# WORLD POLITICS

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A Critical Introduction to International Relations

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Needless to say that any remaining mistake, error or misled thought is entirely mine and that I am always happy to be corrected and to learn more. As the French painter Francis Picabia is said to have said: 'The head is round so that our thoughts can change direction' (see Baker et al. 2016).

# About the author

**Catherine Goetze** is Senior Lecturer at the University of Tasmania in Australia. She has been an academic at universities in Germany, France, the UK, China and Australia. She speaks three languages and has lived on four continents. Her research spans questions of peace, migration, notions of family and home in world politics, and Feminist IR. She is editor of the *Contemporary Reader of Feminist International Relations* (with Khushi Singh Rathore 2025, Routledge) and author of the monograph *The Distinction of Peace* (2017, University of Michigan Press) and over 60 journal articles and book chapters.

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# Preface

## Why a new textbook?

It is 2025, and the world is on fire. Literally and figuratively. Climate changed is inducing severe weather events, setting rainforests on fire, flooding deserts and making entire islands disappear. Wars and armed conflicts are ravaging parts of Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Complex webs of trafficking, organised crime, poverty and dictatorship keep societies and communities across the world terrorized and in check. All the while, the institutions of democracy, equality, human dignity and rule of law are being undermined globally, even in places where they have been seen as solid and strong; and geopolitics are undergoing ominous shifts in power, solidarity and threat.

As different as these disasters are, they often show a common thread in that they reveal unequal power structures, entrenched hierarchies and complex patterns of inequality and injustice in world politics, for which traditional International Relations (IR, written capitalized when talked about as an academic discipline) approaches (those often called the 'mainstream') struggle to provide coherent explanations.

Triggered time and again by any of these events, the call to critically examine what the discipline's so-called mainstream theories (Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism) are not seeing, has not ceased. Feminists have, in politics in general and in International Relations since, long asked 'where are the women?' (Enloe 2014; Sylvester 2002) and have pointed out, with their queer colleagues, that categories like 'sex' matter (Peterson 2014; Weber 2015). Scholars critical of the colonial and imperial history, on the other hand, have criticized that 'the darker nations' are often not recognized (Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015; Gruffydd Jones 2006; Prashad 2008). Critical Historical Sociology had deconstructed the 'whig history' of the international and the discipline of international relations (Guilhot 2015). Critical scholars have notably pointed out the vacuity of IR's concept of power (for example Tickner 1988).

In the turbulent 2010s these critical approaches often reflected the students' calls to decolonize, feminize and queer the curriculum. This call is intertwined with the rise and fall of 'the West' as a dominating force in world politics after the end of the Cold War. With the weight of the iron curtain gone, the world became so open and fluid that multitude and otherness infiltrated the high towers of the high politics of international security, diplomacy, world history and international law. Critical studies of the legacies of European colonialism, American Imperialism, and of the Eurocentric world they have created, have since proliferated. Scholarship has become colourful, multiple and different.

Yet, too many 'Introduction to IR' courses and too many textbooks will still bore students with the kind of single story the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warned us about (2010). This single story is the one where Europe is the cradle of the political form

# 2

# International relations: The making of an academic discipline



## Reader's guide

This chapter will discuss how International Relations became established as an academic discipline. As the academic world in general, the development of International Relations is heavily concentrated in the global North, and in particular in the USA. In the self-reproductive cycle of academic output, productions (publications) and university rankings, it is unsurprising that the 'best' or 'most important' university departments offering IR degrees are commonly seen to be the highly-ranked universities of the English-speaking global North: Harvard, Yale, Stanford, the London School of Economics, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge etc. Consequently, much of what is called 'mainstream' IR reproduces Eurocentric discourses of the international and international politics. These are, in turn, characterized by (often implicit) Eurocentric and liberal assumptions about states, history, reason and rationality, and law. Voices that are critical of the epistemological and ontological presumptions of mainstream IR, like Feminist and queer IR or post/decolonial thought have, however, gained strength in recent decades and changed the narrative. They are centred in this textbook.

## Learning outcomes

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand that the way world politics is analyzed is a result of its institutionalization as an academic discipline.
- Identify the discourse of a rational state system as an inter-national sphere and understand its implications.
- Articulate various critiques of this discourse from queer, Feminist and post-structural theorists.

## Introduction

As an academic discipline, IR is highly unequally represented in the world (De Matos-Ala 2024; Loke and Owen 2024; Umar 2024). Already in quantitative terms, it is a US American discipline, where it is commonly taught and organized alongside Political Science. The US has the most IR departments, the most highly ranked universities, the most IR degree offerings, the most tenured positions in IR, the highest salaries and research income, the most academic IR journals and highly ranked publishers, and they host the largest professional associations in the discipline, the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association. The International Political Science Association, founded by the UNESCO in the 1950s, is equally headquartered in North America.

In the USA, the institutionalization of Political Science and IR really took off after World War II and spread in Europe particularly in the 1970s and 1980s with the widening of university education and the introduction of many new disciplines. This said, there is much debate over the question of whether the institutionalization of IR also signified its establishment as a science, since the systematic thinking about the world dates back to long before World War II, and was widespread outside the USA.



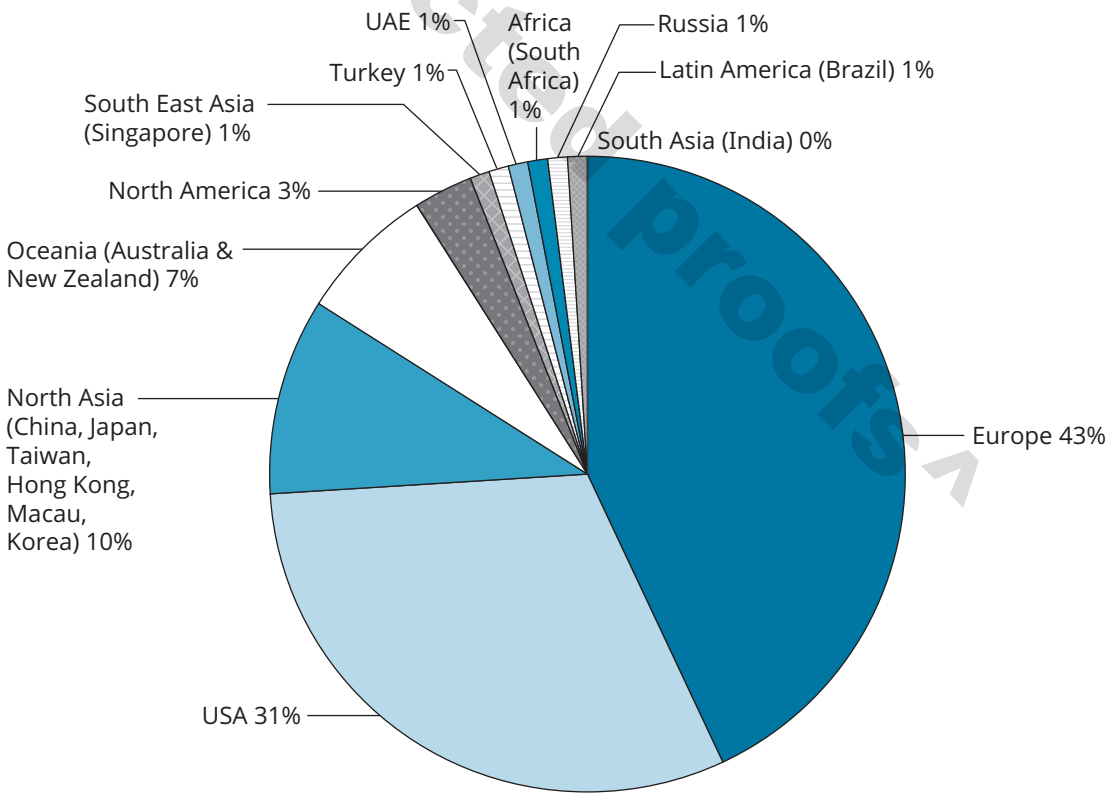


**Figure 2.1** Geographic locations of top 100 universities according to the 2023 ranking of the Times Higher Education Supplement Based on data from Times Higher Education and the THE World University Rankings

## Spotlight 2.1

### Robert vitalis: *White world order, black power politics*

> In the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States, international relations meant race relations. (…) The problem of empire and imperialism, sometimes referred to as 'race subjection', was what preoccupied the first self-identified professors of international relations. (Vitalis 2015, 1)

With this provocative claim Robert Vitalis dismantles a key myth of US/American International Relations, namely that it had formed *after* the experience of the world wars to think about peace and war, notably during the Cold War. Rather, Vitalis says, it was the perception that the 'problems' of colonial Imperialism are similar to race problems in the USA that motivated the American political and social sciences to take up the question of 'international' relations and to transform it into an academic discipline. Particularly, the European view of colonial resistance and independence movements as unruly uprisings against European 'civilisation' echoed how white social and political scientists in the USA treated the so-called Harlem Renaissance, an African-American literary, artistic and political movement in the early 20th century, as a threat to white (Anglo-Saxon, Christian) supremacy.

In *White World Order, Black Power Politics* Vitalis details how this connection between International Relations, on the one hand, and Black consciousness on the other developed intellectually and institutionally. A range of African-American intellectuals that had come out of the Harlem Renaissance or had been inspired by it would move on to form the most solidly theorizing and largest school of international thought at Howard University in Washington. Although not a school in the more formal sense of the word, Vitalis argues that the Howard professors Alain Locke, Ralph Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, Rayford Logan, Eric Williams and Merze Tate were 'leading thinkers (who) evinced a commitment to understanding and writing about white world supremacy from the standpoint of its victims' (Vitalis 2015, 5).

Vitalis notably shows how this group of scholars inversed the *problematique* that was pre-occupying the imperial-colonial predecessors of today's mainstream IR faculties: namely the question of how to govern the darker-skinned races of this world. In critical opposition to this understanding of world politics, Howard scholars thought about the political, economic, and cultural conditions under which the darker-skinned races in both the colonies and the USA would find justice and freedom. Consequently, for the Howard scholars, anti-colonialism and anti-Imperialism in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Pacific, were the same fight as the one against Jim Crow, segregation, racism and discrimination in the USA. They articulated this connection in particular through their efforts to dismantle scientific racism (see Box 2.1 below) and associated justifications for colonialism, apartheid and segregation, and to apply this knowledge to race politics at home and in the world.

Alain Locke debunked scientific racism as junk science and argued that the New Harlem movement would act as the avant-garde of Black liberation at home and in the world. Ralph Bunche, the first African-American to win the Nobel Peace Prize, established himself as the leading Africanist of the US and later became a crucial figure in the United Nation's work for the self-determination of peoples. Merze Tate, the first African-American woman to study at the University of Oxford, researched the constitutional developments of newly independent states and US foreign policies in the Pacific. Before becoming the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric William's research on the slave trade changed the narrative of the making of the Americas. Every one of the

*(Continued)*

scholars Vitalis discusses was a 'first' of something outstanding in academia, public life and also in their contribution to the discipline of International Relations.

Vitalis also investigates how this important school of International Relations scholarship was silenced after World War II. On the one hand, the steady rise of right-wing, white supremacist International Relations in the inter-war years had prepared the terrain for what would become 'Realism' (see chapter 14 on geopolitics; Vitalis 2015, chapter 4); on the other hand, the McCarthy ostracization of Black resistance movements as 'communist', and the lack of funding especially during the war years gutted these early inroads of African-American intellectuals into IR.

After World War II, the newly rising stars of International Relations, mainly the scholars of white East Coast and West Coast universities, erased all talk of 'race' and empire from their research and curricula. Vitalis notes that this is particularly remarkable for a time where decolonization processes offered the opportunity to fundamentally rethink the shape, form and functioning of the international sphere. Yet, instead of promoting a world of greater justice, the discipline continued the colonial-racial discourse of backwardness (which became often couched in terms of 'development', see chapter 8).

White supremacist ideas of the inter-war years continued to shape visions of International Relations in dominant discourses. Vitalis points out the parallels between 1920s colonial writings and later works of scholars like Stephen Krasner, Samuel Huntington or Robert Kaplan (Vitalis 2015, 30). He argues that mainstream IR continues to hold deeply internalized prejudices towards non-Western people and thought, thus replicating in various and often tacit forms ideas of European superiority and non-white backwardness (Vitalis 2015, 168). Vitalis notably argues that anti-Communism and (neo)liberal models of economic rationality, growth and scarcity enabled the perseverance of white supremacist thought. Thus basic concepts of early 20th century imperial geopolitics survived in contemporary disguises in university departments and think tanks, interest groups, international organizations, diplomacy and political agencies like the State Department or National Security Council (Vitalis 2015, 177). The reputation of these circles, in turn, allows the normalization of racialized and silent-racist tropes which hide in plain sight, as Kant's racism does in *Towards a Perpetual Peace* (see Box 2.1).



While the white Anglo-American historiography of International Relations (the one criticized by Vitalis; see Spotlight 2.1) identifies the Woodrow Wilson chair of International Politics at the University of Aberystwyth, founded in 1921, as the starting point of the academic study of world politics, questions like the conditions of war and peace, the conduct of diplomacy, the governance of transnational relations and global activities like commerce and trade had been systematically thought about and researched across other faculties before (law, administrative science and especially colonial administration, but also economics or philosophy). In Europe, International Politics had often been debated and taught in institutions set up specifically for that purpose, as for instance the French Institut d'Etudes Politiques of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, the network of Round Tables that were established in Britain, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and India in the early 20th century to promote unity across the British empire (which would become the Chatham House think tank later). Political and civil society organizations in the late 19th and 20th century also

engaged deeply with the legal, political, philosophical and humanitarian questions of the day's international politics, like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom that had national chapters across the world, the labour movement that organized in the Socialist International, or organizations like the Red Cross movement.

While there is still today a remarkable variety of European traditions studying the international, the global South has been only poorly engaged with the developments of IR as an academic discipline (Collyer 2018; Maliniak et al. 2018; Oztig 2024). Many of these countries have a poor university system in general and governments often have dispensed very little effort to promoting social science disciplines like IR. Governments commonly prefer to employ their limited funding for natural and practical sciences. Authoritarian regimes are also wary of institutionalizing potential centres of critique and dissent (Bluhm et al. 2021). Yet, the weak presence of IR in the global South and the dominance of European traditions and the US is also structurally inscribed into the imperial-colonial legacies in both the systems of knowledge production and the object of international studies itself.

This dominance has been reinforced in recent decades through what many have called the neoliberal management of universities. There has been since the 1980s an ever increasing trend to financialize academic work and to diminish public funding for universities, which has made them dependent on reputational recognition. This is expressed in publication and citation indexes, rankings and internationally recognizable awards. Universities seek to externalize costs by linking staff costs to income from tuition and research income. Funding bodies, on the other hand, treat their funding as investments, i.e. they seek certainty over the return on their investments and privilege researchers and projects that have a reputation for success, as indicated by publication indexes and rankings. This has created cycles of reputation and competition which reproduce Western and Eurocentric domination, since the more and better US American and Western models of research, individual scholars and research institutions score in rankings and competitions, the more university managers, scholars, administrators and politics in the rest of the world will push for reproducing their epistemologies, methodologies and 'success'. The dominance of the US model of science, universities and knowledge has furthermore a practical effect by aligning the foreign policy and international politics training of elites in (West) Europe, the so-called Anglo-Sphere and other parts of the world.

Eurocentrism also weighs heavily on what was/is considered the 'international' as exemplified in the narrative of the Westphalian international system. This narrative identifies the origin of the international in the settlement of the 30-year war in the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648. By massively simplifying a complex history (Osiander 2001; Teschke 2002; Rosenberg 1994), the Treaties of Westphalia are said to have established European statehood, international law and diplomacy, roughly in the same form as we know it today. Thus, the European model of the territorial state and of inter-state rivalry are normalized as 'The' international. From this follows a set of further premises of mainstream IR: states are 'natural' containers of nations; state interests are dictated by the base condition of rivalry and violence among states; central markers of sovereignty – borders and territorial integrity – have to be protected by the state and it's armies; statecraft means upholding economic productivity, perpetuating governance of the state's population, and sustaining

an effective domestic political model of governance, but how this is exactly done is not of importance as the subject of IR is what happens between states, not inside them.

## Good to know 2.1

### Anarchy

'Anarchy' is the core organizing concept of IR mainstream theories. Composed of the negating prefix '*an-*' ('without') and the noun '*-archos*' ('ruler'), the term refers to the foundational presumption of mainstream IR theories that the international system is characterized by the absence of an overarching authority that could arbitrate in disputes between those equal units that are sovereign states. Anarchy in the international system leads to many problems, notably the problem of containing violence between states, as the rule of the strong prevails in the absence of a 'police'. Different mainstream theories diverge over the question of the best means of regulating state behaviour, for example war, in the absence of an overarching ruler that could enforce compliance to behavioural rules and norms.



The Westphalia myth thus creates narrow limits on what counts as international: everything that does not fit the European experience is either represented by what it is not, e.g. non-state actors, non-governmental organizations; or is defined out of the realm of study for IR. Political communities that do not correspond to the narrow premises of the European state model are labelled traditional or otherwise deviant, e.g. 'failing' and associated with irregular violence, criminal activities, extremist ideologies or otherwise illegitimate practices like massive corruption or nepotism (Di John 2010). The study of activities, politics, relationships etc., that cross borders but are not inter-national in the strict sense, are delegated to other academic disciplines like area or comparative studies, anthropology, economics or sociology and cultural studies (Tickner 2013). For some specific questions, mainstream IR considers these other disciplines as providing useful empirical data to illustrate arguments about the discipline's core objective: to build theories on how states behave in the *inter*-national system. The discipline of IR positions itself thus as subcontracting the study of local societies, cultures and politics while preserving its authority over the rules and processes of analysis.

## The three main streams of IR

Within the confines of the Westphalian definition of the international, IR theorizing has developed into three streams: Realism, Liberalism or Institutionalism, and (liberal) Constructivism. Constructivism has cautiously softened the boundaries to other disciplines, yet without necessarily dismantling the basic assumption of the inter-national. These three schools are codified in a set of canonical books and commonly appear with their own chapters at the very beginning of introductory courses into the discipline (see Table 2.1). They represent the orthodox discourse of the academic field of IR (see Box 2.1).

**Table 2.1**

| | Realism | Liberal Institutionalism | Liberal Constructivism |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Key authors (affiliation) and book titles** | Classical Realism:<br>Hans Morgenthau (University of Chicago, later New York University), *Politics Among Nations* (1948).<br>Defensive (Structural) Realism:<br>Kenneth Waltz (University of California at Berkeley), *Man, the State and War* (1959); *Theory of International Politics* (1979).<br>Offensive Realism:<br>John Mearsheimer (University of Chicago)<br>*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001). | Functionalist precursors:<br>David Mitrany (Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton University).<br>Liberal Institutionalism:<br>Robert Keohane (School of Public and International Affairs, formerly Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs, Princeton University),<br>Joseph Nye<br>(John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard)<br>*After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (1984). | State identity: Alexander Wendt (Ohio State University), 'Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics' in *International Organisation*, 46(2) (1992)<br>and<br>*Social Theory of International Politics* (1999).<br>Non-state actors and norm diffusion:<br>Kathryn Sikkink<br>(John F. Kennedy School, Harvard), Martha Finnemore (Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University)<br>*Activists Beyond Borders* (1998). |
| **Ontology of international** | System constituted by states, either personified in statesmen (Classical Realism), governments (Defensive/Offensive Realism) or as structural units (Structural Realism). | System constituted by states and the international regimes they create. | Form of very weakly differentiated society in which are commonly states which have defined themselves as sovereign but in which there are also other actors. |
| **Key arguments** | State power is dangerous for other states; mutual threat leads to politics of security. | State power productive of cooperation as rational utility maximization. | State power is what states make of it, power depends on construction of actor's social construction of identity and power. |
| **Epistemology of IR research** | Objective observation of high politics (military, economics). | Objective observation of interdependence and capacity of states/ actors to realize preferences. | Objectivating observations of communication, cultural-social production of identities and preferences. |
| **Key questions** | Causes of war. | Mechanisms of cooperation. | Conditions of possibility to make conflict or cooperation a shared norm of behaviour in the inter-national system. |

*(Continued)*

**Table 2.1** (Continued)

| | Realism | Liberal Institutionalism | Liberal Constructivism |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Main explanation for international politics** | Anarchy and polarity: because there is no overarching authority, states have to fend for themselves; accumulation of power leads to one, two or multiple states standing out and being in competition. Depending on the polarity structure of the international system, state aggression can be contained or not. | States have preferences which they try to realize at the lowest cost. Cooperation and mechanisms that facilitate cooperation allow this. States will cooperate if they can gain relatively more from cooperation than from conflict. | States build identities, i.e. perceptions of their own behaviour and interests in the international. These identities are normative, i.e. they include normative ideas about right behaviour and states will act accordingly. These norms can be modified or developed in the interaction itself through communication and negotiation. Cooperation and conflict are by themselves normatively regulated behaviours. |



## Critique, dissent and difference

Heterodox approaches, also called critical approaches for their critique of the Westphalian orthodoxy (or mainstream approaches, see Table 2.1), are based on very different epistemologies and ontologies of the international than the so-called mainstream approaches of Realism, Liberalism and (liberal) Constructivism. While critical approaches differ substantially in their subject matter and in their forms of knowledge generation, they share the vision that both the world we see and the way we see it are social constructions. Consequently, they understand the scientific endeavour of IR differently too.

Mainstream approaches understand theory and theory building as seeking, observing and systematizing regularities of state interaction. Critical approaches do that too but they do not look at theories as mechanistic causal paradigms, but as *narratives* or *discourse* that reflect social constructions of power structures. While Realists for instance understand their theoretical task as collecting evidence for their prognostics that state behaviour is governed by (military) power competitions, critical approaches will look at Realism *as a story that is told* about international politics, men and power. Robert Cox, a critical International Political Economy (IPE) scholar summarised this with the short statement: 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose' (Cox 1981). Critical approaches are primarily interested in the configurations of power and knowledge that are expressed in common understandings of the international, world politics and foreign policy. They notably investigate which alternative politics have been cast out of the realm of mainstream IR, why and how. To that end, critical approaches deconstruct in particular three orthodox key concepts: the state, rationality and power (for the terminology of orthodox and heterodox, see Box 1.2).

### Deconstructing the state norm

The very first critique of heterodox approaches contests the conceptualization of the state in mainstream IR and, in consequence, the primordial focus of the discipline on the state.

Critical approaches reject the idea of the state as a universal set of institutions and law. Rather, they understand the state as a configuration of power that is represented through and by specific social groups. Feminists for instance have elaborated the concept of the manly, masculine or patriarchal state to stress that the politics, institutions, cultures, norms and laws of states consistently give power exclusively to men (Brown 1992; Hooper 2012; MacKinnon 1991). Feminist IR studies the multiple spaces and social practices through which women continue to be excluded from politics in general, and international politics in particular (Enloe 2014; Enloe and Zalewski 1999).

Critical International Political Economy (IPE) argues that the state is a configuration of power that serves property owning classes which produce their wealth through mechanisms of exclusion and exploitation of others; commonly critical IPE refers to some form of capitalism critique (see Figure 2.2). The state is not seen as a set of neutral institutions and laws, serving the common interest, but as a space where propertied classes concentrate the means of power to protect the capitalist economy (Jessop 1985; Poulantzas 1978). In world politics, critical IPE examines in particular globalization processes such as the ones observed since the 1980s that have advanced capitalism into the furthest corner of the globe (see chapters 6 and 7) (Applebaum and Robinson 2005; Sklair 2001).



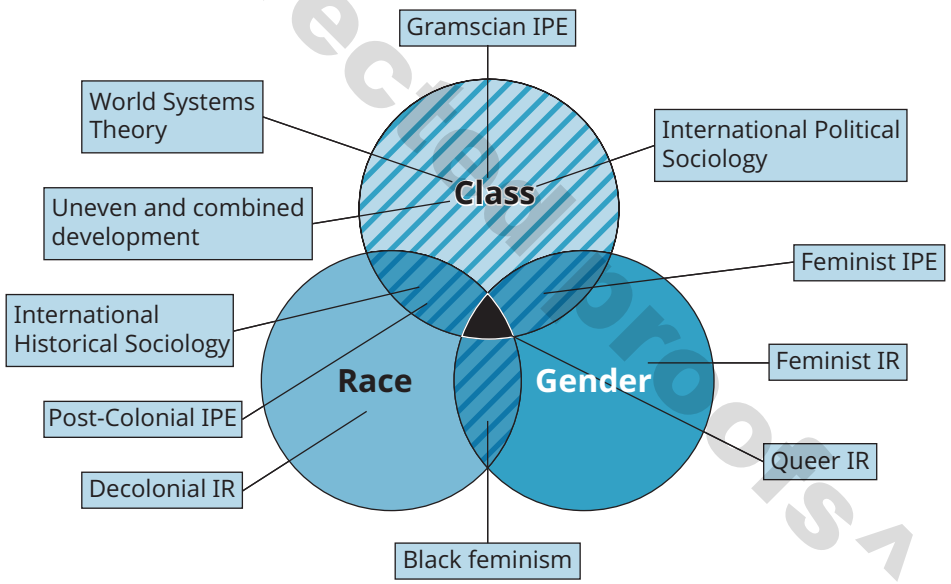


**Figure 2.2** Critical International Relations

Another common point of critique is the ahistorical understanding of the state in mainstream IR. The massive simplification of the history of the Treaty of Westphalia has reified the concept of the state to a universal given (see above). Critical IR, in particular Historical Sociology and decolonial approaches, argues against this ahistorical essentialisation by pointing out the contingency, globality and coloniality of the European state emergence. They conclude that the emergence of the state is not an inherent European development and that it did not 'diffuse' into the world in decolonization. Rather 19th century colonial Imperialism was necessary and essential for the political thought of

modern sovereignty as articulated in international law and diplomatic practice (Benton and Ford 2016). The objectives of European codifications of sovereignty were the justification of colonial conquest and exploitation. The European state constituted itself not through European power struggles of the kind of the 30-year war, at least not through this development alone (Pitts 2018). Rather, the European state emerged out of the wealth that the exploitation of the colonies, especially in the Americas, brought to the royal houses and merchant cities of Europe, notably through the slave trade (Beckert 2014). And the norm of sovereignty became a legal instrument of legitimating the ruler's and consequently the state's authority and refusing it to non-Europeans. Consequently, independence and decolonization was not something granted to non-Europeans but something these oppressed people fought for (Prashad 2008). The international system of today is not the result of states arranging themselves in an inherently immutable system of competition over territory, or of diplomatic negotiation and cooperation, but of colonial wars and struggles for independence and autonomy. It is therefore built upon foundations of injustice and violence, and the rifts of these are still reflected in global structures of inequality, as the following chapters will discuss in various forms.



## Box 2.1

### Racism hidden in plain sight: Kant's perpetual peace

The mainstream discipline of International Relations makes an effort to use a language that appears devoid of value judgements. Yet, if this layer of 'value neutrality' is peeled off and writings put into their intellectual and political context, deep seated ideas on human difference and distinction come to the surface. The reception by liberal IR scholars of '*Toward Perpetual Peace* by the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is a telling example of this (Kant 1991f).

Immanuel Kant was not the only European philosopher of the early modern age to argue that humanity's cultural, religious and social differences are due to 'race'; nor was he the only one to articulate a political theory that is superficially 'universal' and implicitly racist. However, it was Kant's work, notably the essay *Toward Perpetual Peace* that renewed a massive interest in IR in the 1990s and 2000s. Kant's proposal with its apparently universalist rule of law and concept of an international commonwealth seemed to correspond to the 'benevolent empire' that US foreign policy at the time was propagating (for the notion of 'benevolent empire', see Kagan 1998; for the liberal revival of Kant, see Archibugi 1995; Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann 1997; Danilovic and Clare 2007; Doyle 1983; Doyle 2017).

In the Western philosophical canon, Kant stands out for the way he influenced his contemporary debates in epistemology, moral philosophy, ethics, political thought, philosophy of law, aesthetics, geography and natural history. At the core of Kant's works is the wager that we can know and comprehend the world by observing and thinking about it. In the European, Christian tradition this was revolutionary as it meant that the world and human behaviour can be known, understood and guided without having to refer to an external power like God, God's words (e.g. the Bible), or any other religious or spiritual authority (e.g. Jesus) – all of whom derive moral norms from beyond the 'real' world. According to Kant, Man had the unique capacity to gain any kind of knowledge by reasoning.

Kant's essay on perpetual peace was a political reflection born out of his prior philosophical works. Kant argued that in a world governed by reason perpetual peace is possible; in fact, the ultimate goal of human existence, namely the achievement of the state of universal moral happiness, is predicated on the existence of perpetual peace (Kant 1991f). He identifies several conditions of perpetual peace of which three stand out for their similarity to IR discourses in the 1990s and 2000s: 1) all states should be republics, i.e. governed by the rule of law; 2) rights and laws must exist between these republics and guaranteed through a common commitment to self-determination and security, thus a form of commonwealth or federation should be established; 3) laws of cosmopolitan hospitality should govern the proper relations between states and of citizens moving between them. It is easy to see how this essay appealed especially to Liberal Internationalism.

While these conditions appear universal when read on their own, Kant's prior works on racial anthropology introduce a background on which 'republics' are clearly marked as white, European and male dominated (Kant 1991a 1991b 1991c 1991d). Non-Europeans, and women, are not excluded from the perpetual peace but they are also not called upon to establish it. This is because the state of moral maturity that is necessary to make the republic the 'right' form of government, can only be achieved through reason; and only European men are naturally endowed with reason.

Drawing on previous European philosophers, Christian theologians, legal scholars and the observations of 'explorers' Kant argued that while there was one human species, there were, within it, different types of being human – Kant called these 'races' and he argued that races were biologically determined by their original, genetic adaptation to the climate of their natural environment. While the human species had been created as one (monogenesis), different *races* had since developed due to different ways and needs of adapting to different geographical and 'historical' conditions (Kant 1991b 1991d). Kant was thus the first to use the biologically defined term of 'race' in a systematic way as a category of philosophical thought, as those races came to also mean different stages of human progress towards an age of reason (Lu-Adler 2024). According to Kant's teleological view of progressive time, the different races were situated at different moments in History (Kant 1991c).

History with a capital 'H' was the movement of humans out of the state of nature and towards a state of an ethically complete society, a republic. Europeans were the furthest advanced in detaching themselves from the constraints of nature, the mastering of the body through the mind and reason, and the construction of a reasoned and reasonable commonwealth (Kant 1991c, para 5; 1991a). Native Americans were the least advanced as their use of sense was not yet at the stage of reason and barely distinguished them from animals since they were not using technologies, they had no culture and they did not see themselves as perfectible beings different from animals. Africans were a bit more advanced but only so much as they fitted the Aristotelian definition of a 'natural slave', i.e. they were capable of using reason for some basic mechanic tasks like labouring a field but not for any intellectual challenges. The climate had made them strong, too, so they were ideal for the hard work on America's plantations (1991c). Asians, finally, were further advanced than Africans in their capacity to use reason for intellectual tasks, but they were unable of putting reason in the service of 'science' and thus lagged behind Europeans (1991c).

Kant made a similar argument about women (1991a). Because women's sense in life was to bear children and raise them, they remained a subspecies of humanity closer to nature than men.

*(Continued)*

While men's occupation and purpose in life facilitated and required the mind's dominance over the body and emotions, women's childbearing and raising facilitated and required the body's and emotions' dominance over the mind. Women were therefore 'naturally' unable to use reason, and therefore unable to think and comprehend the world reasonably and to follow an ethics of reason.

While Kant's racism and misogyny were not biological quite in the same way as the Nazi 'race theory' was (see chapter 3), since Kant *did* assume that all humans were one and the same species, his 'anthropological' racism was rooted in a stereotyped understanding of genetic predispositions and of nature, that reified the concept of 'race' and immobilized the hierarchical ordering of 'races' with white European men on top (1991d). Perpetual peace would be achieved once these men had agreed on a system of cosmopolitan law and huddled all non-reasonable beings under their protective mantle.

## Contesting the rationality norm

Another critique of heterodox approaches concerns the concept of rationality and its implications in IR. Across the three mainstream theories of IR, the notion of rationality has a distinctly liberal pedigree although it is articulated in different ways. In Realism, it is the international system that is rational, in the sense of having its own mechanics which predictably perform in the most functional way. The concept of anarchy articulates this vision of a self-reproducing mechanics which has been labelled a 'billiard ball system' by some as the inevitability of confrontation is said to be similar to that of billiard balls clashing. In the liberal and institutionalist IR, rationality is predominantly understood as utility maximization.

In the (liberal) Constructivist school of IR theories, rationality is the closest to the Enlightenment understanding of reason (see Box 2.1). 'Rational' means in this case acting, for carefully reflected and evaluated reasons, within a system of logical cause-effect relationships. This well-reflected reason is most accurately reflected in economic cost-utility calculations. Liberal Institutionalism (see Table 2.1) for instance assumes that actors will engage in international cooperation as it is a more cost-efficient way of solving certain problems.

Social Constructivists have criticised this utilitarian notion of reason but often for different reasons. Liberal Social Constructivism remains habitually in the realm of rationalism but makes the criticism that social conditions restrict the pure application of rationalism. They focus for instance on restrictions like actors not having full access to all the information they would need to make a fully rational decision. Or they point to social, political, bureaucratic or economic constraints on the decision-making process that privilege the do-able over the rationally necessary. Yet, Liberal Social Constructivism does not question the essence of the notion of rationality, namely that decisions are taken on the basis of a calculated, deliberated, systematic and, with arguments, justified decision-making process.

Critical approaches propose, in contra-distinction, a critique of the liberal notion of reason and rationality (Smith 2001; Weber 2001). Feminists, for instance, focus on the exclusionary binary of reason and emotion by arguing that there is no inherent opposition

and mutual exclusion between reason and emotion (a claim that is increasingly made also by neuroscience, see Box 1.1) (Ahmed 2017; Harding 2004; hooks 2000). The reason why this myth of exclusionary opposition has remained so pertinent across time and space is, according to critical Feminist theory, that it has been and still is a major technology of gender division and the exclusion of women from politics and public affairs (Benhabib et al. 1995). Quite ubiquitously, the female has been associated with emotions, the heart and the body, irrationality, softness and compromise and subjugation while the masculine has been associated with reason, brains, logic, the capacity to focus on one issue and domination. This binarization is reproduced in so many ways (linguistically, culturally, socially, economically, politically, legally, religiously etc.) that it is entirely normalized. The challenge for Feminist theory, generally and in IR in particular, is thus to deconstruct these normalizations and to show that reason and emotion are inseparable like two sides of a coin (Sylvester 2002).

Queer IR pushes this critique even further by arguing that reason and emotion are not two sides of a coin but rather two dimensions of a social space in which human action and thought moves. Just like gender identities are not rooted in clear opposing sexual distinctions, other forms of 'being in this world' are not neatly polar opposites. On the contrary, polarisations reflect the desire of powerholding actors (orthodox authorities) to order the social world in general and the international world in particular into binaries. With reference to Michel Foucault's study *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1988), queer theory scholars argue that seeing the social world divided into neatly binary male-female spheres is a particular characteristic of Western modernity (see also Box 2.2).

In this understanding the male-female distinction does not so much reflect scientific knowledge of how biology works but it reflects sovereign and disciplinary power (Foucault, Bertani and Fontana 2004). By this Foucault means the power of male-identified holders of the means of violence (notably European kings). In the European tradition of philosophy and political thought, there has been a fusion of the figure of the Man with the figure of the Ruler to a point that both are inseparable (Foucault 2004). He also means the knowledge 'regime' that goes with the ruler's power, and this would be the entire enterprise of science, philosophy and arts that establishes facts and generates knowledge about 'biological' heterosexuality. Foucault concludes that politics is about maintaining both orders (that of the ruler's force and that of knowledge), by institutionalising the binary of sexes and by categorizing behaviours, practices and norms into the Normal (heteronormative sexuality) and the Perverse (non-binary sexuality). The figure of the Perverse signifies a person who is wrong in every conceivable way: sexual-biologically, socially, politically, morally, emotionally, rationally. They are thus destined to be eradicated, physically through violent means if necessary and discursively through negation and tabooization (for a discussion in IR, see Weber 2016).

Queer IR argues thus that mainstream IR is like the 'straight' faction in society which seeks to uphold the idea that 'naturally' the Man is the Ruler, a concept queer theory calls 'heteronormativity', i.e. that the 'straight', male-dominated world is the 'normal' and 'right' one. This way of theorizing world politics obscures the messiness and ambiguity of power relations in the real world. This assumption of fixed and stable power relations makes mainstream IR analytically insufficient. Worse, it also makes it complicit in the violence

with which the heteronormative state reproduces itself. By casting the ambiguous and queer aspects of power out of their analysis, mainstream approaches also obfuscate the lives and thought worlds of all those people, communities or societies who do not fit or do not want not to be placed into binary categories.

## Spotlight 2.2

### Cynthia weber: Queer international relations

> Queer subjectivities are those subjectivities that do not signify as either one sex, gender, and/or sexuality or another; they are subjectivities that signify as (also) more than one sex, gender, and/or sexuality, often at the same time. (Weber 2016, 1)

With this explanation of queer, Cynthia Weber commences her exploration of the insights and knowledge that a queer perspective in IR can bring. Even though this quote makes 'queer' sound like something really complicated, it is actually not. It is simply an acknowledgment that a person, or a group of people, when asked 'Are you A or Z?', can identify as both or neither; there are always more than two ways to be.

Dissolving categorical binaries, overcoming exclusionary either/or logics and unbounding linear teleologies in the analysis of world politics is as much the programme of decolonial/postcolonial IR as it is of queer IR. But not only that. Queer IR also 'trace(s) how this will to knowledge produces sexualized subjectivities like the "homosexual", the "gender variant", and the "trans*" through the anxious labor of enforcing powerful regimes of normalization and perversion' (Weber 2016, 3). Drawing a parallel between the fabrication of sexualized subjectivities in society (as analyzed by Michel Foucault, see above), and the fabrication of the figure of the sovereign state in IR, Weber proposes to use queer theory to explore world politics. Both fabrications are the result of power dynamics that seek to 'unqueer' or 'straighten' the social world by reducing every option in life to two, opposing, mutually exclusive choices (e.g. war OR peace, poverty OR wealth etc.). Accordingly, both, the discipline of IR, and the intellectual traditions inscribed in queer studies can learn from each other how such power dynamics operate.

Introducing queer studies into IR is a full blown attack on the ontology and epistemology of the international and of politics; it is also a complete deconstruction of mainstream IR theories. Weber draws on a wide range of authors whose work is fundamental for queer theory: Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida via Richard Ashley, and Roland Barthes. All these authors have shown in their respective fields how thought and literature, language, social and political practices are fluid, elusive and impossible to fix in binaries. Based on these works, Weber develops a complex argument about world ordering politics as the politics of stabilizing *heteronormative* and *manly* hierarchies of power, i.e. making world politics 'straight'. Heteronormativity is a central term of queer theory to designate the normalization of mutually exclusive binaries like the sexual distinction between male and female.

Weber argues, with the help of queer theory, that the mainstream's claim that there could be a 'system' to world order and that there could be a way scholars can establish regular, systemic patterns of doing world politics is false. World order does not exist in any fixed and stable form. This is because no order can, as Poststructuralists (see Good to Know 1.3) have shown. The linguist Jacques Derrida for instance has argued that there is no linguistic system that can eliminate

the multiplicity of possible meanings of words; and there is also no linguistic system that will not constantly change, either through its own context or the context of its interpretation. Similarly, Weber argues that no social order will ever be unambiguous, 'pure' or immutable.

Weber's argument that world politics is about 'straightening' world order, i.e. making it appear unambiguous, predictable and following stable patterns, also challenges Feminist theorizing that equals the 'manly' state with real, existing 'men'. In opposition to this essentialising of manhood, Weber proposes a view of what 'man' means that emphasizes the social construction of sexual identities. Weber acknowledges that 'statecraft is mancraft', citing IR scholar Richard Ashley's expression. Weber argues that the inherent instability of this 'statecraft is mancraft' politics stems from the already existing instability and ambiguity of its original starting point, namely the semantics (meanings) of the term 'man'. They point out that it is the attempt of 'making' statecraft 'straight' mancraft that accounts for the violence of world politics because this is necessarily a brutal process of fixing and straightening social identities which are by their nature fluid and ambiguous.

This is the moment where Weber introduces 'queer' properly into International Relations theory. Drawing on the work of the French philosopher Roland Barthes, Weber argues that any concept, term or notion receives its meaning from its context and interpretation, and therefore always incorporates also its contrary. A term is never 'and' or 'or', but always both at once: and/or. Consequently, Weber argues that the meanings of sovereign man exceed the binary man/non-man, or sovereign/non-sovereign. With the example of sexual identity at hand, Weber shows how 'being a boy' or 'being a girl' is never monolithically fixed and mutually exclusive because 'being a girl' or 'being not a girl' etc. are always performances which are interpreted by the actor themselves and their environment, constituted by them, read by them. These performances of gender and sex are only binary either/or, if they are coded and enacted like this on all levels of being (subjectivity, sociability, biography etc.). Social (and political) categories like 'boy', 'man', 'girl', 'woman', 'tomboy', 'queen' etc. are socially constructed and attempts of fixing what is inherently shifting and queer.

In the same vein, 'being sovereign' is not an either/or binary. Weber argues that an actor in international politics can be both sovereign and not sovereign. But they also argue that an actor, in the 'queer logics of statecraft' (Weber 2016, 42) will perform themselves and be scripted by others into an and/or figure. Such figurations of actors transcend simple binaries to encompass pluralities which are instable, floatingly transforming and variously performed. Thinking about International Relations, and its principal actor, the state, from a queer perspective means first of all recognizing, acknowledging and understanding the many, plural, possible shapeshiftings of the not-at-all monolithical sovereign.

Weber explores this in four different cases of 'and/or' figurations in international politics: the 'underdeveloped' and 'undevelopable' former colonial state; the 'unwanted im/migrant' who is necessary for a nation's wealth and also undermining the nation; the 'gay patriot' who is heroically sacrificing his life for the nation and also a constant danger to its purity; and the normal and perverse homosexual more generally whose 'liberation' is to be celebrated if it fits heteronormative ideals, e.g. in same sex marriage, and repudiated if it contradicts these, e.g. in the supposed promiscuity that leads to AIDS. What all these figurations have in common is that they disturb the monolithical either/or reading of the sovereign man, and as such have been constructed as dangers, enemies, risks and policy objects that require regulation, disciplining and normalizing.

Decolonial/postcolonial IR and critical IPE formulate again another critique of the 'rationality' of mainstream theories (Jones 2008; Mignolo 2011; Shilliam 2010; Seth 2011). De/postcolonial critiques start from the argument that scientific racism is a wicked output of the age of reason (see Box 2.1) as racism was a base condition of the emergence of capitalism (Byrd et al. 2022; Rutazibwa 2020; Sorg 2025). Drawing, among others, on Karl Marx's argument that the emergence of capitalism required an initial massive accumulation of financial means (capital) to be invested into industrialised production, decolonial/postcolonial IR and critical IPE contend that slavery and colonial expropriation served this function of primitive accumulation on the global scale (for a case study see Obregón 2018). 'Rationality' was in many ways instrumental to make it all happen: technology, science and the economy in the service of capital accumulation. Without the creation of global markets where the production and transportation costs of cotton and wool, for instance, had been 'rationalized' through slave-laboured plantations and dispossession by colonial settlers, English manufacturers would not have been able to become rich and London's importance as a global financial centre would not have seen the day. The mass murder of Indigenous populations and the massive exploitation of natural resources in colonisation, the consequent destruction of natural environments and Indigenous societies only made sense in the rationality of colonial economies (Baptist 2016). For instance Belgium's colonisation of the Congo where an estimated half of the population died within one generation might seem at first sight irrationally expensive and inefficient (Hochschild and Kingsolver 2019). Yet, the wealth accumulated by King Leopold I financed his effort to craft a nation-state from the leftovers of European post-Napoleonic reorderings (Belgium was created in 1830) as well as his private splendour.



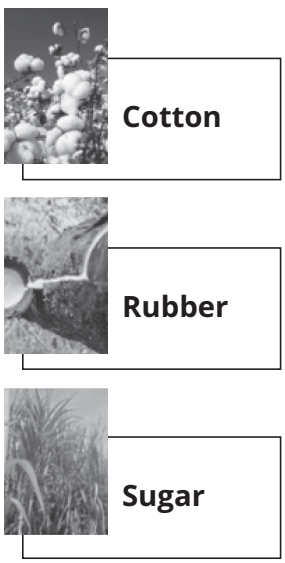


**Figure 2.3** Colonial products that were essential for Europe's industries yet not readily available in Europe

Critical IPE and de/postcolonial IR criticize both the historical inaccuracy of mainstream IR theories and the ethical implications of whitewashing the bloody colonial history of today's international system. Mainstream IR's sanitized narrative of liberal progress in world politics presents rationality and reason as forces of ethical good, e.g. in the liberal Constructivist narrative that draws a line from 19th century abolitionism to contemporary human rights or the vision of a 'perpetual peace' (for a critique of this history, see Held 1995; Moyn 2012; Oshatz 2008). It does not engage with the massive human, cultural, environmental, political and social costs of the colonial origins of today's international system.



## Spotlight 2.3

### Gurminder Bhambra, *connected sociologies*

For most of recent times, critical approaches have been noted as 'misc. other' despite their growing diversity, influence and knowledge production. Yet, this has led in many ways to more fragmentation as heterodox discourses have been corralled off. Gurminder Bhambra's *Connected Sociologies* represents an attempt to overcome this fragmentation and opposes a 'colourblind', 'genderneutral' and Eurocentric core to many 'critical', 'local' 'other' peripheries (Bhambra 2014).

Bhambra's starting point is the internal contradiction of Western social science's understanding of 'modernity' as Edward Said carved it out in his landmark book *Orientalism* (Said 2003). Analyzing the way European arts and literature have over centuries created a dichotomous imaginary of a dynamic, transforming and 'modern' West (occident) that contrasts with an immutable, traditional, backward Orient, Said argued that there is a paradoxical double effect of Orientalism. By using 'modernity' as a frame of observation on the grounds of an universalist epistemological presumption that all human history is one (universal), Orientalism necessarily objectifies 'others' as lagging behind with respect to those who are considered modern, the West. At the same time, however, it also singularizes 'modernity' as something that only the West possesses. Modernity can only be modern if the 'other' is not; Europe can only be modern if the Orient is not. As Bhambra quotes Quijano: 'Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnie should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an ethnie is called Western Europe because this is actually pretend (sic) to impose a provincialism as universalism' (Quijano 2007, 177). Accordingly, so Bhambra adds, it is actually not necessary to reject this universalism by treating Europe just as another period and place in world history; it is so by itself.

What is necessary, however, is to overcome the Eurocentrism of sociological thought that leaves intact the core concept of European modernity as central, world historical fact. This has to be done in two ways: one is to uncover and elevate local histories and theories of 'society' to the same level as the European modernity narrative. Yet, this is not enough. In a second step it is necessary to peal the layers off the Eurocentric version of world history that locates modernity's origins exclusively and endogenously inside Europe and carve out how the connections between the 'rest' and Europe constituted its local history, which then can be called 'modernity'. This means turning the direction of world historical accounts upside down by asking not what the arrival of colonialism did to the rest of the world but what the localities' reception of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and colonial

*(Continued)*

destruction did to Europe to make it become 'modern'. This cannot be done by simply adding non-European histories to the European one but by telling completely different stories about 'modernity' that take as a starting point not the European centre but the other side, the history and stories of those who were colonized, dispossessed, enslaved and whose knowledge, communities and worlds were and still are being destroyed.

Bhambra's book is also a call for the unity of social sciences in order to overcome the dividing out of themes that tell alternative stories (e.g. non-European myths to be the subject-matter of anthropology and not political science), and at the same time for a greater porosity of the boundaries of what counts as scientific inquiry. She calls upon a pluriversal social sciences where the canonical European centre not only is displaced by the diversity of what up to then has been disparate objects of inquiry; but also where the 'West', in full acceptance of its local provincialism, can learn from the pluriverse in order to overcome the blind spots, fallacies, ignorance and, importantly, the injustices of modernity narratives. The aim of these transformed ways of telling world histories, Bhambra insists in this and also her later book *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory* (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021), is not to replace one story by another (or even plural others) but to allow a space for all stories to weave a web of global connections and connectivity. The end result will not be that there is either this or that story that is the 'true' version of XYZ but that there are all those stories about XYZ which in some complex, interconnected way, are all true, at once. World history is neither linear (progress), binary (modern/colonial) nor teleological (end goal: modernity), but world history's epistemic and narrative spaces are full because they are taken in multiple, multidirectional and uncentered ways by many voices at once.

## Taking apart the mainstream notion of 'power'

A third area of contestation finally questions that it is useful or analytically correct to understand the international system as a sphere; as its own, separate and independent sphere of politics. Three criticisms are set out, as follows.

First, state borders are a social and political construction that are neither 'natural' nor fixed. They are the result of particular political struggles and have been for most of human history not even the primary feature of statehood or political rule. Territorial borders also have not always and everywhere been, and still are not, decisive for feelings of belonging and 'home', as far as people's movements and settlements within and across borders are concerned. People's identities are more complex than can be encapsulated by simplistic Nationalism (see also chapter 3 and chapter 10); they are articulated around sub-national and transnational communities and in many more ways than their passport. Since both statehood and nationhood are socially constructed they are never entirely congruent and they are shifting in complex ways.

Second, since states are neither the sole nor unitary actors of the international, the politics in this sphere will always fluctuate back and forth between the inside of a political system and its outside. This critique questions the linearity of 'states' and conceives of governments as more than simply an executive agent of a greater structural force. A wide

range of transnational, supra- and subnational political movements, communities and ties flourish and act in world politics that cannot be accounted for in the Westphalian narrative.

Third, because of the fluidity and socially constructed character of statehood, nationhood, citizenship, politics and 'the' international, a large range of contradictions and conflicts arise. Internationally and within political communities, the most crucial characteristic of power has been the authority to use violence to solve such conflicts. Thus the crucial importance of understanding who holds this power, under which conditions and to what effect. Contrary to mainstream IR, critical approaches centre the question of violence as a question of legitimacy, justice and ethics that is conditioned by social structures *generally*, and only secondarily by physical state borders. In critical approaches, war between states is, for instance, not the inevitable result of a non-human, asocial, objective structure of the international as the highly abstract concept of anarchy declares; rather, war is the result of very real humans who act as concrete social forces and who seek to use collective violence for very concrete and specific goals.

All three arguments lead to the conclusion that both concepts, that of ahistorical territorially defined nation-statehood and that of 'anarchy' in the mainstream sense are utterly insufficient to capture the workings of power and violence in world politics. This does not mean that critical approaches would agree on what kind of world order exists in world politics, and how or by whom it is reproduced in which way. There would be nothing to research anymore if we knew all that!

There is agreement, however, that 'power' is not well understood in mainstream theories and that any critical thinking about power and world order needs to take into account the epistemological and real violence that the history of establishing today's world order required.

Critical approaches also agree on some fundamentals about power: power is socially constructed and represents far more than simply the capacity of using military or economic force, taking up and further developing criticism that Constructivists had formulated earlier already (Barnett and Duvall 2004; Guzzini 2013). Rather, power is understood as the capacity to generate, participate, shape or even transform order (or ideas of order). Instead of seeing power only as the force of the state to constrain others, critical approaches understand power to be an expression of relationships. Power is not necessarily agentic, i.e. there is not one particular type of agent that exercises power over others but power is socially diffuse and varies in its material and concrete expressions. To give an example: the state's apparatus of force, i.e. the army or police, are one institutional expression of the state's capacity to use violence to force people into certain behaviours – and yet, the police's (and by extension the state's) power does not come from the capacity to use violence alone. The authorization of the police does not rely exclusively on the use of violence; and even if it did this would not be sustainable. Thus, the state's and the police's power also derives from law, social and cultural convention and, importantly, recognition and obedience; authority and power have many sources and are expressed in many more ways than only force and violence. In order for the display of power to be efficient, a whole array of social, cultural, legal, political, linguistic and other processes are at work.

## BOX 2.2

### Gramsci's hegemony and foucault's governmentality

Antonio Gramsci's 'hegemony' and Michel Foucault's 'governmentality' are two examples of concepts that critical IR has borrowed from social and cultural studies (Gramsci 1999). Both are of key interest for the analysis of world politics because they allow an understanding of domination and power that is more than from simply the use of force. Both concepts frame domination and power as social phenomenons that are expressed in thought and cultural practices as well as in political institutions, law or social organizations.

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian philosopher and journalist who was incarcerated by the Fascists in the 1920s. In his *Prison Notebooks* he reflected on the question of why a communist revolution had not taken place in Italy even though the economic and political conditions had been favourable (Bieler, Bruff and Morton 2015). He developed the concept of 'hegemony' to capture the power of social norms, of culture and social institutions which justify, normalise and legitimate unjust socio-economic hierarchies. He concluded that ruling classes did not dominate societies only through material power (relationships of property ownership and exploitative oppression) but more subtly and insidiously through normative cultures which are built, reproduced and diffused through social institutions that cross class divides. In Gramsci's Italy these were the Catholic Church for instance, but also schools and community organizations which reinforced the belief that the social order was just and legitimate (Urbinati 1998).

Translated to world politics, the concept of 'hegemony' is useful to explain for instance US American dominance in politics, or the dominance of 'Western' values (mainly associated with some form of liberalism) and culture more generally through the power of US consumer cultures (e.g. MacDonalds, Nike or Coca Cola), in cultural productions (its TV, cinematic, or music productions), in political and social normative orders (e.g. liberalism) and in the isomorphism of key social institutions like universities, schools or workplaces (e.g. the invasion of Anglicism in non-English work environments). The breadth of what 'hegemony' covers is its strength as an epistemological concept as it allows a widening of the view on world politics and power; but it is also its weakness when used as an analytical concept as it comes to mean many, and often contradictory things. The Gramscian understanding of 'hegemony' remains furthermore tied to its Marxist origins as the pivotal point of cultural domination remains the social structures of private ownership and capitalist exploitation, leaving open the question of how or if at all hegemony can change under different socio-economic conditions.

Some critical theorists, notably Feminist and queer theorists, prefer therefore the Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' in which there is the implicit Marxist assumption that cultural dominance is in a historical-materialist way linked to economic class (Foucault and Foucault 2010). The term 'governmentality' fuses the two French terms of mentality (*mentalité*) and government (*gouvernement*) in order to express Foucault's idea that modernity is distinct from former forms of government in that it has *subjectified* domination. This means it has made the rules and norms that are used to govern people part of their own understanding of themselves. Through the particular power/knowledge regimes of modern sciences, society and political rule, people are not ruled over through physical force or coercion. People obey rules and norms because they have internalized them. Power is not exercised directly over people such as in traditional forms of coercion (which he calls sovereign power) but is diffusely present in society and acts through cultivating a

mentality in which only a certain set of behaviours are acceptable and appreciated. Other forms of behaviour are declared 'deviant' and these 'deviants' are literally cast out of society by locking these actors away into specialized institutions like prisons or the asylum (Foucault and Foucault 1977). Foucault's notion of governmentality captures a form of authority, rule and government that is independent from an acting agent. This said, there may be actors who 'best' incorporate these practices and there are certainly some actors who have more leeway in shaping the knowledge/power regime than others. Yet, Foucault points out that government does not mean directing and commanding in regimes of governmentality but rather steering and shepherding (Foucault, Bertani and Fontana 2004). The key point of governmentality is that subjects will incorporate a certain view of the world in which the 'right thing to do' will appear commonsensical. Thus, they will behave according to these incorporated, 'normal' views of seeing, understanding and relating to the world. This way modern society is governed without a ruler forcing anyone; people govern themselves.

## Conclusion

By understanding power as a social relationship, critical approaches move several characteristics of world politics to the centre of analysis which have been largely neglected in mainstream theories. For one, critical approaches are more interested in the question of how power differentials originate and are maintained; and how the hierarchies, inequalities and injustices of these power relations and structures are (re)produced. Given their sociological and historical understandings of states and power, critical approaches look beyond the contemporary form of the sovereign state, at the power of different types of actors and forms of relationships: between citizens and the state, between different social forces, between different cultures, different epistemologies, different ideas, different political orders or systems etc. Critical IR starts from the assumption that world politics are essentially characterized by multiple historical and intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, class and other categorial, unequal differentiations. While Gramscian analysis for instance focuses on social class and socio-cultural differentiations, Foucault-inspired analyzes move, more philosophically, bringing different understandings of (human) subjectivity and sexuality into the foreground (see Box 2.2).

This relational refocusing allows a different ontology of the world than that of mainstream IR theories as it is based on a different epistemology, as discussed in chapter 1. Critical approaches also commonly pursue a critical political project. Critical approaches often interact with social movements and within the academic field of International Relations, critical approaches represent bridges and interweavings with other academic and social fields. Critical scholars often understand themselves as non-unitary, not easily slated in pre-existing categories, such as queer, creole, transgressing boundaries and borders. All this results in an institutionally unstable situation where heterodox voices have to balance careers, projects, research, publications and voices at the edge of the academic field. In the rise of right-wing and authoritarian political movements and regimes in the past decade, critical research, in IR and otherwise, has furthermore become the direct target of authoritarian politics like e.g. the 2019 closure of the Central European University in Budapest and its move to Vienna under the pressure of Hungary's

right-wing government. But even when critical social sciences do not directly become the target of state intervention and prohibitions, they are commonly less well funded and staffed than mainstream or orthodox approaches. Critical scholars often have slower and bumpier careers, too, and, unsurprisingly, the 'critical' content of IR graduate programmes is lesser represented the higher a university is ranked (Ahmed 2012; Thakur 2021). The books showcased in this chapter's Spotlight features discuss how such marginalization takes place (Robert Vitalis), and how disciplinary divides can be overcome with a sociological approach that privileges connections and relations that centre notably the global South (Gurminder Bhambra), or that focuses particularly on the shapeshifting of politics, actors and issues in world politics (Cynthia Weber).

## Something to think about

This chapter discussed how the academic discipline of International Relations is characterized by Eurocentrism and heteronormative masculinity. The dominance of 'pale and male' is institutionalized in the academic system and perpetuated in the discipline's orthodox narratives. Something to think about in this context is the conditions in which writing and creating take place in the academic discipline. As much of the academic language is codified within the intellectual contexts of Eurocentrism, critical approaches, that move alternative and different perspectives into focus, need think about the many ways difference can be expressed. What forms of writing, creating and authoring can we use and devise if we want to think about the international and world politics differently?