

SYMPOSIUM: A SYMPOSIUM ON GLOBAL IR

## Response section

Zeynep Gülşah Çapan<sup>1</sup> , Manjeet S. Pardesi<sup>2</sup> and Musab Younis<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany, <sup>2</sup>Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand and <sup>3</sup>Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

**Corresponding author:** Manjeet S. Pardesi; Email: [manjeet.pardesi@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:manjeet.pardesi@vuw.ac.nz)

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### Abstract

In his response, Manjeet S. Pardesi argues that global international relations and relational scholarship rooted in global history can learn much from each other and must work together to overcome Eurocentrism while avoiding other forms of ‘centrism’. The second contribution by Zeynep Gülşah Çapan aims to underline three interrelated dynamics: space (global), time (history), and knowledge. In the third and final response, Musab Younis draws on Edward Said’s critique of ‘counter-conversion’ to suggest how anticolonial and postcolonial thinkers sought to create oppositional forms of knowledge while remaining alert, in ways not always replicated in recent writing, to the dangers of nativism.

**Keywords:** global IR; relationalism; Eurocentrism, history, postcolonial

## Global history, relationalism, and global international relations: overcoming Eurocentrism together

Manjeet S. Pardesi

The contributors to this symposium are making a useful intervention to help shape the research programme of global international relations (global IR) by infusing it with relational ontology rooted in global history to avoid ‘the essentialism trap’. This is the beginning of an important conversation because the goals of scholarship rooted in relational ontology and global history on the one hand, and global IR on the other, are parallel and overlapping. These shared goals include (but are not limited to) creating a truly ‘global’ IR based on global history (as opposed to Western history), eschewing ethnocentrism, and preventing essentialism.<sup>1</sup> At their core, both global IR and relational global history are explicitly seeking to overcome Eurocentrism, and it is in this endeavour that they must engage each other. In these brief remarks, I will comment on the ways in which global history and relationalism can serve as a foundation to help global

<sup>1</sup>Tickner *et al.* 2021.

IR in overcoming Eurocentrism, and also on how global IR can inform relational scholarship in this endeavour.

The global historian Sebastian Conrad has identified three strands of Eurocentrism: Eurocentrism that sees Europe as *the* agent of change in history, the issue of Europe-centredness of the past 200 years, and conceptual Eurocentrism.<sup>2</sup> While relationalism clearly helps address the first of these three challenges as it conceptualizes change through connections and entanglements (as opposed to being generated out of processes endogenous to Europe), it is important to engage the insights of global IR to address the other two forms of Eurocentrism. In the context of the second strand, Conrad has argued that any 'alternative account of global dynamics ... should not hide from view the episodes in which Western Europe and later, the United States played a dominant role'.<sup>3</sup> There is little doubt that there has existed an 'asymmetrical reference density' centred on Euro-America over the past two centuries.<sup>4</sup> But in the long sweep of global history, the Europe-centredness of this period can be decentred by studying the centredness of other societies at other times and in other places. Examples include the 'sification' of East Asia,<sup>5</sup> and the 'Indianization' of southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> Such processes also deserve our attention because the Europe-centred global transformation of the past 200 years has not been the only translocal structural transformation in the history of world politics.

It is important to interpret these other examples of centredness without essentializing societies such as China and India. After all, China actively borrowed ideas and practices from the Mongols and from India,<sup>7</sup> while India itself was enveloped in the Persian Cosmopolis even as southeast Asia was Indianizing.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to speak of the Chinese-/Indian-/Persian-centredness of certain periods of Eurasian history and this, in turn, provides insights into the relationship between power and ideas in world politics. No society is forever a borrower or an exporter, and the Europe-centredness of the recent past was also built on Europe's prior import of objects, technologies, and ideas from outside the continent.<sup>9</sup>

The third form of Eurocentrism is conceptual, relating to the imposition of 'concepts, values, and chronologies' drawn from Euro-American histories onto the rest of the world.<sup>10</sup> Global IR emphasizes the search for the 'origins and meanings of concepts and practices by paying attention to their autonomous, comparative and connected histories and manifestations'.<sup>11</sup> In turn, global historians have noted that some 'phenomena will continue to be studied in concretely, precisely demarcated contexts',<sup>12</sup> and therefore, area studies and regional expertise are required to explain how these 'local' dynamics form part of the attempt to overcome conceptual Eurocentrism.

<sup>2</sup>Conrad 2016, 164–69.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>4</sup>Osterhammel 2014, 912.

<sup>5</sup>Holcombe 2001.

<sup>6</sup>Acharya 2013.

<sup>7</sup>Gernet 1995.

<sup>8</sup>Eaton 2019.

<sup>9</sup>Hobson 2004; Hobson 2021.

<sup>10</sup>Conrad 2016, 168.

<sup>11</sup>Acharya and Buzan 2019, 300.

<sup>12</sup>Conrad 2016, 16.

This raises a key question around the issue of conceptual commensurability. To put this issue concretely, should we search for European-style ‘great powers’ in global histories beyond Euro-America or are cognate concepts such as ‘universal empires’, ‘Great States’, and ‘Great Houses’ better-suited for explaining the politics of historical international orders?<sup>13</sup> These conceptual issues are important not as a means of demonstrating essential differences between ‘East’ and ‘West’, but because they are guides to the multiple ways in which political power is exercised. At the same time, it follows that, if the Qing, Mughal, and Ottoman empires can be understood as great powers in order to make comparisons with Europe possible, then the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British Empire can also be studied as a universal empire instead of simply assuming that universal empires disappeared from the West after 1648 or with the demise of the Holy Roman Empire. These issues are important not because we are striving for universal conceptual validity but because we need perspectives that ‘do not assume that history is being made from or for a given geographical or conceptual centre’.<sup>14</sup>

As noted above, this issue of conceptual commensurability requires the input of area/regional specialists. While this runs the risk of the essentialism trap, it will be a mistake ‘to move cultural diversity itself out of view’ if we ‘let our categories take more weight than they can bear in any given analytical endeavor’.<sup>15</sup> In other words, avoiding essentialism should not mean the flattening of politico-cultural differences, especially if the aim is to create global narratives reflective of our diverse world. The question is how to represent diversity without essentializing difference. This symposium is a stimulating starting point in this endeavour.

I would like to close with a warning and an opening. The warning is that relationalism is not a vaccine against Eurocentrism. Khodadad Rezakhani has shown that many global historical, relational narratives of the so-called ‘Silk Road(s)’ emphasize the position of the Greco–Roman Mediterranean, Byzantium, and Europe in this network while marginalizing Central Asia, Iran, and India as transit points even as ‘the world economy, whether producing or consuming, was mostly an Asian affair’.<sup>16</sup> In this instance, global history and relationalism valorize nodal points that reproduce Eurocentrism and serve as vehicles for status quo concepts and categories. Perhaps, therefore, it is better to think of global history and relationalism on the one hand, and global IR on the other, as complementary. After all global history and relationalism are ‘better suited to addressing some questions and issues and less appropriate for addressing others’,<sup>17</sup> while global IR notes that the study of the local is ‘not just about how regions self-organize their economic, political, and cultural space, but also about how they relate to each other and shape global order’.<sup>18</sup> This is why I finish with an opening: global history, relationalism, and global IR can learn much from each as we strive to create a truly ‘global’ discipline.

<sup>13</sup>Bang and Kołodziejczyk 2012; Brook 2016; Zarakol 2022.

<sup>14</sup>Drayton and Motadel 2018, 15.

<sup>15</sup>Strathern 2019, 12, 15.

<sup>16</sup>Rezakhani 2011, 426.

<sup>17</sup>Conrad 2016, 5.

<sup>18</sup>Acharya and Buzan 2019, 306.

## On future(s) imagined and imaginable

Zeynep Gülşah Çapan

For some decades, IR has had an ongoing debate about the ahistoricism and Eurocentrism of the discipline.<sup>19</sup> The contributors to this symposium aim to contribute to that dialogue first by underlining the tensions that global IR faces as it develops its research agenda,<sup>20</sup> and second by discussing ways of overcoming these tensions. My intervention aims to further that dialogue through underlining three interrelated dynamics that need further exploration in this debate: space (global), time (history), and knowledge.

In his problematizations of the inside/outside relationship, Rob Walker argues that the root of the ‘ontological crisis’ that ‘modern knowledge’ aims to stabilize is not only the one with self-other, but also those between the universal and particular, and space and time.<sup>21</sup> The constructions of ‘foreign’, the ‘domestic’, the ‘East’, the ‘West’ as well as the ‘international’ and the ‘global’ work to stabilize time through ‘territorializing history’ and ‘historicization of a territory’.<sup>22</sup> The construction of the relationship between space and time is therefore central to the negotiations between the universal and the particular, as well as the self and the other.

There is a dual process here. First, the historicization of a territory ‘takes place through the obscuring of [its] history’ and ‘territories are largely assumed as the fixed, natural ground of local histories’.<sup>23</sup> Then, the ‘territorialization of histories’ is achieved through ‘their fixation in nonhistorical, naturalized territories’ and when ‘the histories of interrelated peoples become territorialized into bounded spaces’.<sup>24</sup> This ‘dual obscuring’ means that ‘histories of various spaces are hidden’ and ‘the historical relations among social actors or units are severed’.<sup>25</sup> This obscuring is evident in the silencing of spaces other than ‘Europe’ or ‘the nation-state’ and in the severing of relations between these units. History is fixed within these spaces.<sup>26</sup> The issue of fixing history within spatial bounds has been addressed widely especially through attempts to write global histories and connected histories.<sup>27</sup> Attempts to transcend these spatialized boundaries within IR has focused predominantly on the role of empires rather than nation-states in the making of the international and problematized the concept of sovereignty within the narrative of the international.<sup>28</sup>

Relational scholarship of the kind advocated in this symposium aims to contribute to these discussions of breaking down the spatial boundedness of categories and underlines instead the importance of transboundary connections. It brings to fore

<sup>19</sup>Grovogui 2006; Lawson 2012; Bilgin 2016a.

<sup>20</sup>Acharya 2014.

<sup>21</sup>Walker 1993, 24; also see Walker 1991.

<sup>22</sup>Coronil 1996, 76–78.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Bhambra 2007; Go 2014; Bilgin 2016b; Bilgin and Çapan 2021.

<sup>27</sup>Subrahmanyam 1997; Bhambra 2007

<sup>28</sup>Barkawi and Laffey 2002; Osiander 2001.

events, dynamics, and units that are often obscured by essentialist, substantialist analysis. However, what has not yet been sufficiently discussed is how temporality is contained within bounded spatialities in the first place.<sup>29</sup> Paying attention to the containment of temporality within these spatial boundaries (whether the nation-state or the empire or the international or the global) necessitates the further problematizing of history, especially the presumed unity between past, present, and future configured within those entities.<sup>30</sup> For example, though important contributions have been made in displacing the myth of 1648 through works that have problematized sovereignty in the narratives of the international, these attempts have also predominantly focused on locating different origin points.<sup>31</sup> As Walker states, ‘the principle of state sovereignty’ suggests ways ‘to think about borders, about the delineation of political possibility in both space and time’.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the assigning of new origin points would also necessitate reflecting on the ‘delineation of political possibility in both space and time’ and as such on what becomes imaginable and also knowable within these new spatio-temporal configurations. As such, the problem of time and the ways in which history fixes a specific configuration of past, present, and future play important roles in how making events, dynamics, and ideas are made visible or rendered invisible.<sup>33</sup>

A focus on the problem of history therefore points to a deeper exploration into the production of archives, the transformation of the past into history, and the relationship past, present, and the future<sup>34</sup> or in the terms of Koselleck ‘between space of experience and horizon of expectation’.<sup>35</sup> These concerns pave the way for a questioning of the politics of knowledge within both global IR and global history: what counts as archival knowledge, what counts as historical knowledge, and what invisibilities results from these definitions of ‘knowledge’ (as opposed to ‘beliefs’ or ‘superstitions’).<sup>36</sup> From these concerns flow further questions with respect to how the past, present, and future continue to be fixed within specific spatio-temporal configurations. Is there a re-territorialization of history through the focus on the global or interconnections? Which political processes and entities are rendered visible and invisible in these narrative reconstructions? What is the relationship between ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’ in our conceptualization of the global? What is the configuration of past, present, and future that is imagined in the narrative reconstructions offered by different views of the global? Which present is being produced through these narratives of the past and which futures are becoming imaginable? In other words, are the current explorations into transcending boundaries continuing to reproduce the futures that have already been imagined within narratives of the international or are they extending the limits of the imaginable and hence knowable? These questions point to an ongoing agenda suggested by, but not fully developed within, this symposium.

<sup>29</sup>Hutchings 2013; Hom 2018.

<sup>30</sup>Koselleck 2004.

<sup>31</sup>Osiander 2001; Costa Lopez *et al.* 2018.

<sup>32</sup>Walker 1991, 457

<sup>33</sup>Shilliam 2006.

<sup>34</sup>Chakrabarty 2009; Vaughan-Williams 2005; Çapan 2016.

<sup>35</sup>Koselleck 2004, 259

<sup>36</sup>Shilliam 2014, 2017.

## The other side

Musab Younis

Here is Edward Said writing on the experience of exile and its attendant dangers in the introduction to his essay collection *Reflections on Exile* (2000):

I have found that the greatest difficulty to be overcome is the temptation to counter-conversion, the wish to find a new system, territory, or allegiance to replace the lost one, to think in terms of panaceas and new, more complete visions that simply do away with complexity, difference, and contradiction.<sup>37</sup>

What Said called ‘counter-conversion’ is, I think, a close parallel to what the authors in this collection have called ‘essentialism’. Both are intellectual positions that start off with a legitimate protest and yet harden into obduracy, imposing stasis where there should be dynamism. To put it simply but not inaccurately, they go too far the other way. Said’s study on late style, which he was still working on when he died in 2003, searched for figures whose work, as they approached death, found not conclusiveness but irresolution, intransigence, and contradiction.<sup>38</sup> It is striking how rare those figures are and how common the tendency, for even the most rigorous, to slip into imprecision and vapidty.

The colonial stratification of the world finds correspondences in the architecture of knowledge produced about that world. This most fundamental of postcolonial claims remains true. But it must always be balanced by a sense that hierarchies are never completely rigid and that correcting them is not as simple as giving voice to ‘the other side’, a strategy that risks bolstering the binary it purports to attack. The best postcolonial scholarship was conscious of this dilemma, and, in a manner that has not always been retained in more recent work, regularly agonized about the dangers of nativism (what is called in the introduction to this issue the ‘ethos of separation’). As Barkawi, Murray, and Zarakol rightly argue in this issue, traditions of anticolonial thought, which inspired postcolonial writing, long resisted easy solutions to the brute reality of geographical domination.

Some may find it strange to read a sustained and qualified defence of the global at a moment when prominent thinkers argue that ‘[t]he age of the global as such is ending’, surpassed by a new horizon of planetary dimensions.<sup>39</sup> It can be argued with some justification that a new collective consciousness of human existence on a terraqueous globe has abandoned the rationalist Apollonian optimism characterizing earlier eras of global thinking, as described by Denis Cosgrove in his masterwork *Apollo’s Eye*, and has given way to a much less hopeful outlook about the prospects for earthly existence, perhaps closer to what Emily Apter has called ‘planetary dysphoria’.<sup>40</sup>

But too strong an emphasis on the downsides of the global risks abandoning a resource whose value has not yet been depleted. Globalism is not, *pace* its

<sup>37</sup>Said, 2013, p. xxxiii.

<sup>38</sup>Said, 2007.

<sup>39</sup>Chakrabarty, 2021, 85.

<sup>40</sup>Cosgrove 2001; Apter, 2013.

outspoken opponents (from North American survivalists to some contemporary social theorists), simply a tool of domination. It is also forged by adversaries to power – often in the face of forbidding difficulties and provincializing strategies. One of its key contributions has been its ability to resist forms of nativism and localism by ‘jumping scales’, to use Neil Smith’s terminology, and pointing to the relationality of what seem like static objects of knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, as contributors to this issue correctly point out, not all returns to the global are the same. Those in the field of international relations have sometimes lacked the verve and depth that we have seen in the field of history, where a global approach has – despite remaining minoritarian – transformed the discipline in recent years.<sup>42</sup> Michael Barnett and George Lawson’s important claim in this issue that we seek to build stronger connections with global history can, I think, be broadened to a suggestion that international relations might benefit from closer adjacency to various related fields of inquiry.

What seems to me most important is the necessity of a shift away from a certain schematism in which interventions in the field of international relations still often identify theoretical problems and then propose point-by-point solutions to those problems. We would do well to consider Marx’s dictum in *Theses of Feuerbach* that: ‘All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice’. One direction away from snappy point-making and schematic writing is towards richer and slower methodologies that emphasize texture and fine-grained attention to detail – archives, ethnography, close reading. A good example is scholarship on the history and politics of Haiti, where in recent years studies by Greg Beckett, Chris Bongie, Marlene Daut, Sybille Fischer, Julia Gaffield, Jeremy D. Popkin, and Brenda Gayle Plummer (among others) have shown how granular detail and careful scholarship is not opposed to theoretical reflection or a sense of contemporary bearing and even political urgency.<sup>43</sup>

Some might see a call for catholicity as leading ineluctably to a loss of disciplinary identity. I don’t personally share a concern for retaining professional boundaries between interlinked areas of knowledge – to my mind, such injunctions too often represent what Pierre Bourdieu described in another context as personal solidarity disguised as intellectual solidarity. But a good place for a demarcation between global international relations and global history would, I think, be the idea of global order. Quite distinct (though not confined) to international relations, global order spans intellectual history,<sup>44</sup> normative and empirical analyses of the present,<sup>45</sup> and a genealogical approach to contemporary political discourse.<sup>46</sup> In all of these modes it operates as an insistent emphasis on the operation of the whole system over and above its constituent parts, while at the same recognizing the always partial, restricted, and embodied perspectives from which that system comes into view. international relations perhaps allows us to stare more fixedly

<sup>41</sup>Smith, 1992.

<sup>42</sup>For a defence of global history’s rise to prominence, see Drayton and Motadel, 2018.

<sup>43</sup>Beckett, 2019; Bongie, 2016; Daut, 2015; Fischer, 2004; Gaffield, 2015; Popkin, 2010; Plummer, 2015.

<sup>44</sup>Aydin, 2007; Bell, 2007, 2012; Conrad and Sachsenmaier, 2012; Rosenboim, 2017.

<sup>45</sup>Ikenberry, 2018; Hurrell, 2008; Clark, 2003.

<sup>46</sup>Drolet and Williams, 2018.

at the global as an ordering system of thought and political order, without being dragged down by the localizing impulses that remain, despite persistent efforts to the contrary, so powerful in sociology, history, political science, and anthropology.

**Competing interest.** None.

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