

## Interview - Jenna Marshall

Written by E-International Relations

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# Interview - Jenna Marshall

<https://www.e-ir.info/2020/05/28/interview-jenna-marshall/>

E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, MAY 28 2020

**This interview is part of a series of interviews with academics and practitioners at an early stage of their career. The interviews discuss current research and projects, as well as advice for other early career scholars.**

Jenna Marshall is a Senior Researcher for Development and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Kassel. She studied in Toronto (BA Hons., York University) and London (PhD Political Science, Queen Mary University of London). She is currently a 2019-2020 Sassoon Visiting Fellow in South Asian and Black History at the University of Oxford. Her research interests take a critical approach to International Relations with a particular interest in empire and the (re)production of colonial global order in contemporary discourses on global governance. More broadly, she is interested in (global) historical sociological inquiry, the politics of the postcolonial and developing world, the political economy of development, and post/decolonial critiques of Eurocentric discourse and methodology. She has taught undergraduate modules in International Relations, Politics and Geography at Oxford Brookes University and QMUL and has received international grants including the British Federation of Women Graduates' Foundation Grant and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean's Dr. Silvia W. de Groot memorial award. Outside of academia, she has worked as an Assistant Curator for the Windrush Foundation's Making Freedom exhibition held at the Marcus Garvey Library and the Royal Geographical Society in London.

**What (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking or encouraged you to pursue your area of research?**

I think it is important to foreground my response to this question by first acknowledging how the discipline of IR stringently polices the contours of acceptable inquiry. I do not suggest IR is an anomaly; it is the prerogative of all disciplines to chart out discrete research foci and agendas. Yet comparatively, there has been less effort in attending to its ontological and epistemological foundations, as in the case of Anthropology or Sociology, for example. The shifts in my work came with the recognition that the work I pursued would not reside comfortably within these predefined boundaries. I wanted to pursue a project that engaged with the Caribbean as a site of critical intellectual traditions that can be deployed to elucidate connections between contemporary development practice and colonial modes of subjugation.

As a consequence, I drew heavily on critical (feminist, post/decolonial and critical race) approaches that: 1) recognised the ways in which scholarship is complicit in the reproduction of colonial ontological and epistemic violence expressed through silences, trivialisations, and erasure, and 2) providing methodologies, theoretical frameworks to capture meaning from actors, institutions and processes that have been foreclosed and suppressed. In this instance, I can say that the work of literary scholar Kamau Brathwaite has offered the most significant intellectual insights for my research in his ability to centre non-Western traditions of the Anglophone Caribbean as alternative conceptual apparatus. In its initial stages, my doctoral work was concerned with conventional political economy of development in the Anglophone Caribbean: questions of market failure in developing states, labour productivity and post-war industrialisation policies advocated by modernist like Arthur Lewis and critiques of neoclassical economic theory including structuralism and dependency theory. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and George Beckford's *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* were also quite instrumental to my research. They rigorously illustrated the enduring exploitative and

## Interview - Jenna Marshall

Written by E-International Relations

extractive nature of the global capitalist system that renders bare the African continent and its Diaspora of its resources. However, Brathwaite attunes us to the broader registers of exploitation within global capitalist modernity through an exploration of the New World plantation as a significant artifice that underpinned the modern world. I am particularly drawn to his concepts of “inner plantation” and “nation language”. The former renders visible the persistence of Eurocentrism within anticolonial thought in the Global South expressed in the work of dependency theorists George Beckford, Norman Girvan and Lloyd Best, active members of the intellectual Left in the 1960s Caribbean. These scholars also mobilised the plantation to lay a theoretical foundation that gave legitimacy to Caribbean collective memory on slavery and economic exploitation, yet less attention was paid to other mechanisms of global power in fashioning ‘conformist subjectivities’ (Santos, 1999:41) who adhere to and perpetuate hegemonic structures.

The latter lays claim to the lived experiences of the marginalised and oppressed peoples of the African diaspora in the New World as emblematic of agency, creativity, and resilience that provide alternative intellectual insights into our understandings of social and political life outside conventional frameworks. Here, Brathwaite is unapologetic in valorising the everyday folk peoples: their language had and continues to have meaning beyond the descriptive and empirical. He placed analytical value in a people, its language, ways of life that were often overlooked, objectified and at times ridiculed to provide new intellectual resources on which to interrogate international relations concerns of self-determination and global citizenship.

**Your research draws on historical sociology, postcolonial and decolonial thought and the political economy of development. How does this approach enhance our understanding and theorising of the international?**

I have studied international relations throughout my entire academic life: as an undergraduate I was introduced to certain analytical tools for exploring the international – mainly realism and its various iterations: neo-realism, offensive realism, and their responses to complex interdependency. In the beginning, I was drawn to the work of classical realists like E.H. Carr’s *The Twenty Year’s Crisis* and Hans J. Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* – I found their arguments much more compelling than liberal traditions. To varying degrees, I found myself sympathetic to their arguments particularly around the normalization of power politics rather than the Kantian notions of freedom, rights and justice that seem misplaced to me. Given my background, born and raised in a former Caribbean colony, manifestations of a *realpolitik* are often felt—through coup d’états, embargoes or foreign occupations in neighbouring islands of Grenada, Cuba and Haiti. There is a nakedness to this type of violence that cannot be explained away in the absence of engaging the political mechanisms and instruments of modern politics, alongside and through empire.

Yet, this exposed violence embodied in the lived realities of Caribbean peoples, and peoples of the Global South more generally, are not present in the IR canon, at least this was the case during my undergraduate years. Olivia Rutazibwa has recently written a review essay entitled *Hidden in Plain Sight: Coloniality, Capitalism and Race/ism as Far as the Eye Can See* that speaks to this colonial amnesia and disavowal, building on postcolonial IR works including L.H.M. Ling’s *The Dao of World Politics*, Siba Grovogui’s *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*, and Robbie Shilliam’s *The Black Pacific*, drawing on non-Western political rationalities, traditions and methodologies.

Classical realist and liberal theoretical schools pay little attention to techniques of power and resistance in empire and its colonial afterlives. Both Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall are instructive in their works *The Wretched of the Earth* and *The West and the Rest* respectively as they examine the nature of the modern world through the lens of colonial power asymmetries and violence. Employing these approaches serves to provide analytical insights to the constitution and reconfiguration of modern international relations beyond the European state system. Firstly, through a post/decolonial approach, one is able to mobilise non-Western actors, histories, institutions in apprehending the making and remaking of the global modern order. Traditionally ‘great powers’ dominate the field of IR and left little in the way of much of the world in its theorisation of global affairs. This is even more acute in regions like the Caribbean, presumed to reside outside of History with a capital ‘H’ (Baugh, 2012). This approach disrupts anarchy as the organising principles of global politics and centres hierarchy in the relations among variegated polities. Secondly, a global historical sociological approach provides explanations to the rise and reproduction of non-state actors like social movements that transcend territorial borders in their attempts to respond to global inequalities and hierarchies

## Interview - Jenna Marshall

Written by E-International Relations

(Go and Lawson, 2017: 3). Thirdly, a political economy of development attunes us to how these inequalities and hierarchies play out in the matter of marshalling the world's 'scarce' resources and the global governance structures that legitimate those deemed fit to govern them. These approaches have profound scholarly implications: it means periodisations shift, objects of inquiry are redrawn, subjugated knowledges are excavated and situated innovatively, but also marginalized communities are rendered visible and imbued with agency that would otherwise go unnoticed.

**Your doctoral research examined the politics of pedagogy in the Caribbean and how Pan-African social movements constructed radical anti-colonial alternatives to institutional educational strategies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What can we learn from these movements about anti-colonial resistance and solidarity?**

The politics of schooling reveals multiple registers and expressions of power at the national and supranational level but also local and transnational resistance. My research charted the techniques employed to ensure imperial integrity and the ways formal education policies were embedded in this imperative. These policies had demonstrated and continue to demonstrate modes of exploitation and extraction at the individual and national level and the ways these modes continue to be normalised in the neoliberal globalisation conjuncture. For Pan African movements, their resistance can be identified in two substantive ways: the more obvious, agitation against the imperial and neo-imperial impositions that manifested in formal education policies to limit enrolment and the racial and gendered bases on which selection criteria were established. Secondly and less obvious, was the creative strategies taken by these movements to subvert imperialistic, misogynistic and racist policies in order to extend an emancipatory struggle. For these activists, resistance came in multiple forms: night schools organised by the local branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), folk theatres during the nationalist modernisation period and more recently with Afrocentric teacher training programmes. What these forms of resistance share was a collective attempt to rehumanise and redeem the Afro-Caribbean of his/her epistemic authority--his/her ability to know him/herself and their environs--to inform new ways for organising social and political life. Resistance meant an insistence on African cultural pride, but this also extended to all peoples of colour in their struggle against white supremacy and demands for self-determination and self-reliance.

This point dovetails to the question of solidarity. Pan African movements by their very nature transcend the nation-state, expressing transnational articulations of historically shared grievances amongst oppressed people but predominantly those of African descent. These grievances manifest differently within local contexts but there is mutual recognition to the denial of full participation within domestic social and economic arrangements. Education and the political struggles for recognition and participation were not far removed. Education for Pan Africans was always considered as a potentially revolutionary act (Chapman, 2004: 430). There was a shared understanding of struggle and the ways education reinforces inequalities through institutional practices of limited access, Eurocentric curricula and the desire for a meaningful education for the purpose of liberation of oppressed peoples. Pan African movements made such interactions tangible. These radical alternatives to institutional policies were at once grounded in the complexities of the local colonial system but also wedded to global recognition of black experiences pathologized to justify European intervention. Pedagogical interventions were thus able to link the psychological effects of chattel enslavement with the material imperative for self-reliance, a key dictum of the Garveyite movement of the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century. Educational practices like those explored in Pan African movements expressed alternative forms of kinship, disrupting imperial circuits of relations.

**How do the activities of these Pan-African actors help us to rethink international development?**

The projects mobilised by Pan African movements are significant and complementary to ongoing critical scholarship on development theory in two key ways. Firstly, they *visibilise the coloniality of development*. Arturo Escobar's landmark work opened up a new field of postdevelopment that critiques the technical and instrumentalist approach to the study of International Development. For these thinkers, development has always been connected to and articulated through modes of discursive power and imbued with a modernising logic that evokes a temporal linearity of nation-states and peoples that in many ways parallels a racialised hierarchy: from barbarity and backwardness to civilisational modernity (see also the work by Kalpana Wilson and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni). But what is notable to Pan African movements is the way development speaks to a broader plane of domination. Through an exploration of Pan African activity, development is viewed through a lens of struggle at the psychological as well as the cultural and

## Interview - Jenna Marshall

Written by E-International Relations

material. Ilan Kapoor and others have written on the usefulness of psychoanalysis on development theory as a means to suture the scientific commitment of objective and neutral policy recommendations and its irrational practices including racism that seeks to “efface its various internal traumas and contradictions” (Kapoor 2014: 1117). The discursive power of development fashions fragmented subjectivities akin to the civilising discourses that produced colonial subjectivities where questions of belonging were always fraught and contradictory.

Secondly, and in light of this psychological domination, Pan African activities are instructive in *problematizing agency*. Rather than abandoning the discourse, they actively respond through complex processes that include negotiation and assimilation of development policies for the purpose of subversion. It is this subversive agency where international development can be considered as a contested field of discursive struggle comprised of multiple meanings that seeks to redeem peoples of African descent in the New World. The important takeaway from their activities is to appreciate development as both a cultural and historically patriarchal project, and thus holding the potential to find multiple approaches to ‘develop’ and to acknowledge to a greater extent the value of other knowledges, actors, and practices.

**Your current research explores how ‘creole’ elites are central to the reconfiguration of the post-World War II global order, particularly for the establishment of development norms and discourse. What role did ‘creole’ elites play in this context, and what can your research tell us about hierarchy in International Relations?**

The analytical purchase of post/de-colonial approaches to International Relations is the ability to mobilise ‘new’ spaces, peoples, knowledges to attend to interrogation of “the international”. My research has been keen to situate Atlantic/Caribbean histories to attend to the broadening of the discipline’s conceptual tools and the creole is one such intervention. Substantive work exists on the creole figure in Caribbean literary tradition, particularly transfixed by the imaginary, most famously the work of Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* that depicts the tortured creole woman. What is fascinating about the concept is its mutability: it is first designated to Europeans born in the Americas and its use dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As it relates to hegemonic discourses, it describes a peculiarity about whiteness that unsettles its normalcy and instead relieves its active production and reproduction in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Caribbean whiteness is confronted by blackness in all of its naked barbarity and as a result, the creole is born—a buffer to the purity of European white identity. The unsophisticated creole is in constant need of metropolitan European civility and rationality for good government and this logic remains within the nation-building moment of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. I draw many insights on this period of decolonization from the recent publication of Adom Getachew’s *Worldmaking After Empire*, where she rejects anarchy as the organising principle in shaping of the modern global (colonial) system. She offers that the inclusion of former colonies into the state system was not indicative of sovereignty equality rather a “partial and burdened form of inclusion” (2019: 19) into international society, where differentiated spaces were organized through relations of hierarchy. I seek to extend this argument to suggest how much of this burdened inclusion and hierarchization manifests through the critical intellectual resources deployed in the construction of these new nation-states. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a new creole emerges in the form of the brown middle-class elites, framed around a black respectability in order to properly prepare members of this elite group to execute the task of the emergent hegemonic paradigm, development. The creole in the context of my current project details this fragmented identity that is tethered to the metropole ideologically, grounded in an anticolonial ethos but at the expense of silencing local knowledges systems. In its absorption of these new creole elites, the development project is actively shaped and reshaped on norms of non-domination, racial equality and redistributive justice without the intellectual insights that the folk community has on offer to substantively reorder local life and citizenship but also demands to reconfigure the international system.

**What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of International Relations?**

Ha! I am still learning so I’m unsure how qualified I am to provide advice. What I do know is that within academia, you can feel very isolated and it can also feel quite disorienting to navigate especially as an Early Career Researcher. Perhaps, I have been lucky to have great colleagues and doctoral supervision to combat the isolation. So, I guess I would say that it is important to build communities with other colleagues who share similar interests. The International Studies Association’s Global Development Studies Section as well as the British International Studies Association’s

## **Interview - Jenna Marshall**

Written by E-International Relations

Colonial, Postcolonial and Decolonial working group and the newly formed European International Studies Association's Political Economy Beyond Boundaries section have really fantastic people working on International Relations and the colonial question, which is quite promising and insightfully addresses much of these silences and disavowals in the discipline.