On the Pedagogy of a Truly International Relations

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Is it possible to teach a truly "global" International Relations? That question is an under-examined assumption at the heart of Global International Relations and Worlding Beyond the West. These two reform movements have issued direct theoretical challenges to the Euro-centrism of conventional IR scholarship, and over the past decade and more, they have yielded a body of research that has greatly expanded the remit of what we call "International Relations." But, as I explore in a recent article, something is still missing (Ettinger 2023). In my view, GIR and Worlding have an underdeveloped understanding of their own pedagogical implications. As a classroom-first IR scholar, I often engage with new scholarship in terms of "how am I going to teach this?" Thus, far the GIR and Worlding programs have not satisfied my concern. So, to sharpen my question above: can GIR and Worlding develop a pedagogical program to ensure that their intellectual substance can be taught? What we need is a pedagogy that is rooted in the theoretical commitments of the programs themselves, and one that is actually useful for classroom teachers.

The stakes are higher than just tweaking the undergraduate IR curriculum. Right now, GIR and Worlding missing out on half the intellectual life of IR – the classroom half, where the assumptions of the field reproduce themselves each year, and where the next generation of IR scholars are born (Ettinger 2020). Failing to develop a classroom pedagogy will limit the reach of GIR and Worlding to only the community of researchers working in those areas. Worse, it will do little to challenge the hegemonic centrality of Euro-Atlantic IR that defines the discipline. Pedagogical application must be more than an *à la carte* addition to an existing syllabus or the use of a new teaching technique. A pedagogical theory of GIR and Worlding needs to be explicit about the larger purpose, clear about its concepts, and practical in its application.

What is GIR and Worlding Beyond the West?

GIR and Worlding Beyond the West emerged in the past ten or fifteen years from a similar objection. Both reject the intellectual and empirical limitations of conventional IR scholarship. They share a desire to expand the scope of IR beyond its Western-centrism but they differ in exactly how to do so. The details of each program are spelled out in plenty of places and, since both are relatively new programs, they are constantly evolving (Acharya 2014; Waever and Tickner 2009; Tickner and Blaney 2012; Tickner and Smith 2020; Layug and Hobson 2023). A straightforward comparison is difficult but I think they can be compared along six basic considerations.

First, the normative agendas are similar. GIR aims to locate agency in the Global South while Worlding aims at decolonization, emancipation, and political solidarity among the subaltern. These are essential to their critique of Western-centric parochialism in conventional IR. Second, they view mainstream of the discipline quite differently. GIR is critical of the mainstream discipline but looks to find mutual compatibilities. Worlding has a much more jaundiced view of IR, seeing it as incompatible with its agenda and the intellectual emancipation of the Global South from the intellectual strictures of the West. Accordingly, the intellectual commitments of both approaches are quite different. GIR seeks to reform the IR mainstream by disabusing it of its intellectual exceptionalism, while Worlding seeks to move "beyond the West" altogether. Fourth, ontologically, the two programs share a relational worldview but differ on universalism: GIR embraces pluralistic universalism – many worlds within the same universe – while Worlding embraces a pluriversal perspective. Fifth, GIR is pluralistic in its epistemological commitments while Worlding proponents embrace standpoint epistemology.

Finally, we come to pedagogy where both programs are most underdeveloped. GIR theorists have spoken about the situatedness of teaching and the Western bias in textbooks. Worlding advocates for "unlearning" IR and empowering students. Noble sentiments, yes. But it is not enough. This literature still lacks a systematic sense of how to diversify IR in the classroom in a way that is consistent with GIR and Worlding's theoretical commitments. Developing such a theory is hard. There are unacknowledged tensions between the intellectual commitments and the plain fact that doing so is remarkably difficult for the people involved. That is the crux of the matter.

The Embodied and Embedded Nature of Teaching

Chief among the pedagogical challenges is coming to terms with some immutable realities of teaching. Fundamentally, teaching and learning are embodied activities, carried out by human beings, who are embedded in a specific time and place. Indeed, as bell hooks (1994: 139) reminds us: "[t]he erasure of the body encourages us to think that we are listening to neutral, objective facts, facts that are not particular to who is sharing the information." This, I argue, is something that the exponents of GIR and Worlding have largely missed, especially those who have tried to address the pedagogical side of things. If they had, they would see that the ordinary (and some extraordinary) challenges of teaching amount to major obstacles in the classroom operationalization of the two programs. Here is what I mean.

The embodied nature of teaching means that the teacher is influenced by many things: cultural assumptions, academic training, preferences, biases, expertise, historically ascribed roles, and stock of knowledge, not to mention responsibilities outside of work. This places limits on what one instructor can realistically teach inside the classroom. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to think otherwise. This does not even begin to address ethical questions about who can speak on behalf of other people's cultures (Gelardi 2020). The embeddedness of teaching means that learning occurs in a specific time and place, located in a network of social relations. Classrooms are nested in schools, universities, culture, regulatory environment, and political climate. Each of these exert influence on scholarly work.

Given these limitations, teaching a program like GIR or Worlding, with their enormous scope is a very steep climb. As I write in the longer-form version of this article, "[t]eaching a GIR or Worlding pedagogy would require a stock of knowledge that is global and/or "multiversal" in scope, millennia-deep in history, and attentive to variations within, and up-to-date on recent developments" (Ettinger 2023: 11) What other area of political science, or IR, or anything else for that matter demands such polymathy? And pity the poor teacher who attempts such a feat without the protections of tenure or the benefit of years of experience.

To all of this we must add the inevitability of parochialism. Teachers and students alike are subject to the influences and availability biases of the "home perspective" – the prevailing cultural and social worldviews arising from the local context among a given student population. This home heuristic is a way of relating new and unfamiliar information about the world to a familiar baseline of knowledge. Teaching without reference to something familiar to students will be disorienting and will compromise learning, at least it will among my predominantly western students.

If we accept that there is no pedagogy from nowhere, then, then the embedded and embodied nature of teaching needs to be factored into GIR and Worlding's pedagogical thinking. This raises questions that are philosophical as much as pedagogical. Where does the Euro-Atlantic "West" fit into an approach that rejects the West? How do we teach non-Western theories critical of the IR mainstream if we take Arlene Tickner's (2013) advice to "forget IR?" And how on earth can a professor operationalize such a vast pedagogical undertaking? If these GIR and Worlding programs cannot be made viable in the classroom, then they will have difficulty penetrating fully half the intellectual life of IR.

Three Solutions

Understanding the concepts and respecting the practical challenges, how do we operationalize GIR and Worlding pedagogically in a way that draws from their respective theoretical literatures? The first step involves a personal choice about curriculum design and trade-offs: what is your pedagogical wager? For me, I embrace "strategic parochialism" – a pedagogy from somewhere that permits me to begin with the near and familiar before departing

into the unfamiliar. It concedes to the home bias but does not allow it to limit possibility. This might seem like an odd thing: embracing parochialism to engage with pluralism, especially when GIR and Worlding are allergic to the idea. Indeed, it is a small but worthwhile wager because it makes teaching approaches and techniques available. Let me mention three.

The first approach, 'contrapuntal reading', derives from music theory by way of GIR scholarship (Bilgin 2016). It refers to two or more musical lines played in harmony, each augmenting the other. Transposed into IR scholarship, it entails the study of multiple histories at the same time to see how one influenced the other. It is manifestly *not* a single narrative tale or covering theory, but one that weaves together an integrated understanding of world politics. The purpose is not to establish the single "right" story or the "truest" theory, or a regionally exclusive history. Rather, it is to develop a multidimensional understanding of mutual co-constitution in world history and to make different perspectives intelligible to one another. In the classroom, a contrapuntal pedagogy would raise awareness among students of the interconnections between world regions and the hierarchies of power at play. Examples from the GIR literature make use of juxtaposition and reading against the grain (Hazbun 2021). This involves comparing conventional global narratives to local histories, or comparing the histories of different peoples or regions in order to understand how knowledge and theory evolves (Behera 2021).

In my own classroom, I use this method in different ways. For example, in upper year undergraduate global politics courses, I ask "when did world politics begin?" The point is to use the question as a starting point for deconstructing assumptions about what "global' means and to reveal the Western-centrism of historical reference points in conventional IR. At introductory levels, I organize IR theory classes around Barry Buzan's (2016) question "what would IR look like if it had been invented somewhere other than in Europe/West?" Like many others, I begin with what will be familiar and intuitive to my students (realism and liberalism) before extending outward to the critiques of state centrism (Marxism, feminism, constructivism, English School). Students write a paper asking if conventional IR is too state centric? Then comes the big leap. I then introduce students to theories coming from post-colonialism, race in IR, and non-Western IR theories in pursuit of the question "is conventional IR too Eurocentric?" This is where contrapuntal pedagogy pays off. It requires students to consider the limits of IR theory's conventional foundations without jettisoning them altogether. Ideally, students walk away from the course as pluralistic thinkers about "the international" and not as partisans of any "-ism." The major drawback is the cost in time and energy. Contrapuntal reading requires a deep stock of knowledge to execute properly and a willingness to sacrifice research time which, as we all know, is more profitable to a career.

The second approach, 'decolonizing politics', borrows from Robbie Shilliam's (2021) work on decolonization in political science. Step one is recontextualization – situating political actors in their imperial and colonial contexts. Step two is reconceptualization – thinking about how imperial and colonial contexts influence the political thought of the day. Doing so reveals underlying assumptions and prejudices embedded in ideas. The third step is reimagining, and far and away the most difficult. At this stage, historically marginalized ideas are brought into the centre and ultimately displace imperial ideas. Shilliam's three-step is a straightforward method for diversifying IR pedagogy. It treats ideas and authors as historically situated things. While he is not writing explicitly for the classroom, the ideas travel well. Each step can easily be deployed in introductory or advanced classrooms to present and unpack IR concepts and case studies. It shares similarities with GIR approaches that seek to decentre the West. For example, Barry Buzan asks "what would IR be like if it was invented someplace other than the West?" More concretely, what would change in introductory IR theory classes if Thucydides appeared alongside Kautilya; if*Arthashastra* and *The Prince* were read side-by-side; if Euro-Westphalian political ontology was taught alongside *Tianxia* and *Mandala*, or if liberalism was read alongside *Nishnaabeg*, *praja,* or *ubuntu* worldviews as sources of political order (Buzan and Acharya 2022)? This approach decentres conventional IR without rejecting it altogether while inviting new ideas in from the margins. Of course, this is easy to say, harder to do. This approach demands a great deal of intellectual labour from teachers which might not be possible.

'The ignorant schoolmaster', the final approach, is the most radical and unnerving for the professor. It involves decentring the subject matter expertise of the professor altogether. No longer should the outer limits of the professor's knowledge be the boundaries of learning. Instead, students should direct their own learning according to their own curiosity. The principle underpinning this approach comes from an early nineteenth-century French teacher

who discovered he could teach peasant children even if they did not speak the same language (Rancière 1991). The radical conclusion was that doing away with the stultifying master-pupil relationship, or what Paolo Freire (2017 [1970]) called the "banking concept of education", could lead to intellectual emancipation. The most obvious way to operationalize this in the twenty-first century is the "flipped classroom" – already a favoured method for innovative teaching. But really, anything that permits students to choose their own direction works. The instructor's role is to motivate. The benefits of this approach are many: this approach mitigates (but does not eliminate) power hierarchies in the classroom, it expands the range of learning possibility, and enables students to take responsibility for their own learning. It is also the least labour intensive for the teacher – which is always attractive. Though giving up hard-earned classroom authority lands differently with different professors. As a white male professor, I benefit from a certain automatic deference in the classroom that is not available to others.

Conclusion

In my teaching career, the shift towards a more "global" IR has been hard, rewarding, and often humbling. I've botched histories, mangled names, and have had students correct my feeble effort to pronounce words in Pastho or Mandarin. I've struggled to write lectures on unconventional topics I'm encountering for the first time – on one occasion I spent more time preparing a lecture than I did preparing for a job talk later that week (I was not hired). After a few years of trying, I've developed a strong reserve of content and the confidence to take risks. Yet there is so much more to go. Global International Relations and Worlding Beyond the West are the most promising challenges to conventional IR in decades but they need a better understanding of how they will engage with "taught discipline" of IR (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014).

My classrooms – and my own understanding of the world – has been enriched by the inclusion of concepts, theories, cases, and histories into IR from outside its conventional Euro-Atlantic core. None of this is to argue that we should junk the traditional IR curriculum. Far from it. I think that the diversification agenda only makes the traditional content more interesting. Unlike some in the GIR and Worlding discourses, I don't think that the old school and the new school are condemned to mutual intolerance. In fact, they are necessary parts of a truly *International* Relations.

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