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The Idea of Dialogue of Civilizations and Core-Periphery Dialogue in International Relations

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Abstract

The idea of dialogue of civilizations, as was envisaged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, includes multi-layer, multi-actor dialogues. Civilization, when defined as “correspondence between material conditions of existence and intersubjective meanings,”¹ has epistemological and ontological elements that constitute the parameters of knowledge. One may easily claim that the existing knowledge of international relations has its roots in Western civilization and, if it is to become a truly global body of knowledge, it has to be nourished by contributions from various civilizations, mostly belonging to the “periphery”. Yet, even this is not enough if we just reach an archipelago consisting of various islands of knowledge without a connection to each other. What may help bridging these islands is dialogue. Dialogues among IR scholars from different civilizational backgrounds may lead to more mutual understanding and even may lead to some common grounds found in-between. Dialogues can be conducted both at inter-civilizational and intra-civilizational levels as civilizations cannot be taken as monolithic wholes. This article seeks to clarify the meaning and implications of dialogue of civilizations in IR. Furthermore, the way in which dialogue of civilizations in the discipline can be conducted and the expectations thereof are discussed.

Keywords: IR, dialogue, core-periphery, dialogue of civilizations, post-Western IR

[W]e live in a world produced almost entirely by human enterprise and thus by human thought... If we look carefully at what we generally take to be reality we begin to see that it includes a collection of concepts, memories and reflexes coloured by our personal needs, fears and desires all of which are limited and distorted by the boundaries of our language and the habits of our history, sex and culture. It is extremely difficult to disassemble this mixture or to ever be certain whether what we are perceiving - or what we may think about those perceptions - is at all accurate.²

1. Introduction

It might be argued that IR as a discipline is not an absolutely “American” discipline as it used

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¹ Robert Cox, “Civilizations and the Twenty-First Century: Some Theoretical Considerations,” in *Globalization and Civilizations*, ed. Mehdi Mozaffari (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

² David Bohm, Donald Factor, and Peter Garrett, “Dialogue-A Proposal,” accessed June 23, 2019, [https://www.dialogue-associates.com/files/files/DIALOGUE%20A%20PROPOSAL%2026-3-14\(2\).pdf](https://www.dialogue-associates.com/files/files/DIALOGUE%20A%20PROPOSAL%2026-3-14(2).pdf), 2–3.

to be.³ Perhaps following Hoffman's advice,⁴ it has become more historical and less policy-oriented and this has helped it to a degree to become more interested in political theory and philosophy and thus more inspired by European thinkers. We have also witnessed significant contributions to it from European scholars and perspectives over the last few decades. This might also be due to the fact that the political elite in other Western countries, unlike at the time when Hoffman wrote, have become increasingly interested in and have found ways to influence what is going on outside their own societies and this in turn has led to more interest in the academic field of International Relations. Even institutional pressures for publishing articles in international journals may have been involved in the de-monopolization of IR.

It may, however, still be argued that IR is mostly "Western" or Eurocentric in its conceptualization of and approach to the international. When we look at the content of journals and books on international life, we find out that not only the majority of authors are from Western societies, but that even if they are not, the concepts, theories, arguments, and methods they apply are often Western and even the issues they attempt to cover are mostly those more significant from a Eurocentric point of view. In the words of John Mearsheimer, it is "Anglo-Saxon [and other Western] scholars who dominate the IR discourse".⁵ This has led many IR scholars to look for a "Global international relations (IR)".⁶

One may challenge the "Western-ness" of IR due to the fact that it is universal in character even if produced by Westerners/Americans and the result is a "benign hegemony";⁷ that Western practices when done in non-Western contexts may result in unexpectedly "different" results;⁸ that even "Western" IR is not something monolithic and purely Western;⁹ and that there is nothing purely non-Western in even the most traditional non-Western approaches. Yet the fact that Western/American IR is hegemonic (even if, "benign"), that West and non-West are not separated by clear boundaries, that they are not monolithic, and that they are hybrid does not imply that scholars from non-Western and in particular peripheral contexts and/or all relevant perspectives have had their voice heard in the discipline or do not need to. A plurality of voices in the discipline, particularly from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, is in itself a step towards the democratization of the field. But these voices should not be limited to the particular context from which they emerge, and they should be heard and able to contribute to the discipline worldwide. Otherwise there would be just an archipelago consisting of various islands of knowledge without a connection to each other. What may help bridging these islands is dialogue.

One may suggest that if so far most of the relations of societies, cultures, and civilizations have been the result of "an unconscious history of the dialectics of civilizations," we now may enter into a "conscious" level of dialogue among them¹⁰ at least for better understanding or mutual influence. Another argument is that since it has become clear that conceptual tools used by IR scholars are not sufficient for understanding key international dynamics, voices

³ See Stanley Hoffman, "International Relations: An American Social Science" *Daedalus* 106 (1977): 41–60.

⁴ Hoffman, "International Relations," 59–60.

⁵ John Mearsheimer, "A Global Discipline of IR? Benign Hegemony," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 147.

⁶ Amitav Acharya, "Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions," *Journal of International Studies* 18, no. 1 (2016): 4.

⁷ Mearsheimer, "A Global Discipline of IR?"

⁸ Pinar Bilgin, "Thinking Past 'Western' IR?," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 5–23.

⁹ Deniz Kuru, "Historicising Eurocentrism and Anti-Eurocentrism in IR: A Revisionist Account of Disciplinary Self-Reflexivity," *Review of International Studies* 41 (2015): 1–26.

¹⁰ Hossein Bashiriyeh, "From Civilizational Dialectics to Civilizational Dialogue," in *Dialogue among Civilizations: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations*, ed. Bahram Mostaghimi (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1384 [2005]), 245.

from peripheral countries should be heard and discussed¹¹ to “save” the discipline. Or, to go even further, one can justify such a dialogue on the basis of “the link between knowledge and power” and as a step to make IR a truly global discipline.¹²

Thus the idea of dialogue between the core (mostly Western) and periphery (mostly non-Western) within the field is not only favorable but also necessary. The question is *how this dialogue can be conceptualized and conducted, and what can be expected of it*. My main argument is that if it can be seen as a part of civilizational dialogue, we may have a better, more clarified understanding of it since “the key philosophical assumption behind the idea of dialogue of civilizations represents a challenge to the Western-centric matrix of contemporary practices and thinking in IR”.¹³ This idea, as was envisaged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, includes multi-layer, multi-actor dialogues and, as I have argued elsewhere, every individual or group can participate in and contribute to civilizational dialogue.¹⁴ This includes dialogues among communities of scholars of different disciplines. Furthermore, the idea has the same ethical concerns of critical tradition shared by the proponents of post-Western IR.¹⁵

In what follows, a short review of the literature is presented. Then I attempt to give a more clarified conception of what I mean by dialogue and civilization and hence the dialogue of civilizations. In the third section, its implications for IR as a discipline will be discussed. I end up with some concluding remarks.

2. Going Beyond Western IR: A Necessity

The idea of Eurocentrism of IR and the necessity of going beyond it has long been discussed. Donald Puchala challenged the existing IR assumption that “Western analytical concepts are universally acceptable and unquestionably valid” and rightly observed that “relatively few Western analysts of International Relations pay much attention to non-Western thinking pertinent to their field.” He even suggested that perhaps non-Western interpretation of international reality might be better than the dominant Western understanding.¹⁶

Inayatollah and Blaney critically discussed the approach of IR to the issue of difference.¹⁷ According to Acharya and Buzan IR theories are mostly “produced by and for the West” and rest on an assumption that “western history is world history.”¹⁸ Even non-mainstream IR theories, from Marxism¹⁹ to Critical Theory²⁰ have been shown to be Eurocentrist in their

¹¹ Ole Wæver and Arlene Tickner, “Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies,” in *International Relations Scholarship around the World*, ed. Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 1–31.

¹² Ann J. Tickner, “Knowledge Is Power: Challenging IR’s Eurocentric Narrative,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 157.

¹³ Fabio Petito, “Dialogue of Civilizations in a Multipolar World: Toward a Multicivilizational-Multiplex World Order,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 79.

¹⁴ Homeira Moshirzadeh, “Dialogue of Civilizations and International Theory,” *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2004): 184.

¹⁵ See Rosa Vasilaki, “Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and Prospects in Post-Western IR Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2012): 3.

¹⁶ Donald Puchala, “Some Non-Western Perspectives on International Relations,” *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 2 (1997): 129–34.

¹⁷ Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁸ Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, “Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An Introduction,” *International Relations of Asia and Pacific* 7 (2007): 287–312.

¹⁹ See Cemal Burak Tansel, “Deafening Silence? Marxism, International Historical Sociology and the Specter of Eurocentrism,” *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2015): 76–100.

²⁰ See John M. Hobson, “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 (2007): 91–116; Giorgio Shani, “Toward a Post-Western IR: The *Umma*, *Khalsa Panth*, and Critical International Relations Theory,” *International Studies Review* 10 (2008): 722–34.; John M. Hobson and Alina Sajed, “Navigating Beyond the Eurofetishist Frontier of Critical IR Theory: Exploring the Complex Landscapes

approach to international relations.

Acharya and Buzan's attempt to search for IR theory in non-Western societies began with the publication of a special issue of the *Asia-Pacific Journal* in 2007, with the contribution of scholars who explained why there is no non-Western IR theory in Asian countries in the stricter sense of the word while at the same time showing that a kind of IR theory can be traced in various countries and cultures. Later they co-edited a book in which they addressed the absence of IR theory outside the West in a broader sense, including in the Islamic World as well as China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and India.²¹

In *International Relations Scholarship around the World*, contributors sought to show the ways in which international life is understood around the world outside the "Anglo core": from Russia to Asia, the Middle East to Africa, and from different parts of Europe to Latin America.²²

Thus the idea of a more global international relations urged "the IR community to look past the American and Western dominance of the field and embrace greater diversity, especially by recognizing the places, roles, and contributions of "non-Western" peoples and societies".²³ The theme of the 2015 International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention, "Global IR and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies" emerged under the presidency of Amitav Acharya, a well-known IR scholar who has for long advocated the idea of a global IR.

In 2016 a special issue of *International Studies Review* was devoted to a series of articles and a forum on global IR that ranged from reviewing the existing state of IR worldwide,²⁴ admitting and celebrating the dominance of American scholarship in the field,²⁵ looking for a more diverse field,²⁶ discussing the roots of the "Western-ness" of the discipline and finding ways to get out of it,²⁷ showing the agency of the South/non-West in international politics in practice,²⁸ finding a way to go beyond the existing international order through dialogue of civilizations,²⁹ presenting some insights from the South,³⁰ and criticizing aspects of non-Western IR.³¹

Most of these works suggest that there are non-western/peripheral understandings of

of Non-Western Agency," *International Studies Review* 19 (2017): 547–72.

²¹ See different chapters in Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

²² See Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver, eds. *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

²³ Acharya, "Advancing Global IR," 4.

²⁴ Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., "The IR of the Beholder: Examining Global IR Using the 2014 TRIP Survey," *International Studies Review* 18 (2016): 16–32.

²⁵ Mearsheimer, "A Global Discipline of IR?,"

²⁶ Peter Katzenstein, "Diversity and Empathy," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016), 151–53.

²⁷ Navintha Chadha Behera, "Knowledge Production," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 153–55; Pinar Bilgin, "'Contrapuntal Reading' as a Method, an Ethos, and a Metaphor for Global IR," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 134–46; Peter Vale, "Inclusion and Exclusion," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016), 159–62; Shiping Tang, "Practical Concerns and Power Considerations," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 162–64; Tickner, "Knowledge Is Power,"; Shirin M. Rai, "One Everyday Step at a Time," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 164–66.

²⁸ Andrew Phillips, "Global IR Meets Global History: Sovereignty, Modernity, and the International System of Expansion in the Indian Ocean Region," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 62–77; Kwesi Aning and Fifi Edu-Afful, "African Agency in R2P: Interventions by African Union and ECOWAS in Mali, Cote D'Ivoire, and Libya," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 120–33; Jiajie He, "Normative Power in the EU and ASEAN: Why They Diverge?," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 92–105; Melisa Deciancio, "International Relations from the South: A Regional Research Agenda for Global IR," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 106–19.

²⁹ Petito, "Dialogue of Civilizations in a Multipolar World".

³⁰ Yaqing Qin, "A Relational Theory of World Politics," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 33–47.

³¹ Buzan, "Could IR Be Different?"; Eric Blanchard and Shuang Lin, "Gender and Non-Western Global IR: Where Are the Women in Chinese International Relations Theory?," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 48–61.

international life that have been neglected or marginalized in IR. As Acharya rightly asserts, “the current parochialism and ethnocentrism of ‘International Relations’ as a field of study, especially its dominant theoretical approaches, are unacceptable and perhaps untenable.”³² Thus some IR scholars have suggested that dialogue is the way to make a global IR possible³³ while others have attempted to show the pitfalls and problems involved in such an endeavor.³⁴ Here I argue that we may conceptualize core-periphery dialogue in IR within the frame of dialogue of civilizations.

3. Conceptual Clarification

What do we mean by “civilization”? Sometimes it is taken to be the opposite of “barbarism” to refer to a specific stage in human life with a high level of social and cultural development, and sometimes it is taken to be a process by which such a stage is reached. Both of these definitions can be argued to be unclear and subjective and that even they carry with them evaluative assumptions.³⁵

A more general and less evaluative definition of civilization is to see it as an equivalent of culture; as a way a life.³⁶ This is its usage in a more anthropological sense with an emphasis on the plurality of civilizations to show the difference. Yet what should be avoided is to assume the superiority of “our civilization” over others’.

Here I use the two terms civilization and culture almost interchangeably to point to civilizations as large cultural units in each of which, despite internal differences and dynamics, there are some important shared “ontological, epistemological, and praxiological perspectives”.³⁷ Some shared worldviews, values, historical experiences, and a sense of identity distinguish various civilizations/ cultures.

In some works, including Samuel Huntington’s,³⁸ the concept of civilization relies on “an essentialist version of the anthropological concept of culture”.³⁹ In this understanding civilization is taken to be a monolithic fixed entity. The fact that cultures and civilizations change makes this understanding problematic. That is why others emphasize the dynamism and fluidity of civilizations. Dallmayr, for example, sees civilization not as “a secure possession but a fragile, ever-renewable endeavor.” From this point of view, “it has the character more of a verb than a noun”.⁴⁰ Civilizations and cultures, according to Ashis Nandy, are more like an “open-ended text” than a “closed book”.⁴¹ This latter understanding helps us avoid assuming some given character for civilizations.

I take civilization, as any other human grouping and community, as a social construct

³² Amitav Acharya “Dialogue and Discovery: In Search of International Relations Theories Beyond the West,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 619–37.

³³ See, for example, Katzenstein, “Diversity and Empathy”; Acharya, “Advancing Global IR”.

³⁴ See Kamila Pieczara, “Two Modes of Dialogue in IR: Testing on Western versus Non-Western Engagement with IR Theory (paper presented at Millennium Annual Conference, London School of Economics, London, 2010); Kimberley Hutchings, “Dialogue between Whom? The Role of the West/Non-West Distinction in Promoting Global Dialogue in IR,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2016): 639–47.

³⁵ Cristian Violatti, “Civilization,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 2014, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://www.ancient.eu/amp/1-10175>.

³⁶ Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 6.

³⁷ Majid Tehranian, “Informatic Civilizations: Promises, Perils, Prospects,” in *Dialogue of Civilizations: A New Peace Agenda for a New Millennium*, ed. Majid Tehranian and David W. Chappell (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 2.

³⁸ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

³⁹ Reeves, *Culture and International Relations*, 148.

⁴⁰ Fred Dallmayr, “Christianity and Civilization,” in *Dialogue of Civilizations: A New Peace Agenda for a New Millennium*, ed. Majid Tehranian and David W. Chappell (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 125.

⁴¹ See Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 13.

or collective intentionality.⁴² They are more like “arenas in which human beings define their own and others’ identities; narrate their destiny and history; depict their utopias”.⁴³ Therefore, like other groupings, they are constituted and reconstituted through “narratives” and “creative actions”.⁴⁴ They are fluid, in constant change, partly due to their encounters and partly due to internal dynamics. That is why although civilizations signify identities, civilizational identities are always blurred.

Plurality of civilizations is one of the manifestations of the variety of human beings which should be celebrated. As this plurality is what guarantees reality and its continuity, each and every different perspective is a contribution to the world and humanity, and this difference should not be denied, ignored, or suppressed.⁴⁵

It is important to note that individuals or groups may not find themselves belonging to just “one” civilization. What is the civilizational identity of a Turk or an Iranian? Do they both belong to the Islamic civilization? At one level, they may. At the same time, a Turk might see herself belonging to Eastern Roman civilization and an Iranian to Persian/Iranian civilization. This example of simultaneous dual sense of civilizational belonging or identity has important implications for dialogue of civilizations and makes any claim of representing a civilization problematic.

Thus when civilizations are taken as fluid, dynamic, and intermingled, dialogue of civilizations would mean a world-wide dialogue including both intra-civilizational and inter-civilizational levels.

Dialogue is usually defined as a “focused conversation”. It has its root in the Greek word *dialogos*: “Logos means ‘the word’ or ... the ‘meaning of the word’. And *dia* means ‘through’ - it doesn’t mean two. A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two”.⁴⁶ What differentiates dialogue from monologue is that a monologue “represents the reflexive absence of an other.” In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, an extreme form of monologism “denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities”.⁴⁷ Thus dialogue is necessarily between the different.⁴⁸

What makes “critical dialogue” possible is “the overlap of self and other”.⁴⁹ As “our worldview, our culture, and our self are partial, parochial, and perhaps invalid in some significant way,” through dialogue “we require others both to affirm the veracity and to expose the limits of our vision”.⁵⁰

This can be achieved, in a Bohmian sense of dialogue, through “suspension”; an attention-based practice that gradually “helps individuals become less identified with their habits of mind and points of view. Learning to be less embedded or reified in one’s perspective and

⁴² See Ali Paya, “Dialogue of Civilizations: Theoretical Foundations and the Realization of an Idea in Practice,” in *Dialogue among Civilizations: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations*, ed. Bahram Mostaghimi, (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1384 [2005]).

⁴³ Mohammad Reza Tajik, *Secure Society in Khatami’s Discourse* (Tehran: Nashr Ney, 1379 [2000]), 227–29.

⁴⁴ See Seyla Benhabib, “International Law and Human Plurality in the Shadow of Totalitarianism: Hannah Arendt and Raphael Lemkin,” *Constellations* 16, no. 2 (2009): 331–50.

⁴⁵ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Benhabib, “International Law and Human Plurality in the Shadow of Totalitarianism”.

⁴⁶ David Bohm, “On Dialogue,” accessed April 17, 2019, <http://sprott.physics.wisc.edu/Chaos-Complexity/dialogue.pdf>, 2.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Xavier Guillaume, “Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002): 6.

⁴⁸ See Robert Craig, “Arguments about ‘Dialogue’ in Practice and Theory” (paper presented at the 6th International Conference on Argumentation, International Society for the Study of Argumentation, Amsterdam, June 27–30, 2006), 1.

⁴⁹ Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 219.

⁵⁰ Naem Inayatullah and David Blaney, “Knowing Encounters: Beyond Parochialism in International Relations Theory,” in *The Return of Culture and Identity*, ed. Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 65–6.

way of thinking about the world, participants gradually develop a more flexible basis of relationship to their reasoning and emotional processes, as well as how they come to know these processes".⁵¹

There can be a genuine dialogue between the parties only if they meet on equal grounds. As Bohm, Factor, and Garrett suggest,

Any controlling authority, no matter how carefully or sensitively applied, will tend to hinder and inhibit the free play of thought and the often delicate and subtle feelings that would otherwise be shared. Dialogue is vulnerable to being manipulated, but its spirit is not consistent with this. Hierarchy has no place in Dialogue.⁵²

What does dialogue lead to? Some believe that in dialogue, like other forms of argumentation, reaching an agreement or a shared position is important. As the interlocutors engaged in an argumentation have differing claims/positions, they try to *persuade* each other of the "truth" of their claim. If one side is more convincing in its truth claims, the other side should give in; and if they conclude that there is some truth in both claims, they may reach a synthesis or a new *via media* can be achieved. Some other understandings of dialogue, however, see it just as a path towards mutual understanding and not reaching agreement. From this point of view, cross-cultural dialogues lead to a *new* "plural future".⁵³

These views are not necessarily inconsistent and can be seen as complementary. We should accept that dialogue "is not concerned with deliberately trying to alter or change behavior nor to get the participants to move toward a predetermined goal" and that such an attempt "would distort and obscure the processes that the Dialogue has set out to explore. Nevertheless, changes *do* occur because observed thought behaves differently from unobserved thought" (emphasis added).⁵⁴

Furthermore, in a dialogue, unlike other forms of argumentation, "influence goals" -- goals related "to the relationship between the arguers as well as goals dealing with the maintenance of the interaction itself"⁵⁵ -- are as important as reaching an agreement, and even they might be regarded as the primary goal. In the words of Bohm,

In dialogue it is necessary that people be able to face their disagreements without confrontation and be willing to explore points of view to which they do not personally subscribe. If they are able to engage in such a dialogue without evasion or anger, they will find that no fixed position is so important that it is worth holding at the expense of destroying the dialogue itself. . . . What is essential is that each participant is, as it were, suspending his or her point of view, while also holding other points of view in a suspended form and giving full attention to what they mean.⁵⁶

In dialogues, parties understand their (possibly different) definitions of situations, their self-understandings, their understanding of the other, and the parties' interests and priorities. Yet "understanding proceeds in a tensional 'polarity of familiarity and strangeness (*fremdheit*)', in that a person entering a dialogue must allow himself/herself to be 'addressed'

⁵¹ Olen Gunnlaugson, "Bohman Dialogue: A Critical Retrospective of Bohm's Approach to Dialogue as a Practice of Collective Communication," *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014), 26.

⁵² Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, "Dialogue-A Proposal".

⁵³ Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, 12.

⁵⁴ Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, "Dialogue-A Proposal," 4.

⁵⁵ Michael Gilbert, "Goals in Argumentation," accessed June 20, 2019, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?sessionid=9C6010BDE0E9CE2B7B119D9C06EFDD01?doi=10.1.1.90.2366&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, 1.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Naomi Gryn, "David Bohm and Group Dialogue or the Interconnectedness of Everything," *The Jewish Quarterly* (2003): 97.

and possibly challenged and disturbed. Hence, dialogical understanding (as the ‘true locus of hermeneutics’) always hovers in the ‘in-between’.⁵⁷

Mutual understanding, which is the least we expect from dialogue, can be attained through the “fusion of horizons”.⁵⁸ The result is a “transformation or extension of their value criteria”.⁵⁹ In this process the parties may incorporate at least a part of each other’s value criteria. This implies being open to others, trying to place oneself in the position of the other, and not imposing one’s criteria upon others.⁶⁰ In the words of Wierzbicka, “each party makes a step in [t]he direction of the other, not that they [necessarily] reach a shared position”.⁶¹

Therefore, dialogue is useful even if the parties just reach a better understanding of each other. Yet mutual “understanding *may* lead to the recognition of common grounds and this *may* lead to shared reason in the process... dialogue itself affects the existing repertoires of the parties and may lead to more shared elements in the future”⁶² (emphasis added). In general, if we accept that in a dialogue nobody should try to win, if there is no attempt to gain points, or to make one view prevail, then “everybody gains”.⁶³

As in any cultural (or civilizational) exchange, in dialogues we should be aware of the instability and ambiguity of cross-cultural signifiers, take culture as a changing construct, and instead of seeing cultures and civilizations as monolithic entities we should see them as a plurality and mixture of cultures.⁶⁴ Thus dialogue of civilization exists at various levels and does not necessarily lead to a final point.

The idea of dialogue of civilizations presumes the existence of difference among people from various historical and cultural backgrounds and underlines the necessity of respecting differences. At the same time, it seeks to enrich human life at all levels through mutual understanding and reaching some common grounds for collaborative actions. Furthermore, by denying any monolithic understanding of civilizations and emphasizing their fluidity, no attempt for finding “the” authentic or even “an” authentic civilizational voice is pursued. Hence no one can assert to re-present a civilization.

The possibility of “the overlap of self and other” would be recognized in the process of dialogue. This enables them to see where reaching shared reason or consensus is possible and where it is not. Even in areas where there are enormous differences, there is still room for *mutual learning* if all parties are prepared to be changed – and not to attempt to assimilate others. Arguing is here “a learning mechanism by which actors acquire new information, evaluate their interests [and knowledge, one may add] in light of new empirical and moral knowledge”.⁶⁵ Then in areas where differences remain, mutual respect can leave room for the coexistence of differences and pluralism may seem to be more feasible.

⁵⁷ Dallmayr, “Christianity and Civilization,” 126.

⁵⁸ See Hans G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), especially 304–5, 337, 367–70, 390.

⁵⁹ Ken Tsutsumibayashi, “Fusion of Horizons or Confusion of Horizons: Intercultural Dialogue and Its Risks,” *Global Governance* 11, no. 1 (2005): 105.

⁶⁰ See Homeira Moshirzadeh, “Intercivilizational Dialogue and Global Governance,” in *Arguing Global Governance*, ed. Cornellio Belluja and Markus Kornprobst (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁶¹ Anna Wierzbicka, “The Concept of ‘Dialogue’ in Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Perspective” (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, New York, May 29, 2005), quoted in Craig, “Arguments about Dialogue,” 2.

⁶² Moshirzadeh, “Intercivilizational Dialogue and Global Governance.”

⁶³ Bohm, “On Dialogue,” 2.

⁶⁴ Timothy Weiss, “‘The Gods Must Be Crazy,’ The Challenge of the Intercultural” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 7, no. 2 (1993): 196–217.

⁶⁵ Thomas Risse, “Global Governance and Communicative Action,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 2 (2004): 288.

An important point is that as dialogue helps participants to “shift from a more identified first-person perspective to a witnessing third-person perspective of the very contents of ... mind and consciousness”, when dialogues take place frequently within and among civilizations, “suspension” may gradually change participants’ “fundamental relationship to the thinking process and the underlying habits of mind and points of view...by putting them in high relief against a background of awareness”.⁶⁶

4. Core-Periphery Dialogue in IR

If we have found that existing IR with all its conceptual, methodological, and theoretical tools has difficulties in understanding what is going on at the global level, one reason for this might be that its parochial conceptual tools and epistemological foundations are not as universal as they usually pretend to be. This has made looking at other understandings of international life necessary. If we are going to move beyond the Western-ness of IR, other voices from all civilizational backgrounds and perspectives should be listened to and be learnt from, and they too in turn should learn from the existing IR. This needs to be done through dialogue. In what follows I address the way in which such dialogue can be conducted and what its possible outcomes might be.

4.1. How to conduct dialogue?

If we are going to move beyond the Western-ness of IR, we must think of different strategies for the core/West and periphery/non-West to follow.

Western IR may look at the history of the non-Western world to find ways that could lead to alternative international politics. This has, to a degree, been followed by some of the English School writers in the past.⁶⁷ It may also look for alternative frameworks of understanding through consulting non-Western sources. This is what we can see in Robert Cox’s reference to Ibn Khaldun⁶⁸ or Puchala’s reading of non-Western radical understandings of international relations.⁶⁹ These attempts might be seen as a kind of indirect dialogue with the non-West/periphery.

So far the periphery has only been in indirect dialogue with the Western IR. Attempts by non-Western IR scholars to apply Western theories to non-Western contexts or finding similarities between various IR theories and various endogenous traditional philosophical, historical, moral, religious sources can also be interpreted as such.

Yet the periphery may also seek for particular versions of IR in different countries based on local/national history, culture, and experiences. An alternative to it would be specific versions of IR at the regional/civilizational level. Some of these versions may find their ways into publication by IR journals or by international publishers. They may, at best, be reviewed by some Western scholars, without necessarily influencing dominant Western ways of doing IR theoretically, methodologically, or substantively even if they somehow help the periphery to go beyond the hegemonic discourse of IR. Can they lead to the formation of an international/global IR? They may, I believe, lead to what Vasilaki calls particularism⁷⁰ or at best pluralism

⁶⁶ Gunnlaugson, “Bohman Dialogue,” 26.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁶⁸ Robert Cox, “Towards a Post-Hegemonic Conceptualization of World Order: Reflections on the Relevancy of Ibn Khaldun,” in *Governance without Government*, ed. James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁶⁹ Puchala, “Some Non-Western Perspectives.”

⁷⁰ Vasilaki and Buzan criticize such particularism. From a postcolonial view, although is critical of Western IR and prioritizes

within IR. If their presence is accompanied by dialogue with existing IR, however, it can help the formation of a global discipline that besides pluralism may experience new ways of thinking, redefinition of basic concepts, revising assumptions, and the like.

Another strategy would be various versions of postcolonialism that “question and subvert those relations of domination that conventional IR takes for granted”.⁷¹ Postcolonialism on the one hand makes us aware of the way in which the non-West has been constructed to make domination and authority over the Orient/non-West possible and on the other hand, goes beyond the very division of West/non-West. It looks for hybridity, provincialization, and contrapuntal reading. Postcolonialist re-reading of international history, its critical approach to Eurocentrism, essentialism, authenticity, Orientalism in reverse, and subalterneity⁷² can be seen as a call for revising our understanding of international relations. Some brilliant work along this line has been published as a way to go beyond “Western” IR.⁷³ The problem, however, is that, postcolonialism might not go much beyond criticism or showing the lack of authenticity of the West’s or the rest’s work. One may say that postcolonialist work discloses the “dialectics of civilizations”⁷⁴ in the past. As for dialogue, it might be argued, that it could undermine the possibility of dialogue by questioning the very possibility of subaltern groups having an effective voice.⁷⁵ Yet within the framework of dialogue of civilizations, if we do not look for “authentic” or “essential” identities, this does not seem to be a major problem. Furthermore, postcolonialism is one of the best critical approaches that can make the “core” more aware of the limitations of its outlook, and the periphery aware of the difficulties in claiming to have an authentic voice, and in this way contribute to the internationalization of IR.

Therefore, all these endeavors can be seen as a part of dialogue of civilizations. Yet we need something more: a more conscious and direct involvement in dialogues among IR scholars from various civilizations. In core-periphery dialogue within IR, authors from various societies, with various civilizational/cultural background, different histories, different understandings, and perhaps even different criteria for an acceptable knowledge, present their ideas to and enter into a focused conversation with each other in order to make IR a thoroughly international endeavor.

As it was mentioned above, a very basic condition of dialogue is to recognize all participants as equal. This equality in the context of the IR community is necessarily the equality of the different. At the same time, it requires all equals to see their ideas, understandings, assumptions, and even findings as limited, contingent, and modifiable.

The participants’ engagements should be on equal grounds. Hutchings rightly argues that “If what shapes the mode and outcome of dialogue is something beyond dialogue, then the

“local or cultural standpoints and systems of thought”, it cannot be “a guarantee of non-hegemonic or democratized IR” and often becomes “the mirror-image of the logic underpinning Western dominance: based on the idea of uniqueness of a ‘special’ civilization” (Vasilaki, “Provincialising IR?”, 6–7). Buzan too warns against the possibility of its enhancing the problem of IR as a divided discipline, producing in-ward looking thinking, and becoming in the service of particular national interest (Barry Buzan, “Could IR Be Different?,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 157). I believe dialogue can control such tendencies.

⁷¹ Vasilaki, “Provincialising IR?,” 8.

⁷² See, for example, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vantage Book, 1979); Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Colonial Difference* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷³ Vasilaki, “Provincialising IR?”; Bilgin, ““Contrapuntal Reading””.

⁷⁴ See Bashiriyeh, “From Civilizational Dialectics to Civilizational Dialogue”.

⁷⁵ See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”.

value of dialogue itself comes into question”.⁷⁶ These engagements may be in different forms, each of which can be a realization of power-knowledge nexus, from the meaning of dialogue to the meaning of truth, from concepts defining the field to epistemological and ontological assumptions taken for granted.

Of course these considerations have long been discussed in the field and the result has been the recognition of pluralism- meaning at least to de-monopolize knowledge/truth claims. This can be a good beginning. But its full realization in practice needs some practical steps including a sort of “affirmative action” or “positive discrimination,” as de-monopolization requires being able to present one’s ideas to others in the first place. For example, in terms of the chances for publication in well-known journals of the field, translation of the work already published in the native languages of non-English speaking IR scholars, and the like.⁷⁷

Then dialogue requires that participants’ approaches, conceptualizations, assumptions, etc. be listened to, evaluated, asked about, criticized, and discussed. But more than that, every participant has to be open to change his or her own approach, conceptualization, assumptions on the basis of that dialogue. If core-periphery dialogue is going to be similar to past experiences of “dialogue” in the field (for example, with Feminism) with a “continuing hegemony of mainstream understandings of the nature, point and purpose of dialogue”, then again nothing is going to shift “in terms of underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions”.⁷⁸ This will result in a “ghettoization” of works from the periphery.

Let us take an example. Katzenstein looks for a more pluralist IR with a variety of “voices, questions, approaches, methods, and standards of what constitutes good work” and rightly suggests that “global IR will not converge on ‘common best practice.’ Instead the dialogue of global IR will serve the purpose of articulating and reinforcing rich diversities that will require more intellectual empathy and capacious thought.”⁷⁹ Yet he speaks of “one shared language” that makes one hesitant about the limitations it might impose upon that plurality. Even within the “Western” IR, this shared language has been a matter of debate⁸⁰ and may become an obstacle in West-non-West dialogue. If, for example, some IR scholars from the Islamic world do not accept the “secular” language of existing IR, that standard of “shared language” locates them outside of the community altogether, and makes any dialogue with them impossible. Perhaps it is better to go further and think of different paradigms in more Kuhnian terms⁸¹ that speak in different “languages,” and the dialogue among which may (at least, sometimes) need “translation”.

In practice one of the best places for dialogue is in IR publications. Yet, as in a fully Bohmian sense dialogue should be conducted with the physical presence of participants, one may suggest both ISA conventions as well as other conferences and workshops. As such dialogues work best in groups of twenty to forty people facing one another in a single circle,⁸² particular arrangements can be envisaged in international conferences, seminars, and workshops to have panels with the intention of conducting a dialogue of civilizations.

⁷⁶ Hutchings, “Dialogue between Whom?,” 643.

⁷⁷ Such considerations have been followed by the ISA since a few years ago. See Acharya, “Advancing Global IR”.

⁷⁸ Hutchings, “Dialogue between Whom?,” 646.

⁷⁹ See Katzenstein, “Diversity and Empathy”.

⁸⁰ See Henry Nau, “No Alternatives to Isms,” *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2011): 487–91 and David Lake, “Why Isms Are Evil?,” *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2011): 465–80.

⁸¹ See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

⁸² “A group of this size allows for the emergence and observation of different subgroups or subcultures that can help to reveal some of the ways in which thought operates collectively” (Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, “Dialogue-A Proposal,” 6).

4.2. What to expect from dialogue?

Civilization, when defined as “correspondence between material conditions of existence and inter-subjective meanings,”⁸³ has epistemological and ontological elements that constitute the parameters of knowledge. Dialogue of civilizations can be seen as the basis for a non-ethnocentric International Relations by introducing new diversity to the field through alternative epistemologies, different ontologies, and various understandings of the subject matter of this field. But what does this diversity lead to?

In one understanding, as was mentioned, dialogue is intended to lead to some sort of (shared) “truth”. This seems to be the objective of the dialogue of civilizations as was envisaged by Khatami: “speaking and listening is a bilateral—or multilateral—effort aimed at reaching *truth* and understanding”⁸⁴ (emphasis added). Yet here the basis of objectivity and truth should also be changed to a discursive/dialogical one. Khatami, not unlike Habermas, is critical of two positions of skepticism and monopolized understanding of truth and criticizes the dominant technical notion of knowledge that “leads to power instead of constraining power”. The difference between Habermas and Khatami is in former’s insistence on the necessity of a shared modern lifeworld for conducting dialogues. Khatami sees the capacity in all civilizations to find dialogues as a way to reach truth and he also sees much shared in human life to make speaking of (at least a minimum) shared lifeworld meaningful. What he does not take into account, however, is that ways of argumentation are not necessarily the same in various cultures. Therefore, what one finds persuasive in one culture might not make sense at all in another. And this is what makes dialogue across cultures with the aim of reaching truth somehow problematic. Here is where we need a sort of translation effort in dialogue.

If one does not take the expectations from core-periphery dialogue that far, what are other possible outcomes? A very minimal expectation is to have everyone’s voice presented to the community of scholars so that at least a precondition of true dialogue can be met. A step further that can be envisaged is not to “displace but subsume existing IR and enrich it with the infusion of ideas and practices from the non-Western world”, sourcing IR from epistemological concepts as well as practices and interactions in the non-Western world.⁸⁵ Yet as Shani argues, the ontological premises of Western IRT need to be “rethought” not merely “enriched” by the addition of new voices from the periphery/non-Western civilizations.⁸⁶

Not only the West, but also all parties may need to rethink their understanding of international relations. But how? David Bohm rightly argues that thought needs attention and that “through dialogue we might change our collective thought processes and find solutions to problems without being misled by our assumptions”.⁸⁷ Therefore, dialogue with others helps all parties to reconsider their thoughts and even their way of thinking. “Suspension” in a Bohemian form of dialogue, involves attention and listening.⁸⁸ It makes “a less attached, yet poised and attentive relationship with our knowledge, beliefs and perspectives” possible. By

⁸³ Robert Cox, “Civilizations and the Twenty-First Century: Some Theoretical Considerations,” in *Globalization and Civilizations*, ed. Mehdi Mozaffari (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

⁸⁴ S.M. Khatami, *Theoretical Foundations of Dialogue of Civilizations: Lectures by S.M. Khatami on Dialogue of Civilizations* (Tehran: Sogand, 1380 [2001]), 17.

⁸⁵ Acharya, “Advancing Global IR,” 6–7.

⁸⁶ Shani, “Toward a Post-Western IR,” 723.

⁸⁷ Gryn, “David Bohm and Group Dialogue,” 94.

⁸⁸ Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, “Dialogue-A Proposal,” 6.

suspension, we slow down our mind so that we can discover and learn.⁸⁹

Furthermore, dialogues could reveal the agency of peripheral actors so far mostly hidden in IR. At one level this hiddenness of agency can be pursued within the IR community: others too have something to say and share. This would give the opportunity to marginal forces to have their voices in the field. At another level, non-Western peripheral agency can be shown to have existed throughout history. Hurrell believes that Western IR needs “to understand much more about the agency of the apparently ‘powerless’⁹⁰ and Buzan asks Western scholars to see “what difference would it make if the history of peoples other than Europeans was what underpinned the discipline?”⁹¹ Ideas such as these can be thought over and discussed more in dialogues. The history that has so far informed much of IR theorizing could be rewritten and this might lead to changes in our understanding of international politics and its dynamics.

If we accept that International Relations is dominated by hegemonic discourses or theories serving specific interests and that it is not free from power relations,⁹² indeed if we even see the whole discipline as being “hegemonic”,⁹³ dialogue at various levels especially at the intercultural level may be seen as a means towards shaping new counter-hegemonic understandings that may result in new versions of international critical theory.

This would be an epistemological challenge against the more or less dominant positivist understanding of knowledge with all its monopolistic claims in this area. One of its main implications is the rejection of value-free knowledge and the emphasis on reflection on both what exists and what should exist.⁹⁴ Critical theorists realize that the actor and the observer cannot be separated and that they are themselves involved in “the reproduction, constitution and fixing of the social entities they observe”.⁹⁵ It seems that critical theorists like their postmodern counterparts are ready to reject “disciplinary closure”.⁹⁶

However, one may see exclusionary practices inside Western critical theory as well. This is what can be avoided by intercultural dialogues that can lead to various non-Eurocentric versions of critical theory in international relations.⁹⁷ Thus the dialogue may lead to co-fertilization of Western and non-Western critical approaches.

5. Conclusion

As Hurrell suggests, the way in which societies are organized and “their various conceptions of what the good life entails” should be brought together and reconciled if solutions to global problems are to be found.⁹⁸ If the ultimate ideal of IR as a discipline is to reach a more

⁸⁹ Gunnlaugson, “Bohmian Dialogue,” 26.

⁹⁰ Andrew Hurrell, “Beyond Critique: How to Study Global IR?,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 149–51.

⁹¹ Buzan, “Could IR Be Different?”

⁹² See Robert Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10 (1981): 126–55.

⁹³ Steve Smith, “The Discipline of International Relations: Still an American Social Science?,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2, no. 3 (2000): 374–402; and “The United States and the Discipline of International Relations: ‘Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline,’” *International Studies Review* 4, no. 2 (2002): 67–85.

⁹⁴ Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991): 14–6; Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 232–33.

⁹⁵ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” in *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, ed. Andrew Linklater (London and NY: Routledge, 2000), 1764.

⁹⁶ Andrew Linklater, “The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Point of View,” in *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, ed. Andrew Linklater (London and NY: Routledge, 2000), 1644.

⁹⁷ See Homeira Moshirzadeh, “Critical International Theory and Dialogue of Civilizations,” in *Civilizational Dialogue and Political Thought*, ed. Fred Dalmyr and Abbas Manoochehri (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

⁹⁸ See Andrew Hurrell, “Norms and Ethics in International Relations,” in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage, 2002).

peaceful world through a better understanding of it, then the contribution of all civilizations to this understanding will be an inevitable requirement that also functions as a basis for non-Eurocentric approaches to international relations within a discipline that seeks to conceptualize, interpret, and explain international life. Furthermore, in the process of dialogue all parties can rethink their approaches, conceptual devices, definitions, and assumptions.

Yet one must be aware that, at its early stages, dialogue “will often lead to the experience of frustration”.⁹⁹ One reason might be that dialogue means being consecutively challenged and having to accept changes in attitudes and understandings and it may jeopardize the ontological security of scholars. Therefore, some institutionalized routines need to be established to prevent this so that an ongoing multi-party dialogue may emerge leading to a new global IR.

The new IR may prove to be not only more democratic and fair but also in a better position to understand and explain international life and thereby make a change in a world that perhaps more than at any time in its recent history needs a change to put an end to violence, threats, and injustice. Thus dialogues within the IR community worldwide may be seen as not only an endeavor to do more justice in the discipline but also to reach a better world.

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⁹⁹ Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, “Dialogue-A Proposal,” 4.

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