Western-Centric Moments in Homegrown IR Theories: Dependency, Chinese and African Schools

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Abstract

The modern international system has been shaped by long-standing historical practices of unequal power relations, which have positioned the Western world at the center of the political universe. Due to the centrality of the Global North in the international system, any IR theory that aims to portray a true picture of the "globe" necessarily situates the West at the center of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, the form of universality generated by Western hegemony has been diffused throughout the world over centuries, spreading Western political institutions, economic structures, and ideological norms in an uneven setting. As a result, the social structures of the Global South have developed through an uneven form of relationship and dialectical interaction with the West. Therefore, homegrown IR theories, which uncover local political, philosophical, or cultural motives as sources for theory-making, in fact, concentrate on stratified forms of the universal reality that is diffused through the uneven spread of Western social structures. In this sense, there is a Western-centric moment in any homegrown IR theory. Accordingly, this article develops a scientific realist account of the structure/agent relationship in order to analyze the material grounds of Western-centrism in the field of international politics and to evaluate the role of non-Western actors. Additionally, it critically evaluates distinctive homegrown theories produced on three different continents to reveal the aforementioned Western-centric moments in these theoretical initiatives. Namely, the Dependency School of Latin America, the Chinese School of International Relations, and the African School are respectively scrutinized to disclose the embedded Western-centrism in these theoretical initiatives.

Keywords: Western-centrism, Scientific Realism, Dependency School, Chinese School, African School

1. Introduction

Globalizing IR has predominantly evolved into an effort to raise the voices of peripheries and seek their "unique" experiences as a source for theory-making.[1] Thus, the main endeavor to globalize IR has been focused on developing homegrown IR theories emanating from different corners of the political universe.[2] In order to globalize IR, as Buzan and Little

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[1] Ersel Aydınlı and Gonca Biltekin, "Introduction: Widening the World of IR," in *Widening the World of International Relations: Homegrown Theorizing*, eds. Ersel Aydınlı and Gonca Biltekin (London: Routledge, 2018), 2.
[2] Pınar Akgül, "Non-Western International Relations Theories," in *Critical Approaches to International Relations: Philosophical Foundations and Current Debates*, eds. M. Kürşad Özekin and Engin Sune (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 217-239.

state,[3] "much more needs to be known about the development of international relations in the different regions…" By revealing how colonial practices influenced knowledge production in the social sciences, post-colonial studies[4] have endeavored to present the perspectives and agential capacity of the post-colonial world. Furthermore, from Latin America to Africa, from Anatolia to China, various efforts have been expended to challenge Western-centrism by developing a homegrown IR theory.

Despite these efforts, there is still no advanced homegrown theory that succeeded in replacing the hegemony of Western-centric IR approaches with an alternative understanding of international politics. In their perennial study aimed at "introducing non-Western IR traditions to a Western audience," Acharya and Buzan[5] ended up questioning why there is no non-Western theory. As Tickner, Wæver, and Blaney stated,[6] in the distinct regions of the world, the study of IR does not seem much different from the mainstream IR theories. Despite Chinese IR scholars' call for a new and distinctive theoretical opening in IR, as noted by Peng,[7] the Chinese School failed to produce a viable alternative to Western-centric concepts. In her analysis of theoretical innovations from Africa, Smith[8] articulates that, for a better comprehension of IR, homegrown theories do not need to be completely different from mainstream IR theories.

Indeed, not all non-Western approaches in IR strive to overthrow Western-centric perspectives. For some, the objective of homegrown theories is to pluralize or globalize the conceptual universe of IR, which is overwhelmingly dominated by Western ideas. For instance, Peng underlines that the Chinese School should establish an efficient communication with Western IR to achieve a scientific output.[9] In this setting, the intent of homegrown theories is not to supplant Western-centric theories, but rather to resolve their shortcomings through a mutual learning process. In a similar vein, in their analysis of the Chinese School, Nielsen and Kristensen[10] state that Chinese scholars blend Western-centric IR with Chinese IR knowledge, resulting in a hybrid theory that integrates local and global, or particular and universal. Nonetheless, not all homegrown theorists attempt to complete or globalize Western-centric IR theories. As Peng emphasizes, some Chinese scholars endeavor to replace Western-centrism in IR with Sino-centrism.[11] Likewise, Demir asserts that Chinese scholars reject Western ontology and epistemology, aiming to replace them with Chinese ones.[12]

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[3]   Barry Buzan and Richard Little, "World History and the Development of non-Western International Relations Theory," in *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia,* eds. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (New York: Routledge, 2010), 214.

[4]   Chowdhry Geeta and Nair Sheila, "Introduction: Power in a Postcolonial World: Race, Gender, and Class, International Relations." in *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class,* eds. Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-32; Siba N. Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Sanjay Seth, *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[5]   Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western IR Theories.*

[6]   Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver, eds., *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Arlene B. Tickner and David Blaney, eds., *Thinking International Relations Differently* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[7]   Lu Peng, "Chinese IR Sino-centrism tradition and its influence on the Chinese School Movement," *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 2 (2019): 151.

[8]   Karen Smith, "Reshaping international relations: theoretical innovations from Africa," in *Widening the* World, 143.

[9]   Peng, "Chinese IR Sino-centrism," 151.

[10]   Ras Tin Nielsen and Peter Marcus Kristensen, "You need to do something that the Westerners cannot understand: The innovation of a Chinese school of IR," in *Chinese Politics and International Relations: Innovation and Invention,* eds. Nicola Horsburgh, Astrid Nordin, and Shaun Breslin (London: Routledge, 2014), 97-118.

[11]   Peng, "Chinese IR Sino-centrism," 150-167.

[12]   Emre Demir, "Chinese School of International Relations: Myth or Reality?" *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 6, no. 2 (2017): 98.

This study, on the other hand, contends that developing a radically distinct homegrown theory devoid of Western-centrism entails structural limitations. By employing a scientific realist account of the international structure, this article aims to reveal material foundations of Western-centrism within the discipline of IR. Throughout the study, it is asserted that Western-centrism is unescapable to a certain extent, since the West is positioned at the center of the political universe. The argument is presented that the "international" has been formed by enduring historical practices of unequal power relations executed by Western actors. However, this standpoint does not validate Ken Booth's argument that if IR as a discipline had been founded not in Wales but somewhere in Africa, the understanding of the discipline would markedly differ.[13] On the contrary, this study contends that the Western-centrism of IR is not based on the ideational primacy or supremacy of the West over the rest, but rather on the central role of the Global North within the material foundations of the international system.

Due to this centrality, any IR theory that aims to portray a true picture of the "globe" inevitably situates the West at the center of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, the form of universality generated by Western hegemony has diffused Western political institutions, economic structures, as well as cultural and ideological norms across the world over centuries. As a result, the social structures of the Global South have developed through an uneven form of relationship and dialectical interaction with the West. Therefore, theorizing the "international" emerges as an initial objective and a fundamental prerequisite for the endeavors of globalizing the IR discipline.

A closer examination of non-Western approaches exposes that they reproduce Western-centric concepts and theories to a certain extent. Bilgin[14] reduces this phenomenon to a mimicry process occurring between West and non-West. She posits that non-Western IR conceptualizations are not devoid of Western theories, since Western and non-Western experiences have been blended over centuries.[15] This study, on the other hand, with its scientific realist understanding of the globe, asserts that it is the structure/agent relationship that fuses Western concepts and theories into the conceptual framework of non-Western theories. This, in turn, generates an inherent Western-centric moment in any homegrown theory.

To uncover the mechanisms functioning behind these "Western-centric" moments in homegrown IR theories, the following section analyzes the structure-agent relationship in IR from a scientific realist perspective. The historical materialist understanding of the structure puts forth why IR as a scientific field cannot elude Western-centrism, given that the modern international system is formed and dominated by the Global North. However, this does not automatically imply that homegrown IR theories are incapable of broadening and deepening the conceptual framework and vocabulary of IR. In this sense, the concept of "agency," as conceived by Roy Bhaskar, is examined to demonstrate that the nature of the "international," which is dominated by the West, is stratified and variegates in different geographies due to the strategic activities of the actors in the Global South. In order to reveal the unique contributions, as well as Western-centric moments in non-Western IR theories, this study scrutinizes three theoretical initiatives originating in three distinct continents. The

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[13] Ken Booth, "Human Wrongs and International Relations," *International Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1995): 103-126.
[14] Pınar Bilgin, "Thinking Past Western IR?" *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 5-23.
[15] Ibid., 6.

Dependency School, the Chinese and the African Schools of IR are analyzed to illustrate that while these schools are capable of enriching the vocabulary of IR by revealing the stratified forms of social reality experienced in their continents, they are still not devoid of Western-centric moments.

2. Stratified Forms of International and Western-Centric Moments in Homegrown Theories

In the last three decades, tremendous effort has been made to globalize the IR discipline through the various branches of critical and homegrown theories. Still, there is no consensus either on the origins of or on the potential paths to transcend Western-centrism. Western-centrism in IR generally refers to the fact that the discipline has been formulated in alignment with the problems, concepts, language, agenda, and policies of the West.[16] Within this context, Western institutions and intellectuals have acquired the ability to define the scope and content of the field, thereby excluding experiences, perspectives, and interpretations from the non-Western world in the IR discipline and theorizing.[17] Western-centric IR theories consider the West and Western civilization as the sole, superior, and ideal reference object of the international field. Within this setting, the Western world is exalted through values such as rationality, science, progress, development, and universality, while any alternative/critical perspectives are suppressed under the guise of objectivity.[18] Any perspective or alternative conceptualization that fails to align with the Western criteria finds itself marginalized within the field of IR. Thus, the discipline's agenda, focal geographical areas, and omitted subjects in theoretical analysis have all been shaped by unequal power relations dominated by the West. The dominant narratives concerning the history of the discipline, the myths propagated by hegemonic theories, and the ontological reduction of IR to the power relations between states have collectively limited the scope of alternative theoretical possibilities and perpetuated Western-centrism in IR.

This study, on the other hand, places the structure-agent debate in IR at the forefront, aiming to recognize and criticize the material underpinnings of Western-centrism within the field. In this context, the study introduces scientific realism's conceptualization of structure,[19] since it facilitates the analysis and critique of the "material" foundations of Western dominance within the IR discipline and global politics by revealing that Western-centrism is not solely rooted in ideational factors. This study sets this fact on the basis of the inherently Western-centric moments present in non-Western IR theories.

Bhaskar defines social structures as generative mechanisms that condition social practices.[20] In this sense, social structures are a collection of settled social relations, with their political, economic, and ideological dimensions, which determine the observable activities of agents. Therefore, conceptualizing the form of the structure stands as the primary objective in comprehending any social practice. In other words, social structures determine

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[16] Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International.*

[17] Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism,* 6.

[18] Faruk Yalvaç, "Karl Marx: Marksizm ve Uluslararası Tarihsel Sosyoloji," in *Tarihsel Sosyoloji ve Uluslararası İlişkiler*, ed. Faruk Yalvaç (Ankara: Nika 2017), 40.

[19] Faruk Yalvaç, "Eleştirel Gerçekçilik: Uluslararası İlişkiler Kuramında Post-Pozitivizm Sonrası Aşama," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 6, no. 24 (2010): 3-32.

[20] Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1989).

the characteristics of the world that we interact with. As Marx stated,[21] "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past." In this sense, social structures have the capacity to either enable or limit certain occurrences. For example, while the global structure enables the smooth spread of Western social norms, it curtails the capacity of the Global South to determine the course of global politics. Given that social structures determine the activities of agents, the international structure should be conceptualized as the determining factor and generative mechanism that dictates how states interact.

As Joseph states,[22] even though social structures depend on human activity to reproduce themselves, they still have an objective existence independent of how agents conceptualize them. In this regard, this materialist conceptualization differs significantly from the intersubjective understanding of structure advocated by conventional constructivists.[23] In the constructivist formulation, the "structure is meaningless without some intersubjective set of norms and practices…"[24] In reality, this ideational definition provides more room for homegrown theories in IR, because if "structure" is conceptualized as an intersubjective reality, then it is meaningful and possible to overcome Western-centrism merely at the ideational or theoretical level. According to the materialist interpretation, on the other hand, since Western-centrism in the international system is founded on enduring historical/material grounds, IR theory cannot challenge it only by questioning Western-centric theories. Undoubtedly, this point of view does not preclude the capacity of critical theories to question existing power relations at the ideational level or to interrogate the dominance of Western-centric theories at the theoretical level. In fact, the materialist interpretation of structure by uncovering the underlying material foundations of Western-centrism affords critical theory the capacity to transcend the confines of Western-centric theories. In this regard, by questioning the underpinnings of existing social and power relations, critical theories have established the framework for efforts aimed at globalizing the IR discipline. For instance, the Dependency School, through its critique of the exclusive focus of the mainstream theories on the core capitalist countries, has expanded the horizons of the discipline, shifting the attention of scholars to the peripheral regions. In a similar vein, by revealing the unequal global division of labor and the hierarchical structure of the international system, the World Systems Theory not only challenged Western-centric IR theories' conceptualization of anarchy, but also stood as one of the significant endeavors in the process of globalizing the discipline. In a comparable manner, through criticizing colonialism and revealing the agential capacity of the Global South, post-colonial theory has radically challenged Western-centrism at the theoretical level. However, in this materialist conceptualization, contrary to its ideational definitions, the international structure is formed through long-standing historical practices of unequal power relations, generating durable constraints and incentives for agents in the international system. Moreover, the domestic sphere in the Global South is formed through its interaction with the international. In this regard, seeking domestic political, philosophical, or cultural motives as sources for homegrown theory-making is misleading, since these

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[21] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: Die Revolution, 1852).

[22] Jonathan Joseph, "Hegemony and the Structure-Agency problem in International Relations: A Scientific Realist Contribution," *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 110.

[23] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[24] Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 173.

elements engage in a dialectical relationship with international structures. Therefore, a closer examination of homegrown theories reveals that while they apply to the domestic sources for theory-making, they still, to a certain extent, reproduce the premises of mainstream Western-centric IR theories.

In this sense, IR is a Western-centric discipline not only due to the dominance of Western-centric theories, but also due to the centrality of the West within the international system. In other words, the modern international system is constructed upon imperialist, exploitative, and unequal forms of relationships predominantly controlled by the Global North, positioning the West at the center of the political universe. As Joseph maintains,[25] the hegemon has a central role in the reproduction of social structures, since it has a mediatory role between the structure and agent. The Western-centrism of IR theories is primarily established on Western hegemony, which holds the ability to dictate the content of the international system. Therefore, any IR theory aiming to portray a true picture of international politics cannot neglect the centrality of the West within the global structure. As Tadjbakhsh states,[26] "the search for non-Western IR theories needs to both recognize the context of Gramscian hegemony of so-called universally accepted systems of knowledge as well as the current international political order and the discourses it has given rise to." This also implies that as long as Western hegemony prevails, challenges to the dominance of Western-oriented social structures and Western-centric theories are very limited given the fact that Western actors set the social reality of the political universe. In other words, as long as the content of the current international structure is determined by the Western actors, these uneven power relations may reflect themselves in theory-making, casting IR as a Western enterprise. Indeed, critical theories have made significant contributions to the efforts of globalizing the IR discipline by engendering an intensive interrogation of Western-centrism. The explication of the stratified characteristic of the international system, wherein the hierarchical structure burgeons under the dominance of the Western countries, stands as an ontological challenge to the established paradigms in IR. The proposition that Western-centrism is not established merely on an intersubjective reality but rests upon the position of the West within the hierarchical global order also stands as an epistemological challenge to mainstream and post-positivist theories' understanding of structure. Additionally, critical theories contest Western-centrism by propounding perspectives, experiences, and agential capacity of the non-Western world. In this regard, overcoming Western-centrism does not necessitate developing an IR theory that abandons analysis of the centrality of the West at the international. On the contrary, the Bhaskarian formulation of the structure reveals that the substantive essence of the international system has been formed around enduring historical, material, and ideational factors that positioned the West at the center. Therefore, developing a non-Western IR theory to globalize the discipline does not inherently entail abolishing the centrality of the West at the theoretical level. In this regard, as long as Western hegemony and its privileged status in the international structure sustain, homegrown IR theories should consider this centrality and the form of universality it creates, which generates a Western-centric moment in every IR theory.

The radical influence of the Western-centric international structure on global social

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[25]   Joseph, "Hegemony and the Structure-Agency," 110.
[26]   Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "International Relations Theory and the Islamic Worldview," in *Non-Western International Relations Theory Perspectives on and beyond Asia*, eds. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (New York: Routledge, 2010), 176.
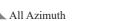
relations does not imply that actors have no choice but to adhere to the directives originating from the structure, as neorealism posits. For neo-realists, states as the actors of the international system passively adapt themselves to the dynamics of the international structure, granting states no ontological status or agential power.[27] Neorealism posits that structures are not products of the interactions among the units, but rather by-products of their unintended actions.[28] In contrast, in the scientific realist formulation, "since structures are the reproduced outcome of human activity then the possibility exists not merely of reproducing but of transforming them."[29] Although the international structure sets the stage for agents to interact, and determines the rules of their interaction, agents have the capacity and are always in motion to shape, change, and mold the forces emanating from the international structure. Therefore, while the hegemony of the Global North over the international structure facilitates the diffusion of Western political, economic, and ideological norms throughout the globe, the form of universality generated by this diffusion takes different national forms due to the strategic activities of actors in distant geographies. In other words, the dialectical relationship between the universal and the local creates a metamorphic form of universality in various national spheres.

In this regard, any IR theory that considers the West and its social structures as the ideal reference point for analyzing the rest of the world will fall short of achieving a global theory, as the globe itself is an uneven structure. Within this framework, the Western form of political institutions, ideologies, and institutional structures varies due to the strategic activities of agents. However, any theory that does not concentrate on the West may also overlook the fact that the form of the international structure is predominantly shaped by the Western states, and this structure, as a generative mechanism, influences all social formations. Hence, any homegrown IR theory that aims to transcend Western-centrism must inevitably commence with an analysis of the West to present an accurate depiction of IR. However, the construction of the international structure under the hegemony of Western states does not mandate that IR solely concentrates on great powers, as mainstream IR theories often do. Although the dominance of Western states in the formation and reproduction of the international structure is an undeniable fact, it is crucial not to overlook the contributions of other societies to this setting. From this perspective, in understanding and theorizing international relations, the political struggles within colonies hold as much significance as the impact of Western colonialism. This broader perspective goes beyond the agency conceptualization found in the mainstream IR theories that solely concentrate on great powers, thus perpetuating Western-centric views within the discipline. Therefore, the exposure of the agential capacity of the non-Western world, as discussed within homegrown theories, represents a substantial contribution to the endeavor of challenging Western-centrism and globalizing IR. Additionally, as universality is stratified and variegated in different geographies, homegrown IR theories have the potential to globalize IR by exploring the dominance of the West on the international structure and its impact on different geographies. They are also valuable in revealing the hierarchical global structure and diversified global reality in distant geographies. In this regard, by revealing the centrality of the West, scientific realism's conceptualization of structure-agent dialectics is worthwhile for understanding Western-centrism in IR, and homegrown theories have the

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[27]   John M. Hobson, "Realism," in *The State and International Relations* (New York: Cambridge, 2003), 24.
[28]   David Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (1989): 450.
[29]   Joseph, "Hegemony and the Structure-Agency," 118.

potential to overcome Western-centrism by exploring how this universality takes different forms in various geographies as a result of the strategic actions of the agents. These elements are highly observable in distinct homegrown IR theories as they are scrutinized below.

3. Contributions of the Dependency School and its Western-Centric Moments

Since the Dependency School originated from outside the IR discipline, it does not actively engage in direct dialogue with Western-centric mainstream IR theories, such as Realism and Idealism. Instead, its central focus is on scrutinizing the underdevelopment of the third world and critically examining its relevance within the context of Western dominance in global political and economic relations. Therefore, the primary objective of the Dependency School is not to formulate a non-Western IR theory, rendering any evaluation of its success in this regard misguided. Moreover, as the premises of the Dependency School have been developed by theoretical contributions from various distinct geographies and disciplines, it is challenging to categorize it as a pure homegrown theory. However, being one of the first theories to interrogate global inequalities, the North-South divide, and the functioning mechanism of the international system, it has not only questioned Western-centrism but also acted as a source for homegrown theories. As indicated below, both the Chinese and African Schools of IR have been inspired by the theoretical deliberations of the Dependency School. Since the Dependency School has had a great impact in other underdeveloped parts of the world, it warrants substantial attention in this study.

Dependency studies,[30] which emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, drew the attention of IR scholars to global inequalities and asymmetrical power relations, establishing the first theoretical corpus that problematized the dominance of the West within the global structure. The most pivotal contribution of the Dependency School lies in its criticism of liberal modernization theories, which take the developmental level of the West as an ideal reference object and present the economic-political structures of the West as a model for the rest of the world.[31] The Dependency School also argues that both traditional Marxist theories and studies of imperialism are Western-centric.[32] It maintains that Marxist theories reproduce the discourse of stages of development present in modernization debates and analyze capitalism by concentrating on Western cases, especially that of Britain. Dependency theorists have also criticized Marxist imperialism theories for focusing only on the relations between the core capitalist states,[33] similar to how Western-centric theories solely concentrate on super powers. Thus, the Dependency School advocates a theoretical initiative that focuses on global social relations rather than exclusively on relations between core countries. With this initiative, the focus of IR began shifting from the interactions among developed Western states to the unequal relationships between the core and periphery. In this respect, by emphasizing differences among states, unequal global economic relations, and underdevelopment, the Dependency School holds a pioneering status within the IR discipline as one of the first theoretical initiatives that originated directly from the Global South.[34]

The Dependency School, which has garnered a substantial audience across the

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[30] Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968); Andre Gunder Frank, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).

[31] Cristobal Kay, *Latin American Theories of Development and Underdevelopment* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[32] Ronaldo Munck, "Dependency and Imperialism in the New Times: A Latin American Perspective," *European Journal of Development Research* 11, no. 1 (1999): 56-74.

[33] M. Kürşad Özekin, "The Achievements of Dependency Approach as a Critical IR Theory," in *Critical Approaches*, 70-94.

[34] Ibid., 74.

Global South, has broadened the theoretical capacity of IR by expanding the discursive and spatial perception within the discipline. By directing scholars' attention to the legacy and continuity of colonialism, the Dependency School has highlighted the importance of political economy, in contrast to Western-centric IR theories' exclusive focus on security-related issues. The emphasis on core-periphery relations, revolving around political interventions, economic exploitation, and other forms of uneven relationships, has enabled the Dependency School to acknowledge the material foundations of Western-centrism in the IR field. By revealing that both development and underdevelopment are products of a single process in which the West progressed through the dispossession of the rest, dependency theorists have demonstrated that Western-centrism in the world is rooted in material factors like trade and production.[35] In other words, according to the Dependency School, Western-centrism is not based on the ideological superiority or theoretical hegemony of the West. Instead, this theoretical dominance by the West stems from enduring historical practices of asymmetrical power relations imposed by the core. In this sense, homegrown theories face significant constraints in challenging Western-centrism unless the centrality of the Global North in the international economic and political system is denounced radically.

Despite this first theoretical challenge, the Dependency School has had a limited direct impact on overcoming Western-centrism in IR. As previously indicated, since the Dependency School did not originate from the IR discipline, it has not engaged in a direct dialogue with the Western-centric mainstream IR theories. Therefore, the Dependency School theorists did not aim to formulate a homegrown theory with the competence to challenge Western-centrism in IR. Furthermore, even though Dependency theorists have directed IR's attention towards core-periphery relations, they also concentrate on a singular category of periphery and core. This parallels the mainstream IR theories' emphasis on a single type of actor (i.e., the great powers), which overlooks the divisions within both core and periphery countries themselves.

Apart from these shortcomings, the Dependency School is inclined towards Western-centric moments in its analysis of the "international." Even though the Dependency School takes the "world economy" as a unit of analysis to present an accurate depiction of the "international," its analysis inevitably shifts towards examining the great powers, given that the governance of global capitalism is orchestrated by the Western core capitalist countries. In this sense, the material foundation of Western-centrism within the "international" system gives rise to Western-centric moments in Dependency studies. These instances of Western-centric moments also hinder the Dependency School from offering a comprehensive account on peripheries. As Martin[36] states, the Dependency School's emphasis on concepts such as global trade relations and production chains, which are developed through analyzing the economies of core countries, faces difficulties in explaining the social reality in countries where wage labor is not as developed as in the West.

Furthermore, the Dependency School reproduces the modern/traditional dichotomy of modernization theories under the rubric of the core/periphery or capitalist/precapitalist dichotomy. Even though the Dependency School underlines that the rise of the West should

[35] Andre Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," in *Sociological Worlds Comparative and Historical Readings on Society*, ed. Stephen K. Sanderson, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 135-141.
[36] William G. Martin, "The World-Systems Perspective in Perspective: Assessing the Attempt to Move Beyond Nineteenth-Century Eurocentric Conceptions," *Review* 17, no. 2 (1994): 160.

not be sought in the elements unique to Europe, the categories of core and periphery do not contribute to the efforts of overcoming Western-centrism. Detecting that the rise of the West is rooted in global dynamics rather than its internal factors does not go beyond uncovering the "Eastern origins of Western-centrism," which strives to discover the East's role in the rise of the West.[37] In this sense, the Dependency School problematizes the negligence of contributions from the periphery to the core's development, rather than questioning the West's centrality in the international system. Anievas and Nişancıoğlu state that in this formulation, "social transformations from the 16th century onwards are understood in the Eurocentric terms of linear developmentalism," wherein "the West is … presented as the pioneering creator of modernity, and the East as a regressive … entity that is incapable of capitalist self-generation."[38] The Dependency School also examines the history of the non-Western world by integrating it into the history of the West, reproducing the Western-centric historiography of IR. However, this is mainly a reflection of the material centrality of the Global North in the international system, which fosters a Western-centric moment in non-Western IR theories.

Despite these limitations, Dependency studies have significantly contributed to broadening the scope of IR by revealing how the centrality of the West in the international system generates a variegated form of reality in the non-Western world. In this sense, through its analysis of the non-Western world, the Dependency School was able to demonstrate that the "universal modernity" of the West is established on "underdeveloping" the rest. Even though the Dependency School perceives non-Western agents as primarily passive which is subjected to the control by the core, it explores the contributions of these passive agents to the development of the modern international system.

4. The Chinese School's Pursuit of a Counter-Hegemonic Theory and its Western-Centric Moments

The current efforts to develop a Chinese School of IR date back to the 2000s. Even though Marxism had been the dominant paradigm to analyze international politics since the communist revolution of 1949, with Deng Xiaoping's reformative and opening-up policies, American and English IR theories gained popularity as well. As stated by Wang,[39] "internationalism with class struggle as the guiding principle before reform and opening-up has been replaced since the 1980s by rationalism with national interests at the center." Since the 2000s, when China started to challenge U.S. domination in the discipline and international politics as the world started to transform from single-centeredness to multi-centeredness, calls for the formation of a Chinese School of IR have become more widespread.[40] Since then, an IR theory with Chinese characteristics began to be formed mostly around the concepts of peace, harmony, and sovereignty. As indicated by Liu,[41] terms of equality, common development, and a harmonious world have become the key concepts in Chinese IR studies.

To this extent, the main motivation behind the establishment of a Chinese School of IR

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[37] See; John M. Hobson, *Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[38] Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, "The Transition Debate: Theories and Critique," in *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 17.

[39] Yiwei Wang, "China, between copying and constructing," in *International Relations Scholarship around the World,* eds. Arlene B.Tickner and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2009), 106.

[40] Xiao Ren, "Grown from within: Building a Chinese School of International Relations," *The Pacific Review* 33, no. 3 (2020): 388.

[41] Yongtao Liu, "Security theorizing in China Culture, evolution and social practice," in *Thinking International Relations Differently*, eds. by Arlene Tickner and David Blaney (London: Routledge, 2012), 84.

was to develop a systemic IR theory that serves China's national interest.[42] The primary objective was to show that China's ascent is peaceful and will bring a harmonious world structure. It was believed that the prevailing Western-centric IR theories failed to explain China's true intentions and portrayed its rise as a threat to the existing balances in the international system. Thus, Chinese scholars endeavored to formulate an IR theory capable of explaining China's foreign policy practice, rooted in the principles of peace and harmony. However, this does not imply that Chinese scholars totally rejected Western theories; instead, they sought to create a theory without directly absorbing the existing theoretical studies. Thus, they engaged in a constant dialogue and exchange with Western-centric theories to glean insights from others' knowledge, with the hope that "Western theories dominating the world of IR theory will hopefully be altered and a healthy Chinese alternative perspective may emerge."[43]

Based on these motivations, a Chinese IR theory that is grounded on Chinese questions, norms, and practices has begun forming. In pursuit of this, Chinese scholars have turned to the teachings of Confucius, which had waned in popularity during the Cultural Revolution.[44] Leveraging this new Confucianism, several conceptual capacities have been developed to explain Chinese IR theory. One of the most well-known of such concepts is the Chinese worldview of Tianxia,[45] which suggests that all people in the world live under the same heaven; therefore, they are united as sisters and brothers. This notion of Tianxia is based on the belief that human nature is benevolent, reminiscent of Idealism.[46] The Tianxia understanding posits an ontology of coexistence and seeks to reveal the feasibility of a harmonious and peaceful world.[47] Through the concept of Tianxia, Chinese scholars aim to overcome Western conceptualizations of "enemies vs friends." With its principle of "all-inclusivity," Chinese scholars wish to demonstrate that the world system is founded on an ontology of coexistence.[48] Parallel to the Dependency School, Tianxia theory concentrates on the system level, rather than the national level, asserting that people are united above national borders. Tianxia, therefore, transcends internationality and develops a political principle of worldness.[49] In this case, unlike the Realist conceptualizations of IR that envision a constant conflict among the units of international politics, the Chinese theory of Tianxia emphasizes a harmony between individuals and states.

In close contact with the concept of peaceful coexistence, Chinese scholars have also developed the "relational theory of world politics." In this paradigm, diverging from the individual rationality of Western-centric theories, the Chinese School brings forward the logic of relation. According to them, international politics is a realm of interrelated elements, which in turn transforms actors into "actors in relation," given that their actions are guided by their relations in the first place.[50] This position relocates the level of analysis from the state

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[42] Ren, "Grown from within," 389.

[43] Ibid., 392.

[44] Liu, "Security theorizing in China," 72.

[45] Zhao Tingyang, *All Under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order,* trans. Josephy E. Harroff, (California: University of California Press, 2021).

[46] See; Ken Booth, "Navigating the Absolute Novum': John H. Herz's Political Realism and Political Idealism," *International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2008): 510-526.

[47] Tingyang, *All Under Heaven*, 4.

[48] Ren, "Grown from within," 404.

[49] Zhao Tingyang, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-Under-Heaven' (Tian-xia)," *Social Identities* 12, no. 1 (2006): 29-41.

[50] Ren, "Grown from within," 399.

to the relations themselves. Therefore, Chinese theorists assert that ideational, institutional, material, and identity-related differences are not really relevant in international politics, as relations are based predominantly on reciprocity and harmony.

Another corollary of the efforts to generate a Chinese School of IR is seen in the concept of "moral realism." This approach, while rejecting the Realist notion of Machiavellian morality, underlines the importance of rulers' moral actions. In other words, according to the Chinese School, rulers' actions should be guided by moral principles.[51] Even though this approach accepts the Realist notions of power and interest, it delves into the role of morality in becoming a real international power. Therefore, Chinese IR scholars underline the role of political leadership and national power as crucial components of moral realism. Based on this understanding, Chinese scholars concentrate on China's golden age from 770 to 222 BC to draw policy lessons for China's recent rise. For them, the success of a rising power lies in its capacity to act morally and in accordance with its strategic reputation, as these factors contribute to the international political power of states. Consequently, it is argued that the new world order, wherein China might rise as a new power, will be built on principles of equality, justice, and civility, as Chinese leaders will act morally instead of solely based on their limited national self-interests.

Chinese IR theorists also critique the Western conceptualizations of actors as selfish entities seeking their limited interests and searching for power. In contrast to this conceptualization, Chinese scholars advanced symbiotic theory, underscoring the diversity of actors. Rather than portraying the state with a fixed and eternal identity, the symbiotic theory adopts a pluralistic worldview where multiple values, cultures, and habits coexist.[52] While the Realist theory envisages a single type of actor constantly in conflict with others, symbiotic theory envisions diverse actors coexisting peacefully on the basis of equality. In this setting, the size and power of states lose their importance, as each distinct actor occupies an appropriate place within the international setting. Within this "multiple worlds" perspective, actors engage in constructive interactions for a mutual benefit.[53]

Since Chinese symbiotic thinking acknowledges and respects differences among identities, cultures, and civilizations, the concept of sovereignty emerges as an integral component of the Chinese IR theory. As indicated by Wang,[54] "the principle of non-interference is seen as more central by Chinese scholars than by most in the West, a view that China advocates in international relations." The Chinese School's support for the Westphalian sovereign state system has been reflected on several occasions when China objected to or vetoed practices of humanitarian intervention. In the symbiotic theory, all the actors with different identities have equal rights to determine their own domestic policies and national development strategies. In this sense, the Chinese School supposes an international sphere where interstate disputes are dealt with on the basis of sovereign equality, without intervening in the internal affairs of other states.[55]

Despite these theoretical contributions and innovations, it is still possible to detect a Western-centric moment in the Chinese School of IR as well. As stated by Nielsen and

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[51] Liu, "Security theorizing in China," 75.
[52] Ren, "Grown from within," 405.
[53] Ibid., 406.
[54] Wang, "China, between copying," 106.
[55] Liu, "Security theorizing in China," 82.

Kristensen,[56] despite its quasi-Marxist conception of history and critique of the Western conceptual framework, there is no pure Chinese theory that is completely free of Western elements. In several cases, for instance, it is possible to come across liberal premises when scrutinizing the Chinese School. When discussing the concept of anarchy, Chinese theorists embrace a position similar to liberal thinking. They see international law, international norms, and international institutions as generating a sort of order in the international system, which transforms international society into a more peaceful environment.[57] Along with the emphasis on sovereignty, this multilateral worldview envisions joint governance of the "international" through inter-state cooperation. The difference between the Western-centric use of these concepts and the way that they are reformulated by Chinese scholars is mostly based on their philosophical starting points. Feger,[58] for instance, disputes the connection between Kantian and Confucian concepts and strives to reveal the radical differences between the Western universalism of Kant and the Eastern universalism of Confucius. For the author, while the Kantian universalism and ethics are based on an individualistic ontology, the Confucian tradition of Tianxia envisions a relational system derived from responsibility and care.[59] However, when the author analyzes the political impact of these different philosophical roots, he states that Tianxia generates moral behavior in political action, which is the basis of a harmonious universal social order. The Machiavellian morality of Realism has been criticized by liberals in a very similar tone,[60] asserting that there is a universal morality in democratic state affairs, which prevents the constant conflict in international politics. The concept of a "peaceful rise" also indicates that liberalism is infused in the Chinese School of IR.[61] In the Confucian thinking of Chinese IR scholars, states can cooperate to generate mutual benefit in a harmonious world structure. This evokes the liberal conceptualizations of security, which discredit unilateral security arrangements and attach importance to coordination in security policies.[62] Therefore, when non-Western philosophical discussions are transmitted to the IR discipline, they do not automatically generate an alternative non-Western theory.

In this sense, the original contributions by the Chinese School end up with similar claims as those proposed by liberalism. As stated by Liu,[63] there is a "flavor of idealism" in the Chinese School of IR, as ontologically, Confucianism is also based on the assumption that human nature is benevolent. In this sense, for the Chinese School, harmony and progression are possible in the international arena. Moreover, imprints of behaviorism can be traced within the "scientization" debate in the Chinese School. As Ren indicates,[64] the School aims to develop a "third culture" of social science that integrates humanistic and scientific approaches. The humanistic position adopts the post-positivistic vision of intersubjective reality that underscores the geo-cultural aspects of social theory. Within this framework, differences among experiences, habits, and ways of thinking generate different perspectives, which makes a Chinese theory not only possible, but also inevitable. The scientific approach, on the other hand, reflects the infusion of American behaviorism in the Chinese

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[56] Nielsen and Kristensen, "You need to do something," 100.
[57] Ren, "Grown from within," 393.
[58] Hans Feger, "Universalism vs. 'All Under Heaven' (Tianxia) – Kant in China," *Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy*, 4, no. 1 (2019): 193-207.
[59] Ibid.,195-197.
[60] Michael Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1151-1169.
[61] Wang, "China, between copying," 113.
[62] Liu, "Security theorizing in China," 80.
[63] Ibid, 85.
[64] Ren, "Grown from within," 398.

School, emphasizing the importance of empirical studies. In this context, the U.S. strongly determines the ontological, epistemological, and methodological universe of IR, motivating others to embrace the American mode of thinking. In this sense, the West has become the dominant subject, both as a unit of analysis and as the hegemonic actor in the formation of the "international," which generates a Western-centric moment in the Chinese School. [65]

Chinese IR scholars strive to reformulate established IR concepts such as sovereignty, justice, order, and change, and emphasize their profound philosophical divergencies from the Western academic tradition.[66] However, as indicated earlier, Western-centrism in IR refers to the dominance of Western perspectives, concepts, ideas, and problems in explaining international politics. Even though the Chinese School seeks to highlight different sources and roots for these concepts, the theorizing is still conducted within the same conceptual framework of Western-centric theories, which limits the possibilities for the emergence of an alternative agenda in IR. In this regard, even though the Chinese School breathes new life into the conceptual universe of IR with its neo-Confucian principles of harmony, relationality, peace, and cooperation, the end product remains essentially the same old ideas presented in a new package. In other words, the contributions by Chinese scholars do not present radically different premises from those of Western-centric IR theories. While the Chinese scholars apply original and local historical and philosophical sources to develop an IR theory with Chinese characteristics, they reiterate the mainstream IR narratives reformulated around the concepts of sovereignty, peace, and harmony. Therefore, the Chinese School actually exposes the Eastern origins of Western-centric IR theories by restating the same premises through a focus on entirely different sources.

5. The African School and its Western-Centric Moments

Even though there has been an increase in recent years in studies aiming to construct theories focused on the African experience,[67] the existence of a uniform African School in IR remains controversial. In fact, it is an exercise in futility to expect that a vast continent comprised of multiple states may produce a homogenous theory. Given the diversity among these countries, there is no single African identity or homogenous native African source to serve as a foundation for the African School of IR.[68] In this sense, the term African School is employed as a broad label encompassing commonalities within African experiences that have been excluded from the core of IR.[69] Therefore, Isike and Iroulo state[70] that the African School is an overarching concept formulated to define "theories that draw from African experience…, methodologies that centered on Africa as the subject…and locus of enunciation based on its histories, epistemologies, and worldviews."

Additionally, African IR studies often prioritize policy-related issues over theoretical studies.[71] Still, there are various studies analyzing how IR is studied and conceptualized

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[65] Wang, "China, between copying," 109.

[66] Isaac Odoom and Nathan Andrews, "What/who is still missing in International Relations scholarship? Situating Africa as an agent in IR theorizing," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2017): 43.

[67] See; Christopher Isike and Lynda Chinenye Iroulo, "Introduction: Theorizing Africa's International Relations," *African and Asian Studies* 22, no. 1-2 (2023): 4.

[68] Benita Parry, "Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism," in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory,* eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 172-196.

[69] Odoom and Andrews, "What/who is still missing," 47.

[70] Isike and Iroulo, "Introduction: Theorizing Africa," 4.

[71] Karen Smith, "Contrived boundaries, kinship and ubuntu: A (South) African view of "the international," in *Thinking International Relations Differently*, eds. Arlene B. Tickner and David Blaney (London: Routledge, 2012), 302.

in Africa, offering a general framework for comprehending the African perspective on the international.[72] The main motivation behind establishing an African School in IR is the dissatisfaction with Western-centric IR theories and the conviction that mainstream IR theories are ill-equipped to analyze the political reality in Africa.[73] As Isike and Iroulo assert,[74] mainstream IR theories apply Western-centric concepts such as sovereignty and democracy as a lens through which to view Africa. This often involves uncritically adopting pre-established concepts derived from Western standards, experiences, and perspectives. Therefore, African scholars aim to fashion an IR theory that is more reflective of their political, economic, and social realities.[75] In this sense, African IR scholars have strived to revise Western-centric IR theories and construct a conceptual framework applicable to events and foreign policy-making in Africa.

Indeed, neo-Marxism and dependency theory were popular paradigms among African scholars, especially for those educated in Western institutions like Samir Amin[76] and Ali Mazrui.[77] Regarding its colonial past, it is not coincidental that studies concentrating on the sources of Africa's underdevelopment and global inequalities gained traction on the continent.[78] However, the current quest for an African School of IR outclasses the premises of the Dependency School, as African scholars criticize the dependency theory for neglecting differences among the countries of the continent.[79] Furthermore, while the African School intends to reveal the agential power of peripheral states,[80] the Dependency School envisions very limited agential capacity for them.[81] For African scholars, as stated by Ofuha,[82] African states are not passive actors whose fate is determined by external powers; instead, they possess active agential power that can enhance their competence to survive. Similarly, while analyzing the IR literature in Ghana, Tieku defines the African School as a collective effort based on decolonial theory, relational ontology, southern epistemologies, and qualitative research aimed at revealing the agential power of the Global South.[83] In this regard, contrary to the assertions that African IR studies lack conceptual innovation,[84] contemporary theoretical contributions from Africa possess the capacity to unveil how the so-called Western universality is stratified and varies across different geographies. In other words, with its new conceptual openings, the African School discloses their experiences and perspectives on the "international." By focusing on the African knowledge system as the foundation for understanding the continent, the African School forges new pathways in IR centered around

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[72] See; Thomas Kwasi Tieku, "The Legon School of International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 47, no. 5 (2021): 656-671.

[73] Ahmed A. Salem, "A critique of failing International Relations theories in African tests, with emphasis on North African responses," in *Africa in Global International Relations*, eds. Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning, and Amitav Acharya (London: Routledge, 2016), 22-42.

[74] Isike and Iroulo, "Introduction: Theorizing Africa," 4.

[75] Cirino H. Ofuho, "Africa: teaching IR where it's not supposed to be," in *International Relations Scholarship around the World*, eds. Arlene B.Tickner and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2009), 76.

[76] Samir Amin, "Accumulation and development: a theoretical model," *Review of African Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1974): 9-26.

[77] Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa's international relations: The diplomacy of dependency and change* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[78] Crawford Young, "The Heritage of Colonialism," in *Africa in World Politics: The African State System in Flux,* eds. John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 9-26.

[79] Ofuho, "Africa: teaching IR," 74.

[80] See; Ian Taylor, *The International Relations of Sub-Saharan Africa* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).

[81] See; Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 4, no. 1 (2002): 239–273.

[82] Ofuho, "Africa: teaching IR," 80.

[83] Tieku, "The Legon School of International Relations," 656-671.

[84] Peter Vale, "International Relations in Post-apartheid South Africa: Some Anniversary Questions," *Politikon* 31, no. 2 (2004): 240.

ideas of decoloniality, relationality, and solidarity.[85] One of these pathways can be observed in the discussions about middle powers, which also reveals the emphasis on the agential capacity of African states. To highlight the distinct characteristics of African agents, scholars have established a differentiation between the "traditional middle powers" from the Global North and "emerging middle powers" like South Africa.[86] Regarding the position of emerging powers in the international system and their relatively limited economic capacity, they tend to adopt a more neutral stance by promoting regional cooperation and integration. In this context, while the traditional middle powers enjoy a sort of security due to their location in the core, emerging middle powers operate in line with the structural limitations of the semi-peripheral world. Therefore, while the former legitimizes the global structure along with its inherent uneven traits, the latter challenges it by advocating for substantial international reforms.[87]

Another theoretical contribution by African IR theorists is the conception of Ubuntu,[88] which resonates with the Tianxia worldview of the Chinese School. Ubuntu is an African indigenous worldview that perceives a shared humanity in the universe, emphasizing "collectivist personhood." Similar to the Chinese concept of "under the same heaven," Ubuntu anticipates that each member of the community is linked to and responsible for each other. African IR theorists apply the Ubuntu philosophy to the international sphere to explain how African states act. In this setting, Western-centric IR theories with their individualistic ontologies are incapable of comprehending how African states conduct foreign policy since Ubuntu emphasizes solidarity and group thinking.[89] The indigenous communal culture in Africa is reflected in foreign policy-making, as states in the region value interdependence in contrast to the individualism of Western social theories.[90] According to Tieku,[91] this collectivist worldview prevents African ruling elites from seeing themselves as atomistic and independent entities, encouraging them to think and behave in relational terms. For African scholars, this perspective cannot be captured by Western-centric IR theories. Therefore, Western-centric IR theories inevitably conceptualize African actors as irrational, as they fail to grasp how the collectivist vision affects African states' foreign policy, which is based on "cooperation, mutual understanding, and collective well-being."[92]

Based on the findings of Ubuntu, African IR scholars assert that Western-centric IR theories' distinction between the international sphere and the domestic is irrelevant in the African context.[93] As underlined by Odoom and Andrews,[94] African scholars critically reject this distinction, preferring to concentrate on the sub-state level, which is largely neglected by mainstream IR theories with their state-centric understandings. Since the borders of African states were drawn artificially by outside powers, the inside and outside spheres have always

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85 Thomas Kwasi Tieku, "A New Research Agenda for Africa's International Relations," *African Affairs* 121, no. 484 (2022): 499

86 Smith, "Reshaping international relations," 143.

87 Ibid.

88 Tim Murithi, "Practical Peacemaking Wisdom from Africa: Reflections on Ubuntu," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 1, no. 4 (2006): 25-34.

89 Smith, "Reshaping international relations," 148.

90 Robert Gaylard, "Welcome to the World of our Humanity: (African) Humanism, Ubuntu and Black South African Writing," *Journal of Literary Studies* 20, no. 3 (2004): 265-282.

91 Thomas Kwasi Tieku, "Collectivist Worldview: Its Challenge to International Relations," in *Africa and International Relations in the 21st Century*, eds. Scarlett Cornelissen, Fantu Cheru, and Tim Shaw (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 42.

92 Smith, "Reshaping international relations," 150.

93 Smith, "Contrived boundaries," 301.

94 Odoom and Andrews, "What/who is still missing," 48.

been loosely separated in the region. The legacy of colonialism, along with the philosophy of Ubuntu, encourages African states to have a multi-layered perception of the international, in which kinship or shared values have tremendous effects on societies. Despite rejecting the distinction between domestic and international, the African School highlights the crucial importance of sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, akin to the Chinese School of IR. This emphasis on sovereignty is, again, a reflection of the colonial past of the region, which still influences African states' attitudes toward the West. In this sense, for African scholars, the real distinction in IR should not be between the domestic and international spheres, but rather between the industrialized North and underdeveloped South.[95]

Despite these theoretical contributions, a closer examination of the African School reveals that it is not devoid of Western-centric moments, as visible in other homegrown IR theories. While reading the international through the lens of the philosophy of Ubuntu is an original contribution, the premises built upon this philosophy do not go beyond the findings of Western-centric IR theories. While Ubuntu is an indigenous worldview that perceives Africa as a collectivist social entity united around shared norms, rules, and humanity, its application to IR does not present a radically different proposition from the "international society" conception of the English School. According to the English School, states interact in an environment where they are bound by common interests, values, and a set of rules.[96] In this context, the African School's emphasis on the concept of a "collectivist social entity" does not bring a real theoretical opening to IR. This is evident in Ngcoya's critique of Western cosmopolitanism and its reformulation under the philosophy of Ubuntu.[97] Ngcoya compares Kantian cosmopolitanism with the emancipatory cosmopolitanism of Ubuntu and states that Kantian cosmopolitanism assigns the "responsibility to act" to the states, which is itself the source of the problem.[98] For the Ubuntu philosophy, on the other hand, the source of responsibility stems from its conceptualization of humanity as an interdependent existence. According to this view, while the non-humanistic cosmopolitanism of Kant's universalism assigns the responsibilities of protection to certain states, Ubuntu's cosmopolitanism suggests a dialogic approach to fostering ties among units.[99] In this sense law-based Kantian discussions on the responsibility to protect are reformulated as a political phenomenon. Despite this radical ontological divergence in the understanding of humanity, both liberalism and Ubuntu philosophy confine the conceptual discussions in IR to the responsibilities of humanity towards others. In this sense, the African School does not radically expand the conceptual universe of Western-centric IR, nor does it alter the dominant agenda of the discipline.

Apart from the English School, the concept of Ubuntu also shares common ground with the neo-liberal theory due to its emphasis on cooperation and non-state actors. African theorists utilize the concept of Ubuntu to reveal that the Realist perception of never-ending conflict among states is a mistaken premise, and that cooperation among states is not only possible, but also inevitable. While these scholars aim to refute the Realist theory by demonstrating

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[95] Ibid, 307.

[96] Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of English School* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

[97] Mvuselelo Ngcoya, "Ubuntu: Toward an Emancipatory Cosmopolitanism?" *International Political Sociology*, 9, no. 3 (2015): 248-262.

[98] Ibid., 254.

[99] Ibid., 250.

that multilateralism is a preferred policy for African states, they approach the liberal theory that underlines the possibility of cooperation under anarchical rule.[100] In a similar vein, the Ubuntu philosophy shares some common ground with liberal theory by highlighting the impact of citizens in foreign policy-making. In other words, since all units of a collectivist entity are interdependent in Ubuntu, all components should be analyzed to understand state relations. In this sense, the African School also aligns with liberal theory by underlining the role of non-state actors.[101]

Finally, the Ubuntu philosophy, with its emphasis on common humanity, rediscovers the liberal conceptualizations of the responsibility to protect. As Smith states,[102] "while Ubuntu is different in many ways from Western concepts" of humanism, it exhibits rooted similarities with liberal conceptualizations of human rights. As Africans perceive humanism as a communal concept in which all members of different societies are interdependent and responsible for each other,[103] the African School presents a human rights understanding that is based on obligations towards all individuals. As indicated, this position confirms the contemporary liberal notions of the responsibility to protect, which assign a certain mission to the "international community" for the protection of human rights. It is contradictory that while the African School underlines the importance of state sovereignty and non-intervention, it inevitably legitimizes interventions in the name of human rights with its conceptualization of Ubuntu.

In this regard, since the efforts by African scholars to use original and indigenous sources to generate an IR theory end up with similar premises to the Western-centric IR theories, the end product turns into finding the Eastern origins of Western-centric theories. In other words, the adoption of radically different sources than the West does not yield a brand-new theory. In fact, as Salem underlines,[104] the real effort by the African School is not to produce a substitute for Western-centric IR theories, but to complete them. This is why Marxism as a theory is perceived as less Western-centric and has gained more recognition from African scholars, as its critique of global inequalities and exploitation is believed to explain the political and economic circumstances in Africa.[105] As indicated before, the domestic sphere in the Global South is shaped through its interaction with the international; therefore, the material control of the West over the "international" has not only transformed the political and economic reality of the continent, but also its ideational structures. In other words, to analyze their socioeconomic vulnerabilities and their position in the international system, African scholars inevitably concentrate on the West to a certain extent. Moreover, utilizing domestic elements for an alternative understanding of the international results in a combination of imported Western ideas with homegrown theoretical resources. In this sense, whilst African scholars try to overcome Western-centrism and dominance, the reproduction of Western intellectual tools in an African context generates an ironic hybridity.

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[100] See; Robert Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994): 313-344.

[101] Ofuho, "Africa: teaching IR," 80.

[102] Smith, "Contrived boundaries," 314-315.

[103] Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issue*s (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[104] Salem, "A critique of," 36.

[105] Sankaran Krishna, "Narratives in Contention: Indian, Sinhalese, and Tamil Nationalism," in *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the three non-Western theoretical initiatives from three different continents reveals that all of them inevitably place the West at the center of inquiry at certain moments and unconsciously reproduce Western-centric perceptions to a certain extent. This study criticizes neither these Western-centric moments, nor the reproduction of Western-centrism, but aims to highlight the inevitability and necessity of this process. While the inevitability stems from the hegemonic position of the Western world in the global structure, the necessity arises from the agential activity of the Global South.

In this context, the largest structural challenge facing non/counter-hegemonic theories is their necessity to engage in a dialogic process with the hegemonic theory in order to determine their own positions. This inevitability compels non/counter-hegemonic theories to legitimize and incorporate the position/ideas of the hegemonic one to a certain extent. Conversely, the hegemonic theory always enjoys the privilege and material capacity to disregard or marginalize alternative positions. While such a capacity is lacking for homegrown IR theories, they strive to determine the boundaries of their own identity by positioning themselves against the Western identity. Therefore, reducing Western-centrism into an ideational dominance results in attempts to overcome it solely on the ideational level, inadvertently legitimizing Western identity to a certain extent by reproducing the "us vs. them" dichotomy in a different context.

This study took the discussion one step further by revealing the materiality of Western-centrism in IR, which situates the West at the center of the international structure. Therefore, overcoming Western-centrism solely at the theoretical level seems a futile task. Instead of striving to generate a counter, non-Western IR theory, homegrown theories should concentrate on reflecting the impact of the centrality of the West in different parts of the political universe. In this sense, homegrown theories are valuable and possess the potential to reveal the impact of the international system in their own geographies. Furthermore, they may unveil their own experiences and perspectives by illustrating how the so-called Western universality metamorphizes in distant geographies. For instance, they can highlight how Western-centrism is rooted in the legacy of colonialism or unequal representation in the international system. Alternatively, while Western-centric security studies have mostly concentrated on state security and nuclear issues for years, the real challenge for the Global South has been insecurities related to sustainable development, food, clean water, etc. In this sense, homegrown theories have the potential to enrich the vocabulary and subject matter of IR by exploring the stratified reality emanating from the international system. However, to depict a true picture of IR, homegrown theories should be considered alongside Western-centric IR theories.

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