

The What, Who and Where of World Politics? Two Different Conceptions of ‘the International’

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The What, Who and Where of World Politics? Two Different Conceptions of ‘the International’

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ABSTRACT

Limitations pertaining to the discipline of International Relations (IR) in its approach to the non-core parts of the world have been debated over the last several decades. This paper looks at the contributions of two significant bodies of scholarship, namely Third World IR and postcolonial IR, to this conversation and questions whether there have been any differences regarding how ‘the international’ is understood in these two bodies of scholarship. Such an analysis is significant, argues the paper, because their conceptions of ‘the international’ inform how the limitations of IR and the place of the non-core in world politics can be understood. To this end, the paper looks at questions that constitute conceptions of ‘the international,’ namely, the what, who, and where of world politics. We conclude by enumerating the commonalities and differences between these two bodies of scholarship and discussing the implications of our findings for studying non-core and world politics.

Keywords: Third World, Global South, Non-Core; International, Critical IR Approaches

Dünya Politikasında Ne, Kim ve Nerede? İki Farklı ‘Uluslararası’ Anlayışı

ÖZET

Uluslararası İlişkiler (Uİ) disiplininin dünyanın merkez dışı yerlerine olan yaklaşımındaki kısıtlar son yıllarda tartışmaya açılmıştır. Bu makale, bu tartışmaya katkı sunan iki önemli yazın olan Üçüncü Dünya Uİ ve postkolonyal Uİ perspektiflerine odaklanmaktadır. Makale, bu iki yaklaşımın ‘uluslararası’ anlamada farklarının olup olmadığını sorgulamaktadır. Makaleye göre bu analizin önemi ‘uluslararası’ anlayışlarının Uİ’nin kısıtlarını ve merkez dışının dünya politikasındaki yerini anlamadaki rolünden kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu amaçla makale, ‘uluslararası’ anlayışlarını oluşturan üç temel soru olan dünya politikasında ne, kim ve nerede sorularına cevap arar. Makale bu iki yazın arasındaki benzerliklere ve farklılıklara işaret ederken bu bulguların disiplinde merkez dışını ve dünya politikasını çalışmaya olan etkilerini tartışarak sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üçüncü Dünya; Küresel Güney; Merkez Dışı; Uluslararası, Eleştirel Uİ Yaklaşımları

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Introduction

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has long witnessed discussions on the limitations of the discipline in its understanding of world politics, and the place of the non-core. These discussions have focused on the “‘Western’ character,” “Western-centrism,” and “Westernness” and/or “Eurocentrism” of the discipline.¹ Scholars who contribute to this debate have suggested that such limitations resulted in overlooking experiences in different parts of the world for understanding world politics,² and hence pose an obstacle in making IR a global discipline.³ Relatedly, a scholarship has emerged in the discipline that is interested in “looking beyond the West”⁴ for making sense of world politics as it is experienced in different parts of the world.

Based on particular rationales, different scholars prefer different terms such as “Third World,” “Global South,” “non-West,” “non-core,” and “colonized” while contributing to this discussion. Throughout the paper, we use these terms interchangeably, although we remain cognizant of their problematic nature. In this paper, these terms refer to those parts of the world that are “not to be located on or near the top of hierarchies”⁵ and are “less influential,” “non-dominant,” and/or “non-privileged” in world politics.⁶

The article examines two bodies of IR scholarship in this discussion. The first is composed of Third World IR scholarship, which does not refer to studies of those located in or from the Third World but rather to the scholarship that explores international relations from the perspectives of states and social groups in the Third World. The second is postcolonial IR scholarship, which is composed of studies approaching international relations through using postcolonial insights. We chose to focus on these two scholarships since they have been influential in discussions about the discipline’s limitations in its engagement with the non-core. That said, in the literature, these scholarships are mostly treated as composing a single approach.⁷ How each contributes to this discussion and whether there

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- 1 Pinar Bilgin, “Looking for ‘the International’ Beyond the West”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No 5, 2010, p. 819; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, “Why is There no Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction”, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 7, No 3, 2007, p. 287-312; Pinar Bilgin, *The International in Security, Security in the International*, London, Routledge, 2016; Pinar Bilgin, “Thinking Past ‘Western’ IR?”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No 1, 2008, p. 5-23; Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, *Re-Writing International Relations: History and Theory beyond Eurocentrism in Turkey*, London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2016; Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006; John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Vivienne Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject: Claiming Politics/Governing Others in Late Modernity*, London, Routledge, 2013; Meghaba Nayak and Eric Selbin, *Decentering International Relations*, London & New York, Zed Books, 2010; Robbie Shilliam (ed.), *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, London, Routledge, 2011; Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney (eds.), *Thinking International Relations Differently*, London: New York, Routledge, 2012; Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, (eds.), *Claiming the International*, London: New York, Routledge, 2013.
 - 2 Bilgin, “Looking for ‘the International’”; Pinar Bilgin, “Critical Investigations into the International”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No 6, 2014, p. 1098-1114.
 - 3 Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No 4, 2014, p. 647-659.
 - 4 Bilgin, “Looking for ‘the International’”, p. 817.
 - 5 Bilgin, *The International in Security*, p. 1.
 - 6 Ole Waever and Arlene B. Tickner, “Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies”, Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Waever (eds.), *International Relations Scholarship*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 1.
 - 7 Waever and Tickner, “Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies”; Arlene B. Tickner, “Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 32, No 2, 2003, p. 295-324.

are any differences between them has been under-examined. Informed by this observation, this paper aims to look at conceptions of 'the international' as found in these scholarships and question whether there have been any differences in their understandings of this notion. We suggest that this analysis is significant because it is the conceptions of 'the international' that inform how the limitations of IR and the place of the non-core in world politics are understood.

As we will explain in detail in the next section, we offer to study the conceptions of 'the international' as found in the writings of scholars from Third World IR scholarship and postcolonial IR scholarship with reference to questions that constitute the conceptions of 'the international,' namely, the what, who, and where of world politics. In the literature, different terminologies are used to define the subject matter of the discipline, including "world politics", "global politics", and "international relations", and there have been debates about the limitations and implications of these terms for the discipline of IR.⁸ Although we are aware of such debates, we do not engage with them in this paper. As such, we use world politics and international relations/politics interchangeably.

In choosing the scholars subjected to analysis, we use "purposive sampling". The purposive sampling method aims to "produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population" by consulting "expert knowledge" available in the field.⁹ As such, we select scholars based on the discussions on these scholarships in the literature. In these discussions, other IR scholars have identified selected authors as significant representatives who have produced some of the earliest studies on these two respective bodies of scholarship.¹⁰ Based on this method, we look at the works of Caroline Thomas, Mohammed Ayoob, and Stephanie G. Neuman in examining Third World IR scholarship, and Albert J. Paolini, L.M.H. Ling, and Siba N. Grovogui in analyzing postcolonial IR scholarship.

Our findings suggest that despite certain commonalities between them, there have been significant differences in the conceptions of 'the international' in the two bodies of scholarship under consideration. While the scholars who study the Third World point to a 'particular' conception of 'the international' by highlighting experiences in the Third World, postcolonial IR scholarship goes beyond merely pointing to particular experiences, questioning 'universality' assumptions in IR. Thus, Third World IR scholarship broadens the conception of 'the international' in IR, whereas postcolonial IR scholarship deepens it.

8 James N. Rosenau. *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1990; Rob B.J. Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2010.

9 Michael P. Battaglia, "Purposive Sample", Paul J. Lavrakas (ed.), *Encyclopedia Survey Research Methods: Volume 1&2*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2008, p.645.

10 For the selection of the Third World IR scholars, we looked at Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009; Pinar Bilgin et al., "Security Studies: The Next Stage?", *Nação Defesa*, Vol. 84, No 2, 1998, p.131-157; Pinar Bilgin, *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2004, and Bilgin, *The International in Security*. For postcolonial IR scholars, we drew on Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, "Introduction: Power in a Postcolonial World: Race, Gender, and Class in International Relations", Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (eds.), *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class*, London, Routledge, 2002, p.1-32; Olivia Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam, "Postcolonial Politics: An Introduction", Olivia Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics*, Oxon, Routledge, 2018, p. 1-15; Meera Sabaratnam, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Approaches", John Baylis et al. (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

The paper is organized into three sections. The first section introduces the framework. The second section looks at the conception of ‘the international’ in Third World IR scholarship. The third part examines postcolonial IR scholarship and analyzes the conception of ‘the international’ in this literature. In these two sections, we also highlight the implications of these conceptions for the study of the non-core. The concluding section discusses the importance of our findings for the discipline of IR.

How to Examine the Conceptions of ‘the International’?

In order to examine the conceptions of ‘the international’ in these two bodies of scholarship, we suggest analysing three questions that constitute the conceptions of ‘the international,’ namely the what, who, and where of world politics¹¹ The “What of world politics” refers to interrogating scholars’ basic ideas about “what makes the world go around.”¹² In other words, this question is interested in identifying the most fundamental dynamic shaping world politics according to different scholars. This question enables us to see whether scholars conceive material and/or ideational aspects of world politics, how they challenge conventional understandings and what they offer in their stead. Through questioning the “who of world politics,” we look at those actors whose acts shape world politics according to the selected scholars. This question also includes a discussion of why scholars consider these actors significant and how they account for how these actors’ ideas, capabilities, practices, or policies influence world politics. Lastly, the “where of world politics” aims to understand the location of world politics or where world politics takes place according to the selected scholars. This question examines whether scholars take internal and external realms as “separate or convergent”¹³ and where they think ideas, capabilities, practices, and policies of the actors of world politics take place.

By utilising this framework, we examine the conceptions of ‘the international’ as found in Third World IR scholarship (section 2) and postcolonial IR scholarship (section 3). While doing so, we also show how these conceptions differ from the mainstream or conventional accounts in the discipline and discuss their implications for studying world politics. We understand mainstream or conventional accounts of IR as those which “defend[s] a positivist idea of science” and share an ontological and epistemological assumption that “the West and North America are the main origins (and drivers) of international relations” and IR.¹⁴

The Conception of ‘the International’ in Third World IR Scholarship

The aim to understand the place and role of the Third World in world politics and IR has been on Third World IR scholars’ agenda since the late 1980s. These scholars mainly address two points about the limitations of IR and its “Western character.” First, they point out that the Third World received

11 For an earlier discussion on this framework, see Mine Nur Küçük, “Conceptions of ‘the International’ Beyond the Core: Turkey in the post-Cold War Era”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 19, No 4, 2018, p. 571-592.

12 Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.154.

13 James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 32.

14 Karen Smith and Arlene B. Tickner, “Introduction: International relations from the Global South”, Arlene B Tickner and Karen Smith (eds.), *International Relations from the Global South: Worlds of Difference*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2020, p. 5.

attention only within the context of great power politics.¹⁵ This situation did not change with the end of the Cold War. Security and development issues in the Third World were still examined as regards “perceived threats to the north such as terrorism, migration, human trafficking.”¹⁶ Second, these scholars have questioned the “correspondence between standard IR terminology, categories and theories, and third world realities”¹⁷ and suggest the necessity for rethinking them.¹⁸ Since the selected scholars did not openly discuss how they conceive ‘the international,’ we aim to tease out their conceptions from their writings.

The What of World Politics?

From the perspective of the Third World IR scholars, the unequal distribution of power between the core and non-core parts of the world shapes the main dynamic of world politics. In this understanding, even though the anarchical nature of world politics manifests itself in the existence of the formal sovereign equality of the Third World states, which was gained in the course of the decolonization process, the high amount of inequality in the distribution of power (material capacities) defines world politics’ hierarchical nature. By pointing to these unequal power relations between the core and non-core parts of the world, Third World IR scholarship explains the reasons for these inequalities and their implications for the functioning of world politics.

In their analysis, the notion of hierarchy is mainly understood with reference to material aspects, such as military, economic, and institutional capabilities. According to Third World IR scholars, due to their late entrance into the international political and economic system, Third World states experienced hierarchy in world politics. Hence, Third World states are not experiencing state-making and nation-building processes under the same international conditions as their Western counterparts. Since there are already established international norms of human rights and standards of political behaviour, these norms also affected Third World states’ political legitimacy, economic development and contributed to their internal discontent.¹⁹

Third World IR scholars argue that the inequality regarding the distribution of power between different actors turned the status of these states in the international system into an issue of security and vulnerability. As such, the inequality in power distribution has made these states’ security problem more acute. This is because the lack of control over the international environment due to “the

15 Stephanie G. Neuman (ed.), *International Relations and the Third World*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998; Caroline Thomas, *In Search for security: The Third World in International Relations*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1987; Muhammed Ayooob, “Subaltern Realism: International Relations Theory Meets the Third World”, Stephanie G. Neuman (ed.), *International Relations and the Third World*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, p. 31-54; Muhammed Ayooob, “Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism”, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 4, No 3, 2002, p. 27-48; Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

16 Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkin, “Still Waiting After All These Years, ‘The Third World’ on the Periphery of International Relations”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol.6, No 2, 2004, p. 241-258.

17 Tickner, “Seeing IR Differently”, p. 296; See, among others, Donald J. Puchala, “Third World Thinking and Contemporary International Relations”, Stephanie G. Neuman (ed.), *International Relations and the Third World*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, p. 133-158; Muhammed Ayooob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State-Making, Regional Conflict and International System*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1995; Clapham, *Africa and the International System*.

18 William Brown, “Africa and International Relations: A Comment on IR Theory, Anarchy and Statehood”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 32, No 1, 2006, p. 122.

19 Ayooob, *The Third World Security Predicament*, p. 85.

overarching power hierarchy in the international political system” and the geopolitical structure of the East-West divide, which has curtailed Third World states’ ability to control their domestic economic, social, and political domains.²⁰ For instance, Thomas argues that the limited access to the international environment and regimes was the “major blow to the Third World’s search for security”²¹, diminishing these states’ ability to create better conditions for their citizens. Other significant effects of these unequal power relations can also be seen in Third World states’ dependence on core states regarding military assistance, technologies (such as intelligence and satellite information), and economic resources (such as debts).²²

By taking into account the unequal distribution of power between great powers and Third World states even after the Cold War, Neuman notes that anarchy only describes the nature of relations among the great powers. Accordingly, the author asks, “if the international system is less anarchical or not anarchical at all for the majority of states in it, is it not then logical to wonder whether there is, in fact, only one international system?”²³ For Neuman, therefore, the assumption of the international system’s unitary nature held by conventional accounts is not correct, as it does not include Third World experiences. These material inequalities faced by the Third World states make it possible to talk about two different types/kinds of state actors in international relations: core and non-core states, which the next section will elaborate on in detail.

To sum up, Third World IR scholars all point to the unevenness of the distribution of material capabilities in world politics and underscore the limited military, economic and institutional capabilities of Third World states. The lack of such material capabilities led to the particular experiences of dependency of these states on great powers and hierarchies in world politics.

The Who of World Politics?

For Third World IR scholars, mainstream accounts’ understanding of actors in world politics is limited because of two factors. First, these accounts have failed to understand the Third World states that act according to their particular positions in world politics. Second, Third World IR scholars point to the agency of Third World states by underscoring the asymmetrical nature of this agency. As such, Third World IR scholars stress how the material inequalities limit non-core actors’ space for action in world politics. Some also highlight the role of non-state actors in this asymmetrical relationship. These two criticisms mainly inform how Third World IR scholars understand the actors of world politics.

According to Third World IR scholars, when compared with the states in the core, Third World states have a more limited capacity to act effectively in the international system due to their more limited political, military, and institutional capabilities. Accordingly, these scholars define two types of state actors in world politics: core and non-core states. For instance, for Ayoob, unlike the core states, Third World states lack “adequate stateness.” Thus, he differentiates between “strong states” and “weak states” based on his definition of “stateness”, which takes the Westphalian state as the norm. This difference

20 Thomas, *In Search for Security*, p. 5.

21 Ibid., p. 7.

22 Stephanie G. Neuman, *Military Assistance in Recent Wars*, The Washington Papers/122, New York, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, 1986, p. 109.

23 Stephanie G. Neuman, “International Relations Theory and the Third World: An Oxymoron?”, Stephanie G. Neuman (ed.), *International Relations and the Third World*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998, p. 3-4.

has stemmed from Third World states' particular experiences of state-building processes, determining their place in international politics.²⁴ Thomas also distinguishes between two groups of actors ("weak" and "strong" states) in world politics regarding their position in the international political and economic system. However, unlike Ayoob, she mainly focuses on the state-society relationships in the "weak" and "strong" states and how they affect their respective positions in international relations as well as limit their capacity to act effectively in the international political and economic system.²⁵

Third World IR scholars also point to the different nature of agency that Third World states have in world politics. According to these scholars, non-core states' role in shaping and influencing world politics is relatively small compared to core states. Thus, they stress how inequalities in material capabilities limit non-core states' space for action in world politics. For instance, Ayoob notes that during the Cold War, there was an "asymmetry and inequality in the interaction between the fundamental dynamics of the Cold War and that of Third World regional concerns and conflicts."²⁶ The logic of the Cold War mainly determined superpowers' interests in the Third World. In contrast, rivalries in the Third World had a very marginal effect on global power relations. In other words, one can see the Third World states' ability to shape interstate relations mainly with reference to regional politics.²⁷

As another instance of this asymmetrical nature of agency, Thomas looks at North-South relations within the scope of international regimes, pointing to the limited influence of non-core actors' ideas, practices, and policies in the North-South relationship. For instance, by examining the stances of Third World states toward the nuclear non-proliferation regimes, Thomas explains the non-participation of many Third World states into the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). For the author, not the NPT but a more comprehensive test-ban would be seen as more preferable by many Third World state elites since they think the latter would both "improve their own security" as well as the security of humankind.²⁸ However, these concerns and views of Third World states could not influence the NPT regime due to their position in hierarchies of the international political system.

For Third World IR scholars, even with the end of the Cold War, and the emergence of new dynamics (such as globalization), these two groups of states' positions in world politics and the asymmetrical relationship between them mainly remain the same.²⁹ Yet, such new developments increase the role of certain non-state actors in shaping the asymmetrical relationship between the core and the non-core actors not only in the political and economic realms³⁰ but also in the military realm. For instance, referring to Mary Kaldor's notion of new wars, Harkovy and Neuman note the emergence of new actors in the very organizational structures of ethnic warfare such as paramilitary units and local warlords.³¹ Given the numerous intrastate and low-intensity conflicts in the Third World (including

24 Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*.

25 Caroline Thomas, "Conclusion: Southern Instability, Security and Western Concepts- On an Unhappy Marriage and the Need for a Divorce", Caroline Thomas and Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu (eds.), *The State and Instability in the South*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989, p. 174-191.

26 Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*, p. 95.

27 Robert E. Harkavy and Stephanie G. Neuman, *Warfare and the Third World*, New York, Palgrave, 2001; Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*.

28 Thomas, *In Search for Security*, p. 142-143.

29 Caroline Thomas, "Globalization and the South", Caroline Thomas and Peter Wilkin (eds.), *Globalization and the South*, London, Macmillan Press, 1997, p.15.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 1-17.

31 Harkavy and Neuman, *Warfare and the Third World*, p. 191.

ethnic conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, the narcotics trade, and traditional counterinsurgency³²), the Third World scholars highlight the importance of non-state actors and their influence on domestic and international dynamics in the Third World.

To sum up, Third World IR scholars identify two groups of states, namely core and non-core, as the actors of world politics based on these states' respective positions within the international system. For Third World IR scholarship, although these two groups of actors are interrelated, this relationship and the nature of the non-core actors' agency are asymmetrical. Hence, the lack of material capabilities limits non-core actors' space for action and their ability to influence and shape world politics.

The Where of World Politics?

Scholars who study the Third World understand the location of world politics with reference to interstate relations. Different from some of the conventional accounts (such as realism), which treat states' internal and external realms as separate, Third World IR scholars highlight how these two are interrelated with one another. Besides, in making sense of interstate relations in the Third World, Third World IR scholars point to the regional level.

Third World IR scholars problematize conventional accounts that treat domestic and international realms as separate. Thus, they point to the interrelation between domestic and international dynamics. Considering the importance of the internal-external interconnection, they note that the problem of domestic order in the Third World cannot be understood in isolation from world order problems, as they are intertwined. For instance, Ayoob argues that the Third World security predicament emerges as the "elements of anarchy clearly coexist with those of order within the boundaries of the state."³³ Although the process of this predicament is primarily domestic, "external variables such as the operation of international norms and interventionary policies espoused by the major powers"³⁴ are also influential.

Third World IR scholars also focus on the regional level to understand Third World interstate relations. For instance, they discuss the security conditions in particular regions of the Third World by highlighting the importance of autonomous regional dynamics. Comparing regionalism in Europe and the Third World, Ayoob underscores that while in the former, "security communities" have been established, in the latter, "defense communities" have been built. According to Ayoob, European security communities were established for the external security of each European state, whereas in the Third World, "regional cooperation is based primarily on the convergence of regime interests relating to internal security."³⁵ Accordingly, in the Third World, each region has its own outlook, shaped by the security concerns of regional states. Thus, regional politics and security issues in the Third World "have a life of their own independent of great power relationship"³⁶, which underline the significance of non-intervention and sovereignty that should be protected against external influence.

According to this scholarship, it is not only regional security dynamics that shape interstate relations in the Third World, but also regional as well as local cultures and attitudes condition the

32 Ibid., p. 10,12.

33 Ayoob, "Subaltern Realism", p.37.

34 Ibid., p. 38.

35 Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*, p.62. For a similar discussion on the autonomous regional security dynamics in Africa, see Tandeka C. Nkiwane, "Africa and International Relations: Regional Lessons for a Global Discourse", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 22, No 3, 2001, p. 279-290.

36 Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*, p. 56.

interstate relations. For instance, Harkavy and Neuman underscore that local values and cultures influence the conduct of warfare in the Third World, and warfare also has effects on “a society’s values, attitudes, and beliefs.”³⁷ There is a relationship between the local and the international, which shapes the international behaviours of Third World states.

To sum up, for the Third World IR scholars, world politics is located in the interrelation between internal and external realms. While hierarchical relations in the international realm have shaped domestic and regional concerns and priorities in the Third World, domestic and local dynamics also shape regional and international relations of the non-core states.

This section looked at the questions that constitute conceptions of ‘the international,’ namely the what, who, and where of world politics in Third World IR scholarship. We concluded that Third World IR scholarship presents a particular conception of ‘the international’ as experienced in the Third World. This conception is composed of identifying hierarchy shaped by the material inequalities as the central dynamic, core and non-core states as main actors, and the interrelation between the internal and external as the location of world politics. This particular conception enables these scholars to develop a more comprehensive understanding of world politics in IR. Accordingly, Third World IR scholars voice concerns regarding the ‘universal’ relevance of mainstream IR assumptions and concepts in the context of the Third World,³⁸ and hence offer to broaden the conception of ‘the international’ in the discipline. Such broadening enables this scholarship “to revise and strengthen the conceptual foundations upon which IR theory is built upon, so that it better reflects what is happening globally today.”³⁹ However, adding a particular conception of ‘the international’ based on the experiences in the Third World, we suggest, did not lead to questioning how the ‘universality’ assumption found in the conception of ‘the international’ in the mainstream IR accounts became possible. In other words, while these latter accounts identify “anarchy” as the dynamic, core states as the actors, and interstate relations between great powers or core states as the locations of world politics as universal assumptions, they are in fact only based on the ‘particular’ experiences in the core parts of the world. Nevertheless, this situation remains under-examined by Third World IR scholarship.

Consider, for instance, how some Third World IR scholars reformulate the distinction made between the core and the non-core parts of the world. In some conventional IR discourses, the core and the non-core are differentiated as the zones of “peace” and “turmoil.”⁴⁰ These discourses underscore that the former shares common norms and practices for maintaining peace, while the latter lacks these characteristics. While Third World IR scholars question this categorization, they reformulate this distinction by showing the interdependence between these two parts of the world, i.e., how core renders non-core as the zone of “turmoil.”⁴¹ While doing this, however, they do not problematize the very ‘ideational’ aspects of drawing a distinction between “core” and “non-core” in these mainstream accounts. Put differently, by only focusing on the material inequalities faced by non-core states, Third World IR scholarship overlooks how non-material inequalities, such as the lack of ability of non-core actors to shape “their own

37 Harkavy and Neuman, *Warfare and the Third World*, p. 253.

38 Neuman, “International Relations Theory”, p. 2.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

40 Georg Sorensen, “States are not Like Units: Types of State and Forms of Anarchy in the Present International System”, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No 1, 1998, p. 79-98; James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, “A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era”, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No 2, 1992, p. 469-491.

41 See Ayoob, “Subaltern Realism”; Neuman, “International Relations Theory”.

portrayal in world politics”⁴², also play a role in limiting IR’s approach to the non-core. Thus, they have failed to see the co-constitution between material and ideational dynamics in core and non-core relationships and the implications of these hierarchies for the knowledge production in IR.

The Conception of ‘the International’ in Postcolonial IR Scholarship

This section will focus on postcolonial IR scholars and suggest that what postcolonial IR approaches offer is more than merely incorporating the particular experiences found in non-core contexts in their analysis. That is because these scholars seek to interrogate how the discipline of IR is “part of the problem of imperial violence, allowing Western intellectuals to sanitize and limit their understanding of international order through selective forgetting.”⁴³ Put differently, these scholars problematize the role played by the conception of ‘the international’ in conventional accounts of IR, which are based on only ‘particular’ views on dynamics, actors, and locations of world politics.

The What of World Politics?

The colonial relations of power constitute the main dynamic of world politics in postcolonial IR scholarship. This view builds on postcolonial IR scholars’ argument that even though formal colonization ended after decolonization, the effects of colonial power relations have continued. By problematizing IR’s disinterest in the centrality of colonialism and imperialism in shaping world politics, postcolonial IR points to how colonialism continues to affect both “the colonizer” and “the colonized”⁴⁴ and to produce various hierarchies that shape world politics.

As discussed in the previous section, Third World IR scholars also take hierarchy as a central mechanism through which world politics unfolds. What differentiates postcolonial IR scholarship’s take on the hierarchy from this conception is how this scholarship considers the material and ideational aspects. Put differently, rather than holding a dichotomous understanding that locates material vis-a-vis ideational factors or vice versa, postcolonial IR scholarship is interested in the interaction between the two in shaping the central dynamics of world politics.⁴⁵ As such, postcolonial IR sees world politics “as a continuum from macro-structural forces of material production, at one analytical end, to microsocial indicators of meaning, on the other.”⁴⁶ These ideational structures make it possible to understand the central concepts of IR in particular ways. Such understandings legitimize the hierarchy in world politics by marginalizing the ideas of non-core actors. Hence, postcolonial IR scholars explain hierarchy regarding one particular world’s dominance over other worlds through universalizing its particularity via political, economic, and cultural ways.⁴⁷

42 Bilgin, *The International in Security*, p. 1.

43 Sabaratnam, “Postcolonial”, p. 171.

44 L.H.M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations: Conquest and Desire Between Asia and the West*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 69.

45 Albert J. Paolini, *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity, and International Relations*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999, p. 149.

46 Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*, p. 68.

47 Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, “The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the Poiesis of Worldism”, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 6, No 4, 2004, p. 21-49; Siba N. Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006; Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*; L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations*, London, Routledge, 2014; Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*.

For example, postcolonial IR scholars problematize the neoliberal economic order that reproduces the hegemony of the Western powers⁴⁸ and discuss how this order shapes the experiences of the non-core actors through creating economic inequalities.⁴⁹ However, from a postcolonial perspective, one also needs to identify “the axis between economy and discourse.” Exemplifying this point, Agathangelou and Ling state that we need to look at:

“How a particular discourse assigns characteristics to a population- e.g., poverty and hunger among certain social groups -such that they become reproduced as material conditions - e.g., exclusion from resources due to their condition of impoverishment and hunger coupled with a discursive erasure of why certain social groups are invariably poor and hungry.”⁵⁰

Ideational aspects of colonial relations, then, include how these material hierarchies are justified in the realm of ideas, knowledge, culture, and representations. As stated above, ideational structures are not divorced from material ones, since certain ideas in world politics enable material inequalities. For postcolonial IR scholars, hierarchies, both material and ideational, constitute one another and shape the main dynamics of world politics.

The Who of World Politics?

For postcolonial IR scholars, the IR discipline’s mainstream accounts are “narrow and increasingly limited as a discourse of world politics.”⁵¹ This limitation stems from two factors: failing to engage with actors other than states and marginalizing the non-core actors in understanding how the world works.⁵² These two criticisms inform how actors in world politics are understood in the postcolonial analyses and the idea of the “mutual constitution” of world politics by core and non-core actors.

According to Ling, the dominant accounts in IR build their arguments on the existence of one “Westphalian world” based on the idea of territorial sovereignty and interstate trade relations.⁵³ This conception of world politics results in a lack of interest in actors other than great powers and taking states as “billiard balls”, whose internal characteristics do not affect how the world works. Postcolonial IR scholars challenge these limitations by underscoring the significance of “internal social formation in an understanding of international politics.”⁵⁴ They also transcend these limitations by showing how actors other than states shape world politics. Secondly, they examine the agency of non-core actors (states and non-states) in world politics. Let us elaborate on these two points, respectively.

Postcolonial IR scholars challenge taking states as “sole definers of political space.”⁵⁵ Although they do not overlook the importance of states and their ability to shape world politics, they underscore the necessity to inquire into other actors below and beyond states. By underlining the importance of

48 L.H.M. Ling, “Cultural Chauvinism and The Liberal International Order: ‘West versus Rest’ in Asia’s Financial Crisis”, Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (eds.), *Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 115.

49 Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, p. 153.

50 Anna, M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling. “Postcolonial Dissidence within Dissident IR: Transforming Master Narratives of Sovereignty in Greco-Turkish Cyprus”, *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 54, No 1, 1997, p. 17.

51 Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, p. 29-30.

52 Ibid., p. 30.

53 Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*, p. 11.

54 Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, p. 33.

55 Ibid., p. 30.

widening the ontological horizon of IR⁵⁶ and noting that “no single people, culture, or state wholly dominant or wholly subjugated” in world politics,⁵⁷ postcolonial IR shows how multiple actors, such as non-core intellectuals or counter-hegemonic movements, shape world politics and knowledge of world politics.

In addition to this point, postcolonial IR scholars also highlight the importance of the agency of non-core actors. Since its inception in the discipline, the question of agency “has been a key concern of postcolonial critics of IR.”⁵⁸ Even though there have been debates surrounding the views of the nature of non-core agency as held by some postcolonial IR scholars (i.e., reducing the agency either to “resistance” or “victimization/silence”),⁵⁹ this does not change the centrality accorded to non-core agency in postcolonial IR writings, which mainly manifest itself in the argument of the “mutual constitution” of world politics.

In conventional accounts, non-core actors “rarely receive formal recognition for their critical role in making world politics”⁶⁰ as “international theory has been formalized to reflect peculiar histories, memories, rationales, values, and interests, all bound by time, space, and specific political languages and values.”⁶¹ By problematizing the erasure of “cross-cultural or cross-national dialogue” or “mutual exchanges”⁶² between different actors, postcolonial IR scholars highlight the importance of non-core actors (state and non-state alike) in shaping both material⁶³ as well as ideational⁶⁴ aspects of world politics.

In doing this, despite existing material inequalities between core and non-core actors, postcolonial approaches underline how supposedly separate worlds of these two actors mutually constitute world politics through “various, entwined legacies of worldviews, traditions, practices, institutions, and norms.”⁶⁵ Consider, for instance, Grovogui’s analysis of Egypt during the Suez Canal crisis. From an exclusively material perspective, Egypt was less potent than the other parties of the conflict (the UK, France, and Israel). Yet by claiming the right to control a canal within its own territory, it challenged “the desire to make permanent Western authority over others based on regimes of truth that legitimized the implied violence and a commandment that legalized the subordination of the native to Western power.”⁶⁶ In this way, Egypt became a significant agent in changing the dominant normative understanding that assigned “superiority” to Western actors in world politics.

56 Boyu Chen et al, “Lust/Caution in IR: Democratizing World Politics with Culture as a Method”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No 3, 2009, p. 744.

57 Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*, p. 30.

58 Bilgin, “Critical Investigations”, p. 1105; For other earlier examples also see Chowdhry and Nair, “Introduction: Power in a Postcolonial World”; Sankaran Krishna, “The Importance of Being Ironic: A Postcolonial View on Critical International Relations”, *Alternatives*, Vol. 18, No 3, 1993, p. 385–417.

59 John M. Hobson and Alina Sajed, “Navigating Beyond the Eurofetishist Frontier of Critical IR Theory: Exploring the Complex Landscapes of Non-Western Agency”, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No 4, 2017, p. 547-572.

60 Ling, *The Dao of World Politics*, p. 1.

61 Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism*, p. 16-17.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

63 On this point, see, among others, Tarak Barkawi, “Connection and Constitution: Locating War and Culture in Globalization Studies”, *Globalizations*, Vol. 1, No 2, 2004, p. 155-170; John. M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

64 Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism*.

65 Chen et al., “Lust/Caution”, p. 744.

66 Siba N. Grovogui, “Postcolonialism”, Tim Dunne et al (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 249-250.

To sum up, postcolonial IR scholars understand the main actors of world politics with reference to the mutual constitution of world politics by core and non-core actors, even though there are different types of hierarchies (material and ideational) between them. These actors can include non-core states (as in the case of Egypt) and/or non-state actors (such as counter-hegemonic movements).

The Where of World Politics?

Like Third World IR scholars, postcolonial IR authors challenge the conventional understandings that treat domestic and international realms as separate. They point to the co-constitution of these two realms. Different from the former, postcolonial IR scholarship also problematizes limiting the location of world politics to interstate relations. Instead, they identify multiple intertwined locations where international relations unfold.

Postcolonial scholars problematize the limitations of IR's understanding of political space by underscoring "the fluidity of the modern boundaries of political space."⁶⁷ In this sense, they underscore the co-constitution of internal and external realms where world politics takes place as "what pertains within the individual/household/nation contributes to the community/state/world, just as what happens in the world/state/community affects us as nation/household/individual."⁶⁸

Ling's analysis of the hierarchical relations, which intensified following the financial crisis in Asia in 1997-1998, exemplifies this co-constitution of internal and external realms.⁶⁹ Accordingly, the IMF's structural adjustment policies towards Asian states following the financial crisis indicated one such location at the systemic level. At the domestic level, the effects of the financial crisis and impositions of specific rules by Western actors resulted in oppressive state-society relations, as Asian states consolidated their coercive power. At the individual or local level, the psychological depression caused by the financial crisis and its aftermath resulted in the victimization of particular individuals such as women and minorities in Asian countries. As exemplified in Ling's study, for postcolonial IR scholarship, states' external and internal realms and the systemic, domestic, and private realms are all connected. Hence, from this perspective, world politics does not take place in one particular realm at the expense of others, and hierarchical relations in different realms constitute one another.

Postcolonial IR scholars oppose "distinguish[ing] between the domestic, national, and international spheres"⁷⁰ as unrelated realms and posit that there are multiple, intertwined locations where 'the international' takes place. Postcolonial IR scholars highlight that "'the international' exceeds its current location within spaces between and among states" since "'international events' -or events of global significance- have occurred mostly within overlapping structures of spaces encompassing not only the state boundaries but also empires, regions, and stateless territories."⁷¹ In explaining this point, postcolonial IR scholars reveal the connections between different locations. They also engage with spaces that have generally been ignored by mainstream accounts of the discipline.

67 Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, p. 8.

68 Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*, p. 67.

69 Ling, "Cultural Chauvinism", p. 129-133.

70 Grovogui, "Postcolonialism", p. 254.

71 Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism*, p. 21.

One such significant location is “everyday life.” For Paolini, engaging with the “everyday practices at the local level” is necessary to understand “global space.”⁷² This focus enables one to understand the different experiences of people in different parts of the world.⁷³ Paolini views this global space as “located in specific material contexts and geographically mobile; contextualized and grounded, yet free-floating and transgressive.”⁷⁴ Defined as such, in addition to challenging “established borders and boundaries,” space is also considered as “constitutive of identity.”⁷⁵

This argument leads Paolini to suggest that the global influence of the non-core actors also reveals itself at “the level of local and the everyday.”⁷⁶ That is because, on the one hand, everyday life and the city where it takes place “works as a liberating site for identity formation” where the people of the postcolonial contexts can present “vibrant, nonformal expression of politics.”⁷⁷ On the other hand, the city is also a space where material legacies of colonization and consequences of neo-colonization (such as poverty and hunger) are also experienced. By looking at the case of Africa, Paolini concludes that even though “Africa resides within the global system not of its choosing and decidedly out of its control,” which brings material limitations and curtail opportunities for the people, Africans also act and shape world politics in everyday life, which resides “outside the formal province of the State and politics.”⁷⁸

To conclude the section, postcolonial IR scholars differ in their conception of ‘the international’ from mainstream IR scholarship. They question how a particular hegemonic global imaginary has become dominant in IR discipline by revealing what is left outside of the study of ‘the international’ and pointing to the multiple dynamics, actors, and locations of world politics. As our analysis has shown, all three scholars have critically interrogated the consequences of identifying anarchy, states, and interstate relations as the ‘universal’ components of ‘the international.’ For instance, Paolini points to how this particular conception of ‘the international’ limits asking “the questions of identity, subjectivity, and modernity, particularly as they apply to non-Western places such as Africa.”⁷⁹ For both Paolini and Ling, interrogations of the postcolonial and global discourses on non-core contexts (Africa in the case of Paolini and Asia in the case of Ling) and discussions on the role of non-core “agency and subjectivity”⁸⁰ are crucial to understand of world politics. While these two authors mainly focus on categories of subjectivity, identity, and the political space, Grovogui focuses mostly on the contributions of non-Western actors to world politics, which are overlooked by the discipline due to the particular conception of ‘the international’ that only conceive of the diffusion of ideas from the core to the non-core rather than mutual constitution between them.

Regarding the implications of this analysis for the study of the non-core, what we can underscore is that unlike Third World IR scholarship, which solely points to a particular conception of ‘the international’ driven from the experiences of the non-core parts of the world, postcolonial IR scholarship interrogates how the particular conception of ‘the international’ based on the experiences of the core has

72 Paolini, *Navigating Modernity*, p. 22-23.

73 Ibid., p. 150.

74 Ibid., p. 151.

75 Ibid., p. 149.

76 Ibid., p. 118.

77 Ibid., p. 13.

78 Ibid., p. 17-18.

79 Ibid., p. 5.

80 Ibid., p. 7.

become dominant in the discipline. Thus, they deepen the conception of ‘the international’ as found in IR’s mainstream accounts rather than merely broaden it. First, they do so by challenging the treatment of anarchy as the ‘universal’ dynamic of world politics and showing how this treatment has overlooked the centrality of hierarchy in making the world go around in both ideational and material terms. Second, they question the lack of engagement with non-core actors other than core ones by showing how non-core actors (states and non-state actors) influence world politics despite the material inequalities between core and non-core. Lastly, postcolonial IR scholars locate world politics within a complex web of spheres in which non-core actors influence politics from the level of everyday to the global.

Table 1: The Similarities and Differences between the Conceptions of ‘the International’ in Third World IR Scholarship and Postcolonial IR Scholarship

	Third World IR scholarship	Postcolonial IR scholarship
What of world politics? (Fundamental dynamic shaping world politics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The hierarchy between the core and non-core states resulting from several material (economic, institutional, military) inequalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The hierarchy between the core and non-core states which is not only stemming from material inequalities but also ideational structures legitimizing this hierarchy
Who of world politics? (Main actors whose ideas, capabilities, practices, and policies influence world politics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Two groups of states, namely core and non-core, are interrelated with one another ➤ The increasing role of non-state actors ➤ The nature of agency is viewed as “asymmetrical” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Two groups of states, namely core and non-core, are related with one another ➤ The importance of non-state actors ➤ The nature of the agency is conceived in terms of “mutual constitution” of world politics despite the existence of unequal relations
Where of world politics? (The location where world politics takes place)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The interrelatedness of internal and external realms of states ➤ Regional level is also the location where world politics emerge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Co-constitution of internal and external realms of states ➤ Non-core actors’ ideas, capabilities, practices, and policies take place at multiple, intertwined locations from the everyday to the global

Conclusion

This paper looked at the conceptions of ‘the international’ in two bodies of scholarship, namely Third World IR scholarship and postcolonial IR scholarship, which have been significant contributors to the conversation regarding the limitations of IR discipline in its approach to the non-core. We questioned whether there had been any differences regarding how these scholarships understand the notion of ‘the international’, the central category shaping how IR’s limitations are understood. In the paper, we argued that Third World IR scholarship broadens the conception of ‘the international’ found in the mainstream accounts of IR by adding a particular conception of ‘the international’ based on their analyses of Third World experiences and extending beyond the discipline’s great-power focus.

Postcolonial IR scholarship, on the other hand, goes beyond this understanding and deepens the conception of ‘the international’ by questioning the consequences of mainstream IR’s treatment of anarchy, states, and inter-state relations as ‘universal’ features of world politics, and by highlighting the importance of the co-constitution of material as well as ideational hierarchies, and the mutual constitution between core and non-core actors (state and non-state alike) at multiple locations in different parts of the world. As such, postcolonial IR scholars challenge the mainstream accounts of the discipline and Third World IR scholarship.

This analysis demonstrated that broadening the understanding of ‘the international’ by adding a particular conception based on Third World experiences will not be enough to go beyond the limitations of IR discipline. There is always a need to problematize the ‘particularity’ of prevalent accounts of IR by revealing the co-constitutive relationship between the material and ideational aspects of world politics, and how non-core actors have also shaped ideas, practices, and policies of world politics, both of which have implications for knowledge production in IR. Otherwise, overcoming the Western-centric and/or Eurocentric limitations of the discipline will continue.

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