Our work is International Relations: on exclusion, negotiation, and engagement against disciplinary boundaries


Published in:
Alternatives: global, local, political

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal

Publisher rights
Copyright 2023 The Authors.
This is an open access article published under a Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the author and source are cited.

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Open Access
This research has been made openly available by Queen's academics and its Open Research team. We would love to hear how access to this research benefits you. – Share your feedback with us: http://go.qub.ac.uk/oa-feedback
Our Work is International Relations: On Exclusion, Negotiation, and Engagement Against Disciplinary Boundaries

Jamie J. Hagen and Anupama Ranawana

Abstract
With this forum we aim to contribute to the debate within International Relations (IR) scholarship about the space that has opened up since the inter-paradigmatic debate 30 years ago and the challenges still experienced by those of us coming from the “margin” yet committed to the “globalization” of the discipline. That is to say, to building a pluriverse of IR. In the first contribution Anupama Ranawana begins by considering the practical difficulties for Southern research and knowledge creation in IR, detailing a snapshot of how current funding structures continue to relegate academics and researchers in the Global South to a relationship of dependency on their counterparts in the Global North. The next two contributions to the discussion reflect on how these problematic bounds of the disciple are then embodied by those of us working in more marginal spaces in IR. First, Ahmed Rizky Mardhatilla Umar writes of the policing of IR within the Indonesian University which continues to leave most critical work as outside of IR. Another point of embodied experience in what for many continues to be marginal or even outside of the discipline is considered by Jamie J. Hagen and Alex Edney-Browne who write about queer IR and specifically the experience of being a part of a community of LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and allies) in IR scholars. In conclusion Roland Bleiker reflects and evaluates “the potential and limits of International Relations as an academic discipline” even as the discipline continues to call for greater diversity. As such, each contributor speaks separately to a jointly articulated provocation regarding what counts and is centered as “real” International Relations scholarship, based on their own encounters with being told explicitly (i.e., through rejections, lack of institutional support) or implicitly (i.e., through what we are taught) that our work is not International Relations.

Keywords
global South, international relations, decolonial, racialization

1 Co-Director Centre for Gender in Politics, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, UK
2 Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics, School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews, UK

Corresponding Author:
Jamie J. Hagen, Queen’s University Belfast, 25 University Square, Belfast BT7 1NN, UK.
Email: j.hagen@qub.ac.uk
Introduction to the Forum

The discipline/disciplining of International Relations (IR) is not neutral. In practice, the making and remaking of IR is deeply contextual and framed by a particular set of logics. With our interventions in this forum we illustrate that even as IR scholars expand who the discipline is for, and what the discipline is about, the foundational norms of IR still shape how scholars and students alike experience the push and pull of inclusion/exclusion in shifting scholarly terrain. In this forum, an outgrowth of the two 2019 Millennium conference panels entitled “Your Work is Not International Relations” organized by Jamie J. Hagen (Abu-Bakare, 2022), we offer snapshots into the lived-experiences of a group of us committed to undisciplined approaches to IR with four personal interventions. Together our interventions serve to add to work that illuminates some of the seemingly banal ways the discipline continues to be unable to move away from certain frameworks, even amid more widespread calls to decolonize, to include diverse voices and to address racism within IR. The key objective of our forum is to engage with what barriers remain for a more plural and inclusive cultivation of knowledge and for working towards epistemic justice in IR. This forum strongly argues for the importance of the lived, embodied experience for how such epistemic justice can occur.

While there has been much attention to addressing the foundational texts and teaching of what makes IR, and how those of us who teach IR can challenge and confront this in our pedagogical practices, less attention has been paid to the embodied experience of why this practice of being disciplined matters to those of us doing IR. The Caribbean writer Sylvia Wynter explains that the method/ology of categories of knowledge is a form of discipline, and that disciplining is what Empire is all about (Wynter 2003). Robbie Shilliam, reminds readers to be mindful that knowledge production itself is a kind of accumulation and space of exclusivity arguing, “The colonized and their descendants, as the known, must always be catching up with someone else’s production line” (Shilliam, 2013). The voices of queer and other similarly marginalized authors are often still silenced through knowledge mechanisms established under Empire, and therefore built to uphold and serve whiteness. This is true even of more “participatory” and “co-creative” ventures wedded to structures that extract and accumulate knowledge rather than center and disrupt how we know and think about the world. The power of what knowledge is remains within the legitimacy of the few. This takes on critical dimensions given a rise in authoritarianism and populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), the COVID-19 pandemic (Agostinis et al., 2021), censorship of critical race theory scholarship (Ray & Gibbons, 2021) and bans on gender studies scholarship (Korolczuk, 2020).

We aim to contribute to the debate within IR scholarship about the space that has opened up since the inter-paradigmatic debate 30 years ago and the challenges still experienced by those of us coming from the “margin” yet committed to the “globalization” of the discipline. That is to say, to building a pluriverse of IR. Each piece in this forum offers an intervention from a different positionality (academically, theoretically, critically, etc.) of those writing in this opened up space in IR. Since J. Ann Tickner’s diagnosis of the mainstream’s blindness to feminist perspectives in “You Just Don’t Understand” or Rob B. J. Walker and Richard Ashley’s enunciation of the “Dissident Thought in International Studies” 30 years ago, major conferences and journals in international studies have opened up to a greater spectrum of voices (Tickner, 1997) (Walker & Ashley, 1990). We situate our discussion alongside calls for contesting/challenging/expanding the sociology of IR as a discipline (including calls for global IR, to situate race in IR, and to decolonize IR). This work is buttressed by feminist scholarship about the exclusion of women in IR/feminist approaches to IR. Some of this scholarship we are in conversation with includes reflections on the continuing predominance of white Western male scholarship in IR (Zvogbo & Loken, 2020), the continuing exclusionary practitioners of IR theory (Mansour, 2017), IR texts focusing on Global South authors as a response to this absence (Tickner & Smith 2020), the continuing exclusion of feminist research in the IR syllabi (Sondarjee, 2020) and related gender citation...
gap in IR scholarship (Maliniak et al., 2013), and recognizing the centrality of race and racism in the founding of the modern world order (Acharya, 2022). While citing scholarship written in English to inform the introduction to our intervention, throughout the forum we also recognize IR knowledge is not only cultivated in English speaking institutions.

In the first contribution Anupama Ranwana begins by considering the practical difficulties for Southern research and knowledge creation in IR. As part of this, Ranwana details a snapshot of how current funding structures continue to relegate academics and researchers in the Global South to a relationship of dependency on their counterparts in the Global North. They note that this is particularly hazardous to researchers working in non-university contexts like think tanks. Ranwana argues that, “To truly ‘decolonise’ and to engender the knowledge pluriverse, an overhaul of the structural hierarchies embedded within the trade of knowledge production is urgently required.” The next two contributions to the discussion reflect on how these problematic bounds of the discipline are then embodied by those of us working in more marginal spaces in IR. First, Ahmed Rizky Maradhatilla Umar writes of the policing of IR within the Indonesian University which continues to leave most critical work as outside of IR. Another point of embodied experience in what for many continues to be marginal or even outside of the discipline is considered by Jamie J. Hagen and Alex Edney-Browne who write about queer IR and specifically the experience of being a part of a community of LGBTQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and allies) as IR scholars. With this contribution the authors speak of both the inclusion of queer IR scholarship publishing, but also the state of inclusion of queer and trans scholars working in the field. In conclusion Roland Bleiker reflects and evaluates “the potential and limits of International Relations as an academic discipline” even as the discipline continues to call for greater diversity. As such, each contributor speaks separately to a jointly articulated provocation regarding what counts and is centered as “real” International Relations (IR) scholarship, based on their own encounters with being told explicitly (i.e., through rejections, lack of institutional support) or implicitly (i.e., through what we are taught) that our work is not International Relations.

As individuals at different stages in our careers, with differing positionalities in academia we reflect on how our research both fits but also does not fit within the curriculum of IR based on the literature from which we draw, the questions we ask, the methods and methodologies guiding our inquiries as well as the different regions of the world we each individually propose to study. We view “the discipline of IR” as a field of study of global politics between and beyond states, drawing on a plurality of theories and interdisciplinary interventions. Each of us have encountered this field as students, on the job market, at academic conferences and through journals where we seek to publish. Rather than seeing the question of IR as being a boundary where we are either in or out of the discipline, our pieces each look at the complexity of new ideas being invited in to the discipline, but then negotiating 1) how and if those ideas are engaged with beyond the margins and 2) the experience of the person doing the work of bringing these ideas in past the borders of IR.

While we are committed to the call by Roland Bleiker to “Forget IR Theory,” many of us find this results in speaking from exile, speaking to IR through other disciplinary lenses, struggling to justify why or how our research agendas matter to “International Relations” or whether they are “international” enough (Bleiker, 1997). This animates us to think about the importance of a discipline that is focused on the creation and cultivation of knowledge, rather than its production. We borrow from Robbie Shilliam in doing so. Shilliam argues for knowledge cultivation so that we “till, to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to encourage growth. Knowledge production is less a creative endeavour and more a process of accumulation and imperial extension disguised as “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” (Shilliam, 2015, 2016). With this in mind, we recognize the role of feminist, queer, post-structuralist, decolonial and post-colonial theory in particular in expanding the conversation about the spaces and places of “politics” through our personal “case studies.” As such we focus on our experience of doing the work of remaking IR and in turn illustrate how we confront the knowledge mechanisms of Empire within the discipline. The sense of not belonging to the “discipline” by each
contributor to the discussion is revealed through various personal encounters including negotiating the unequal research partnerships between Global North and Global South, confronting isolation in academic conferences and naming obstacles in finding a proper venue for publication and engagement with scholars in “IR” (Abu-Bakare, 2022). Together our contributions illustrate how despite decades of calls for broadening the discipline of IR, some communities of IR scholars, ways of thinking about IR and modes of being IR are still met with a mindset that certain IR work does not belong within the discipline. Even more importantly, we aim to illustrate the implications of these exclusions, as narrated through our experiences of meeting, negotiating and engaging with the boundaries of what many still hold up to be a very narrow view of the field of IR.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD
Jamie J. Hagen  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0998-9359

References


**Author Biographies**

**Jamie J. Hagen** is a Lecturer in International Relations at Queen’s University Belfast (UK) where she is founding co-Director of the Centre for Gender in Politics. She is an expert on international attention to LGBTQ populations in security studies, specifically focusing on queering the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Jamie is currently researcher with Anupama Ranawana, María Susana Peralta Ramón (Colombia Diversa) and Nathalie Mercier (Christian Aid Colombia) on the British Academy Innovation Fellowship project “Queering Women, Peace and Security (WPS): Improving Engagement with Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LBTQ) women in WPS Programming.”

**Anupama Ranawana** is a theologian and political economist with over 8 years of experience working in academia and international development. Her research and teaching expertise and interests are focussed on gender and justice, decolonial thought, diversifying research methodological practice, religious thought in the Global South, faith and international development and the intersections between racial and climate justice. She holds advanced degrees in Theology and International Politics. Her most recent publication has been on the importance of women’s religious thought to global politics. She is currently working on her first book: A Liberation for the Earth: Reflections on Race, Climate and Cross, due to be published with SCM Press in 2022.