphery) will entail exclusion at the moment of presumed inclusion. In addition, the many 'roads not taken' during the process of decolonization provide a rich store of intellectual and normative resources for thinking about alterative notions of globality and of global justice.

Second, as noted most strongly by Maria Eriksson Baaz and Swati Parashar, it is "essential to recognize that there have been significant changes to the global landscape over recent decades". One difficulty with much post-colonial writing is that it remains focused on a single axis of hierarchy and has trouble in coming to terms with the diffusion of power and agency and with the reconstitution over time of new patterns of stratification and hierarchy. This is not a right or wrong question, but one that varies by issue. In some areas, we are seeing the welcome increase in the political salience of a number of post-colonial issues—such as colonial atrocities, reparations for slavery, demands for the restitution of plundered objects. But in other areas claims about historic injustice have moved in a different direction. In climate change negotiations, for example, demands focused on historic injustice have become markedly less central to the positions of China, India or Brazil than they were twenty years ago.

Finally, and here I may differ from other contributors to this special issue, I have to confess that I have never thought of International Relations as being about the whole of global politics. It does not seek to encompass, "nor represent the entire stock of perspectives on world politics" (Ianna Hamati-Ataya). Audrey Alejandro talks of IR as "an academic discipline whose contentious raison d'être is to produce a knowledge capable of representing the whole world." But is this correct? Some of us concentrate on this 'traditional core' for two reasons: First, the international

political system has been characterized by immense violence and by persistent patterns of stratification and exclusion. Second, for the first time in human history, it has come to constitute a single political system that provides, for all its faults, a still unavoidable basis for political order.

The global political order is—alongside capitalism—one of the cojoined evil twins of western modernity. But it has never been the whole of global politics. There are, of course, many other ways of thinking about the possibilities of human emancipation. But it is wrong to see mainstream IR as utilitarian and only obsessed with power and interest, and without an interest or willingness to think of 'developing alternatives' as Audrey Alejandro claims. Martti Koskenniemi captures very nicely the tension between the messy and power-cementing role of international law and society on the one hand and the importance of the practice of law and of legal argument in expressing and debating collective projects on the other (Koskenniemi, 2012, p. 25).

Amitav Acharya

It is valid and important to recognize some of the dangers of relying too much on culture and history and be wary of essentialisms. But equally important, one should not use this as a blanket pretext for denying the legitimacy of contributions from Global South scholars or area specialists that are grounded in indigenous culture and history. The challenge is to find ways of discouraging essentialization or its close relative, "exceptionalism" while encouraging diversity and pluralism. I would call it "pluralism sans essentialism" or "pluralistic universalism".

In building such pluralism, whatever one calls it, non-Western, post-Western, Global, "geocultural", Chinese School, etc., one "must eschew cultural exceptionalism and parochialism. Exceptionalism is the tendency to present the characteristics of one's own group (society, state, or civilization) as homogenous, unique, and superior to those of others. Claims about exceptionalism frequently fall apart not just because of the cultural and political diversity within nations, regions, and civilizations. Such claims reflect the political agendas and purposes of the ruling elite, as evident in concepts such as "Asian Values," "Asian human rights," or "Asian Democracy"—which critics rightly associated with authoritarianism. Similarly, exceptionalism often justifies the dominance of the powerful states over the weak. American exceptionalism, seemingly benign and popular at home, finds expression in the Monroe Doctrine and its self-serving global interventionism. One strand of Japan's pre-war pan-Asian discourse—founded upon the slogan of "Asia for Asians"—also illustrates this tendency. Some efforts to invoke the Chinese tributary system as the basis of a new Chinese School of IR raise similar possibilities" (Acharya, 2014, p. 651).

I think this pluralism sans essentialism can and has been done by different scholars in different ways, and it would be extremely useful if postcolonial scholars like Krishna, or liberals like Hurrell could offer their own thoughts on how this can be achieved, beyond recognizing and problematizing "essentialization" and the alleged "reverse ethnocentrism" of Global South societies. As for myself, I believe that to

avoid essentializing, any school of thought, whether "non-Western" or national and regional approaches and "schools" should be able to travel beyond the country of their origin and its immediate neighborhood (East Asia) and offer a more general framework for analyzing world affairs. They should attract a critical mass of scholars within and beyond the country of their origin. They should generate a vibrant research agenda, meaning they should be taken up and applied by other scholars, especially students and new generation of scholars to develop their own research and theoretical contribution. They should enjoy some longevity and not turn out to be a passing fad. They should maintain some distance from official policy of the country of their origin. The Frankfurt School, English School and Copenhagen School do this, to varying degrees and could serve as examples, if not role models.

If not "geocultural" or "pluralism", then what- and where- now?

Arlene B. Tickner

If geocultural pluralism is a minefield filled with numerous risks, what are the alternatives to IR's current concern with difference, diversity and pluralism? The contributors offer several routes. Alejandro invites us to approach diversity and pluralism from a distinct vantagepoint, and to eschew the worn-out assumption that International Relations in varied "geocultural" sites, particularly within the periphery, is different. While Bilgin and Krishna gesture to Said's contrapuntal reading or Narayan's "double vision"—strategies that echo those developed by standpoint and Black feminism—Shani proposes that we understand pluralism and diversity in terms of a pluriversal IR that sees difference as arising from diverse but co-dependent and interacting cosmological conceptions of the universe and of particularity that cannot be subsumed within shared ideas of the global given their incommensurability. Eriksson Baaz and Parashar in turn, maintain that the "ontological frailty" of the discipline is such that unsettling IR is the only remedy for entrenched Eurocentrism. To this, Krishna adds that critical scholars might dedicate their efforts to imploding the mainstream. Finally, Hamati-Ataya invites us to move beyond/outside academia and envision a bottom-up politics of contestation in which academic discourse is not the starting point but eventually, the end result of a collective experience of emancipatory praxis.

Andrew Hurrell

The issue of incommensurability is surely crucial. The core question here is: can we do more than gather together and set side-by-side a certain number of perspectives, narratives, even cosmologies of the global and of how the modern global evolved? Pinar Bilgin worries that we will merely collect perspectives and thereby 'fossilize difference'. Giorgio Shani claims: 'We live in a world of many worlds, each with their own understanding of universality and particularity'. But, pushing in a slightly

different direction, Audrey Alejandro points to the need to capture the 'wholeness' of the human condition and she highlights the crucial importance of the 'freedom to pursue universalist ambitions on their topic of expertise'.

Are all representations and judgements perspectival, and are some, as Adrian Moore suggests, radically perspectival—'unintelligible except against a specific background of share sensibilities and values' (Moore, 2000)? Let us follow Moore a little. There are many forms of understanding in which perspective is crucial. Deep involvement and personal engagement shape how we see the world. This is exactly as it should be and is especially important in bringing to the fore the claims and views of those who have been most marginalized and who have suffered most from the violence and perversities of inter-state politics. Truth and objectivity are not the same. In addition, the very fact of different perspectives allows us to understand our own perspectives as exactly that and to achieve a degree of self-consciousness. This is what reflexivity is about. The difficulty here is not with the idea, but with the practice. Merely acknowledging a plurality of perspectives can serve as a comfort blanket that helps us evade deeper self-awareness and deeper understanding. 'Now we have provided some more space for the voices of others, all is well, and we can continue as normal'. The danger is real. But it does not undercut the value of reflexivity.

But differing perspectives may be indirectly integrated, as Moore puts it. They cannot be brought into a single shared representation of some singular global reality. But that hardly means that there are no aspects of that global that cannot be connected and integrated, and deliberated and evaluated within particular shared communities of knowledge and practice And finally, as part of this process, there will be some claims about the global whose falsity can be established. And this is why, in the final instance, it is unhelpful to reduce everything to discourse, expression or contrasting imaginaries. As John Hall suggests in his biography of Ernest Gellner, 'it is the very falsity of certain beliefs that makes possible an investigation into how they are sustained'(As quoted in Lukes, 2011, p. 157).

Amitav Acharya

As Andrew Hurrell has often reminded us, there is a lot of critique of Western IR, and now there is a lot of critique of other approaches, including "non-Western"; "post-Western", "Global", etc. I think a central issue for this forum is diversity and "diversity management", as Arlene Tickner put it so well, amidst competing (and potentially complimenting) claims about or approaches to inclusion and epistemic justice. It also seems to me that most contributors want to promote diversity at least normatively, but cannot agree on how to. Or even agree on how to define the problem. But this is hardly surprising. IR scholars have never agreed on such issues.

It is crucial to keep in mind that IR scholars, not just within the Global South as a whole but also within regions and countries are already not a homogenous a lot, and that by a long margin. I could not help but noticing that perhaps more by accident than design, Indian scholars or scholars of Indian origin (myself included) constitute the majority of contributors and discussants to this forum. Yet Indian scholarship on IR in general (not in this forum) is quite varied: very little of it identifies itself as

"Global IR", but usually encompasses postcolonial, realist (offensive and defensive), sub-altern, feminist, liberal institutionalist, etc. In Delhi, for example, the two leading approaches are realism (quite unabashed, especially among policy-oriented IR scholars such as C. Raja Mohan); and post-colonialism. There are also scholars like Kanti Bajpai who identify with a liberal internationalist perspective. Three scholars who are still living and working in India, Navnita Behera, Deepshikha Shahi and Deep Datta-Ray, draw on classical Indian history, both as a critique and as a source of new insights. So Indian scholars do not need to be told about "diversity management" when they were already doing fine on that score.

Relatedly, very few Global South scholars draw on deep history or culture. Scholars outside of Beijing do not buy into the "Chinese School of IR" for example; and view it essentially as a "Beijing School". Similarly, many scholars in the Middle East do not uniformly view Islam as a necessary or useful source of IR theorizing (Turkey), while others do. So there is "diversity within diversity".

Such diversity will continue to exist and should be respected. No approach or "ism", including post-colonialism, post-Western, reflexivist, or Global IR whether from inside or outside where the center of the diversity discourse is, can claim to represent these ranges of scholarship in the Global South, much less "manage" it.

One other point here, as I recognized very early on, I do take it seriously that numerous Global South scholars approach IR from an area studies perspective which gives them a much-needed voice and vantage-point that IR scholarship, whether mainstream or critical, denies them. My own engagement with IR began as an area studies scholar of Southeast Asia and in many respects remains so. At the same time, conversations across regions are happening, and more need to happen. I remember Arlene Tickner talked to me about an initiative that would bring in scholars from different regions, for example, Latin America and Asia and Africa, to engage in such cross-regional dialogues. Some such conversations are already happening through WISC and ISA, but there are still little direct interactions among Global South scholars. This is unlikely to change much. Also let's look at scholars working in the regions, in isolation, without the benefit of participating in ISA or WISC or this this forum.

Recognizing their voices for what they are is a key conceptual basis of my view on and own approach to IR—whatever one may call it, non-Western, post-Western, global. I have called it "pluralistic universalism". If geoculturalism was from Wallerstein, pluralistic universalism is Coxian. It is a term I developed from Robert Cox's writings. As Cox put it (as cited in my ISA 2014 address and ISQ article), "In the Enlightenment meaning universal meant true for all time and space—the perspective of a homogenous reality". Cox offers an alternative conception of universalism, which rests on "comprehending and respecting diversity in an ever-changing world" (Cox, 2002, p. 530).

Yet, any meta-conceptions of "universal" have its own dangers and limitations. As Partha Chatterjee's in his critique of "Imagined Communities" argues: "What Anderson does not seem to recognize is that as comparativists looking upon the world in the twentieth century, the perspective of the Indonesian can never be symmetrical to that of the Irishman. One's comparative vision is not the mirror image of the other's. To put it plainly, the universalism that is available to Anderson to

be refined and enriched through his anthropological practice could never have been available to Sukarno, regardless of the political power the latter may have wielded as leader of a major postcolonial nation" (Chatterjee, 1999, p. 133).

Finally, culture and history are two of the elements, but by no means the only ones in any conceptualization of IR scholarship from or about the Global South, or to extend it beyond the Western mainstream, including but not limited to Global IR; other important ones include: ideas and approaches of leaders of anti-colonial struggles (including, in India's case, liberals like Nehru and radicals like Bose, and that of many pan-African anti-colonial leaders like Walter Rodney or Eric Williams who were both scholars and practitioners), as well as thinking of philosophers, contemporary IR scholars in Global South no matter what approach they take and the ideas and institutions within regions and regionalisms around the world.

Arlene B. Tickner

All of this begs the issue of what the purpose of doing International Relations is and should be. If, as some of the contributors suggest, it is to take down—to use Krishna's phrasing—centuries-long processes of violence, destruction and antagonism rooted in Eurocentrism and its derivatives, then seeking out the demise of conventional IR from within critical disciplinary circles, is not enough. Perhaps, as insinuated by Hamati-Ataya and echoed in the contributions of Eriksson Baaz and Parashar, Alejandro and Shani, the loci or social-cultural pathways through which we make sense of the world needs to be rethought. Although some deem a more decentered academia—rooted in non-Western, non-centric or global South agencies—the appropriate site from which to achieve such deep pluralism, others consider the academy simply another participant and suggest that we envision—to cite Hamati-Ataya—an international theory of knowledge that transcends our disciplinary and academic myopia.

It may well be that a post-hegemonic, post-Western or pluralist IR entails first and foremost, de-schooling ourselves from the discipline, if not from academic practice in general, and reschooling through respectful and caring engagement with knowledges from below. This means that adding new perspectives to an overarching canopy called "International Relations" may not be a suitable remedy for the field's ills. Indeed, the decolonial, ontological and relational "turns" within the social sciences have led some scholars to argue that difference is not only a question of how we know and represent reality, but also of how we exist in and with the world, and thus, of how we create worlds. As the authors in this Forum suggest, engaging with and practicing plurality otherwise is fundamental for doing it, and IR, differently.

Amitav Acharya

It is useful to remind ourselves that we are prisoners of disciplinarity. Honestly, I am happy to "exit" from IR anytime and embrace the kind of multidisciplinary beyond IR approach suggested above.

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