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IR in Dialogue... but can we change the subjects? A typology of decolonising strategies for the study of world politics¹

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Abstract

In an effort to re-conceive the conduct of 'dialogue' within world politics, it is necessary for IR to find new subject-positions from which to speak. This paper develops a typology of six distinctive intellectual strategies through which 'decolonising' approaches to social theory can help re-think world politics, by bringing alternative 'subjects' of inquiry into being. These strategies include pointing out discursive Orientalisms, deconstructing historical myths of European development, challenging Eurocentric historiographies, re-articulating subaltern subjectivities, diversifying political subjecthoods, and re-imagining the social-psychological subject of world politics. The value of articulating the project in this way is illustrated in relation to a specific research project on the politics of the liberal peace in Mozambique. The paper discusses a number of tensions arising from engaging with plurality and difference as a basis for conducting social inquiry, as well as some structural problems in the profession that inhibit carrying out this kind of research.

Keywords: postcolonialism; decolonisation; Eurocentrism; liberal peace

Introduction

The academic enterprise requires that we make our arguments in *conversation* with existing work and ideas. As such it is an inherently social activity – indeed we might consider conversation a *constitutive* element of academic life. The move to thinking about IR's conversations as a set of 'dialogues' rather than 'debates', as *Millennium's* conference has encouraged, is both in keeping with the traditions of the study of world politics *and* subversive of the order that has historically shielded the conversation from intruders. The notion of 'dialogue', taken etymologically, is about speaking (-logos) across or through (dia-), suggesting distance and difference between

¹ This research is supported by ESRC Studentship ES/F005431/1. I am also grateful for helpful comments from participants at the Millennium Conference, members of the LSE IR Department's International Theory seminar and members of the LSE Global Governance lunchtime seminar. In particular, the input of the Millennium Editors and two anonymous reviewers has been invaluable, although all remaining errors are my own.

the speakers. It requires that we ask questions about their identities, horizons and interests, and indeed how these are situated within the world of practice and action, rather than presuming homogeneity of interest and a common purpose to inquiry. We are pushed towards understanding academic work as a live enterprise, disorderly and dynamic in form, embedded in a world of plurality.

And yet, despite engaging in the conversational practices all the time that constitute the practice of academic work, the mainstream has been slow to pick up the emergence of a movement in the discipline that extends dialogue itself as a critical strategy for thinking about the world.² As this paper aims to show, self-consciously decolonising strategies aim to articulate different subject-positions from which this 'speaking across' or 'dialogue' can take place. In doing so they bring to prominence a principle that is already taken for granted in everyday academic practice – that understanding is improved through dialogue – and use it to generate a wider and more critical understanding of what we think of as international relations.³ Although necessarily rooted in common traditions of social thought, decolonising strategies aim at reconfiguring our understanding of world politics through subjecting its main perspectives to philosophical and empirical challenges. This project sees itself as broadly rooted in a progressive ethic, motivated by the desire to see and understand world order in a way appropriate to the realisation of more equal relations between and within diverse political communities.⁴

² Recent texts include Inayatullah, N. and D. L. Blaney (2003). International relations and the problem of difference. New York, London, Routledge, Bhambra, G. K. and R. Shilliam (2009). Silencing human rights: critical engagements with a contested project, Palgrave MacMillan. Grovogui, S. N. (2002). "Regimes of sovereignty: International morality and the African condition." European Journal of International Relations 8(3): 315, Hobson, J. M. (2004). The Eastern origins of Western civilisation. Cambridge, UK ; New York, Cambridge University Press, Jones, B. G. (2006). Decolonizing international relations, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Agathangelou, A. M. and L. H. M. Ling (2009). Transforming world politics: from empire to multiple worlds, Taylor & Francis, Nayak and Selbin (2010) Decentering International Relations, (London: Zed Books)

³ The concerns of the discourse ethics movement were similar but were critiqued in terms of how they viewed the problems of power. See Hutchings, K. (2005). "Speaking and hearing: Habermasian discourse ethics, feminism and IR." Review of International Studies 31(01): 155-165.

⁴ The role of normative evaluation in social analysis is a controversial issue. I am broadly sympathetic to the position articulated by Mervyn Frost, who sees normative judgements as relevant at all stages of analysis, and argues for making them more explicit. See Frost, M. (1994). "The Role of Normative Theory in IR." Millennium - Journal of International Studies 23(1): 109-118.

This paper aims to develop conversations within IR about the contribution of decolonising strategies. The overall argument is that decolonising thought can be viewed as a set of distinct but connected intellectual strategies that provide a productive platform for identifying specific problems in our research into world politics. Firstly, I will read decolonising strategies as problematising the embedded 'subjects' of world politics in various ways and offer a heuristic typology of this wide research programme along these lines. Secondly, I will demonstrate the contribution of this critical move through applying these distinctive strategies to the 'liberal peace' debate in IR and the case of Mozambique. Finally, I will offer some reflections about the questions this raises for the future study of world politics, both through building theory and research practices.

The paper seeks to make contributions to the literature on a number of fronts. Primarily, in offering an innovative typology of decolonising strategies it sets up a useful framework for debate about and between different 'postcolonial' or 'anti-Eurocentric' approaches in the study of world politics. In particular, it enables the detailed comparison of complementarities and tensions in decolonising thought through indicating how and why approaches differ and what their specific concerns are. However, the corollary contribution is that it also offers a unique mirror to the discipline of IR through articulating different ways in which its framings might be problematic in a supposedly postcolonial era. The contribution of the case study is a demonstration of the ways in which the typology supports a development of applied critical approaches in IR, which all too often attempt to critique international political power without disturbing some important underlying assumptions. It demonstrates that these specific decolonising strategies as articulated by the typology can be usefully concretised and applied to specific sites and topics of interest. It also makes a case for how and why appropriate empirical research is a crucial part of an active decolonising project, whilst highlighting the precariousness of the support that the profession offers for this.

Theory as strategy: recovering the purposes of critique

If 'theory is always for someone and some purpose', we should think about it as a form of intellectual *strategy*, i.e. a response to a particular set of conditions, involving different tactics employed towards a particular end. In this sense, the philosophical wagers and commitments made are located in

and directed towards a particular problem, and express different interests.⁵ This is as true for a conception of the international derived from a statist and materialist ontology of power as it is for feminist excavations of the international structures of patriarchy or concepts of globalisation.

This now commonplace observation has at least three important implications for how we assess and think about theories of the international. Firstly, it suggests that an important aspect of evaluating theory needs to be done in the context of its own purposes. This may not seem controversial to many academics, and particularly not the readership of *Millennium*, but given the persistence of ‘science’ controversies in the broader discipline it needs to be borne in mind.⁶ Theories are not the ‘last word’ on phenomena, but analytic lenses that structure our thinking to a particular end. Secondly, however, it must mean that it is at least useful, but also legitimate and necessary to engage with, discuss and challenge the purposes of work and its context rather than assume that this stands outside or apart from the endeavour. This does not preclude the possibility of reasonable disagreement about these objectives, but it does preclude the denial of their relevance.⁷

Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially however, it also draws attention to the necessarily limited and incomplete nature of our conceptual endeavours. These are not shortcomings of our work but its constitutive features – it is grounded in a particular conceptual vocabulary or register, and has a particular focus or target. As such, when thinking about how we analyse complex social phenomena, such as patriarchy, political violence or racism, given a wide acceptance that these are manifested and can be explained at various levels, no single mode of analysis is likely to be completely satisfactory.

In drawing together the connections in this literature, it makes sense to read the contributions as ‘decolonising strategies’ for thinking about world politics rather than as ‘theory’ as IR has conventionally tried to understand it – these are critical intellectual strategies designed to challenge the centrality of particular ideas about the international which naturalise forms of historic inequality between communities and people. In particular, these are connected to the legacies, broadly understood, of European colonialism and the hierarchies of power, wealth and regard that it sought to institute.

⁵ In future work I intend to deal more fully with the essentially situated character of decolonising critiques. The link between anti-colonial thought and philosophical pragmatism is found in the work of Cornel West – I am grateful to Joe Hoover for pointing this out.

⁶ Jackson narrates these controversies well in the first chapter of Jackson, P. T. (2010). The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations. London, Routledge.

⁷ Frost, op.cit., 118.

Why do we need a typology?

To this author at least, there is a clear sense in which the decolonising project in IR has been blossoming in recent years. The publication of groundbreaking monographs has been complemented by more edited collections, mainstream journal articles, conference panels and entire conferences, postgraduate courses and now textbooks.⁸ In this period, the principal aims and concerns of the project have been articulated in divergent ways by different authors, which has contributed to the flourishing of the research programme. However, it also raises important questions about the relationship between these different articulations. For example, Inayatullah and Blaney have foregrounded the 'difference' problematic as central to their project, concentrating on the Self/Other encounter that constitutes the space of the international.⁹ This project suggests a focus on the production of alterity and the question of respect. On the other hand, Jones articulates the project as a common preoccupation with the persistence of colonial and imperial relations within the international system, with an emphasis on discovering the Eurocentric and imperial constitution of international relations in the present day.¹⁰ As she notes, debates about Eurocentrism can often divide into culturalist and political economy camps which talk past each other.¹¹

Whilst valuable, this richness also brings the potential for opacity. As Bhambra notes, following Wallerstein, the notion of 'Eurocentrism' is itself contested and can mean different things.¹² Whilst this does not mean that it cannot be a useful frame of analysis, it does mean that usages might be interchanged or conflated in a number of ways. For example, for Hobson, Eurocentrism is

the assumption that the West lies at the centre of all things in the world and that the West self-generates through its own endogenous 'logic of immanence', before projecting its global will-to-power outwards through a one-way diffusionism so as to remake the world in its own image.¹³

⁸ E.g. Seth, S. (ed) (2011) Postcolonial theory and International Relations: A Comprehensive Introduction, London: Routledge.

⁹ Inayatullah and Blaney, op. cit., 9-16.

¹⁰ Jones (2006). 'Introduction: International Relations, Eurocentrism, and Imperialism', in Jones, op.cit.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bhambra, G. K. (2007). Rethinking modernity: postcolonialism and the sociological imagination, Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

¹³ Hobson, J. M. (2007). "Is critical theory always for the white West and for Western imperialism? Beyond Westphalian towards a post-racist critical IR." Review of International Studies 33(S1): 91-116, 93.

Hobson's conception suggests that Eurocentrism simultaneously contains certain historical, sociological and political claims, which brings to the fore how these may be inter-related. However, as Bhambra notes, it may be possible for work to explicitly reject some aspects whilst retaining others.¹⁴ Moreover, in some of the literature the 'Eurocentrism' problematic can drop out altogether, particularly that concerned most principally with contemporary US / North American power.¹⁵

Yet, even with this diversity, I want to argue that there is a common framework that unites the project, recognition of which might serve as a platform for dialogue between its elements and with those working outside it. This is the claim that IR is constructed around the exclusionary premise of an imagined *Western subject* of world politics.¹⁶ Decolonising strategies are those that problematize this claim and offer alternative accounts of subjecthood as the basis for inquiry. The recognition of possible alternative subjects of inquiry is the essential precondition for a *dialogic* mode of inquiry in IR – that is, speaking across divides from different positions. Conversely, without challenging the implicit and assumed universality of a particular subject, the possibility for genuine dialogue – rather than simply conversation – in the discipline becomes remote.

A typology of strategies: challenging the 'subjects' of IR

In social theory, the 'subject' of inquiry has multiple but related definitions.¹⁷ I am using these different meanings in a non-exhaustive and heuristic sense to delve into the structure of thinking behind decolonising strategies (numbered i-vi in the text). I summarise these here before elaborating in more depth in the rest of this section. In the first sense, various approaches focus on the construction of the West as an epistemically privileged or centred subject that can represent, know and treat parts of the world as its objects, through processes of objectification. In the second sense,

¹⁴ Bhambra, op.cit.

¹⁵ In particular, Agathangelou, A. M. and L. H. M. Ling (2009), op.cit.

¹⁶ This framing emerges in a limited way in the debates around subaltern historiography, but is not extended in consideration of other decolonising strategies as far as I know e.g. O'Hanlon, R. (1988). "Recovering the subject: Subaltern Studies and histories of resistance in colonial South Asia." *Modern Asian Studies* 22(1): 189-224.

¹⁷ For explicitly disaggregating different uses of the term 'subject' in social theory, I am indebted to Paul Kirby's unpublished paper '*The System Of Subjects: International Relations Theory and the Hard Problem of Subjectivity*', International Theory seminar at the LSE's IR Department, 23rd November 2009, although his usages are not mine.

there is a strategy to challenge the exceptionalist presumption of the West as the primary subject of modern world history and international relations. Thirdly, a number of approaches challenge Europe as the implicit subject of historiography. Fourthly, various works reconstruct the subjectivities of subaltern positions. Fifthly, there is a tradition which interrogates the presumed contours of the political subject underpinning analysis. Finally, decolonising work in IR has sought to challenge the constitution of the social-psychological subject underpinning recent work which anthropomorphises states as reflexive beings.

Understood in this way, at a broad level decolonising strategies argue that IR sees the world through the *subjecthood(s)*,¹⁸ in all the senses just described, of formerly colonial and imperial European and American modernist, capitalist elites. This is understood to constitute a system of multiple exclusions that continues to permeate the study and conduct of world politics, which subsequently retains deeply hierarchical forms oriented towards the interests and perspectives of this particular audience. However, as a response decolonising strategies do not on the whole advocate a systematic erasure or denial of these categories – rather they have attempted to expose the alternatives and initiate dialogue between them. In this sense they seek to re-negotiate the terms and preoccupations of inquiry, a point to which I will return in the conclusion.¹⁹

The first strategy (i) centres on exposing the ways in which the conceptual framings of both International Relations and international politics express and reinforce hierarchical subject-object relationships between formerly colonising and colonised peoples, despite the political-legal act of decolonisation. Drawing directly on Said's critique of colonial practices of

¹⁸ I owe use of the term to Robbie Shilliam.

¹⁹ A point which at the time of writing must be temporarily shelved is the ongoing tensions and overlaps between the decolonising project and the historical materialist project. Whilst they are in some ways inseparable, for this author the key fundamental difference arises in the possibility of a socially meaningful alterity that is not sidelined analytically as a form of false consciousness, incomplete modernity or underdevelopment; in short, the debate over the significance of pluralities of experience and standpoints in the analysis of human affairs. Decolonising approaches on the whole are broadly sympathetic to, and often use, arguments in terms of social forces and the material conditions of political power and change; however there is discomfort with the *potentially* reductive implications of such a view for human subjectivity and political subjecthood in the extrapolation to the 'objective' understanding of world history. However, this is a very general statement and it is clear that there are broad churches of thought within the various camps self-identifying as 'Marxist' or 'decolonising / postcolonialist', who have varying approaches to this relationship between selves and social forces. For an alternative account of the encounter between Marxism and postcolonialism from a broadly Marxist perspective, see Bartolovich, C. and N. Lazarus (2002). Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies, Cambridge University Press.

representation in *Orientalism*, further elaborated in *Culture and Imperialism*, this strategy has focused on the discursive and normative structures governing contemporary international politics and sought to show how they depend on the establishment of the 'flexible positional superiority'²⁰ of Western/Northern countries and agents. For example, Doty analyses historical and contemporary framings of North-South relations, from colonialism to governance to foreign aid in terms of the persistence of the imperial structure of the discourse that produces the relationship.²¹ Antony Anghie argues that the concept of 'good governance' is historically continuous with international legal norms that established rights and duties for colonial powers to rule the colonies, operating under ideas of racialised civilisational hierarchies.²² Both writers, amongst others, point towards the ways in which the ways that the global South – that is to say, spaces outside Europe and North America – become *objectified* in discourse as requiring external control, involvement and direction – in Said's term that they 'beseech domination'.²³ In a substantive sense this means that formerly colonised countries become understood through being fixed as the object of some other subject which instrumentalises it or treats it as lacking proper agency.²⁴ Under conditions of objectification, then, the possibility of dialogue becomes remote.

Within the discipline of IR itself, there has been solid critique of Robert Jackson's analysis of 'quasi-states' along similar lines, which obliquely renders the third world as a cracked or incomplete image of the first.²⁵ The various objectifying representations of the South as backward, developing, failed or 'new' states continually reproduce the hierarchical self imagery that underpinned European colonialism, and specifically produces a disposition that favours intervention and control between the full subjects and lesser objects of world politics. The critique that decolonising thought makes is that whilst the formal political and legal acts of decolonisation have broadly occurred, the deeper challenge to the colonial system of thinking – of objectifying the South in discourses of world politics – has not happened. The strategy in this case is to raise consciousness about the ways in which our

²⁰ Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London, Penguin, 7.

²¹ Doty, R. L. (1996). *Imperial encounters : the politics of representation in North-South relations*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

²² Anghie, A. (2008). Decolonizing the Concept of " Good Governance. *Decolonizing international relations*. B. Gruffydd Jones, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

²³ Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. London, Vintage, 8.

²⁴ See Nussbaum, M. C. (1995). "Objectification." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24(4): 249-291.

²⁵ See Morton, A. D. (2005). "The 'failed state' of International Relations." *New Political Economy* 10(3): 371-379; Jones, B. G. (2008). "The global political economy of social crisis: Towards a critique of the 'failed state' ideology." *Review of international political economy* 15(2): 180-205.

systems of knowledge and political discourses objectify those who were to have become its subjects, perhaps more radically its authors.

As a decolonising intellectual strategy, the critique of objectification through the analysis of authoritative discourses is clear and deeply important but also necessarily limited in scope. As Anghie recognises, this strategy must work alongside others which recover another telling of this encounter in order to challenge these discourses as not just hegemonic but essentially *fictive* rhetorical devices.²⁶ Insofar as these strategies work within a framework whereby the discourses of the powerful are the primary object of analysis, they have tended to do the latter understandably in only a secondary or limited sense. Nonetheless, this groundwork is clearly critical in clearing the space for alternative discourses and speakers, and the possibility of dialogue which is precluded by Orientalist objectifications.

The second approach is a deconstruction of the West as the primary subject of world history. This wider approach develops into two distinct strategies. The first (ii) involves the direct contradiction of foundational historical myths in social theory and discourse about Europe itself – i.e. that it was technologically advanced, economically developed, that it advanced the problems of international coexistence through the institutionalisation of state sovereignty, that it was the origin of enlightened and universalist ethical and political thought. These strands have generally had their heritage in historical sociology, political economy and revisionist readings of political thought.²⁷ Overall they have sought to contradict or subvert the correlation of Europe with pioneering a progressive modernity. John Hobson for example argues that historically in the encounter between West and East it was the West that was considered backward in terms of technology and social structures, and was only able to flourish as the consequence of being a 'late developer'.²⁸ Sandra Halperin argues that the mythologisation of European development, and in particular the various 'revolutions' that were instantiated, obscures the fact that European growth and expansion was predicated on the 'dualistic' economy, with its violences and exclusions, that the Third World is currently

²⁶ Anghie, op cit. .However, there is disquiet amongst thinkers about the extent to which postcolonial literature has been constrained by the postmodern / poststructuralist tenor of its approaches, and the commitment to 'real' lives. See Appiah, K. A. (1991). "Is the post-in postmodernism the post-in postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry*: 336-357 for one such discussion.

²⁷ Under my reading decolonising strategies are themselves heterodox in scope and origins, inclusive of aspects of other traditions as well as work which self-identifies as 'postcolonial'.

²⁸ Hobson, J. M. (2004). *The Eastern origins of Western civilisation*. Cambridge, UK ; New York, Cambridge University Press.

critiqued for having.²⁹ Beate Jahn's critique of nineteenth century liberal political thought suggests that it was predicated on the limited and particularist rather than universalist protection of rights, and was supportive of imperialist policy.³⁰

Collectively they deconstruct the mythic subject of the 'European model' in history through challenging the primacy and exceptionalism that has been historically claimed. This is important to the decolonising project insofar as the implicit particular history of exceptionalism and enlightenment often serves to legitimate various forms of control and authority in the present day. By pushing beyond the 'winner/loser' account of world history³¹ it is argued that they open up a dialogical mode of thinking that elevates the hybrid, connected nature of the relationships between civilisations.³²

This line of thinking has led to a third, in some ways more subversive, strategy (iii) for decolonising thought, as a critique of the particular European subjects immanent and naturalised in the writing of History itself. The argument here is that historiographical understandings of change and development, even for critical historians, are understood in terms of categories and trajectories that were seen as significant in the emergence of Europe's modernity, thus excluding the significance of the pluralities of pasts, presents and futures that were and are happening elsewhere, to which this modernity was necessarily connected. This line of thought was extended from the work of the *Subaltern Studies* group, who took issue specifically with the claim in Marx and Hobsbawm that the colonies were 'outside history' prior to their insertion into the European capitalist system, although this critique was extended to other historiographies.³³ This understanding of history, they argued, preserved the centrality of an underlying European referent subject to the telling of history, even when that history was intended to be of elsewhere, and even if such history was critical or myth-shattering, and even if such

²⁹ Halperin, S. (1997). In the mirror of the Third World: capitalist development in modern Europe, Cornell Univ Pr, Halperin, S. (2006). "International Relations Theory and the Hegemony of Western Conceptions of Modernity" in Jones (ed) Decolonizing international relations, op. cit.: 43-64.

³⁰ Jahn, B. (2005). "Kant, Mill, and illiberal legacies in international affairs." International Organization 59(01): 177-207.

³¹ Exemplified, however unintentionally, by Diamond, J. (1997). Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies. 1997. New York, Norton.

³² Hobson, J. M. (2007), *ibid.*, 106.

³³ Prakash, G. (1990). "Writing post-orientalist histories of the third world: perspectives from Indian historiography." Comparative Studies in Society and History 32(02): 383-408. See also Hutchings, K. (2008). Time and world politics : thinking the present. Manchester ; New York, Manchester University Press, for a related argument about the specific conceptions of time that inform influential thinkers from the Western canon.

categories were otherwise indispensable.³⁴ Instead, it has been argued that there is a need to think in terms of ‘multiple modernities’ occurring in the context of ‘connected histories’³⁵ to avoid analysis that only refracts understanding of social relations through a truncated telling of the European experience of industrialisation. Alison Ayers’ work on an African historiography makes a similar point about the histories of democracy that begin in Europe and are translated to African contexts, without any consciousness of alternative and autonomously developed traditions within Africa itself.³⁶

The historiographical critiques make manifest a seeming paradox at the centre of decolonising strategies for social inquiry, which is that despite this problematisation of the exclusions of social theory, it must nonetheless continue to employ in some sense this intellectual inheritance as a means of engagement and response. This is in some senses an important tension between the approaches of the second strategy, which are more clearly aimed at a straightforward rebuttal of myths, and this third strategy which interrogates the conduct of inquiry itself. Certainly this is a perennial critique put by those operating outside the paradigm, who complain that decolonising strategies are ‘really’ or ‘ultimately’ ‘Western’ or even ‘liberal’ in content and outlook.³⁷ Partly in response to this issue, for some, this has prompted the response of seeking much more widely for intellectual resources from non-Western traditions to think about the international, as Ayers does.³⁸ However, as I will elaborate in the conclusion, by and large there is little need for anxiety about this issue, insofar as decolonising strategies are self-conscious about the ‘geocultural’ conditions of their production, and the strategic purposes for which they are employed.³⁹ Indeed the emphasis on the inherently *dialogic* production of societies, selves and social analysis that means that accusations of inauthenticity which presuppose the possibility of an ‘authentic’ self become misplaced. Moreover, by retaining a consciousness of these as ‘strategies’ we are alive to these circumscriptions of purpose and origins.

³⁴ Chakrabarty, D. (2000). Provincializing Europe : postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 38-9.

³⁵ Bhambra, G. K. (2010). "Historical sociology, international relations and connected histories." Cambridge Review of International Affairs 23(1): 127-143.

³⁶ Ayers, A.J. (2006), ‘Beyond the Imperial Narrative: African Political Historiography revisited’, in Jones (ed) (2006), op. cit.

³⁷ Most recently, this emerged from discussion at this conference and by a reviewer of this piece.

³⁸ See also Shilliam, R. (2010). International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity. Routledge.

³⁹ Tickner’s keynote at this conference deals with the meaning of ‘geocultural’.

The deep critique of history itself as being a type of practice centred around the subject of Europe's own modernity has generated the fourth strategy (iv) of pluralising the various potential subjects of social inquiry and analysing world politics from alternative subaltern perspectives.⁴⁰ In some senses, this is an inheritance from Fanon's engagement with the phenomenological aspects of colonialism and their importance in being able to understand these relations in their entirety.⁴¹ In Chakrabarty's work, this has involved an exploration of the lifeworlds – a term from Husserl – of various groups in Bengal in order to illustrate narratives of human experience that are otherwise excluded or suppressed by modernist history.⁴² Within the context of IR conversations Laffey and Weldes have re-told the story of the Cuban missile crisis through the lens of Cuban interpretations rather than superpower perspectives.⁴³ This re-centring of different subjectivities has necessarily involved a more interpretive engagement with both historical and contemporary sources and people; that is to say an engagement with what they thought and what they thought they were doing, rendering them as more than principally the instruments of history or social forces. Often, as in the case of Chakrabarty and others, this involves multiple layering of ideas and sources in order to build up the understanding of the lifeworld as concrete experience. Mohanty's call for this engaged and detailed empirical work as a means of appreciating fully both different domains of power and the meanings given to the various structures also supports this approach.⁴⁴ Clearly this strategy is connected with and complementary to the previous one which problematises the adequacy of universalist historiographies and narratives for a diverse social world.

However, this strategy, most closely connected with standpoint theories in general, begins to pose important questions for decolonising approaches to the study of world politics – in particular in thinking about the relevance of particular experiences and worlds to the questions about world politics which are pitched at an ostensibly general level. What weight should be given to the inter/subjective interpretations of subaltern peoples about their experiences of domination? Do these entail a commitment to the

⁴⁰ An interesting example of this, developed somewhat separately from the Subaltern Studies movement is Honwana, R. and A. F. Isaacman (1988). The life history of Raúl Honwana : an inside view of Mozambique from colonialism to independence, 1905-1975. Boulder ; London, Rienner.

⁴¹ Fanon, F. (1986). Black skin, white masks. London, Pluto.

⁴² Chakrabarty, op.cit; Chakrabarty, D. (1989). Rethinking Working-class History: Indian jute workers in Bengal, 1890-1940, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁴³ Laffey, M. and J. Weldes (2008). "Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis." International Studies Quarterly 52(3): 555-577.

⁴⁴ Mohanty, C. T. (1988). "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses." Feminist review: 61-88.

'objectivity' of the position of the subaltern with regard to structures of domination, which e.g. feminist standpoint theory has claimed?⁴⁵ How do these engagements with colonised lifeworlds deal with Nandy's attention to the colonisation of the mind, and Spivak's warnings about the hegemonic acts involved in attempting to voice or translate the subaltern?⁴⁶

This problem can be addressed in part through a reminder of the strategic character of inquiry. For example, the controversy about 'objectivity' only makes sense where the value of work is primarily evaluated through the prior commitment to mind-world dualism which suggests a direct form of comparability between competing explanatory frameworks.⁴⁷ Where the notion of social inquiry as objective 'science' is rejected, as in many decolonising approaches, and the principal concern is for 'worlding' our understanding of social relations – as discussed for example by Agathangelou and Ling, or by Said⁴⁸ - this suggests that interpretive and non-interpretive understandings can and should be intertwined and work in dialogue with each other. As I will suggest in my discussion of applying these strategies to my own research, the weight given to each will tend to depend on the nature of the research question and the normative commitments entailed. This is consistent with the way Fanon sets up the problem – he makes clear from the outset that he is interested in understanding *how colonialism de-humanises* – as such the relevance of the phenomenological is closely integrated with Fanon's conception of humanity as requiring both 'objective' and 'subjective' engagement.⁴⁹ For these other critiques too, it is a humanist and pluralist ethic which drives the interest in the exploration of the lifeworld, but not at the expense of thinking about how these might be interpellated into what can be understood as broader political structures.

A fifth strategy (v) which relates to, but is somewhat distinct from, these modes of rethinking history is the recovery of alternative *political* subjecthoods in both historical and contemporaneous contexts. CLR James' *The Black Jacobins* has served as one point of departure for this strategy, which was a story of slave emancipation written at a time where Black and Asian

⁴⁵ Harding, S. G. (2004). The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies, Psychology Press.

⁴⁶ Nandy, A. (1989). The intimate enemy: Loss and recovery of self under colonialism, Oxford University Press Delhi; Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the subaltern speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: 271-313.

⁴⁷ For clarification on these terms, see Jackson, op.cit, 34-37.

⁴⁸ Agathangelou and Ling, op.cit., Chowdhry, G. (2007). "Edward Said and Contrapuntal Reading: Implications for Critical Interventions in International Relations." Millennium-Journal of International Studies 36(1): 101

⁴⁹ Fanon, F.(2001) Black Skin. White Masks, Pluto Press, 63-4

colonial peoples were making claims for political emancipation and equality. In this sense it was an alternative vision of Black political subjecthood that asserted an already-existing capacity and desire for freedom which was militant and resurgent, even if it had to appropriate and subvert the discourses of its oppressors. This was a reply to contemporaneous scientific racist discourses on Black political subjecthood that emphasised its incapacity, as well as alternative conceptions of decolonisation which were more conservative and reformist in outlook.⁵⁰ Ongoing interpretations of the significance of the Haitian revolution have also sought to read within it the possibility of an emancipatory ideal of politics and political subjecthood for formerly colonised peoples that do not necessarily imply the passive diffusion or acceptance of European norms.⁵¹ Gandhian conceptions of *swaraj* and *satyagraha* are a further example of this strategy – the articulation of political subjecthood that offers an alternative vision of the bases of authority, rule and resistance to those conceived under colonial rule, that are not simply imitations of secular nationalism but resonate with and draw on particular cultural and spiritual tropes.

Within IR, Shilliam has used a similar strategy in terms of pitching Rastafarian cosmologies of freedom as a claim and counterpoint to universalist developmental ones, which represent the contemporary mould for ideas surrounding international development and engagement in the Third World.⁵² This strategy is of course closely linked to the attempts to de-centre Europe as the referent subject for historical accounts; instead it is a provincialisation of the concept of individualist secular citizenship as the only referent frame for politically relevant being.⁵³ Instead, through a privileging of the contextually grounded character of political subjecthood, this strategy attempts to elucidate rather than suppress alterity.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Scott, D. (2004). *Conscripts of modernity : the tragedy of colonial enlightenment*. Durham, Duke University Press. There is controversy over exactly whether James' account is representative of an 'alternative' which was 'post'-colonial or simply another version of elitist and exclusionary politics: I am sympathetic to Scott's point that reading James in his historical context is key to understanding the significance of the 'alternative' that he had envisaged, although contemporaneous readings of Toussaint's political programme note his authoritarian tendencies. See Nesbitt (ed) 2008, *Jean-Bertrand Aristide presents Toussaint L'Ouverture. The Haitian Revolution*. London, Verso.

⁵¹ See Grovogui, S. N. (2006) 'Mind, Body and Gut! Elements of a Postcolonial Human Rights Discourse' in Jones (ed) *Decolonising International Relations*, op.cit.

⁵² Shilliam, R. (2009). *Redemption From Development: Amartya Sen, Rastafari and Promises of Freedom*. *British International Studies Association Annual Conference*. Leicester, UK.

⁵³ See Ayers, A. J. (2009). "Imperial Liberties: Democratisation and Governance in the 'New' Imperial Order." *Political Studies* 57(1): 1-27 for a sustained critique of the political subject exported through the 'democratisation' agenda.

⁵⁴ Inayatullah and Blaney (2003), *ibid*.

Of all the tensions raised by all the strategies, this is probably the one that challenges the practices of comparative and evaluative social inquiry most explicitly, giving rise to the underlying question: how is it that humans can be the same and yet different?⁵⁵ And how does our work reflect assumptions about the relevant degrees and nature of sameness and difference? In thinking about the extent to which decolonising strategies are viewed as controversial, despite few disputes on their objectives or normative orientation, it seems that much revolves around an apparent willingness to reject human similarity in favour of valorising human difference, giving up both analytic and moral ground to some sort of relativism.⁵⁶

Much has been said in response to this problem, and I will not cover the relevant issues here.⁵⁷ I am sympathetic to work that suggests that the tension is inescapable.⁵⁸ Indeed, in the abstract it makes little sense either analytically or morally to deny either sameness or difference as foundational aspects of existence. The real question, then, is what the limits of their relevance might be, and the extent to which we can *presume* this ahead of time. As I suggest in the application of this strategy to a particular problem, there is a large extent to which different emphases might be reasonable choices in different circumstances.

One final strategy (vi) of the decolonising project in broader social theory that is only just beginning to take off self-consciously within IR is the attempt to comprehend, challenge and displace the presumed psychic and psychologically-understood 'subjects' that are produced by and support various aspects of international relations. This is however consistent with the low level of attention given to the affective dimension of politics within the discipline as a whole.⁵⁹ However, the emergence of considerations of the affective and psychic dimensions of international politics within IR has also stimulated a decolonising critique of the particular origins of this view of the self. In particular, Shilliam's critique of Lebow's *Cultural Theory of International*

⁵⁵ With apologies to Nancy Banks-Smith, whose formulation of anthropology I have stolen and adapted: "the study of how people are the same, except when they are different."

⁵⁶ This critique is made strongly within by sympathisers as well as critics. Mohanty, S. P. (1997). Literary theory and the claims of history: Postmodernism, objectivity, multicultural politics, Cornell Univ Pr.

⁵⁷ Inayatullah and Blaney, op. cit.

⁵⁸ Paipais, V. (2011). "Self and other in critical international theory: assimilation, incommensurability and the paradox of critique." Review of International Studies 37(01): 121-140.

⁵⁹ Arguably, the discipline's overwhelming critical focus on Foucault, poststructuralism and the productivity of discourses turned it away from the questions of subjectivity and affect, although this is also changing across the field. See .

Relations demonstrates clearly the limits of the neo-Aristotelian basis on which the human psyche is imagined in this text, pitching as an alternative a Fanonian conception of colonised subjectivity as a necessarily *embodied* or 'situated' subjectivity.⁶⁰ This is in distinction to the presumed mind-body distinction that underpins the conception of the psyche in Lebow. In re-imagining the security bonds between states, Chen, Hwang and Ling introduce questions of ambivalent postcolonial longing through the allegory of the relationships in the film *Lust/Caution*.⁶¹ The displacement of the rationalist, masculinist subjectivity/psyche attributed implicitly to states' relations with each other within security studies with one that is more complex, situated, affective and particular is a useful move, and seems to deliver a compelling account of the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan. Whilst these two pieces consist of very different analyses, they both use a strategy which looks at the ways in which the presumed seeing subject of world politics identifies itself, with itself and with other entities, and show how this vision is tied to both particular locations and particular psychological assumptions, often masking the inherently dialogical and relational production of the self.⁶² The decolonising project thus seeks to examine and problematise this tethering, and in doing so start to imagine alternative sites of departure.

It is noteworthy that this final strategy of challenging the presumed psyche of international actors emerges principally in response to a particular provocation – namely the anthropomorphisation of the state in a culturally and gender specific way in analysis. In this sense it principally relates to the disciplinary context of IR, the mainstream of which has moved from treating states as 'billiard balls' to treating them as 'people'.⁶³ Although as yet not widely developed, it is a particularly useful challenge to lay to a discipline that continually attempts to update its core ontologies in a way which is seemingly disembedded from the evaluative content of this theory.

⁶⁰ Shilliam, R. (2009). "A Fanonian Critique of Lebow's A Cultural Theory of International Relations." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38(1): 117.

⁶¹ Chen, B., C. C. Hwang, et al. (2009). "Lust/caution in IR: democratising world politics with culture as a method." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37(3): 743.

⁶² Not irrelevantly, however, both the sub-disciplines of war studies and peace studies have a history of engaging with the psychological and affective dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding. This has not, as far as my understanding of developments in these two fields goes, led to a problematisation of the imagined psychological subject which serves as a baseline for analysis, but it is a longstanding problematisation of the assumptions of instrumental rationalities as dominating these two processes.

⁶³ See the *Review of International Studies* forum, 2004, Volume 30, Issue 2.

Decolonising strategies: central questions

Given the breadth of their conceptual concerns and intellectual approaches, how, then, do decolonising strategies operate in a way which is more *dialogic* than other modes of studying world politics? Why might these be better? And what does this entail in terms of applying these strategies to other areas of research?

Whilst there is increasing recognition that there are a plurality of ways to study world politics, decolonising strategies, through pluralising the *subjects* of inquiry, offer an intellectual platform for making good the ambition of a discipline that has been trying to transcend its imperial, colonial and racist roots.⁶⁴ What they also expose however is the deep implications and effects these roots have had on the ways of thinking within social theory at a broad level as well as within the discipline, across theoretical divides. By seeing this as a set of particularistic intellectual *choices*, they may *provincialise* rather than *reject wholesale* these modes of analysis, meaning dialogue about their relevance and structure is not only possible but imperative. The act of provincialising particular perspectives and introducing the relevance of others is a way of making inquiry itself a dialogue – speaking across different subject positions – about the world rather than a single narrative which might be more agnostic about its exclusions.

A central question that these strategies seem to generate is about the level of co-implication between normative and analytic exclusions – whether and how the forms of intellectual discrimination which are exercised in the conduct of analysis, e.g. in a state-centric analysis of the international system or a Gramscian account of capitalist hegemony, always reproduce types of political and normative discrimination which we would consider problematic. For example, one might accept that these failed to represent the experiences of many in the world or continued to be Eurocentric but nonetheless had explanatory purchase on events in the international arena by virtue of their ability to parse events in a coherent manner.

Much might depend on the extent to which this work acknowledged or failed to acknowledge its shortcomings as a piece of *humanist* research. Given broad overlapping consensus on a) the inherently purposive character of inquiry, b) the necessarily perspectival character of knowledge and c) the

⁶⁴ Vitalis, R. (2000). "The Graceful and Generous Liberal Gesture: Making Racism Invisible in American International Relations." *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 29(2): 331-356.

illegitimacy of presumed civilizational hierarchies⁶⁵, persisting with work that rested on structures of thought which depends on denying or ignoring these starting points seems odd to say the least. If these really are three foundational assumptions for research then recognising and managing the tensions these generate seems a rather more intellectually honest if precarious way forward. As Mervyn Frost has argued, this is not about ‘adding’ normative values to structural analysis but making clear what is commitments are already implicit.⁶⁶

Such tensions include the co-implication between frames which enable analysis through comparison or modelling and frames which suppress potentially relevant difference. However, in general decolonising strategies have tended to deal with this through putting these elements into dialogue with one another and formalising this tension in the concept of ‘worlding’. Said’s call for contrapuntal analysis conceives of these framings as part of a wider whole, in which the relationship between the two or more melody lines is as interesting, perhaps more so, than each line in and of itself.⁶⁷ Note then, that the substantive assumption returns here about the value any attempt to narrate the world single-handedly or monologically – it will remain inadequate and partial. Moreover, it may persist in cementing structures of exclusion that continue to deny the experience of ‘most of the world’ in Chatterjee’s expression as legitimate bases of knowledge. Whilst ‘worlding’ will still produce analyses that exclude important analytic and experiential issues, this is a better way to think about a diverse and hierarchical world than by denying this diversity.

This section, through unpicking the contributions of decolonising strategies in world politics, has sought to re-articulate the project in a way which demonstrates both its existing uses and possible future uses in the study of world politics. As indicated at the outset, however, one of the reasons for reflecting on decolonising thought and its commitments has been to work through how it might be more widely applied.

I now turn to a particular research framing in order to explore more deeply the potential for re-thinking IR through this typology. Drawing on a wider research project, this case study specifically demonstrates the ways in which the typology developed above helps re-frame critical approaches to world politics, which express concerns for Western hegemony or imperialism

⁶⁵ There may be a less broad consensus on this, although few who would be prepared to admit to such in print.

⁶⁶ Frost, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ Chowdry, *op.cit.*

but without an adequate intellectual framing to redress the problem of exclusion that they identify. I reconfigure the problematic of the 'liberal peace', widely employed in the critical literature, through imagining 'Mozambique' as the relevant subject of inquiry in different ways. I do this through an alternative historical grounding, through exploring shared conceptions of political subjecthood and how these shape an engagement with international co-operation, and through exploring the lifeworld of social relations that this co-operation is part of in a variegated middle class. By foregrounding these subjecthoods, critique can move away from assuming the non-West as a space of insuperable difference and move towards a more articulate, inclusive and concrete dialogue about the nature of international power.

'Changing the subjects': decolonising the 'liberal peace' in Mozambique

A central topic in the study of world politics is the nature and structure of international power and authority. There is widespread agreement that in the contemporary world something called the 'West' remains predominant in various spheres, although much dispute takes place regarding the nature, origins, durability and effects of that power. Is the power hard or soft?⁶⁸ Is it based in military, ideological or capitalist expansion? Does it support or undermine international institutions? Is it best characterised as operating through consent, coercion, hegemony or governmentality? A particular critical debate in this broader literature, emerging from the confluence of peace studies, IR and globalisation theory is about the nature of the 'liberal peace', as discussed by writers such as Duffield, Paris, Chandler and Richmond.⁶⁹

This research programme has a clear relevance in terms of contemporary global politics, addressing a wide range of political and ethical questions regarding the legitimacy, political effects and effectiveness of Western power. At least some of these questions emerge from the claims of certain governments to be acting the interests of humanity as a whole or on the basis of the will to help the internationally vulnerable rather than simply national self-interest. This coheres with seemingly inclusive cosmopolitan stances on the need for globally-promoted standards of governance in political and social life. Clearly, questions about the liberal peace are relevant not only to the more narrowly defined activities of peacebuilding missions,

⁶⁸ Berenskoetter, F. and M. J. Williams (2007). *Power in world politics*, Taylor & Francis

⁶⁹ For an extended summary, see Chandler, D. (2011) 'The uncritical critique of 'liberal peace''. *Review of International Studies*, Available on CJO 26 Aug 2010 doi:10.1017/S0260210510000823

but resonate strongly with this wider set of political goals, upon which much of their legitimacy depends. My argument is that this research programme has nonetheless failed to produce a *dialogic* account of this power, articulated through the perspectives of those supposedly subject to it.

The principal thrust of the critique is that multilateral intervention in post-war environments in the name of peacebuilding powerfully cements and advances Western control and transformation of these societies through economic and political liberalisation, the institutionalisation of conditional foreign aid flows and related governance monitoring mechanisms in the state, and the attempted re-making of civil society through the promotion of liberal values.⁷⁰ This is in some cases analysed as being problematic due to the implications for political sovereignty and the principle of autonomy,⁷¹ in others due to the increased vulnerability of economies to market forces,⁷² in others consolidation of Western power over the South,⁷³ and in others as for promoting social and political arrangements more likely to lead to conflict than not.⁷⁴ In each of these cases, analogies with former European imperialism and the civilising mission have been drawn. These analogies are of critical moral, ethical and political salience given the contemporary de-legitimisation of these historical practices.

These critiques have been hugely productive in terms of generating an extensive critical narrative on the nature of international peacebuilding, and reflect much of the richness of contemporary critical theory in IR, including neo-Gramscian, Foucauldian and feminist responses. It is not my intention to suggest that what has been said is fundamentally wrong or misguided – on the contrary it has been very important and generally illuminating. Nonetheless, despite an anxiety about the hegemony of the West and the political exclusions generated by the liberal peace, these global critiques have largely failed to dislodge it as the central *subject* of inquiry, in many of the senses described in the previous section. Although these critiques profess interest in advancing an agenda ‘in solidarity with the governed’ or more attuned to the ‘everyday’, their modes of analysing world order end up reproducing, perhaps unintentionally, many of the exclusions they critique. In Hobson’s formulation, their focus on Western agency and the question of

⁷⁰ Richmond, O. P. (2005). *The transformation of peace*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

⁷¹ Chandler, (2011), op.cit.

⁷² Pugh, M. (2005). "The Political Economy of Peacebuilding: A Critical Theory Perspective." *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10(2): 23

⁷³ Duffield, M. R. (2007). *Development, security and unending war : governing the world of peoples*. Cambridge, Polity.

⁷⁴ Paris, R. (2004). *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Cambridge University Press.

'difference' reproduce a monological quality to the analysis.⁷⁵ In some senses, there has been a partial engagement of the first strategy discussed – an identification of how discourse objectifies recipient societies⁷⁶ – but little else by way of counter-argument.

This is because the primary subject of analysis remains the (neo)liberal and hegemonic West, which acts imperiously upon this objectified non-liberal non-West.⁷⁷ Richmond, recognises and attempts to address the problem in his more recent work,⁷⁸ which is broadly articulated as a critique of the liberal peace's colonial tendencies. However, the debate is framed through a contrast between the 'liberal'/'Western' and the 'local' or 'non-liberal' – as defined variously by 'kinship', 'custom', 'agency', 'the individual', 'community', 'tradition' and so forth.⁷⁹ Although it is argued that this transcends the colonial gaze through calling for a hybrid, post-liberal peace, centred on the 'everyday', it is difficult to see how the rationale does not also simultaneously re-assert particular assumptions about the centrality and coherence of Western agency and the necessity for Western engagement to bring peace in the non-liberal non-West. This 'local' space, whilst contrasted to the space of power, is also represented as banalised – 'everyday' – rather than politicised as such.⁸⁰ Difference, where it exists, is primarily represented as cultural or 'customary' in character.

This pattern of exclusion is repeated within the other literature in the locating of the historical subject of analysis as the post-imperial Western states *qua* interveners, represented through the backstory of UN peacebuilding missions or more broadly Western development aid, or nineteenth century colonial policy.⁸¹ In this manner, the West is also represented as a coherent political subject with its formative essence in the Enlightenment, in capitalism, in imperialism – a liberal subject that seeks to universalise itself through modern forms of liberal governance.⁸²

⁷⁵ Hobson (2007) 'Is critical theory always for the white West and Western imperialism?', op.cit.

⁷⁶ E.g. in Duffield, (2007), ch. 7.

⁷⁷ I expand on this point in Sabaratnam, M (2011) 'Situated critiques of intervention: Mozambique and the diverse politics of response', in Campbell, S., Chandler, D. and Sabaratnam, M (2011 / forthcoming) A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding, (London: Zed Books)

⁷⁸ Richmond, O. P. (2010). "Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace." Millennium - Journal of International Studies 38(3): 665-692, footnote 10, 667.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 689-690.

⁸¹ Paris, op.cit., Duffield, op.cit.

⁸² Chandler, (2011), op.cit, 3-4.

By contrast, however, across the critiques of the liberal peace, direct engagement with the 'recipients' of these interventions has been relatively limited, except as demonstrations of where the liberal peace has failed to bring democracy, human rights and so on.⁸³ The typology I present above shows precisely the kinds of intellectual strategies that can be used to address these exclusions. For example, by using this framework, attention is drawn to the fact that there are few substantive articulations of these societies as potentially distinctive or significant subjects of politics and history, and extremely few examinations of the ways in which people and groups within them have interpreted or engaged the practices and agents of intervention.⁸⁴ As such, the potential for the exploration of possible alternatives to it through a dialogic and situated understanding of this relationship is deeply inhibited.

In counterpoint and contrast to these critiques, I have sought to reconstruct an analysis of the liberal peace that foregrounds as alternative 'subjects' of analysis the society which is normally rendered its 'object'. I deal with a specific site which seemingly expresses *par excellence* the power of the liberal transformation agenda through peacebuilding and development – ongoing multilateral presence in Mozambique. I attempt to think about it in a way which deliberately attempts deeper engagement with and appreciation of the intended recipients as politically and historically located subjects whose experiences and interpretations of the so-called liberal peace can be used in the 'worlding' of analysis.⁸⁵ However, I will go on to identify various constraints that limit the reach of this dialogic strategy.

A preliminary step in this process is to re-locate understanding of the liberal peace not in the history of the West but within the social and political history of Mozambique. To do this, I set out the contemporary period in a relationship to late colonialism and the post-independence socialist regime. This means that the foregrounded issues are about the relations and struggles between different groups, the nature of state, the political economy, social and political authority, the experiences of war and the nature of the peace, in which international interactions play a role but do not occlude these other issues. Using 'Mozambique' as a historical 'subject' rather than 'the liberal

⁸³ E.g. Roberts, D. (2008). "Hybrid Polities and Indigenous Pluralities: Advanced Lessons in Statebuilding from Cambodia." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 2(1): 63-86.

⁸⁴ Although there are a few important exceptions – e.g. Belloni, R. (2001). "Civil society and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Journal of Peace Research*: 163-180, Heathershaw, J. (2007). "Peacebuilding as Practice: Discourses from Post-Conflict Tajikistan." *International Peacekeeping* 14(2): 219-236.

⁸⁵ Kristoffer Lidén has also engaged post-colonial thought as a framing for thinking about the liberal peace as self-governance,. See chapter in Tadjbaksh, S. ed. (2011) *Rethinking the Liberal Peace: External Models and Local Alternatives*, Routledge.

peace' as a focal point is not unproblematic – it also relies on occluding and stylising particular issues in order to foreground a particular focus on the 'imagined community' of Mozambique as a subject of history. It is also important to acknowledge that this construction of history has been closely associated with the political decolonisation and nationalist project, and remains internally contested within Mozambique itself.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, insofar as critics of the liberal peace have expressed an interest in the hegemony of the West over these societies, and insofar as people within this society identify with the category it can be a useful place to dialogue from about the relationship. It also forces a re-thinking of historical *agency*, usually narrated as being the preserve of intervening powers, in part because we now understand what an alternative historical *agenda* might look like from the point of view of social relations in Mozambique.

A further step is to engage the ways in which this history has given rise to complex structures of authority and legitimacy that shape political subjecthoods and subjectivities, which strongly shape how the liberal peace is understood, enacted and experienced. The *presumptive* exclusion of these factors from an assessment of whether the liberal peace might or might not be understood as 'legitimate' seems to reduce *a priori* a discussion of the issue to the discursive framing of the analyst, excluding the possibility of a dialogic engagement on these issues. For example, engaging public commentaries on the question of corruption – acknowledged as a key theme in the liberal governance agenda – demonstrates both that many see the spread of corruption as emerging historically with the influx of post-conflict aid and the process of privatisation.⁸⁷ This viewpoint should give us pause for thought in reflecting on the liberal peace relationship, as it counter-argues the claim of the liberal peace to be a general agent of 'good governance' in a much more powerful way than critiques which have not interrogated this stylised narrative. Furthermore, engaging with historical political discourses about corruption further highlights that a concern with corruption is not unique to donor discourses about governance but has a broader political resonance, which is not simply dismissable as the symptom of a comprador elite trying to win favour. On the contrary, through engaging how corruption is understood within popular culture, we can see that it also emerges as a potent critique of elites themselves at various times and places.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ For a minority position, for example, see Cabrita, J. M. (2000). Mozambique : the tortuous road to democracy. Basingstoke, Palgrave.

⁸⁷ From author's ongoing doctoral research on which this section is based; also see Harrison, G. (1999). "Corruption as boundary politics : the state, democratisation, and Mozambique's unstable liberalisation." Third World Quarterly 20(3): 537-550.

⁸⁸ See for example the work of the musician Azagaia, whose songs decry the corruption of both national elites and development agencies – 'Povo No Poder' (trans. The People in

Thirdly, engaging with the 'lifeworlds' of those whom the liberal peace is designed to transform further allows us to construct alternative subject perspectives from which to think about the political relations instantiated. In particular, this requires thinking about the specific mechanisms through which the liberal peace is supposedly deployed and thinking about how these are interpreted.⁸⁹ I have sought to do this both through secondary research on ethnographies undertaken in rural areas whilst the liberal peace has been implemented, and through a series of observations and interviews of people working at the interface of donor projects and aid. This brings to the fore not only important aspects of interpretation but also a raft of issues and problems usually assigned to the realm of the 'mundane' which nonetheless significantly shape the actual practices of the liberal peace. As just one example, the ways in which the practices of development and democratisation assistance restructure material incentives for large numbers of professional and semi-skilled workers away from long-term employment in national organisations, as well as the highly repetitive and cyclical turnover of foreign staff leads to relatively widespread cynicism and alienation that is not necessarily based on an ideological or cultural rejection of liberalism but the clearer problem that there is very wide hypocrisy in a system which is self-interested and ineffective.

These examples demonstrate briefly the added value of the typology earlier developed in the paper as a frame for approaching the task of decolonising world politics through the extension of dialogue. By articulating the key problem as one of the 'subjects' of analysis, doors are opened in terms of thinking about how to rethink the liberal peace in ways which do not reproduce its own simplified and binaristic understandings of the world.

A good question to ask might be 'why does it matter'? So what if political life in Mozambique is structured around the navigation of post-colonial identity, and so what if anti-corruption laws speak to memories of the socialist past? How does this help us think critically about international power relations? I would argue that bringing this research back into the conversation about the liberal peace begins to lay the platform for a conceptual and political *dialogue* about what is at stake when we 'world' our analysis. One issue that seems to become clear is that the division between a 'liberal' West and a non-liberal non-West does not really seem to reflect either

Power): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhSKixT-n0w&feature=related>; 'As Mentiras da Verdade' (trans. The Lies of Truth)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9IwDjrUNTE&feature=related>

⁸⁹ I specify these along the lines elaborated by Duffield, Richmond and Mac Ginty.

identities or practices in a place like Mozambique, and should not be the basis on which our understanding of the liberal peace is constructed.

This might mean that some of the ethical-political-practical questions raised by the literature which turn on the distinction drop out, with others taking their place. One replacement question might be about the extent to which ameliorative interventions structurally re-form social relations and the knowledge base around their short-termist and superficial needs. Another might be about the extent to which the liberal peace does not pursue a transformative political agenda which re-makes the South but a rather conservative one which preserves its partisans and deflects pressures for change. These kinds of issues can only come to the fore when we change the 'subjects' of our analysis and begin to attempt to get to grips with the inherently multi-faceted quality of these relationships.

However, the approach that I have set out as a mode of 'decolonising' the liberal peace is in no way exhaustive and necessarily instantiates its own exclusions. As such, it adds only a few more interlocutors – many of whom are in some senses 'elite' – to the dialogue out of many possible ones, although these interlocutors are very important. These limitations are certainly not trivial in the context of work that seeks to 'democratise' our understanding of world politics. Clearly, these exclusions are in some senses borne of habits of analysis developed and trained in a particular academic setting, and they reflect shortcomings in terms of possible depths of engagement. In others, they simply reflect the need to limit the ambitions of any single work – for example, I have used only three of the six distinctive strategies above at this time, selected through my judgements about their viability, compatibility and relevance for the research framing.

I hope, nonetheless, that they demonstrate a need for IR scholars, and perhaps critical theorists in particular to think about *the links between analytic and political exclusion*, which lies behind the call for not just more 'debate' but greater 'dialogue' in the discipline. This is particularly given the context in which the power of the liberal peace is justified politically and intellectually – that is, specifically on its desire and ability to deliver a more just and peaceful order *in the name of* war-torn societies and victims of conflict. Yet without engaging with those societies as real historical and political subjects, they remain objectified and voiceless in both politics and intellectual analysis.

Analytic inclusion in itself does not however 'solve' any problems as such – indeed, it properly raises a vast array of new ones. This is the point from a disciplinary perspective – to help re-frame the questions about international power in terms that appreciate and reflect the situations of the

intended recipients, in a manner which is explicit, accountable, and grounded in detailed engagement and argument. The ultimate importance of this intervention in the ongoing conversation is not something that can be settled within the terms of the study itself but rather in its dialogue with existing studies and the broader context of public discourses about the liberal peace.

Facilitating dialogue: the under-appreciated value of learning-in-exile

Even if, however, if one is convinced of the need for problematising the subjecthoods of international politics through deep empirical engagement with those normally excluded, there are several practical barriers to being able to do so, which themselves need to be highlighted and challenged. A further issue worth considering is the way in which we as an academic community of scholars view ourselves and what we do that deeply conditions our ability to execute the kinds of work that the decolonising project demands of us personally. It is an uncomfortable but necessary admission that we are perhaps (though not exclusively) not (yet) fit for purpose, a problem which makes us all the more needful of dialogic modes of engagement.

By this, I principally mean that we should not shrink from recognising the limits of our own perspectives and the value of trying to *learn* from others, and the *necessarily incomplete* nature of our endeavours. This of course involves appreciating the process of studying particular places and cases as a *learning process*, and devoting time and energy to improving our own skills – in languages, historical techniques and so on. These take significant resources of time, energy, money and commitment for which there is limited incentive and support beyond one's postgraduate research methods course. Indeed, given professional pressures to publish and teach,⁹⁰ it is possible to say that further training and deep empirical and applied engagement with alternative subject positions is structurally inhibited within the discipline.

These perhaps obvious constraints have very serious analytic and political consequences in terms of maintaining the discipline's tendencies towards Eurocentrism in research. It is unsurprising that the decolonising project requires scholars to look at sources and work quite outside the discipline for these alternative perspectives, and also unsurprising that the empirical groundings of projects often do not seem completely satisfying. When the necessary periods of exile are limited to the few weeks between terms and funded only partially by institutions and departments, one's

⁹⁰ These are of course pressures exacerbated by present pressures on the higher education system.

mobility is deeply curtailed. Re-shaping where possible the opportunities for engaged research is no less important a task

More than this, however, treating the decolonising project as being about a process of learning is about the spirit or posture in which the research is undertaken and then presented. If the decolonising project is about taking the perspectival character of knowledge seriously, then the unsettling of where epistemic authority lies between ‘researcher’ and ‘subject’ is a necessary part of it. Whilst our professional identities, and moreover our personal ones, will require us to re-occupy a space in various epistemic hierarchies, as scholars and teachers, a consciousness that this is a fragile and tenuous place imbued with power often presumed rather than justified should encourage an openness to dialogue and alternative perspectives. In a practical sense, this could start with putting more value on collaborative work, as well as working harder to promote awareness of work from marginalised perspectives, even if we have not produced it ourselves. Whilst there are always strategic closures within any analysis, nonetheless a decolonising project in social theory that is working to think in terms of, perhaps counter-intuitively, heterogeneous and marginalised subjects of world politics, with an appreciation of how to push the limits of this endeavour, will contribute to the broader question of democratising world politics.

Conclusions: Decolonising future horizons

This piece has argued that enabling dialogue in international relations requires us to get to grips with the nature of the ‘subjects’ of this dialogue and of our research. It has shown through its suggested typology that decolonising strategies are connected and contested around this common preoccupation. I have also argued that this can be a productive way to think about the problem of international power structures in a more inclusive way, through an illustrative case in which these strategies are applied to a wider research project.

Through engaging with the preoccupations and strategies of decolonising thought in the course of my research, I have become alive to the multiple ways in which even in a politically decolonised age, variously colonial and imperial ideas permeate the ways in which the contemporary world is understood and represented, even in critical thought. Whilst, given the intertwined character of modernity with colonialism in Europe, this is not altogether surprising, the academy has been relatively slow to elaborate ways of seeing and engaging that might help unpick some of these myths and

framings of world order. Nonetheless, as I hope I have shown, this is not for want of innovative intellectual strategies for decolonising our analyses, which can inspire new ways of researching that offer a less exclusionary terrain for dialogue.

Substantive questions remain, for which there may be no answers that satisfy everyone. In particular, the emphasis on the sources and nature of alterity present key tensions. Can you really 'do' social theory that is ultimately respectful of difference? What are legitimate and illegitimate differentiations between people in the conduct of social inquiry? In whose name is inquiry carried out, and who benefits from it? Can 'dialogue' be a satisfactory alternative to Eurocentrism, given the persistence of this intellectual baggage in constructing alternatives?

Many decolonising strategies have recognised these seeming paradoxes. These paradoxes are not just 'theoretical' but also pervaded the practical problems faced by the protagonists of Third World decolonisation in the twentieth century. Although it is a now-standard response to these issues, maintaining a reflexive and non-dogmatic approach to our conceptual lenses is clearly important, and being explicit about the objectives of engagement and analysis more so. However, it would be to capitulate too much to suggest that decolonising theory is somehow more theoretically compromised by such a stance in a way that other approaches are not. Simply being prepared to admit and consider deeply the relevance of these issues does not mean that they do not apply to other theoretical frames – it is more that they are systematically ignored.

'Decolonising' 'IR' may not work as full accommodation or logical coherence between the two terms, but it might produce some things which sit better than the alternatives. Yet, for dialogue about world politics to be fully realised, decolonising strategies and lines of argument require and deserve replies from mainstream IR rather than being simply included without comment in the burgeoning roster. Although so far, decolonising strategies have been treated as little more than 'local difficulties', given conferences like this these modes of thought seem to be spreading in popularity and sophistication. This paper has aimed to add some small momentum to what is an exciting research movement in the discipline, through opening up some explicit ways in which particular problems and conceptual framings might be re-imagined.