

## **Dangerous Relations?**

### **Lessons from the Interface of Postcolonialism and International Relations**

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## Introduction

The scene is a University of Melbourne seminar room in the mid-1990s. Together with around 15 other students, I wait for a postgraduate teaching assistant to open discussions in a tutorial accompanying an international relations module. The tutor begins by explaining that he has recently returned to Australia following postgraduate study of the subject in the United Kingdom. He name-drops the institution at which was enrolled and the eminent British scholars of the discipline he has encountered. With his bona fides thus established, he surveys our group and asks: “So who here has studied international relations before? And I don’t mean any of that postcolonial bullshit.”

True story. But beyond the academic archetypes – postgraduate bluster; an un-wowed group of undergraduates; the cultural cringe evident in much of the relationship between Australia and the United Kingdom – something significant was taking place. The tutor’s dismissal of postcolonialism as irrelevant to a discussion of international relations was, first and foremost, a piece of disciplinary boundary-riding; an attempt to delineate what was, and most importantly what was *not*, relevant to international relations scholarship. The delivery was nonchalant (subtext: “surely everyone here is intelligent enough to agree with my prejudicial assessment of postcolonialism’s relevance”). But the attempt to make postcolonialism an object of mirth, and to buttress students’ disciplinary allegiances to a version of international relations that explicitly *rejected* engagement with postcolonialism, betrayed unease over what was already an emergent postcolonial critique.

At the time, a literature exploring the relationship between postcolonialism and international relations was becoming evident. In 1999, Paolini was to call for a “redrawing of the international relations canvas” (39), denouncing the discipline’s Eurocentrism, its orientation towards Western universalism, obsession with Great Power politics, and disregard for non-Western cultures and concerns (33-40). Reaffirming Hoffman’s classic (1977) appraisal of the discipline, Steve Smith would declare that at the end of the twentieth century international relations was “still an American social science” (2000, 374). Others would argue that international relations was so thoroughly contaminated by Eurocentrism and by an obsession with structures and politics universalised by European colonial expansion that entirely new ways of understanding international processes were required (Bleiker 1997, Krishna 2001). What was clear was that a postcolonial challenge was being mounted; my undergraduate seminar was to become an arena where the purity of mainstream disciplinary approaches to international relations was to be defended and where no “postcolonial bullshit” would be allowed to stick.

This chapter uses the complex relationship between disciplinary international relations (IR) and postcolonialism to explore what we might learn from the dialogues and disjunctures between postcolonialism and the social sciences. Scholars working at the intersection of IR and postcolonialism have been forced to grapple with a range of issues that often lie beyond the experience of those pursuing postcolonial studies in the humanities. Most obviously, there is the challenge of working against the grain of settled orthodoxies and in ways often unrewarded (even penalised) by the discipline. Yet the picture is not all bleak. In carving out intellectual and institutional spaces

from which to explore these ideas, those working to bring postcolonialism into dialogue with the politics and processes of international affairs have been pursuing scholarship in ways that should prove of broader interest. Certainly, not all scholarship reflecting on IR and its allied disciplines (globalization studies, development, international political economy, international law) from postcolonial perspectives is marked by a consistent approach. Many of the most productive lessons become visible where scholars disagree or take opposing positions. Nor is it the case that the postcolonial critique of IR has proved an unalloyed success. Yet within the body of scholarly work attempting this task we can identify several key themes worthy of further examination: a sophisticated awareness of the problems of intellectual institutionalisation and disciplinary incorporation; a dedicated attention to issues of politics, economics, materiality and the processes of everyday life; and a commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and outcomes of practical benefit.

This chapter does not rehearse the arguments over the need for a postcolonial intervention into international relations. The point has already been well made by a range of scholars (Shilliam 2011, Krishna 2009, Gruffydd Jones 2006, Darby 2004). Rather, my argument is that examining the ways in which scholarship on postcolonial issues has been undertaken from disciplinary vantage points *other* than those provided by the conventional institutional and intellectual locations of postcolonial inquiry can serve to signal potential future directions for postcolonial studies and help overcome a looming pessimism over the field's future on the part of its scholars and practitioners. Throughout, the intention is to highlight where the experience of those working at the interface of IR and postcolonialism might prove of broader interest to those concerned with the future development of postcolonial discourses, and how it might assist in

addressing some of the more persistent criticisms made regarding the field. The chapter thus contributes to the broader aims of the volume, exploring how postcolonial studies has been deployed and received in locations and debates well beyond its scholarly comfort zones. The chapter concludes by drawing together the lessons of such a process in order to argue for the reinvigoration of a commitment to the normative politics of postcolonial scholarship and to interdisciplinary dialogue.

### **Postcolonialism, Incorporated?**

It is practical to begin with questions of institutional location and disciplinary reception. Postcolonialism has been taken up most enthusiastically in English and cultural studies departments, where it has been lionised as part of the leading edge of the discipline. Indeed, it was the emergence of postcolonial studies that gave impetus to the entrenchment of cultural studies in the contemporary university (Rao 2006, Radhakrishnan 1993). While I shall have more to say about the consequences of postcolonial studies' institutional affiliation with culturalist modes of enquiry in the pages that follow, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the celebratory welcome accorded postcolonialism in the humanities has not been replicated elsewhere.

For those pursuing postcolonial critiques and analyses of international relations, for instance, matters are in stark contrast. The mainstream of IR still largely resists or remains ignorant of postcolonial criticisms. In pursuing dialogue and engagement, postcolonial studies scholars have had to negotiate with a confident, well-established and powerful academic formation whose reflex instincts are to dismiss any potential

postcolonial contribution. Siba Grovogui, in a searing critique of IR's reluctance to pursue meaningful exchange with postcolonial perspectives, has written of how

IR scholars are securely guided by disciplinary gatekeepers, road maps of tenure rules and professional journals...[to] dispense with alternative Western and non-Western imaginaries of communities and politics and their modes of inquiry, assumptions, hypotheses and questions (Grovogui 2009, 138).

Echoing this point, Kim Nossal, in a survey of introductory international relations texts, has argued that these are usually “noteworthy for what they do *not* tell their student-readers about international politics, those things deemed to be too unimportant to bother knowing about” (2001, 177 original emphasis). Among these, he argues, are an accurate understanding of politics and concerns other than those of the global hegemons, of the history and consequences of European colonial expansion, and of the ethnocentric basis of much international relations theorising.

The need for postcolonial perspectives seems obvious. Indeed, many scholars have applied insights derived from postcolonial studies in ways that serve to highlight IR's elisions, asserting the signal importance of European colonialism in universalising the Westphalian state form (Spruyt 2000, Clapham 1999); identifying the imbrication of the doctrine of sovereignty with European imperialism (Anghie 2005); pointing to the derivative nature of discourses of postcolonial nationalism (Chatterjee 1985); identifying the connections between colonialism, imperialism and contemporary patterns of global economic inequality (Hoogvelt 2001); or highlighting the neo-

imperialist motivations and colonialist assumptions that feed into contemporary discourses of terrorism, border protection, peacekeeping or national security (Barkawi and Laffey 2006, Darby 2006b, Hage 2003). Yet despite such efforts, their impact on the discipline of IR has been minimal. Analyses of international politics and processes informed by postcolonial theoretical perspectives have proceeded largely outside disciplinary frameworks. Even where engagement has been attempted, it has met with little recognition. Agathangelou and Ling evoke the nature of postcolonialism's relationship to the mainstream of international relations with the image of postcolonialism hovering "outside the House of IR" (2004, 32): illicit, largely disavowed by mainstream realist and liberal theoretical traditions, and raising critiques of the discipline while isolated from it.

The benefits of having a seat at the table of disciplinary IR appear both self-apparent and beguiling. From recognition would flow access to resources, career opportunities, enhanced possibilities for collaboration and, above all, the promise of influence. The connections between international relations scholarship and the practical affairs of diplomacy, foreign policy, military doctrine, and inter-state relations make the job of asserting postcolonial politics and perspectives seem all the more urgent. The question thus poses itself: how and to what extent should postcolonial studies seek validation from, and a role within, disciplinary international relations? While a settled consensus on this issue is unlikely to emerge, three main approaches can be identified. The first is that pursued by those scholars who believe that postcolonialism can and should establish a role for itself within the theoretical corpus of IR, even to the extent of establishing a school of "postcolonial international relations". Opposing such tactics are those who believe that IR is so irretrievably Eurocentric that scholars

should instead direct their attention to supplanting it with alternative accounts of transnational and transcultural politics and exchange. Finally there are those who adopt a more cautious and nuanced approach, preferring to remain at some distance from the discipline and to mount their critiques from the outside.

One way of accomplishing this has been to seek an accommodation with those parts of existing IR theory and scholarship perceived as most receptive to postcolonial critique. For instance, reflectivist approaches to the study of international relations have been presented as more able to address IR's disciplinary parochialism due to their greater commitment to normative, historically informed and interdisciplinary thinking in comparison with the descriptive, positivist and model-based methodologies that characterise the predominant (especially American) approaches to IR scholarship (Crawford 2001, Smith 2000). Along these lines, LHM Ling has drawn upon reflectivist IR theories such as constructivism that explore how phenomena in the international domain are constructed socially and historically and how they can be explained by reference to state interests and identities (Wendt 1992). She asserts that blending constructivism with postcolonial theory will overcome much of IR's current cultural chauvinism and lead to the creation of a "postcolonial international relations" (Ling 2002). Elsewhere, others have pointed to theories of international political economy (Chase-Dunn 1991, Wallerstein 1974) and attempts by IR theorists to bring critical theoretical perspectives to bear on understandings of imperialism, class and the state system (Linklater 1990) as providing potential avenues of entry for postcolonial thought (Paolini 1997, 33). A different approach has been pursued within comparative political studies, with scholars seeking to identify how materials from

non-Western cultures might contribute to, or even restructure, mainstream IR thinking (Acharya and Buzan 2010, Bilgin 2008, Behera 2007).

What such accounts share is a conviction that postcolonial approaches will be able to carve out a space and a role for themselves within IR theorising. They present postcolonialism as able to contribute in practical and politically progressive ways to theories of the international, even if this means engaging with its intellectual and disciplinary others, such as development studies, international relations and global neoliberal economics (Chowdhry and Nair 2002b, Sylvester 1999a, b). Yet enthusiasm over a potential rapprochement between postcolonialism and IR is by no means universal and it is not just mainstream scholars of IR who are antagonistic towards postcolonialism assuming a place within the disciplinary canon.

Here the opposing strand of thinking regarding the relationship between postcolonialism and IR becomes apparent. Many of those committed to postcolonial scholarship have expressed grave reservations about the appropriateness of postcolonialism being incorporated into the mainstream of disciplinary IR. In an incisive study, Sankaran Krishna argues that the disciplinary abstractions upon which international relations theorising relies – a focus on sovereign state actors, strict delineations of international and domestic politics - work to excise from the discipline's consideration entire narratives of violence, dispossession, victimhood and resistance that do not fall into the neat categories of inter-state relations or *realpolitik*. Thus, far from being a desirable platform from which to work toward redressing the inequality and Eurocentrism that shapes contemporary global politics, IR instead is exposed as one of the root causes of the problem. Accordingly, Krishna sees little

possibility for any meaningful dialogue between postcolonialism and international relations. He unambiguously asserts: “postcolonial IR is an oxymoron – a contradiction in terms.” (2001, 407).

This reluctance to be drawn into IR’s theoretical discourses or to present postcolonially-informed interventions in the language and terms of in-house debate runs the risk of accusations that postcolonialism constructs IR as a paper tiger, overstating its resistance to outside influence. Yet there is certainly reason to proceed with caution. Speaking on feminism’s fate within international relations, Cynthia Weber has written that IR has actively worked to evacuate the discourse of its political content, recasting “what feminism supposedly is and what feminism supposedly does in order to insulate itself from feminism’s transformatory potential” (Weber 1999, 444). Specifically addressing the implications of this critique for postcolonial studies, a group of scholars (including the present author) from the Institute of Postcolonial Studies in Melbourne has put it thus:

The greatest risk...is that an entanglement with international relations will blunt the discourse’s radical edge...Some distance must therefore be maintained from the encaptive capacities of the discipline. Once inside the house of international relations, it is difficult to escape confinement... and the enabling possibilities are drained away. (Darby et al. 2003, 5)

The consequences of such intellectual confinement are apparent. Many attempts to establish postcolonialism within IR are characterised by a suppliant tone, seeking to

establish such projects' value to the discipline and to demonstrate specialist knowledge of its intellectual contours. Less apparent is the reciprocal value such interventions might hold for postcolonial studies, or a sense that in-depth knowledge of postcolonialism might be expected from disciplinary IR. Addressing himself to those scholars who would work towards recasting the language, subject matter, and politics of international relations, Roland Bleiker has offered stark guidance: "forget IR theory" (Bleiker 1997).

It is here that the third approach to a postcolonial engagement with IR comes into view. Not all scholarship in this area either seeks inclusion in IR's theoretical fold or entirely rejects the value of critiquing disciplinary international relations from a postcolonial stance. Even from a distance sufficient to avoid the temptations and dangers of incorporation, much of worth can be said and important critiques can be raised. When it comes to interdisciplinary engagement, marginality – long valorised within postcolonial studies – has its merits. Scholars who have chosen to work at the edge of international relations (the phrase is borrowed from the title of Darby 1997) have done much to highlight the erasures and violence that underwrite IR as an academic discipline, a source of knowledge and a field of practical politics (Shilliam 2011, Gruffydd Jones 2006, Darby 2006a, 2003).

Together, such authors share a commitment to a project of decolonising the theoretical discipline of IR; to expanding understandings of processes of transnational and transcultural exchange; and to broadening out the category of the international with reference to non-Western sources and materials and notions of global justice. The project is one of both critiquing the lacunae of contemporary IR and offering up

critical insights into how it might be variously transformed and transcended. In many ways this is a process of attempting to speak truth to power. There is a sense that IR is too important – most obviously due to the sway it holds over the definition of the world and to the conduct of transnational affairs - to allow its current practitioners and theorists to escape external scrutiny. As Grovogui argues, IR as a discipline needs to be challenged both for the lack of attention it has paid to non-Western thought and to its attempt to exclude histories of colonial dispossession and violence from its remit. “This exclusion”, he writes “has ethical implications, whether in the actual world of international relations or the discipline that purports to study them (2009, 138).

### **The Politics of Postcolonialism**

This brings us squarely to the question of politics and change. One of the most persistent critiques of postcolonial studies has been regarding the lack of interest it shows toward projects of political praxis. A common line of thinking attributes this outcome at least in part to postcolonialism’s success in establishing its disciplinary home within the humanities. Benita Parry characterises postcolonial studies as “institutionalised” within departments of English and cultural studies, arguing that a predisposition toward poststructuralist theory and a preference for distanced interpretation of texts, images and discourses has led to the field having “an insufficient engagement with the conditions and practices of actually existing imperialism” (Parry 2004a, 74). Kwame Anthony Appiah’s famous description of postcolonialism as being the concern of a “comprador intelligentsia” (1991, 348), interested only in cultural products, has been echoed in concerns over the field’s perceived avoidance of substantial engagement with postcolonial histories, politics or economics (Ahmad 1995, Dirlik 1994). One critic has pungently described such

processes as representing a “sacrifice of postcoloniality as potential politics or activism at the altar of postcoloniality as metropolitan epistemology” (Radhakrishnan 1993, 751).

There appears to be a pressing need, therefore, to excavate a politics of postcolonial studies. Despite the institutional legitimacy it has achieved, postcolonial studies has proved reluctant to move beyond a limited range of largely culturalist concerns to challenge the Eurocentrism evident in the canons of Western scholarship (Seshadri-Crooks 1995). For those working at the nexus of postcolonial studies and IR, overcoming this problem is a crucial undertaking. Harootunian (1999) has argued that a preference for literary criticism has worked to limit postcolonial studies’ ability to either intervene in the politics of intellectual theorising about international processes as they impact upon the non-West, or to understand those real-world issues (such as underdevelopment) that confront the postcolony worldwide. Overcoming such limitations holds out the potential not just of reforming IR as a body of theory, but of influencing the North-South relations that such theory informs and animates. Vinay Lal highlights the urgency of this task:

The three decades that postcolonial studies has flourished in the American academy are precisely those where the US [United States] has engaged in rapacious conduct around the world, from its illegal mining of Nicaragua’s harbours to the Gulf War of 1991 and, more recently, to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One can be certain that postcolonial studies, even if some of its practitioners occasionally deluded themselves into believing that their interventions and

interpretations were calculated to make a difference in the 'real' world...made no difference to the outcome of US foreign policy (Lal 2010, ¶5).

Whether or not postcolonial studies can rise to meet such challenges is still open to debate. Certainly, Lal is not alone in his scepticism. Saurin (2006) has argued that postcolonialism does not offer a sufficiently trenchant critique of Eurocentrism, and that more forceful anti-imperialist politics and strategies must be brought to the fore in order to decolonise IR. Yet this does not appear to be the majority viewpoint; the ways in which scholars have sought to bring a postcolonial normative politics to bear on disciplinary IR provide some intriguing pointers toward a more politically effective and materially engaged postcolonial studies. Uniting many of these accounts is a conviction that postcolonial studies *do* possess a normative quality that can be profitably brought to bear on the knowledge politics of IR and in practical areas such as development; international political economy; and activism of benefit to marginalised, minority and subaltern communities.

Such investment in the potential of a postcolonial politics holds out great promise not just for reformist intervention into the theories and practices of contemporary world affairs, but for a reinvigoration of the normative tradition in postcolonial studies more broadly. To both of these ends, several productive ways to proceed suggest themselves: a serious engagement with postcolonialism's Marxian heritage; an attention to the pasts, politics and everyday life-worlds of non-European societies; and a renewed commitment to activist intervention into the processes of resistance and domination that characterise the North-South divide in the contemporary world.

The call for postcolonialism to re-engage with Marxian approaches and material conditions is by now a common refrain. Ahmad's early criticism of the apolitical nature of postcolonial enquiry due to its "apocalyptic anti-Marxism" (1995, 10) was picked up and expanded by Lazarus and Bartolovich (2002) and Parry (2004b), who identified materialist critique as a powerful and practical source of postcolonial politics. Unsurprisingly, such analyses have fed into the literature on postcolonialism and IR. The thinking is that postcolonialism's Marxist foundations can serve to underpin a politically muscular postcolonialism able to inform critique of disciplinary IR by identifying practices and politics of anti-colonial resistance, revealing systemic factors working to entrench global economic inequality and underscoring the importance of solidarity (Darby et al. 2003). Sethi, in a recent volume examining global patterns of resistance to domination and imperialism, has provided a spirited justification of the necessity of Marxist perspectives to contemporary postcolonial scholarship. She presents the incorporation of these perspectives as vital to the very survival of postcolonialism as an intellectual endeavour.

An affiliation between third-world cultures and their social and political histories has to be established so that postcolonial studies might profitably survive. If certain key aspects of postcolonial studies – nationalism, globalization, the subaltern – are issues that Marxists have been involved in from the beginning, why should postcolonialist practitioners be reluctant to embrace Marxist parameters? (Sethi 2011, 123)

Significantly, Sethi exhibits a reluctance to read materialist and culturalist explanations as necessarily oppositional. In their introduction to *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations*, Chowdhry and Nair (2002a) similarly argue that the materialist/culturalist split has been overstated. They point to the early influence of Marx and Gramsci on postcolonial scholarship and the ways in which work within the field – most notably that of the subaltern studies collective – sought to remedy Marx’s Eurocentrism. Having established the importance of such non-Eurocentric materialist approaches to crafting a postcolonial intervention into contemporary global power relations, they go on to assert that “the imbrication of the discursive and the material...illuminates the necessity for a postcolonial re-reading of international relations and political economy” (Chowdhry and Nair 2002a, 24).

The point is well made. If postcolonial interventions in IR help establish the importance of materialist thinking and draw the discipline’s attention to axes of economic inequality, class and exploitation, they also highlight the need for IR to be confronted by the politics of difference. Postcolonial readings of IR have been shaped by the attempt to gain insights to the operation of transnational circuits of power from sources other than the usual narratives of great power manoeuvrings and orthodox theoretical understandings of sovereignty and state self-interest. At the core of such attempts lies the assertion that IR as a discipline has developed largely in ignorance of material conditions, politics and cultures outside of Europe and America and of the colonial basis of the expansion of the international system (Seth 2011, Thomas and Wilkin 2004).

Postcolonial critics have sought to show how IR's preference for systemic and generalist theory building downplays or dismisses local and specific accounts that proceed from the realms of culture and everyday life. The "world has been written from London or Washington without the impediment of having to know much about other places or histories or peoples" (Darby et al. 2003, 10). Postcolonial studies – long attuned to the question of difference and better able to provide insights to non-Western cultures and specific life-worlds – has been seen as able to motivate and inform projects of theory-building that draw upon non-Western sources and the grassroots of societies. As Darby explains, the politics that scholars of international theory look to here is one that

must in the first instance be drawn from within non-European societies, tapping sources that give us glimpses of other life worlds. These glimpses will tell us something of how people come to terms with external influence and intervention, but they will also tell us much about other concerns, quite unrelated to imperialism and its aftermath (2004, 31).

Postcolonialism is thus marshalled to help overcome IR's ignorance of non-Western voices, histories and situations and to highlight the partiality of its theories. This is no easy task. There has yet to be a thoroughgoing engagement between much of IR and the sorts of politics that have been anticipated. The contours of any future adaptation or reform remain unpredictable. But, significantly for this chapter's purposes, there is a sense in the literature that postcolonialism is able, at least in part, to provide the methodological apparatus and normative politics necessary for the job. Seth asserts

that postcolonial theory works to illustrate the ways in which knowledge formations act “as a potent force for shaping what is ‘out there’” and that it is “especially sensitive to the many circumstances in which knowledges born in Europe are inadequate to their non-European object” (2011, 182). There is an investment here in both anticolonial theory *and* praxis; a belief that postcolonial scholarship can and should move beyond the domain of description and analysis to assert preferable political outcomes and to operate as an agent of change. Devadas and Prentice capture something of the nature of this potential when they write: “[p]ostcolonial critique remains productive to the extent that it brings its commitment to the analysis of all violent sovereignties that have followed colonialism's modern moment” (2007, ¶8).

### **The Challenge of Interdisciplinarity**

This principled turn away from Western materials and interests, and the assertion of a politics of difference, draws attention to the issue of working across disciplinary boundaries. The attempts to bridge postcolonialism and international relations are prime examples of interdisciplinarity in action. Postcolonial studies have been used to identify salient issues and inform the political content of critique and intervention. More significantly, they have helped provide access to materials to inform and guide new narratives and theories of international processes. This experience of interdisciplinary working is worth exploring for what it might reveal about the contributions postcolonial studies can make beyond their current intellectual boundaries and the importance of forging working relationships with those working to allied purposes in other disciplines.

It is important to acknowledge that calls for interdisciplinary engagement have not always met with the approval of scholars associated with what might be regarded as postcolonialism's mainstream. Fears have been expressed regarding the potential for a diffusion of intellectual focus and the likelihood of misrepresentation. Childs and Williams argue that:

[v]enturing across...[disciplinary] boundaries has its dangers...critical assessments of post-colonialism from the 'outside' as it were, may be – indeed usually are – very impressive in the area of the author's specialism (history, international relations, politics, etc) but may be rather less convincing as analyses of post-colonialism (1997, 22).

The reluctance to engage is, on one level, understandable. The ways in which the social sciences in particular have approached the study of non-Western artefacts and knowledges – characterising them in ways that stand at odds with the meanings they derive from their specific cultural, historical, spiritual or social milieux – are well documented (Dutton 2002). For postcolonial studies, a field that takes difference as its touchstone and texts derived in specific cultural contexts as its core area of inquiry, there is a reasonable desire to avoid association with universalising, rationalist and social-scientific methodologies. Such concerns are likely to come to the fore in different scenarios and registers as postcolonialism is increasingly brought into engagement with other disciplines. They should not be too easily dismissed. Dominant discourses hold the potential to envelop and define postcolonialism in ways that might diminish or defeat its purposes.

Yet as we have seen, much of the scholarship bridging postcolonialism and IR has been marked by the extreme care it has taken to preserve postcolonial studies' ability to critique, and to prevent the field being subsumed by dominant disciplinary structures. Those working within postcolonial studies should be more self-confident about working across disciplinary boundaries and more trusting of their ability to maintain the field's intellectual integrity and particularity. Indeed, one of the strongest defences of postcolonialism's explanatory utility and political contribution has come from those critical of IR, who seek in postcolonialism a set of political and methodological tools that can be put to the task of accomplishing reform (Dutton, Gandhi, and Seth 1999).

The experience of how postcolonialism has helped structure a critique of IR is instructive here. Much of the scholarship in this area has required access to the experiences, politics and viewpoints of those in the postcolony. The task has been to explore the extent to which the politics of the international can be read off the realms of the social, the everyday and the personal. In this, postcolonial studies have taken the lead, not just in fleshing out the necessity and politics of such a re-narrativisation, but in providing guidance as to how it might best be attempted. Scholars working in postcolonial cultural studies have extensive experience in using literary materials to illustrate the ways in which external and internal exercises of power and hegemony act to shape experiences and subjectivities within postcolonial polities.

One example of this has been the turn to postcolonial fiction as a sourcebook from which the politics of everyday life, understandings of external influence and connections between the discursive and the material might be read. In his exploration

of the relevance of fictional accounts to processes of decolonising international relations, Darby has argued that “literature’s concentration on the personal can be a corrective to international relations’ preoccupation with aggregates, its mechanistic presumptions about international processes and its positivist approach to outcomes.” (1998, 42) Of course fictional accounts are not the only source at play here. The attempt to gain a more complete understanding of processes of everyday life in the postcolony and to give voice to the concerns of the postcolonial world has prompted those working on international processes to use postcolonialism’s modes of enquiry and attentiveness to a variety of textual sources in order to explore real events and everyday life. A sense of the possibilities inherent in such an approach is provided by the work of Gyanendra Pandey. Pandey presents it as a matter of ethical responsibility for scholars to cast as wide a net as possible when garnering source materials about issues such as violence, war and suffering in the postcolony. For Pandey, fragmentary sources such as pamphlets, poems, oral narratives (and their silences) and folk songs provide a necessary counterbalance to the official accounts of generals, police forces and government reports with which scholars and theorists from the social sciences are more comfortable dealing (Pandey 1992). They hold the potential to provide us with key insights the experience of external influence, of conflict and of how the patternings of everyday life are imbricated with transnational flows and spaces.

While such assertions about the value of engagement with creative literature and a broad range of textual sources materials may seem familiar and relatively unproblematic to those used to working within postcolonial cultural or literary studies, for scholars of disciplinary IR they are more likely to appear novel and unsettling. They signal the possibility that self-consciously political – and locally or

personally grounded — narratives might help to overcome the grand-theoretical, Eurocentric and hegemonic tendencies that pervade much of IR scholarship. The influences of a postcolonial politics are certainly discernable in this project. But perhaps more significant is the fact that these politics have been used to frame a range of interdisciplinary engagements that extend well beyond postcolonial studies' usual interest in cultural and literary production. The project of seeking to demonstrate the connections between material conditions, everyday life and international affairs has seen a broader, multifaceted, interdisciplinary project begin to coalesce. Increasingly, there has been an awareness of the need for insights into society, culture and everyday life that can be provided by social science disciplines such as ethnography, anthropology, geography or sociology.

This preparedness to work across multiple disciplinary boundaries has proved fruitful for scholars seeking to demonstrate the connections between what is occurring at the level of lived experience and the politics of transnational processes. Yet for the purposes of the present argument, what is remarkable about many of these studies is the preparedness they have shown to express their interventions with reference to postcolonial politics and concerns. Thus, postcolonially-informed critique of international theory has variously been made with reference to non-Western materials derived from (among others) urban geography (Bishop, Phillips, and Yeo 2003), sexuality studies (Obendorf 2012, 2006), development (Ng 2006), environmental analysis (Magnusson and Shaw 2003) and ethnography (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, Das et al. 2001). If nothing else, the range of disciplines that now look to postcolonial studies to inform their critical analysis of the theory and practice of contemporary international affairs demonstrates the extent to which postcolonialism is

seen as able to contribute to projects of theoretical reform and practical change. It also demonstrates the value of forging interdisciplinary alliances in bringing about particular theoretical or practical acts of reform.

### Conclusion

Postcolonial studies have a seemingly unique capacity for self-doubt and critical introspection. There is a long-standing tradition of internal debate over parameters, methodologies and politics that stretches back to the earliest phases of postcolonialism's emergence as a field of study. In 1995, Seshadri-Crooks opined that postcolonialism had arrived at "that phase in its development in which, like every other revisionary discourse, it is melancholic about its new-found authority and incorporation into institutions of higher learning" (47). Ten years later, Mishra and Hodge felt able to deploy the past tense when speaking of the field, asking: "what *was* postcolonialism?" (2005). More recently, a symposium in Berlin expressed doubts over postcolonialism's ability to explain its contemporary relevance, with many participants giving the impression that field had largely run its course (Amine et al. 2010). Summarising what he sees as a growing sense of "postcolonial fatigue", Vinay Lal has argued that

“[e]ven among the adherents of postcolonial studies...there is a growing recognition that exhaustion has set in, the questions put on offer are predictable, and that one is only likely to encounter regurgitation of familiar arguments. (Lal 2010, ¶2)

The reasons for this supposed fatigue are familiar. Lal points both to the repetition and reach of postcolonialism's established successes (its institutional recognition within the contemporary university, its contribution to bringing marginal voices and issues to the attention of the centre and its criticisms of the master narratives of the Enlightenment) as well as its reluctance to address many of its failings (its inability to effect real world change, its avoidance of issues of material culture and political economy and its institutionalisation in and for the humanities). Yet he is careful not to characterise postcolonialism as a spent force. Instead he sees attention to particular projects of critique – he identifies the critique of history, of the nation-state and of non-violence – and the development of an ability to contribute in practical as well as epistemological terms to politics of dissent and resistance as critical to postcolonialism retaining future relevance. In each of these areas, he argues, much remains to be done; “before we convince ourselves of a postcolonial fatigue, perhaps we should seriously ask if postcolonial studies traveled as far as is sometimes alleged” (Lal 2010, ¶5).

This chapter has sought to trace the consequences of one particular instance of postcolonial studies' travel. The argument has been that the strategies and implications of bringing a postcolonial critique to bear on international theory can illuminate a route towards overcoming the sorts of intellectual lethargy and pessimism that Lal and others have identified. I share with Lal – and with many of those seeking to deploy postcolonial politics, perspectives and methodologies within international relations scholarship – a sense that postcolonial studies are able to structure a range of intellectually rigorous and politically effective interventions and critiques. This has the potential to unlock benefits not merely for the discipline of IR but more broadly.

Bleiker has cautioned scholars “not to ignore the IR practices that have framed our realities” (2001, 39). IR, under such a reading, acts not merely to *describe* the international realm, but works actively to constitute it. Postcolonial critique therefore holds the potential not merely to disturb and challenge dominant discursive models of the international but to actively participate in the theorisation and bringing into being of more sensitive, informed, anticolonial and pluralistically conceived translocal processes, spaces, and politics.

Yet while the benefits for international studies seem clear, it is important to note that the experience of working at the interface of international relations and postcolonial studies holds great potential for reinvigorating the field of postcolonialism itself. This chapter has explored three areas where such a contribution might be detected: an awareness of the risks and rewards of engaging with other disciplines, the (re)assertion of a politics of postcolonialism and the processes of interdisciplinarity. My intent has been to demonstrate that postcolonial studies, as seen from outside its institutional location in the humanities, does not appear to be suffering from fatigue or irrelevance. In many ways it appears revolutionary, even threatening.

This is not to say that working across disciplinary boundaries will always be easy, of immediate impact or necessarily work to the benefit of postcolonial studies. One of the key insights the experience of working with IR holds is that scholars committed to postcolonial critique need to stand ready to protect and assert the particular politics and methodologies of the field in their interdisciplinary work. A seat at the table will prove of little value if the languages and rules of debate are already set, the agenda

not open to amendment, and dissenting voices kept at bay. Here too, we must remain cognisant of the knowledge politics of the contemporary university. The problems flowing from postcolonialism's institutionalisation in cultural studies could all too easily be duplicated should postcolonialism wind up similarly institutionalised within one or other of the social sciences. Similarly, the exhortation to work collaboratively with those in the developing world, to access non-Western voices and materials and to seek allies in disciplines outside our own does not always sit comfortably with the discipline-specific career paths, research audit cultures, pedagogic concerns, student expectations and disciplinary divisions of today's higher education institutions (Darby et al. 2003, 10).

Yet the potential benefits that can flow from engagement should counsel against any tendency to conceive of postcolonialism as a closed shop. The risks inherent in engagement with other disciplines should not be used as a justification for insularity or lassitude; the search for alternative futures for both scholarship and society is too important a task to neglect. A desire to contribute to the search for practical solutions informs much of the interest in postcolonial studies exhibited by those seeking reform in disciplines like international relations. Here, there is a sense that postcolonial studies can and should provide more than description or critique. The instances explored in this chapter demonstrate how a politically engaged and self-confident postcolonialism can make powerful contributions to interdisciplinary problem-solving and the identification of new intellectual concerns.

An oft-quoted maxim within critical IR scholarship is provided by Robert Cox: "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" (Cox 1981, 128). The

experience of postcolonialism as it has been brought into dialogue with the discipline of IR is valuable to the extent that it asks us once more to re-engage with the normative traditions of postcolonial scholarship. As we survey the future of postcolonial studies, it impels us to ask just who postcolonialism is for, and what purposes we want it to serve.

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