Post-Positivism Is Not Yet Normalized in International Relations

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Positivism has been "the allegedly scientific mainstream of IR theory" (Rengger and Thirkell-White 2007, 6). On the other hand, it has been criticized that its "embedded standards, criteria, norms, and principles (⋯) give them privileged status" (Lapid 1989, 243) and avoid any "anomalies in theories" (Lapid 1989, 242). However, it is difficult to say that positivism's dominance disappeared in International Relations (IR). How and why could Positivism remain the mainstream role in IR despite the development of Critical theories? Have Critical theories and other radical ideas been indeed normalized and weakened as some critics argue? (Hynek and Teti 2010). In this article, I explain that positivism has its strength in supporting liberalism and establishing problem-solving policies, creating nation-centric and U.S.-centric views of IR. Since the U.S. scholarly and disciplinary power has preferred such narrow perspectives emphasizing national policies to date, Positivism could still be most prominent in IR. However, I disagree that post-positivism has been normalized. Rather, I contend that IR now faces an inevitable pressure to challenge positivism ironically due to the fundamental and inherent characteristics of "science" and positivism itself – testability and falsifiability.

The article starts by explaining why and how positivism became dominant and influential in IR by emphasizing its contributions to the justification of liberalism and U.S. policy-making processes after the Second World War. Then, I address how positivism could become and stay as the main epistemology in IR hitherto. In the next section, I summarize the points of Critical theories in IR and introduce their rebuttals against the reasonings for the positivist dominance. Accordingly, I argue that the transition from positivism to the entitlement of critical approaches needs to be viewed as another paradigm of IR due to the intrinsic aspects of positivism and the presence of continuous criticism against it. Finally, I emphasize that the future of IR will be realized through deliberate endeavors to oversee power relations in the discipline.

What Is Positivism?

There are two main assumptions of positivist perspectives: first, positivists believe that people can analyze the social in the same way natural scientists do, which aligns with the name of "social science." When it comes to IR, they also consider the international system the same as the natural world, adopting scientific methods (Smith 1996). Second, positivism assumes that facts are distinguished from values and are "theory-neutral" (Smith 1996, 16). Operationalism and institutionalism also underlie such positivist premises. As all theories should be derived from facts, concepts that theories use or social behaviors that are subject to research should be operationalized by observable data (Wight 2002; Smith 1996), which means scientific or empirical methods. Furthermore, instrumentalism drives positivists to judge theoretical concepts "not by their truth or falsity, but by their theoretical utility" (Smith 1996). In other words, theoretical terms that are not observable are only suppositions for the research, not denoting one true form of the world.

Moreover, Popperism underscoring "testability, falsification, tentativity, and the importance of methods over results"

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(Ricci 1987, 116) becomes the condition for scientific and positivist research. In other words, social scientific research can be falsified by unexpected evidence due to the complexity of human society but can be complemented by its testability like natural science does. Scholars' preferences for findings and research that can falsify theories stem from the eagerness to build a stronger explanation of world events, arguing that "theories are tested only by attempting to falsify them" and emphasizing hypothesis building and testing (Waltz 1979, 123). In this regard, IR theories have been regarded as "sets of logically related, ideally causal propositions, to be empirically tested or falsified in the Popperian sense" (Tickner 1979, 618).

Positivist Predisposition: The Results of The War

What made positivism achieve its dominance in IR? Positivist and scientific approaches developed in the process of establishing liberalist values after the Second World War. Specifically, Hoffmann (1977) argues that the American-Soviet confrontation affected the proliferation of IR as a social science (47). As the U.S. was considered a major and sole actor that had enough power to contest the Soviet Union, the U.S. needed to show the legitimacy of its academic dispositions and works, facing academic interests all over the globe on how the U.S. would act in international relations. Specifically, the U.S. ideologically supported and globally promoted the main values of scientific research, which are "the respect for truth, freedom of investigation, of discussion, and publication" (Hoffmann 1977, 47). Accordingly, political scientists began to assert that science's rejection of absolutism resembled a core aspect of democracy and that they should conduct research contributing to the prosperity of democratic politics in the real world. They also assessed such scientific approaches believed as rational and independent as adequate to challenge totalitarianism, Communism, and Marxist alternatives in the postwar era (Tickner 1997, 618; Ricci 1987).

Additionally, at the end of the Second World War, social science obtained its power due to the eagerness to prevent wars and confirm no more disasters (Hoffmann 1977). Since the world had experienced multiple wars and conflicts, the sure way to prevent such tragedy and the endeavors to establish certainty in IR were required (Hoffmann 1977, 46). In this regard, as Tickner points out, Morgenthau explains that the goal of scientific research in IR should be "lessening the chances that disasters would recur in the future" (1997, 618) by figuring out how "the laws of nature" affect world issues (Tickner 1997, 618). Those views are based on the belief that scientific and value-free methods can bring practical solutions to all problems by using hypotheses and testing them through empirical investigation, thereby contributing to progress (Hoffmann 1977, 46).

Meanwhile, Hoffmann also highlights the influence of policymakers on the positivist dominance in IR as it became crucial to build adequate alliances and accurately predict its subsequent effects (Hoffmann 1977, 48). As the Cold War began, the tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union got worse because they both had nuclear power that could lead to mass destruction. Consequently, the need to "appease the frustrations of the bellicose" and "reassure a nation eager for ultimate accommodation, about the possibility of both avoiding war and achieving its ideals" appeared (Hoffmann 1977, 48). In this sense, an approach to IR as rational and scientific research was encouraged and urged because it is an effective way for "hypotheses formation and testing" (Hoffmann 1977, 46), which allows for predicting the possible aftermath of diplomatic and international policies.

In short, positivism first gained its power in IR by going through a specific and historical event – The Second World War – and especially by aligning with the relevant needs of the U.S. With this regard, positivism is *still* dominant in IR because the power of the U.S. did not disappear nor decayed after the war. Moreover, IR and positivism that the U.S. academia promoted began to create an academic hierarchy and held a higher position in the field. For example, most IR journals focus on empirical and theory-testing research and articles while journals dealing with theory-based research are often ranked lower than them (Waever 2010, 306). Besides, most leading IR journals are currently based in the U.S. so as to make it easy to access the journals and interact with other intellectuals. As Waever (2010) points out, "the US research community became by far the largest and therefore most attractive in which to succeed" and many scholars struggle to obtain the acknowledgement of US-based universities, journals, and publishers (305). In addition, IR as a discipline creates and regulates standard commitments or "the conduct of conduct" regarding publishing, funding, hiring, and tenure decisions (Weber 2015, 29). As U.S. universities and scholars dominated the IR field during the postwar era, scholars and institutions from other countries had no power to stand against the existing system of the discipline (Waever 2010). If they challenge it, students will lose their opportunities and options

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for developing their careers and not be approved as "qualified" people in their major (Waever 2010, 301).

Another factor that makes positivism still dominant in IR is derived from scepticism about Critical theories that they are weak in building policies and thus not adequate for practical uses. As Ashley and Walker (1990) mention, Keohane says that "reflective scholars will remain on the margins of the field" because their research program is obscure and inapplicable to various studies on international issues (266). Keohane criticizes that such reflective readings are "diversionary," distracting students from a focus on IR's subject matter, which is "world politics" (Ashley and Walker 1990, 267). Besides, even if Critical theories contribute to "a potentially emancipatory exercise" (Rengger and Thirkell-White 2007, 20), how to realize such marginalized voices into concrete policies and institutions is still controversial. As each Critical theory has a different perspective on how to promote emancipation, it does not provide a "definite answer" to what the relationship between academia and real-world politics needs to be (Rengger and Thirkell-White 2007, 23).

A Transitional Period: Post-Positivism in IR Is Not Yet Normalized

Despite all the aspects that led to the dominance of positivism, I argue that post-positivism in IR is not yet normalized. Instead, the field currently faces inevitable ruptures against the existing academic positivist predisposition. My argument, however, does not stem from a vague hope or assertion but is based on logical reasoning. First, post-positivist explanations can refute the foundation and justification of positivist dominance such as the continuing power of the U.S. in IR and Critical theories' weakness in policymaking. Secondly, given the intrinsic characteristics of positivism like testability and falsifiability, the current field of IR cannot neglect the divergent voices of post-positivists but should dialectically assess and incorporate them. Meanwhile, I view the current field of IR as in the transitional period to another paradigm, not repeating "The Third Debate" or the debate over "dialogue or synthesis." To dialectically achieve and realize the next level, I suggest that tackling the existing power differentials between positivist knowledge and "the other" is necessary and that students should deliberately focus on previously hidden issues, cases, experiences, and voices in the empirical world. Besides, they need to allow their research accessible to people outside of academia and exposed to critical discussion.

Rebuttals of Post-Positivists

Post-positivists have continuously challenged the positivist mainstream. This is conceptualized as The Third Debate which shows "the confluence of diverse anti-positivistic philosophical and sociological trends" (Lapid 1989, 237) emerged, following the previous two Great Debates which were respectively between Realists and Idealists in the 1920s and 1930s regarding the effects of human nature in global affairs, and between scientific behaviorists and interpretative scholars in the 1960s (Navon 2001).

First, an emphasis on marginalized voices and academic works outside the U.S. has been increased (Waever 2010, 305). Specifically, "the language of exiles," the concept that Ashely and Walker suggest (1990), tackles the U.S.-centric atmosphere in IR. According to them, Critical theories help understand that existing terms and knowledge in the world had been created by the thoughts of modern Westernized society (259) that assume men as the main actors who can prevent uncertainties and explore regularities, based on their rational analysis (262). These critical views provide chances to focus on the perspectives of "exiles" from "marginal spaces and times" by examining how power constructs knowledge (Waever 1990, 263).

Moreover, Critical Theories reject nation-centric approaches of IR. For instance, Enloe's statements that "the personal is international" and thus "the international is personal" underline the importance of exploring ordinary people's everyday politics to overcome the conventional ways to understand military and war at a national level (Enloe et al. 2016, 538). Additionally, these scholars criticize the positivist assumption that states are "unitary, autonomous, interest-maximizing and rational" agents (Peterson 1999, 36), highlighting that multi-disciplinary methods and studies are needed to understand countries as political identities (Peterson 1999).

In this regard, criticism about "dysfunctions, dissatisfactions, and inequities" in Political Science began to arise. For instance, Monroe (2005) raised many questions regarding how the American Political Science Association (APSA)

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and the American Political Science Review (APSR) had been discriminative, excluding methodologies and subject matter and the research of non-male and non-white scholars. Some of this followed from the emphasis on quantitative methods that derived from the pursuit of being scientific, democratic, and universal (Almond 1996, 10). Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2010) particularly condemned the methodological bias toward statistics and parsimony. According to them, even with considerable constructive efforts to address Monroe's (and others') criticism, a variety of journals still prefer research that uses replicable data, and scholars' productivity is assessed through measures developed for quantitative work (743-744). Smith (1997) similarly points out that the discipline has been neglectful of insights that emerge from political theory even as he acknowledges the importance of "scientific methods of rigorous hypothesis testing" (274).

Second, challenging what Keohane describes post-positivism as diversionary and irrelevant to problem-solving and policymaking, Critical theorists can ask, "Why isn't that world politics?" In other words, they could argue that the unobservable or the immeasurable does not mean non-existence or insignificant. Specifically, the narratives of Syrian female refugees and activists by interviewing and analyzing how such specific experiences at individual and societal levels matter in understanding the Syrian War (Enloe et al. 2016, 545). From a positivist perspective, such concrete testimonies or people's emotions cannot be easily operationalized or generalized. However, at the same time, it does not mean that those stories are fake or nonexistent, having no relation to world politics. Instead, "you can't really claim to understand international politics if you don't know how marriage works internationally or how ideas about femininity become a pillar holding up the international global economic system" (Enloe et al. 2016, 545).

Besides, Disciplinary IR overlooks Queer Theories by adopting Wight's homology that Politics and International Politics should be distinguished from "bodies of theory" and be explained "in a neutral and unbiased way" (Weber 2015, 33). In other words, Queer Theories are considered inappropriate as they offer "scattered, unsystematic texts published almost exclusively in non-IR outlets" (Weber, 2015, 34) and "stray too far from deploying acceptable approaches . . . that uses positivist methods to accumulate knowledge" (Weber 2015, 34). However, it does not mean that Queer Theory "does not exist" (Weber 2015, 34) as it contributes to discovering hidden assumptions and aspects of IR. Critical views on heterosexism in IR reveal that nationalism is built based on a heterosexual bonding of family by reinforcing the dichotomy of public and private spheres and limiting women's roles to biological reproduction (Peterson 1999, 43-44) given that abortion was regarded as the "death of the nation" or "national catastrophe" (Peterson 1999, 45) and homosexuality was strategically regulated to "mobilize nationalist sentiments" (Peterson 1999, 45).

Lastly, in terms of variation within Critical theories on how marginalized voices are represented, such heterogeneity is not a *barrier* to making policies, which leads to a defeat by Positivism, but instead a *resistance* to policy-making-centric approaches. For example, Lawson (2008) criticizes that IR should focus on linking international relations to "everyday world politics" (29) rather than exclusively representing "the 10% of the world" (29). In that sense, different approaches argued by various Critical theories could be resources to develop the discourses over how to construct the relationships between academia and real politics rather than a defect or obstacle in making policies. As Rengger and Thirkell-White (2007) say, Critical theories can have "the potential for an ongoing and creative process of mutual engagement between different strands of critical theory" (23).

Testability and Falsifiability: Inherent Possibility of Positivism to Change

Regarding the basic principles underlying Popperism, IR in Political Science cannot help but allow a dialectic research process that epistemologically opens room for progressive and diverse discourse. For example, Monroe (2005) clarifies this point by saying, "Where is the diversity of United States and the world that APSA 'pretends' to study" (10)? In other words, if you study Political Science, you have no reason to neglect critical theories and subjects like race, gender, and minoritization. Ironically, doing so is your duty, because you are following the "scientific" premise of the discipline.

Furthermore, Popperism paradoxically assumes that no everlasting theories exist. It intrinsically affirms the potential for a change and amendment of theories in the case of outliers. Namely, Positivism should be open to every possibility or "unexpected" irregularities in the first place. Given this, the discipline of IR cannot be indifferent to post-

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positivist views highlighting various cases and stories that have been neglected by the field to date. Instead, conventional IR theorists need to address these cases if they want to prove their positivist and scientific theories are perfect because individual experiences, sentiments, and unexpected narratives can be outliers that would falsify existing theories based on nation-state units. Additionally, given that positivists accept the possibility of dialectic changes based on Kuhn's term – paradigm, positivism's role could not be insensitive to diversities (Kuhn, 1962).

Consequently, the epistemology of IR cannot avoid "The Third Debate," experiencing a transitional period. This has been discussed so far among IR scholars in terms of either dialogue or synthesis between two different "theories" – positivism and post-positivism. While synthesis means unifying distinct theories into one (Hellmann 2003a), which could not challenge the status and efficacy of positivism (Moravcsik 2003), dialogue emphasizes the importance of sharing and understanding critical theories and perspectives with continuous scepticism on the existing views (Kratochwil 2003). Besides, some explain that dialogue as an "engaged pluralism" needs to be understood as part of disciplinary efforts to be open to communications and diversity, not limited to the epistemological or theoretical suggestion (Lapid 2003, 128). Yet other scholars argue that synthesis is not different from engaged pluralism (Hellmann 2003b; Smith 2003) as dialogue *and* synthesis could help ideas become more sharpened and refined (Smith 2003).

I contend, however, that this stage of debate could be considered the transitional period to another paradigm in IR, not constrained to either a dialogue adding new ideas or a synthesis maintaining the current power of positivism or the middle ground of the two. Instead, I assess that IR as a discipline inevitably faces a dialectical change of the existing mainstream, incorporating the antithesis of positivism and leading to a whole new paradigm of epistemology. The antithesis would contain positivism's innate contradiction that stems from its affirmation of falsification and democratic values, and the subsequent logical counterarguments of Critical theories against their positivist critique. Although it is difficult to suggest what the next mainstream would look like at this stage because it is a transitional period, the co-optation of such an antithesis in the previous debate would not be free from the recurrent controversy over "which theory is more scientific."

In this regard, I contend that the dialectic process of change not only needs the inclusion of the antithesis but also requires the reconstruction of power relations in the field. In other words, scholars' deliberate efforts to make themselves free from power-driven rules and perspectives can facilitate the inflow of diverse and critical discourse in the discipline, challenging the existing mainstream. What constitutes the knowledge of a particular academic field is determined by the power holders and their legacies in influential scholarly networks (McClain et al. 2016, 470). For example, Burgess, a so-called pioneer of the field of Political Science, was a white U.S. southerner and advocate of segregationism. He did not want racial and Indigenous issues to receive serious, critical, academic attention from scholars of politics and discounted contrary efforts as unscientific or unprofessional (McClain et al. 2016). In this circumstance, deliberate challenges to such exclusionary power are needed to regulate the unilateral force of the mainstream.

One such measure can be the discipline's encouragement and promotion of previously hidden issues, cases, experiences, and voices worldwide. Students should identify new examples and utilize them as falsifying evidence to previous, established arguments. Namely, anomalies that have long been excluded are the critical factor to self-correcting theories through their dialectical revisiting. Such outliers and untold cases should not only be logically derived but also be based on empirical examples. This means that more people outside academia should become the witnesses, critics, and counterevidence of the existing discourse. What they experience, see, hear, and feel is not fictitious but existent and meaningful. By exploring and adopting this kind of evidence as necessary for publicly accountable research, scholars effectively distribute the roles of supervisors to more people. In this condition, students could ask a question that challenges the foundation of mainstream theories: is liberalism always democratic? If so, how can we explain the existence of citizens who cannot sustain stable lives as other people in the same liberal state and the underrepresentation of them in politics? Are such circumstances really democratic? How can previous theory address their experiences?

Additionally, students and scholars should provide firm paths for citizens to make their cases heard. In other words, ordinary people should be guaranteed accessibility to join in the open discussion of scholarly work that is relevant to

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their lives. To achieve this aim, the formats can be diverse. For instance, public lectures via TV or the Internet can be one way. Programs on various platforms sharing academic thoughts and empirical stories concurrently can be another method. By lessening the distance between formal students and non-students, the ability to democratize the supervision of the field and regulate powerholders within it would increase.

Conclusion

In this essay, I explain the power of the U.S., the disciplinary inclinations constructed by the mainstream, and the emphasis on policymaking not only lead positivism to emerge in IR but also make it still dominant since those aspects have continuous influences on the field. Regarding the question of whether post-positivist ideas are normalized, however, I would answer "no" and argue that IR faces a transitional period for the next paradigm. To support this argument, I articulated the rebuttals and resistant movements of Critical theories against the U.S.-centric predispositions and scepticism of the conventional IR and provided logical reasons why positivism itself should be open to diversities and irregularities.

Nevertheless, I do not contend that it is destined to change naturally and that we can just sit back and wait for it. As Waever says (2010), "disciplines do not die, merge, or split just because their subject appears in a new light" (301). In this sense, continuous criticism of the dominant narratives in IR is necessary to make a change and maintain it. Besides, as detected in the history of IR to date, power differentials between mainstream and marginalized subjects affect the disciplinary compositions and features. Given this, deliberate efforts are required to be wary of the power-driven rules and perspectives that prevent diversities and new insights in the field.

In conclusion, the valuing of testability obligates scientists to listen seriously to counterarguments and to engage in self-reflection. To lessen the impact of power differences in the discipline, we should allocate the right to make authoritative criticism to more people. In this process, unexpected experiences and cases could be disclosed and thus become a factor in falsifying and critically revisiting the existing dominant discourses.

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