

Realism's Timeless Wisdom and its Relevance for the Global South

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Abstract

Since the numerous calls for developing a truly global and plural IR discipline, a growing spate of IR studies have sought to contextualize and critique the Euro-centeredness of the field. One of the most significant problems scholars have pointed out is the hegemonic status of Anglo-American IR theories, which seemingly assert an ontological preeminence and universality at the expense of local knowledge and homegrown theories. While the present article shares many of global IR's concerns, it nevertheless proposes that in our quest to teach IR and develop homegrown theories, we should not lose sight of the importance of traditional contributions to the field. Our argument is based on a series of reflections about the relevance of realist scholarship for the developing world. Through an analysis of the major criticisms of classical IR theories, we seek to show that classical and, to a lesser extent, structural and neoclassical realism contain several and diverse arguments that speak directly to audiences in the global South. Classical realism, in particular, shares some interesting commonalities with postcolonial theory, which could pave the way for a more systematic engagement between the two approaches. Therefore, we argue that a global IR founded primarily on critiquing classical theories would be an impoverished IR, and "the thousand small steps" to a globalized discipline ought not neglect the valuable insights and reflections of traditional theory.

Keywords: IR theory, global IR, realism, postcolonialism

"What is this thing called international relations in the 'English speaking countries' other than the 'study' about how 'to run the world from positions of strength'?"

E. H. Carr¹

1. Introduction

The starting point for our analysis is global IR's difficult and unresolved relationship with the core canon of IR literature. While Acharya's seminal 2014 article argued that global

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¹ Michael Cox, "Introduction," in *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, [1939, 1946, 1981, 2001] 2016), xxix.

IR “subsumes, rather than supplants, existing IR theories and methods,”² other voices of the global IR debate are more critical.³ Many of the critiques have pointed out the Western-centeredness of major IR theories and their limited relevance to audiences in the global South. According to Tickner and Smith, “A typical challenge faced by professors of IR, particularly in global South classrooms, but increasingly in the North too, is how to teach theories, concepts and issues in ways that make sense to students, given the strong disconnect that exists between what we have grown accustomed to labeling the ‘ABC’ or the ‘canon’ of the discipline, on the one hand, and lived realities on the ground, on the other.”⁴

The present article applauds the critical engagement with traditional IR theory as a necessary step to raise awareness about its biases and shortcomings. Yet, we argue that many of the concerns raised understate the richness and usefulness of traditional contributions to the field. To substantiate our argument, we first provide a brief summary of the most important critiques of traditional IR theory. Second, we respond to these critiques by discussing the virtues of realism, a theory that has often been associated with hegemonic interests and is a main recipient of global IR’s critiques, for the global South. In this exercise, we seek to build a solid case for realism’s relevance beyond the North, focusing first on structural realism and neoclassical realism. We then proceed to classical realism as the most promising realist framework from a global IR perspective. One of our most interesting findings is a largely overlooked affinity between classical realism and postcolonial theory, especially in the way they address power and (a)morality in world politics. The main difference is realism’s pessimism and, perhaps, resignation to contingency, injustice, and expediency over genuine normative transformation. However, the apparent lack of progress in world politics and international relations renders realism’s pessimistic and cautionary axioms valid.⁵ We end our discussion by addressing valid concerns to our argument and providing a brief reflection about the benefits of a more systematic engagement between classical realism and postcolonialism.

2. Global IR’s Critique of Mainstream IR Theories

The global IR conversation reflects the culmination of long-brewing discontent towards several issues with the mainstream discipline, related but also distinct from the extant inter-paradigmatic debates that have shaped the field. Global IR challenges mainstream theorizing through its engagement with the interrelated issues of international, substantive, and epistemic hierarchies resulting from its Eurocentrism. *International* because of the disproportionate influence of the Anglo-American academe and U.S. geopolitical objectives;⁶ *substantive* because of an inevitable concentration on subject materials rooted in the geopolitical experiences of the West; and *epistemic* due to the lack of genuine globality, diversity, and

² Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 649.

³ E.g., Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, “The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the Poesies of Worldism,” *International Studies Review* 6, no. 4 (2004): 21-49; Phillip Darby, “A Disabling Discipline,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, eds. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94-105; L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁴ Arlene B. Tickner and Karen Smith, eds., “Preface,” in *International Relations from the Global South: Worlds of Difference* (London & New York: Routledge, 2020), xvi.

⁵ Joshua Foa Diebing, “Pessimistic Realism and Realistic Pessimism,” in *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme*, ed. Duncan Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 169.

⁶ Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States, and World Order: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126-155; Stanley Hoffman, “An American Social Science: International Relations,” *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 41-60.

pluralism in the point of origins of mainstream IR theories, which are eschewed in favor of a false universalism predicated on Eurocentric assumptions about the social world.⁷ Institutional hierarchies also persist and must be a part of any conversation about the problems in the IR discipline since most of the top schools, major avenues of publication, and funding opportunities are located in the Anglo-American core and greatly incentivize the publication of paradigmatic or (neo)positivist research written in highly specialized English.⁸

While the authors of this article share global IR's concerns about the discipline's international, substantive, epistemic, and institutional hierarchies, we also uphold that some of the critiques of mainstream IR theories go too far. This is not to say that IR's major paradigms are free of serious problems, nor that they are the only viable theories to teach international or global politics around the world. What we try to show, instead, is that realism, a mainstream and heavily critiqued body of IR theory, contains numerous useful insights that are relevant to the global South and often overlooked by global IR scholars. Hence, the following paragraphs examine criticisms of mainstream IR in some detail.

Mainstream theories of IR are often labelled as grand theories or paradigms that present relatively coherent views about which types of actors are the most important ones in global politics (states, international organizations, social forces, multinational businesses, etc.) and the nature of their relationships (harmonious, cooperative, conflictive, etc.). These approaches occupy the intellectual heights of the discipline, enjoying a commanding position in the intellectual hierarchy despite a recent disciplinary gravitation towards publishing mid-range theories.⁹ Their dominant position is reflected in publications and bibliometric trends, as well as their presence in syllabi and other pedagogical material.¹⁰ According to several authors within the global IR movement, mainstream theories are Eurocentric at their core, reflecting the biases of the global North, resulting not only in epistemic violence, but also in ahistorical IR research that ignores local agency outside the West. Steeped in Eurocentric assumptions and biases, such IR research then fails to capture unique local dynamics, and therefore impoverishes the discipline as a whole.¹¹

According to global IR scholars, mainstream IR theories are Eurocentric because their research agendas are largely rooted in the fascinations of scholars from the global North concerning the origins and fundamental make-up of contemporary world politics. Firstly, the world-building of mainstream IR theories takes the Peace of Westphalia as a starting point for the modern state and international system, upon which the axioms of the major

⁷ Acharya, "International Relations Theories and Western Dominance: Reassessing the Foundations of International Order," in *Rethinking Power, Institutions and Ideas in World Politics: Whose IR?* (London: Routledge, 2013): 25; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten Tears On," *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 17, no. 3 (2017): 341-370; Arlene B. Tickner, "Core, Periphery and (Neo) Imperialist International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 627-646.

⁸ For recent overviews of core-periphery divisions in the discipline, see, Peter M. Kristensen, "Revisiting the 'American Social Science'—Mapping the Geography of International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 16, no. 3 (2015): 246-269; Helen L. Turton, "Locating a Multifaceted and Stratified Disciplinary 'Core'," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 9, no. 1 (2020): 177-210. Regarding recent trends in publications, see, Wiebke Wemhauer-Vogelaar, Peter M. Kristensen, and Mathis Lohaus, "The Global Division of Labor in a Not So Global Discipline," *All Azimuth* 11, no. 1 (2022): 3-27.

⁹ David A. Lake, "Theory is Dead, Long Live Theory: The End of the Great Debates and the Rise of Eclecticism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 567-587; Lake, "White Man's IR: An Intellectual Confession," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 4 (2016): 1112-1122; Ersel Aydinli and Onur Erpul, "The False Promise of Global IR: Exposing the Paradox of Dependent Development," *International Theory* 14, no. 3 (2022): 419-459.

¹⁰ Lake, "Theory is Dead,"; Daniel Maliniak, Amy Oaks, Susan Peterson, and Michael J. Tierney, "International Relations in the US Academy," *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2011): 439; Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytics Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹¹ Melody Fonseca, "Global IR and Western Dominance: Moving Forward or Eurocentric Entrapment?" *Millennium*, 48, no. 1 (2019): 58.

paradigms are founded.¹² Secondly, this would not be an issue if not for the problem that mainstream theories often fashion themselves as major research paradigms and operate from a narrow perspective of epistemological positivism in which timeless and universal knowledge about world politics is accumulated through hypothesis testing.¹³ The realist paradigm, and neorealism specifically, is considered to be particularly culpable because its conceptualizations of the state, anarchy, and the international system, among other key concepts, are rarely contextualized historically and geographically.¹⁴ This is exacerbated not only by the realists' self-professed "timeless wisdom" that envisions a world politics driven by power politics,¹⁵ but also by the resoluteness of its hard-nosed theorists about the "foolishness" of disregarding international anarchy and the balance of power.¹⁶ For critics, realism's "timeless wisdom" is nothing more than a reproduction of a racist caricature of a premodern anarchy.¹⁷ Thirdly, regarding contemporary world politics, mainstream theories' research agendas and assumptions are driven by the vicissitudes of American hegemony, as evidenced by the problematization of international anarchy and what can be done (by the U.S. and its allies) to transcend geopolitical inconveniences.¹⁸ Finally, and as a natural consequence of their geopolitical agenda, mainstream theories are problem-solving theories to the extent that their research agendas are intractably linked to the policy goals of the hegemonic state.¹⁹ For these reasons, mainstream theories' apparent commitment to an intellectual status quo and paradigmatic research render them as "imperial" scholarship.²⁰

According to many critics, the Eurocentrism of mainstream theories also recreates international hierarchies within the discipline in the form of substantive hierarchies. One need only inquire about how the global South figures into the narratives about the core canon of IR and its relationship to the global North. Its relative distance from the lofty heights of present-day great-power politics results in the global South going unnoticed, except to the extent that its constituent states are amicable or adversarial to the hegemon. This is amply evidenced by a bloated literature on the prospects of conflict between rising and status-quo powers.²¹ Obsession with great-power politics also distorts analytical boundaries when considering the validity of theoretical assumptions, as immortalized by Waltz's admission that his automatic balance of power theory is predicated on great-power states alone because

¹² Siba N. Grovgui, "Regimes of Sovereignty: International Morality and the African Condition," *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 3 (2002): 316.

¹³ Jill Steans, "Engaging from the Margins: Feminist Encounters with the 'Mainstream' of International Relations," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 5, no. 3 (2003): 432.

¹⁴ John M. Hobson, "Part 1: Traditional Theories of the State and International Relations," in *The State and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 17-63.

¹⁵ Barry Buzan, "The Timeless Wisdom of Realism," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marilya Zelewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47.

¹⁶ Dale Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000): 187-212; John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 5-49; Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Randall Schweller, "Fantasy Theory," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 147-150; Schweller, "The Problem of International Order Revisited," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 161-186; among others.

¹⁷ Errol A. Henderson, "Chapter 2: Africa's Wars as New Wars – Dubious Dichotomies and Flattening History," in *African Realism? International Relations Theory and Africa's Wars in the Postcolonial Era* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 81-82; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

¹⁸ Grovgui, "Sovereignty in Africa: Quasi Statehood and Other Myths of International Theory," in *Africa's Challenge to International Theory*, eds. Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 29-45; Ekkehart Krippendorff, "The Dominance of American Approaches in International Relations," *Millennium* 16, no. 4 (1987): 207-214.

¹⁹ Cox, "Social Forces," 123-155.

²⁰ Aydinli and Erpul, "The False Promise," 419-459.

²¹ Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105, no. 690 (2006): 160-162; Daniel Vukovich, *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the PRC* (London: Routledge, 2013).

it would be “as ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics based on Malaysia and Costa Rica as it would be to construct an economic theory of oligopolistic competition based on the minor firms in a sector of an economy.”²² By the same token, Denmark, a country from the global North, “doesn’t matter” due to its diminutive military and economic capabilities.²³ Stephen Krasner, meanwhile, points out that no one “gives a damn” about Luxembourg because “Luxembourg ain’t hegemonic.”²⁴

Critics of Eurocentrism also charge mainstream theories—particularly realism—with overlooking the rest of the international system on substantive grounds, and assert that such theories ignore important nuances in world politics since the behavioral tendencies of great-power states *inter se* since the 17th century hardly constitute a timeless and universal explanation of international regularities.²⁵ Substantive hierarchy is not limited to realism since many of the most widely read contributions of the liberal and constructivist paradigms reify American hegemony and assert the primacy of liberal, and “Western” values on international relations.^{26,27} Empirical and data-driven enterprises that monitor and rate states on the virtues of their regime types and governance qualities only reinforce this notion.²⁸

The global South, meanwhile, retains its substantive usefulness for mainstream IR theories as a laboratory in which mainstream theories can be honed and tested. An interesting consequence is that when this issue is considered in tandem with the institutional realities and publication trends of IR, it results in a specific genre of research, particularly produced by local scholars, that fleshes out a local case from the global South to test its (inevitable) complementarity with imperial scholarship.²⁹ This essentially consigns the non-Western theorist to the role of a technician that applies Western ideas to a local curiosity; they become native informants.³⁰ This brings us to Eurocentrism’s final consequence: that IR theories inflict epistemic violence by imposing Western-centric knowledge on other parts of the world, thereby creating hierarchies and exclusions of non-Western epistemologies.³¹ The fixation on a canon of IR texts originating from Anglo-American IR in the 20th century, all of which has

²² Kenneth N. Waltz, “Chapter 5: Political Structures,” in *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1979): 73.

²³ Waltz, “Chapter 5,” 73-74; Cox, “Towards a Post-Hegemonic Conceptualization of World Order: Reflections on the Relevancy of Ibn Khaldun,” in *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, eds. James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 143.

²⁴ Richard Higgott, “Toward a Non-Hegemonic IPE: An Antipodean Perspective,” in *The New International Political Economy*, eds. C. Murphy and R. Tooze, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991): 99.

²⁵ To do so would equate to what Hobson calls “subliminal Eurocentrism” (Hobson, “Constructing Civilization: Global Hierarchy, ‘Graded Sovereignty’ and Globalization in International Theory, 1760–2010,” in *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012]: 320). See, also, Powel’s discussion on tempocentrism (Brieg Powel, “Blinkered Learning, Blinkered Theory: How Histories in Textbooks Parochialize IR,” *International Studies Review* 22, no. 4 [2020]: 957-982).

²⁶ Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239-275; Jennifer Folker-Sterling, “All Hail to the Chief: Liberal IR Theory in the New World Order,” *International Studies Perspectives* 16, no. 1 (2016): 40-49; Amaya Querejazu Escobari, “Violencias encubiertas de la gobernanza global [Covert violence of global governance],” *Estudios Políticos* 49, (2016): 148-166.

²⁷ In fact, Folker-Sterling argues that Liberalism might be more preponderant than Realism because of its status as the official ideology of American hegemony (Folker-Sterling, “All Hail,” 45). See, also, Martin Griffiths, “Introduction: Conquest, Coexistence, and IR Theory,” in *Rethinking International Relations Theory* (London: Palgrave, 2011): 14.

²⁸ For a discussion, see Jeff D. Colgan, “American Bias in Global Security Studies Data,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 3, (2019): 358-371.

²⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

³⁰ Ersel Aydinli, “Methodology as a Lingua Franca in International Relations: Peripheral Self-reflections on Dialogue with the Core,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 13, no. 2 (2020): 289; Kristensen, “How Can Emerging Powers Speak? On Theorists, Native Informants and Quasi-Officials in International Relations Discourse,” *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2015): 637-653.

³¹ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

ossified into paradigms and shares Eurocentric axioms about world politics and the nature of science, naturally creates a hierarchy in terms of which theorizing and which theorists matter more. Not only are mainstream theories considered to be the pinnacle of IR research, but all forms of distinct or homegrown theorizing are also regarded as inferior by necessity.³²

What results is a discipline in which the experiences of the global South rarely figure into mainstream scholarship, except in the most circumscribed of ways. The paradigmatic and problem-solving aspects of mainstream theories lead to a discipline largely shaped by the experiences of a narrow set of countries in a limited period. According to global IR scholars, we are thus confronted with severe problems, like the irrelevance of mainstream IR theories for explaining or predicting anything of consequence for the rest of the international system outside of the Anglo-American core. The epistemic hierarchy inflicted by mainstream theories and exacerbated by institutional incentives results in an impoverished IR that has much to say about the relative applicability of the IR paradigms on a range of issues around the world but is also exclusionary of genuine homegrown scholarship that can offer original insights and novel formulations.

Pedagogically, mainstream theories tend to stifle creativity too. For the Anglo-American core, the narrow fixation on a Western historical experience, starting with Thucydides, advancing with Machiavelli and Hobbes, and finally arriving at modern Anglo-American and émigré scholars, presents a neat and uniform narrative linking antiquity to the modern age. Apart from neglecting the multiple points of origin of IR concepts, a narrow focus on the West prevents aspiring IR scholars in the core from achieving a deeper engagement with the rest of the world. As Colgan notes, this has resulted in a “distort[ion of] the conclusions and inferences we draw in important ways.”³³ This is because Western IR theories occupy a central position in teaching not only in the U.S., but all around the world.³⁴ Accordingly, students in the global South must rely on Western theories grounded in Western histories for their IR learning, resulting in a need to interpret their own national and historical contexts through the fulcrum of Western IR. Without a well-developed corpus of local texts, instruction of theory is achieved through imported theories, often applied to local contexts by academic compradors. In fact, the ubiquity of mainstream theories in the global South, as opposed to critical and homegrown research, underscores intellectual dependency.³⁵

It may appear that the present article is proceeding on a fundamentally false premise per Acharya’s statement that global IR seeks to subsume rather than supplant conventional theories.³⁶ Yet, the claim that “IR has largely limited itself to the study of issues of relevance to the global North” is a common theme within the global IR debate.³⁷ Hence, our goal is to show that conventional theories, particularly realism, retain their analytical utility, while several of IR’s core readings are less ethnocentric than global IR scholars claim. Our focus on realism is justified by the fact that it has been at the center of the critiques of many global IR scholars, while its spread has been associated with a neocolonial or imperial project.³⁸ To

³² L. H. M. Ling and Carolina Pinheiro, “South-South Talk,” in *International Relations from the Global South*, 317-340.

³³ Colgan, “American Perspectives and Blind Spots on World Politics,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 3 (2019): 307.

³⁴ Thomas J. Biersteker, “The Parochialism of Hegemony: Challenges for ‘American’ International Relations,” in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, eds. Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2009): 322-341; Colgan, “Where Is International Relations Going? Evidence from Graduate Training,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2016): 486-498.

³⁵ Aydinli and Erpul, “The False Promise,” 419-459.

³⁶ Acharya, “Global International Relations,” 649.

³⁷ Tickner and Smith, eds., “Introduction: International Relations from the Global South,” in *International Relations from the Global South*, 2.

³⁸ Álvaro Morcillo Laiz, “The Cold War Origins of Global IR. The Rockefeller Foundation and Realism in Latin America,”

contest this claim, we first focus on the theory's two most recent and popular strands, structural and neoclassical realism. As we illustrate below, even neorealists like Kenneth Waltz and John J. Mearsheimer, whose theories are, at first sight, further detached from concerns of the global South, have been at the forefront of criticizing excesses of U.S. foreign policy, while highlighting that the U.S. is not morally superior to other states.³⁹ We then proceed to develop a strong case for classical realism as the most promising realist framework. We first outline ontological and epistemological affinities between classical realism and the positions defended by global IR scholars. We then identify a strong connection between classical realism's theoretical core and postcolonialism. Overall, we seek to show that realism can be seen as less of a hard case for global IR than generally assumed.⁴⁰

3. The modest case for structural and neoclassical realism

Structural or neorealism is arguably the most controversial strand of the realist school of thought. To our mind, neorealism is rightly criticized for its almost irreverent dismissal of cultural and ideational factors in world politics, its rigid ontology, and its imposition of a particular and universalist understanding of science and the operation of the social world.⁴¹ Yet, while global IR scholars often dismiss core theories as ethnocentric, we claim that it is precisely structural realism's insistence on universality that offers scholars and decision-makers valuable tools for overcoming ethnocentric thinking.

For instance, by invoking analogies like the billiard ball model of international politics, neorealists envisage a framework of international politics in which military and economic capabilities define political outcomes in world politics to enable analytical precision and predictability.⁴² Furthermore, states' motives are simplified into indistinct "black boxes." While this simplification undermines the analytical utility of neorealism and similarly oriented structural theories,⁴³ it is important to note that these assumptions advocate an inherent equality and similarity between states, especially in terms of their motives and (a)morality. The billiard ball model, the black box of the state, and Wolfers' analogy of the house on fire, which arguably inspires realist thinking about the immanence of survival and fear as a universal motivator, all point to a world politics in which states and their decision-makers are similar. Neither are particular states seen as morally inferior, nor are specific peoples seen as less capable in their faculties or rational because of their culture and ethnicity.

These principles, of course, do not automatically result in neutral and objective thinking since a certain degree of ethnocentric biases are probably inescapable.⁴⁴ Structural realism's axioms nevertheless offer a sobering view of the inherent sameness of human beings, political actors, and states operating within a heterogenous world. Such a view is valuable given the countless reinventions and rediscoveries of a core of realist thinking across human

International Studies Review 24, no. 1 (2022): 1-26; Vitalis, *White World Order*.

³⁹ Waltz, "America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24, no. 4 (1991): 670; Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*.

⁴⁰ Michiel Foulon and Gustav Meibauer, "Realist Avenues to Global International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 4 (2020): 1204.

⁴¹ Ole Wæver, "Waltz's Theory of Theory," *International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2009): 201-222.

⁴² Arnold Wolfers, "The Pole of Power and the Pole of Indifference," *World Politics* 4, no. 1 (1951): 39-63.

⁴³ Treating all states and decision-makers as being inherently similar did reduce neorealism's analytical leverage and necessitated many corrections with the inclusion of unit- and individual-level factors. See, for example, Jack L. Snyder, "The Soviet Strategic Culture. Implications for Limited Nuclear Operation," (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1977); Graham T. Allison and Phillip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Pearson, 1999).

⁴⁴ See, Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Routledge, 1977).

civilizations and history, as well as more contemporary applications of realist theories across the global South.⁴⁵

Furthermore, despite its reputation for eschewing ambitious normative goals and conceptualizing the balance of power as an unintended and automatic process,⁴⁶ even structural realism expounds the normative objective of upholding the balance of power in the name of conflict avoidance, as evidenced by the attempted scholarly interventions into U.S. foreign policy.⁴⁷ Two examples are worth remarking upon.

The first of these embodies the realist principle that the balance of power is conducive to peace. To this end, structural realism's founding father, Kenneth Waltz, was an active proponent of nuclear proliferation, arguing that the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons can act as equalizers to the balance of power by increasing the destructive capabilities of even weak states and enabling the stabilizing dynamics of nuclear deterrence.⁴⁸ Nuclear proliferation could not only serve international peace, but also offer a bulwark for the states of the global South against Western intervention. Waltz's notion is provocative given that the non-proliferation regime is predicated on maintaining the status quo for the powers already in possession of nuclear weapons and denying the same exclusive rights to aspiring nuclear powers.⁴⁹ Whatever the merits of proliferation, realist propositions aspire to a framework for thinking about balance and fairness for the sake of strategic stability and effective deterrence.

The second example concerns the scholarly reactions to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Among IR scholars, realists were the most vocal critics of U.S. foreign policy through their sustained criticism of the nexus of Wilsonian idealism, liberal internationalism, and unilateralism.⁵⁰ According to them, U.S. foreign policy was hijacked by neoconservatives and resulted in a destructive war that could not be justified from the purview of realism, as Iraq posed no immediate threat to the U.S.⁵¹ This invasion inspired a series of important realist works that significantly scrutinized U.S. grand strategy, helped to coin terms like soft-balancing, and prompted discussion of strategic restraint, among other contributions.⁵²

While most structural realists have not systematically engaged with the debates

⁴⁵ See, for example, Mohammed Ayoob, "Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism," *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3 (2002): 27-48; Arshid I. Dar, "Beyond Eurocentrism: Kautilya's Realism and India's Regional Diplomacy," *Humanity Social Sciences Community* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1-7; Victor M. Mijares, "Soft-Balancing the Titans: Venezuelan Foreign-Policy Strategy Toward the United States, China and Russia," *Latin American Policy* 8, no. 2 (2017): 201-231; Rajesh Rajogopalan, "Realist Approaches to the International Relations of South Asia," in *Routledge Handbook of the International Relations of South Asia*, eds. Sumit Ganguly and Frank O'Donnell (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 7-19; Luis L. Schenoni and Carlos Escudé, "Peripheral Realism Revisited," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 51, no. 1 (2016): 1-18; Luis L. Schenoni, "Subsystemic Unipolarities? Power Distribution and State Behavior in South America and Southern Africa," *Strategic Analysis* 41 (2017): 74-86.

⁴⁶ Waltz, "Chapter 5," 88-93. For a discussion, see Schweller, "The Balance of Power in World Politics," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 9 May. 2016. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-119>

⁴⁷ Some versions of neorealism challenged this notion in light of the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

⁴⁸ Waltz, "More may be better," in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, eds. Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz (New York: Norton, 1995): 3-45; Sagan and Waltz, "Is Nuclear Zero the Best Option?" *The National Interest*, no. 109 (2010): 88-96.

⁴⁹ Barry O'Neill, "Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige," *Cowles Foundation, Discussion Paper* No. 1560 (2015).

⁵⁰ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Realism, Liberalism, and the Iraq War," *Survival* 59, no. 4 (2017): 7-8.

⁵¹ Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 191-220; cf. Deudney and Ikenberry, "Realism, Liberalism," 7-26. The latter account argues that versions of realism are, in fact, as culpable as liberalism in forming and justifying the U.S. invasion of Iraq since realist theories of hegemony do, in fact, provide a theoretical justification for such interventions.

⁵² See, for example, Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005): 7-45; Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005); Michael C. Desch, "America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007/08): 7-43; Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

about global IR,⁵³ Foulon and Meibauer have sought to bridge the divide by arguing that neoclassical realism in particular has much to offer to scholars from the global South.⁵⁴ Their article upholds that, despite its perceived position as a foil to homegrown research, global IR scholars should not ignore Western knowledge production and theories, as this would reinforce the dichotomies between Western and non-Western IR that they challenge.⁵⁵ They further claim that neoclassical realism (NCR) provides interesting avenues for global IR:

We argue that because NCR has a less strict understanding of paradigmatic boundaries compared to neorealism, it can embrace global questions and cases, global thought and concepts, and global perspectives and scholarship. Its use of unit-level intervening variables allows it to broaden its scope beyond the West and take non-Western cases seriously in theory building (not only testing). It is open to reconsidering a wider canon of non-Western scholarship to conceptualize decision-making processes and state behavior.⁵⁶

The present article wholeheartedly agrees that neoclassical realism can contribute to global IR by virtue of its ability to weave together system-level and an assortment of unit-level variables into a transmission-belt model used for theorizing about state behavior.⁵⁷ Yet, three significant obstacles remain. First, despite the emphasis on an imperfect transmission belt, NCR heavily prioritizes neorealism's system-level factors over national or regional dynamics as the main drivers of foreign policies. Second, neoclassical realism embraces a positivist epistemology, and thus privileges conventional methods, which embody IR's Western hegemony and exclusionary practices. Finally, NCR is primarily employed as an analytical, and occasionally predictive, framework for state behavior.⁵⁸ Despite its obvious strengths in aiding a productive research agenda on foreign policy in global South contexts,⁵⁹ it does not easily accommodate reflections about normative concerns and the morality of political actions.⁶⁰ We are, therefore, less confident that NCR and global IR are fully reconcilable. Instead, we seek to develop a strong case for classical realism, which we will lay out in the following section.

4. The strong case for classical realism

Similar to other branches of realism, authors like Carr, Morgenthau, and Niebuhr argue that considerations about power are the heart of international (and national) politics. However, they view human nature, desires, emotions, and intra-group dynamics, rather than the constraints imposed by the international system, as more fundamental to elucidate why political agents strive for power. While their explanations highlight the timelessness of competition over power and clashes of interests, like global IR scholars, they also assert that international

⁵³ An exception is Mearsheimer's short defense of the U.S.'s "benign" hegemony in the IR discipline (Mearsheimer, "A Global Discipline of IR? Benign Hegemony," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 [2016]: 147-149).

⁵⁴ Foulon and Meibauer, "Realist Avenues," 1204.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1204, 1208, 1217, 1220.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1205.

⁵⁷ Gideon Rose, "Review Article: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 158, 169.

⁵⁸ See, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, "Methodology of Neoclassical Realism," in *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016): 99-138.

⁵⁹ Foulon and Meibauer, "Realist Avenues," 1203-1229.

⁶⁰ As a theory of foreign policy, neoclassical realism's engagement with moral questions about statecraft has been somewhat limited. For a discussion about neoclassical realism's prospects for accommodating normativity in foreign policy, see Gustav Meibauer, Linde Desmaele, Tudor Onea, Nicholas Kitchen, Michiel Foulon, Alexander Reichwein, and Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Forum: Rethinking Neoclassical Realism at Theory's End," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2021): 284-287.

politics is messy, contingent, uncertain, and complex. As Morgenthau upholds in *Politics Among Nations*,

Knowledge of the forces that determine politics among nations, and the ways in which political relations unfold, reveals the ambiguity of the facts of international politics. In every political situation contradictory tendencies are at play. One of these tendencies is more likely to prevail under certain conditions. But which tendency actually will prevail is anybody's guess. The best the scholar can do, then, is to trace the different tendencies that, as potentialities, are inherent in a certain political situation.⁶¹

While over the past 20 years, several scholars from Europe have rediscovered classical realism's context-sensitive epistemologies and contributions to the field, this scholarship has not achieved the same recognition as the more recent strands of realism.⁶² However, Jonathan Kirchner prominently claimed that classical realism continues to be relevant as the superior realist approach to reflect on the uneasy relationship between the world's most powerful states, China and the U.S.⁶³ For Kirchner, classical realists recognize that hubris and arrogance often drive great-power behavior. Furthermore, according to him, the approach's "emphasis on uncertainty and contingency" is a more realistic starting point for the study of international affairs than structural realism's determinism.⁶⁴

Classical realism has also contributed to the analysis of the war in Ukraine. For Ross Smith and Dawson, both neoclassical and classical realism provide more complete explanations for Russia's invasion than its purely structural variant as both "can coherently marry material, ideational, and psychological factors into an overarching power-politics framework which can offer useful and convincing realist explanations for the Ukraine war."⁶⁵

The dynamics of great-power competition and the Ukraine war are naturally of relevance to any IR student, expert, and practitioner around the world, including, of course, the global South. To our mind, however, classical realism holds additional potential for the analysis of inter- and transnational dynamics from a global IR perspective. Despite the theory's interest in great-power politics, its ontology leaves a lot of room for human agency and is more flexible than other brands of realism.⁶⁶ Furthermore, while structural and neoclassical realism share a strong commitment to the dominant (neo)positivist methods and language (which many global IR scholars view with skepticism), classical realists have also expressed concerns about the excesses of positivism and the behavioral revolution in the social sciences.⁶⁷ Their sensitivity to the contextual and contingent elements of power politics hence facilitates drawing connections and blending with important strands of political thinking from all parts of the globe.

Apart from the ontological and epistemological proximity, we try to show in the following paragraphs that classical realism's theoretical core speaks directly to audiences in the global South. In fact, there is a common theme among classical realists and postcolonial scholarship,

⁶¹ Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, "Part Two: International Politics as a Struggle for Power," in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985): 23.

⁶² Felix Rösch, "Realism, the War in Ukraine, and the Limits of Diplomacy," *Analyse & Kritik* 44, no. 2 (2022): 209.

⁶³ Jonathan Kirchner, "The Tragedy of Offensive Realism: Classical Realism and the Rise of China," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 53-75; Kirchner, "Offensive Realism, Thucydides Traps, and the Tragedy of Unforced Errors: Classical Realism and US-China Relations," *China International Strategy Review* 1 (2019): 51-63.

⁶⁴ Kirchner, "Offensive Realism," 57.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Ross Smith and Grant Dawson, "Mearsheimer, Realism, and the Ukraine War," *Analyse & Kritik* 44, no. 2 (2022): 186.

⁶⁶ Robert Schuett, "The End of Open Society Realism?" *Analyse & Kritik* 44, no. 2 (2022): 220.

⁶⁷ Rösch, "Realism," 209.

both of which argue that great powers tend to act in immoral ways while planting universalist moral discourses to advance their selfish interests. In essence, both approaches tell audiences in the global South to be skeptical about great-power intentions and discourses, which try to hide their egoistic nature in a moralist language.

In E. H. Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis*, one of IR's most widely read foundational texts, the author delineates the conscious and unconscious mechanisms that dominant states apply to weaken other states' economic development, welfare, and power. As is well-known, in this book, Carr develops a realist critique of inter-war liberalism, which he polemically labels as idealism or utopianism, and its detachment from facts and reality. A large part of his critique is centered around the liberal discourse of a harmony of interest. According to Carr, "the utopian, when he preaches the doctrine of the harmony of interests, is innocently and unconsciously adopting Waleski's maxim, and clothing his own interest in the guise of a universal interest for the purpose of imposing it on the rest of the world."⁶⁸ Hence, "[t]he doctrine of the harmony of interests thus serves as an ingenious moral device invoked, in perfect sincerity, by privileged groups in order to justify and maintain their dominant position."⁶⁹ For Carr, the idea of a harmony of interests was intimately tied to the liberal doctrine of free trade and *laissez-faire* economics, which the industrialized countries sought to impose on the rest of the world. However, "this alleged international harmony of interests seemed a mockery to those underprivileged nations whose inferior status and insignificant stake in international trade were consecrated by it."⁷⁰

To substantiate the claim that the harmony of interests is not harmonious at all, Carr presents strong critiques of the *laissez-faire* discourse by the former Yugoslavian Foreign Minister, Vojislav Marinković⁷¹ (1924 and 1927-1932), and the Colombian President, Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938 and 1942-1945). Both intelligently express the sentiment and frustration of less-developed societies with the constant pressure they faced to apply free market policies, which, according to them, primarily served the interests of industrialized states and undermined their countries' economic and development goals.⁷²

Moreover, although Carr does not go as far as calling out individual writers or statesmen as racist, he takes on the racist, social Darwinist, and imperialist thinking prominent in the "idealist" discourse. According to Carr, the victims of imperialism and great-power politics are systematically depicted as inferior beings through racial theories:

In such theories, sexual abnormality and sexual offences are commonly imputed to the discredited race or group. Sexual depravity is imputed by the white American to the negro; by the white South African to the Kaffir; by the Anglo-Indian to the Hindu; and by the Nazi-German to the Jew. (...) Atrocity stories, among which offenses of a sexual character predominate, are the familiar product of war.⁷³

Carr further elucidates how the "utopians" used social Darwinism and notions of racial superiority to justify imperialist policies: "The doctrine of progress through the elimination of unfit nations seemed a fair corollary of the doctrine of progress through the elimination of

⁶⁸ E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1919-1939 (Palgrave MacMillan, [1939, 1946, 1981, 2001] 2016), 71. For example, Carr writes "Bismarck records the remark made to him by Waleski, the French Foreign Minister, in 1857, that it was the business of a diplomat to cloak the interests of his country in the language of universal justice." Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 69.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷¹ For a brief period, from April 4 to July 3, 1932, Marinković was also Yugoslavia's Prime Minister.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 54-6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 68.

unfit individuals; and some such belief, though not always openly avowed, was implicit in late nineteenth-century imperialism.”⁷⁴ According to him, “British writers of the past half-century have been particularly eloquent supporters of the theory that the maintenance of British supremacy is the performance of a duty to mankind.”⁷⁵ The author backs up his claim by direct quotes from Lord Garnet Wolseley, Cecil Rhodes, and Arnold Toynbee, among others.⁷⁶

Carr also demonstrates how the “utopians” increasingly relied on social Darwinism to defend the harmony of interests in light of imperialism and economic policies that only benefitted a few great powers. When it became evident that imperialism and liberal economics created a few winners and many losers, the “idealists” slightly adjusted their message: “The good of the community (or, as people were now inclined to say, of the species) was still identical with the good of individual members, but only those individuals who were effective competitors in the struggle for life.”⁷⁷ Hence, as long as European great powers could thrive and expand, the harmony of interests remained intact. However, as Carr maintains, it “was established through the sacrifice of ‘unfit’ Africans and Asiatics.”⁷⁸ Only after most of the world had been conquered and no additional colonies were left available to be invaded did the idea of a harmony of interests finally begin to fade.⁷⁹

The prior analysis leaves no doubt that, for Carr, the “idealist” discourse that justified imperialism was centered around racist and Darwinist ideas. Therefore, we strongly reject the claim that “E.H. Carr’s framing of the first debate invariably erases race from the disciplinary memory, giving us a racially sanitized version of IR.”⁸⁰

The relevance of early IR scholarship to audiences in the global South would be easier to dismiss if Carr were the only author exposing the hypocrisy and manipulative techniques of the powerful. Yet, other prominent scholars who laid the foundations of the discipline made similar claims. In his seminal work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr goes to great lengths to expose the hypocrisy of great powers, nations, classes, and other dominant groups. Like Carr, Niebuhr characterizes *laissez-faire* economics as exploitative, and outlines how great powers disguise their selfish interests behind a moral discourse: “No nation has ever made a frank avowal of its real imperial motives. It always claims to be primarily concerned with the peace and prosperity of the people whom it subjugates.”⁸¹ He is particularly critical of the Spanish-American war, which offered “some of the most striking illustrations of the hypocrisy of governments as well as of the self-deception of intellectuals.”⁸² According to Niebuhr, “Though the little junta, of which Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Lodge were the leaders, had carefully planned the campaign of war so that the Philippines would become ours, the fiction that the fortunes of war had made us the unwilling recipients and custodians of the Philippine Islands was quickly fabricated and exists to this day. We decided to keep

⁷⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71-73.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁸⁰ Peter Vale and Vineet Thakur, “IR and the Making of the White Man’s World,” in *International Relations from the Global South*, 59.

⁸¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Morality of Nations,” in *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 83-112.

⁸² Ibid.

the Philippines against their will at the conclusion of a war ostensibly begun to free the Cubans.”⁸³

Hans Morgenthau, arguably the most renowned classical realist, has elevated Carr and Niebuhr’s claim to one of the guiding principles of his theory. According to his fifth principle of political realism, his theory “refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe.”⁸⁴ In his explanation of the principle, Morgenthau asserts that

[a]ll nations are tempted—and few have been able to resist the temptation for long—to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe. (...) There is a world of difference between the belief that all nations stand under the judgment of God, inscrutable to the human mind, and the blasphemous conviction that God is always on one’s side.⁸⁵

Hence, in its very essence, classical realism is telling audiences in the global South to be skeptical of great powers’ moralist discourses, their intentions, and the conscious and unconscious mechanisms they use to trick them into applying policies that primarily favor industrialized nations. In this sense, the arguments developed by classical realists are strikingly similar to some of the core arguments expressed within postcolonial scholarship. For instance, in his presentation of postcolonialism as an approach to study global politics, Grovogui claims that “liberal and neoliberal institutionalist discourses often appear as rationalizations of hegemony disguised as universal humanism.”⁸⁶ Although it is important to recognize that postcolonialism goes much further in detailing “the techniques of power that constrain self-determinations,”⁸⁷ the core message is almost identical: great powers will do everything they can to advance their interests at the costs of others, while disguising their interests and actions in a moralist language and scientific facade. Hence, both bodies of scholarship agree that states, especially great powers, often act in immoral ways, and develop institutions, laws, and discourses that help them to obtain their goals and undermine weaker powers. A major difference between the two approaches arises in their normative ambitions. While postcolonialism aspires “to transform the international order and associated notions of community, society, and morality,”⁸⁸ realists are much more skeptical about such possibilities since history, for them, is a recurring quest for survival, power, and domination.

5. Final Thoughts

Are mainstream theories of IR, such as realism, a dominant and much-maligned perspective that embodies much of the problems prescribed by global IR, irrelevant? Our analysis attempted to show that realist perspectives are, in fact, sensitive to the issues of the global South, and that they hold assumptions about world politics that challenge the moral righteousness of powerful states and underscore some of the difficulties faced by states and peoples in the global South.

Despite realism’s tragic view of world politics, realist thinking has animated scholars to

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Morgenthau and Thompson, “Part Two,” 13.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Grovogui, “Postcolonialism,” in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 252.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 248.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

challenge the worst excesses of their governments and attempt to envision new and fairer systems of international peace, as in the cases of the academic resistance to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Waltz's advocacy of nuclear proliferation to avoid an interstate war.

Furthermore,

Classical realists for example highlighted the role of emotions in politics, warned of nationalism and the nation state and promoted global communities, they criticized the squandering of natural resources and urged to protect the environment, and classical realists also dismissed modern economies for their greed and for dehumanizing humans by seeing them simply as another resource.⁸⁹

Hence, as highlighted by Michael Cox, "realism might be better understood as a way of criticizing the uses and abuses of power by the powerful."⁹⁰

Critics will be quick to point out some of the recent deficiencies in the realist perspective, as notable realists like Mearsheimer have come under intense scrutiny due to the great-power bias that appears to blight realist thinking. Yet, while a particularly narrow reading of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* may seek to conceal the most egregious expressions of naked self-interest, a more enlightened and encompassing interpretation of realism can equally expose the hypocrisy of the great powers while reminding students and practitioners around the world about the unavoidable immanence of power. Crucial for scholarly and policy ends, however, is that the practitioner of realism must exercise impartiality and moral detachment with consistency and rigor, because while it is "a dangerous thing to be a Machiavelli; it is a disastrous thing to be a Machiavelli without *virtū*."⁹¹

Another possible critique of our argument may well point out that great-power politics remains realism's most important focus, and that homegrown theories as well as postcolonial scholarship are ultimately better equipped to make sense of the diverse realities of the global South. This is a fair point that we do not seek to dispute. Yet, it is noteworthy that strong warnings to policymakers and societies in the global South to be skeptical of great powers' moralist discourses can be found in the discipline's most influential foundational texts, a point that has gone largely unnoticed within the global IR community. Once again, we are not trying to argue that classical realism offers a superior analysis about the receiving end of great-power politics, but instead that it complements and reinforces some of postcolonialism's key premises, which should make them harder to dismiss. This is not a minor detail given that it is quite common for students, pundits, and policymakers in the global South to side with one of the great powers and repeat their moralist discourses.

Furthermore, it is likely that governments in the global South will increasingly be pressured to take sides in global power struggles and align with one of the great powers. This has led to renewed calls for "active non-alignment"⁹² as a way of maintaining autonomy and sovereignty for many small and midsize countries across the globe. However, such strategies can only be successful if many countries from the global South act as a coherent block. Both classical realism and postcolonialism are helpful in providing such positions with a solid theoretical foundation and have the potential to connect with different audiences in the policy world.

⁸⁹ Rösch, "Realism," 215.

⁹⁰ Michael Cox, "A New Preface from Michael Cox, 2016," in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, xvi.

⁹¹ Morgenthau, "The Political Science of E. H. Carr," *World Politics* 1, no. 1 (1948): 134.

⁹² Carlos Fortin, Jorge Heine, and Carlos Ominami, eds., *Latin American Foreign Policies in the New World: The Active Non-Alignment Option* (New York: Anthem Press, 2023).

Finally, we believe that drawing more systematic connections between classical realism and postcolonialism is an enterprise that is worth exploring. Postcolonialism provides convincing answers for many of the global South's problems by focusing on colonialism's shameful legacies and the diverse means through which actors from the global North maintain their dominant position in world politics. At the same time, postcolonialists acknowledge that not all of the difficulties and hardships of the global South are exclusively the fault of hegemonic states, be it because of the moral bankruptcy and corruption of postcolonial elites, or because beleaguered decision-makers have to sacrifice among a variety of competing priorities, threats, and expediencies. Through their focus on human nature, psychology, emotions, and inter/intra-group dynamics, classical realists provide additional introspection and clarity when addressing the intricacies of global South politics and offer interesting complementary answers as to why a genuine emancipation and moral transformation remains such a difficult endeavor. What classical realism lacks, however, is a coherent vision of how a viable future could look. As Carr has pointed out:

we cannot find a resting place in pure realism; for realism, though logically overwhelming, does not provide us with the springs of action which are necessary even to the pursuit of thought. (...) In politics, the belief that certain facts are unalterable or certain trends irresistible commonly reflects a lack of desire or interest to change or resist them. (...) Consistent realism excludes four things which appear to be essential ingredients of all effective political thinking: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action.⁹³

To our mind, postcolonialism and other strands of political thinking from the global South are well equipped to fill this void. While classical realism addresses the inherent tensions between power politics, clashes of interests, questions of legitimacy, and normative goals, postcolonialism represents an emancipatory approach to global politics, which must be part of the discussion about any of the world's most pressing problems.

What our discussion means for how IR should be taught or introduced to new students around the world is an issue that arguably cannot be resolved in any satisfactory way. We have great sympathy for scholars that are exploring new, innovative, and more global ways of teaching IR and world politics. At the same time, we have sought to show that some of the new approaches do not acknowledge the richness, diversity, and relevance of traditional IR theory to audiences in the global South. Hence, a global IR project that diminishes classical scholarship would be an impoverished IR, short of many valuable insights. Similarly, teaching IR without taking into consideration the numerous implications and insights of the global IR project would do a great disservice to students and professionals.

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⁹³ Carr, "Part Two," 84.

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