

Bhaso Ndzendze & Tshilidzi Marwala, *Artificial Intelligence and International Relations Theories* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, 162 pp.)

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Book Review

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been one of the most significant issues in our lives in all aspects, and yet, International Relations (IR) theory has not fully engaged with AI. Since “the theory is central to IR” (1), *Artificial Intelligence and International Relations Theories* fills this lacunae and questions how IR theories may embrace AI.

The book consists of ten chapters, which successfully discuss several IR theories. What “theory” means in IR, the nature and purpose of IR theory, the major debates in the field, major events in IR theorization, such as 9/11, and the issues of methodology in the IR discipline are well captured in the book. Also, the authors emphasize that “theoretical dialogue” is critical in the AI era since AI itself requires “renewed eclecticism” as an “all-encompassing general-purpose technology (GPT)” (27). Thus, the authors seek to go beyond and provide a theoretical contribution to AI within the framework of IR theories. However, they mostly fail to establish a theoretical dialogue between the two and end up focusing more on reviewing various IR theories.

The book first provides a brief history of AI which can be traced back to the 1950s and demonstrates how AI and international politics have been tied. After introductory debates in IR and AI, the book revisits IR theories one by one to evaluate them in the AI era. Similar to any undergraduate-level IR theories book, it starts with traditional theories and continues with critical ones. Regarding Realism, the authors particularly rethink the Realist conceptualization of “balance of power”. They argue that in addition to the traditional indicators of balance of power, such as military expenditure and nuclear capacity, the average level of innovation, total AI patterns, and total share of technology exports should also be included in the concept of “AI balance of power”. The authors also claim that AI challenges Realism since it may be used today by various actors including the non-state ones. Although the chapter on Realism argues

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that this theoretical perspective should consider AI as a significant improvement, the question “how” remains unanswered here.

The authors then revisit the main liberal concepts, specifically democratic peace theory and economic interdependence. Democratic peace theory posits that democracies are unlikely to engage in military conflict with other democracies. However, the chapter highlights the significant role misinformation and manipulation, particularly through Deepfakes, play in shaping public opinion and influencing policy outcomes. Thus, the authors argue that whether or not information on any given issue is manipulated by AI has become critical for policy outcomes. They suggest that along with regime types, democratic peace theory should consider the role of information and its source in determining war and peace outcomes.

The authors also challenge the liberal concept of “interdependence”. They assert that “economic transformation in the wake of AI will disrupt economic interdependence” (82), eventually escalating tensions between states. However, they do not explain how AI has altered economic relations or how AI’s impact on economic relations differs from that of globalization.

The chapters on Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) and Dependency Theory pursue a different approach compared to the previous chapters. Here, the authors draw on real-world cases to enhance the theorization of HST and Dependency Theory. To update HST, the authors review the emerging AI competition between the United States (the US) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). HST argues that if there is a single superpower, peace and commercial activity are maintained globally. According to HST, hegemony relies on two critical factors: military power and economic power. By analyzing the rivalry between the US and PRC, the authors offer a new determinant in addition to the previous two: the possession of the “largest and most advanced militarily applicable AI” (99). Dependency Theory, meanwhile, can be defined as “a method of understanding how political and economic relations of the countries on the periphery have evolved and come to be embedded in the international system” (108). By examining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows during the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the authors aim to uncover a pattern akin to the so-called dependency. They analyze the World Economic Forum (WEF) Competitiveness Index which consists of 12 pillars, one of which is “technological readiness”, referring to AI in recent years. The chapter assesses the relationship between FDI flows and the technological readiness scores of 20 countries. The authors find that some of these countries have an exclusive inflow of FDI regardless of their performance. Nevertheless, they emphasize the potential explanatory power of Dependency Theory in

understanding the division of labor and patterns of dependency in the AI era. However, they do not provide any specific examples.

The book re-visits English School (ES) as another traditional theory of IR. The authors argue that ES' distinction between the international system and international society can help us understand the current world, where states possess differentiated technological capabilities. In other words, varying levels of technology may lead to states being categorized into different systems and/or societies. Although it may be a new perspective to look at ES based on technology and AI, this chapter does not clearly demonstrate how *exactly* the ES provides significant explanatory power on recent developments driven by AI.

Finally, the book reviews Constructivism, Postcolonial Theory, Feminism, and Green Theory under the umbrella of Critical Theories. Although this chapter claims to revisit these theories and demonstrate what they can offer for the AI era, the connections between these theories and AI require a stronger and clearer discussion and analysis. Constructivism, for instance, and its debates on IR theorization are well summarized in this section. The case study on the unification of Germany, which seeks to “explore the intersection of language, technology and international relations” (144) provides valuable insights into the *potential* intersection of Constructivism and AI, but it needs further elaboration to fully achieve its intended goals. Regarding Postcolonial Theory, the authors emphasize the importance of language for newly independent African states. Here, 4IR and AI present some critical opportunities for Postcolonial Theory since AI can help preserve endangered languages and decrease language barriers. Yet, again, the chapter falls short of providing a robust *theoretical* discussion on AI from the perspective of Postcolonial Theory, despite the book's stated objective.

Feminist IR studies focus on power relations and the gendered nature of IR. The authors argue that Feminism may be a valuable framework for discussing “gendered lenses on AI”, “gender bias in the AI-making process” and “gender-inclusive processes, and ethical foundations for AI” (152). Similarly, Green Theory in IR is concerned with the environmental consequences of industrial productivity, growth, and change. Given AI and 4IR's considerable energy demands, Green Theory “must help differentiate among various forms of AI to identify those which can have utility in combatting environmental change, and those which exacerbate it” (142). However, the sections on both Feminism and Green Theory mainly summarize these frameworks without proposing new discussions or in-depth analyses of how AI can be examined through these critical theories.

In conclusion, the book has several strengths. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive summary of IR theories and the major debates in the discipline. Secondly, it reviews AI's history from an international political perspective by demonstrating the rivalry between the US and PRC on AI. Most importantly, the book is seminal in making AI its main focus in IR theorization. In other words, rather than merely incorporating AI into empirical studies, it aims to discuss and analyze AI from a theoretical standpoint. Additionally, it demonstrates how IR theorization is vivid and part of the major changes in the global arena. Furthermore, the book provides a fresh and innovative perspective to re-think various theories of IR.

The main argument of the book is that AI will *eventually* influence and transform all theories of IR in one way or another. It serves as an excellent starting point for rethinking IR theories within the context of AI. However, being a “starting point” and attempting to cover all IR theories, the book does have some shortcomings. Although each IR theory is well explained in each chapter, readers may expect further discussion and analysis showing how these theoretical frameworks interact with AI. The book lacks case studies and detailed examples that could help assess IR theories from an AI perspective. In other words, while the book's discussion on IR theories may be sufficient for early researchers, further development is needed to fully understand AI through the lens of IR theories.