

Looking to the periphery¹: the value-added of ‘non-core’ perspectives

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Foreword

This paper forms part of a bigger project in which I want to consider the way in which IR is studied in sub-Saharan Africa, and possible contributions to the field. I take my cue from scholars who have done similar projects in other regions of the developing world – notably Arlene Tickner’s work (2003b) on Latin America and Amitav Acharya’s work on IR in Southeast Asia.

Introduction

“The mainstream must ‘see’ the Third World. To ‘see’ the Third World means to recognize the inherent limitations of mainstream IR theory for explaining Third World security patterns, and to recognize these limitations not as a mark of the Third World’s strangeness, but as a weakness of mainstream theory” (Barnett, 2002:49).

¹ There is, of course, much debate about the value of concepts like ‘the periphery’ and even more debate about what exactly it refers to. Here it is used very broadly and as a synonym for the global south, the third world, the developing world – all which are characterised by a common feeling of exclusion and marginalisation, in other words a shared perception of international relations. The division between core and periphery in the field of IR does not necessarily coincide with the way the division is usually conceptualised in IR and IPE.

I have always considered myself an International Relations (IR) scholar, which in the South African context means I form of a particularly small minority of social scientists who are regarded with some uncertainty by others in more ‘traditional’ disciplines. Most scholars who dabble in IR do so from a Political Science or IPE base. Furthermore, I am one of literally a handful of scholars in SA who deal explicitly with theoretical issues in IR. This in particular has puzzled and concerned me, which was the main impetus for embarking on this project. I became increasingly concerned with the marginalisation of Africa and the developing world more generally in IR theory, and was happy to realise that it is also an issue with which other scholars – albeit a handful – are grappling with.

The past decade has seen a number of studies² questioning the applicability of western-centric³ IR theory to the developing world, and lamenting the neglect of the developing world, and Africa in particular⁴, in mainstream IR theory. Increasingly, scholars have become aware of the limitations of existing theories in relation to the developing world. Neuman (1998:1) notes that “changes in the international system in general, and in the Third World in particular, seem to be outpacing developments in International Relations Theory”. Ayoob’s concern that, “Since much of the theoretically sophisticated IR analysis is based on premises that are of limited relevance, it does not reflect many of the major realities in the contemporary international system” (2003:30) summarises many of these views. This criticism builds on a long-standing one that Western social science cannot adequately explain or understand the non-Western world.

² Neuman, S.G. (ed.) (1998) *International Relations Theory and the Third World*. Houndsmills: Macmillan; Dunn, K.C. and Shaw, T.M. (eds.) (2001) *Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave; Aydinli and Mathews (2000); Thomas and Wilkin (2004); Nkiwane, T.C. (2001) “Africa and International Relations: Regional Lessons for a Global Discourse” in *International Political Science Review*, 22:279-290; Lavelle, K.C. (2005) Review article: “Moving in from the periphery: Africa and the study of international political economy” in *Review of International Political Economy*, vol.12, no.2:364-379.

³ The term ‘western-centric’ can be substituted with ‘western’, ‘northern’, Anglo-centric, US-centric, referring to that body of IR theory which has its origin in the developed world, in particular the USA and the UK, being the dominant players in the global discipline of IR.

⁴ As Lavelle (2005:366) notes, “Africa occupies a rather unique place in English-language literature on politics. While it has never been entirely absent, African states have not constituted the core theoretical concern of either international relations or comparative politics scholarship...The lack of attention has been more pronounced in the subfield of international relations”.

Africa's Exclusion

For much of the second half of the 20th century, neither neorealism, with its focus on power politics and traditional security issues between the great powers nor neoliberal institutionalism paid much attention to Africa in IR, except perhaps with regard to Africa's fringe role in the drama of the Cold War. Despite all the debates about ontological and epistemological issues, the opposing sides seemed to be in agreement about the irrelevance of Africa to the bigger picture. Not only was there little interest in Africa based on the belief that the international relations of the developing world were not instrumental to understanding the important issues of war and peace in IR, but Africa also proved to be a thorn in the side of IR theorists, who found that their theories just did not make sense in the African context. As Nkiwane (2001:280) so aptly says, "For the IR scholar, the significance of Africa lies solely in its disruptive potential for neat theoretical paradigms".

Although Africa is undoubtedly receiving increased attention post-911 due to its strategic position in the global war on terrorism, the focus is again on security-related matters, with "the majority of contributions on Africa in IR continu[ing] to be descriptive and research designs in general seem[ing] to be little informed by IR theory debates" (Engel and Olsen, 2005:9).

As Buzan (in the preface to Engel and Olsen, 2005) states, Europe's imposition of the Westphalian state model on most regions of the world subsequently "allowed IR theories that were essentially rooted in European history to be, with some justification, applied on a global scale. The widespread failure of this transplant in Africa explains much of the difficulty in applying IR theory there".

This is not a new problem, and yet not much progress has been made in addressing it. In 1987, after teaching at the University of Zambia, Stephen Chan wrote a book attempting to look at IR from an African perspective. In the preface, he laments the fact that "the view from metropolitan academies is distorted and condescending" and that in the

discipline of IR, “the Third world, the world of my students, was incidental, accorded a few paragraphs in case studies, but was essentially swept aside in the theories of international power and international systems” (Chan, 1987:vii). This criticism is just as valid today as it was then.

While most scholars have based the criticism that the Third World, and particularly Africa, is marginalised in IR, on general perceptions, Thomas and Wilkin (2004) conducted an empirical study to find evidence for this assumption. They did this by conducting an overview of the topics covered in what they regarded as five leading IR journals⁵ over the period January 1998 to November 2003. They also considered the content of the most widely used IR textbooks, such as Baylis and Smith’s *The Globalisation of World Politics*. One of the conclusions drawn is that one of the reasons for the neglect of the developing world is the “tradition of orthodox International Relations theory”, which “...presents us with only a limited picture of global politics” (Thomas and Wilkin, 2004:247).

Due to the lack of interest paid to the African experience by IR theories, Engel and Olsen (2005:6) argue, “it is quite obvious that Africa, its development and its special problems have had strikingly little impact on IR theory. By and large, empirical research on Africa, within either IR or comparative politics, has dealt with specific problems – not general theories”.

The problem with this state of affairs is not just the exclusion or marginalisation of Africa, but the presumption of universality. As Holsti (1998:105) says, “The defining hallmark of International Relations Theory is precisely that it seeks to establish generalizations that transcend time, location, and personality...” Similarly, Inayatullah and Blaney’s 2004 book⁶ (reviewed by Bleiker, 2006) holds that “the theory and practice of international relations is in many ways about the erasure of difference” (Bleiker,

⁵ International Organization, Foreign Policy, International Studies Quarterly, International Affairs and Review of International Studies.

⁶ Inayatullah, Naeem and David L. Blaney (2004) *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*. London: Routledge.

2006:128). This has proven to be problematic in that empirical evidence from the developing world clearly disputes mainstream IR theory's claim to universality.

Finally, the issue of exclusion is not simply of academic interest but also of political concern because, as Ayoob notes, "it helps to reinforce, reproduce, and perpetuate images of reality on which analysts and policymakers base their prescriptions, decisions, and policies" (Ayoob, 1998:31).

Some commentators have noted that critics of IR theory's marginalisation of Africa and the developing world should be more specific in who they are directing the criticism at. Brown (2006) makes a valid point in arguing that not all IR theory is inadequate for Africa, or for the developing world for that matter, and that there have been important advances in some approaches in looking beyond neorealism's state-centric approach to include factors which critics maintain are essential to understanding IR in Africa. Of course there have been challenges to the mainstream that have contributed to a better understanding of the developing world and have resulted in more theoretical pluralism within the field. One could cite efforts made by critical theories and Marxist-inspired world systems and *dependencia* theories, (however, mainly within IPE), to understand the peripheral role that Africa and other developing countries played in the global economy. Similarly, Barnett's (2002:50) article is an important example of how constructivism may be able to offer an alternative to bringing in the Third World. Acharya and Stubbs (2006:125) note how constructivism has "helped to broaden the understanding of Southeast Asia's regional order by capturing its ideational determinants (norms and identity), the agency role of local actors, and the possibility of transformation through socialization and institution building". One could also mention the contributions made by postcolonial theory and other critical theories such as feminism. As Engel and Olsen (2005:5) however point out, these "radical contributions remained more or less isolated from the general debates between the other IR schools". Most of these theories are still limited on the basis that they share with mainstream theory a reliance on Western philosophy and a Eurocentric framing of world history. Additionally, as Thomas and Wilkin (2004:249) point out, "the dominance of mainstream International Relations

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approaches has not been sufficiently dented to give the confidence that as a discipline we are engaged systematically with understanding the major challenges facing the majority of humanity”.

This state of affairs lead the President of the ISA, Ann Tickner, to pose some serious questions about the state of IR during her presidential address at this year’s International Studies Association Conference in Chicago. These included:

“Is our field open to a variety of scholarly approaches and disciplines other than political science? How do we exercise responsibility in judging the scholarship of others, particularly when it falls outside what is conventionally defined as within disciplinary boundaries? What are our responsibilities to our research subjects for whom we profess to speak but whose voices we may co-opt? What are the consequences of hegemonic scholarship for those in the peripheries or for those whose lives are not part of the construction of conventional knowledge about world politics? Does our scholarship reinforce existing power structures and existing political, social and economic inequalities? Is Western international relations neutral with regard to scholarly and policy practices in areas outside the West? What are some of the political and cultural boundaries of spreading academic knowledge across the world? What implications does the presence of such boundaries carry for cross-cultural dialogue and knowledge cumulation? Western social science scholarship has been profoundly secular and rationalist. Do we have a responsibility to understand religious and cultural traditions other than our own whose commitment to other forms of knowledge may be seen as equally or more valid by their proponents?” (Ann Tickner, 2007)

This paper engages with some of these questions, starting from the assumption that many of them go to the very core of what IR is about, and yet are not sufficiently reflected on by scholars working in the field. It attempts to go beyond the (well-founded) criticism about the inapplicability of much IR theory to the developing world, and instead of asking what IR theory should be doing to address the concerns of the developing world, turn the question around to ask: what is western or northern IR theory missing out on by neglecting the experiences of the south? How can the experiences of the majority of the world’s population and its scholars contribute to a greater understanding of IR? And in particular, how can this lead to an advancement of the theoretical development of the field? In other words, the focus here is thus not just on IR theory *for* but *from* the

developing world. So the focus, to borrow from Arlene Tickner (2003a:300), is less on the developing world as an object of IR study, but rather as an agent of IR knowledge.

Relatedly, it is also important to consider the challenges that this poses. Despite many complaints coming from the developing world about American hegemony and the lack of relevance of existing IR theory to the problems of the developing world, there is not much theoretical work being done in the global south⁷. As some commentators have noted, the IR communities in countries like South Africa suffer from what appears to be an inferiority complex, with IR being “an enterprise which, generally speaking, displays little imagination and almost no conceptual adventure” and “an absence of daring” (Vale, 2004:240). At most, existing theories are applied, and perhaps criticised, but no attempts are made to suggest alternative, ‘home-grown’ approaches. Nkiwane (2001:280) asks whether the current situation can be explained on the basis that “Africa has little to contribute to IR, or because the power dynamics of the discipline are such that African voices are not heard?” Initially I would have argued that mainly the latter reason is to blame, but I now believe it is a bit of both, and that there are deeper lying reasons, such as the nature of the discipline, which need to be uncovered. Although an exploration of some of the obstacles and challenges - both internal and external - to developing IR theory in the global South – is integral to the broader research project, it will not be the focus here.

The value-added of “non-core” perspectives

“Hearing alternative voices...in addition to satisfying recent demands for disciplinary opening, would provide the field with a wider array of conceptual tools for understanding the multiple worlds in which international relations inevitably take place” (Tickner, 2003b:348).

⁷ There have been some attempts at establishing non-western-centric approaches to IR. To date, dependency theory and its offshoots has been the most successful. Stephanie Neuman's 1998 edited book brings together some developing world scholars, such as Mohammed Ayoob, who have put forward alternative theories.

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“Shifting out gaze from the few powerful actors in world affairs to the many who are less powerful may help us to revise and strengthen the conceptual foundations upon which IR Theory is built, so that it better reflects what is happening globally today. The study of small states may answer big questions” (Neuman, 1998:17).

As Bleiker (2006:128) rightly states “By its very subject matter, international relations (IR) scholarship ought to engage the complexities and diversities of world politics: the myriad cultural, linguistic, political, religious, and ideological experiences that encompass the globe”. This seems an obvious statement. And yet, as we know, few disciplines are as homogeneous as International Relations. This state of affairs is, of course, based on the assumption that the ‘truths’ of IR are valid across all states and cultures, and that one need not account for political, cultural or other differences understanding the most important things about world politics.

This has resulted in existing IR theory being largely incapable of making sense of the experiences of the developing world, with such cases usually dismissed as aberrations to the norm. Dunn (2001:4), for example, emphasises, “Rather than use African experiences to revise their theories, most IR scholars simply continue to ignore the continent”. Puchala has a slightly different view. According to him, “The experience of the Third World can be forced into the conceptual categories of Western theorising about IR. But the explanations that result are at least wanting in richness if not also in interpretive validity” (Puchala, 1998:149). Whether one believes that existing theories marginalise the developing world or force it into inappropriate frameworks, developing theory that is better able to provide explanations for the issues and problems that plague the majority of humankind would seem to be a matter of urgency.

This is not, however, the only reason why it is important to look beyond the core for theoretical innovations. Tickner elaborates on this point in arguing, “the intellectual crisis that currently plagues the field, manifest in the misfit between theoretical treatments of the world and fundamental global problems, warrants tapping into alternative sources of knowledge. Shifting the position from which ideas are formulated may shed light upon distinct aspects of global politics that dominant perspectives simply

fail to see” (2003a:302). What she is highlighting is that approaching the study of IR from a non-Western, developing world perspective is significantly different to approaching it from a western worldview. Different questions are asked, different worldviews are incorporated to understand issues and the outcome will, inevitably, be different. The benefits are obvious, and can only result in a more comprehensive view of international relations. Aydinli and Mathews agree, pointing out that the converse, what they call “disciplinary deafness” will result in “intellectual loss and stunted disciplinary growth” (2000:300).

The different social, political, economic, cultural (including intellectual), historical, geographical and ideological contexts found in the global South, in comparison to the North, thus provides potentially fertile ground for innovative perspectives on IR that may fall outside the intellectual framework of northern scholars. Tickner (2003a:302-308) provides us with a useful conceptual framework to explore what makes looking at IR from outside the core a fundamentally different endeavour, with resultantly different outcomes. She identifies three factors, namely “culture”, “hybridity” and “everyday life”. Without going into too much detail, “culture” refers to the fact that different cultures ask different questions about their environment due to their respective worldviews. Linked to this is “everyday life”, which refers to the idea that knowledge of the world is also largely a product of everyday experiences. Ultimately, different questions are asked and different topics are prioritised. For example, in the global South, nuclear non-proliferation and terrorism are less important than are issues of poverty, marginalisation and inequality.

The call, ultimately, is thus for more pluralism in the field of IR. There are different views on how perspectives from the developing world can contribute to broader IR theory. The first is that advanced by Ayoob when he writes, “Breaking the monopoly that controls knowledge demands that we seriously attempt to present conceptual alternatives to the dominant theories in IR” (2002:27)⁸. Some Africanists (notably Dunn

⁸ Ironically, Ayoob’s ‘subaltern realism’ can be criticised for doing exactly the opposite, namely drawing very heavily on neorealism.

and Shaw, 2001) claim that Africa is essentially different. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that existing IR theory is inappropriate for understanding the African situation, and hence a new theory needs to be developed. Other writers, notable Thomas and Wilkin (2004:249), also warn that one should be careful of not simply tagging new issues “on to an existing framework of analysis” without “call[ing] into question the principles underpinning the orthodox approaches”. What is implied is that the aim should thus be the development of a framework based on different principles, in other words the theoretical autonomy of the South.

This approach relates to the ‘two worlds’ approach which some authors have advocated. Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky (quoted in Neuman, 1998:4) for example claim that “The key to understanding the real world order is to separate the world into two parts”.⁹ Engel and Olsen (2005:14-16) also subscribe to the two worlds view, making a distinction in the international system between what they call post-Westphalian components such as the EU, and pre-Westphalian components, which would include large parts of Africa. Buzan (1998:221) takes it one step further by proposing that the current states system be divided into three types: postmodern, modern and premodern. The assumption is that the internal character of units is an important factor to consider in analysis, i.e. the differentiation of units, contrary to neorealism’s view that all units are functionally alike¹⁰.

Buzan (1998) makes the argument that the two world view can be regarded as a serious challenge to systemic efforts to construct a single, universally applicable theory to understand international relations. He makes the point that there seems to be a need for two theories: one to explain each of the two zones. Some scholars (such as Taylor and Williams (2004:1) may disagree with this view on the grounds that “Africa has never

⁹ Goldgeier and McFaul (1992) also describe the international relations in the post-Cold War era as best understood as consisting of two worlds.

¹⁰ Escude (1998) proposes a slight variation, arguing that the interstate system can in fact be seen as consisting of three types of functionally differentiated states: states that command, states that obey, and rebel states. One could also employ Alexander Wendt’s (1999) distinction between Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian logics, and argue that all three these logics are currently operating simultaneously in different parts of the world.

existed apart from world politics but has been unavoidably entangled in the ebb and flow of events and changing configurations of power. This recognition highlights the sterility of attempts to define a rigid relationship between Africa and a somehow separate international system”.

The opinion of this author, however, is not that by recognising the need for a different approach to theory to understand Africa one is implying that Africa is not part of the broader international system. In fact, another major challenge is how to understand and theorise the areas of interface between the two zones or worlds, as it is a fallacy to believe that, despite being significantly different, are disconnected from one another. Buzan agrees when he suggests that “While there may well be a case for having two theories to explain how the different domestic structures in the two zones generate their distinctive forms of International Relations, there also needs to be an overarching theory that ties the two together” (1998:225). He proposes as a starting point focusing on what seems to be one of the underlying reasons for mainstream theory’s inability to understand the developing world: namely the assumption that units are alike and lack functional differentiation.

Adopting a Pluralist Approach

Is the only solution to our perceived problem then to develop entirely new IR theories, perhaps with a particular regional content? Would we be better off admitting that creating a universal theory of IR (such as neorealists presume to have done) is just not possible, and instead opt for a Chinese IR theory, an African IR theory, and so forth? This might sound feasible, however, creating new strands of IR theory which are independent of the existing Western world undoubtedly lead to the further marginalisation of the periphery.

Perhaps another approach to dealing with the problem of existing IR theory’s inapplicability to the African situation would focus on cultivating a diverse and pluralist approach to understanding the world. This is also the view held by this author. The call

is thus not for an outright rejection of existing theories and an exclusive focus on the generation of entirely new theories, but instead for a more inclusive, tolerant and pluralist approach.

While it might be said that pluralism is already a feature of IR, this is only true in a limited sense. While there is currently a greater variety of contending IR theories than ever before, they all originate in and hence privilege the interests of a relatively small number of states and people. At the same time, Ayoob's qualification that "This limitation does not render such theories completely irrelevant as explanatory tools. These theories successfully explain important aspects of how the international system works" is a valid one. It is, however, inevitable, that their explanatory power is restricted due to their limited worldview. This is where developing world perspectives could make an important contribution, with such insights being complementary to existing frameworks.

One approach to this would be for the recent interest in bridge-building between contending northern theories to be extended to building bridges between theories from the core and the periphery. Engaging in bridge building allows scholars to adopt a position of dialogue which, "while lacking the elegance of a theory (which may, however prove of little use in empirical research), offers the advantage of being open towards conceptual innovation as the result of discussions" (Wiener, 2001:17).

In practical terms, this would involve incorporating the African and developing world reality into the fold of existing IR theory. Nkiwane (2001:280) for example, tries to show that "African examples and African scholarship lend important insights and critiques to the various perspectives on international relations" (Nkiwane, 2001:280). She proceeds to look at the contribution African debates have made to understanding development issues, the African perspective on liberalism and the related issue of rights and democracy, and of course alternative understandings of the state. Similarly, Escude (1998) employs the case of Argentina to show how looking at an issue from a different angle (or as he describes it, from the perspective of Melos instead of Athens. He argues that "the inclusion of peripheral states in systemic analysis adds explanatory power to

theory because it provides a different prism through which to observe the same phenomena” (Escude, 1998:70).

Another way in which scholars in the developing world may contribute to the growth of IR theory is by adapting existing western theories to their situation. Tickner explains how this has been done in Latin America, where, “Although dominant U.S. discourses are present in regional analyses of international problems, they have been appropriated and molded to the Latin American context, suggesting that the flow of knowledge from the United States has been adjusted to fit conditions in the region” (2003b:326). She reviews the contributions of some scholars like Helio Jaguaribe, Juan Carlos Puig and Carlos Escudé, who creatively applied traditional IR ideas to the regional context (Tickner, 2003b :331). The latter’s aim was to derive a normative theory based on neorealism, which would be appropriate to the periphery. Ticker also notes how the literature on autonomy produced in Latin America during the 1980s, for example, succeeded in establishing “conceptual bridge” between dependency theory and mainstream IR theory. It also managed to “transcend[ing] the pessimistic conclusions derived from these theories in terms of the possibility for autonomous international action on the part of peripheral countries”. This eclectic model consisting of elements of neorealism, dependency theory and interdependence constitutes what is known as the Latin American hybrid model (Tickner, 2003b:331).

Acharya and Stubbs (2006:128) also note how scholars of Southeast Asian IR have adapted IR theories to make them more appropriate for understanding the particularities of the region. By using the case study of the ASEAN member states’ efforts in establishing regional co-operation and institutions, for example, scholars of Southeast Asia are able to make an important contribution to the way in which power is understood, particularly in constructivist thinking. Significantly, they note that these ‘modifications’ may not only be limited to engendering greater understanding of that particular region, but may also contribute to studying other parts of the world, and hold considerable potential for advancing IR theorising.

Lastly, a number of authors (Nkiwane (2001), Dunn (2001), Neumann (1998), Brown (2006), Tickner (2003b)) have written about how central concepts found in IR (such as anarchy, state, sovereignty, alliance, international system) become problematic when applied to the Third World, and how they can be reinterpreted from a Third World perspective. A very relevant contribution to the development of IR theory would thus be the rereading or reconstruction of concepts central to the discipline. This is an important process as one could argue that Western-centric concepts and the nature of the discipline prevents developing scholars from creating IR theories that are universally applicable.

Having outlined some of the possible benefits of pluralism, one cannot lose sight of the many dangers associated with adopting a pluralist approach¹¹. These would entail all the problems inherent in eclecticism, including possibly irreconcilable epistemological and ontological points of departure. Another criticism might be that such an approach will lack in explanatory power, given that one of the supposed characteristics of good theory is simplicity and parsimony. One could argue, however, that while parsimonious arguments are attractive in their simplicity, they may lead to an oversimplification of the complex phenomenon that is change. Sometimes sacrificing parsimony appears justified in exchange for gains in explanatory strength and depth. As Cox so aptly states, “One person’s elegance is another’s oversimplification” (1996:53).

Is this still IR?

In conclusion, my concern is that I may be expecting too much from the discipline of IR, and that much of what I, and others, have proposed in fact falls outside of the narrow scope which IR has defined for itself. Perhaps the systemic approach preferred by IR theory is just not suited to the understanding of problems of the majority of the world’s population. And perhaps the calls that the discipline of IR undergoes an extreme makeover are inappropriate. This issue is of course closely related to a much more fundamental one regarding the disciplinary boundaries of IR, which continues to be an

¹¹ The *International Studies Review* (vol. 5, 2003:123-153) forum on whether dialogue and synthesis are possible in IR, and in particular Steve Smith’s contribution (2003:141-143) provide a useful discussion on the pros and cons of engaging in such an endeavour.

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area of great debate. Tickner (2003b:346) has made the point that the discipline of IR has “reaffirmed its legitimacy though the fixing of boundaries. Knowledge of global realities, however, often lies beyond such boundaries”.

In 1989 David Hirschman, speaking at a workshop on IR in South Africa, lamented, “The very great possibility of this field of study seeming to be irrelevant to the poorest people of this world appears to be inherent. Even when it goes beyond relations between states...it remains a disciplines which is distant in the extreme from the concerns of the vast majority of the Third World, and, therefore, from some of the most fundamental problems facing the world community...A field of study that is so concerned with the behaviour of those who have power has precious little to say about the powerless...International relations, then, beyond appearing irrelevant, also looks like an unconcerned discipline” (Hirschman, 1989:53). It would appear that IR, by its nature, is a marginalising discipline.

So perhaps we should conclude that we should not hold the discipline of IR to any unrealistic expectations. While I still advocate for the cultivation of a diverse, theoretically tolerant and pluralist approach to understanding the world, I have my doubts whether this kind of approach is possible within the context of our very exclusive field. Perhaps those of us who believe that making sense of the problems faced by the people of Africa should be one of the main concerns of social scientists should not try to do so through this limited instrument called IR. Perhaps we should just get on with it and instead simply call ourselves social scientists or students of international studies.