Empires: Beyond the 'Imperial Turn' in International Relations

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Abstract: Studies of empire and imperialism within IR have been rejuvenated in recent years. This has pulled in multiple dimensions. Some, partly responding to the renaissance of American empire, have explored the political form of empire and its impact on systems of world order. Elsewhere, taking inspiration from intellectual history and the "historiographical turn" within international political thought, imperialism and its intersection with internationalism have featured once more within the disciplinary purview. In addition, and linked to this, the imperial turn has prompted disciplinary self-reflection as IR has considered its own imperial roots. This chapter explores each of these developments in turn, including their payoffs for the IR discipline. The chapter argues that despite these developments, the treatment of empire within historical IR still exhibits a degree of Eurocentrism, an overlooking of those subjected to imperial rule, and a continued reliance upon secondary sources. Addressing these deficiencies offers a terrain as yet unexplored.

> *The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality - judiciously, as you will - we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."* (Suskind, 2004)

When Ron Suskind of the *New York Times* found himself on the receiving end of this frank assessment of American power, offered by an aide in White House of the George W. Bush administration, he was observing a sea-change in America's view of itself. The designation of 'American Empire' was nothing new, but the 9/11 attacks ushered in over two decades of US-led intervention largely into parts of the world previously under the sway of European imperial powers. It wasn't simply the projection of power, but the language and style of that projection that marked a rupture moment. Policies of regime change, the deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan of counterinsurgency doctrines crafted during colonial wars of decolonization, the discourse of "rogue states", a global campaign of counter-terrorism fought through the suspension of legal rights, and the Manichean division of the world into enemies and friends; all marked a more strident era of

American dominance. The military, economic, and cultural dimensions of the US-foreign policy agenda from 2001 appeared to indicate that the "unipolar moment" was in fact an imperial moment.

America's imperial turn was reflected in the social sciences too. In a reminder of the ongoing and intimate connection between contemporary world politics and the substantive and theoretical concerns of IR, the discipline witnessed its own "turn" to empire. But empire and imperialism had never really gone away. In fact, an appreciation for the impacts and legacies of European imperialism in particular is essential in comprehending the ways in which world politics appears today. The material and normative dominance of the "west" (despite numerous and growing challenges to this); the delineation of borders across the continent of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and beyond; the presence of large scale South Asian diaspora throughout the Indian Ocean region and beyond; the discourse of "civilized" and "uncivilized" states, or in more contemporary parlance, "failed states", "ungoverned spaces", and "rogue states"; and the presence of the P5 on the UN Security Council. All of these features of world politics can be traced back to empire and imperialism in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century; patterns of empire that in turn were parasitic upon other imperial polities and their legacies elsewhere.

What is surprising is not so much that we live in a world beset by the ongoing consequences of imperialism, but that until relatively recently the IR discipline was so proficient in what Robert Vitalis (2005: Loc 2415) has termed the "willful forgetting" of empire. A cursory study of the IR canon bears this out. Kenneth

Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) contains no index references to "empire", and "imperialism" features in his text largely as a critique of the economic theories of Hobson and Lenin. Amongst the index entries for Mearsheimer's *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001); Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999); and Keohane and Nye's *Power and Interdependence* (1977), the terms "empire" or "imperialism" do not appear once. This is despite the fact that many of the case studies presented within those texts derived not from a world of nation-states, but of empires too. This isn't just about leaving empire out, but overlooking those subject to imperial rule. As Tarak Barkawi (2010) suggests, the failure of social science and IR to deal with questions of empire and imperialism left the discipline inadequate "to the experiences and histories of most of the peoples and places on the planet". The move, in recent years, towards what has been termed "global IR" (Acharya, 2014), has made this observation more urgent. Above all, given the theme of this volume, as history clearly shows, nation-states are a relatively new invention. World politics, including for much of the twentieth century, has been primarily the story of empires not states.

For all these critiques, the "imperial turn" has made its mark. In recent years the study of empire and imperialism has been rejuvenated within IR. This has pulled in multiple dimensions. Some, partly motivated by the renaissance of American empire, have explored the political form of empire and its impact on systems of world order (Nexon and Wright, 2007; Phillips, 2010). Elsewhere, taking inspiration from intellectual history and the "historiographical turn" within international political thought, imperialism and its intersection with

internationalism have featured once more within the disciplinary purview (Long and Schmidt, 2005; Bell, 2001; 2007). In addition, and linked to this, the imperial turn has prompted disciplinary self-reflection as IR has considered its own imperial roots (Schmidt, 1998; Muppidi, 2012; Vitalis 2015). In what follows I shall explore each of these developments in turn, including their payoffs for the IR discipline, before considering those areas of imperial history that IR has still yet to explore.

Bringing Empire Back In: The Political Form of Empire

Empire may not always have been a "hot topic" within IR, but Michael Doyle's 1986 volume *Empires* provides a prominent exception. Better known for his work on democratic peace, Doyle's earlier work sought to comprehend the political form taken by imperial rule, in the process offering a definition that provided a way marker for later scholars. For Doyle, empire was constituted by "effective control, whether formal or informal, of a subordinated society by an imperial society", where effective control means control over sovereignty. "Imperialism", was therefore "the process of establishing and maintaining" this basic political relationship (Doyle, 1986: 19).

Significant in Doyle's work was the manner in which he sought to incorporate existing explanations for imperialism, drawing upon both history and IR. Outlining the spatial form of empire he delineated "metrocentric" approaches where

imperialism resulted from a metropolitan urge, as with Lenin and Hobson's stress on the acquisitive nature of capitalism for instance. Meanwhile "pericentric" approaches brought in the doyennes of the "Cambridge School" of imperial history, Gallagher and Robinson (1953), who stressed the peripheral motivations for imperial expansion, emphasising the importance of "informal empire" in comprehending imperialism overall. Here, empire was not so much about the whims of Emperors and their cabinets, but rather about the inevitable expansion into what Doyle termed "imperializable peripheries" – spaces with no, or at best highly divided government; undifferentiated economies; and with absent or highly divided loyalties (Doyle, 1986: 19). Finally, "systemic" approaches allowed for the incorporation of mainstream IR theories, notably Waltz's structural realism, which identified the system as the key variable shaping the political form of empire.

Empires reflected then a particular attitude towards the purpose of disciplinary IR. Key here was the elaboration of essential attributes of empire as primarily a *political* relationship. This was an attempt to pin down the mechanics of imperialism as a means of cross-case comparison. However, as Daniel Nexon and Thomas Wright (2007) argued two decades later in their own contribution to the debate, few IR scholars took up the discussion that Doyle reignited. Whereas Doyle laid the emphasis on the essential attributes of imperial units, Nexon and Wright's contribution entered the debate at the level of order. Doyle's extraction of "empire" from "imperialism" carried with it the implicit distinction between an empire as a form of polity, and the international order within which it was located. This entailed an assumption that has tended to bedevil the treatment of empire

within IR as whole: The idea that empire was essentially the state writ large. For Nexon and Wright what was missing was not so much a theorising of empire as a unitary polity, but rather a theorising of imperial orders as a set of relations. Empire had evaded treatment within IR because imperial orders tended to be treated as some form of hegemonic order, or pattern of preponderance, when in fact, imperial orders historically were frequently nested within other forms of order, including anarchic, biplolar, and multipolar orders.

Nexon and Wright's approach therefore offered a jailbreak from the tendency to socialise empire into a state-centric order within IR. Imperial power was instead theorised as a relational form of power, deriving from the positional relationship between metropoles and periphery actors. Imperial orders were thus based on hierarchical "heterogenous contracting" with a diversity of periphery actors. Local intermediaries were invested with power precisely *because* of their relationship with the central authority, but were kept in check by the possibility that their status may be revoked and passed to another if they fail to keep to the contract. Imperial metropolitan actors thereby exerted control through their capacity to "divide and rule" – to play local intermediaries off one another.

Although largely unacknowledged this heterogeneous contracting and indirect rule model of empire resonated with some of the moves within imperial history at the time. Notable here is Tony Ballantyne's notion of empire as consisting of a series of webs rather than the more traditional "empire from above" narrative (Ballantyne, 2014). In many ways this continued the genealogy of indirect or informal empire models begun by Gallagher and Robinson, adapted in different

ways through the likes of Chris Bayly and Thomas Metcalf (Bayly, 1996; Metcalf, 2008). Nexon and Wright's model also had the benefit of explaining how the US could be described as an empire without exhibiting many of the characteristics traditionally associated with imperialism (at least not in the post-Cold War era), notably direct rule and permanent territorial conquest. Meanwhile, a shift away from describing essentialist qualities of empire as a political form, towards relational patterns of intersocietal encounter hint at the works of postcolonial scholars and those who have sought to bring "metropole" and "periphery" in a more complex relational whole (Steinmetz, 2016; Ballantyne and Burton, 2012; Barkawi and Laffey, 2002).

But metropole-periphery models, as Nexon and Wright pointed out, remained essentially ideal-typical understandings of imperialism, raising the question of historical veracity. Direct imperial conquest didn't die out in the nineteenth century, indeed the third imperialist wave of the twentieth century, which included imperial expansions by countries such as Germany, Italy and Japan, in many ways reflected the old-fashioned model of imperialism. These forms of imperialism co-existed with more informal and indirect patterns as with the British Empire in South Asia, whose independence movements were mobilised precisely in opposition to an apparently reinvigorated imperialist threat from both East and West in the early decades of the twentieth century. Meanwhile the pattern of French empire had always resembled a more metrocentric form of direct rule where French colonies were perceived as *départements* of the French state. These differing structures not only challenged the ideal typical models laid out by Doyle, Nexon, and Wright, and others, but also shaped the ways in which

those empires operated, their longevity, and the patterns of resistance that they faced.

Indeed, the agency of 'periphery' actors – those subject to imperialism and colonialism - is itself worthy of greater analysis and study, including the impacts these agents had on imperial and world politics (Viksand, 2020). It is true, for instance, that the 1857 mutiny in India only saw limited impact on other colonial spaces at least beyond the immediate South Asian region, despite colonial and para-colonial ties between these spaces (Bose, 2006). But later patterns of resistance against empire clearly profited from the ability of periphery segments to collaborate and share across so-called "imperial firewalls" (Nexon and Wright, 2007). The League Against Imperialism set up in the 1927 Brussels Conference provides one prominent example, an organization that thrived precisely because of shared outlooks behind diverse so-called periphery segments, and their corralling under wider banners of socialist and Marxist internationalisms (Louro, 2018; Raza, Roy, and Zachariah, 2015).

More broadly to suggest that peripheries didn't engage in some form of collaboration or intellectual political social or cultural contact only works as an assumption if we ignore subaltern histories, the history of ideas, and indigenous knowledge orders (Bayly, 1996). Anti-imperialism had a political, intellectual, and social life too – one which refutes the all-pervasive hegemony of imperial order (Getachew, 2019). The recent turn towards a narrative of imperial "anxieties" has shown just how fearful imperial power was; a fear that regularly manifested in displays of performative violence and collective punishment (Condos, 2017;

Wagner 2017). The danger here is that IR's insistence on abstraction forces it to incorporate a largely top-down – maybe even conservative – form of imperial history, in this instance unwittingly writing out the voices of those subject to imperial rule. This is just one example of how IR once more privileges the voice of the powerful, and opens up the critique from critical, post-colonial, and decolonial scholars on the essentially imperialist character of IR, and the coloniality of its knowledge (more on this later).

So we reach an impasse. Once again, history fights back against the concepts that social science demands as the cost of doing business. A theory that tries to capture everything is no theory at all, but questions remain as to the level of conceptual abstraction we are comfortable with. At what point do we end up doing damage to the history that we seek to bring into the discipline? These are surely questions that cut across the entire enterprise of historical IR.

An Empire State of Mind: The Historiography of Imperial Thought

One of the difficulties then of dealing with empire within IR relates to the ontological stability of the term. The same may also be said of "state", "territoriality", "sovereignty" and a host of other concepts that are central to the discipline. But empire is perhaps unique in its apparent capacity not only to encompass these other concepts, but also in its variability across time and space. The semantic range of imperialism is broad enough to incorporate territorial and

non-territorial forms (for example, epistemic imperialism; capitalist accumulation; neo-imperialism). It can be said to express multiple forms of sovereignty (divided, direct, indirect). Frequently the category of "state" is nested within the imperial form, indeed in many cases states can be seen as constituted by empire. This is apparent in the fact that in the political thought of empire "state" was a term often used interchangeably with terms such as "nation", "commonwealth", "government", "body politic", "political union", and "sovereign" (Bell, 2007, 98-9). Attention to the political thought of imperialism, what has been termed the "historiographical turn" (Bell, 2001), presents a second front in the study of empire within historical IR. If empire has the capacity to create its own reality, then one of the most obvious manifestations of this was in the universe of ideas that constituted imperial thought – or what Jay-Z and Alicia Keys might call, an "empire state of mind".

Rather than attempting to fix the conceptual content of empire, studies of imperial thought have instead explored its multivalent intellectual worlds. Duncan Bell's wide-ranging exploration of European ideologies of empire challenges the notion of a monolithic form of imperial rule both in theory and in practice (Bell, 2006; 2007; 2016). Empire was justified and critiqued on the basis of legal, ethical, moral, cultural, and commercial imperatives, as well as its political and strategic rationales. Key here was the relationship between empire and Liberal ideologies with respect to the pursuit of free-trade, the pacific benefits of commerce, and more embodied ideas of civilizational development (Pitts, 2005).

A central binary distinction that these ideologies opened up was that between so-called "civilized" and "uncivilized" states, a distinction that corresponded as much with perceptions of political organisation, as with judgements over the moral status of subject populations (Gong, 1984). According to this logic, empire was justified on the grounds of its benevolent cultivation of more civilized practices. This was a legal and normative distinction that reached "all the way down". At the macro level, "uncivilized" powers were located in a separate normative universe justifying a general derogation from the established practices of interstate conduct, including in relation to the laws of war. But at a micro-level too, the representation of subject populations by colonial administrators, political officers, and orientalist scholars alike, frequently revolved around stadial tropes of barbarianism, savagery, and capacities for commercial or even intellectual intercourse. Colonial knowledge thereby justified and sustained the practices of colonial governmentality, whilst also feeding upwards into wider patterns of ordering the world that found a location in legal discourses and international organizations (Bayly, 2016; Bayly, 2019; Simpson, 2004).

The implications for IR of attention to the intellectual worlds of empire are profound. Firstly, we perceive more clearly the co-implication of imperial thought, imperial practice, and international political theory, including canonical texts within IR theory (Lowe, 2015; Pitts, 2005; Buck-Morss, 2000). As Edward Keene (2002) has shown through his reappraisal of Grotius' work, imperialism carried with it the presumption that beyond the European system of states, sovereign-territoriality was not assumed. The sovereign prerogatives of public authorities were seen as divisible "such that it would be possible for sovereignty to be divided

between several institutions within a single political community, or … for a state to acquire some of the sovereign prerogatives that had originally belonged to another and exercise them on its behalf" (2002: 3). Furthermore, Grotius' understanding of the law of nations allowed for the private appropriation of unoccupied lands and in the absence of established political authority the right to wage "private war" in their defence. Significant here is not just the legal provision for what would be commonly understood as colonialism, but the fact that this goes against one of the central organising principles of international society (in the English School sense), namely the principle of indivisible sovereign-territoriality.

Second, attention to the legal dimensions of imperial thought in particular has also challenged the mythology of the essentially egalitarian nature of international law. Key here was the nineteenth century shift from naturalist conceptions of international to a more positivist reading, in other words a shift from a transcendental set of practices to a more "scientific" reading, based on the dictates of a professional legal class, and the product of sovereign will, (i.e. the "civilized" (European) powers of the family of nations) (Pitts, 2007; Sylvest, 2007). In this sense Antony Anghie (1999) points to the complicity between positivism and colonialism, where a body of international law was constructed around the practical requirement of ruling over "peripheral" societies. Taking this further, and again with reference to the misconceptions of the English School, Gerry Simpson (2004) has explored the tradition of "anti-pluralism" within the international legal system, as evidenced in the category of "outlaw states" in international society. Contemporary discourses of "rogue", "failed", or "backlash" states, familiar to International Criminal Court proceedings and Security Council

resolutions can accordingly trace a genealogy back to the 1815 Vienna Congress, and arguably, in terms of the "barbarian" distinction, back to the "Pax Romana" of the Roman empire. Such arguments have also helped to sustain the move from anarchy to hierarchy in the theorizing of international order (Hobson and Sharman, 2005; Zarakol, 2017; Barnett, 2017; Spanu, 2019).

Third, although this has perhaps been underappreciated within historical IR, are the spatial dimensions of empire. In theory and in practice, empire rarely covered space in a uniform fashion. Striking here is the intersection of legal provisions, colonial knowledge, and the spatial regimes of imperial and colonial authority. Lauren Benton's groundbreaking work (2009) exploring the confluence of sovereignty, law, and geography, has disturbed the "logical and perhaps even comforting … narrative of European empires as generating a slow but steady rationalization of space", one that was encouraged by the refining of cartographic practice at the time, and cemented most emblematically in the pink shading of British imperial maps. As Benton's work demonstrates, empire, as a political, legal, and geographical order "did not cover space evenly but composed a fabric that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces … politically fragmented; legally differentiated; and encased in irregular, porous, and sometimes undefined borders" (Benton, 2009: 2). Overlapping with this, and arguably overlooked within IR, has been Ann Laura Stoler's description of "imperial formations": "macropolities whose technologies of rule thrive on the production of exceptions and their uneven and changing proliferation. … harboring and building on territorial ambiguity, redefining legal categories of belonging and quasi-membership, and shifting the geographic and demographic zones of partially

suspended rights" (Stoler, 2006: 128). As this suggests, imperial geographies, and their politics of legality were productive not only of certain types of space, but of certain categories of people: Imperial spatializations had (and arguably continue to have) *social* effects, productive of "shadow populations", "zones of exclusion", and zones of "privileged exemption". The point here is that these sites should be seen as anomalous but rather at the very core of imperial practice in producing spaces of scaled sovereignty and differentiated subjecthood. The capacity for imperial formations to capture spaces as diverse as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan; the Mediterranean; and the US-Mexican border, should prompt IR to take notice.

Both Benton and Stoler's work offer escape routes from what John Agnew described as IR's "territorial trap" (1994). In particular, and as David Strang (1996) has shown, here we can bring in the voluminous travel and exploration literature that was generated by the imperial encounter, a literature that was productive of a host of geographical imaginations, often peddled by the "scientific" learned societies of imperial metropoles (Bayly, 2016). Bell's study of the idea of "Greater Britain" (2007) demonstrates how these imperial geographies could operate on a global scale. Spatializations produced by the British empire sought to tie together the English speaking settler colonies, and even the United States, under an imperial "federation", an idea that found avatars in for instance the "Closer Union" project that sought to reorganise East African colonies. Federative ideas also migrated into the post-imperial visions of anti-colonial thinkers (Getachew, 2019; Fezjula, 2020). As an attempt at imperial reform "Greater Britain" ultimately failed, but the idea lives on in the notion of the "Anglosphere"

upon which pro-"Brexit" campaigners in the United Kingdom have pinned such high hopes (Bell, 2017).

Fourth, imperial ideologies had productive effects in a more practical sense, with consequences for world order and practices of international relations. What Buzan and Lawson (2015) have termed 'ideologies of progress' (including liberalism itself) manifested in new forms of governmental management by which 'rational states' sought to comprehend and manage their subject populations. The advent of the 'colonial state' served to systematise knowledge and inculcate a new cadre of professional bureaucrats – a shift that was reflected back into metropolitan spaces. At the frontiers of colonial and imperial spaces new methods of cartography offered a "scientific" and fixed delimitation of space for Europeans unfamiliar with the reach of these newly acquired territories (Branch, 2013; Goettlich, 2018). It was in this drive towards mapping which was then imported back to Europe, and not the Peace of Westphalia, that Jordan Branch (2013) locates the origins of the territorial sovereign state and the possibility of international relations as such.

Finally, the scientification of government had implications for foreign policy and the conduct of military operations too as forms of knowledge shaping the official mind became more generic and sterile. This signalled a move towards "utile forms" (Ansorge and Barkawi, 2013) away from the more embodied and fluid colonial knowledge of early scholar-practitioners. For Patricia Owens (2015), it was in the colonial "small wars" and counterinsurgency campaigns of imperial states, and particularly the wars of decolonization, that the advent of a particular

rendering of the "social" was operationalized – one which harkened back to the doctrines of "household management" first elaborated by Ancient Greek philosophy. Combined with the differentiation of subject populations along scales of savagery and barbarianism, these ideologies of progress also demonstrated a "dark side" (Buzan and Lawson, 2015). The use of colonies as "imperial laboratories" (Barder, 2015; Go, 2020) offered sites for new experiments in government. Often these were reflected back to imperial metropoles. Prison camps, policing, the surveillance state, and neoliberal economics all originated in "periphery" spaces as projects of formal and informal imperial experimentation.

An Imperial Social Science: International Relations

To return to Vitalis (2005) and the "wilful forgetting" of empire within IR, we ought to remind ourselves that "forgetting" is the key word here. Whilst the contemporary IR discipline spent much of the twentieth century focussing on states, Vitalis' work shows us that at its origins, IR was a profoundly imperial discipline concerned not with relations between states, but with colonial administration, imperial relations, and "race management" (2015). The "turn" to empire then is partly conceived as a "re-turn" to the foundational purposes of political science and International Relations as a source of "useful knowledge" for imperial powers. This undermines one of the central creation myths of the IR discipline, that it was developed for the purposes of understanding and preventing the horrors of the First World War with the establishing of the Woodrow Wilson Chair at the University of Aberystwyth (Wilson, 1998). Rather than a debate

between idealism and realism, a more accurate framing is accordingly one between internationalism and imperialism (Long and Schmidt, 2005). The legacies of this were faintly visible even with the rise of the heroic age of theory. As the English School theorist, Martin Wight, put it: "the question of relations with barbarians was a political problem forming a bridge between international relations and colonial administrations" (Schmidt, 2005: Loc 709). Han J Morgenthau's observation in *Politics Among Nations* that the disappearance of "politically empty spaces" on colonial frontiers demanded a reformed theoretical vision shows how "internationalism", and its "scientific" treatment could be seen as emergent from imperialism (1967: 52). Following Tarak Barkawi (2010): "Repeatedly, it would seem, IR was founded amidst empire, but discovered instead only a world of sovereign states and their collective action problems."

International Relations is not alone in its complicity with imperialism and colonial administration. Sociology, Anthropology, and Geopolitics can all trace their roots in colonial modernity and the need for "useful knowledge" as means of instructing colonial administration (Steinmetz 2012; Asad, 1973; Kearns, 2009). But the discipline does stand out in its unwillingness to confront these origins – a reflection perhaps of a general apathy towards disciplinary history within the field (Bell 2009; Schmidt and Long 2005). There are however more urgent imperatives here too not only in addressing the Eurocentrism of disciplinary knowledge at its origins but bringing in those aspects that have been lost along the way – notably race and violence. Whilst early twentieth century scholars of international politics may have disagreed on the best ways to organise colonies, or prevent war, they did agree on the central problematic of race management in international affairs.

The popular prediction of "race war" attests to this. By justifying imperial rule as the continuation of white dominance over subject peoples, Vitalis (2015) exposes the racist, white supremacist, discourses central to American International Relations at birth. Key here are the "counter-networks" that resisted these arguments, networks that connected together spaces as diverse as Sugar Hill in Harlem, New York; Port of Spain, Trinidad; Camden in London, UK; and Ghana's capital, Accra.

Difference, or the management of difference, therefore lay at the core of IR's disciplinary project at its inception (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004) and in this sense, as postcolonial and critical scholarship has also shown, we can point to the deep coloniality of disciplinary knowledge. Himadeep Muppidi (2012) has shown how IR's "narrative protocols" serve to perpetuate the representation of non-westerners through "zooalogical modalities" and a "numerative gaze". In this sense, the origins of IR in colonial knowledge are all too apparent. Accordingly, instead of a discipline that is alive to the constant presence of violence and death, IR is complicit in the explaining away of mass violence through implicitly dehumanising "others" and rationalising-by-numerating the exercise of military force. It is in parallel with this that decolonial scholars have pushed for an epistemic flight from IR's foundations in European modernity and its intimate connections with imperialism (Shani, 2008; Bilgin, 2008; Sabaratnam, 2017; Agathangelou and Ling, 2004).

Where does this all leave us? At a conceptual level, one of the principle payoffs from this body of work has been the challenge that has been mounted towards the analytical bifurcation of empires vs. states. A teleological vision of the unproblematic shift from an imperial system, to a system of states, some time after the Second World War is no longer viable. Empire has not emerged from this literature as simply a unit in itself to be placed alongside state units. Instead the multivalent nature of European empires in particular is revealed. Empires have been shown to consist of actors and ideas that transcend public and private realms. The growth of mercantile imperialism, the role of private companies and their sometimes ambivalent relationship with "state" power complicates the ontology of states vs. empires, showing how polities in the international system were frequently nested within each other. Long-standing concepts of "informal" vs. "formal" empire – well-established within imperial history – have been brought more systematically into IR. Above all, through greater historical consciousness, the historical ontology of these concepts has also been revealed. Empire meant different things in different spaces, at different times. As a result, perhaps unsurprisingly a significant part of the imperial turn has been dominated by approaches deriving from historical sociology and "global" historical sociology (Buzan and Lawson, 2015).

Yet for all the recovery of imperialism within IR in recent years, the story of non-western imperialism has been far less apparent. Such studies offer new insights into the structural variety of international systems, as shown in Manjeet Pardesi

(2017) studies of Mughal and Islamicate Asia, or through Andrew Phillips and Jason Sharman's work on the hybrid forms of sovereignty that emerged through the East India Company's expansion into the Indian Ocean region (Phillips, 2016; Phillips and Sharman 2015). Equally important are studies of the movements that *opposed* European empires. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century and its afterlives in the Pan-Islamist movement, which resonated across colonised spaces from Afghanistan to South East Asia has been well covered by international historians (Aydin, 2007). Yet curiously these movements have made limited impact in IR – despite their echoes with recent events in the Middle East, and the somewhat eclectic political ideologies of the so-called Islamic State (Devji, 2015). Alongside this, the political life of Pan-Asianism, which grew out of a modernist critique of European imperialism, and paradoxically also a modernist pursuit of colonies for imperial Japan, also offers an as-yet underexplored example of global inter-imperial dynamics. These entanglements of European and non-European imperialism, including the ways in which they were navigated and even exploited by anti-colonial groups offers one potential avenue for new research.

Attention to non-European imperial thought, and anti-imperial political thought also offers a deeper research programme on empire as a global phenomenon – theorised from the non-western perspective. Here an analytical bifurcation of the imperial west and the non-imperial non-west will not do. Anti-colonial liberation movements galvanized around ideas of anti-imperialism with profound implications for world politics, that is clear, but broader traditions of thought are also apparent that complicate a simple binary logic. In the South Asian context, for

instance, internationalist visions, ideas of hierarchy, and imperialism were extracted from the sacred texts of the Hindu *Vedic* traditions, including its imperial histories. The recovery of these histories and archaic tracts of statecraft by South Asian scholars served a purpose for nationalist thinkers who sought to showcase the intellectual vitality of South Asia against the degenerative orientalist representations of certain European scholars. Here, the response to imperialism, its intellectual worlds, and its international effects are shown to be just as important as the study of empire itself. In a sense, whilst IR had its imperial origins, it had its anti-imperial origins too. Understanding the entanglements between these worlds offers a 'global IR' that is worth of the name.

Aside from these macro-level topics of order, scale, and intellectual history, the study of empire in historical IR might also turn its attention to more micro-level studies of imperial practice. The generation and diffusion of practices of trade, commerce, law, land management, population management, policing, intelligence, or military activity for instance, across and between imperial spaces, offers new understandings of the ordering effects of imperial governance, its spatial reach, as well as its legacies. One notable absence here are studies of the practices of imperial violence, the frequent silencing of which offers a host of ethical as well as methodological challenges. The recent lawsuit brought against the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office by Kenyan victims of torture perpetrated by the British government during the emergency era of the 1950s provides a case in point.

Finally, on a methodological point, it is striking that for all of the talk of a "re-turn" to empire in IR and the co-presence of a more historically informed programme of

research, the use of primary source materials remains relatively uncommon. As the historiographical turn has shown "the archive" is a term that encapsulates a variety of sources and one area that has seen growth has been the recovery of overlooked historical works of political thought, and even travel accounts. But the exploration of national, organizational, and local archives, still seems to be viewed by many IR scholars as something that historians do. It might be said that in its quest to deal with empire more comprehensively, for IR to avoid regurgitating outdated debates in imperial history, it should engage with primary sources with the same vigour that it engages with secondary sources. For all of the problems with the construction of the archive, its silences, and its occlusions, a reliance upon only secondary sources is the equivalent of attempting to learn about the past by only visiting museums – these are curated collections.

If this can be achieved, IR offers a suite of theoretical approaches, and scales of analysis that are not always in the forefront of the historian's mind. Historical IR has ameliorated IR's traditional instrumentalization and distortion of history through slavish adherence to concepts and theory. But opportunities may also be explored to speak back to the instrumentalization and distortion of *theory* that the discipline of history is sometimes guilty of. One avenue here is to engage with the "multi-axial" frameworks for analysis that global historians have developed off the back of the achievements of imperial history (Ballantyne and Burton, 2012). Given IR's competence with theorizing and operating across multiple analytical levels there is an opportunity for IR to bring a different range of questions to the debate on the historical and ongoing presence of empire in world politics and to sharpen its disciplinary contribution.

World politics continues to echo its imperial pasts. The reverberations of racism and imperial nostalgia that have been visited upon European and North American politics can find equivalents in the hyper-nationalist projects of Xi Xinping, Narendra Modi, and Vladmir Putin. The spatial imaginaries of '*Tianxia'*, the BJP's attempted recovery of 'Greater India', or conceptions of Eurasia located in the writings of Russian Conservative thinkers such as Alexander Dugin, all provide reminders of the ongoing presence of imperial imaginaries. Assessing the implications of these for international relations is only achievable if IR begins to confidently craft its own histories.

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