



## Forum: doing historical international relations

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## Forum: doing historical international relations

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**Abstract** *This forum takes up the question of how to do work in Historical International Relations (IR). Especially in the past decade, scholars have debated what modes of analysis are best suited to this sort of work and how Historical IR relates to*

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*the disciplines of History and International Relations. The contributors to this forum intervene in these debates and converge on three issues facing Historical IR—questions of methods, ontology, and disciplinary boundaries. We outline the convergences and differences among the contributors on those points in this introduction, and we conclude by offering a definition of Historical IR in an effort to clarify its position within the discipline of IR.*

## **Introduction: doing historical international relations**

Tobias Lemke and Andrew A. Szarejko

History has always been central to the work of International Relations (IR) scholars. Regardless of what kind of IR you practice, the effort to better understand international political phenomena necessarily references past events. However, disciplinary norms and incentives have produced a falsely stark distinction between IR and History. Indeed, despite IR's roots in History and the ubiquity of historical analysis in IR—something once used to inform policies of colonial administration (Vitalis 2015)—this relationship has long been fraught, especially since the behaviouralist turn of the 1950s and 60s (Armitage 2004; Dryzek 2006, 489–490). Debates on the relationship between IR and History have typically focused on the question of whether there is a 'proper' mode of historical analysis for IR (Hobson and Lawson 2008, 416). Historians and IR scholars alike have criticized work in IR for various mistreatments of History—for taking individual interpretations as objective, for presenting 'statist and Eurocentric' theories as 'timeless,' and for relying on outdated secondary sources (Schroeder 1997; Leira 2015, 28; Hom 2020, 6–8; Møller 2020).

Nonetheless, within the past decade, scholars have sought to rectify such issues from within IR, often under the banner of 'Historical IR.' Indeed, de Carvalho, Costa López, and Leira (2021, 1) go so far as to call Historical IR a 'subfield' within IR, albeit 'a relatively new one.'<sup>1</sup> The work being done within this subfield, however, is wide-ranging. Conceptual and intellectual histories have helped to excavate the origins and shifting meanings of commonplaces such as 'sovereignty' and 'the global' (Bartleson 1995; Bell 2009; Costa López et al 2018). Scholars have also turned to deeper engagement with History so as to reaffirm, critique, or expand IR's dominant 'paradigms' and to go beyond their typical focus on great-power politics of the last two centuries (Kaufman, Richard, and Wohlforth 2007; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2009; Nexon 2009a). Likewise, some constructivists frame their work as constituting Historical IR in

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<sup>1</sup>de Carvalho, Costa López, and Leira's edited volume, *The Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*, is itself evidence of this consolidation and a helpful overview of the process. As they note there, 'so much material is being produced that a stock-taking exercise is both possible and necessary,' and we see this forum as serving a similar purpose (2021, 2). One important factor in the subfield's consolidation was the formation of the Historical International Relations Section (HIST) within the International Studies Association in 2013, which has spurred coordination among like-minded scholars. The kind of work done by HIST's founding committee—Daniel Green, Halvard Leira, Benjamin de Carvalho, Andrea Paras, and Daniel Nexon—suggests some overlap in a substantive interest in the ways that international political practices have been constructed, maintained, and disrupted over long periods of time and an affinity for critical perspectives or genealogical approaches that seek to denaturalize concepts like sovereignty and anarchy (see MacKay and LaRoche 2017; Paras 2019).

that they have been ‘propelled towards accounts of time and place specificity, context and change’ (Lawson 2012, 209; Bially Mattern 2005; Zarakol 2011).<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, other scholars approach Historical IR from the somewhat different disciplinary standpoint of International (or Global) Historical Sociology. In so doing, scholars seek to go beyond IR’s typically state-centric scope of analysis and to unsettle dominant narratives about international history, especially those that elide gendered and racialized hierarchies (Lawson 2006; Shilliam 2006; Owens 2018). Similarly, (neo)Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial approaches have sought to make sense of the historical entanglements between the state and capitalism and the overlapping ‘global hierarchies’ associated with modernity (Chowdhry and Nair 2002, 1; Allinson and Anievas 2009; Towns 2009; Getachew 2019). This focus is mirrored in the English School’s focus on *longue-durée* history to illuminate the ‘deep, organic, evolved ideas and practices that constitute both the players and the game of international relations’ (Buzan 2015, 129).

Given this variety, what does it actually mean to do Historical IR? What distinguishes this subfield or mode of analysis from other work that simply labels itself as IR or IR Theory? In this forum, five IR scholars offer their perspectives on these central questions. In so doing, they share a focus on three narrower issues. What methods are most appropriate for work in Historical IR? What is the ontological status of the subject(s) of our inquiry? And how should Historical IR create or dissolve boundaries between it and other (sub)fields?

## Methods

Historical IR scholars, as the above description of work in the field suggests, have used a variety of methods, which prompts the question of whether Historical IR can lay claim to any unique methodological toolkit that meaningfully distinguishes it from History or IR (Lawson 2012, 204; Rosenboim and Hartnett 2021, 101–103). When it comes to doing Historical IR, however, the contributors to this forum all argue against the use of history as a decontextualized data set with which to test hypotheses, though they have different ways of making this case. Daniel Green, for example, laments the habit of ‘cherry picking’ historical events to support a theory and suggests an alternative way forward via the construction of ‘meso-scale historical narratives’ that provide ‘a thick account of eras and disjunctures.’<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Jessica Auchter and Swati Srivastava call attention to the ways that existing biases in historical records can be reproduced through uncritical data collection.

For similar reasons, Barder, Green, and Srivastava emphasize the need to more rigorously contextualize our narratives in the relevant historiography, literatures with which IR scholars often have only a passing familiarity (Lustick 1996). But when secondary sources will not suffice, Stephen Pampinella

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<sup>2</sup>As Vaughan-Williams (2005, 133) explains, ‘The worry is that the discourse of the historical turn in IR perpetuates rather than displaces the tendency to privilege structure and space over context and time in our analyses of world politics.’

<sup>3</sup>Elman and Elman (2001, 35) offer a similar warning against using history solely for theory-testing.

advocates deeper engagement with primary sources by way of ‘triangulation’ and ‘textual ethnography.’ Both methods, he suggests, can help IR scholars produce thicker descriptions of multiple subjectivities so as to better elucidate ‘the contexts and interpretations of agents contesting political orders.’ The basic impulse the contributors express—the rejection of History as data with which to establish nomothetic causal relationships between variables—is perhaps one of the most broadly shared views among Historical IR scholars. As McCourt (2012, 25) puts it: ‘[T]he surge in interest in history in IR must be understood as part of a wider movement in the social sciences as a whole away from neo-positivism.’<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the excavation of different histories of international political thought often serves to illuminate paths not taken and to chart alternative futures for the discipline (Molloy 2006; Ashworth 2021).

On the other hand, Historical IR—like History itself (Lawson 2018)—is not wedded to any one method. Such work may be more likely to rely on archival research than other IR scholarship, but this sort of primary-source research is not the only means of doing Historical IR. Rather, as Srivastava points out, there are various digital tools now available to scholars that lend themselves to ‘interpretive quantification’ (Barkin and Sjöberg 2017) or other forms of primary- and secondary-source analysis.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Green approvingly cites recent, methodologically ecumenical work on comparative ‘hegemonies’ (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019), and Auchter suggests that storytelling, a term often pejoratively applied to History, can be a useful method in that we can sometimes glean as much from the stories that people tell about their histories as we can from archival materials.<sup>6</sup> History, Auchter reminds us, is too contested a political space to lend itself easily to the uncovering of generalizable causal relationships or transhistorical truths.

## Ontology

A second theme centres around ontological claims. When we do Historical IR, is ‘history’ a truth that we discover or a source of uncertainty that frustrates any attempts at crafting complete, singular accounts of any given phenomenon (Carr 1961; Lawson 2012)? Again, there is convergence among our contributors in that they evince a constructivist sensitivity to the inherent intersubjectivity of historical renderings and the contingency of historical processes.<sup>7</sup> Srivastava, for example, emphasizes Historical IR’s potential in ‘accounting for

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<sup>4</sup>Nonetheless, Historical IR remains a broad category, and we do not seek to bar quantitative, rationalist, or neo-positivist work from being considered a part of this field. For work of this sort that could be considered Historical IR, see, e.g., Kokkonen and Sundell (2014) and Blaydes and Paik (2016). See Jackson (2010) on neo-positivism as one of multiple equally ‘scientific’ approaches to the study of world politics.

<sup>5</sup>See also Barkin (2008) on the perhaps unhelpful distinction between ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ research, the latter often being a residual category that encompasses myriad approaches.

<sup>6</sup>Lawson (2012, 218–219) argues that ‘narrative,’ or the construction of ‘structured stories that explain events and make them intelligible to others,’ is a shared feature of work in History and International Relations. Auchter’s emphasis on storytelling is similar but is less concerned with causal explanation.

<sup>7</sup>Though there are many varieties of constructivism in IR (Srivastava 2020), we mean constructivist in at least the minimal sense of accepting the non-inevitability of a given social phenomenon (Hacking 1999, 6). Postcolonial perspectives share a similar emphasis on subjectivities (Epstein 2014).

the contingency of historical development,’ and Auchter’s exposition of historical narrative as both a hermeneutical and political exercise is arguably the most vocal articulation of this position. Green’s argument for periodization and more contextually embedded accounts of historical periods echoes this view, although he cautions that the tension between searching for specificity and providing generalizable accounts poses an ongoing challenge to Historical IR. An excessive emphasis on contingency, as Anievas (2016) suggests, can prevent us from theorizing at all (about, among other things, the structural sources of contingency).<sup>8</sup>

The call for a more contextualized rendering of history is also central to Barder and Pampinella’s suggestion that Historical IR should embrace a relational ontology of the social world. Relationalism prioritizes the constitutive effects of social interactions over fixed unit attributes and essential categories, which proponents contend produces a more dynamic understanding of society and undercuts the view of states as unitary actors (Emirbayer 1997, 281; Barkawi 2017, 61).<sup>9</sup> For Pampinella specifically, methodological relationalism can help IR scholars build ‘historically-informed theoretical explanations of world-historical phenomena’ without falling into either pure abstract generalization or contextually-specific and contingent descriptions.<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, a commitment to relationalism does not limit the methodological repertoire of Historical IR. As Jackson and Nexon (2019) note, relationalism has no methodological implications; an ontology that foregrounds relations is compatible with a variety of ways of knowing. This helps to explain why, as noted above, our contributors do not converge on any one method for doing this sort of work. All of this suggests that Historical IR can similarly accommodate different ontologies—or perhaps different analytical wagers that resist ontological commitments (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 52–53)—but one gets the impression in this forum that constructivist approaches may be the most natural fit for doing Historical IR.

## **Boundaries**

A third theme concerns the location of an intradisciplinary boundary distinguishing Historical IR from other research traditions in IR. Two questions are of importance here. First, if Historical IR is indeed a distinct approach, how should such boundary lines be drawn? One answer—a possibility raised by Hobson and Lawson (2008)—is to draw lines inclusively. Barder, for example, sees the turn towards global history as inspired by a cosmopolitan ethos that might promote a multiplicity of voices within Historical IR—a welcome development, in his view. Likewise, Auchter’s focus on memory holds the promise of recovering lost and suppressed voices that usually fall

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<sup>8</sup>Here Anievas (2016) echoes Hobson and Lawson’s (2008, 424) critique of ‘radical historicism,’ which ‘embraces a view of history as an infinite problem that can never be mastered’.

<sup>9</sup>This is a typical starting point for scholars of International Historical Sociology. As Rosenberg (2006, 335) puts it, ‘This assertion of a fundamentally relational ontology is the first principle of any strictly sociological method: explanation not just of society, but by society.’

<sup>10</sup>In considering how to reconcile this tension between particularity and generality in History and IR, Lawson (2012) argues that ideal-typification offers a way forward, and Jackson’s (2010) ‘analyticism’ offers a similar approach.

outside the purview of IR's state-centered narratives, a project similar to Owens's (2018) effort to recover the international thought of long-overlooked women.

A potential drawback of a maximally inclusive approach to doing Historical IR is that almost anything may qualify as a contribution to the field. For example, Russia's interference in the 2016 US presidential elections is surely as 'historical' as nineteenth-century revolutions or settler-Indigenous conflicts (Pampinella 2021; Szarejko 2021). However, those of us writing presently would likely not immediately see the former as pertaining to Historical IR, even if an author were to bring a close examination of primary sources to bear on the subject. Among our contributors, Green is most wary of being overly capacious in this way. He finds the crux of inquiry in Historical IR in questions that are driven more by history than by theory—a history-first approach—and he argues for the development of a community of Historical IR scholars with shared goals and common touchstones.<sup>11</sup>

The second question deals less with the subjective drawing of disciplinary boundaries and more with the practicalities of research—how should Historical IR scholars substantiate their claims? Does the way they do so have any bearing on whether they should be considered Historical IR scholars? As noted above, the contributors are not unanimous on what methods ought to define Historical IR, and a distaste for 'decontextualized' data prompts the question of how much context will suffice (Butcher and Griffiths 2021). Srivastava intervenes in this debate by arguing that the 'increased availability of digital archives, less restrictive digitization policies in physical archives, and enhanced Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology' now facilitates high-volume data collection and its systematic analysis. In other words, even if Historical IR scholars today feel a need to work with primary sources, they are no longer limited to in-person archival research. However, a focus on primary sources and archival research as the backbone of Historical IR might set unreasonable expectations for many scholars, especially those not housed within institutions that provide the financial resources and support necessary for projects of that scope. This can also help to avoid the false distinction between Historians and IR scholars as working with primary and secondary sources, respectively (Lawson 2012, 204).

## Conclusion

There is good reason to see Historical IR as an increasingly distinct community within IR even as questions remain about what constitutes Historical IR. The contributors to this forum provide answers that we hope will serve as productive provocations in advancing this discussion. We would close with something that we have grappled with since first discussing this subject on a conference panel—a definition of Historical IR.<sup>12</sup> For us, Historical IR is a tradition of inquiry constituted by a community of scholars who desire to broaden the historical

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<sup>11</sup>Correspondence with author, 26 May 2020. Here Green echoes the position of Hobson and Lawson (2008, 430) in advocating for 'historicist historical sociology' as an inclusive *via media*.

<sup>12</sup>This forum began with a roundtable at the ISA-Northeast Regional Conference in November 2019.



imagination of IR.<sup>13</sup> We can enrich the discipline by expanding the range of historical experiences we use to think about world politics, and as our contributors suggest, there may be more than one good way of doing so.<sup>14</sup> Trying to better understand and articulate ways of working at the intersection of IR and History may be a perennial pursuit, but we believe it to be worthwhile.

### **Voices and storytelling: who speaks as historical IR?**

Jessica Auchter

**Abstract** The nature of historical writing means that the very position of the historian is a relevant one, perhaps best articulated by EH Carr: we should ‘study the historian before you begin to study the facts’ (as cited in Carr 2019). He calls attention to the social and political context of the historian, noting that ‘the facts...are like fish on the fishmonger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home and cooks and serves them’ (as cited in Carr 2019). Carr’s characterization of the historian is as an interpretivist, yet historical approaches to IR are often denigrated as less methodologically sound for this very reason.

In this contribution, I argue that IR historical writing can and should be understood as a site of memory itself, and thus interrogated just like any other memory site. I seek to redeem the language of storytelling that is often used to critique Historical IR, encourage approaches that depart from history-as-data, including the study of historical memory, and examine the usefulness of post-colonial and narrative approaches to historical IR. Such approaches can problematize efforts to deploy memory and history by dominant communities. They complicate and challenge issues of representation and subjectivity, and open up narratives about past injustices, one key disruptive promise of Historical IR. This contribution articulates three points in turn.

First, the framing of history as data is fundamentally limiting. While classical figures in IR such as Carr and Martin Wight elevated historical approaches to understanding global politics, particularly IR theory, during the scientific turn in IR during the Cold War, historical approaches sought to appear more positivist and data-driven and turned away from their more interpretivist origins (Hobson and Lawson 2008, 415). As a result, some historical approaches to IR distill complex history into a data point for establishing a causal relationship, simply incorporated within existing theories (Lustick 1996), or from which we can predict fundamental ideas about the causes of war and peace. Such approaches fall into the ‘traditional history’ or the ‘history without historicism’ camps delineated by Hobson and Lawson (2008). This has two problematic results. It privileges a particular type of history: that of states, reifying the state-centrism of IR, and a lot of voices disappear in this telling of history. Relatedly, history becomes about trying to uncover truth rather than something inherently contested. Whose history is worthy of becoming data points, in other words?

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<sup>13</sup>Isacoff (2002) uses similar language in arguing for a pragmatist turn in IR.

<sup>14</sup>This applies to our teaching as well, a domain in which IR students are typically exposed to a relatively narrow range of international history (Knight 2019).



While I am supportive of the rich archival work that is being done under the auspices of Historical IR, we should also be conscious of the politics of that same archive, as Srivastava in this forum also examines. The parameters of our research are already defined by how history has been told and the materials deemed worthy of archiving. Srivastava (2016) has drawn attention to how reliance on archives can reify a gendered view of history, for example. We have to be aware that only certain stories become history, and that all archives are memoirs of a sort (Benjamin 2015). Indeed, EH Carr's own rich engagement with Historical IR connected structural political problems to the intersections of local and global dynamics, and to the lived experiences of individuals (Carr 2019). He was attuned to the notion that historical facts are not simply givens about the world, but already interpretations of it, triggered by a Professor at Cambridge who suggested that Herodotus's account of the Persian Wars was likely shaped by his attitude to the Peloponnesian War (Carr 2019).

In other words, history can be appropriated by IR unproblematically, and as if it is an uncontested form of truth. The politics of history becomes elided in this move, and Historical IR would do well to reflect more on the history of the history of IR.<sup>15</sup> To sum up, I suggest treating history not as an internally coherent set of events that can function as data for IR, but rather as a multi-layered set of narratives that can shed light on how dominant stories come to be told, and as a politics in itself.

Relatedly, my second point is that paying attention to memory can broaden the idea of historical IR. Scholars debate the connections between memory and history (Olick 2003; Bell 2006; Cubitt 2007). However, I find memory a useful way to approach Historical IR. In a study of memory the important question is less about excavating truth or telling the story of a past reality, than about understanding why historical actors constructed their memories in a particular way at a particular time. This understanding is often focused on the way states coopt memory as a tool, or how non-state actors and memory entrepreneurs shape historical events for a particular political purpose (Becker 2014). Memory can help us uncover the stories that were silenced in how particular moments were deemed key moments for history and IR, which has particular importance given recent efforts to understand IR's evolution as Euro-centric (Barkawi and Laffey 2006), as Barder in this forum examines. The purpose of memory is to understand how narratives of the past structure and shape the present through the reconstruction of linear time after a traumatic event or crisis. In this sense, it is less about the past as it happened and more about the past as its story was told.

Attending to history as itself political allows us to examine how history can be wielded by various actors. As Douglas Becker has noted, 'The study of history, and specifically historical memory, is as much a study of the present as it is the past. History has profound implications for the present and as well as future social, political, [and] cultural implications.'<sup>16</sup> His approach to memory entrepreneurship offers one example of how history can be utilized to sustain

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<sup>15</sup>Thanks to Andreas Behnke for this point.

<sup>16</sup>See

<https://www.thebigq.org/2018/03/29/history-as-battleground-how-does-memory-shape-todays-politics/>.

state narratives of ontological security. Yet, it can also shed light on the voices silenced by such narratives, including those of survivors or dissenters, as we see in present-day Rwanda, for example. To emphasize: history is not unproblematic data, but rather a way of putting together events that is itself driven by political, cultural, and social choices. Scholars of Historical IR would do well to consider this not only in the way they utilize history as a mechanism of explanation of global politics (in their methodological choices), but also in the way in which they write.

This takes me to my third point, about storytelling in Historical IR and the role of the narrative turn. Part of the appeal of Historical IR, which draws on archival work, public history, and memoir, is that it opens the door not only to telling stories about history, but to telling our own stories as they relate to these historical moments. Let me be more explicit here about how I see Historical IR relating to other approaches in this sense. I see two productive linkages: with work on memory, and with postcolonialism, both of which have emphasized the importance of narrative work as both a methodology and an epistemology. These fit within what some have referred to as radical historicism or deconstructionism (Hobson and Lawson 2008), and with Vaughan-Williams's caution that the idea of history deployed by many scholars of the historical turn in IR is ahistorical or anti-historical, because it presumes a truth outside of politics that can be accessed via history (2005).

Recent work on memory in IR complicates the stories we tell about our histories and provides a model for the kind of engagement I am advocating in Historical IR (Auchter 2014; Mälksoo 2015; Steele 2017; Subotic 2019). Like approaches to memory, postcolonial approaches often adopt a historical orientation that focuses on how the history of colonialism persists and structures contemporary politics, and emphasizes the importance of both the historical and the genealogical (Barkawi and Laffey 2006; Epstein 2014; Nair 2017). Memory studies scholars and postcolonial scholars tend to focus on moments or stories of rupture and fracture (Rao 2020). They note that history is not linear or even progressive. Memory studies scholars have drawn attention to the relationship between trauma and identity, noting the ways that trauma disrupts linear time and blurs traditional mechanisms of representation, including language (Nichanian 2003; Zehfuss 2007). Postcolonial scholars in particular seek to problematize efforts to deploy memory and history by dominant communities, including within the IR discipline, often framing their calls in terms of 'decolonizing IR' (Gruffydd Jones 2006; Beier 2009; Manchanda 2020). They complicate and challenge issues of representation and subjectivity, and open up narratives about past injustices.

I end here by describing the opportunities for historical work to be disruptive. Much of this promise can come from the narrative turn, which has problematized the way much IR research is presented in flat, emotionless terms, in which the lived lives of individuals become representable only as data points. Instead, rich historical work that takes into account the politics of history and the way it is created, and the voices it elevates, can and should lead us to new ways of writing. We see this in Roxanne Doty's call to change the voice we write in (Doty 2004). More recently, others have cautioned us to reject the view of the scholar as one who is not implicated and imbricated with their scholarly work and ways of writing (Brigg and Bleiker 2010; Inayatullah 2010;

Daigle 2016). Such scholars argue that new forms of writing are needed to disrupt linear forms of time. Jenny Edkins, drawing on her topical focus on memory and trauma, has emphasized that writing itself must inhabit what she calls 'trauma time,' and calls for the development of creative aesthetic practices of writing in IR (Edkins 2013). Maja Zehfuss's *Wounds of Memory* (Zehfuss 2007) is also an example of a work where the scholar is written into the work itself. Nonetheless, there should be more attention paid to the positioning of the IR historian in the writing of Historical IR as it evolves as a distinct approach.

In this sense, viewing history as a form of truth to be excavated can reify a 'high politics' view of IR that denies the ways individuals and communities are also creating their own forms of knowledge. Writing Historical IR in new ways that draw on already existing approaches developed by postcolonial scholars and scholars working on memory and trauma and telling our own stories about our relationships to the past can radically break apart traditional historical narratives and imagine alternative forms of international politics.

## Global history for IR

Alexander D. Barder

**Abstract** The discipline of history has turned to global history as a way of moving away from methodological nationalism. Global historical approaches are innovative insofar as they challenge Eurocentric historical assumptions, as well as demonstrate the wide range of transnational connections and cultural fluidity that made up the modern world. My contribution explores this global turn in history for IR. What are some of the theoretical and political implications of this turn in history for IR? In particular, my contribution explores how this global historical turn can help us understand how nineteenth century ideas of race and racial hierarchy constituted and sustained the very notion of the global.

Narratives of 'global history' by historians have enjoyed a significant resurgence in recent years. CA Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (2004) and Jürgen Osterhammel's *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (2014 [2009]), are emblematic of this attempt at crafting narratives that surpass the compartmentalization of methodological nationalism. This turn to the writing and teaching of global history reflects, as Sebastian Conrad argues, a certain 'dissatisfaction with the longstanding and pervasive sense to conceive of national histories as the history of discrete, self-contained spaces' (Conrad 2016, 2). The turn to global history is then a recognition that the formation and processes of our contemporary globalized world cannot be understood as the outcome of disjointed national histories. Moreover, the recognition that the world of the past is also one comprised of a myriad of entanglements and imbrications that do not necessarily obey the political geographies of nation-states necessitates an ability to tell its stories in alternative ways.

International relations has long had a complicated relationship with the discipline of history; in the American academy in particular, political scientists were originally wary of a greater engagement with history, seeing it as a distraction from rendering the discipline rigorous enough to make broad scientific

claims. Nonetheless, the recent 'historical turn' in IR theory, which challenges the ontological, epistemological and methodological commitments of the discipline, represents an important step in connecting international relations with history (Vaughan-Williams 2005; Lawson 2012; McCourt 2012; Lawson 2018). Significantly, the impetus for this historical turn is the recognition that what passes for history within international relations remains problematic: history is typically conceived of as a data set from which one can derive theoretically salient claims about the 'international,' and crucial historiographical debates are all too often ignored. Nonetheless, the promise of the historical turn and the increasing research in historical international relations is the emergence of a wide range of work that informs the field of a much more nuanced understanding of what is the international of the past and present (Nexon 2009b; Ashworth 2014; Buzan and Lawson 2015).

What I am interested in exploring in this contribution is this turn to global history within the discipline of history and how it might speak to us who study international relations from an historical perspective. What does global history offer international relations? Or to put it differently, what are some crucial empirical but also theoretical insights that global historical approaches reveal? Second, I want to explore the nexus between the global historical approach and the recent interest in international relations in race and hierarchy/empire. What I claim is that historical connections between race, empire and violence are deeply constitutive of international order till the present and that global historical approaches help demonstrate this.

### **The global turn in history: Implications for IR**

Crafting global historical narratives is not a recent innovation. Since at least the seventeenth century, as Conrad shows, there's been an attempt at understanding the historical trajectory of the world as such (Conrad 2016, 17–36). It is, however, by the nineteenth century that we begin to see the nexus between approaches to world history and a conceptualization of how such a history operates. Karl Marx's historical materialism is emblematic of this approach and has proven, evidently, enormously influential for the trajectory of the study of world history throughout the twentieth century. From world-systems theory to modernization theory, global or world historical approaches have developed an understanding of the world by analysing holistic processes beyond the nation-state. At the same time, what also constituted part of early twentieth-century world-history were normative histories of (European) civilizational decline (Spengler 2012 [1926, 1918]). Many approaches to world-history revolved around claims and arguments about the historical trajectory of civilizations – something I will discuss further in the next section. The problem with many of such approaches, however, has been their Eurocentric focus: whether by placing European history as a proxy for world history or by assuming that the particularity of the European historical experience can be emulated across the developing world (Chakrabarty 2000).

Nonetheless, the more recent turn to global history, as Conrad shows, represents a set of methodological approaches that does not necessarily rely upon predetermined units (the nation-state or 'civilizations'), but rather focuses on the flows, processes and imbrications that constitute a world. For Conrad,

global historical approaches first emphasize the extent to which ‘concrete historical issues and phenomena within broader, potentially global contexts’ (Conrad 2016, 65). Importantly, Conrad argues that a global historical approach is ‘inherently relational,’ which implies that units of analysis should be understood in terms of their relational or interactive histories. As opposed to traditional world-historical approaches which stress the autochthonous development of European civilization and its planetary spread through imperialism, contemporary approaches stress the importance of networks of transmission that have influenced European development as elsewhere (Barder 2015; Beckert 2014). Indeed, global historical approaches confirm the ontological importance of examining international relations beyond substantialist points of departure to instead focus on relations *qua* social interactions (Jackson and Nexon 1999). However, what global history also emphasizes, Conrad argues, is the importance of examining the processes of integration: the multiplicity of causal relationships that crystalize into a social structure (i.e. the processes of formation of globalization) (Conrad 2016, 90–114). Finally, given its inclusivity, a cosmopolitan project is at the heart of this turn to global history, as Conrad argues. Such approaches demonstrate the various historical imbrications that have constituted the present. Unsurprisingly, a recognition of the contingency of historical processes is also at the core of this turn to global history. Thus, for Conrad, ‘Global history can offer a reflexive awareness and problematize the narratives that interested parties employ to legitimize their political agendas ...’ (Conrad 2016, 212).

### Global racial imaginaries as international relations

To a certain extent, this turn to global history mirrors the recent call for a global approach to IR (see especially Acharya and Buzan 2019). But whereas global IR is primarily concerned with the attempt to pluralize the study of IR beyond the Western academy and to problematize its disciplinary historiography, global history reflects, more generally, on the importance of rethinking the foundational assumptions about an assumed ‘Western’ past. Indeed, as Zeynep Gülşah Çapan argues, if global IR is simply the attempt to retrieve ‘absent’ historical narratives to a Eurocentric IR, then it can unwittingly reinscribe ‘spatio-temporal hierarchies and recenters the space of “Europe” as it does not question the stages of development narrative of the international but rather aims to make the “non-West” present within that narrative’ (Çapan 2020, 294). For example, within IR there’s been a renewed sense that our understanding of the nineteenth century remains inadequate to understand the formation of the present. For Buzan and Lawson, IR’s lack of appreciation for the nineteenth century is also a function of its inability to appreciate the ‘density and connectedness of the international system’ of that century (Buzan and Lawson 2015, 5). Nonetheless, as Çapan shows, while Buzan and Lawson point to the variety of different processes that have come to connect the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in political-economic terms, they end up crafting a narrative ‘about making present the dynamics of imperialism in the story of the international’ (Çapan 2020, 294).

Global history, by contrast, emphasizes the complexity of social and political life that cannot fit within a priori ontological commitments. As such, I

want to highlight the importance of what I call the global racial imaginary as a way of framing historical interactions and imbrications beyond progressive historical narratives that reconstitute Eurocentric narratives. By imaginary, I am referring to Charles Taylor's concept, which is a way of understanding 'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectation that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectation' (Taylor 2004, 23). For me, Taylor's notion of imaginary is an important concept for understanding the processes of world-making of the global that cannot be reducible to a notion of state-centrism.

Throughout the nineteenth century, coterminous with the expansion of European imperialism and settler colonialism, was the circulation and reification of the global in profoundly racialized terms. For many intellectuals until the middle of the twentieth century, what made up the world was not primarily the European/Western state-system; rather, the world as such was constituted on the basis of incompatible or incommensurable races that were continuously competing with each other. This racialized world was profoundly hierarchical in that white European/American writers assumed the natural superiority of their own race and the inevitable – as a result of the pressures of Social Darwinian interactions – demise of so-called inferior races. The great fear in the latter part of the nineteenth century was precisely seen to be the nascent great-civilizational/racial struggles of the next century. For example, the American strategist Alfred Mahan argued in an essay entitled 'A Twentieth Century Outlook' that the major fault lines of global conflict will revolve around American/European civilization and Asian civilizations (see Barder 2019).

To be sure, there has been a growing interest in uncovering the racial substratum of historical global order in IR in recent years (see Vucetic 2011; Getachew 2019; Thakur and Vale 2020; Bell 2021). Indeed, building upon this literature reveals histories of this global racial imaginary in two ways. First, it reveals an alternative geopolitical imaginary that is not predicated upon ontological assumptions of anarchy and state-centrism, which remain important for theory-building in contemporary IR. Here, for example, Duncan Bell's work on nineteenth century history of the Anglosphere is an important insight into alternative geopolitical imaginaries (Bell 2007). But if anything, examining the nineteenth century more closely reveals instead a much more stratified world on the basis of racial distinctions and difference that had significant repercussions for the development of the field of IR itself (Vitalis 2015). For too long, IR's ontological commitments have blinded it to a past world that would not have understood itself in such terms. Second, the importance of examining the history of the global racial imaginary is in how it may help us understand the intensification of violence over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is not happenstance that the radical intensification of (genocidal) violence is tied to racialization of violence which called into question political structures; from the proliferation of settler colonial forms of exterminatory violence of Native populations to outright state genocidal projects in the Ottoman Empire (1915) and Nazi Germany (1941–1945) racial dynamics play a crucial role in cementing a world of racial hierarchy and conquest. This recognition involves grappling – conceptually, but especially, ethically – with the ways in which the



history of international order and politics emerged out of such episodes of extraordinary racial violence. For example, a global/IR history of settler colonialism can focus on the American experience of continental expansion, the genocidal eradication of Native Americans, and the emergence of the United States as a global imperial power to understand the establishment and contours of a post-Second World War international order. Such a global history would be revealing of the continued perpetuation of racial violence and stratification throughout the global South.

Global history has obvious epistemological and methodological connections with the study of international relations. However, I do think that global historical approaches can especially widen the ontological frameworks that can allow international relations scholars to ask different questions about what was and is international politics. Turning to global history, then, would allow us to avoid what Stanley Hoffman saw as IR's tendency to have a 'highly embellished ideal-type of eighteenth and nineteenth-century international relations' (Hoffmann, 1959).

### Contextualization, periodization, and the riddle of international history

Daniel M. Green

**Abstract** Selection bias, presentism, excessive patternization and ahistorical rational egoism are pitfalls that often ensnare IR scholars when they bring history and theory-building together. Contextualization of events, actions and thought in their historical settings is sometimes called for as a logical antidote to these. But how to pursue contextualization optimally, so that IR may advance beyond repetitious cycles proffering one grand historical framework after another, or ahistorical hypothesis testing? This brief essay suggests a specific strategy of periodization, done as a collective scholarly effort to chart and debate discontinuities, turning points, the meso-scale eras they mark out, and their political content, to produce an elaborated periodization of the global politico-strategic realm across time. From that thick accounting of eras and disjunctures a new and improved IR scholarship can be built.

Theory is history-dependent. If theory is always 'from somewhere,' then the universal 'somewhere' is history. Not only because theorists write in historical contexts they cannot escape, but because the theories invariably rest on historical propositions. (Reus-Smit 2016, 422).

Recent years have seen considerable attention given to what happens and goes wrong when history and the discipline of international relations (IR) meet (Cello 2018; Hobson 2002; Hobson and Lawson 2008; MacKay and LaRoche 2017; McIntosh 2015; Owens 2016; Reus-Smit 2008, 2016; Yetiv 2011). The riddle for practitioners of history in IR, complicated by perceived pressure to produce theoretical generalizations, has always been how to engage with history properly, to give us the 'historical propositions' we can use without regret.

Four pitfalls in the use of history in IR have troubled us. Most basically, there is simple selection bias, the 'cherry-picking' of case examples to make a



theoretical point: for example, the 1930s and failure to balance, the Concert of Europe and the behavior of status quo powers, etc. Cherry-picking uses history as a data base to make a point for a given hypothesis but likely distorts history and does not build IR's knowledge about international history as a whole. It is made possible by a second common abuse of history, presentism - the smoothing over of history so that it relates seamlessly to one's present interests and problems (Hobson 2002, 9–11; McIntosh 2015). Presentism creates the 'isomorphic illusion' (Hobson 2002, 7) that past historical systems are homologous, inhibiting recognition of their unique features and historical discontinuities. It infects the concepts, analytic frameworks and research questions that shape IR (Owens 2016).

A third problem, enabled by cherry-picking and presentism, is what might be called an excessive 'patternization' of history to construct grand frameworks to summarize international history, as in hegemonic stability theory, power transition theory, or long cycle analysis. These insist on key continuities and repetition to propose theories that are also extended narratives of history and typically do not bear up to an intensive review of historical evidence. History is 'strained' and made to fit the model. These three in combination enable unwarranted confirmation of our propositions. They make us uninterested in developing a thick account of international history and render it unnecessary, allowing us to sidestep rigorous checks for transhistorical relevance. Finally, a tactic often used as an alternative to patternization's flawed grand frameworks is to shift to situational analysis but make the assumption that all human actors are rational egoists: self-interested, strategic, and rationally calculating relatively time-invariant costs and benefit impulses (Reus-Smit 2008).

The above are understandable temptations IR scholars succumb to, but an alternative path offers an antidote to each. The solution would logically be to start with history and an account of contexts, not in an entirely open-ended manner but via accumulating work on history with IR concerns in mind, a thick history of the 'global political system' in a sense. Contextualization of events, actions and thought in their historical settings has been called for (see Cello 2018; MacKay and LaRoche 2017; Reus-Smit 2008) but is not always taken seriously by IR scholars or pursued in a constructive way; IR sticks to the rut of repetitious cycles proposing framework after framework, or ahistorical hypothesis testing.

How to proceed? The approach proposed here differs from the micro-focused, Skinnerian, textual, 'texts in context' method (Cello 2018; Reus-Smit 2008), in favor of contextualization via periodization and a collective scholarly effort to chart and debate discontinuities, turning points, the periods they mark out and their political content, producing an elaborated periodization of the global politico-strategic realm across time. It assumes history is 'knowable' (MacKay and LaRoche 2017; Reus-Smit 2008)—though not objectively but intersubjectively, via scholarly consensus—to construct a thick, shared account of eras and disjunctures from which an improved IR scholarship might blossom. The centrality of periodization to knowledge-building has been noted:

Periodization is both the product and begetter of theory. The organizing principles upon which we write history, the priorities we assign to various aspects of human endeavor, and the theories of change we adopt to explain the historical process: all are represented in periodization. (Green 1995, 99).

Periodization is about the criteria for defining what constitute major continuities and major changes in any story that evolves over time. (Buzan and Little 2000, 386).

Periodizations are powerfully consequential, suggesting we be more systematic and logical as to how to proceed with them. A more autonomous, thicker history would be initially for the purpose of achieving a better contextualization of action and thought. But additionally, this approach offers the possibility of working with the contexts/periods and the critical junctures themselves, and the things that inhabit them, as a basis for building knowledge and theory.<sup>17</sup> All in the spirit of Herbert Butterfield's observation a century ago: 'The chief aim of the historian is the elucidation of the unlikeness between past and present' (1931, 10).

Collaboration and exchange in building a collective periodization narrative—or at least taking up the question—raises the issue of the advisable level of specification and patternizing we can build in, mindful of the tension between providing contexts for situated meanings and the need to produce narratives about international history—for our students, the public and ourselves. There are of course multiple temporalities at work (Jordheim 2012), but the choices are narrowed by IR's traditional global-political subject matter. Concluding that IR should have no narratives could mean adopting a post-structuralist sensibility that embraces unrelenting deconstruction and constant contextual particularity; this has been called 'Radical Historicism' (Hobson and Lawson 2008; Yetiv 2011) or hyper-historicism. To be sure, large-scale 'metanarratives'—the panglossian liberal progress narrative, the related Eurocentric modernity narrative, or the static realist narrative of perpetual struggle and prepare-for-war—are methodologically unsound, analytically stifling, and politically dangerous and oppressive (Chakrabarty 2000). But those can be avoided. Indeed, that is the first reward from a careful periodization.

There is a surprising lack of reflection in IR on good practice for moving forward with this. We do see discussion of iconic dates like 1648 (for example de Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011), but little on methods of periodization for IR generally. Three issues leap out for immediate attention: What is the proper scale and scope of such periodizations/eras? What subject matter is the basis of our periodization? How do we summarize and label the eras between key dates that mark period boundaries?

If micro, meso, macro and mega-macro are on offer (Hobson and Lawson 2008)—in essence, months, decades, centuries, multiple centuries—I suggest that meso-scale historical narratives are the best. Located above the micro, they help link us directly to understanding more general conditions, since they postulate about overarching patterns. But they are below the macro, at which scale it might be hard to discuss situated meanings. At the macro and mega-macro scale our arguments will become crudely transhistorical and our theoretical devices divorced from context, almost by definition within a straitened, mega-narrative of history that obscures far too much—for example 'international history is the struggle for power.'

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<sup>17</sup>For example, mainstream IR theories tend to assume in advance that history is linear, nonlinear or multilinear (MacKay and LaRoche 2017). This is an issue better addressed after a thick periodization narrative is produced, not before.

Historians *do* discuss periodization and grand narratives somewhat systematically (for example Green 1992, 1995), and get into angry debates about them (Jordheim 2012). But arguably at the root of this vitriol is the problem that their efforts are too mega-macro in scale. They fight about the boundaries and content of broad, century-heavy developments such as modernity, the Renaissance, the Early Modern, the Medieval, etc. The scale is too great, their ideal types too inaccurate for many specific times and places. This resembles IR's wrestling with a giant social formation such as the state-system via 'Westphalia' and 1648. A 300-plus year frame is doomed to be over-generalizing and obfuscating.

As to subject matter, one general tension is between political, state-focused narratives attentive to system governance, as against the new 'global historical sociology' (GHS) approach, about macro-scale changes in the development of capitalism, state formation and modernity writ large. While both are vital research programs, IR need not embrace the expansive GHS research agenda; sticking to the traditional war/peace/political order agenda is ambitious enough.

As to how to label these eras, this should be the outcome of our collective engagement and debate. The new comparative 'hegemonies' work might contribute (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019), and comparative regional systems is another direction (Westphalia, Sinosphere, Mughalsphere, Pax Ottomanica), though the systems themselves are sometimes essentialized; certainly, separating regional and global analysis makes sense. It could be interesting to merge these threads, perhaps by bringing in distributions of power, 'power shifts,' and great power order projects as part of a shared ontology (Gunitsky 2017; Ikenberry 2001).

With little periodization methods work to draw from, a recent article by Barry Buzan and George Lawson (2014) points in useful directions, discussing criteria for identifying primary, secondary and tertiary benchmark dates.<sup>18</sup> They oddly downplay periodization as being about 'a sequence of eras of more or less equal significance' (2014: 452), but their useful set of primary dates (1500, 1860, 1942) and secondary dates (1648, 1800, 1916), when brought together, sketch a demarcation of international history into a periodization narrative, if slightly on the macro side, and tend to center around recognized points of power shifts as well. Work on more dates and characterizing the eras in between can fruitfully begin here.

As an example of a manageable, heuristic meso-scale era, consider the global British free trade order of 1830-1865 (Green 2020). The global power setting was British hegemony outside Europe, an order project promoting free trade and informal empire, and ending slavery and the slave trade. This is the context for many key developments. British faith in free trade forced the opening of China in the Opium Wars and tore down the Sinosphere; Japan, Korea and China were rushed into global strategic struggles. In North America, pro-slavery forces resisted and doubled the size of the United States in the 1840s before calling a truce with Britain on expansion in the Western Hemisphere. Britain favored a balance of power in Europe which quashed nationalism, preserved

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<sup>18</sup>A scan of their bibliography reveals how few articles on periodization issues in IR had been written before theirs.

the multi-ethnic empires (Austrian, Ottoman, Russian) and helped freeze the map until Italian and German unifications were forced through. Periodization also focuses our attention on the boundary of the era in the late 1860s: free trade and informal empire shift to protectionism and the New Imperialism; Darwinian scientific racism endorses conquest and the gradual (re)drawing of the global color line (Lake and Reynolds 2008); Italy and Germany unite; Japan becomes expansionist; competition for territory accelerates in Africa and Asia. A power context provides a frame for understanding a great deal of thought, action and events.

In conclusion, the subject matter of IR historians is international history, focused on IR's broader interest in peace, order, and the many forms of violence, including empire. The more we develop a thick collective narrative of that history and the timing of key developments, the more productive our work and exchanges will be. This points to giving periodization far more attention than we have done so far.

### **Relational social theory and historical IR: Studying race and racism in the US hegemonic order**

Stephen Pampinella

**Abstract** In this short article, I argue that novel historical accounts of US hegemony can be developed by using relational social theory to analyse transnational linkages between US domestic and international ordering projects. Such analyses enable us to combine Historical IR's focus on relational processes with post-colonial analyses of race and examine how US policymakers maintain hierarchies within the US-led hegemonic order. The article begins by discussing how the Columbia School as well as the practice and field theory of Pierre Bourdieu permit us to abandon methodological nationalism for a relational alternative. It then suggests how relational approaches can be applied to the US hegemonic ordering project to demonstrate how race and racism shape its establishment and contestation. Two research agendas are offered: one that explains the intensity of hierarchy in US state building interventions by focusing on the racialized dispositions of US policymakers, and another that examines how Anglospheric coalitions shaped early liberal internationalism during the negotiations surrounding the racial equality clause within the League of Nations Covenant. Finally, the article discusses the broader contribution of a relational analysis of race and liberal ordering to Historical IR and US political science.

### **Introduction**

Contemporary crises in US foreign policy have generated renewed interest in the history of the US hegemony, especially the role of race and racism in making possible specific policy choices. Although President Donald Trump refused to define the United States in exceptionalist terms, he built upon a long-standing tradition of envisioning US foreign policy in terms of race (Restad 2019). New historical work demonstrates how the idea of an Anglo-American alliance rooted in both nations' common racial heritage informed wartime proposals

for US global dominance that later served as the basis for liberal internationalism (Wertheim 2020, 94–114).

However, Historical International Relations (IR) has yet to offer its own reappraisal of how the United States assumed its leadership role. I argue that the broad turn toward relational social theory (McCourt 2016; Jackson and Nexon 2019) can enable us to develop new historical accounts of how race informed the US hegemonic ordering project. Such a project can extend ‘postcolonial relationalism’ (Go 2016, 139) by illustrating how transnational processes enabled the United States to combine Eurocentric racial hierarchies with its own vision of liberal internationalism. The result was a foreign policy that legitimated informal empire based on specious racial differences while also promoting a limited form of internationalism that denied equal standing to non-white polities. For Historical IR and the broader discipline of US political science, the payoff of a relational engagement with US hegemony lies in connecting postcolonial and critical analyses of race to the origins of liberal internationalism through rigorous historical analysis.

### **Rethinking constructivism as relational social theory**

The relational turn enables us to develop historically-grounded explanations of US hegemony. Relationalism examines how agent characteristics, otherwise taken for granted as fixed substances, emerge out of transactional processes that evolve and change (Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 1999; Nexon 2009b). Studying relations across history builds on IR constructivism by emphasizing ideas and a plurality of historical narratives (Reus-Smit 2008), but goes beyond it by focusing on how narratives are constituted through exchanges of symbolic and material resources (Jackson 2006). Multiple sociological traditions permit such analyses, including the Tilly-inspired Columbia School and Bourdieu’s practice and field theory (Jackson and Nexon 2019). All use relational processes and mechanisms to explain how specific ideas are reproduced across history and make possible collective action given specific configurations of social relations (Goddard and Nexon 2016). Macro- and meso-level social processes either reproduce or transform social structures and micro-level dispositions, and these involve the emergence of historically contingent transnational relationships.

Relationalism thereby departs from the limiting confines of methodological nationalism and refuses to naturalize states and collectivities. Instead, methodological relationalism analyses how group boundaries and identities are constituted by transnational processes that link agents together and provide the social context in which they develop interpretations of the world (Go and Lawson 2016). Explaining how relations constitute actors can be realized by employing a variety of methodologies, though I focus on what Jackson (2010, 35–36) describes as analytic and reflexivist approaches. These adopt mind-world monism by assuming that the world which scholars study is produced by the very practices they use to generate knowledge. If we want to avoid taking for granted a pre-existing account of history, these methodologies ensure that we do not reify collective actors which contest power or invoke narratives that privilege one set of actors over others. Instead, they allow us to study

history as a set of interrelated events whose emergence is a function of relational configurations and interpretations of the world sustained by them.

Adopting relationalism allows us to embrace other scholarly fields and subfields whose subject matter lies outside of mainstream IR analyses of US hegemonic ordering. These include historical institutionalism within the fields of comparative politics and American politics, including American Political Development (see Pierson 2004; Orren and Skowronek 2004). Path dependent processes and critical junctures that transform political orders over time are ultimately stories about exchanges that transcend state boundaries. By starting from transnational ties, relationalism allows us to place domestic struggles over the arrangements that define how agents relate to each other in a broader global context.

### **Incorporating race into contestation over the US ordering project**

A relational engagement with these scholarly approaches enables us to develop a postcolonial account of race and racism in the establishment and contestation of the US hegemonic order (Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015; Ikenberry and Nexon 2019). It relies on Julian Go's analysis of empire in terms of 'postcolonial relationalism' (Go 2016, 139), or the analysis of transnational connections and overlapping histories that constitute racial and civilizational identities associated with modernity (see also Shilliam 2017). Analyses of US global counterinsurgency and domestic policing as well as US state formation and migration policy have already illustrated the benefits of studying the co-constitutive effects of transnational relationships (Schrader 2019; Walia 2021). If applied to the US-led international order, postcolonial relationalism suggests a two-part research agenda that demonstrates how racial hierarchies co-constitute international governance arrangements and struggles over them by dominant and subordinate agents.

First, we can examine how the relational context of US policymakers structured their governance practices during US state building interventions. For example, we can explain variation in the intensity of hierarchies enacted by the United States by analysing how race and racism shape the embodied dispositions of US policymakers. During the US occupations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the early twentieth century, policymakers' background knowledge of white supremacy suggested that Black Haitians were incapable of self-rule while the Spanish heritage of Dominicans enabled them to learn civilized governance (Pampinella 2021). By enabling Dominicans to claim whiteness, the racialized field inhibited the emergence of a resistant Haitian-Dominican coalition and allowed for the continuation of heterogeneous contracting by US policymakers, a core element of any imperial configuration (Nexon and Wright 2007).

Second, a relational approach allows us to examine how the egalitarian potential of early liberal internationalism was limited by racialized visions of world order. Although an Anglospheric identity had emerged prior to World War I (Vucetic 2011), we have yet to evaluate how it shapes debates around the creation of the League of Nations. Such an analysis can build upon intellectual histories that situate the development of international thought within Eurocentric racial and civilizational discourses (Bell 2007, 2020; Long and Schmidt 2008; Hobson 2012). A relational perspective enables us to more rigorously evaluate the transnational ties that made possible the defeat of the racial equality clause during



League negotiations at Versailles as well as the role of race in US debates about the Treaty during 1919 and 1920. If Wilsonian self-determination was always intended for European or white settler nations capable of civilized governance (Getachew 2019), then the prospect of an egalitarian international order would delegitimize Eurocentric stratification in both world politics and white settler polities. By analysing the transnational relations that bound the Anglosphere together, scholars can demonstrate how global and domestic fields of power reinforced racial domination at different levels of analysis.

To perform such research, Historical IR scholars can develop their own accounts of US hegemony by relying on primary archival sources and first-person publications. Srivastava's contribution to this forum provides a technical discussion of how to use archival sources, but I merely want to add two specific techniques relevant to the study of social relations. Pouliot (2010, 71–72) describes 'triangulation' as a method for developing an objective account of a phenomenon of interest based on multiple subjective interpretations of involved actors. When investigating governance hierarchies amid US military occupations, we can uncover the various perspectives of dominant and subordinate actors and demonstrate how they ascribed different meanings to racial categories. Scholars can use archival sources to generate this narrative by conducting what Jackson (2006b, 271–272) calls a 'textual ethnography,' or a thick description of agent understandings based on their official statements and private communications.

### **Broadening the horizons of historical IR and political science**

Relational analyses of the US hegemonic ordering project have broader implications for Historical IR and US political science. A key strength of Historical IR is its ability to revisit classic questions of international relations while drawing upon otherwise ignored aspects of history (de Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011; Szarejko 2021). The same attention to historical detail ought to be applied to the US hegemonic order, which continues to be understood in terms of its supposed benevolence and dramatic break from its explicitly imperial predecessors (Ikenberry 2011). Such analyses can expand postcolonial accounts of Eurocentrism by uncovering how racialized understandings of the world have always demarcated the boundaries of US-led order and suggested how it might be expanded at specific moments in time.

Relationalism can also overcome the disciplinary constraints of US political science that inhibit more critical accounts of US hegemony. A relational analysis of the US hegemonic ordering project can offer a scientifically rigorous explanation of its emergence without succumbing to the neo-positivist premise that observers and their objects of study are independent of each other (Jackson 2010). Rather than treating history as a series of data points or events decontextualized by the researcher, we can examine how policymaking is a product of habits and dispositions learned from occupying an embedded position within a relational configuration. This kind of analysis allows us to overcome the fact-value distinction that otherwise led US political science to reject normativity in favour of scientific neutrality (Mihic, Engelmann, and Wingrove 2005). In this way, a relational perspective can permit an explicitly anti-racist account of US hegemony, one that uncovers how policymakers' self-professed liberal commitments are deeply intertwined with racialized interpretations of the world.



## Situating historical IR in the data revolution

Swati Srivastava

**Abstract** History is more than data, but Historical IR can benefit from the ongoing data revolution in the social sciences and beyond. This contribution considers the promises and perils of a turn to high-volume original data collection and analysis for historically-inclined IR scholars. It argues there are at least three benefits and drawbacks of the data revolution. The benefits include the democratizing access of archival material, potential strengthening of arguments that span long time periods, and creating a more collaborative and inclusive Historical IR community. The drawbacks include a reification of ‘mining history’ for prediction, the commodification of historical knowledge, and the ratcheting up of data availability expectations for ‘replication.’ The contribution encourages IR scholars to take the data revolution seriously for its potential upsides for research and visibility, while offering best practices to avoid the drawbacks.

History is more than data, but Historical IR can benefit from the ongoing data revolution in the social sciences and beyond. This contribution considers the promises and perils of the data revolution for historically-inclined IR scholars. The data revolution refers to the increased availability of digital archives, less restrictive digitization policies in physical archives, and enhanced Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology that have permitted high-volume original data collection and analysis. Sometimes referred to as the ‘digital humanities,’ most major research universities now have either a librarian or an entire centre dedicated to the enterprise. There is a debate within History about the treatment of ‘history as a giant data set’ (Spinney 2019) nestled within disciplinary issues of whether History is situated in the humanities or the social sciences (see Auchter and Pampinella in this forum for an overview of some of the methodological debates). The postwar field of ‘Cliometrics’ (featuring economist Douglass North) embraced the computational study of history and paved the way for the emerging study of ‘Cliodynamics’ (led by ecologist Peter Turchin), which is ‘the search for general principles explaining the functioning and dynamics of historical societies’ (Wood 2020). My purpose here is not to wade in those controversies. I am also not interested in evaluating the merits of computational text-as-data methods. Instead, I focus on how Historical IR may benefit from the democratizing aspects of the data revolution while identifying challenges and best practices.

First, the most important benefit of the data revolution is the democratization of research access. When conducting my dissertation research, I visited seven archives in four countries across three years, all of which were located in expensive European cities, and invested in new equipment. The total cost approximated \$25,000. I was fortunate that my graduate programme had prioritized supporting field and archival work, but I still had to pay for some expenses out-of-pocket. Since my dissertation research was completed, some of the data are now available digitally, some through the archives’ own digitization efforts and others via a commercial data vendor (I address the drawbacks of this below). If I began the research today, I would spend less time and money on obtaining the same materials. In the current climate of rushing

graduate students to finish, this is undoubtedly a positive development. Moreover, as we navigate the ripple effects of Covid-19 travel shutdowns, democratizing research access should be a priority.

Second, the use of some digital tools can help strengthen arguments that span long time periods and/or those conducted within global history (see Barder in this forum). For example, my book project's empirics span many centuries to examine processes of public-private sovereign hybridity. While I had taken a 'Big Data' methods class towards the end of my graduate training, I analysed most of my materials the old-fashioned way: by reading them. However, digital tools made my life easier. OCR allowed the typed text to be searchable, which was useful for prioritizing what to analyse and locating relevant records. Indeed, Huistra and Mellink (2016, 220) note that 'full-text search to retrieve manageable sets of sources from large repositories to study them manually' is the most widespread use of digital methods in historical research. I also used NVivo's word frequency and tree functions for content analysis, inventing my own data visualization techniques to help make sense of longitudinal processes through descriptive quantification (Barkin and Sjöberg 2017). Another example of historical digital visualization is Edelstein et al. (2017)'s mapping of the 'Republic of Letters' from John Locke, Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire, and others.

Third, the data revolution has potential to increase collaboration and inclusivity within Historical IR. The use and sharing of information in the digital humanities may generate a stronger scholarly network of collaboration and support. Edelstein et al. (2017, 404) remark that digitization made it easier for five different seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historians to collaborate on the Republic of Letters project. Digital access to historical materials and collaborating tools could result in an increase in scholarship by participants with otherwise limited access to resources in the Global North. This may lead the Historical IR community to become more inclusive.

But I see three main drawbacks of the data revolution for Historical IR. First, there is the danger of simply 'mining history' for prediction. Auchter in this forum warns that such efforts oversimplify complex narratives, reify 'high politics,' and exclude marginalized voices from historical memory. Historian Lara Putnam (2016, 377–78) concurs that digital full-search 'risk[s] overemphasizing the importance of that which connects, and underestimating the weight of that which is connected: emplaced structures, internal societal dynamics.' The ease of digital access has the potential to devalue the hard work of accounting for the contingency of historical development. The data revolution may also 'open shortcuts that enable ignorance' (Putnam 2016, 379), such as by reproducing the biases generated in the preservation of history. For instance, archives typically place women in 'miscellaneous' or uncatalogued boxes while the men are catalogued through named papers, which has serious implications for representing women in international history (Srivastava 2016). Thus, the move towards higher volume data use may then exacerbate the disregard for historical contingency and narrow *who* is represented *as* history.

Second, many digitization efforts for commercial purposes have cost-prohibitive access charges. For instance, one database that contains archival materials that I collected for my book would charge my institution \$75,000 for access. I am able to access it through a university consortium, but such arrangements are *ad hoc* and depend on institutional resources and their

priorities for allocation. Google has digitized many records from the British Library, which it has made available for free online. But that practice is not widely incentivized. Moreover, even the digitization of freely available materials can hamper time-sensitive in-person archival visits as materials may be out of circulation while undergoing digitization. As data becomes the most valuable global asset in ‘surveillance capitalism’ (Zuboff 2019), the commodification of historical materials might undermine some of the democratization potential.

Third, the data revolution runs parallel to the emerging guidelines for transparency in the use of archival material (Moravcsik 2014; Elman and Kapiszewski 2014). Others have already addressed the transparency debates and their potential to disproportionately hurt qualitative scholars (Büthe et al. 2015; Pachirat 2015; Fujii 2016). As more materials become digitized, they increase disciplinary expectations of sharing source material even for those who continue to acquire data at physical archives. For scholars who invest in costly, time-intensive research trips to gather original data, the trade-offs to publicly sharing all available material for the purposes of ‘replication’ are high. Moreover, researchers who obtain access to historical records that are otherwise under embargo or contain restricted material agree to prohibit sharing as the cost of access. If the replication standards continue to ratchet up, bolstered by the increasing availability of some digitized material, then we might see scholars who use non-digitized primary data at a significant disadvantage for publishing in top outlets.

I do not have easy recommendations for balancing these benefits and challenges. It is important that this forum features these conversations, especially so that early career researchers may evaluate these trade-offs for themselves. But I will end with three best practices for how Historical IR should responsibly situate itself within the data revolution.

### 1. Diversify the archives

While historical repositories have a known ‘nation-state bias’ (Putnam 2016, 381), international relations are not just found in the foreign relations sections of national archives. Nor do they exclusively occur through diplomatic cables, letters, and interviews. The availability of digitized records and community archives make it possible to break ranks and find fresh material for understanding or explaining more of international politics. Thus, scholars can leverage expanding digital access to diversify their sources for where international history is archived. For instance, I looked for sovereign power in supposedly nonstate organizational archives like the International Chamber of Commerce and Amnesty International. Both organizations have digitized some early records on their websites. I discovered material there that I would not have had I searched in the same governmental records as international and diplomatic historians have for the past century.

### Foreground historical commitments

To avoid ‘mining history,’ researchers should be more explicit about tying theories of history to their substantive work by foregrounding their historical commitments, for instance whether they ascribe to history as nonlinear, linear, or multilinear (MacKay and LaRoche 2017). As Green in this forum argues, scholars

also ought to be more attentive to periodization. In addition, we should be more explicit about historiography and source interpretation, especially but not exclusively for causal inference: Why should we believe the record to be reliable? What role does it play in substantiating the argument? What is the counterfactual absent the record? Some of these questions are now being asked under the data transparency and replication movement. But these practices also help guide readers to the contingency of historical explanations and understandings. There is of course a limit to such investigations, yet moving to higher volume of data should not preclude engagement with making explicit some of our commitments to history.

Use more public news data

To displace some of the emerging costs of sharing original archival material, Historical IR scholars can make more systematic use of publicly available news archives. Many of the most frequently used news sources have now digitized their collections going back to the mid-1800s. Media historian Bob Nicholson (2013) provides an early application of the possibility of digital news archives for studying the late-Victorian period. I flip through digitized newspaper front-pages of a new period to immerse myself in the main concerns of that time, even if the stories are not directly relevant to my work. News data is also useful for acquiring interview quotes and otherwise hard-to-find figures in official records. There is a growing use of news for constructing event data, sometimes using computational methods, which may be useful for some Historical IR projects. But using the news as an end in itself remains insightful and has become more convenient.

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