The Global IR Revolution Must Start in the Graduate Classroom

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Abstract

The Global IR literature of recent years has effectively brought greater attention to the need for transforming and globalizing the IR discipline, but there is little evidence that fundamental change has yet occurred. This work highlights this disconnect between Global IR's aims and practice, and argues that to move beyond the rhetorical, greater emphasis should be placed on pedagogical change. The work draws on a collaborative project between a professor and four MA students, and reports the results of weekly discussions in which they explored their experiences of the challenges faced by those entering the disciplinary community, and proposed pedagogical solutions for contributing to a globalizing of IR. The findings raise warning flags of a growing 'academic industrial complex,' in which students are herded into a competitive race driving them to publish at ever earlier stages. By emphasizing product over curiosity, our 'factories' of future IR scholars (graduate classrooms), are leading to premature assimilation, homogenization of thought, and, ultimately, to a "global" IR discipline that remains trapped in narrow Western-centric knowledge production.

Keywords: Global IR, IR Pedagogy, Graduate Training, Disciplinary Socialization, Academic Industrial Complex, Assimilation

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Because of their limited socialization into the discipline… [graduate students] have a good instinct for epistemic violence and new ideas of how to make IR more diverse, plural, and inclusive. Teaching should embrace this potential and establish an environment of mutual learning, in which students and lecturers discuss as equals, and student research is considered a valuable addition. (Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., 2020)

1. Introduction

This article and the project out of which it grew start with the broad assumption that the International Relations (IR) discipline is in need of change. Calls for change have led in past decades to much-highlighted paradigmatic debates, the growth of feminist IR and other critical approaches, as well as a body of literature on the need for greater recognition of 'non-Western' or 'global' contributions to IR knowledge production. The push for the last of these can be first linked to various pioneering works identifying the discipline's non-global nature, e.g., Hoffman (1977), Holsti (1985), Smith (2000, 2002), and Weaver (1998), and early efforts to explore resulting production imbalances in scholarship (Aydinli & Mathews, 2000).

In 2007, Acharya and Buzan coined the term 'Global IR', and with their subsequent writings (Acharya 2014, 2016; Acharya & Buzan 2017, 2019), it became a key defining label for many works in a growing body of literature examining the problems of IR's core-centric nature. These have included inquiries into publishing practices (e.g. Grenier & Hagmann, 2016; Lohaus & Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., 2022) and updated critiques of the imbalanced discipline and its corrosive effects (e.g. Tickner, 2013; Shih, 2017; Tripathi, 2021; Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al, 2020); as well as overviews of various national theorizing practices (e.g. Karadeniz & Gök, 2024; Karamık & Ermihan, 2023; Kristensen 2019; Shahi 2024; Sune 2024); and examples of homegrown theorizing of IR from non-Western perspectives (e.g. Bakır & Ersoy, 2022; Holliday & Wastnidge, 2025; Kuik & Benny, 2024; Ling, 2014; Shahi, 2019; Xiong et al, 2024; Xuetong, 2013).

The Global IR literature, despite some pointed debates raised about the risks of its essentialism (Barnett & Zarakol, 2023), ahistoricism (Barnett & Lawson, 2023), and paradoxical furthering of periphery dependency (Aydinli & Erpul, 2022), has been effectively bringing attention to a vision of the direction in which IR as a discipline arguably needs to develop, and has been pointedly making the case for why it needs to do so. However, considering various observations that *fundamentally*, little has yet changed (e.g., Aydinli, 2023; Vogel et al., 2024; Zarakol & Aydinli, 2025), we believe there is a disconnect between Global IR's aim and its practice, and that the Global IR initiative needs to focus more concretely on how that transformation can come about. It is time, in other words, for an intervention to move Global IR beyond the rhetorical, towards intensive engagement with practical transformation, lest it run the risk of being reduced to a faddish discursive exercise.

Pedagogically, this study is situated in a critical action research tradition (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 42). This article reports on an exploratory joint project among a small group of IR disciplinary community members—one experienced and four newcomers—to explore the various reasons behind the apparent resistance to Global IR's vision for transformation within the IR discipline, and to present an example of possible ways to bring about needed

change. In this sense, we incorporated auto-ethnographic reflection as a complementary methodological orientation. Rather than excluding the self from the sources of knowledge, this approach foregrounds situated reflexivity, showing self-awareness of how the researcher's positionalities and personal experiences emerge within the pedagogical and disciplinary networks they inhabit (Brigg & Bleiker, 2010). Consistent with critical action research, the primary data of the study were collected through the essays written by the students at the end of the Global IR class (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 149). The essays were collaboratively reworked into the present article, allowing the students to reflect on the challenges and possibilities of the Global IR problematique and its pedagogical implications, starting from the classroom. Thus, this study examines the effects of Western-centric IR in its micro-space—the classroom—and presents its critique within that same space, articulating a power–knowledge dynamic consistent with auto-ethnographic scholarship. (Bencherif & Vlavonou, 2021, p. 455).

1.1. Moving Beyond Rhetoric in Global IR

There seem to be two main routes for moving beyond rhetoric and stimulating real transformation consistent with Global IR's ideals. The first involves calls for changes in knowledge production and dissemination, and the second involves pedagogical revision. Many valuable works have begun exploring problems in IR knowledge production and dissemination (e.g., Cerioli, 2024; Eun, 2023; Leeds et al., 2019; Umar, 2024). Because, however, the driving energy for this project stems from a dialogue with newcomers to the disciplinary community, members who, as graduate students, are still operating from within a pedagogical context, this article focuses on the potential of pedagogical change.

Works in various fields have long suggested that disciplinary change may be affected through pedagogical practices, from 'reflexive consideration' (Wilkinson, 1990) and drawing on personal narratives (D'Augelli, 2003), to 'leveraging diversity' (Sinclair-Chapmann, 2015) in the sense of relying on shifting demographics to 'force' change. Others have emphasized the materials used in transmitting knowledge and the role they can play in bringing about broader disciplinary change, thus recommending updating reading lists (Worthen, 2018) and textbooks (Sidaway & Hall, 2018). In IR, Nossal (2001) offered early insights into the lack of diversity in IR textbooks, and works like Hagmann and Biersteker (2012) were among the first to particularly emphasize a need to focus on the "instructed discipline" in IR as opposed to the "published discipline."

There is also a wide body of literature not explicitly tied to Global IR but with common transformative missions, often recommending critical approaches to teaching and learning in IR (e.g., Inayatullah, 2022; Timperley & Schick, 2022). These range from works like Krystalli's (2023) call for incorporating reflexivity into the classroom as a "potential site of experimentation and freedom" (p. 1), or Sondarjee's for 'decentring the Western gaze' in IR syllabi (2023), to works suggesting ways of incorporating unconventional texts into the IR classroom (e.g. Dunn, 2016). Others find a foundation in the works of critical thinkers like educator Paolo Freire and feminist bell hooks, recognizing pedagogy as a tool of empowerment, and building on their calls to remember that the classroom "remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (Hooks, 1994, p. 12). Accordingly, works like Smith and Hornsby (2021) or Savas (2024) promote a disruption of the embedded Eurocentric

assumptions in IR teaching, and Tripathi (2021) explores whether dialogue on the 'Global South' can help improve inclusivity in the IR discipline.

Despite these various efforts, most works in recent years surveying the taught discipline of Global IR continue to show that, despite greater awareness and apparent efforts, diversification of IR pedagogy has not occurred. Descriptions of IR teaching around the world (e.g. Ala, 2024); in regions such as Africa (Andrews, 2020) and the Arab World (El Kurd, 2023); and in individual countries from Turkey (Okur & Aytekin, 2023) and India (Narain, 2017) to Indonesia (Wicaksana & Santoso, 2022) and Thailand (Thalong, 2022), all emphasize the continued heavy preponderance of Western domination both in approaches and in materials. Not only do these works generally find a continued Western emphasis, but they also reveal self-defeating paradoxes. For example, when alternatives *are* sought, the tendency is to include Western critical-based works rather than non-Western ones or, when the teaching materials do cite non-Westerners, it is only those who are fully socialized into Western academia (Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al., 2020). Ultimately, even though some recognition of a growing interest in 'Global IR' is noted, the primary conclusion is that current talk of 'indigenising' IR teaching and learning has so far led only to 'neomarginalisation' (El Kurd, 2023).

In part, the resistance to disciplinary change may reflect a narrow focus on pedagogy as teaching approaches and materials, rather than a broader 'pedagogy-plus' understanding of the overall student experience, in particular, the graduate student experience. Outside of IR, some works have recognized the influence of graduate training and how socialization into a disciplinary culture can serve to either reproduce the status quo or encourage evolution and change (e.g., Thorkelson, 2010). In doing so, these works rightly acknowledge the well-developed scholarship on educational socialization, which has long sought to explain the intricate processes of how newcomers navigate their way to becoming legitimate members of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They also consider how those experiences subsequently shape the products these members then contribute to the community, which, in turn, help construct the standards and expectations for future newcomers. Ultimately, as Sigle (2021) cautions, without addressing the critical factor of disciplinary socialization, all scholarly discussions about and intent for change in any discipline run the risk of simply turning into an 'echo chamber'.

Writing within the field of IR, Shahi (2016) highlights a distinction between pedagogy and andragogy, and notes the particular qualities of adult graduate students that make them the most appropriate group for launching disciplinary change: they are self-directed; have growing reservoirs of experience; are ready to learn; and are ready to apply knowledge rather than simply store it. Still, she cautions that change must take place at the application-of-knowledge level. The positive qualities listed can be made irrelevant if these relatively mature learners unconsciously 'apply' the knowledge, and if that underlying knowledge consists only of what the Western-centric discipline has already produced. Such 'application', even in the sense of testing or questioning that knowledge, can indirectly turn those graduate students into parts of the Western-centric industry.

In other words, the graduate classroom, while offering perhaps the most promising venue for encouraging disciplinary change, has to be reformed in ways that allow for socialization into the discipline to take place *without* simultaneous assimilation (Antony, 2002). This might sound oxymoronic–is it even possible to socialize without some degree of assimilation? We

believe it is. For our purposes, socialization can be considered as conscious, mindful learning about the expected norms and behaviors of a particular community, whereas assimilation describes an unconditional acceptance of those norms and behaviors with a possible simultaneous denial of one's own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. As challenging as it may be to facilitate the first without inevitably leading to the latter, we believe such a goal must be set.

Finally, returning to our initial assumption that there is a need for disciplinary change in IR, some might ask whether the problems cited here are unique to IR or whether they reflect issues stemming from the 'neoliberalization' of academic life—which has been described as the promotion of individualism, competitiveness and entrepreneurial practices in universities (Valovirta & Manneuvo, 2022), producing a divide between 'precariat' (Standing, 2014) and 'secureitariat' classes (McKeown, 2022), and generally blamed for stifling creativity and dissent, partly through the complicity of relatively privileged bodies (Barthual-Datta, 2025).

True, some of the problems highlighted in this article can be attributed broadly to the corporatization of the higher education, and some of the proposed reforms that emerge reflect the recommendations from works on countering the neoliberal academy, particularly in the sense of encouraging greater collectiveness and collegiality (Gavin et al, 2023; Horton, 2020; Museus & Sasaki, 2021; Yin & Mu, 2023) and disrupting the race of time and temporality norms (Zembylas, 2023). However, it can be argued that, given its flawed beginning as an "international" discipline with highly localized foundations and its resilient resistance to globalizing efforts, IR is an acute disciplinary case of the narrowing intellectual scope being exacerbated by the broader neoliberal phenomenon. As such, it both exemplifies those problems particularly well and offers a fertile testing ground for the needed transformation. What follows is therefore an exploration of one vision of what that transformation might look like—not a prescriptive design, but an example of a local experience in this effort, one which may be adopted, adapted, or even rejected, but hopefully not ignored, as the principle aim is to raise consciousness and generate discussion.

2. The Context: The Professor's Perspective

In recent years, I have been teaching a graduate-level course on IR theory at a major, research-oriented university in Turkey, with an emphasis on globalization of the discipline. As a result of my research and teaching, I have come to believe that the global IR initiative in its current form is unlikely to bring about substantive change, and I set out to discuss this prediction with my students in this class. My essential argument is that the project of transforming IR and IR theorizing in particular, must draw energy from newcomers to the community, those whose unharnessed curiosity and creativity have not yet been molded by years of focused training and disciplinary assimilation. Unfortunately, I feel that insufficient interest has been given to nurturing this particular source for change. Instead, greater emphasis even in the proactive literature has been on making changes in knowledge production and publishing practices (e.g., Loke and Owen, 2022) or arguing about how to encourage more theorizing from outside of traditional core experiences and perspectives (e.g., de Leon, 2022; Ersoy, 2023; Lake, 2016; Mikelis, 2023). While those too are of course important elements in the needed change, I wanted to see what kind of insights and suggestions might emerge from a group of young minds not yet crushed by the daily pressures of professional academic life–or if that seems too strong an analogy, then at least not yet suffering the narrowing vision that

results from repetition of accustomed practice and accepted beliefs.

In addition to our presentations and discussions of assigned weekly readings, therefore, we also launched a class project intended to explore how (whether) disciplinary globalization might take place. We held regular discussions both through a Moodle forum and in recorded oral sessions, in which the students spoke about pedagogical practices in IR—reflecting on their own on-going experiences as graduate IR students in the periphery and their understandings of the literature they were being asked to read, the materials used, the physical settings, the teacher-student relationship, language issues, and so on—in order to come up with suggestions on how to make IR pedagogy, focusing on IR theory, more inclusive and global. Their notes from these sessions were organized and compiled into a single text that stands as the main body of this article. The ideas expressed represent those which the four student authors collectively agreed upon, after which they divided up and wrote the article's four main sub-sections. While providing feedback and editing their sections, I wrote the introductory sections and the article's conclusion.

By embarking on this project my initial intentions were three-fold: 1) to raise the students' consciousness of the power of socialization when entering a disciplinary community, essentially, alerting them to what I view as the reality that, as graduate students they are entering a scholarly industrial complex, with its own mechanisms for assimilation and manipulation, not an idealistic world of egalitarian, free-flowing knowledge exchange; 2) to have them experience what it is like to take an active part in determining what to study, and after doing so, to make concrete suggestions for designing an 'ideal' syllabus[1] in which all ideas count regardless of history, tradition, or experience; and 3) to encourage them to imagine how an emancipatory and non-hierarchical learning and creative production environment could be developed in graduate IR theory studies, and explore possible changes to current learning contexts that might facilitate such practices.

The first aim of the article is therefore about exploring ways of empowering graduate students in IR and cultivating their critical and intellectual potential in an increasingly competitive and restrictive context. Such pedagogical reform is deeply intertwined however, with disciplinary change, since it is through students' socialization into disciplinary beliefs and practices that an establishment reproduces itself. In the 'classroom' of graduate education, students are taught, intuit, and absorb what it means to be a part of a local and global disciplinary culture. Everything from recognizing what questions are valued and how they should be explored, to understanding publication hierarchies are ultimately (re)produced throughout the socialization process. The further aim here, therefore, is to draw attention to the critical role that pedagogical changes can play in transforming the broader IR discipline from a hegemonic, hierarchical, unilateral one to an egalitarian, multilateral, and global one. Ultimately, if the discussion of globalizing IR is to move beyond the popular 'Global IR' trend in the scholarly literature, concrete steps for change need to be taken, and the classroom is a critical place for these to start.

The following sections report on the observations and suggestions of one group of students, as penned by the student colleagues themselves.

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[1]   A single 'ideal' syllabus cannot, of course, exist in a dynamic discipline and world, and any syllabus, including the ideas proposed here, would have to be questioned and regularly revised. The word 'ideal' is used however to refer to how we think about such revisions, which, ideally, should go beyond simply updating the materials used, and include deeper reflections on everything from classroom structure to assessment.

3. Towards a Global IR Pedagogy: Student Voices

We, the four student co-authors, are all current or former M.A. students of International Relations at a leading private university in Turkey. We became involved in this project exploring the globalizing of the IR discipline as part of a graded discussion assignment for the elective class described above. Subsequently, when the course ended, the four of us volunteered to continue working together to produce this written outcome. Since writing this article, we have either completed or are in the process of finishing our MA theses and are preparing to enter PhD programs or the work force. The ideas represented here reflect a consensus reached among us through hours of discussion, despite our differences in terms of future career plans, research interests, and previous educational and life experiences.

We decided to divide the discussion into two spheres: intra-class, i.e., issues rooted within the IR theory classroom itself; and extra-class, or issues acting as external forces. We first identify the challenging factors within each that we believe encourage students to assimilate into the current Anglo-American-centric discipline, and then propose strategies for building up mindful resistance to help pave pathways for a more global IR. All of these suggestions, from the most general to the details of a proposed syllabus, are presented for the purpose of sparking discussion and promoting further initiatives, not as prescriptive directives to be followed. Our discussion may be of interest to instructors who are dissatisfied with the current shape of the IR discipline and IR theory courses in particular, and who want to contribute to breaking up the perpetual cycle of indoctrination into Western works and assimilation into the mainstream discipline. However, this classroom-based push for globalizing the discipline is first and foremost aimed at students, and at helping them understand that we, as intellectuals, have a critical role to play in overcoming the malfunctions of the aforementioned system.

3.1. Intra-class Challenges

3.1.1. Critiques of Syllabus

The first challenge we face within IR theory classes is the syllabus. As a detailed prescript, loaded by the instructor with mandatory readings, assignment details, and general instructions for class conduct, the syllabus stands as a potential monolith between the students and global IR knowledge. The main problem is its predetermined nature, in which there is generally no room for student input. It has been argued that learning is "an inherently voluntary act that you can no more force than you can force someone to love you" (Singham, 2005, p.55), and that without, therefore, 'negotiated syllabuses' (Clarke, 1991), we cannot expect full learner participation and self-expression. A negotiated syllabus is a joint curriculum-creation process in which students' interests and needs meet with the instructor's expertise and advice. Proponents of negotiated syllabi further argue that traditional syllabi and the teaching styles associated with them subtly encourage students to absorb the assigned readings and prescribed in-class practices without critical engagement. Indeed, research has suggested that with traditional syllabi and teaching, students tend to fall back on the "clearer narratives and distinct boundaries" of mainstream ideas (Clarke 2024, p.8), and students who become fully accustomed to such a learning style may lose interest in engaging critically. They might begin to feel inadequate to question and contribute to the class conduct–and thus to any future change in the discipline overall–and hence voluntarily assume a passive stance. This issue

is arguably of even greater concern in countries like Turkey, where critical thinking skills are rhetorically promoted but often under-emphasized in practice (Alagözlü & Süzer, 2010).

The overall composition of traditional IR theory syllabi arguably predisposes students to which pieces are considered more valuable. However, basing our knowledge on material compiled exclusively by someone else undermines our potential for self-discernment. What we know and subsequently ask as research questions are the main ideas and key takeaways from these pre-selected pieces. That means we build our own foundations on someone else's interpretation of what that foundation should be built out of! What if that trusted interpretation were misconceived? What if it were biased? What if there were non-included alternative views that, based on *our* experiences and understandings, may be considered more important, relevant, or interesting?

A student in our cohort expressed another concern about syllabus content in IR theory courses:

> *I wish we had covered more tangible examples so that we could better grasp how all these readings actually played out (or not). I am having a hard time seeing their application value to the issues of today's world.*

This student raises the issue of theory density. Overly abstract contents could frustrate students (Clarke, 2024) who need real-life and digestible pieces of information. Although we recognize the importance of building up strong foundations and familiarity with how intellectual development took place in IR, both in terms of history and theory, simply learning who said what is not enough to understand those theories' application and explanatory value. In order for students to truly digest a theory, they should be able to put the learned theory to use to describe problems, both old and new.

Also focusing on syllabus content, this time from a global IR perspective, current research shows that most IR syllabi around the world continue to focus on mainstream core-produced works, with only a tiny percentage assigning so-called "homegrown" materials (Aydınlı & Erpul, 2022). This practice of prioritizing core IR theoretical works shows a high level of conceptual dependency, which should be moderated in order to ensure greater pluralism in IR. As one colleague of ours said:

> *Most of us chose IR, thinking it is a dynamic subject matter, but we quickly learn there are 'biblical' works that impact everything we see and discuss. Moreover, these works are solely a reflection of Western history and experience! If you're a non-Western student in an IR theory class, the first thing you learn is to accept that you are learning someone else's world and are, in a sense, interning for acceptance into that other world.*

While this student was speaking from a non-Western context, the point being made is of relevance to all graduate IR students. When students obtain their knowledge from any single perspective, in this case, Western-centric sources, the interest-driven authenticity of intellectual activity fades. We do not deny that there is diversity among 'Western-centric' sources (or, indeed, among 'periphery' ones, Özdemir, 2024), but for those of us from outside the Anglo-American core, there is still a strong sense of an established body of knowledge that largely excludes periphery works. Especially on the point of representation, attending IR courses for most students worldwide generally means being socialized into a foreign, "Western" set of ideas. The average IR theory syllabus has been argued to "focus almost

exclusively on how particular theories arose from scholars deliberating the great Western wars, the primacy of great (Western) powers, and the maintenance or possible decline of the US's status as the sole superpower in the 21st century" (Bertrand & Lee, 2012, p. 129). Such dominance of mainstream works is both a disservice to the students and to the discipline itself, as it takes away from its dynamic nature. While we do not recommend dismissing those canonical works entirely and replacing them with something else (Keene, 2017), we believe that students' curiosity and interests can be promoted by giving them a role in selecting which works should be included.

3.1.2. Instructor-Student Hierarchy

All of the above discussion about syllabi becomes moot if instructors are unconvinced that such changes are needed. A second major issue of concern, therefore, is that of flattening the instructor-student hierarchy (Donohue-Bergeler et al. 2018), the root issue of which is illustrated in this conversation between one of our cohort and a faculty member:

> *Student: I think it would be a good idea if students had more influence over the literature we cover during our IR classes. If we could incorporate our topics of interest into the syllabus, our motivation to participate in class could increase.*
>
> *Instructor: I don't think that's the way to go. I doubt students even fully read and comprehend the classical works of our discipline. My job is to make sure they know the theoretical evolution of the discipline and guide them through the course. Let's say the students come to me and ask for less space for core texts and more space for their works of interest. How can I be certain that the students have read the important literature and gained enough confidence to embark on different routes on their own?*

We acknowledge that this reluctance to share control arises from the instructor's genuine desire to supply the students with appropriate material; however, change cannot occur without at least some reconstructing of both parties' roles within the classroom. Parisi et al. (2013), in their discussion about IR Theory courses, argue that transgressive teaching methods improve student engagement. When the class structure is inflexible and unaccommodating, it may hinder the knowledge transmission process. Zech et al. (2022), in their survey of graduate IR students, found that they overwhelmingly prefer active learning to lectures both for learning outcomes and classroom experiences, and others (e.g., Michael, 2006) have shown that students benefit from taking an active part in the knowledge production process. This point was supported empirically in Bosio and Origo's study, showing that MA students in an "*active* entrepreneurship course" increased their average grades by the end of the first year by nearly 36% (2020, p. 323).

Moreover, a hierarchical or superior-subordinate relationship in the classroom naturally dictates the flow of discussion. It has been shown that students are more likely to engage in active learning when they are instructed by a process-oriented supervisor (Børte et al., 2023), and when the instructor acts as a facilitator (Mohammed & Daham, 2021). Instead of following a primary education style of 'teacher says, students write down', the 'instructor as facilitator' guides students through the contents of the course. They introduce the works, but instead of explaining what is written, they generate thought-provoking questions to nudge students to formulate their own unique explanations and criticisms of the texts.

Ultimately, the classrooms we have been exposed to, despite various efforts for reform, still evolve around a basic principle: Students are there, often paying for the privilege, to take something away from the interaction; and instructors are there, getting paid, to provide that 'something'. This reality automatically creates a hierarchy. Any significant proposal to change this deep structure may appear instrumentalist, but it may be the best way to produce real change if it facilitates something beyond learning by providing a safer environment to experience being a contributing part of the community, moving communication in the classroom beyond the knowledge receiver/provider dichotomy, and maybe even staving off feelings of isolation and competition.

3.1.3. The Student-status Problem

It has been our common observation, as students at a Western-oriented, English-medium, competitive university in Turkey, that many in our peer group suffer from low self-image in terms of how much space they are brave enough to claim in the classroom, with implications for their relations both with the instructor and with their student peers. This image problem may be related to the overall state of Turkish university students who, research has shown, rank highest on measures of depression and anxiety in a comparative study including students from countries such as Ukraine, Russia, and Israel, among others (Ochnik et al., 2021). It has further been argued that if students have low self-image, in the sense of how they view themselves within the broader scheme of IR education, there is less chance for creativity (Wang & Wang, 2016). Moreover, low self-image leads to student failure in gaining the consciousness to produce authentic questions and comments. If we are not confident in ourselves as having value to contribute to an intellectual debate, we become the first obstacles to exploring our own creative capacity. Students who see themselves as proto-intellectuals who can ask original questions and not simply echo others, will become young scholars with the consciousness and skills to effectively contribute to an evolving discipline.

Our experiences have shown that too often, students who do not see themselves as intellectuals-in-development are more likely to put instructors on pedestals and rely on them to show them how to think. Such idolization contributes to a second phase of the student image problem, in which students model themselves after their instructors in hope of being 'right'. In doing so, the knowledge-transmission process is again hindered, as these students become mere echoes of the teacher. Such mimicry may happen because the students do not feel inspired to seek unique voices or are never encouraged to go against the current. Instead, a classroom culture emerges in which the teacher reads, speaks, and expects certain things; and the students try to fit like a glove to be deemed successful. If students' self-imagery is to become just like their professors, they cannot develop a healthy distance from or even form constructive criticisms, failing to see them as ordinary people who may make mistakes or have differing opinions. Students in this mimicry trap may struggle to cultivate local and novel questions and to seek globally relevant answers to those questions.

Lastly, we need to consider how students see themselves in regard to other students. Friendly rivalry can be healthy for bouncing ideas off one another and getting feedback, but if the class atmosphere turns into one of solely competition, attention shifts from a common pursuit of knowledge to a mere race. Pressure to outperform becomes a source of stress and reduces the potential power of collaboration. Course discussions may turn into a

jeopardy game of who-knows-first, diverting students away from the idea that we are actually teammates, looking at the same puzzle pieces and trying to make sense of them together. The moment we succumb fully to competition, we find ourselves tangled in a race to memorize faster, to be more favored by the professor, and to be always 'correct', which generally means being closest in line with the course material. The 'runners' on this race track do not realize they have been socialized into thinking that they are competing in a zero-sum game, in which one's victory is another's loss. What is forgotten is that students may not all have the same skill sets or even all be aiming for the same goal in the first place. Wouldn't it be more fruitful if we focused on ways to generate relative gains for all within the classroom?

In such a competitive classroom climate, we have observed that students may find themselves trapped in "survival" mode and become distanced from the essence of intellectual activities. While overly focused on memorizing the most, saying the 'right' thing, and getting the best grade, we lose the chance to be authentic and to cultivate our own curiosity and individual voices. A lack of solidarity among peers in the classroom means we do not get the chance to unselfconsciously and fearlessly exchange ideas and cultivate scholarly friendships, or even disagreements, leaving us in a position similar to Hobbes' state of nature, in which we dare not rely on others and struggle instead on our own. In our solitude, we rely on memorization, idolization, and mimicry, and cease listening to our classmates, engaging in genuine dialogue with them, or ever developing our independent thinking muscle.

3.2. Extra-class Challanges

As this piece of work emerges from the experiences of IR graduate students studying outside the North American/Western European context, the following section on extra-class challenges addresses issues that may in some cases be more periphery-specific, but we feel are still largely universal, and which we strongly believe have implications for the broader discipline. The above-mentioned 'survival mode' for IR graduate students may begin in the classroom, but it far exceeds those borders and is triggered further by pressures delivered through the limited and competitive nature of job markets, publishing stress, and an embedded fear of missing out (FoMO), all of which can be tied to the highly concentrated identity of the discipline. That is, the IR discipline, though claiming a global image, embraces a predominantly American-oriented identity and is often perceived as such by inexperienced graduate students. This tangible dominance, shrinking the definition of a "successful" IR scholar solely to visibility through presence within American academia, dictates a single successful route to be run and prohibits one from pausing, simply walking, or even imagining alternative paths around the racetrack if one wants to construct a secure and "valid" academic career. While the actual classroom is not always a space of trust, acceptance, and embracement of multiplicity, the world outside the classroom introduces even further dimensions to the race, such as competitive labor markets and increasing publishing pressure.

3.2.1. The Labor Market

Academic careers have become notorious for the hardships in getting a permanent job, not only because there are limited positions and thus a high demand for them, but also because of an embedded hierarchy within the labor market structures. This hierarchy places two main obstacles in front of scholars-to-be: one's choice of subject matter and/or method of

expertise, and one's educational background, with its subsequent network web. Hierarchy within both the subjects to be studied and among educational institutions pushes graduate students to strategically choose *what* and *where* they should study in hopes of achieving the promise of a future job. The globally expanded hierarchical identity of the IR discipline prioritizes mainly Western (North American and to some extent Western European) schools, and subjects that are favored at these institutions, to such a degree that many institutions outside of North America and Western Europe now demand a "competitive" Ph.D. (i.e., from abroad or from "Americanized/Westernized" universities) focused on a "valued topic", thus intensifying the barriers for finding a job even in the so-called periphery. In other words, the factory operating in peripheral IR circles encourages production of research for the core, centering on problematiques valued in the core, while diminishing perspectives from the periphery.

These competition pressures flourish in parallel to the aforementioned Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), which feeds students' lack of confidence and reduces their capacity to explore what they truly want. The significance attributed to top-tier admissions, the network that comes along with them, and the advertisement of these, particularly on social media platforms, has intensified academic competition, making scholars-to-be fear that others are having more rewarding experiences. This may even lead to beliefs that they cannot compete with the pace of others or that they are not updating their academic identity frequently and efficiently enough, translating into a contrast between the natural ideal of the knowledge-seeking graduate student and a predetermined, imposed, alien (and alienating) academic character. In other words, graduate students are encouraged to explore short-cuts of imitating 'successful' examples, as they realize that their initial idealistic and curiosity-based motivations hold little promise of a future job or visibility as an academic within the broader IR disciplinary community.

3.2.2. Publication Stress

The portrayal of an "ideal" educational background and subject of expertise is also reflected in the pressure to publish in top-tier journals. Publication pressure no longer begins when one is an Assistant Professor but instead from the very first days of graduate studies, as the rising competition in the job market has been feeding a requirement to publish even before graduation–a policy deemed by some as "disempowering" (Li, 2016). This demand, coupled with anxiety about the need to locate either a competitive post-doctorate position or a job, imprisons the graduate in a narrow temporal frame. In addition to completing their coursework, broadly mastering the core disciplinary knowledge, developing a sophisticated curiosity in a particular area of interest, and crafting a thesis or dissertation, most graduate students are now also expected to publish in indexed (generally Western) journals.

Publishing stress not only shapes the academic journey of graduate students but also their developing perceptions of what is valued in the discipline. It becomes evident that the problem is not merely the pressure to publish itself, but particular expectations about *where* and *what* to publish. Scholars-to-be are forced to quickly define their role in the broader community through their area of expertise and the rankings of journals in which they have published. Under this pressure of becoming part of the publishing community at an early stage, the student is incentivized to look for shortcuts to survive, leading to such outcomes as

students falling victim to predatory publishing (Taylor, 2019) or quickly attaching themselves to a particular disciplinary sub-community (or paradigmatic "sect") (Whyte, 2019) that has established research questions/methods, and thus de facto control over the refereeing and editing of that sub-community's leading publication venues. To survive the race, i.e., to publish and get a job, one is pushed to surrender to these established components of the deeper structure. This mechanism plays a crucial role in the assimilation of young scholars and contributes to an unquestioned regeneration of disciplinary norms–the antithesis of a push for a globalization of IR.

Ultimately, in addition to presenting problems for graduate students themselves, the relentless and ever-earlier pressures to publish also pose risks to the overall discipline by increasing the amount of lower-quality research being produced by inadequately prepared young scholars squeezed by time constraints. Once publishing becomes a crucial element of an emerging scholarly identity at too early a stage, it can overshadow any emphasis on content or quality of intellectual contributions. The necessary stages of a well-built academic journey become overshadowed by market pressure, and less robust work, shortcuts, and even publishing in paid journals may flourish. It's worth noting that three of the four *Master's* level co-authors of this article already have publications (co-authored) in SCI/SSCI journals. We can attest that our drive to complete those earlier works–unlike the current effort–was not due to a burning, self-developed curiosity or passion for the particular research questions, but largely because of the idea that publishing early might be advantageous in the intense competition of the labor market. Building an academic identity resembles, in a sense, the process of child development, meaning we can look to the works of psychologists like Piaget or Vygotsky to draw lessons. Like a child progressing through broad cognitive stages, academics-to-be need to climb a developmental ladder towards mature scientific thinking and construct knowledge appropriate to their developmental level through interaction with peers, experts, and materials. Unfortunately, instead of respecting the need for and nurturing such gradual growth, the current state of the discipline imposes premature demands to publish, making graduate students focus on a (pre-chosen) subject matter around which they can rapidly build their academic identity, all at a too-early stage. This pressure incentivizes not only poorer quality research but also repetition, as a small selection of 'more valued' topics will likely be chosen under such stressful conditions.

All in all, like the nymph of Greek mythology who faded away, leaving only her voice, which was a continuous repetition of others, the IR discipline also risks becoming reduced to an infertile echo of limited ideas and perspectives. However, there may be ways of ameliorating these shortcomings produced by both intra- and extra-class challenges. Hence, in the following sections, we will humbly offer some possible solutions to the challenges that have been depicted above.

3.3. Intra-class Solutions

Based on the in-class challenges introduced above, this section offers recommendations for a graduate-level IR Theory course syllabus, including such revisions as adjusting the role of the instructor, revising mandatory readings and assignment details, and reconsidering the goals and methods of evaluation. The ideas below are intended as suggestions, presented with the aim of increasing student creativity, broadening the pool of questions about which

and whose ideas to be curious about, and promoting asking original questions—ultimately hoping to encourage learning while still challenging and not simply reproducing already existing knowledge paradigms. Their aim is to provoke thinking on practical solutions for the readers rather than creating a recipe for one-size-fits-all. We invite the readers to question themselves in their reactions to our suggestions in this section, whether finding the following suggestions rejectable or unapplicable; in either case, this section then fulfills our purpose.

3.3.1 Course Structure

Our first recommendation is to restructure the course schedule in ways that permit a (re) introduction to state-of-the-art concepts and debates of IR theory and leading works of the IR canon, while also allowing students to assume some responsibility for directing the choice of topics, readings, and discussions. One way could be to devote early weeks of the course to more traditional course content—the goal being not to reinforce the centrality of mainstream thought, but to familiarize students with the discipline's intellectual history, and provide them a basis on which to develop informed conscious opinions. Subsequently, students could choose a topic/question of relevance and interest to them, to examine both through the lenses of existing theoretical approaches, but also with an eye to exploring alternative, indigenous conceptual lessons that might be drawn. Over the following weeks, as they read about their topic/question and consider how various theoretical lenses may interpret the topic/question, they could share their growing reading lists and report on their ongoing intellectual journeys in an open exchange of ideas. In this way, in line with the principles of a negotiated syllabus, students would have input in the questions to be explored, the topics to be covered, and the reading materials to be included.

We further recommend a reconsideration of the professor's role towards one of 'facilitator', helping students broaden their scope of theorizing, ask questions, and search for readings and resources to answer or problematize their research questions. Research has shown the importance of discussions for improving student knowledge retention (Zhao & Potter, 2016), but also the need to ensure inclusivity in discussions (Leese & Rosen, 2024). We recommend that certain physical characteristics of the classroom be considered. While having class discussions take place at a round table in order to equalize all participants may be quite common now in graduate classrooms, a further way of reducing the hierarchical position of professor-as-gatekeeper could be to have everyone, including the professor, raise their hands for recognition to speak, unless directly addressed with a question. In such a scenario, raised hands are acknowledged by the preceding speaker.

3.3.2. Assignments

Along with our proposed changes to structure, various alternative activities may be considered as a way of encouraging students' active involvement and investment in their learning and socialization into the discipline. In the student-led class design described above, much of the class would revolve around discussion of students' selected readings as they explore different theoretical takes and empirical studies related to the particular question/puzzle they have chosen to explore—compiled in what we might call *Intellectual Sharing Bags*—a term based on a historical image of intellectuals traveling to exchange knowledge and insights with other intellectuals, while carrying their books and notes in satchels. Students should try to

consciously keep track of the route they take while identifying and choosing new readings–for example, a reference to a particular theoretical perspective in a study they read may lead them to search for additional works about the conceptual foundations described in it, or perhaps to seek out empirical works explicitly assuming an alternative theoretical perspective. Each week, classmates can bring to class the readings in their intellectual sharing bags, shared in advance among classmates, and during discussions, each participant can raise questions and lead the discussion for their own selected works. Such discussions could help promote participants' intellectual interdependency in a non-threatening (ungraded), non-hierarchical context.

To address different learning styles, students could also opt to present a graphic representation of the journey they took in compiling their intellectual bag–drawn by hand or using a digital visualization tool like *Miro, Adobe Illustrator, or Draw.io*—and depicting the theories and studies they have read about over the previous weeks; their interconnections; and how these readings have contributed to their intellectual background. Such visualizations of the intellectual sharing bags could encourage thought mapping, an approach that has been found to enhance students' depth of understanding, analytical skills, and to encourage critical engagement with the material, as they consciously track which ideas are related to existing paradigms and which are challenging them. Moreover, such mapping may help them improve their self-image as intellectuals; as the students visualize, they will have a better vantage point from which to observe from which paradigms and areas their thoughts have been fed.

Rather than more traditional writing assignments, students could also be asked to prepare intellectual forum articles dealing with political concerns of their community or country. For this, students would identify a significant question, develop effective argumentation, and, drawing on the theoretical insights they are gaining in the course, suggest relevant and feasible policy recommendations. These texts could then be submitted to online forum platforms and also presented/discussed in class.

As long as knowledge production in IR, like much of modern academia, continues to suffer from English linguistic imperialism (Aydinli & Aydinli, 2024), a reality that adds extra hurdles and stress to non-native English-speaking scholars and contributes to periphery dependency, we would also propose that students be encouraged to submit at least one writing assignment in a language other than their native language. For non-native English speakers studying in English-medium contexts, doing so would provide them with an opportunity to fulfill an assignment in their native language. For native English speakers (or non-native speakers studying in their native language), it would force them to experience what it is like completing assignments in a foreign language. This experience could help core members of the IR disciplinary community better understand the role language plays in maintaining the core/periphery imbalance in the discipline.

Yet another type of possible assignment, one that could be done in pairs or small groups, would be to have students invite an IR academician from around the world to an interview about their familiarity with, understanding of, and views on global IR; their thoughts on IR theorizing from a global IR perspective; their personal academic experiences while socializing into the global IR disciplinary community etc. The rationale behind this assignment would be twofold. First, it could serve as a small but concrete effort at encouraging dialogue among diverse members of the global IR disciplinary community–individuals from the 'core' and 'periphery', from varying professional contexts (e.g., from major research universities to think

tanks), and from all stages along the academic spectrum (from junior graduate students to senior scholars). In so doing, it could help raise consciousness of the ongoing need for action to make IR a more global discipline. Second, it could contribute to easing students' FoMo, as classmates would work collaboratively to formulate questions; identify and communicate with potential interviewees; conduct interviews; transcribe and analyze the contents of the interviews; and then, as a whole group, discuss the common/differing perspectives obtained and create a final summary of 'lessons to be drawn'. Moreover, reaching out to scholars from the field might help bolster students' self-image as intellectuals and legitimate emerging participants in the global IR disciplinary community, as the faceless 'idols' whose scholarly works they have read become 'real' people, with whom they are able to communicate and share ideas.

Finally, we would like to add a note about assessment in graduate classrooms. Given our emphasis on promoting students' self-image as intellectuals-in-the-making and reducing the impact of hierarchical class structures, assessment should arguably require only self-evaluation of personal growth. The realities of most higher education environments, however, demand some degree of more formal evaluation, so a compromise approach might be to determine certain percentages for the assigned 'products', while also acknowledging the commitment shown and the knowledge gained. 'Grades' for these accomplishments could be earned through regular and active participation in the class; timely management of the assignments; and general displaying of professional and respectful behavior, thereby promoting students to be productive, not 'right'. We would also propose that the determining of each assignment grade be divided: ½ from the instructor (in recognition of their greater experience and knowledge); ¼ self-assessment by the student; and ¼ peer-assessment by classmates. For the latter two, a clear and mutually agreed-upon rubric for students to use when evaluating themselves and others would be essential.

3.4. Extra-class Solutions

Attempting to propose solutions to extra-class challenges like the tight labor market and premature publication pressures is a hard task. Simply put, when fighting against any massive, established system that has consolidated interests and practices constructed to promote reproduction, change is never going to be easy. Still, there may be a few things we can suggest, and principles we can highlight. Rather than addressing individually the issues outlined in the extra-class challenges section, we instead divide our suggestions into those that can come from within the graduate student community itself (bottom-up) and those that require initiatives from institutional and disciplinary leadership (top-down).

3.4.1. Bottom-up

Perhaps the most feasible thing that graduate students can do to promote change for themselves and for the IR disciplinary community as a whole—and indeed, one of the driving forces behind our enthusiasm to be part of this project—is to raise awareness of the problems. The challenges outlined in this article are not unique to the present day, but they are becoming increasingly acute. More members of the academic community need to be shown that the job market around the world and across disciplines actually *is* more competitive than in past decades (see e.g., Jaschik, 2016; Lightfoot & Zheng, 2021), and that the pressure to

publish really is being exerted at earlier and earlier stages (e.g., Horta & Li, 2022). Moreover, everyone in the IR disciplinary community needs to be made conscious of the risks that these challenges pose, not just to the comfort of graduate students' lives, but to the very heart of efforts to diversify and globalize scholarly knowledge production in IR. By speaking up and raising awareness of these issues, graduate students need to make those in leadership positions uncomfortable enough that they actively join in the search for solutions.

In their effort to raise awareness, graduate students need to seek allies. Strength comes in numbers, and to raise awareness, you need both a loud and legitimate voice that will be heard by those in positions to make changes. Graduate students' most obvious and closest potential allies are their professors, and in particular their advisors, who are themselves not completely impervious to the rising demands on graduate students, as they too may be under pressure to show where their advisees are publishing and getting placed after graduation. The mass academic industrial complex may seem like a void too vast to speak into, but talking to known professors and advisors, and getting them to join in the cause of awareness building ,could help lead to steps being taken towards the top-down measures listed below.

Interdisciplinary alliances can also be sought. At institutions where there are graduate unions or student representatives on administrative boards, the focus for their advocacy efforts should include issues like the early publication demand. Pressure from these organized student voices could perhaps eventually convince some institutions to reconsider their hiring criteria and to issue transparent statements that, when hiring, they look at more than just publications. Much like when certain leading schools in the U.S. announced they would make SAT scores optional as part of the undergraduate application process, leading to a change in perspectives about the exclusive value of standardized tests, some key institutions openly stating that publications are not required for PhD program entry nor are they the primary factor of consideration for entry-level faculty positions, could go far in promoting more holistic selection and hiring processes, in which, for example, statements of research intent and/or teaching philosophy assume more significance.

A final bottom-up measure that graduate students can begin taking immediately is to focus on building nurturing, local communities. This might be encouraged by, for example, creating a site for online shared documents, where matches are made between those seeking or volunteering help on research projects, or organizing online study groups, where graduate students with similar research interests can present their research and get peer feedback. Research has shown that writing does not in fact have to be the solitary activity we so often imagine it to be, and that to promote greater creativity, we should be practicing more collaborative writing (e.g., Simmons & Singh, 2019). Building up online or in-person writing partnerships or arranging writing retreats among graduate students can be a way of not only pushing back at a culture of competitiveness, but may also serve to improve the quality of the work being produced.

3.4.2. Top-down

True disciplinary change also requires efforts by the leading disciplinary associations like the International Studies Association (ISA) or the British International Studies Association (BISA). If such associations can be convinced that the problems outlined here are indeed having a negative impact on the trajectory of the discipline, leadership can show its genuine

commitment to change by giving greater voice to graduate students as intellectuals-in-development rather than expecting them to jump into the deep end of the pool as mini-scholars. This means giving full support to reputable, well-funded, unique venues for graduate students to exchange ideas.

While it's possible to find many graduate student conferences in IR run by individual universities, the major associations, such as ISA and BISA, do not organize separate graduate student meetings and instead incorporate graduate students into the regular annual conventions. The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) stopped organizing its graduate-student conference in 2018, having observed that students were submitting proposals to both the graduate student conference and the 'regular' one, and only reluctantly attending the former if they were unable to get a paper accepted at the latter. While graduate student participation in the larger association conventions may seem like a positive move as part of students' socialization into disciplinary practices, we would argue that it is another sign of a forced, early maturation as scholars, and that it further promotes rapid unconscious assimilation. Separate conferences specifically focused on graduate students, but with the full support and power of the big associations behind them, would give a greater voice to specific issues that graduate students face and questions they want to explore.

4. Concluding Discussion

4.1. Intellectualism vs. Industrialization and the Industrial Academic Complex

This article focuses on problems observed by graduate students of IR. They identify challenges in and outside the classroom that lead to painful consequences for the students themselves, but also have detrimental effects on knowledge production in the discipline. They highlight the increased stresses of a tightening job market and acute pressure to publish at earlier and earlier stages in one's entry into the discipline, the pressures of which lead to students adopting survival mode strategies of mimicry over creativity, rushed identity claiming over exploration, and production quantity over quality. Their concerns support my own observations that, in order to feed the industrial machine, students are prioritizing product-centric over curiosity-centric practices. A focus on production, particularly when based on reproduction of a prescribed literature, leads to homogenization and complacency with the system—don't stick out, don't rock the boat. Ultimately, the concerns raised in this work reveal a deep-seated structure that is responsible for a narrowing production of core-based, Western-centric, establishment knowledge—a problem recognized by those seeking to globalize IR, but one that is arguably not being effectively addressed yet in practice.

This structure begins in the graduate classroom, and therefore, hope for change lies in the graduate classroom. The overall graduate student experience has to be reformed in a way that these young agents should be encouraged and enabled to resist the homogenizing, assimilating structure and then, with their global contributions, possibly transform it into one more welcoming and encouraging to multiple perspectives.

While writing this article, I was reminded of the potential that lies among the most junior members of our disciplinary community. The back-and-forth discussions of this collaborative, co-authorship process brought with it unexpected challenges but also surprising benefits— most importantly, the refreshing and unrestricted–though sometimes unstructured—ideas

that they consistently contributed. Nevertheless, a graduate student based, bottom-up transformation is not going to be easy. Graduate students are the least represented portion of the IR disciplinary system. They are also dispersed, and highly dependent on their 'superiors'' guidance, resource allocation, and approval. Moreover, there will always be deserters who think they are competitive enough to gain entry to the 'club', and thus have no motivation for collaborative team spirit. For all these reasons, top-down awareness building, vision, and initiative taking are critical to turn the graduate student classroom into a site for creativity, diversity, and true globalizing.

It has become popular in the last decade or so to express one's support for a globalization of the IR discipline. It is oxymoronic, however, that even as we debate the degree to which IR is globalized, and the ways in which it could be changed to be more globalized, our universities are mass-reproducing the entrenched structures we are trying to run away from. This study showed some of the mechanisms for assimilation, e.g., premature publication pressure that leads to shortcut seeking; attaching oneself to sub-groups in the discipline to get closer to the gatekeepers; assuming popular Western-centered disciplinary identities; mimicry and idolization in the classroom. All of these are supported by the system—e.g., the big associations' "acquiescence" to having graduate students take part in the 'adult' conferences and practices. Between the shortcuts, the soul-crushing competition, and the premature socialization, the ultimate victim is the discipline—it loses the potential diversity and creativity that these new minds might introduce into it; existing knowledge patterns become reified through increasingly formulaic texts; and "scholarly diversity becomes an oddity in an expanding sea of normality" (Boussebaa & Tienari, 2021, p. 60).

Survival in the current industrialized structure leads to imitation, homogenization, and assimilation. By raising awareness of this pattern, this work advocates for viewing graduate studies as an intellectual journey, one that promotes fearless creativity, diversity, and alternative perspectives. This is not pure romanticism; we are not arguing that idealistic 'intellectualism' will or even should entirely replace the realities of academic production, but if today's industrialization is allowed to continue unquestioned, IR scholarship will become a soulless factory that reproduces the imperfections of today's existing Global (but not really) IR. By consciously trying to strike a healthier balance, we may first save the graduate students, but ultimately, by empowering their critical energy force, we may even help save the discipline.

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