The impact of colonialism on policy and knowledge production in International Relations

JASMINE K. GANI AND JENNA MARSHALL[*]

Is there an academic–policy divide, and if so, does that gap need to be bridged? For decades, International Relations (IR) scholars have reflected on their roles and responsibilities towards the 'real world', while policy-makers have often criticized the so-called detachment of academic research. In response, there have been increased calls from within the academy itself for fellow academics to descend from their 'ivory tower'. First accredited to Alexander L. George and later taken up by Joseph S. Nye, Jr,[1] the 'bridge the gap' debate saw scholars attend to the sustained frustration of policy-makers at the inaccessibility of jargon-filled language and, at times, the indifference of academics to the needs of policy-makers subject to the fast-paced demands of formulating national security policy.[2] Thus, for many, academia needs to reconsider its audience, and dispense with the 'trickle-down approach' of metatheory, considered too esoteric and abstract to have any real-world application.[3] In fairness, it would be too simplistic to define this view solely in terms of a need to serve the policy realm; rather, it also reflects the view that the discipline of IR has the ability to provide 'the vocabulary and conceptual framework to ask hard questions of those who think that changing the world is

[1] Joseph Nye, Jr, is exemplary of the porosity of the policy and academic worlds. He has served as a high-ranking official—as assistant secretary of defence for international security affairs, chair of the National Intelligence Council and deputy under-secretary of state for security assistance, science and technology—as well as serving as dean of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.
[2] Joseph S. Nye, Jr, 'Autobiographical reflections on bridging the policy–academy divide', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22: 1, 2009, pp. 111–28; Hans J. Morgenthau, *The dilemmas of politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Alexander L. George, *Bridging the gap: theory and practice in foreign policy* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993).
[3] Stephen M. Walt, 'The relationship between theory and policy in international relations', *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 8, 2005, p. 40. See also Joseph S. Nye Jr, 'Bridging the gap between theory and policy', *Political Psychology* 29: 4, 2008, pp. 593–603.

easy'[4]—so that it also embodies a spirit of holding accountable both sides of the academic–policy divide.

However, nearly two decades on from this laudable statement, the capacity for 'asking hard questions' has nevertheless been limited by the parochial West-centric disposition of a discipline that calls itself 'international'.[5] How can the discipline hold practitioners accountable or contribute to more effective policy-making if it has struggled to grapple with and overcome its own foundational mythologies, exclusionary practices and amnesias, especially *vis-à-vis* race, racism and imperialism? Would not a failure to address those blind spots then become manifest yet again, once scaled up into the academic–policy nexus? How do the exclusions, amnesias and denials that constitute the discipline's history get reproduced at the policy level, inflecting the actors, institutions and processes that comprise an interconnected world?[6]

These are the questions that frame this centennial special issue of *International Affairs*. The occasion serves as an opportunity to reflect on the past 100 years to consider how legacies of empire and race have worked to constrain the possibilities of thinking on an international scale, in both academic and practitioner contexts. It is particularly fitting to explore these matters in *International Affairs*, a journal with a long history of commitment to publishing 'policy relevant articles',[7] but one that has also acknowledged that some of its earlier works 'draw on unacceptable assumptions and theories about world politics—not least during the colonial era'.[8] In acknowledgement of that legacy, this special issue interrogates the perceived 'academic–policy divide'. We contend that this purported 'gap' provides only a partial rendering of a far more entangled and complex encounter between academics and practitioners, an encounter that has increasingly become depoliticized as a technical concern over 'policy relevance',[9] rather than developed as a salve to actual political problems and global injustices. Against a background of prominent debates on the worlds of theory and policy, typically framed through a vernacular of fraught (dis)connections in the form of gaps, bridges and thoroughfares, we consider the ways in which such worlds are in fact enmeshed and engender a reified minority or epistemic community that often produces intra-elite debates.[10] A more critical focus on the academic–practitioner nexus renders

---

[4] Jack Snyder, 'One world, rival theories', *Foreign Policy* 145: 1, 2004, p. 62.

[5] Stanley Hoffman, 'An American social science: International Relations', *Daedalus* 106: 3, 1977, pp. 41–60; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, 'Why is there no non-western International Relations theory? Ten years on', *International Relations of the Asia–Pacific* 17: 3, 2017, pp. 341–70.

[6] See Duncan Bell, 'Writing the world: disciplinary history and beyond', *International Affairs* 85: 1, 2009, pp. 3–22; John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric conception of world politics: western international theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[7] *International Affairs* author guidelines page, https://academic.oup.com/ia/pages/Author_Guidelines. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 24 Nov. 2021.)

[8] Andrew Dorman, 'Call for proposals: the *International Affairs* 100th anniversary special issue', 14 Aug. 2020, *International Affairs* blog, https://medium.com/international-affairs-blog/call-for-proposals-the-international-affairs-100th-anniversary-special-issue-fb30b3f1fcfa.

[9] Beate Jahn, 'Theorizing the political relevance of International Relations theory', *International Studies Quarterly* 61: 1, 2017, pp. 64–77.

[10] Peter Haas, 'Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination', *International Organization* 46: 1, 1992, p. 2.

visible the otherwise unseen ways in which mechanisms of race and imperialism condition not only peoples, but also knowledge and practice.

Additionally, we call for greater problematizing of the now ubiquitous expectation and pressure within departments and universities for academics to pursue and showcase the 'impact value' of their research. This pressure is increasingly reflected in funding criteria and measured through compilations of 'impact cases' for submission to national research assessment bodies. The pressure to 'prove' the impact of research is in turn produced by governments who want universities to justify their budgets and contribution to wider society. To be clear, we are certainly not suggesting that the notion of impactful knowledge production is wrong—rather, our aim with this special issue is to encourage more questions: What or whom is being impacted? Are there less visible impacts we are overlooking while we focus on the impacts that can be quantified—impacts that may, for example, be extractive, exploitative or harmful? What are the channels we have to go through, and the complicities we accept, in order to pursue impact? The point here is to discourage the '*any impact*' approach; the mere fact that a form of knowledge exchange reflects recognition from the policy world does not always mean it is necessary or positive.

The articles in this special issue consider various questions that pursue these goals. They problematize normalized patterns of academic–policy exchanges, or expose the non-embodied connections and ideas that travel through institutions and material structures in society; they interrogate who can and cannot be included in the field as experts, whether scholars or practitioners. Such questions also provide scrutiny on how we as scholars and practitioners decide which matters of world politics merit our attention—and, equally important, how imperial and racialized knowledge orders condition and at times constrain the ways in which we are able to define what the problems of world politics are. In the remainder of this piece, we introduce each of the articles in this special issue and offer snapshots of how they each contribute in diverse ways to a more robust theorization and transparent illustration of the academic–policy nexus. They draw on multiple regional, institutional and country case-studies, from the global North to the global South. Moreover, the articles explore the most pressing issues that shape our understanding of global politics today: multilateralism, security, democratization, climate change, insurgency, statecraft and borders, identity, grand strategy, peacebuilding, nuclear diplomacy, counterterrorism, human rights, regionalism and hierarchy. Synthesizing the arguments of the contributions, three prominent dynamics can be delineated in the academic–practitioner nexus: the role of academia as a supplier of knowledge for colonial policies; the influence of imperial practice and policy-makers in shaping IR and academic knowledge production; and contestation from academics and/or practitioners against racial hierarchies, and challenges to imperialist status quos. We explore these three dynamics in more depth below.

7

Jasmine K. Gani and Jenna Marshall

Academia as knowledge-supplier for colonial policies

In this first section we elucidate how academia and intellectuals have helped to supply, shape and justify colonial and racist policies. Underpinning all the articles in the special issue is an acknowledgement of the racial foundations of the discipline of IR, which, though formally established in IR departments in the early twentieth century, already existed in various forms such as 'imperial' or 'diplomatic' history and was rooted in Enlightenment political thought. Scholars across academic disciplines have increasingly been confronting the erasure of the racism that coursed through the writings and beliefs of early political theorists and the founders of their disciplines,[11] and have argued that this erasure forecloses greater debate about and scrutiny of racism within the discipline's mainstream and critical theories. While this important conversation and excavation have already been under way for some time,[12] we seek to take this understanding further to probe how these ideas and patterns of racism, colonialism and erasure go on to shape, and become operationalized through, policy. The research by the contributors to this special issue has exposed a long and deep history in which universities, as well as other sites of knowledge production and expertise that draw on academic insights, such as museums and think tanks, have (and had) a close entanglement with state practitioners, supplying the ideas and logic that in many instances were used to justify racist beliefs and colonial policies.[13] This unsavoury 'transmission belt' has occurred in two forms.[14]

[11] Errol Henderson, 'The revolution will not be theorized: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's Challenge to White Supremacist IR Theory', *Millennium* 45: 3, 2017, pp. 492–510; Lucian M. Ashworth, *Creating international studies: Angell, Mitrany and the liberal tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Robert Vitalis, 'Birth of a discipline', in David Long and Brian Schmidt, eds, *Imperialism and internationalism in the discipline of International Relations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2005), pp. 159–182; Jasmine K. Gani, 'The erasure of race: cosmopolitanism and the illusion of Kantian hospitality', *Millennium* 45: 3, 2017, pp. 425–46; Charles Mills, *Black rights/white wrongs: the critique of racial liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[12] Sithembile Mbete, 'On South Africa, race and the making of International Relations: the Francesco Guicciardini prize forum', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, publ. online 28 Oct. 2021, pp. 1–4; Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam, eds, *Race and racism in International Relations: confronting the global colour line* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Robbie Shilliam, 'Race and racism in International Relations: retrieving a scholarly inheritance', *International Politics Reviews*, vol. 8, 2020, pp. 152–95; Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, *Power, postcolonialism and International Relations: reading race, gender and class* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Duncan Bell, ed., *Empire, race and global justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Errol A. Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight: racism in International Relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26: 1, 2013, pp. 71–92; Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui, *Sovereigns, quasi sovereigns, and Africans: race and self-determination in international law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Randolph B. Persaud and Rob B. J. Walker, 'Apertura: race in International Relations', *Alternatives* 26: 4, 2001, pp. 373–6.

[13] As has been argued elsewhere, we too recognize the complexity of the division of labour between the worlds of the academy and policy; this is most visible when engaging with the rise of think tanks. These entities have been characterized as 'void-filling' *vis-à-vis* the more theoretically-minded academics. Yet their presence in the policy world is often marred by a trade-off between prominence and credibility in the US context. For more on think tanks and their relationship with policy, see Inderjeet Parmar, *Think tanks and power in foreign policy: a comparative study of the role and influence of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1939–1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Jasmine K. Gani, 'From discourse to practice: Orientalism, western policy and the Arab uprisings', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 45–65.

[14] We borrow the term 'transmission belt' from Andrew Moravcik, who used it to connote the constructive ways in which states represent the views of domestic forces at an institutional level: see Andrew Moravcik, 'Preferences, power and institutions in 21st-century Europe', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 56: 7, 2018, pp. 1648–74; Bruce W. Jentleson and Ely Ratner, 'Bridging the beltway–ivory tower gap', *International Studies Review* 13: 1, 2011, p. 7. See also Andrew Rich, *Think tanks, public policy and the politics of expertise* (Cambridge:

8

First, as a number of the contributions argue,[15] academia has been a predominant influence in the production of broad epistemic communities. In the course of this process, academic knowledge production has acted as a supplier of racial, civilizational and imperialist discourse, ideology and 'logic' that were (and are) disseminated through research, teaching and broader public intellectualism. Bearing in mind that many policy-makers have been taught and trained within academia, especially elite institutions, it is necessary to recall that IR departments were founded in the early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and United States precisely to serve the purpose of informing imperial administrations.[16] While this form of transmission is impossible to quantify precisely, the articles in this special issue show that nevertheless universities, along with think tanks and journals, delineated the parameters of rational and acceptable debate. That the ideas emanated (as they still do) from so-called bastions of scholarship and rigour meant they carried greater credibility and gravitas, and were accompanied by an assumption that they had been scientifically tested. In many cases universities and intellectuals were responsible for upholding the legitimacy of racist hierarchies and the necessity of colonialism in the West *against the grain* of anti-colonial and anti-racist social movements and intellectuals in the colonies, and subsequent grassroots movements for the abolition of colonialism and racism in the West. Thus, in contrast to the common refrain that academia is an 'ivory tower' that is disconnected from the real world, in IR it has in fact routinely demonstrated the opposite, with the capacity to embed and systematize racism, scavenging the disorganized and reactionary fears of society and refining them in such a way that they appear rational,[17] indeed necessary for the sake of order, security and communal peace.

A second way in which academia has historically fed and continues to feed policy is in a more direct way—through a supply chain of academically trained experts who go on to work in policy, either as consultants or by holding office in government or in other state institutions such as the military. This pattern was laid down during the peak period of European colonialism, the clearest example being provided by J. S. Mill: despite being a philosopher, he was anything but detached from the 'real world', taking up the position of colonial officer in British-controlled India, arguing against Indian self-rule on the racist intellectual basis that the natives were still in their infancy.[18] Such 'knowledge entrepreneurs'

Cambridge University Press, 2004); James G. McGann, *The global go-to think tanks*, University of Pennsylvania, International Relations Program, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, 2009, https://repository.upenn. edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=think_tanks.

[15] See Amitav Acharya, 'Race and racism in the founding of the modern world order', pp. 23–43; Gani, 'From discourse to practice'; Randolph B. Persaud, 'Ideology, socialization and hegemony in Disciplinary International Relations', pp. 105–23; Lucian Ashworth, 'Warriors, pacifists and empires: race and racism in international thought before 1914', pp. 281–301; Tomohito Baji, 'Colonial policy studies in Japan: racial visions of Nan'yo, or the early creation of a global South', pp. 165–82; Nivi Manchanda and Sharri Plonski, 'Between mobile corridors and immobilizing borders: race, fixity and friction in Palestine/Israel', pp. 183–207; Srdjan Vucetic, 'Elite–mass agreement in British foreign policy', pp. 245–62, in *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022.

[16] Brian C. Schmidt, *The political discourse of anarchy: a disciplinary history of International Relations* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

[17] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The conduct of inquiry in International Relations: philosophy of science and its implications for the study of world politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

[18] Bhikhu Parekh, 'Liberalism and colonialism: a critique of Locke and Mill', in Jan Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh,

9

were at the forefront of the knowledge ordering indispensable to Britain's expansion into south Asia. These 'epistemological invasions', alongside the core group of 'European explorers, diplomats, military men, and Company officials', had the chief function of producing 'a proto-episteme' or 'corpus of knowledge' by which the region was rendered legible for imperial expansion.[19] Later, the urgent imperatives of war established the revolving door that turned scholars into practitioners and vice versa, as witnessed, for example, in the interplay in 1930s British East Africa between colonial administrations and anthropologists to ensure indirect rule.[20]

But such close embodied relationships between academics and imperial governance were not confined to the age of formal empires. The scholarly sanitizing and rebranding of contemporary imperialism as 'hegemony' or 'soft power' prevents us from applying anti-colonial critiques to contemporary empires. In his contribution to the special issue, Randolph Persaud argues that this is a complicity especially epitomized by US 'Disciplinary IR', and challenges the feigning of neutrality in US-led theorizing, calling for it to be recognized as implicitly ideological.[21] Moreover, it is precisely their ideological character that renders such academics 'useful' and allows them to move smoothly into policy roles. Thus, for Persaud, their service as practitioners acts as the chief conduit for those ideologies to travel into and be socialized in policy. Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Barack Obama, and Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Condoleezza Rice, are just some of the examples of academics who have served in high office in the United States. The notion that academic expertise might temper imprudence and propensity for war in policy-making is refuted by their respective willingness to approve of foreign occupations, military intervention, coups, drone attacks or authoritarian allies abroad, and of racial securitization, border regimes and incarceration at home. As Persaud points out, beyond those holding office there are multiple examples of academics who have acted as advisers to governments, obliquely upholding the principles of imperialism under the guise of 'grand strategy' or the 'liberal international order'.

While the US example makes it easy to single out 'mainstream' or 'positivist' IR as particularly culpable, it must be noted that racist and imperialist ideologies have also been carried forth by critical, liberal or 'left-wing' academics. Earlier postcolonial writers already pointed to this trend. Frantz Fanon's essay 'Algeria unveiled' provides an important example of such scrutiny: in this piece he criticizes feminist sociologists and anthropologists who supplied the intellectual rationalization for France's forced 'deveiling' policy of Muslim women in Algeria under the name of

---

eds, *The decolonization of imagination: culture, knowledge and power* (London: Zed, 1995), pp. 81–98.

[19] Martin J. Bayly, *Taming the imperial imagination: colonial knowledge, International Relations, and the Anglo–Afghan encounter, 1808–1878* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 32–3; see also Tomohito Baji, *The international thought of Alfred Zimmern* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), which explores the academic–policy overlap throughout Zimmern's career as he shifted from academia to the Foreign Office and back to academia as the world's first formal professor of International Relations.

[20] Adam Kuper, *Anthropologists and anthropology: the British School, 1922–1972* (New York: Pica Press, 1973).

[21] Persaud, 'Ideology, socialization and hegemony'.

female emancipation from patriarchy and backwardness.[22] The hangover of such colonial policies, and intellectual complicity in them, can be seen within contemporary France (and elsewhere in Europe), where French Muslim women activists have observed the silence of feminist academics in the face of attacks on the hijab and women's 'bodily autonomy'.[23]

Echoing this cross-ideological scrutiny, Lucian Ashworth in his article highlights the latent imperialism in Norman Angell's ideas and the anti-Semitism that laced the writings of the prominent pacifist J. A. Hobson; such normalization of anti-Semitism in intellectual work was the backdrop to rising anti-Semitism across Europe in the early twentieth century, precisely when such racism needed to be challenged by scholars, especially pacifist scholars.[24] As he notes, IR's historical division between warriors and pacifists, realists and idealists, or right wing and left wing, can serve to produce an illusion of a critical debate and interrogation of the status quo within the discipline while utterly failing to grapple with racial and colonial assumptions that underpin both camps. Ashworth's article thus demonstrates the need to explore the reach of racism beyond theoretical binaries.

In her article, Jasmine K. Gani similarly highlights academic complicity, across ideological and theoretical divides, in upholding colonial tropes.[25] Thus, Orientalist fears about the rise of an 'Islamist threat' and an inherent unpreparedness for democracy in the Middle East were not just stoked by neo-conservative interventionists but were also routinely used by pacifist academics to *oppose* western intervention. Gani makes the case that decades of Orientalist representations of the Middle East among academics prior to the Arab uprisings of 2011 influenced western policy expectations of a liberal democratic trajectory in the early months of the protests; while the prompt turn to latent Orientalism among academics in the aftermath of the uprisings, predicting failure and doom, was also eventually manifested through policy. Think tanks, in particular, played an important role as mediators of academic discourse to the policy realm in both the United States and Britain, facilitating 'impact'—but often of the kind that served to entrench rather than contest racial tropes and policies in the Middle East.

Continuing the theme of contesting binaries, this time that of an 'imperialist West' and an 'anti-colonial non-West', Tomohito Baji's article focuses on the ideas of key Japanese intellectuals who also served as policy-makers in the administrations of imperial Japan.[26] Extrapolating from western standards of civilization and native traditions, these individuals defined a regional racial hierarchy that upheld the necessity and 'morality' of Japanese imperialism in east and south-east Asia. Once again, their status as intellectuals, alongside the strategic amalgamation of

---

[22] Frantz Fanon, 'Algeria unveiled' in Fanon, *A dying colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), pp. 35–64.
[23] See comments by Latifa Akay of the charity Maslaha: 'What I want to know is: where are the white feminists, in France and beyond, who are normally so militant about bodily autonomy?', quoted in Musab Younis, 'Racism, pure and simple', *London Review of Books* blog, 24 Aug. 2016, https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2016/august/racism-pure-and-simple.
[24] Ashworth, 'Warriors, pacifists and empires'.
[25] Gani, 'From discourse to practice'.
[26] Baji, 'Colonial policy studies in Japan'.

11

external ideas with local traditions, helped to provide their ideas with greater legitimacy. Baji's article is a caution to IR that simply diversifying the sources of our ideas, though necessary, is not on its own sufficient to undo racism and coloniality in the discipline.

Imperialist practice shaping academic knowledge production

If academia has had a long history of supplying imperial policy through its knowledge production, the reverse has also been true—it is not a unidirectional process. Thus, imperial policies and those that embed racial injustices have often provided the starting-point for academic enquiry, with imperialist and racist constructions taken as the material reality from which to launch any research, without historicization or interrogation of whether that is how it has to be. The risk of academia being a mule for unjust and oppressive assumptions generated through colonial and racist practice looms even larger with the increased emphasis in academia on the necessity of applying for and obtaining research grants. Many funding bodies are dependent on state subsidies, or are financed by the corporate sector or by benefactors from the business and political elite.[27] When it comes to selecting prize-winners, the committees are often made up of members from the business community to assess the potential 'real world' (and presumably monetary) impact of the proposed research. Thus academia is not a bastion of intellectual autonomy, but is increasingly allowing the parameters and goals of research to be delineated by practitioners and their priorities. Where those practitioners have vested interests (as is often likely, even if not always the case) in a social, economic and political status quo that upholds systemic discrimination against marginalized communities, the potential for deep-rooted long-term change becomes muted.

This special issue accordingly demonstrates how academic knowledge production risks reifying colonial and racial injustices. Like so-called impartial reporting in journalism, which indirectly becomes a convenient and efficient means for political elites to distribute their messages, IR as a discipline can end up being a disseminator of the rationales and motives of policy-makers. Thus the supposed neutrality of analytical theorizing and empiricism,[28] which claim merely to observe and predict impartially the way the world is and will be without problematization, can be seen as complicit in normalizing what should in fact be treated as abnormal, even unacceptable.

Several contributions apply this argument to particular regions and debates where the inherent absorption of unjust practices and erasures within knowledge production is particularly egregious. The articles by Kwaku Danso and Kwesi Aning, and by Somdeep Sen, both call for greater challenges to the centrality of the state in IR, and criticize the way it has mirrored an (often colonial) international practice of delegitimizing non-state actors.

---

[27] On the selective nature of research funding, see Johan Eriksson, 'On the policy relevance of grand theory', *International Studies Perspectives* 15: 1, 2014, p. 97.
[28] See Ashworth, 'Warriors, pacifists and empires'; Persaud, 'Ideology, socialization and hegemony'.

In their article, Danso and Aning complicate Weberian notions of the state monopoly on violence, extending validity and recognition to non-state actors in their ability to act as authoritative avenues for dispute resolution.[29] They further make the case for the unsettling of knowledge within security studies, especially when engaging with the African continent, arguing that methodological whiteness has been unquestioningly accepted as the logic that underpins much of security studies discourse. This lack of problematization racializes Africa as ungovernable, and flattens or often entirely negates any substantive understandings of the complexities of lived experiences.[30] Their article also makes visible the ways in which academic eagerness to supply regional case-studies for the sake of policy relevance and proof of 'universal theories' impact people's lived realities. They make their point explicit through an illustration of the 'war on terror' discourses within the Sahel region.

Providing an alternative example, Sen argues that academic scholarship has contributed to the concretization of the state and its violence as 'normal politics', while insurgency (or, in other words, anti-colonial resistance) is thereby rendered 'unnatural' and existentially dangerous for global order.[31] In failing to question the sanctity of the state, scholars have been complicit in upholding colonial practice and the outlawing of resistance, consigning it beyond the realm of acceptable politics, as seen in contexts such as Palestine.

Sharri Plonski and Nivi Manchanda extend these arguments about unsettling the fixity of the state and its borders, but also expand where we look to first to identify the producers of knowledge.[32] Thus, they argue knowledge is not necessarily always produced within the academy, but often is first made (and indeed exchanged and concretized) through (colonial) practice and, in turn, via normalization that converts the practice into 'fact' that goes unchallenged by academic knowledge producers. Their article demonstrates the way colonial and racist knowledges are nourished, upheld and validated by silences within broader epistemic communities—communities in which the boundaries between academics, policy-makers and corporations are much more fluid than a strict binary between academics and practitioners. Recognizing this fluidity also serves to disrupt the 'bridge the gap' debate discussed at the outset of this article.

Thus, all the articles in various ways encourage us to reflect on how universities, intellectuals, schools and museums support the banalization and naturalization of oppressive structures. The academic–policy industries of terrorism studies, traditional security studies or African and Middle East studies often reinstate old myths about endemic 'cycles of violence', or about colonial vulnerability and the need for self-defence in the face of native barbarism; or explore non-western regions

[29] Kwaku Danso and Kwesi Aning, 'African experiences and alternativity in International Relations theorizing about security', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 67–83.

[30] Valentin Yves Mudimbé and Vumbi Yoka Mudimbé, *The idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). See also Marta Iñiguez de Heredia and Zubairu Wai, *Recentering Africa in International Relations: beyond lack, peripherality, and failure* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[31] Somdeep Sen, 'The colonial roots of counter-insurgencies in international politics', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 209–23.

[32] Manchanda and Plonski, 'Between mobile corridors and immobilizing borders'.

13

through the lens of western historical/political watersheds.[33] They often do so without scrutinizing the ways in which international norms assumed to represent order and stability—from statecraft to borders to theories of polarity—are all imbricated in the colonial infrastructure and thus will, and should, necessarily be resisted by the colonized and oppressed. The question academic researchers need to ask ourselves is why we have failed to make so many of these colonial and racist practices 'strange' and culpable in our knowledge production.

Of course, it is not the case that practitioners and knowledge producers *never* abnormalize racism and colonialism. To give some credit to scholars, the devastation and depravity of mass slaughter stemming from racism and imperialism in the two world wars is rightly treated with horror in IR. But while there is recognition and condemnation, academic knowledge production has tended to assign those crimes to the past, undermining the need for responsibility and action in the present.[34] Exploring this instrumentalization of history and memory to absolve the present, Katrin Antweiler explains that international institutions have played a leading role, and have vested interests, in depicting racial crimes as historical events rather than as a contemporary phenomenon, while knowledge producers and disseminators, such as museums and schools, have been complicit in supporting that effort.[35] Drawing on the example of South Africa, Antweiler argues that the memory of the historical and geographically distant racial crimes of the Holocaust is instrumentalized to suppress the memory of near and local racial crimes during apartheid. The point is not that Holocaust commemoration is not needed or laudable, but rather that this top-down form of knowledge exchange, via directives from the UN, doubles up as a form of governmentality where pressure is placed on global South countries to show they conform to western markers of progress, democracy and human rights.

Amitav Acharya's article also considers IR's role in relaying and effectively certifying the (re)branding attempts of colonial practice via the policy-led concept of global governance.[36] For all their laudable claims, international institutions acted

---

[33] For critiques and correctives, see Ruth Blakeley, *State terrorism and neoliberalism: the North in the South* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan: the history and politics of imperial knowledge production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Olivia Rutazibwa, 'Studying Agaciro: moving beyond Wilsonian interventionist knowledge production on Rwanda', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 8: 4, 2014, pp. 291–302; Jasmine K. Gani, 'Escaping the nation in the Middle East: a doomed project? Fanonian decolonisation and the Muslim Brotherhood', *Interventions* 21: 5, 2019, pp. 652–70; Rabea M. Khan, 'Race, coloniality and the post 9/11 counter-discourse: critical terrorism studies and the reproduction of the Islam–terrorism discourse', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, publ. online 21 Sept. 2021, special issue: 'Reflections on remembering: 9/11 twenty years on'; Amal Abu-Bakare, 'Counterterrorism and race', *International Politics Review*, vol. 8, 2020, pp. 79–99; Alina Sajed, 'Insurrectional politics in colonial southeast Asia: colonial modernity, Islamic "counterplots", and translocal (anti-colonial) connectivity', *Globalizations* 12: 6, 2015, pp. 899–912; Sarah Bertrand, 'Can the subaltern securitize? Postcolonial perspectives on securitization theory and its critics', *European Journal of International Security* 3: 3, 2018, pp. 281–99.

[34] Heloise Weber and Martin Weber, 'Colonialism, genocide and International Relations: the Namibian–German case and struggles for restorative relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 26: 1, 2020, pp. 91–115; Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Lager und Genozid: Die Konzentrationslager in Südwestafrika zwischen Windhuk und Auschwitz', in Christoph Jahr and Jens Thiel, eds, *Lager vor Auschwitz. Gewalt und Integration im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Metropol, 2013), pp. 54–67.

[35] Katrin Antweiler, 'The coloniality of Holocaust memorialization in post-apartheid South Africa', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 263–80.

[36] Acharya, 'Race and racism in the founding of the modern world order'.

14

as gatekeepers for entry into what would become the international community, recodifying old (racist) standards of civilization as neutral conditions for acceptance into the modern club of nations. IR as a discipline in turn has been particularly complicit in this 'rebooting' of a western-led liberal order, by promulgating the creation of institutions and of the post-1945 and post-Cold War world orders as watersheds that marked the emergence of a more humanitarian, progressive, civilized and peaceful world. Neo-liberalism, institutionalism, even the human rights regime, are routinely taught as essential theories on IR courses as the cooperative and ethical responses to the wars of the twentieth century: it is remarkable that such deeply hierarchical organizations can then be upheld as pillars of global stability and morality via these theoretical discourses. This, alongside the rebranding of academic journals from what were effectively treatises of imperialism into objective enterprises,[37] shows how a collaboration between academia and the policy world allowed policy-makers to 'move on' from their imperial legacies without confronting the racial classifications and global inequalities that continued to constitute these institutions and the liberal international order.

What these articles also show is that IR's role as messenger (and thus its failure to problematize the narratives supplied by practitioners) has meant it has also reproduced the policy world's erasures of non-western architects and movements for emancipation who were pivotal in advocating those precise ethical norms now held up to be legacies of western civilization. Their erasure, first by institutions and then by academics, provided a rubric for the way in which, even when race and colonialism do get addressed in both policy and scholarship, the non-white and gendered sources of those ideas get airbrushed out of their genealogy.[38] What academic experts of liberal international orders should be asking is: What do such erasures do for our conceptions and narratives of who are the progenitors of world order and 'progress'? By challenging the stories these institutions have told about themselves, and by giving historical policy-makers from the global South the prominence they were and are due, academics could have done more to disrupt the West's civilizational narrative and the intellectual and practical hierarchies in both academia and the policy world.

Meanwhile, where IR has overlooked the importance of policy-makers and liberation activists in the global South, it has conversely given undue prominence to policy-makers from the global North who in fact championed imperialism and racism—not only in research and teaching, but by also welcoming them into the

---

[37] A lesser-known feature of one of IR's more prominent journals, *Foreign Affairs*, is its creation through a merger of the *Journal of International Relations* and the *Journal of Race Development*, the latter explicitly intended to 'uplift the backward peoples from the Sea Islands of Georgia to the Philippine Archipelago': see Robert Vitalis, 'The noble American science of imperial relations and its laws of race development', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52: 4, 2010, p. 929.

[38] See G. K. Bhambra, 'Undoing the epistemic disavowal of the Haitian revolution: a contribution to global social thought', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37: 1, 2016, pp. 1–16, on the erasure of the Haitian revolution by both institutions and academics as a source of global ideas on liberty, sovereignty and equality. There has also been growing scholarship on the work of women in International Relations theory, including the works of women of colour and their previously neglected contributions to the discipline, notably the path-breaking anthology edited by Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, *Women's international thought: a new history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

15

academy. A case in point is Alfred T. Mahan.[39] As Ashworth argues, Mahan's experience as an admiral in the US Navy appeared to enhance his credibility as a scholar. Thus, just as academics who move into the policy world have been conduits for the transmission of ideas into practice, the process also works the other way around, when practitioners—often those who have enacted or overseen egregious wars, coups, debilitating sanctions and extractive economic policies—are invited to take up chairs in prominent IR and political science departments. This pattern urges us to reflect on who is given authority to speak in the discipline, who gets to shape the main debates of the discipline and who is allowed to reinforce its silences.[40] It appears that the closer one is to structures and practices of hegemony, the more weight and influence they are afforded within the academy.

Looking forward: academic and practitioner pushback against colonialism, and cautionary tales

Given the historical and ongoing mutual complicity between knowledge producers and policy-makers in upholding imperial and racial orders, we now consider the responsibilities, possibilities and challenges faced in altering the nature of that nexus. Doing so requires turning to what Danso and Aning call an 'episteme of alternativity';[41] and the primary way for academics to enact this would be to draw on *anti-colonial* practice and legacies, rather than imperial competition, as the foundation of their theorizing.

Thus, in his article, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh forefronts global South policy-makers and focuses on the nuclear order (a topic that is typically associated with realist IR) to demonstrate how it can be approached through an alternative, critical epistemology.[42] Disrupting the 'Great Power gaze', Mpofu-Walsh asks what the politics of non-proliferation looks like from the perspective of the global South, especially the African continent as the sole nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ). There, *denuclearization* is fundamentally linked to *decolonization*. Thus anti-colonial goals, rather than hegemonic/imperialist competition, are at the root of both policy and theorizing. How different would IR knowledge and theories on nuclear weapons be if African praxis and the importance of NWFZs were taken seriously? Turning to the Middle East, Gani similarly argues in her article that the inclusion of non-western history and voices—from policy-makers to activists and scholars—in think-tank discussions can mitigate the latent colonialism that shapes western policy.[43]

Nevertheless, even with an incorporation of non-western practice and knowledge in policy making and scholarly theorizing, multiple perspectives that are marginalized even in the local context, owing to class or gender, may continue

---

[39] Ashworth, 'Warriors, pacifists and empires'.
[40] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past: power and the production of history* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2015); Nicolas Guilhot, 'Imperial realism: post-war IR theory and decolonisation', *International History Review* 36: 4, 2014, pp. 698–720.
[41] Danso and Aning, 'African experiences and alternativity'.
[42] Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, 'Obedient rebellion: conceiving the African nuclear weapon-free zone', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 145–63.
[43] Gani, 'From discourse to practice'.

16

to go unheard.[44] One crucial way in which both academics and practitioners can challenge such patterns is by adopting a more expansive reading of what constitutes 'knowledge' and indeed 'practice'. In doing so, we can dismantle some of the constructed and false hierarchies between elite 'knowledge' and 'research' on one hand, and local 'tradition' on the other.[45] The former is assumed to be objective, reliable and associated with western (and western-validated) universities; while the latter is viewed as subjective, unscientific and commonly associated with Indigenous, racialized, grassroots communities. Assumptions about who counts as a true knowledge producer or 'expert' is not only elitist but heavily racialized and gendered. Definitions of who counts as a 'practitioner' are equally narrow, so that scholars or policy-makers may place much weight on the views and actions of state, global governance and corporate practitioners, but do not view as equal practitioners those involved in everyday practice in their communities—those who in fact sustain their ecology, livelihoods, security and identities, all while having to navigate the impact of top-down policies.[46]

Both the articles by Jan Wilkens and Alvine Datchoua-Tirvaudey on climate justice, and by Althea Rivas and Mariam Safi on the organizing and practices of Afghan women, share knowledge from non-elite local communities and challenge the above binaries and hierarchies. In their article on climate justice in the Arctic and the Mediterranean, Wilkens and Datchoua-Tirvaudey explain that academic–practitioner knowledge exchange has often been a contributing factor in continued climate *in*justice.[47] The existing patterns of this knowledge exchange on climate governance are dependent on hierarchies of knowledge, namely, the valorization of western/'scientific' knowledge production at the expense of the needs and knowledges of the Indigenous and local communities most affected by climate change (i.e. the community-based practitioners, rather than the institutional/state ones). Moreover, the spaces where such knowledge exchange takes place are often exclusionary (in who is invited, in the parameters of discourse and/or in the extortionate costs of participating), producing an intra-elite debate.[48] Having identified these racialized patterns, they offer a corrective decolonial strategy for ethical climate governance, founded on practice-based knowledge and diverse ways of knowing that bring in those excluded insights.

The article by Rivas and Safi also provides an example of how the academic–practitioner nexus can be 'decolonized', one in which everyday knowledges of

---

[44] See Jenna Marshall, 'Postcolonial paradoxes, ambiguities of self-determination and Adom Getachew's world-making after empire', *Millennium* 48: 3, 2020, pp. 340–50; Anupana Ranawana, 'Persistent becoming: women's religious thought and the global', *International Politics Review* , vol. 8, 2020, pp. 100–27.

[45] Walter D. Mignolo, *Local histories/global designs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: justice against epistemicide* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Ananya Sharma, 'Decolonizing International Relations: confronting erasures through Indigenous knowledge systems', *International Studies* 58: 1, 2021, pp. 25–40.

[46] Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, *The power of everyday politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Robbie Shilliam, *The black Pacific: anti-colonial struggles and oceanic connections* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[47] Jan Wilkens and Alvine Datchoua-Tirvaudey, 'Researching climate justice: a decolonial approach to global climate governance', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 125–43.

[48] Their argument is particularly relevant and timely given the criticisms of the exclusionary practices of the 2021 COP in Glasgow, UK (31 Oct.–12 Nov. 2021).

17

Afghan women, in all their diversity and complexity, are centred in peacebuilding efforts.[49] Their article, co-written by an academic and a local practitioner, offers a methodology of how to take into account the internal hierarchies of positionality, interests and knowledges that are always present when engaging with grass-roots communities for the sake of 'research'. Rivas and Safi also demonstrate the importance of registering and valuing the unlooked-for, atypical knowledges from below, such as the subtle observations offered by Afghan women in rural areas that, contrary to wider assumptions, reflect their political engagement and interest.

Caution against extractivism in the search for such local knowledge exchange is at the forefront of both the above contributions.[50] Thus academics should remain reflexive in what the purpose of their research is, and who really benefits. Moreover, a praxis of decolonizing such research necessarily entails taking time in a way that is at odds with the current culture of speedy and multitudinous productivity in academia: the rapid churning out of articles from 'the field' should raise appropriate questions about how, why and for whom that research is being conducted.

Of course, at issue is not just whom but also *what* we consider as worthy of scholarly and policy attention, and how inclusive we are of alternative methodologies. Dependence on state and official archives, 'canonical' theorists, written records and English-language sources all reproduce the racialized hierarchies inherent in the prioritization of certain types of knowledge and transmission.[51] These factors also close the door on appreciating the power—both practical and ideational—generated by collective social action, whose impact cannot (and should not) be individualized to one or a few visible and often romanticized protagonists. Recognizing all this and reading into the silences of the archives should encourage greater attention to non-hegemonic record-keeping, story-telling and witnessing beyond elitist and prohibitive barriers—from oral histories, to poetry, art and independent publishing on paper and online. As anti-colonial and anti-racist thinkers and activists have long argued, these are the ways in which those who are dispossessed and marginalized, but also, consequently, *autonomous*, have kept their identities, cultures and memories alive, and sought to prevent their

---

[49] Althea-Maria Rivas and Mariam Safi, 'Women and the Afghan peace and reintegration process', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 85–104.

[50] It is also worth noting that even if academics want to cultivate knowledge in a more sensitive and collaborative way, institutional regulations may prevent it, such as the need to abide by risk assessments that necessarily reinsert the state and its security channels that preclude engagement with non-elite people. See Mateja Peter and Francesco Strazzari, 'Securitisation of research: fieldwork under new restrictions in Darfur and Mali', *Third World Quarterly* 38: 7, 2017, pp. 1531–50.

[51] For more on the colonial implications of the dependence on the English language (and therefore translations of native sources), see M. Shwaikh, 'Translation in the war-zone: the Gaza Strip as case study', in Rebecca Ruth Gould and Kayvan Tahmasebian, eds, *Routledge handbook of translation and activism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 129–44. For more on recognizing multiple knowledge traditions, see Meera Sabaratnam, 'In the ruins of canonicity: women and their practices of thought', *International Politics Reviews*, publ. online 27 Sept. 2021, pp. 1–5; P. Owens, K. Rietzler, K. Hutchings and S. C. Dunstan, eds, *Women's international thought: towards a new canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Robbie Shilliam, 'Theorizing (with) Amy Ashwood Garvey', in K. Rietzler and P. Owens, eds, *Women's international thought: a new history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 158–78.

18

experiences from being suppressed and erased.[52] In the face of systematic racism and the colonial dismantling of their histories, those who are marginalized are not, in fact, silent but continue to cultivate and share knowledge, even if they may lack the resources and type of support received by hegemonic knowledges (and people).[53] Recognizing the equal validity of marginalized forms of knowledges in both academic and policy realms pushes back against the de-representation in knowledge exchanges within elite spaces and formats.

However, it would be erroneous to assume from these arguments that knowledge produced by so-called elite communities is always bad, and that knowledge or cultural production from the bottom up is always more authentic and supports the cause of justice. Srdjan Vucetic's article unsettles multiple binaries, between the elite and the 'masses', as well as between academics and practitioners.[54] Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, he complicates what we read as knowledge production and who we see as its progenitors, challenging the notion of purely top-down (and imperialist) identity construction. Exploring the role (and popularity) of nationalistic films and novels as signifiers of this consensus between policy-makers and wider society, Vucetic demonstrates that it is not enough to hold accountable only those deemed to possess political capital, be they policy-makers or academics. Rather, it is necessary also to challenge the broader pressures and expectations of the public that produce a collusion between elite and mass discourse, and help to foreclose the adoption of more critical, justice-oriented policies. Thus, if we focus solely on academics and practitioners in any anti-racist work, we miss the uncomfortable reality that narrow, exclusionary nationalism that foments such racism and imperialist foreign policies actually enjoys substantial 'buy-in' from people and may be an accepted part of a local (in this case British) identity.

This observation reinforces the need outlined above for a more expansive approach to defining knowledges, but this time when interrogating the generators of coloniality. This in turn allows us to bring into equal focus other facilitating institutions and mediums of knowledge dissemination, many of which play a pivotal role in making colonial tropes and erasures more palatable, accessible, even culturally and economically valuable. This theme runs through several of the articles in this special issue. As noted above, Vucetic's article focuses on cultural output; Antweiler looks at museums and schools; Baji considers the instrumentalization of local folklore for imperialist ideologies in Japan; Plonski and Manchanda examine

---

[52] See *Black British publishing—past to present*, with speakers Hudda Khaireh and Aurella Yussuf from Thick/er Black Lines, Marl'ene Edwin and Ida Hadjivayanis, recorded webinar, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I77UKusx40s, part of the Hidden Histories seminar series organized by the School of Oriental and African Studies Decolonising Working Group curated by the Library Decolonisation Operational Group led by Farzana Qureshi, Ludi Price, Amma Poku and Angelica Baschiera; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999); Shiera S. El-Malik and Isaac A. Kamola, eds, *Politics of African anticolonial archive* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); 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* 19: 4, 2017, p. 548. For an example of collating stories of collective grassroots action, see K. Elshayyal, *Muslim identity politics: Islam, activism and equality in Britain* (London: Tauris, 2018).
[53] Shilliam, *The black Pacific*, p. 58.
[54] Vucetic, 'Elite–mass agreement in British foreign policy'.

19

the power of racial capitalism via Israel's surveillance industry and marketing; and Gani scrutinizes the impact of journalistic discourse and think tanks.

Thus far, a lot of responsibility for challenging the racial and colonial dynamics of the academic–practitioner nexus has been placed with knowledge producers, whether within or outside academia. But it is necessary to emphasize that efforts have already been under way, not only to 'decolonize' our academic disciplines, but to bring that discourse into the public realm. At that point practitioners need to carry their share of responsibility in listening to and applying the expertise (whether academic or community-based) that can foster more just policies. Instead, the attention policy-makers give to expertise is often selective and politicized, based not on what can actually improve people's lives but on what helps to justify the existing approaches adopted by governments. The current denigration and growing securitization of critical race theory, especially in the United States but increasingly elsewhere, is an example of attacks on emancipatory knowledges that challenge power and oppression. Offering another stark example of this, Amal Abu-Bakare explores in her article the lack of any serious attempts to confront Islamophobia in society, despite the wealth of research and expert advice from scholars and community-based practitioners available to policy-makers.[55] Focusing on the cases of the UK and Canada, she highlights the way in which practitioner intervention, in this case that of security and police officials, has actively prevented the adoption of expert guidelines on tackling Islamophobia on the grounds that they might interfere with their counterterrorism strategies. In many ways this is a blatant acknowledgement from policy-makers that their counterterrorism strategy is inherently built upon racial tropes and discrimination. In contrast, so-called 'neutral' research on terrorism and/or counterterrorism is embraced by practitioners, precisely because such research might not ask uncomfortable questions about the racial foundations or assumptions that are necessary to enact their policies.

Abu-Bakare's article offers an example of the limitations of academic–practitioner knowledge exchange. Exhorting scholars to make their research policy relevant does not address the unequal receptivity towards critical research that may challenge policy. Nor does it sufficiently take into account the implicit disciplining that can take place in that process of knowledge exchange. Those very spaces or channels that are created to facilitate sharing, listening and negotiation between knowledge producers and practitioners (through all the blurred boundaries between them) may reproduce and reify hierarchies through unequal interactions. Is real dialogue possible if power dynamics render the interlocutors unequal?[56] Or, in their efforts to be heard, taken seriously, and make their presence

---

[55] Amal Abu-Bakare, 'Exploring mechanisms of whiteness: how counterterrorism practitioners disrupt anti-racist expertise', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 225–43.

[56] For a critique of dialogue, see e.g. Edward Said's criticism of the Oslo Peace Process in Cindi Katz and Neil Smith, 'An interview with Edward Said', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21: 6, 2003, pp. 635–51; for theoretical critique, see K. Hutchings, 'Dialogue between whom? The role of the West/non-West distinction in promoting global dialogue in IR', *Millennium* 39: 3, 2011, pp. 639–47, and other articles in that special issue of *Millennium* on 'International Relations in dialogue', ed. J. K. Gani, M. Iniguez de Heredia and P. Kirby; K. Fierke and V. Jabri, 'Global conversations: relationality, embodiment and power in the move towards a global IR', *Global Constitutionalism* 8: 3, 2019, pp. 506–35.

worthwhile, academics and other knowledge producers may find themselves being subtly socialized into the very modes of speech and thought that they sought to criticize. This can also happen in reverse when grassroots practitioners share spaces with scholars and elite institutions. The path-breaking and radical ideas needed to initiate change on some of the most deep-seated problems in politics and society may be diluted in such spaces for the sake of pragmatism and communication, undermining the ability to imagine real alternatives to the status quo. This is not to say that knowledge producers, whether academic or community-based, should not engage with policy-makers, but rather that they should be clear in what they seek to achieve—if, for example, constructive dialogue or receptivity to expertise is unlikely, it is at times necessary and an ethical responsibility simply to register alternative ideas or contestation. Returning to the point made at the start of this piece, this cautions us in how we champion 'impact' and knowledge–policy engagement, especially if we only recognize engagements that supplement and are 'useful' to systems of power rather than those that hold them to account.

Conclusion

This special issue introduces the readers of *International Affairs* to the relatively undertheorized and underhistoricized relationship between race, knowledge production and policy-making. The articles demonstrate the ways in which practitioners have historically relied on research produced within the academy to inform policy, initiating the establishment of departments and disciplines for this purpose, but they also show the reverse to be equally true: that policy, both foreign and multilateral, influences the possibilities and parameters of research, funding and recruitment practices, and retention of jobs.[57] A key goal of this special issue has been to foster reflection on the ways in which knowledge production (in its multifaceted forms) contributes to or challenges the practice of racism and coloniality; and the ways in which policy and practice shape, validate, limit or ignore knowledge production—in ways that either perpetuate or interrogate coloniality. As the three categories delineated above show, the academic–practitioner nexus is best captured as a series of foreclosures that actively work to uphold narrowly espoused evolutionary myths of the discipline and entrench a naturalization of white-racialized subject positions in academic discourse on the 'international', while sidelining scholars and activists, notably women and people of colour, who have made undeniable contributions to analysis of the contemporary world.[58] All this brings into view, as one scholar puts it, 'the fundamental ways in which IR already is, and always has been, complicit in ordering politics'.[59]

[57] On the selective uptake of academic ideas, see Steve Smith, 'Six wishes for a more relevant discipline of International Relations', in Christian Reus-Smith and Duncan Snidal, eds, *Oxford handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 725–32.

[58] Vineet Thakur and Peter Vale, *South Africa, race and the making of International Relations* (Lanhan, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Meera Sabaratnam, 'Is IR theory white? Racialised subject-positioning in three canonical texts', *Millennium* 49: 1, 2020, pp. 3–31; Robert Vitalis, *White world order, black power politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

[59] Jahn, 'Theorizing the political relevance of International Relations theory', p. 65.

As we have argued in this introductory piece, the exposure in this special issue of the deep academic–practitioner nexus confronts and challenges the 'gaps' discourse advanced at the expense of making visible the existing reciprocity that disciplines the boundaries of acceptable enquiry. The outcome of this disciplining at the theoretical level can be seen in the construction of paradigms that normalize Eurocentric presuppositions on 'how the world is'. But such outcomes are also made manifest through *material* implications generated by narrow policy responses and policy instruments.

The special issue is not just an exposure, though; it is also a call for *repair*. To embark on a project of repair, those involved in knowledge production, dissemination and application—within academia, think tanks, museums, schools, cultural production and policy—first and foremost need to recognize that their work is not detached from the real world, even if they seek to make it so. If the articles in this special issue have shown anything, it is that there can be no realistic and honest demarcation between political and apolitical knowledge: to assert neutrality is like offering a blank slate that will inevitably be written over. It is worth knowing that even with the best intentions, a scholar's work is likely to be co-opted for political ends; and that one's erasures and blind spots regarding injustice, even if innocently produced, will be taken as justification for inaction and marginalization of these injustices in the real world.

Sincerity in seeking to prevent racist or imperialist co-optation necessitates more open interrogations of power and commitments to justice: and without doubt IR, whether 'analytical' or 'critical', and academia more broadly, *are* filled with sincere and honourable scholars who care about the world they live in and have the capacity to enact positive change. Questioning and challenging accepted and expected modes of academic enquiry requires courage and creativity, both of which are aided through collective effort. This special issue, then, is an invitation to adopt that courage and creativity in how we cultivate knowledge, in questioning the purpose and the ends of that knowledge, and to be discerning in how we try to put it into practice.